

LIFE AND DEATH

THE POWER OF
THE TONGUE



LIFE THE POWER OF
THE TONGUE
AND
DEATH

HOT

SHOTS

Life and Death: The Power of the Tongue

Written by Jeff Diedrich

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Second Edition

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-59557-131-1

General Editor: CJ Harris

Design by Shannon Brown

Published by Positive Action for Christ

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While the word is yet unspoken, you are master of it; once it is spoken, it is master of you.

—Arabian Proverb

I love the game of basketball. Don't get me wrong: I don't know as much as Dean Smith and can't score like a Jordan, but I do enjoy hitting the court and playing the game. One of the trends in modern basketball is what the street players call trash talk. You're probably already familiar with this particular art form.

I remember sitting on the bench during a college game and watching one of our forwards give another guy a hard time. He said things like, "Shoot the ball, come on man, drive to the hoop, yeah, yeah . . ."

But not all trash talk is this tame, especially on the "court" of life. Many people use their tongue for wicked purposes. Plenty have perfected the art of passing a verbal jab, cutting down the lane of another's emotions and slamming home a hateful word. This kind of linguistic dribble is sure to stir anger, resentment, and bitterness within anyone.

All people have a difficult time controlling their tongue and teenagers are no exception. They must know that unless they realize the power of their speech, it can master them for the rest of their lives.

Life and Death takes on the tongue and its many poisonous sins. You will discover the awesome strength of the tongue and the means for dealing effectively with the root problem of poor speech. By teaching this Hot Shot, you can help your students bridle their tongues as they speak with friends, family, or anyone else.

Lesson Format

Hot Shots are written with a firm belief that the Word of God is the primary life-changing element that the Holy Spirit uses to do His work. You can be assured that we will not depend upon psychology, values clarification, touchy-feely questions, or humanistic methods. Instead, we will allow Scripture to reveal God's character to the teens, thereby exposing them to His life-changing power. We stand unashamedly upon the Word of God, which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

While the writing staff at Positive Action For Christ understands that all our lessons must be centered in the Bible, we also see the need for helping the teacher by including creative teaching ideas. These creative ideas are simply sermon illustrations taken one step further. Instead of talking about opening a window in an illustration, we ask you to open it. Instead of imagining how destructive the tongue can be, you should present an object lesson to show them. These ideas can enhance your lesson and help teens grasp the truth of God's Word.

Our belief is that through object lessons and illustrations we are better able to imitate the teaching of Jesus Christ. He depended wholly upon

the Scriptures for the content of His lessons, but He also used coins, trees, water, and more to illustrate His teaching.

Each Hotshot follows the same lesson format throughout the study.



The Warm Up opens the door of the student's mind to the main lesson. This may include handouts, object lessons, or stimulating questions.



The Bridge transitions the teen from the warm-up into the main text of Scripture that you will be teaching.



The Content is the main body of the lesson, focusing on Bible exposition and application.



The Closing summarizes the lesson and calls for a commitment to the truth.

In this Hot Shot you will find Scripture memory verses that complement the lessons. We believe that Scripture memorization is an excellent tool which the Holy Spirit uses to sanctify and guide Christians today.



Before you start the study...

Read the Introduction, Course Objectives and Overview. It is important that you understand the scope of this study before you teach it.

Before each lesson...

1. Read through the lesson and take note of the Lesson Aim, Objectives, and the materials needed for creative teaching segments.
2. Plan ahead to modify the lesson if necessary. Your facilities or equipment may limit you. Substitute your own ideas if necessary.
3. Each lesson can be taught in 20–30 minutes, but preparation can let you shorten or lengthen the lesson as needed.
4. Use excitement when you teach! An excited teacher produces students who are excited about learning. If you don't feel that one of our teaching ideas or warm ups will excite your teens, spend some time and develop one that will work.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course students will:

- respect the power of speech
- regard lying as a form of trashing truth
- recognize the signs of a complainer
- discover the truth about mockers
- learn how to clean up speech by dealing with the root problem

Overview

Lesson 1: The Power of the Tongue: One Small Match

- **Lesson Aim:** To show teens the destructive power of the tongue
- **Text:** James 3:1–8

Lesson 2: Lying: Fuel to the Fire

- **Lesson Aim:** To understand the true nature of a lie
- **Text:** John 14:6; Exodus 20:16; Acts 5:1–11; John 8:44; Colossians 3:1–17

Lesson 3: Complaining: Three-Alarm Fire

- **Lesson Aim:** To analyze the true nature of a complainer
- **Text:** Exodus 14–19; Numbers 20:1–11

Lesson 4: Mocking: Out of Control

- **Lesson Aim:** To understand the true nature of those who insult others
- **Text:** Nehemiah 1:4–11; 2:10, 17–19; 4:1–3, 7–8

Lesson 5: Changing: Grab a Bucket

- **Lesson Aim:** To teach the importance of the Holy Spirit in controlling the tongue
- **Texts:** Ephesians 4:22–24; 5:1–21

LESSON 1

The Power of the Tongue

One Small Match

Controlling the tongue is one of life's great challenges, and nobody faces this more than teenagers do. They are learning bad speech habits from adults who never learned how to control their tongues, viewing entertainment that bombards them with filthy speech, and mingling with peers that use sinful phrases. Words are like sticks of dynamite: if handled properly, they can be used for beneficial purposes. But if handled carelessly, they can explode upon another person. This tragedy does not have to happen.



To show teens the destructive power of the tongue.



Students will:

- realize that everyone has a problem with the tongue
- see how the tongue controls people
- learn how the owner of an evil tongue will destroy himself and others around him
- understand that only God can help them control their tongues



James 3:1–8

In this passage James paints a vivid picture of the trouble that the tongue can cause. While it is only a small member, like the rudder of a ship or the bit for the horse, the tongue can control our whole body. Since it is fleshly, it has a bent toward sin and can be incredibly destructive.

James knows that everyone struggles with the tongue—especially those who use it often, like teachers. This lesson applies to teens because James wants everyone to watch out for the tongue's unruly, destructive power (v. 2).

What You Need

Damp red sheet cut
in the shape of a tongue
and large enough to
cover a doorway,

Hooks or masking tape
to hang on doorway,

“Unsolved Mysteries”
handout,

Box of tongue depressors,

Nurse outfit and
nurse assistant

The Lesson



Hang the “tongue” over the doorway of your teen room. As the teens enter, they will have to pull back this “tongue.” Have a lady dressed up as a nurse, complete with a box of tongue depressors. She will ask each teen to say “ahhh,” examining the tongue dramatically. She can then make some remarks about the teen’s tongue like “definite problem here” or “we may have to quarantine you.” Finally, her assistant will ask the teen to read the “Unsolved Mysteries” handout as she gives it to him.



After all the teens have read the handout, ask them what caused the accidents. (A broken gauge downed the plane, and a stone caused the skateboard crash. They will only know what killed the teen in the third scenario when you tell them that a word did. His parents called him worthless so often that he believed it and jumped from the bridge.) Ask the teens what all the solutions had in common. (All the accidents were caused by something small.)

These are small but very destructive items, just like the tongue.

Everybody Has Sinned with the Tongue

James 3:2

The tense of this verb (offend) shows continuous action. James is saying that everybody (we) continuously sins with his tongue when it is left unchecked. This sinning happens often. No matter what we think, we cannot truly deny that we have sinned with our tongue. The only person who does not sin with the tongue is a perfect man, and only Jesus was a perfect man. This is probably the most common sin to mankind.

Chalk Talk: Have a teen list various ways that people sin with their tongues.

Everybody Has Been Controlled by the Tongue

James 3:2b–4

Two illustrations are given in the text, and they both teach one maxim: our tongue will control us if we allow it to run its natural course. A horse will naturally trot off where it wants unless the rider controls it. A ship will go wherever the wind pushes it unless there is a rudder steering its course. The tongue will naturally control us for two reasons:

The Tongue Is Powerful—James 3:3–5

Though it is a small member of our body, it has the power to control us. Only the Holy Spirit coupled with His Word can bring the tongue into

submission; we do not have the natural ability to do this. The Spirit acts as a bit and a rudder in the life of a Christian.

The Tongue Is Inherently Evil—James 3:6

We must remember that the tongue is a fleshly weapon that can be very harmful to others. In fact, Satan used his tongue to bring the human race to its knees by crafting a lie in the Garden of Eden.

Question: Why do you think that the tongue is so hard to control? (Possible answers could be: we talk without thinking, we don't try to control it, etc.) If the tongue were a tool, what would it be? And why? (It could be a hammer because it pounds people verbally, a saw because it cuts people, sandpaper, a chisel, or others).

The Tongue Can Be Very Destructive

James 3:5–6

The tongue may be hidden in our mouth, but it has the ability to affect the whole body because it is inherently evil. From birth to death—the course of nature, or the course of life—our tongue can cause us and others great harm if we don't control it. Our tongue is like a small match: useful, but it can easily start a huge forest fire.

Object Lesson: Break off a match from the book and explain that an unlit match represents a word which has not been spoken. Write on the three pieces of paper the words feelings, reputation, and friendships. Strike the match and explain to them that an evil word will damage whatever it touches. Light the paper that has feelings written on it—that is the match of mean-spiritedness. Light another match and burn the paper with reputation written on it—that is the match of slander. Light a final match and burn the paper with friendships written on it—that is the match of gossip. This will demonstrate what a single word is able to do to the feelings, reputation, and friendships of other people.

The Tongue Is Hard to Tame

James 3:7–8

James contrasts the small size of the tongue with the enormity of God's creation. A horse, a lion, and an elephant are all much bigger and stronger than a tongue, but we're able to tame these animals and even have them perform tricks in a circus or zoo. However, we cannot cage or tame the tongue on our own.

What You Need

Matches,
Sheet of paper
cut in thirds

James gives two reasons that the tongue is hard to tame:

It Is Unstable

The tongue must be treated like a bottle of nitroglycerin that could explode at any moment. Each word should be weighed carefully before being spoken.

It Is Poisonous

The tongue is full of deadly poison. This poison penetrates not only the person who has the tongue but also those who are abused by it.

What You Need

Surgical gloves

What You Need

Candy mints,
Copes of the Scripture
memory bookmarks

Object Lesson: Have the teens try to grab their tongues. It is hard to do. For those not too grossed out, provide surgical gloves and have them grab the tongue of a friend. The friend should wiggle his tongue without moving his head to see how long the other teen can hold on to it.

This activity shows them how unstable and slimy the tongue can be when you try to control it physically. Imagine the problems of controlling it spiritually!



As the teens leave the room, hand them each a candy mint to remind them that their tongue should be sweetened with kindness and not soured by harmful words. Encourage them to memorize the verses on the Scripture memory bookmarks.

Unsolved Mysteries

You have been selected to participate in **the search for the truth**. Below you will read of three mysterious events which occurred in the last week. Not many clues are out there, but that's why we've asked for your professional opinion. It will require your best application of logic and precise thinking, not to mention some really good guessing.

See how you do, but remember: **small things can have big consequences**.

1. The smoldering remains of a charter flight lay in a **snow-capped grave** in the Rocky Mountains. There are no survivors and few clues about what caused this tragedy. Structurally, **the aircraft seems sound**—indeed, the only damage to the frame is on the nose where the it smashed into the side of the mountain. But while the windshield seems solid, there is a great deal of **broken glass scattered** about within the cockpit. How did this terrible tragedy in the skies occur?
2. A twenty-year-old man is **lying unconscious** in the middle of the road that winds along the side of a **rock quarry**. His head, knees, and hands are bleeding. Not a single car is in sight, and the only sound to be heard is the whir of the man's **skateboard** as it continues down the hill. How did he end up like this?
3. His body is shattered, bloody, and dead. This teenage boy is lying on a **major freeway** surrounded by people and a whole string of smashed cars. A torn piece of the **teen's shirt** is hanging from the sign on the bridge twenty feet above. What was the cause of this teen's gruesome death?



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Scripture
Memory**

James 3:6

Proverbs 25:11

Proverbs 15:1-2

Proverbs 14:9

Ephesians 4:29

Leviticus 19:16a



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Ephesians 4:29

Leviticus 19:16a

LESSON 2

Lying

Fuel to the Fire

Sadly, lying has become so habitual in some teens' lives that they no longer think about it, much less care about the consequences. Teens must realize that telling the truth—completely and consistently—is honoring to God.



To understand the true nature of a lie.



Students will:

- understand the foolishness of lying
- be challenged to commit to telling the truth in every situation
- examine the ethical dilemmas of lying



**John 14:6; Exodus 20:16; Acts 5:1–11;
John 8:44; Colossians 3:1–17**

These passages help us understand the consequences of telling a lie.

The Lesson



Distribute copies of the handout to the teenagers. Discuss their responses after they fill them out.



Discuss how easy it is to tell a lie when under pressure. We can become so used to lying that we don't even think about it. Lying just seems like the easiest way out of a difficult situation.

What You Need

Copies of "To Tell the Truth,"

Pens or pencils

Lying Betrays the Character of God

John 14:6

T John’s gospel uses the word truth twenty-five times. The first occurrence of the word in this book is in reference to Jesus Christ (1:14). John says that Christ is full of truth. Christ reflects God’s glory as we are to reflect God’s glory. Part of reflecting God’s glory is demonstrating truth.

John 14:6 stresses that Jesus Christ is God, and as such, He is truth personified. There is no superficiality or lack of genuineness—He is absolute truth.

We must realize that trusting Christ involves a commitment to conform to His image. So whenever we tell a lie, we are betraying the nature of Christ. Christ set a pattern of truth for us to follow. We should ask God to fill us with His truth as Christ was filled with God’s truth.

Response: Tell the teens that you are going to say some names of famous people and they are to write down (on the back of the “To Tell the Truth” handout) a one-word impression of that person as each name is spoken. The names might include Santa Claus, a sports figure, the President of the United States, or other famous contemporary individuals. Then ask the teens to share what the one word was for each name. Ask the teens what others might write down next to their name. Would it be “liar”? “Dependable”? “Christian”?

Lying Breaks a Command of God

Exodus 20:16; Acts 5:1–11

The Ten Commandments—called the “Ten Words” in the Hebrew—were the foundation of the Mosaic Covenant made between God and Israel. These commands were the foundational law for the people of Israel as they moved toward Canaan under the leadership of Moses and Joshua.

In Exodus 20:16, God includes a command that prohibits bearing false witness. Israel understood the ninth commandment to apply especially to the context of a legal proceeding or court. No falsification of truth was to obscure justice, and no lie was to hurt an innocent victim. The truth was and is important to God.

And we apply this principle to every human relationship. God wants us to speak the truth wherever we go—in or out of court. It is vital that we obey this command.

Read Acts 5:1–11.

Question: What happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they lied? (They both died, vv. 5, 10) Why did they die? (They lied to God, vv. 3–4, 9) What does this story teach us today?

(God takes lying just as seriously in the lives of New Testament believers as He did in the Old Testament.)

Lying Associates You with the Enemy of God

John 8:44

The first time Satan ever talked with a human, he lied. He questioned and then denied God's one command in the garden, tricking Eve into eating the forbidden fruit.

In John 8:44, Christ condemned Satan as a liar. Jesus revealed that Satan had literally no truth in him—that it was in his very nature to lie. The Bible reveals that the language of lying is Satan's native tongue, and those of us who speak the devil's language are inevitably associated with him.

Lying Destroys Your Relationship with God

Colossians 3:1–17

It is impossible to please a God who is defined by holiness and integrity when you are living an unholy life. Lying is a sin guaranteed to keep us from close fellowship with Him.

Colossians 3:1–17 speaks of many sins that should not be in our life—along with spiritual virtues that must replace those sins. Lying is one of the sins that must be put off with the old nature (v. 9). How can a holy and truthful God have any fellowship with a Christian who lies like the devil?

Question: There are instances in the Bible when people such as Abraham (Gn 12 & 20) and Rahab (Jo 2) told lies. Both of them are listed in Hebrews 11 as people of tremendous faith. Is it right to lie in certain situations? (No! God has an absolute standard of righteousness, and He is never honored by sin. God does not need our help for His plan to prevail. When we lie for a "good reason," we are actually showing our lack of faith in God's plan. Doing wrong to do right is only doing wrong. Neither Abraham nor Rahab were ever commended in Scripture for lying.)



Use the "whisper down the alley" game to illustrate how easily lies can begin. Have your teens line up single file and instruct them to repeat in their own words to the person behind them what is whispered to them by the person in front of them. Use this story or come up with your own:

"A long time ago, Billy the rodeo cowboy proposed to Janet the lifeguard by the camp lake, but she would not accept because he had no money. He then started a canning business."

Ask the last student to repeat to the class the story he or she was told. You should then read what the actual story was. Since truth is easily distorted, we should be accurate in what we say.

To Tell the Truth

Imagine being with a group of friends at someone's house. While you are there, one of the guys asks whether you mind if he tells a dirty joke. Everyone turns and looks at you for a response.

What would you say?

Why would it be easy to lie in this situation?

Read the account of Peter by the fire in John 18:15–18.

Why do you think Peter denied knowing Christ, not just once, but three times?

Can you think of a situation that makes lying easier than telling the truth?

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