

Equipped to turn off the flow!

When I was in my first year of school, I got into trouble for talking when I should have been quiet. My response to the teacher was, *“But I talk all the time at home!”* When I told this story many years later to a class of teenagers whom I was teaching, one of them said that I hadn’t changed - I still talked all the time. I quickly retorted that, although this was true, I now got paid for talking and, furthermore, my students couldn’t punish me for doing so! You see, I love talking, but there comes a point when too much of it isn’t good for us or for our hearers. A verse in the Old Testament book of Proverbs warns us, *“Don’t talk too much, for it fosters sin. Be sensible and turn off the flow!”*¹ What can we learn from this verse and how can it help us take control of our talk?

- **Talking isn’t the problem - talking too much is.** How much we talk will depend on the context in which we find ourselves. For example, we tend to talk less if we’re interviewing someone for a job compared to having a conversation with a friend. But how do we know when we’re talking too much? Here are some suggestions:
 - We talk too much when we’re not interested in listening to someone else. The New Testament book of James urges us to *“be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry”*.² I wonder how many of us consistently live according to this statement.
 - We talk too much when our speech is governed by grumbling and complaining. Remember the story of the Israelites after Moses had led them out of slavery in Egypt? It wasn’t long before they started grumbling and complaining against their leader.³ New Testament believers weren’t immune from this either - the apostle Paul warned the people in the church at Philippi to *“stay away from complaining and arguing”*.⁴
 - We talk too much when our conversation leads us into gossip. The book of Proverbs reminds us of how appealing gossip can be: *“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down into the person’s innermost being”*⁵ and *“a gossip separates the closest friends”*.⁶
 - We talk too much when we don’t get a balance between speech and silence. Often, we can be uncomfortable with silence and feel we need to say something - anything - in order to feel at ease. But there is *“... a time to be quiet and a time to speak up”*.⁷
- **The more we talk, the more likely we are to say something wrong.** Proverbs 10:19 tells us that talking too much *“fosters sin”*. It seems that, if we persist in talking excessively, it will only be a matter of time before we slip up. I find this is particularly true when negative emotions are running high. For example, any time I allow myself to feel irritated about something, I need to state my case with as few words as possible. If I don’t do this, I’m likely to get more and more wound up with every extra word I utter and perhaps end up having to apologize at a later date for having said something unkind in the heat of the moment. Ever been there?
- **We need to be self-controlled.** If we follow through on what Proverbs says, we’ll *“be sensible and turn off the flow”* - in other words, we’ll show some verbal restraint or self-control. We’re also reminded that *“those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way”*.⁸ Self-control is a wonderful fruit of the Spirit and there are many times we’ll need to demonstrate it as far as the extent of our talking is concerned! How often do you exercise self-control when you are about to become involved in a senseless argument? Can you control your tongue when someone criticizes you? How often do you exercise self-control by discerning between speech and silence - and then choose to be silent? Join me in learning to *“turn off the flow!”*

¹ Proverbs 10:19 (NLT)

² James 1:9 (NLT)

³ Exodus 14:11, 12

⁴ Philippians 2:14 (NLT)

⁵ Proverbs 18:8 (NET Bible ©)

⁶ Proverbs 16:28 (NET Bible ©)

⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:7 (NLT)

⁸ James 3:2 (NLT)