

Lesson 11 / August 16, 2009

# A Slip of the Tongue

for use as

STEP 1 

Lesson 11

**Focus:**

What you say reflects  
what's in your heart.

Lesson 11

**Bible Basis:**

Proverbs 15:1–4, 7–8;  
17:4–10

Students will discuss the importance of choosing their words wisely so that both they and their words reflect a godly character.

**Materials Needed:**

pens or pencils  index cards

**OPENING ACTIVITY:** *Oops!*: Before class, write the following on a whiteboard or sheet of newsprint:

*Oops! I sure wish I hadn't said that!*

Ask arriving students to think of a time when the above words may have applied to them and something they said. Then have them share with several other students what the situation was and why they wished they'd said something else or nothing at all under the circumstances. Then gather the class together and ask this question:

*What are some consequences of saying something that we may regret saying later on and wished we'd said differently or not at all?*

As volunteers share, summarize their answers on the newsprint or board. For example, we can embarrass ourselves if we say the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time. But misspoken words can also hurt those we are speaking to or speaking about. In addition, we may be reprimanded or become victims of retaliation if we aren't careful about what we say to others. Today's lesson will focus on why we need to guard our words carefully and what we can do to make sure our speech reflects a godly character.

**OPENING STORY** [read it aloud to your class, or make copies and pass it around]:

**CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY**

We've all been in a situation like this—one where we've said something that later on we wished we'd said differently or hadn't said at all. President Obama recently found himself in one of those situations. At a news conference, Obama commented on the arrest of Henry Louis

Lesson 11  
**Memory Verse**

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

—Proverbs 15:2

Gates, a black professor at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It seems that Gates broke into his home when the door lock became jammed. A neighbor saw what was happening, mistook Gates for a burglar, and called the police. When Officer Jim Crowley arrived on the scene, he and Gates exchanged heated words, and Gates was eventually arrested for disorderly conduct. Obama, in commenting on the arrest, said that the police “acted stupidly” by arresting Gates even though he had proven he was in his own home.

To his credit, Obama thought he might be addressing a case of racial profiling. But following a public outcry over Obama’s hasty characterization of what happened, Obama admitted he made a mistake: “In my choice of words, I unfortunately gave the impression that I was maligning the Cambridge Police Department or Sergeant Crowley specifically.” But though Obama admitted his choice of words was faulty, he did not apologize for speaking out publicly on what many consider to be a local matter. “I continue to believe, based on what I have heard,” said Obama, “that there was an overreaction in pulling Professor Gates out of his home and to the station. I also continue to believe, based on what I heard, that Professor Gates probably overreacted as well.” At the very least, it’s safe to say that the President wished that he had chosen different words to express his opinion about the whole incident.

In another situation, someone spoke out in writing regarding their opinion on a matter and afterwards, probably wished they hadn’t said anything at all. The “guilty party” in this case is Amanda Bonnen. She apparently had some problems with mold in an apartment she was leasing from Horizon Group Management in Chicago and wrote her opinion about the matter on Twitter, an online mini-blogging service. She said, “Who said sleeping in a moldy apartment was bad for you? Horizon Realty thinks it’s okay.” Since her Twitter postings are in the public domain and could have been viewed by anyone with the right software, Horizon felt that Bonnen’s comments defamed the company. Horizon filed a lawsuit against Bonnen and is seeking \$50,000 in damages.

[Now form small groups and ask the following questions.]

- ▶ What do Obama’s comments about the Gates incident and Bonnen’s remarks about Horizon Group Management have in common?
- ▶ How could Obama or Bonnen have voiced their opinions in a way that was more tactful and didn’t have such potential negative consequences?
- ▶ In what ways did Obama’s and Bonnen’s words give a glimpse of something about their character, whether positive or negative?

*(Possible answer: Obama’s words reveals that he has a genuine concern for race relations and some of the problems that still exist between people of different color. But it also shows that he’s may be quick to make judgments at*

*times without having all the facts. In Bonnen's case, though her grievance may be legitimate, the way she voiced it may be show a lacking of understanding of the consequences of criticizing someone even though that criticism might be warranted.)*

- ▶ **What are some principles Obama or Bonnen could have applied to keep them from saying things they would later regret?**
- ▶ **What can you do to avoid making similar mistakes?**

(When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your *Adult Teacher's Guide*, where you read the Scripture and begin to discuss it; your Step 4 appears below.)

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News Source:

Politico – “President Obama walks back police criticism”

[<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0709/25381.html>]

Brietbart.com – “With a few beers, Obama tries to patch up race row”

[[http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=CNG.82f009296641d71012fd169066121cd0.1b1&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=CNG.82f009296641d71012fd169066121cd0.1b1&show_article=1)]

New York Daily News – “Chicago woman sued after complaining over moldy apartment on Twitter”

[[http://www.nydailynews.com/tech\\_guide/2009/07/29/2009-07-29\\_chicago\\_woman.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/tech_guide/2009/07/29/2009-07-29_chicago_woman.html)]

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# A Slip of the Tongue

for use as  
STEP 4 

Lesson 11  
**Focus:**

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Lesson 11  
**Bible Basis:**

Proverbs 15:1-4, 7-8;  
17:4-10

'BE CAREFUL, LITTLE MOUTH, WHAT YOU SAY'

**W**ords, once voiced, cannot be taken back. And if we're not careful, the things we say can be harmful us or to others. And so, since we can't retract our words once they leave our lips, it's in our best interests as well as the interests of others to speak carefully in ways that are helpful, with words that positively reflect our character as well as the character of God.

There are several ways we can do this. We can speak gently, choose words that heal rather than hurt, and be honest instead of deceitful. We can listen to what is good and avoid paying attention to what we know is malicious. And we can make sure that our words are good and honorable in God's eyes and speak only to the facts of a matter.'

[Activity]

Ask this question of your students: **What do you need to do so that your words are helpful rather than harmful and are good representations of your character as well as the character of God?**

Have your students return to the small groups from Step 1 and review the verses and principles discussed during today's lesson. Ask them to think about the ones they can apply when choosing the words they use to communicate their thoughts and feelings to others. Give them an index card to write out one or two of these verses or principles. Encourage them after class to take their index card home and put it somewhere prominent as a reminder of what they plan to do, so that the way they communicate what is on their hearts and minds reflects a godly heart.

Close the session in prayer. Thank God that He cares about us and for the principles He provides to help us be effective in our relationships with others. Pray that you and your students will apply today's lesson in practical ways by making sure your words are chosen carefully so that they reflect favorably on your character as God's servant.

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