



Glenn Brown

441 1/2 Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

Telephone 970-434-1377

Email casabrn441@gmail.com

Website www.glennbrownministries.com

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BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY, LITTLE MOUTH!

In her devotional book, Jesus Calling, Sarah Young says, as if God were speaking to her:

“I have trained you to pray, ‘Help me, Holy Spirit,’ before answering the phone, and you have seen the benefits of this discipline. Do the same thing when communicating with people around you. If they are silent, pray before speaking to them. If they are talking, pray before responding. These are split-second prayers. When you do this, your speaking comes under the control of My Spirit.”

(From Glenn) This is Christianity 101, and I have been doing this for many years, but I can't recall hearing or reading any teaching about it before. I certainly can't claim that I do it perfectly - my mouth runs ahead of my brain lots of times. But I always repent and, if appropriate, ask the person I offended to forgive me. Then I start again trying to control my mouth. It's not easy. James says, *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* (James 3:2) I'm not quite there yet. Ha!

Romans 8:14 tells us, *Those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.* The conversations we have, the words that we speak all the time are probably the most significant thing we do day after day. If we are not being “*led by the Spirit*” in those conversations, where or how are we being led by the Spirit?

Scripture even tells us that, *The tongue has the power of death and life.* (Prov. 18:21) Wow! That is a strong statement. But I have found in years of counseling situations that

those words are literally true. One time I was praying for a young Japanese man when I was at the Dream Center in Hollywood. He told me about his mother who was in the hospital and apparently dying. He said that once a week his grandparents, his mother's parents, came on the bus to visit her. He said his grandfather always did the same thing: He stood over his daughter's bed and berated her for an hour. He always said, “You're stupid! You should have sent your sons to college so they could make a lot of money. But you were lazy and stupid. Now they will never have good jobs.” And so on for about an hour and then they left.

The young man said, “He is killing my mother. Her hair is falling out, and she is deeply depressed. I think she wants to die.” Yes, the tongue literally has the power of death and life.

I've already admitted that I fall short of perfection in allowing the Holy Spirit to monitor my conversations, but this is what I am sure of: Over the years because of this little practice, I have been able many times to restrain my mouth from saying things that were sarcastic, judgmental, crude or inappropriate.

It is my sincere desire to say things to others that are encouraging, loving and wise. I need a lot of help to accomplish that, and the Holy Spirit is ready and able to help me.....and you.

So I repeat Sarah Young's wise advice: Ask the Lord to help you adopt the habit of asking His help in every conversation, every response, every word that comes out of your mouth. In my opinion, that is a big part of what it means to be “*led by the Spirit.*”

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ENGEL'S SCALE OF STEPS TO CHRIST

Some years ago “Engel's Scale of Steps to Christ” came out. This was an imaginative way to describe some of the incremental

stages through which people may pass before they make a decision to become believers in Christ and afterwards to grow as a Christian.

I confess that I couldn't resist making quite a few changes to Rev. Engel's idea, so following is: "The New and Improved (?) Engel's and Brown's Scale of Steps to Christ."

1. No awareness of a Supreme Being
2. Some awareness of a Supreme Being
3. Contact with Christians (may include Christian witnessing)
4. Interest in Jesus, and beginning to investigate Jesus
5. Grasping truth about Jesus, and starting to understand the implications of becoming a Christian
6. Acceptance of Christian truth
7. **Decision to believe, to surrender their will to God, being "born again"**
8. Some immediate changes in their perspective on the Bible, God, purpose, sin, eternity, etc.
9. Start to experience some profound life changes
10. Start to experience some problems related to their new faith, like opposition from their family, etc
11. Begin to have a deeper understanding and trust in the Bible as the Word of God
12. Begin to grasp the wisdom and the nuances of the faith in a deeper way
13. Struggles to hear and obey God, perhaps related to forgiving others; honesty; overcoming patterns of impurity; and overcoming addictions
14. Learning to be a giver
15. Learning about God's mercy and grace . when we backslide
16. Growing in prayer and in the presence of God

Obviously, there may be many other points on this progression of possibilities, things like dreams and visions, and traumas that might shake a person and wake him up.

Sharon Jones, a good friend here in the Vineyard Church, recently wrote out her testimony and did a great job in describing her

struggles as she became a believer. Notice how it aligns in some points with the famous "Engel's and Brown's Scale of Steps to Christ." Sharon wrote:

"As a teenager, I had some questions about God and Christianity but not a lot of interest. I remember hearing Billy Graham say on television that he was sure he was going to heaven, and I thought, "How can he be so sure?" High school was a very difficult time for me, and then a classmate asked me to go to his church. I was curious and searching for answers, and I had a crush on the boy, so I said yes.

I met with the youth group at the church and talked for a long time with the woman youth pastor. Then I remember going out into the hall with the young woman, sitting on the steps with her, and giving my life to Jesus.

I started attending church and the youth group and loved having them as my friends. But I had even more questions and nobody had the answers. Nothing seemed to make sense. "Why are we here? What is our purpose? Why are people so hard to understand, and why do people so often misunderstand what I say or do?" I started reading the Bible looking for answers, but it just caused me more confusion. Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice." I didn't know his voice, how come?

After high school I enrolled in a Baptist Bible college in Texas, but that caused me even more confusion. I thought all Christians believed the same things about God and the Bible, but I learned that wasn't true at all. They argued about everything. Some of my professors didn't even believe certain things in the Bible.

The next year I moved to a different Bible college near my home and my mother in Colorado. I learned a lot of things there, but my soul was searching for answers to life questions that were never addressed. If someone had asked me to sum up my life in one word at that time, my answer would have been "confusion."

Years passed and when I was nearing middle age, my husband and I decided to quit

our jobs and go to Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry in Redding, California. Bethel Church is led by Bill Johnson and they always seem to be in revival. They have an inner healing ministry (SOZO); marriage ministry; Dream Culture; stadium events for young people; Bethel Music; and other ministries.

Joe and I stayed there for three years, and the deep ministry they led me into was the hardest, most painful time in my life. It was like having surgery without anesthesia. But it started bringing healing to my heart and giving me some of the answers I had always searched for. I now have a personal relationship with God and even pray for and minister to others.”

 Isn't that a beautiful life story? Please note that much of the confusion, pain and hard work happened after Sharon accepted Christ as her Savior and started trying to grow as a Christian. Yes, that is the way it is for everyone who is serious about living as a Christian. In the physical, natural realm, we are born as a baby and have to grow up into adulthood, and that is a difficult journey. Right? Likewise, we are “born again” as a spiritual baby and have to grow up into spiritual maturity. Peter and Paul both say that we drink milk as spiritual babies before we can eat meat as mature Christians.

Where do you place yourself on the scale of Christian maturity? Are you still a baby after many years of being a believer? Remember that it's painful to grow into maturity. Remember your teen years? If you want to fulfill God's plan for your life, ask Him to help you get started.

(I plan to lead another “Pathway to Freedom” class starting on Wednesday, September 29th - If by God's grace I am still around then. This class is designed to help people grow into Christian maturity. It is designed to bring healing to the heart and break the chains that trap people.)

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DOES GOD ALWAYS HEAR OUR PRAYERS? NO, HE DOES NOT.

“What? How can you say that, brother Glenn? Everybody says that God is loving and kind and always listens to our prayers.”

It is true that God is loving and kind, but it is also true that He doesn't always listen to our prayers. It doesn't matter what “everybody says.” The Bible says clearly that our prayers are conditional and that if we don't meet God's conditions then He closes His ears and refuses to listen to us. Kind of sobering, isn't it?

Let me clarify: There is one kind of prayer that God always listens to. It sounds like this -

- “Forgive me, Father in heaven.”
- “Oh God, have mercy on me.”
- “Help me, Lord.”
- “Jesus, hear my prayer and show me what to do.”
- “I repent, Lord, please cleanse me from my sins.”
- “I accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord. I surrender my life to you, Lord. Please help me to overcome my sin and rebellion and to live for you.”
- “I humble myself before you, Jesus.”
- “I pray for wisdom, Lord.”

Those are the kinds of prayers God is always listening for. *He stands at the door and knocks* at the door of our heart, and He listens for the faintest indication that we are opening the door to Him.

Then when are our prayers conditional, and what condition does God want us to meet? It is clear all through the Bible: After we accept Christ as Lord and Savior, if we continue to live in sin and disobedience, God will close His ears and refuse to hear or answer our prayers.

Note: God understands that living a Christian life goes against our fallen nature and that it is a hard struggle for us to overcome our self, to die to self, and to live for Him. Read Sharon Jones' story again and see how difficult it was for her, and she only touches on the difficulties she went through. And read Paul's testimony in Romans 7 where he said he found himself “*doing the very things he hated.*” We can all identify with that struggle. God understands that, of course. But that is not what God is talking about.

God is talking about the attitude that, “Well, I’ve joined the church; I said the words in front of the church; I got baptized; I got my fire insurance; I took care of the God question, the heaven question; so now I can relax and live like everybody else. If I slip back into my old sins, it doesn’t matter. God is cool with it. God is always on call, so if I fall into a serious problem, I will just pray and He will run to take care of me.”

To those people who think like that, and there are many like that in the church, there is a big, red, flashing sign over their heads. It says, “**Danger! Danger! Danger.**”

Let me list a few of the many Scriptures that pertain to this subject:

1. God said through Moses, about 1,500 years B.C., and I’m paraphrasing- *If a person hears this teaching and thinks, “Now I’m safe, but he continues to persist in going his own way in defiance of God, I will never forgive him and my wrath will burn against that man.”* (Deut. 29:19-21)
2. God said through David, about 1,000 years B.C. - *To those who honor me and keep your promises to me, call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you. But to the wicked who disobey and dishonor me, what right do you have to recite my Scriptures and pretend to be my people? Consider this, you who forget God, I will tear you to pieces with none to rescue.* (Psalm 50:15-23)
3. God said through Isaiah, about 700 years B.C. - *Surely God’s ear is not too dull to hear, **but your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.*** (Isa. 59:1-3, and see all of Isaiah chapter 1)
4. God said through Jesus Christ - *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven.* (Matthew 7:21-27)
5. God said through the blind man who was healed by Jesus - *We know that God does not listen to sinners* (those

who are living in rebellion and disobedience). *He listens to the godly man who does his will.* (John 9:31)

6. God said through James - *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives.* (James 4:3)
7. And there are numerous other passages that make the same point.

So what is God saying to us through all these Scriptures? When a man and woman enter the covenant of marriage, it is a serious commitment. It’s hard work to make a marriage work, and if both don’t take it seriously and work at it, then it may fail. Entering into a covenant with God through faith in Jesus Christ is infinitely more serious than marriage. But frankly there are many in the church who do not take it seriously. They believe they can make a covenant with the Christ who died on the cross for them and then flaunt that commitment.

Years ago one of my sons had a close friend that had a business in Ft. Collins. This friend was part of a big family that were pillars in an evangelical, Bible-believing church. He had a wife and two little children. He met a woman who worked in his business, and they started an affair. He abandoned his wife and children and moved in with the other woman. My son asked him how he could do such a thing, especially in view of his faith. He said, “I know it is wrong, but I don’t care. I’m saved and I can’t be lost, so I’m going to do what I want to do.”

Every time I think of that story it gives me cold chills. He thought the belief he had learned about in his church, “Once saved always saved,” meant that he could defy God, that he had an unbreakable contract and poor old God couldn’t do anything about it. Unless he repents, I believe God says to that man, *I will tear you to pieces, and there will be none to rescue.* (Read Hebrews 10:26-31)

Sin is what kills us. *The wages of sin is death.* God enables us to repent of our sins - our bitterness and hatred and jealousy; our lust and impure sexual lives; our addictions to alcohol and drugs and gambling - that are

destroying our marriages and children and our health - - and to live clean, loving lives.

Please, let's not try to play games with God. Let's not try to control or manipulate Him for our ends. That's a terrible idea.

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