I could feel my panic level rising. The director of the companion DVD for my book, *Divine Design*, had just shouted, “Action!” As the cameras began recording, my anxiety level began escalating. I was excited about the opportunity to be the speaker for a teaching video, but I was also scared to death! The usual comfort I felt talking in front of groups disappeared at the thought of speaking in front of cameras. Although I prepared as thoroughly as possible, the butterflies in my stomach fluttered wildly when the big day arrived. In fact, those butterflies were so active I had to redo the beginning of the first segment four times.

By the time I got to the third segment, I began to relax a bit. Inside I was shouting a little “Woohoo!” when I got through the entire session in one take. After the closing prayer, I felt a sense of relief — until Peggy, my editor, approached me. “Sharla,” she said, “that was a great dress rehearsal.”

**Dress rehearsal? What went wrong?**

“We just noticed at the end of the session that you had lipstick on your teeth. Take two.”

While I wasn’t thrilled at the prospect of having to perform the third speech over again, I was grateful for the chance for a do-over. Pink teeth are not a particularly glamorous look. The episode of lipstick-stained teeth ended up in some electronic trash bin, and I was given a fresh start. Thankfully, God also gives me the opportunity for a new beginning. Every morning when I put on my lipstick, I not only think about what I am putting on my lips, but what will come out of them. I start out with good intentions of speaking only positive words, encouraging words. But it doesn’t take long before I’ve blown it. Too often my lips end up looking like they are wearing lipstick in the shades of Insensitive Iris, Criticizing Cranberry and Foot-in-Mouth Fuchsia. Yet even when my mouth is stained with speech in the shades of nagging, belittling, or grumbling, my Savior forgives me and gives me opportunities to use my mouth in God-pleasing ways.

The Old Testament tells a story about a man who also needed a do-over. In the sixth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet tells about a vision of heaven he received that changed the way he looked at himself. When Isaiah was faced with the holiness of God, he cried out with a deep guttural cry, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5) We don’t know what harmful words the prophet had spoken, but we do know Isaiah was convicted about his speech.
However, God did not leave Isaiah in a state of despair. In fact, God cleansed Isaiah’s mouth and immediately gave him a second chance to use his words for God. An angel of God took a burning coal from God’s holy altar, touched the coal to Isaiah’s lips and said, “Your guilt is taken away” (Isaiah 6:7). Then the Lord immediately asked Isaiah, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8) Frankly, I was a little surprised that God would offer Isaiah the opportunity to speak for Him. After all, the prophet had already come clean about his unclean lips. If he knew his mouth was dirty, certainly God was also aware of Isaiah’s mouth problems. Yet God gave Isaiah the chance to be His spokesperson.

What was Isaiah’s response? He had just been feeling totally despondent about the state of his mouth. Logic would tell me that the humble scribe would slink away, thinking the job of God’s spokesman was way out of his reach. Let someone else more qualified take the position. However, Isaiah shouts out, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

What made all of this possible? Forgiveness. Mercy. God’s exfoliator of grace. God no longer saw any trace of unclean lips. He offered the cleansed Isaiah a new role, a chance to use his lips for the Lord.

I, too, rejoice that God forgives all my mouth mishaps and gives me a second chance. I no longer have to feel the burden of my guilt, the stain of my unclean speech. Because I have experienced my Savior’s forgiveness, I am free to speak about His love. Each day He commissions me to build up my friends and family with my words.

God offers all of us opportunities to serve Him with our lips. Once He has cleansed our lips from the effects of nagging, insensitivity, and criticizing, He gives us a whole new makeup bag stocked with encouragement, praise, and mercy. Thankfully, our mouth mishaps do not prevent us from participating in God’s mission of sharing His grace. He extends His mercy to us, His baptized and forgiven daughters, and offers the chance to be a spokesperson for His love. Hear His words to you, “Take two!”

Sharla Fritz, wife of Pastor John Fritz, who shepherds Hope Lutheran Church in Aurora, Illinois, is the author of Divine Design: 40 Days of Spiritual Makeover. This article is excerpted from her CPH Bible study, Bless These Lips: 40 Days for Spiritual Transformation. Sharla will be the Bible study leader at the Women’s Leadership Institute conference, “Christ-Connected Women,” in Milwaukee, March 14–16, 2014.