

## 10 Ways to Foster Gracious Speech

Years ago, when our young family lived in Wyoming, my parents regularly came all the way from Louisiana to visit us. Just before one such visit, we purchased a dining table and chairs for a long-empty breakfast area. I couldn't wait to show off the new furniture.

The first time we gathered around the table, Mom pulled out her chair and sat. As she scooted forward, a leg of the chair caught in the groove between two tiles. The leg snapped off, the chair tilted, and my mother hit the floor. Hard.

My immediate reaction was not words of grace. Oh, no. "You broke my chair!" is what came out of my mouth. Not, "Are you alright?!" or "Let me help you!"

My mother looked so hurt. Not physically; the tumble wasn't bad. But I terribly hurt her feelings. My quick words revealed what was in my heart – I cared far too much about material things. My first thought had been for the chair, not my mother. And my thoughtless words wounded her.

The apostle Paul knew our words have the power to build up or tear down. In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, he tells them – and us – exactly what effect our speech should and should not have on others.

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Ephesians 4:29, KJV*

First, our speech should not "corrupt." Corrupt speech is far more than curse words. Corrupt speech is *graceless* speech. Corrupt speech tears down, deflates. Whenever we speak corrupt words to our spouse, our child, our coworker, or friend, they deflate like a beach ball full of holes.

Can you see them deflate? Any words not wholesome or beneficial tear them down emotionally and spiritually. Little by little the air goes out. Sadly, I've seen my own words have that effect on other people.

Second, our speech *should* "benefit" or "minister grace" to others. Once again, picture that limp, floppy beach ball. What happens when you blow air into it? That's exactly how gracious words affect another person. Like air blown into a deflated beach ball, good and edifying words will encourage and build up an individual, helping them to reach their full potential in Christ.

Even when we long for our words to give grace to others, sometimes things break down between our desire and the words that flow out of our mouths. Sadly, our words will betray us, revealing the junk we have hidden in our hearts. Things like insecurity, hurt, unresolved anger, selfishness, and pride produce words that wound, tear down, and corrupt.

Would you like your words to consistently encourage, build up, and give grace to others? Here are ten things we can do to foster this “gracious” overflow:

1. Regularly reflect on the unbounded grace God has lavished on us.
2. Remember God will hold us accountable for every word we speak (Matthew 12:36).
3. Constantly check our hearts for sinful attitudes and motivations. (See Matthew 12:34-36.)
4. Ask God to heal old hurts, soothe anger, and humble pride.
5. Refuse to use "corrupt" speech – any words that wound, discourage, or tear down.
6. Commit to using "good" words - kind and gracious words that build up and encourage.
7. Find something positive with which to begin and end every conversation.
8. Don't waste time talking about things that can't be changed.
9. Focus on the other person. Ask questions about them and their feelings.
10. Exercise self-control. Sometimes the most gracious thing to say is nothing.

With God’s grace flowing through us, our words can be tools of grace God uses to build up, encourage, and edify.

***When was the last time you noticed the power of your words to either wound or give grace? What was the result?***

*This post is adapted from Kathy Howard’s new Bible study Lavish Grace: Poured Out, Poured Through, and Overflowing. Lavish Grace is a 9-week journey with the apostle Paul that helps readers discover God’s abundant grace for their daily lives and relationships. You can find out more about Kathy, her speaking and writing, and find free resources at [www.KathyHoward.org](http://www.KathyHoward.org).*