

Watch Your Mouth!

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless (James 1:26).

Scripture: James 1:19-27

Song: “In Control”

Today’s Scripture passage is one of the very first I learned as a new Christian. Friends who had encouraged me to faith suggested I needed it. *Ouch*. They were right. Having grown up in a family known for quick, sarcastic wit and sometimes funny barbs, I was known for my “smart mouth” that could equally make a person wince or cry—a skill not needed or welcome in the kingdom of God.

Acting on my friends’ counsel, I painstakingly read and memorized Scriptures regarding the tongue and how to wield it as a vessel of blessing, not cursing. Still, I struggled with achieving that goal. I needed to change. I wanted to change. But I was relying on myself to become something God’s Word said I should become. Realizing the error, I switched tactics. I prayed about my wayward tongue, inviting others to pray in agreement with me. It took months before I could easily speak without being rude or sarcastic, my former version of trying to be funny.

Many people admit that they don’t want to become believers because they don’t want to change. What they fail to realize is that change can be a good thing. It can make us a better version of ourselves—one we never imagined. That happens when we give the reins of our lives—including our tongues—to God.

Heavenly Father, help me use my tongue in God-honoring ways. To Your glory I pray. Amen.

He Will Provide

Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided” (Genesis 22:14).

Scripture: Genesis 22:9-19

Song: “I Will Follow”

Years ago, when my husband and I were in missionary training, one of the instructors gave me a handmade bookmark that read, “Where God guides, God provides.” It sounds like a trite little statement; but if you realize the truth behind those five words, there is nothing little about them. That saying was tested many times while we served in missions.

Often God guides us into situations where some sort of personal sacrifice is required. As with Abraham, it is God’s way of asking us, “Do you love Me above all?” The thing He asks us to sacrifice is always something important to us. If it is something we are comfortable giving up, we don’t depend on Him; we believe we have everything under control and that the sacrifice can be accomplished in our own strength.

So God, in His wisdom, often asks us to trust in Him for things that, to our finite minds, are inconceivable, even impossible. “Where God guides” will often make us uncomfortable. He does that because He loves us as a Father, to increase our trust in Him. Where He guides, He always provides.

Father God, thank You for Your provision for my physical needs and my spiritual growth. Help me to trust You more. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Faith in the Face of Fear

[Rahab] had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof (Joshua 2:6).

Scripture: Joshua 2:1-7

Song: “No Longer Slaves”

Several of my greatest fears awaited me when we moved our family of six to Irian Jaya, Indonesia. At that time, the religious culture in Indonesia was 95 percent Islam. I feared religious persecution. Malaria, a mosquito-borne illness, is rampant there. I feared sickness and death. Some thought we were crazy, but we felt God’s call on our lives, and we followed that call—to go more than 9,000 miles away from home, family, and familiarity. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. I honestly feared that we’d go there with our four children and come back with three. Or two. Maybe none of us would come back!

I will never forget the sense of peace that washed over me the moment we arrived. It lasted the entire time we were there—through a political uprising and through several cases of malaria in my two youngest children. His peace covered me and clung to me like a shroud.

What fears are you facing today? Is God calling you to do something “crazy”? Something dangerous? Joshua’s young spies faced their fears as they entered Jericho. Rahab faced her fears as she hid the spies and redirected the king’s men. Through facing my fears, I learned that God’s grace and peace overpower all fear. He never leaves us or forsakes us (Hebrews 13:5).

Heavenly Father, Your perfect love casts out all fear. Help me to be obedient to Your call on my life, no matter what. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Love Mercy

“The master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’” (Matthew 18:32, 33).

Scripture: Matthew 18:23-35

Song: “Mercy”

The game of Mercy is played by two people who grasp each other’s hands with interlocked fingers. The goal is to twist the opponent’s hands until the opponent surrenders, yelling, “Mercy!”

True mercy is a difficult concept, especially for those who have never been shown mercy. To put it simply, mercy is undeserved pardon. It is deliverance from judgment. God’s mercy is demonstrated in His sparing us from what we deserve: eternal separation from His holiness because of the filthiness of our sin. In His unfathomable mercy, He sent His Son to take the penalty for our sin upon himself, saving us from the death we deserve.

Mercy is a requirement for His people. Micah 6:8 says, “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

How can mercy play out in your daily life? Be nice to mean people. Offer forgiveness freely, before it is asked for. Prefer others above yourself. Offer to pay the consequence for someone else. Instead of waiting for your “opponent” to beg for mercy, extend it freely, just as God the Father extended His mercy to you, while you were yet a sinner (Romans 5:8).

Father, when I think on Your great mercy, I am overcome with gratitude. Help me to extend mercy to others as You have to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Holy Living

I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (Titus 3:8).

Scripture: Titus 3:1, 2, 8-11

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

I work with elementary school children, and each year I seem to learn the names of the “naughty kids” first. Why? Because they draw attention to themselves by their actions and require correction on a regular basis. “Even a child is known by his doings” (Proverbs 20:11, *KJV*). The “good kids” also stand out, and in a matter of weeks, the entire school knows who’s who.

God wants His children not only to *be* good but also to devote themselves to *doing* good. We are intended to stand out in this world for our actions and not to gain attention for ourselves or to become famous or puffed up over our goodness. Scripture tells us: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Our society is getting darker. Instead of despairing, let us see that as an opportunity to shine brighter, giving more glory to God. We will stand out more and more as the world around us turns away from Him. Let us hold on tightly to His Word and devote ourselves to doing what is good—for His glory and for the sake of lighting the way for others to find hope.

Dear Lord, help me to devote myself to doing good in order to bring others to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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The Center

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Song: “This Is the Air I Breathe”

Life on Earth depends on our position in relation to the Sun. If Earth were any closer to the Sun, our oceans would boil away. Conversely, if Earth was farther from the Sun, our blue planet would be white with ice. Either way, life would be destroyed. God the Creator placed us exactly the right distance from the Sun to sustain life.

A great way to make your life unnecessarily difficult is to believe or act as if the world revolves around you. Just as the Earth revolves around the Sun and depends on its warmth for its very existence, we should “revolve” around God and depend on Him in every area of our lives. His Word is to be a living and active presence to us, like the Sun is to the Earth. He should be the center of our being, the center of our homes, the reason for everything we do. Let us not neglect to teach our children and grandchildren to depend on the Lord in every way, every day of their lives. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He is the very author and giver of life.

Father, help me to remember how dependent I am on You—and to live my life with You at the center. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Mercy Triumphs

Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).

Scripture: James 2:8-13

Song: “Your Mercy”

The Christian who is truly committed to living for Jesus will live a life that is characterized by mercy and compassion.

Mercy understands that sin is sin. Mercy accepts the fact that I am no better than the “shadiest” of sinners I encounter as I go about my life. The only difference that matters is that as Christians, we have been forgiven, and by the grace of God, we have new hearts. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). Mercy sees others through eyes of compassion. It shows kindness to those who are still wandering, lost in the darkness. It shows love to the undeserving—because we too are undeserving.

Are your relationships only with those who look and act like you? Is your ministry focused on people who are already saved? Jesus was drawn to people who needed Him. He touched leprosy victims, He spoke with compassion to prostitutes, He welcomed the despised into His presence. As sinners saved by His mercy, we are to extend that same mercy to others, no matter how much it stretches us out of our comfort zones.

Father God, help me to ever be mindful of the mercy You have shown me, and please provide me with what I need in order to be merciful to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.