

## SESSION 1

# LETHAL LANGUAGE

## Experiencing the Power of Life-Giving Words

*The tongue is a thermometer; it gives us our spiritual temperature.  
It is also a thermostat; it regulates our spiritual temperature. Control of the  
tongue can mean everything.*

**Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline**

**VIDEO NOTES** As you watch, use the outline below to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

### NOTES

*"The tongue has the power of life and death" (Prov. 18:21)*

The Bible contrasts life-giving words and toxic words:

*"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov. 12:18 NIV).*

*"The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit" (Prov. 15:4 NIV).*

**WE MUST GUARD OUR HEARTS AGAINST TOXIC WORDS (see Prov. 4:23)**

**Truth vs. Trash:** When people speak words about you, is what they say truth? If so, believe it and embrace it. If it's trash, reject it.

**Every chance you get, speak life-giving words.**

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building other up" (Eph 4:29).*

Any time you think something positive, say it. Why rob someone of a blessing by keeping a positive statement to yourself?

Don't internalize the toxic words that others speak about you. Guard your heart.

**GROUP DISCUSSION** Let's talk about what we just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

#### **TOXIC WORDS**

2. A toxic substance is something that causes serious harm or even death. *Toxikon*, the Greek origin of the English word "toxic," refers to an archer's bow armed with a poison arrow. The psalmist uses this very image to describe the power of toxic words:

*[Evildoers] sharpen their tongues like swords, and aim cruel words like deadly arrow (Psalm 64:3).*

The author of Proverbs draws on a similar image:

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords (Prov. 12:18)*

- Those who speak toxic words in these verses are "evildoers" and "the reckless." How would you describe the similarities and differences in how words are used by someone who is an evildoer and someone who is reckless? If you can think of any, use examples – from the news, social media, books, movies, etc. – to describe both.
- Overall, how would you characterize the people whose words have wounded you? As evildoers, as reckless, or as something else?

- At some point in our lives, all of us have spoken words that wound. What thoughts or feelings are you aware of when you consider how the words *evildoer* and *reckless* might characterize you?

### **GUARD YOUR HEART**

3. Toxic words are words that lodge in the heart and cause deep wounds. When we internalize these words, we allow them to distort the truth about who we are – and that impacts everything. The Bible’s familiar wisdom about this comes from Proverbs:

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it (Prov. 4:23)*

In ancient Hebrew thought, the heart referred to more than just the center of emotions. It included the “entire inner life of a person” – everything we might describe as psychological, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. To guard your heart, then, is to guard the essence of who God created you to be.

- What examples come to mind when you think of what it means in practical terms to guard your heart? How have you done this well, or how have you witnessed someone you know doing this well?
- How would you describe the differences between guarding your heart and being overly self-protective in your relationships?

4. The verses that follow Proverbs 4:23 elaborate on it by listing specific behaviors that guard the heart:

*Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil (Prov 4:24-27).*

The first behavior on the list – the one the Proverbs writer perhaps considers most important – directly addresses the power of words. It’s easy to recognize the impact of toxic words spoken to us by someone else, but this passage emphasizes the need to guard our hearts from our *own words*.

Take a moment to recall a recent or past occasion when you were careless or misleading with your words. For example, you said something unkind, had an angry outburst, or spun the truth to make yourself look better. How might you have internalized what you said? In other words, how might your careless or misleading words have harmed your heart by distorting the truth of who you are?

## **LIFE-GIVING WORDS**

5. The Bible uses vivid images to describe the impact of life-giving words:

*The soothing tongue is a tree of life (Prov. 15:4).*

*Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (Prov. 16:24).*

*The right word at the right times is like precious gold set in silver (Prov. 25:11 CEV).*

- Which image resonates most with your own experience of life-giving words? Why?
- In the last one or two, what experiences, if any, have you had of giving or receiving life-giving words? How would you describe the impact these words had – on you and on the other person?
- Some words are not only life-giving but life-changing. Have you, or has someone you know, experienced life-changing words? Briefly share the situation, the life-changing words, and what happened as a result.

6. The four remaining sessions in *Soul Detox* explore the potentially toxic impact of fear, unhealthy people, false beliefs, and popular culture. These are important topics to be sure, but perhaps even more important are the ways you'll experience God at work among you – especially in how you relate to each other and share your lives throughout this study. As you discuss the teaching in each session, there will be many opportunities to practice giving and receiving life-giving, heart-guarding, and truth-telling words.

Take a few moments to consider the kinds of words and conversations that are important to you in this setting. What do you need or want to hear from the other members of the group? Use one or more of the sentence starters below, or your own statement, to help the group understand the best way to speak life and truth to you. As each person responds, use the chart on the next page to briefly note what is important to that person and how you can companion them well.

*It really helps me when ...*

*I tend to withdraw when ...*

*I'll know this group is a safe place if you ...*

*In our discussion, the best thing you could do for me is ...*

NAME	THE BEST WAY I CAN COMPANION THIS PERSON IS ...

**INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY** **What I Want to Remember** (Complete this activity on your own)

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. On another piece of paper, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session – from the teaching, activities, or discussion.

**FOR NEXT WEEK**

READ CHAPTER 3 OF “SOUL DETOX” BOOK. MAKE NOTES OF ANY INSIGHTS OR QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO BRING TO THE NEXT GROUP SESSION 2 “Scare Pollution” ...*Unlocking the Chokehold of Fear*.

***“We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality”.***

*E. Stanley Jones, TRANSFORMED BY THORNS*