

CHOOSING WORDS THAT PROTECT

Changing Harsh Speech, Insults, and Name Calling

A companion worksheet to : [How Does God Change Us?](#)

Name or initials: _____ Date: _____

Words That Tear Down and Words That Build Up

Words can linger long after a disagreement ends. A name, a cutting remark, or repeated criticism can leave someone feeling small, ashamed, or afraid to speak. Perhaps you learned to speak this way growing up, or harsh words come quickly when you feel hurt or unheard. Understanding that pattern can help you change it. God invites you to take responsibility for your speech and learn to speak with truth and care.

Our words can wound or bring healing. Proverbs 12:18 compares reckless speech to the piercing of a sword and contrasts it with the healing effect of wise words. Calling someone “stupid,” mocking a vulnerability, or attacking their character can turn a concern into a personal wound. We can address what happened without declaring that the person is worthless or incapable.

God calls us to consider what the listener needs. Ephesians 4:29–32 calls believers to speech that builds others up and to replace bitterness and destructive conduct with kindness. Before speaking, ask: What needs to be understood or changed? How can I say it in a way that respects the person receiving it? Building someone up can include correction, accountability, and a clear boundary.

Gentleness can change the direction of a conversation. Proverbs 15:1 contrasts a gentle answer with a harsh word that stirs up anger. Gentleness means choosing a response that does not add an attack to the problem. It does not guarantee the other person will respond well, and you remain responsible for your own words.

Anger does not give us permission to injure. Ephesians 4:26–27 distinguishes anger from sin, while James 1:19–20 calls us to listen and slow our speech and anger. Feeling upset is a cue to pause, identify the concern, and choose how to express it. “I am angry about what happened” communicates something different from “You are useless.”

Change includes responsibility and repair. An apology matters, and it needs to be followed by changed behavior. We can acknowledge the specific words we used, listen to their impact, and practice a different response. Respectful speech allows honest disagreement and firm boundaries. If threats, intimidation, or repeated humiliation are part of the pattern, seek help to address the harm; the person receiving it is not responsible for managing your behavior.

Use this worksheet to examine one recent interaction, connect it with Scripture, and choose a response to practice for seven days. This work is a response to God’s grace, not a way to earn His love.

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1 Notice Your Pattern

Choose a recent interaction in which your words or tone hurt someone. Describe your own actions specifically, even if the other person also contributed. Use initials to protect privacy.

What happened, and what did you say or do? Identify the insult, harsh tone, mocking remark, or personal accusation you want to change. Record only the detail needed to recognize the pattern.

What did you notice just before speaking: feeling dismissed, hurt, embarrassed, overwhelmed, or angry? What physical warning signs appeared, such as a tight jaw, raised voice, or urge to interrupt?

What were you trying to accomplish with your words—for example, make the person listen, win the argument, hurt them back, or gain control? What concern or need did you actually want to communicate?

What effect did your response have? Separate what the person said or did from what you assume they felt. If you do not know the impact, write what you need to ask without demanding reassurance.

A learned pattern can explain why a response feels familiar. It does not make harmful speech inevitable. Notice the earliest point at which you can choose a different response.

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2 Bring the Pattern Into the Light of Scripture

Read the passages below in context. These notes are summaries and applications, not quotations. Choose one passage that directly addresses the interaction you described.

Proverbs 12:18 Consider whether your words attacked the person or helped address the concern. What would wisdom change about your response?

Ephesians 4:26–32 Notice the connection between anger, speech, kindness, and forgiveness. Identify what you need to stop and what you can practice instead.

Proverbs 15:1 and James 1:19–20 Consider how listening, pacing, and tone could change your next response. Gentleness can include a firm statement of what is acceptable.

Which passage did you choose? Write the reference and explain in your own words what it asks you to change about your speech.

What thought gave you permission to attack—for example, “They deserve it” or “They only listen when I yell”? Write that thought, then a response consistent with the passage you read.

What are you repeatedly feeding that strengthens this response? Consider rehearsing grievances, insulting humor, or conversations that normalize contempt. Name one influence you will reduce and one truth you will practice remembering.

Guarding your heart includes attending to what shapes your inner life and the choices that follow (Proverbs 4:23). Ask God to help you address the resentment, fear, or desire for control behind your words, as well as the words themselves.

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3 Practice Speaking Without Attacking

Pause when you notice your warning signs. Identify the specific behavior or event, name your concern, and make a clear request or boundary. If you cannot speak respectfully, take a break and agree on a time to return when it is appropriate and safe.

Words that tear down	A response to practice
<i>"You're so stupid."</i>	<i>"I disagree with that decision. Let's discuss what happened and what needs to change."</i>
<i>"You never care about anyone."</i>	<i>"When you looked at your phone while I spoke, I felt dismissed. Please put it away while we talk."</i>
<i>"Shut up. You're ridiculous."</i>	<i>"I'm too upset to respond respectfully. I need a break. Can we return to this in 20 minutes?"</i>

Rewrite one statement from your own interaction. Name what happened, express the concern, and make a request or boundary. Remove insults, labels, and claims about the person's motives.

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Complete the plan with actions you can observe. Include when you will arrange support. A break should help you return thoughtfully; avoid using silence to punish or indefinitely avoid the issue.

Part of my plan	My specific choice
My earliest warning sign	
What I will do before speaking	
The words I will practice instead	
Scripture truth I will remember	
Support or routine I will arrange and when	

4 Take Responsibility and Repair Harm

An apology names your behavior without blaming the person for causing it. For example: “I called you a name. That was wrong and hurtful. I am sorry. Next time I will pause and speak about the concern without insulting you.” Allow the other person time; an apology does not require immediate forgiveness or restored trust.

What specific words or behavior do you need to acknowledge? Write an apology without “but,” excuses, or pressure for the other person to reassure you. If contact is inappropriate, identify another responsible step.

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4 Take Responsibility and Repair Harm (continued)

What action will show change? State what you will practice, when you will begin, and whether you need accountability or counseling to address a repeated pattern.

How will you listen if the person describes the impact of your words? Write a response that acknowledges their experience without defending yourself or asking them to move on.

If the pattern happens again, stop the attack, acknowledge it, and revisit the earliest warning sign you missed. Adjust the plan and seek additional support when needed. Progress includes more consistent behavior over time, not simply a stronger promise after an argument.

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5 Practice for Seven Days and Review

Each day, record one relevant situation, the response you practiced, and an adjustment. If no opportunity arose, write that and briefly rehearse your planned response. This record supports learning; it does not measure your worth.

Day	Situation and response	What I learned or will adjust
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

At the end of the week, what helped you speak with greater care? Name one change you will continue and any repair or support still needed.

Prayer: Father, help me notice what is happening in my heart before I speak. Teach me to express truth without attacking, listen with humility, and take responsibility when I hurt someone. Help me practice words that reflect Your love. Amen.

Scripture sources: Proverbs 12:18; 15:1; 4:23; Ephesians 4:26–32; James 1:19–20. Read the full passages at BibleGateway.com. Biblical notes above are paraphrases and practical applications.