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## WORDS CAN GET US IN TROUBLE



*“...the tongue is the dipstick of the heart;  
and I don’t always like what I discover.”*

I speak just enough Spanish to be dangerous. This was proven during a recent trip to Guatemala for ten days of teaching.

Though “hombre” and “hambre” sound similar to this gringo, they are radically different. The first is a man while the other indicates hunger. A lady I know got slightly befuddled and ended up proclaiming she was hungry for a man -- not a fantastic first impression.

I’ve lost track of the number of times I’ve requested Thursdays for breakfast in that “Hueves” means Thursday, but “huevos” is eggs. Ordering eggs on a Thursday can be doubly challenging.

Shocked stares resulted when explaining my children’s ages. “Anos” is years but “anis” is crude slang for intercourse. Even Paul Harvey wouldn’t want to know the rest of that story.

You would almost think the biblical St. James had me in mind when he declared, “...no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” I know James, I know. But it’s a challenge I’ve lived with even before learning to limp by in Spanish. At least this second language allows me to insult others while claiming ignorance.

Such excuses hold no water while speaking my native English -- but how I wish they did. After speaking harshly to my daughter, I could straighten it all out by simply declaring that she misunderstood. When word-missiles are aimed at my spouse during a heated “discussion”, it would be nice to turn to her and say, “That’s not what I meant. I thought I was pledging unending devotion and that your smile lights up my life.”

However, no such rational exists. The flaw is with me -- it’s an internal issue. As usual, Jesus summarizes it best in his observation that “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” He was saying that our words are not the core problem, our heart is.

Just as we evaluate the condition of engine oil via a dipstick, we can check out our inner condition by paying attention to our words that naturally flow. In essence, the tongue is the dipstick of the heart; and I don’t always like what I discover.

If you relate, you may also appreciate some of the tools I have found beneficial in dealing with the unwelcome words that sometimes spill forth.

First, ask God for change. That’s why Jesus came to Earth in the first place – to transform lives from the inside out; and that is where lasting and genuine change always

begins. When it is firmly rooted within, it will work its way out, even to the point of affecting the way we speak. Transformed words flow from a transformed heart.

Secondly, be quick to say, "I'm sorry". It is all too easy to leave a wake of wounded people wallowing in my harsh words. "I'm sorry" is the admission that those words resulted in another's pain and that I am just not comfortable with that ugly fact. Look the "victim" in the eye and declare the phrase with sincerity. Make sure you also ask forgiveness – this is the bridge by which we stride into renewed relationship. It's about taking out the proverbial garbage and starting with a fresh "slate"

Lastly, cultivate the habit of speaking life-giving words. This will become more "natural" as the supernatural transformation continues within.

Your mouth *can* be an instrument of great blessing. I believe in you, but more importantly, God believes in you -- and that's pretty amazing no matter what language we speak it in.