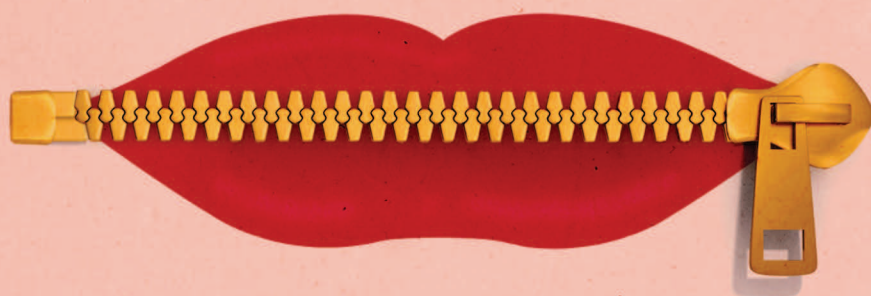


STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

KEEP IT SHUT



WHAT TO SAY, HOW TO SAY IT,
AND WHEN TO SAY NOTHING AT ALL

KAREN EHMAN



Session 1

SPARKS, SQUABBLES, SPATS, AND SUCH: OUR WORDS MATTER

**Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruits.**

(PROVERBS 18:21 ESV)

VIDEO: Sparks, Squabbles, Spats, and Such: Our Words Matter (19 minutes)

Play the video teaching segment for session one. As you watch, record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you in the outline that follows.

Notes

Words are powerful and they have consequences.

What starts as a little spark can become a booming blaze, as in the Colorado Black Forest fire of 2013.

James 3:2–12 tells us this about the tongue:

- It can corrupt our whole body.
- It cannot be tamed.

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- It cannot pour out both what is bitter and what is sweet.

Luke 6:45 states that the mouth speaks what the heart is already full of. We need to learn to “mind our spillage.”

In our homes, often the problem isn’t how we talk *about* our family members but rather how we talk *to* them.

Our tongues are fire. From where will they be lit: above or below? Are our words a sword or a salve?

Let’s learn to pause before we pounce; to not say something permanently painful just because you are temporarily ticked off.

Perhaps we need a “force quit” feature for our mouths.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to discuss what you just watched.

1. What part of the video teaching had the most impact on you?
2. Can you think of an example when, as a school-age girl, your words — or the words of one of your friends — caused drama? Describe the situation.
3. It has been estimated that women speak around twenty thousand words a day. That’s a lot of yacking! Brainstorm as a group the many areas of life where we use our words — both spoken and written. Ready? Fire away.

Cluster Group Discussion (10 minutes)

If your group is comprised of more than twelve members, consider completing this discussion in smaller groups of three to six people each.

4. King David penned the words to Psalm 15. Have someone read this psalm aloud to the group. In the space below, record as many observations as you can about what is mentioned about our words. Number them as well to see how many you can come up with.

- Our group's observations:

- What do you learn from recording these particular words and phrases about the kind of person David says will “dwell on [God’s] holy hill” (v. 1 ESV)?

- Are there any guidelines you can draw out of this passage for how we can use our words wisely in the future? Can you think of a specific example that pertains to a current, real-life situation?

Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Gather back together as one large group and answer the following questions.

5. What is one insight you gained from the small group activity about Psalm 15 and the picture it paints of how we should use our words?

6. In the video segment, Karen described the Black Forest fire in Colorado in 2013. She also referred to James 3:2–6 and how in it James likens our tongue to fire. What insights did you get out of this analogy of fire? What similarities can you draw between the reality of fire and the effects of our words?

7. Karen talked about how her and her husband's opposite personalities and different styles of completing tasks can cause conflict and clashing. Do you live or work with someone who either has a polar opposite personality or does things in a way you never would? Does this ever make you use your words in a wrong manner? If so, how?

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8. In the video, we were encouraged to “pause before we pounce” — to not say something permanently painful just because we are temporarily ticked off. Give an example of a time when you paused and it prevented you from wounding with your words, or a time when you didn’t pause and you wish you had.

9. Time to flip your thinking! Instead of just “unloading” the next time you may be angry about someone’s actions or irritated at the way he or she approaches situations, give yourself a little pep talk while you pause and ponder. List some things you might say to yourself to avoid saying something permanently painful just because you are temporarily ticked off.

10. “Are your words a sword or a salve?” Ouch! What does this word picture bring to mind when you read it? Can you think of anyone you know whose words seem to be a salve instead of a sword? Give an example. How do you feel when you are around them?

Individual Activity: What Is God Saying to Me? (3 minutes)

Complete this activity on your own.

Take a mental inventory of your life. In what areas do you most struggle with using your words correctly? It might not just be that you use them in an angry manner. It may be that you don't speak up when you should. Or you speak too much. Or you talk before really listening to the other person. Or you don't speak the truth because you are afraid of what someone else might think. Perhaps you are a people-pleaser and say yes when you should say no, and then find yourself overcommitted and miserable. Checkmark any areas below where you need a little help with your language:

- ☐ Work situations
- ☐ Relationship with my husband
- ☐ Relationship with my kids
- ☐ Dealing with neighbors
- ☐ Extended family situations
- ☐ When talking with other parents
- ☐ At church
- ☐ Online
- ☐ Friendships (either longtime friends or newer ones)
- ☐ When dealing with people I see throughout my day: at the grocery store, the bank, the coffeehouse, etc.
- ☐ Other _____

Now go back and put a star in front of the one or two areas where you most feel God may be prompting you to change how you behave when it comes to your speech.

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Have one person close in prayer. Then, get ready to learn more in your between-sessions personal study before meeting for session two!

BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

Read and Learn

Read chapters 1–2 of the *Keep It Shut* book. Use the space below to record any insights you discovered or questions you may want to bring to the next group session.

Study and Reflect

1. Can you recall any incident from childhood or your teenage years where either you let your words get you in trouble, or the words of someone else stung so much that it still hurts somewhat (or even a lot!) today? What was it about the words spoken, or the person to whom they were said, that made this an incident you still can recall as an adult?

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2. In chapter one of *Keep It Shut*, Karen writes this about James 3:6:

The passage in James also talks about how the tongue can corrupt our whole body. I myself know very well from the times I have wished I could take back my words; often my whole body is affected. My mind races with regret. My heart pounds. My stomach churns and becomes tied up in knots as I fret and stress over what now might happen. My fingers fidget, and I can't seem to concentrate. Sometimes my feet pace as I ponder what I possibly can do now to get myself out of the royal mess I now find myself in.

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- Have you ever felt this way? If so, describe the situation here:

- How does this concept of our whole body being affected when we misuse our tongue tie into what James says in chapter 3, the last part of verse 2? Write what that portion of Scripture says here:

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- The ESV and NIV versions of the Bible use the word *perfect* in James 3:2. The HCSB translation uses the word *mature*. The original Greek word used here is *teleios*. It is an adjective that means full-grown, complete, having reached maturity, especially as it relates to character. Does knowing the background of this word shed any new light on what you think this verse means?

- Finally, using a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being “never” and 10 being “always”), use the chart on the next pages to evaluate each relational area of your life when it comes to how often you speak in a mature manner, displaying character that is evidence of Christian growth. Record your rating in column two. Jot a phrase or two about what needs improvement (if anything) in column three. (You may need additional space if you have more family or work relationships than allowed for in the chart.)

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Area	Rating	What I Need to Improve
Husband		
Child		
Child		
Child		
Child		
Child		
Child		
Family member		
Family member		
Family member		
Family member		
Coworker		
Coworker		

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Area	Rating	What I Need to Improve
Coworker		
Friend		
Friend		
Friend		
Friend		
Online words (social media, blog comments)		
Church/civic situation		
Church/civic situation		
People in daily settings: bank, grocery store, etc.		
Other		
Other		
Other		
Other		

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What do you learn from the preceding exercise? Do you see any commonalties?

A survey through the Bible reveals that God places great importance on the way we use our speech. In fact, the words *tongue*, *talk*, *speak*, *words*, *mouth*, and *silence* are used over 3,500 times in the Bible. The pages of Scripture are full of people just like you and me. Some of them serve as a great example of how we should use our words to build up, encourage, and speak for truth. However, there are others who seem to be the poster children for just how *not* to use our mouths.

Keep It Shut, pages 15–16

In chapter 2 of *Keep It Shut*, we encounter an example of someone who used his words — and sometimes his silence — wisely and strategically: the Old Testament character Joseph. Glance back over this portion in the book (pages 26–37), and then answer the following questions:

3. What stands out to you most about the way Joseph behaved when it comes to the words he uttered or even the times he remained silent? Did you learn anything new that you hadn't discovered about him before? If so, record it briefly in the space below.

SESSION 1: BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

4. Karen also listed several cues we can take from Joseph's life. Which most resonated with you? Checkmark any that apply and then, in the space provided, record why it jumped out at you. What is taking place in your life currently that made that particular statement speak to you right now?

√	Cue from Joseph's Life	Why It Speaks to Me
	Beware of bragging — and the impact your good news could have on others.	
	Say what honors God, not what other people want to hear.	
	Realize that lies are the minuscule snowflakes in a monumental snowball.	
	Give God credit where credit is due.	
	Watch your words in the workplace.	
	Just because you have a reason to retaliate does not mean you're justified in doing so.	
	Don't be God.	
	Do be nice.	

KEEP IT SHUT STUDY GUIDE

Now go back and place a star in front of the statement you most want to work on this next week. For added effect, write the statement on a sticky note and post it somewhere you will be sure to see it (your bathroom mirror, on your desk, on the dashboard of your car, etc.). Or set a calendar reminder on your phone for a few days from now with the particular phrase written out. When it pops up, do a quick self-evaluation to see how you are doing with regards to that principle from the life of Joseph.

All the humans you encounter throughout the course of the day are “on purpose” people. God plopped them into your life for a reason.

These souls — whether they are of the easy-to-love variety or the scratchy sandpaper kind — can be used by God to mold, reshape, and sometimes stretch our souls as he perpetually crafts us into creations who are becoming more and more like his Son.

Will we be perfect?

Nope. Never. (Not until heaven!)

Just like Joseph?

Maybe close.

But of this I’m certain: others can catch a quick glimpse of Jesus when they see us speak and act in ways that honor him and line up with God’s Word.

Keep It Shut, page 41

5. In chapter 2 of *Keep It Shut* (pages 38–39), Karen explains the concept of grace and gracious speech as taught in the Bible. Does the clever way her husband was taught to remember just what grace is (G.R.A.C.E. = **G**od’s **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense) help your understanding? Or does it equip you to better explain it to someone else? How so?

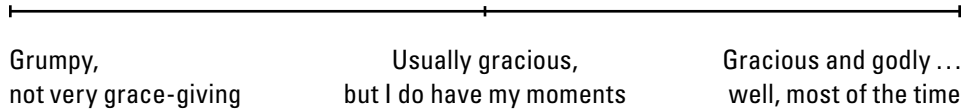
SESSION 1: BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

6. Look up the following Bible passages. After each, write how it speaks to the concept of having gracious speech.

- Psalm 145:8
- Proverbs 15:26
- Proverbs 16:21
- Proverbs 16:24
- Ecclesiastes 10:12
- Colossians 4:6

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X marks the spot! Based on what you just read in Scripture, how are you doing in the “gracious speech” quest? Place an X on the continuum below closest to where you would say your overall speech toward others generally falls:



Now, are there any adjustments you need to make to your language to enable your words to be more grace-laced? If so, what are they?

Scripture Memory Verse of the Week

Each week of this study will feature a verse to ponder and even memorize if you desire. For your convenience, all verses are printed in the back of this study guide. You may photocopy that page on card stock or colored paper and then cut out the verses to make them into memory cards. The memory verses are the size of a standard business card, so you can tuck them into a portable business card holder and carry them with you throughout the day. Or put them in a prominent place — purse, dashboard, desk, kitchen sink — where you can read, study, or memorize them. (You may want to laminate them if posting them at your kitchen sink. Karen has a friend who actually places laminated memory verses in her shower! She calls it her

SESSION 1: BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

“Showers of Blessing Prayer Closet.”) Consider pairing with another study group member to help you stay accountable to memorize the six verses. You could come a few minutes early to class — or stay a bit longer — to practice your verses with each other.

Here is our verse for this week:

Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs. Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning.

Proverbs 10:12–13a