

TEEN CULTURE

A Parent's Guide to

PROFANITY

axis

A Parent's Guide to **PROFANITY**

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What did you just say?!

For some of us, hearing a bad word come out of our kids' mouths for the first time was an experience roughly equivalent to hearing a tortoise sing an opera. We didn't think it could happen, and now that it has, we don't know what to do about it. Others among us only wish our teens' profane language were so surprising. In this Guide, we want to unpack a biblical approach to language that will protect us from becoming lame "language police," but that will also allow us to help our teens discover the power, freedom, and importance of speech for themselves. We'll take away bad words' aura of forbiddenness, and ask how best to address the issue of foul language in our homes. Fair warning: The approach in this guide requires a fairly deep dive into history, linguistics, theology, and the movie *Shrek*.

What is profanity/swearing?

Initially, the definition of swearing seems pretty straightforward. We have a kind of mental list of words that are "bad," and we sense that some of these "bad" words are "worse" than others. Some are R-Rated, while some are only PG-13. It's self-evident—to us—which words are not to be said.

But after further consideration, this way of thinking about profanity is unhelpful for the simple reason that there is no single list of words that everyone agrees should be unconditionally avoided. Words that count as bad words for one community are inoffensive to others. Take, for example, the words "fag" and "faggot." In America, each of these words is a derogatory slur, but in England—[as we learned doing research for this guide](#)—"fag" can refer to a cigarette and "faggot" can refer to a meatball! To make matters more complicated, among some communities, certain words are off-limits only in certain contexts. For example, among Christians words like "God" and "damn," though off-limits as interjections, are important in the context of worship and theological discussion. Clearly, it's not simply our *word-choice* that defines swearing.

The changing status of words across time, communities, and contexts should tune us in to the importance of *circumstances* in our assessments of swearing. When we hear a bad word—from our TV or our teenager—we can't rush to judgment. We have to

consider who is saying the word, to whom the word is addressed, in what spirit it is being spoken, and a host of other circumstantial details.

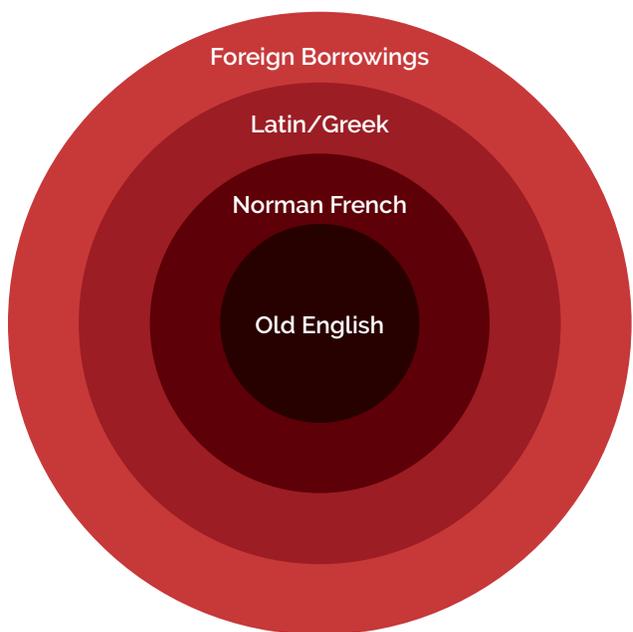
What this means practically is that we have to move away from a simple list-of-naughty-words approach to teaching our teens to speak wisely and to be careful when speaking in anger. Words alone do not a swearer make! The relationships and contexts of word usage do. Recognizing this fact saves us from becoming super lame “language police,” always harping on the diction of our teens without giving any *reason* for the counsel we give about their speech.

So let’s try a more nuanced definition of swearing: ***We swear when our language seems inappropriate to a community we are a part of.*** According to this definition, speaking rightly is a matter of timing, intention, and effect rather than a matter of following simplistic rules. It’s also a flexible definition. What’s a swear word to Grandma may not be one to our kid’s best friend. We hope the wisdom of this definition will show up in the questions below.

How did some words come to be considered profane?

Though most of us have an internal sense of what words are bad, almost none of us knows *why* those words are the naughty ones. [Jeanne Fahnestock explains](#) that the vocabulary of the English language as it has developed over the centuries has four layers (pictured right).

The words of the outer layer came into our language from contact with world cultures. For example, “caravan” comes from Persian. The words of the next layer come from Latin and Greek. They form the vocabulary of science, medicine, law, and the academy and tend to sound cold and distant to us. For example, the words



“biopsy” and “laceration” sound more scientific than words like “cut” and “carve.” The words of the next layer come from Norman French. These words tend to strike us as fancy or high-falutin’. The word “saute,” for example, sounds fancier than the word “scorch.” The words that form the core of our language come from Old English. These words are used more than the others, and tend to tug at our hearts and sound powerful and old. “Hymn,” “Holy Ghost,” “relic,” “life,” and “death” all come from Old English.

Now, most of our “dirty words” also stem from Old English. Why? In the Middle ages, the Normans invaded England and changed the official language of politics, law, the military, and other spheres to French for over three hundred years. During this time, Old English, the language of the conquered inhabitants, became “vulgar” (from Latin, *vulgaris*, meaning “of the common people”), and French became the language of political correctness. In other words, most of the words we identify as swear words today were originally avoided as a result of class prejudice. They were the words of poor, blue collar people, not the words of the upper class.

The history of swear words should make us examine our thoughts and feelings about swearing and people who use swear words. As [Donald Roth has written](#), “When we refer to such words as ‘vulgar,’ ‘blue,’ or ‘low class,’ we teach an association of lower social class with lower value.” We Christians are supposed to “[honor everyone](#),” but it is possible for us to harbor prejudice against people from a lower social status. We may dislike profane language, but we shouldn’t dislike it simply because it’s the language of “trashy” people.

In general, then, words become taboo when people in authority tell us—sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly—that we’re not supposed to say them. Censorship creates “bad” words, not the other way around.

Why do we swear? (And why does my teen swear so much?!)

[Magnus Ljung](#), a linguist who studies expletives (yes, that’s his job), explains that unlike other uses of speech, swearing has no referential purpose. When a man says “Those bloody neighbors of ours!” he is not saying that the neighbors are covered with blood. Rather, swear words “function exclusively as indications of the speaker’s state of mind.”

They reflect the speaker's attitude toward what is being talked about.

Within this general purpose of letting our state of mind be known, swearing is put to many uses. Probably the most important reason we swear is to signal that we belong to a certain group. The first step to fitting in is using similar verbal and tonal patterns. This is one of the reasons swearing is so common among teenagers. Our teens are transitioning from understanding themselves primarily in the context of their nuclear family to understanding themselves primarily in the context of their peers. Since bad words are usually off-limits at home, many teens distinguish their peer groups from their families by employing a lingo that cannot be mistaken for home-talk. (This is also the reason straight-up bans on certain words evoke rebellion rather than compliance from our teens.)

People also tend to swear when they are experiencing intense pain or emotion. In these cases, swearing can actually serve an important communicative purpose. They help us show that the present situation requires special attention, as if to say *I'm really in pain, here!* Or *What I'm saying right now is serious.*

Since curse words function as pressure valves for our emotions, it's no wonder that teenagers tend to use more profanity than younger and older children. [Teenagers' brains](#) sport a fully developed limbic system (that's the part that gives us our stronger, less rational impulses) and a still-developing prefrontal cortex (the part that allows us to distance ourselves from our impulses in order to assess the outcomes of a potential choice). For this reason, teens can have strong urges and emotions (don't we know it!) and meager cognitive resources to handle them. For adults-in-the-making, firing off a swear word can be cathartic. It can also be a difficult impulse to check.

Since we swear most often because we're experiencing intense emotion or because we want to fit in, it's tempting (and probably not altogether inaccurate) to say that the main reasons we swear boil down to an angry or unstable spirit and the fear of man. But of course, people use swear words for many reasons beyond these ones. Some people cuss for sheer comedic effect. Others use profanity to encourage people. The list could go on.

Why do profanities sometimes seem to convey something more fully?

It's no coincidence that many of our acknowledged cuss words start with an explosive sound. F---! Sh--! B----! These sounds carry over even into "sanitized" expletives like "shoot!" or "frick!" or "son of a beesting!" Words like these have the perfect mouth-feel for blowing off steam.

There's also a moral reason cursing can seem necessary to say what we want to say. Because communities have identified swear words as "off-limits," a whole host of things can be conveyed by purposefully crossing the boundary from polite to profane. The unspoken societal agreement that saying sh-- crosses a line gives people an easy way to add some comedic or emotional punch to their language. Cuss words are "extra" in that way. Here again, it's clear that the lines drawn around swear words are what make them taboo. If these words weren't off-limits, they'd lose much of their power as linguistic superchargers.

So far, we've been trying to peel the aura of forbiddenness away from swear words, since that aura is often the product of prejudice and is also almost certainly the reason people choose to use them. Of course, none of what we've said matters if the Bible prohibits swearing altogether.

What does the Bible say about profanity?

In one sense, nothing at all. The Bible never lists words that should never be said. The closest it comes to a point-blank prohibition is Jesus' warning in [Matthew 5:22](#): "whoever says '[raca](#)' will be liable to the hell of fire." In context, however, it is clear that Jesus' main concern is the sinful rage behind this word rather than the word itself. Elsewhere, [Jesus has no problem calling people fools](#).

If the Bible has no list of no-no words, why have so many of us been led to believe that there are certain words that Christians cannot say? The sad fact is that we have often made the mistake of thinking that being a disciple of Jesus Christ means being a respectable, middle-class citizen, a "decent chap." That mistake has led us to associate

Christian living with a certain suburban etiquette in unthinking ways. Our teenagers are right to sense the arbitrariness of this association, as well as its lack of biblical grounding.

If we want to teach our children a truly, radically Christian ethic of speech, we need more than ungrounded assumptions and knee-jerk reactions. We need to go back to the Source, to learn what the Bible says about the purpose of speech.

What does the Bible say about the purpose of human speech?

A lot! Let's start at the beginning.

In [Genesis 2](#), when God observes that it is “not good” for Adam to be alone, he guides Adam through a process that will culminate in the creation of his one-and-only, his wife. This journey toward a perfect companion requires Adam to exercise his power of speech. God brings Adam beast after beast, each time “waiting to see” what Adam will call them. Though God is the creator of the animals, He grants Adam authority to name and classify them. When Adam finally lays eyes on Eve, he uses his power of speech not only to name her (“she shall be called woman”), but also to express his love for her and to stir love in her for himself (“this at last!”).

Adam's song to Eve, the first human words recorded in the Bible, show us that God gave human beings the ability to speak for two purposes. First, to help them exercise stewardship over creation. And second, to establish life-giving relationships with other persons. We were given speech so that we might have dominion and share love. This, [according to theologian Kevin Vanhoozer](#), is the design plan of human language.

Because language plays such a central role in our vocation to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “fill the earth and subdue it,” God has endowed language with immense power. [Proverbs 18:21](#) sums it up nicely: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” We should regard our ability to speak with awe and humility, since so much rides on saying the right thing at the right time. The account of the fall of humankind in Genesis 3 is the most vivid illustration of this principle: The whole world goes wrong through the serpent's misuse of power of the tongue.

Within this general framework, the Bible shows that some pretty shocking word-choices can fall within the zone of “life-giving” speech, as theologian [Preston Sprinkle explains](#). For example, in [Song of Songs 5:14](#) the woman character in the poem utters a sentence that is often translated as “[my beloved’s] body is polished ivory.” But the Hebrew word translated “body” means “midsection,” and the words for “polished ivory” are supposed to evoke the image of an elephant’s tusk. “Yes, that’s right,” Sprinkle confirms, “The wife in Song of Songs 5:14 is,” well, happy with her husband’s proportions (to put it delicately). In another, less-poetic example, in Philippians 3:8, Paul compares his religious works, in contrast to faith in the grace of God, as “*skubala*,” a Greek word that might be better translated *sh--* than the ESV’s “rubbish” or the KJV’s “dung.” Instances of God inspiring graphic, strong, raw language in His scriptures—scriptures written to call dead sinners to life!—abound.

Several years ago, one young man we spoke to really learned the life-giving power of a well-placed, well-timed cuss word. When he was about to graduate from college, he was chosen to give the speech at commencement. Thousands of people packed into the stadium. Up on the stage, in his cap and gown, he was pretty nervous. Seated next to him was an older female history professor. When the time came and he rose tremblingly to give his speech, he heard the professor grumble joyfully over his shoulder, “Kick a--!” It was just the jolt he needed!

So it’s okay to cuss/swear?

Actually, no. Once again, it all depends on the timing, intention, and effect of the words we use. Though the Bible shows that some uses of strong speech may be beneficial, it also gives general guidelines that seem to rule out most swearing. In [Ephesians 4:29](#), Paul says “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” While not a straightforward injunction against a socially constructed list of profane words, this verse commands us not to say things that: 1. damage our souls and make us more prone to sin (this makes the use of racist, sexist, and other prejudiced speech sinful); 2. tear people down; 3. are inappropriate for the occasion in which they are said; or 4. shower people with graceless condemnation. Since some of the most popular uses of bad words—cursing, insulting, name-calling—run afoul of one or more of these criteria,

we probably shouldn't expect to hear Christians swearing very often.

Later in Ephesians, Paul adds another guideline for speech: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place" ([Ephesians 5:4](#)). Here, Paul rules out language that graphically describes sexual acts for the purpose of making light of them. Obviously, as Song of Songs 5:14 shows, there are times when descriptive language about sex should be used, particularly in the intimate space of a marriage relationship. But denigrating sex or the people involved in sex is unchristian, and therefore, sexual jokes among Christians, whether they involve swear words or not, should be rare, if not non-existent.

Basically, what we've been saying so far is that speaking Christianly is more a matter of timing, intention, and effect than it is of following simplistic rules. God gave us language to accomplish tasks and to build relationships, and all our language choices should contribute to these purposes. Thinking of it this way, and discussing it this way with our teens, is much more likely to encourage a household environment marked by upbuilding, life-giving conversation.

How do I teach my kids a God-honoring view of language?

We'll discuss in-the-moment discipline in the next question. For now, what big-picture, family-culture-level things should we do to teach our children the biblical view of speech?

Jesus says, "Out of the abundance of the heart [a person's] mouth speaks" ([Luke 6:45](#)). So if we want to change our teens' speech-patterns, we need to focus not on their vocabulary, but on their hearts.

As we have already explained, the main reasons people swear are: 1. to express intense emotion; and 2. to signal group-belonging. Addressing *these* issues, rather than vocabulary, will lead to more effective changes than brute-force disciplinary tactics like swear-jars, groundings for saying bad words, etc.

So first, we should cultivate a heart of peace and contentment in our teens. Obviously this starts with ourselves. What sort of emotional tone do we set in our homes? Are

we always on edge, over-stressed, struggling with internal turmoil? Do we have anger issues? Our emotional states get subconsciously communicated to our teens. But even if we walk in an angelic peace and tranquility, we will also have to take steps and create spaces in which our teens can [practice dealing with their emotions](#) in a productive and healthy way. (For examples, see the next question.)

Second, we should do what we can to base our teenagers' sense of self in the unfathomable love of God. Put alternately, [we should address their desperate need to fit in](#). If we speak a certain way among a certain group in order to seem like we are one of them (at school, at home, or at church), are we living “as to the Lord” or “as to man”? Of course, everyone adapts their language to their audience to some degree. You will notice that this guide is written in English! But our teens need help identifying the difference between proper adaptation and chameleonic assimilation. The best way to give them this help, we think, is to remind them often, through our words and our actions, of the story of God's plan to rescue them from condemnation through Jesus Christ. If there is no one who can condemn, then there is no reason to conform!

Apart from these heart-level issues, we should also talk with our teens about the immense power that God has given our tongues. We should discuss this in an abstract way—for example, by quoting [Proverbs 18:21](#)—and exemplify it by speaking life-givingly ourselves. We should tell stories about how someone's words hurt or helped us. We should help them see that they have a *choice* when it comes to the way they speak, and that in this choice resides great power for doing good. A family culture marked by a deep respect for the power of all speech is unlikely to have trouble with the flippant use of a few poisonous words.

What should I do if I hear my kid swearing?

What should we do when we hear an f-bomb go off upstairs...or in our face?

Usually, bad language habits are *symptomatic* of deeper issues and struggles ([Luke 6:45](#)). So it's usually best to ignore the bad language, at first, and pay attention to the situation from which the language arose. It's not unthinkable that a teen might throw in a curse word to distract you from a deeper issue. So look past it and ask, “What happened?” Is your teen frustrated with a younger sibling? Is she tired, hungry, stressed,

angry? Who is she with? Showing our kids that we see how they are feeling is more important than telling them that we disapprove of their choice of words.

Next, we should introduce a pause in the action before discussing the incident with our kid. Try changing the setting—move to the living room, find a place to sit together, or go on a walk. Christian neuroscientist Curt Thompson explains [the importance of body-posture](#) in dealing with teen-aged kids. Remember that teenagers' brains are prone to impulsive fight-or-flight responses. If they're not somewhat calm, we'll have little success in reaching them with counsel. Remember also that sons, who tend to swear more often than daughters, [find it easier to talk with less direct eye contact than their sisters](#). (That's why the best guy talk happens in the car!)

Have a full discussion about the situation *before* addressing language. Focus on the feelings: “You feeling pretty angry at your brother?”—“So... you dropped your phone. That really sucks.”—“What were you and your friends laughing about when you came in?” Avoid anything that seems to make vocabulary more important than life. If we can teach our teens to process intense emotion and not get caught up in peer pressure, the language problem will be less of an issue.

What happens next depends on the family culture you're trying to keep in place. If you would like not to hear certain words in your home, calmly explain that your teen's choice of words were inappropriate. They have the power to choose rightly, and you will expect them to do so next time. If not, consequences will occur. It might be useful also to discuss *why* such words are not allowed. Were the words used to curse, degrade, etc.?

Will it hurt my child's future if he/she “talks like a sailor”?

Many well-meaning parents don't want their kids to swear because they're afraid their children will turn into “riff-raff” who will embarrass themselves in a job interview. (We note again the associations of swearing with class-distinctions and prejudice.) Strangely enough, however, depending on where they work and in what field they work, swearing might not be as fatal to a job candidate as it used to be. [According to Forbes](#), “Profanity in personal branding is definitely hot right now.” And [according to one study](#) done by

researchers from Stanford and Cambridge University, people who swear are perceived as more honest and as having more integrity than people who don't.

Of course, this doesn't mean that swearing should be encouraged. What's more important is that our teens learn to sense when certain ways of talking are appropriate, and speak accordingly. The ability to choose and choose wisely among all our available linguistic options is not only necessary to keep from speaking inappropriately, but is also [a skill highly valued by potential employers](#).

Is it better to use Christian alternatives?

Ha! No. We find it funny that Christian subculture has invented its own set of “authorized” cuss words. You might recall [this video](#) satirizing the whole practice (especially 1:50-2:03).

So-called “soft” swear words like *freaking*, *shoot*, *dadgummit*, or even texting abbreviations like “af” serve essentially the same psychological and emotional purposes of “hard” swear words. So if we use those words for the same reasons that people use “real” bad words—like, if we use them to tear people down or because our hearts are hot with anger—[then we have just as much to repent of](#).

That said, Christian alternatives to cussing may be preferable for the sake of not giving offense to people who find the practice of swearing dismaying (Paul calls such people “weaker brothers,” we call them grandmothers). If saying certain words ever becomes so important to us that we are willing to needlessly offend our neighbors with them, then we need to get our priorities straight. The purpose of speech is to bind us together for teamwork and love. So say what gets the job done, dadgummit!

How can we not be legalistic when others choose to swear?

When it comes to profanity, we find that feelings of judgment toward others who swear are connected to our assumptions and prejudices about the kind of people we imagine

have dirty mouths. *Intelligent ladies don't talk that way*, we think to ourselves. Some people, especially from past generations, have similar associations with nose rings, tattoos, alcohol, and (mostly among people from a couple generations ago) dancing—even though all of these things appear in the Bible! Feelings and thoughts like these are instances of stereotyping and should be understood by Christians as a sin, namely the sin of partiality. Just as James tells us not to judge a poor man for his appearance, so we shouldn't judge a person simply by the way she speaks.

A few seconds of reflection will show anyone that everyone needs grace and forgiveness when it comes to how we have used the power of the tongue. Probably each of us can think of several times in our lives when other people hurt us with their words. We can remember things said to us decades ago. When we hear a person who seems possessed with toxic language habits, our first thought should be, *But for the grace of God, I would talk that way.*

Is it bad to consume media that has profanity in it?

Mainstream media outlets are well aware of the excitement they can cause by peppering their products with naughty words. One man remembers the gasp that rushed through the theater when, as a 10-year-old, he saw Donkey use the word “damn” in the movie *Shrek*. Shock-value tactics like this deserve our eye-rolls more than our gasps!

Even so, not all profanity in media is as nefarious as it seems to be. In the space of an imaginary world, characters can use words in ways that would be sinful for us to use them, and they can do this without tainting the artwork as a whole. For example, in Genesis 3, the serpent lies. Does all of Satan's conniving throughout the Bible ruin its master narrative or make it damaging to read? Not at all.

In a similar way, sometimes writers use bad words to signal who is a bad guy, who is stupid, whom we shouldn't like, who is racist or sexist, and so forth. They also can depict moments in which emotions are rightfully extreme and merit extreme language, or at least make extreme speech an understandable thing for the characters to do. Therefore, as in life, so in media: We have to pay attention to the circumstances of word usage rather than word usage alone. Where foul language is unconditionally

valorized, the media is probably not worth consuming on aesthetic grounds alone (how simplistic would a character be if he was cool just for saying the F word?). Moreover, in such movies, there are usually many other, more serious problems to make us put them down, like sexual objectification, gratuitous violence, and so on. Let's not make the mistake of banning bad words without banning valorized violence, greed, sex, etc.!

Sooner or later, our teens are going to leave our houses. We have to ask ourselves whether it would be preferable for them to know how to hear a swear word and not repeat it or simply to never encounter such language. **Obviously the ability to face the world and not follow it is better.**

While it is true that what we take in through our eyes and ears affects us, consuming media that has swearing in it is much more dangerous for people who haven't realized and respected the power of the tongue. When we watch or listen to media *unthinkingly*, we run the risk of being uncritically influenced by the content we imbibe. Realizing that we have choices when it comes to our words is a prerequisite to making the *right* choices. So perhaps the best policy is to periodically check in to make sure our teens are consuming their media critically. Talking about the stuff they're watching or reading or listening to is a great way to connect with them and show interest in their lives. It's also a great way to help them step back, assess, and rethink their relationship to such media in the first place.

If you're not sure you have the background knowledge necessary to engage your teen in this way, you should check out our other guides (see Related Axis Resources below)!

Final thoughts

God has given words immense power to heal, encourage, empower, and energize. It was, after all, through words that God spoke the universe into existence. And since "[words create worlds](#)," we and our teens should be asking what kind of world our words are creating. Our prayer for you is that, with God's help, your home will be marked by loving and life-giving speech that give birth to peace, goodness, unity, and joy. We all fall short—that's for sure—but the beauty of following a gracious God is that even when we can't tame our tongues, his Word comes to dwell among us, to redeem us, and to grant us the power to speak light, life, and love to our kids and to our world.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to Tough Conversations](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Kendrick Lamar](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Discipling Teenagers](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Generation Z](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Shame-Free Parenting](#)
- [Bullying Conversation Kit](#)
- Check out [axis.org](#) for even more resources!
- If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low yearly or monthly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass!](#)

Additional Resources

While the position represented in this guide reflects our carefully considered approach to the issue of profanity in the Christian life, ours is not the only Christian position on offer. In the links below, you will find a range of opinions on swearing. Each of the items linked below contains ideas and attitudes that we considered worth hearing, even if we ultimately parted ways with the perspectives put forward.

- [“War of Words: Getting to the Heart for God’s Sake,”](#) sermon by Paul David Tripp
- [“On Cussing,”](#) John Piper
- [“What about Soft Cussing?”](#) John Piper
- [“The Problem with Cussing Christians and Easy Answers,”](#) InAllThings.org
- [“What the Bleep Does the Bible Say about Profanity?”](#) Preston Sprinkle for *Relevant Magazine*
- [“What Makes Bad Language Bad?”](#) Paul David Tripp
- [“Is Swearing a Big Deal?”](#) *Relevant Magazine*
- [“@#\\$%! Language,”](#) Teen Therapy Center
- [“Frankly, we do give a damn: The relationship between profanity and honesty,”](#) Stanford University
- [“We are a Christian family and my son sometimes uses bad language and is disrespectful. What should we do?”](#) CloudTownsend.com

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Recap

- Swearing is not about word-choice, but about word usage in context.
- Swearing reflects a speaker's state of mind and is put to several different social uses, most prominently to signal group-belonging and to express intense emotion.
- The words that a given community considers taboo gain their taboo status when people in authority deem them to be off-limits. Often such boundaries are drawn as a result of prejudice.
- The Bible contains no list of words we shouldn't say, but rather reveals God's purposes in giving us the ability to speak, namely in order to rule over creation and create relationships with one another.
- The Bible shows that these purposes are sometimes accomplished through the use of strong language, demonstrating that timing, intention, and effect matter more than word-choice when it comes to assessing what to say.
- Nevertheless, the Bible also gives general guidelines about how Christians should speak, and these seem to preclude the use of foul language or to rebuke the states of mind that would lead one to use foul language.
- The Bible also reminds us to think on things that are good, beautiful, and true, which in turn should lead to good, beautiful, and true language.
- Teaching our kids the biblical view of speech depends on our ability to address the underlying causes of bad language usage, rather than the vocabulary terms themselves.
- We need to interrogate our associations with swearing to make sure they don't reflect unthinking prejudices that have no place in the mind of a Christian.
- Christian alternatives to swearing serve the same psychological and emotional purposes as regular swear words.
- Understanding the power we have to choose our words carefully is the best protection against being influenced by media that uses words in detrimental ways.

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!



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Discussion Questions

- Why do you think some words and not others are considered “bad”?
- Do you think it’s ok to say alternatives like “darn” or “shoot” in place of profanities? Why or why not?
- Do you think who hears you should be considered when choosing how to speak? Why or why not?
- Does the context in which something is said matter and change the permissibility of something? Why or why not?
- Is typing out full profanities different from typing out abbreviations like “af” or “wtf” or “lmao”? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the Bible doesn’t have a list of words we shouldn’t say?
- Since there isn’t a list of off-limits words, how can we know what we should or shouldn’t say?
- How can the intention behind our words change the goodness or badness of what we’re saying?
- Should we get offended when others use profanity? Why or why not?
- How can we use our words to build up, heal, encourage, and love others without being legalistic about things like profanity?

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!