



# CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

DON'T ADD FUEL TO THE FIRE

By Lenya Heitzig



**I**n New Mexico, we know it only takes a tiny spark to start a fire. In De Baca County, a freight train sent off a spark igniting a fire that destroyed 40,000 acres of land and all the grazing cattle in the area. More recently, massive wildfires necessitated the evacuation of Los Alamos.

*Wildfire* describes any unplanned fire. While we usually assume that lightning is the source, sadly, nine out of ten fires are human-caused. James said our tongues unleash wildfires through boasting and bragging. In marriages, nagging and bullying often cause conflict. “The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles” (James 3:5)!

On average, we speak 7,000 words per day. That’s a lot of potential kindling between couples. Once a harsh word flares, kicking the coals of petty paybacks adds fuel to a bad situation. The lingering smoke damage can contaminate our children, who often repeat the pattern in their own relationships; or our parents, who continue to harbor bitterness toward our spouse; or even our friends, who took sides in the argument.

Another way our homes implode is through rumors and back-biting. Repeating accusations and innuendo is like lingering smoke that permeates everything. If you are exhibiting symptoms of word pollution, ask yourself a few questions:

1. **Do I *dislike* a person based on second-hand knowledge?** This is a symptom of being defiled by simply listening to gossip about others.



2. **Do I *disapprove* of people involved in the situation?** If you choose sides, then you've been contaminated. God alone is judge.
3. **Do I *distort* the facts to others?** Adding to or "spinning" the information means that you are now corrupting others.
4. **Do I *deceive* myself by thinking my involvement is somehow accomplishing God's will?** Unless you are part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

At times, we've all been guilty of adding fuel to the fire of an argument. If you've gotten in over your head, decontaminate your heart and lift yourself out of the mire with the following steps:

- **REPENT** — Ask God to forgive your involvement in the matter and to cleanse your mind. John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- **RESTORE** — Pray that God will give you genuine love for the persons involved in the situation. Jesus said, "Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24).
- **RENEW** — Finally, renew your mind with the truth. John 15:3 says, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Meditate on Scripture and ask God to make your words a source of blessing.

Remember The Carpenters, a brother and sister singing duo from the 1970s? A newspaper article once described Karen as "Richard's chubby sister." As a result, she developed anorexia and died of heart failure at age thirty-two. Are ugly words eating away at your family from the inside out?

Here are twelve words that can quench any flaming tongue and extinguish hot arguments:

One: ***Please***  
Two and Three: ***Thank You***  
Four and Five: ***I'm Sorry***  
Six, Seven, and Eight: ***I Love You***  
Nine, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve: ***I'm Praying For You***

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."