

The Wise Use of Words (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] Well, over the past several weeks now, we have been looking at what Proverbs has to say about our speech, about the words that we use.

I have heard more comments, positive comments of various kinds about this series that I think anything I've ever preached on, not because of what I have said, but because of what the Lord has said through Proverbs about our language.

I've heard such things as these studies have been very convicting. I have needed these reminders to watch my words.

I've heard it said, I wish I could take back a lot of the things I've said over the years. As we've gone through these studies, I could have said each one of those statements.

They're true. In varying degrees, we all know from experience what James says about the tongue is true. Look at it.

[1 : 14] No human being can tame the tongue. I've not tamed mine. I don't think you've tamed yours as well.

That doesn't mean we're not responsible for our words. James says no human being can tame the tongue, but that doesn't let us off the hook for the negative, the hurtful, the harmful, the destructive words that we sometimes say.

Our words are not just mindless thoughts. They're not just knee-jerk reactions to various situations. Our words, as a general rule, originate in our heart, within us.

Jesus made it clear. What comes out of our mouth is an indication of what's in our heart, what's in our soul, who we really are. And Jesus said it this way. The good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good.

[2 : 28] And the evil person, out of his evil treasure, produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. Jesus is saying that a person's spiritual condition is revealed by the kinds of words he uses, by the way we speak.

Because the way we speak is the way that we think. It's how we feel. It's an indication of who we are.

Now, this does not mean that a genuine Christian won't ever say things that they shouldn't say. You know that's not true. We can say some terrible things, some hurtful things, very mean things.

When James pointed out that no one contained a tongue, he was writing to Christians. He knew that just as we struggle to overcome various sins in our lives and develop Christ-like character, he knew that those struggles include struggles with our speech.

The Apostle Paul understood that as well. Which is why he issues numerous warnings to Christians. Watch your words, such as, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.

[3 : 57] He's writing to the church at Ephesus, and he says that because sometimes corrupting talk comes out of the mouths of Christians.

We've seen over the last couple of weeks now that the Bible doesn't just talk about our words or speech in negative terms. All words are not destructive.

Words can be very positive, encouraging, life-giving even, as we have seen back a few weeks ago in Proverbs 18.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Paul even spoke of the positive power of our words. That sentence that we saw from Ephesians 4 a moment ago, look at what it continues to say.

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.

[4 : 59] And then he says something very similar in Colossians chapter 4. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

I've tried to make this clear just about every week, and I'm going to continue to do it. This study is not saying to you, just do the best you can.

Just do the best you can, not to say negative, harmful, hateful things, and just put forth your best effort to just say positive and truthful and helpful words.

This study on our speech, our words, Jesus said, words come from within us.

They're a reflection of who we are. Our words can help us really understand if we're Christians or not.

[6 : 10] The speech, the things that come to mind, the things we want to say, the things that we do say, that indicates whether the Spirit of God is living within us, by the way, He lives in every Christian, or it may indicate He does not live in us.

So as important as our words are, and it is important that we exercise self-control, we're not talking about some kind of do your best with your words when we study this.

This message is for God's people. It's for Christians primarily. God holds us accountable for the words we use and by His grace, with His help, with His Spirit who indwells us, we can overcome destructive patterns of speech.

We can develop life-giving, encouraging, helpful patterns of speech. That's what we need to be trying to understand, get a hold of.

So with that in mind, let's continue on looking at the positive use of our words or how we can use our words wisely. Let's look today at a wise person uses words to teach.

[7 : 40] Now all of us in this room, we're teachers in some way. Most of us teach informally. We teach at home. We're parents or grandparents or aunts or uncles.

We teach as friends. Some of you teach on the job. Some of you teach out in the community, volunteering in this organization with sports and things of this nature.

You may not realize it, but there are people who are around you. There are people in your circles of influence. They're learning life lessons from watching you and listening to the things that you say.

We can break down what Proverbs says about teaching into two categories, positive and negative teaching. Positive teaching is described as giving thoughtful, wise counsel.

Let's think about that. Positive teaching. Giving thoughtful, wise counsel.

[8 : 49] Do you think about how important it is to think before you speak? God does.

I want you to look at what he says in Proverbs 15. The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer.

The New Living Translation says it this way. The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking. The point is obvious, isn't it?

Godly, wise teachers are cautious about giving advice. I'm talking about godly, wise teachers, people are cautious about giving advice.

They're not impulsive with their words. They think before they speak. And the reason why is they want to understand the situation.

[9 : 57] They want to know what's really going on, have all the facts for as much as they can so that they can speak appropriately to the situation.

A godly person, a Christian, we should want to prayerfully consider what God's Word has to say about an issue before we offer too much advice, telling people to do this or not do that.

A godly, wise counselor wants to make sure that whatever advice they give, it is true, it is timely, it is appropriate, it will be well received, or as well as it can be received, that it will be helpful.

This verse is also a warning against people who are always quick to give you their opinion. You know, wise, excuse me, wise counsel, wise counsel is rarely on the tip of our tongue.

That's why the verse says that a godly person thinks carefully before they speak. Wise counsel is more than a personal opinion.

[11 : 23] I want you to think. Godly counselors think carefully before they speak. Are you a godly counselor?

Do you try to understand the true situation, the facts when someone comes to you and seeking your advice before you advise them?

And if someone comes to you about a problem with another person, you know when you just hear them, you've only heard half of the story.

And you really are going to be hard pressed to give a lot of wise counsel until you hear the other side. Until you get the complete story.

And if we're truly serious about being Christians who speak God's word, who speak the truth of Scripture, when people come to us talking about various things, seeking our advice, we need to

take time to think, what does the Bible say about this?

[12 : 44] And if you don't already know, to actually research it, to study it, to try to find out. A godly, wise counselor is someone who takes helping someone this way, giving advice, providing counsel, they take it seriously.

And so you think, take some time to prayerfully consider the best response, the way to counsel them or advise them.

But giving and seeking wise counsel is important. Don't take what I just said to think, well, I just need to keep my mouth closed. I'm afraid I might not say the right thing.

No. Giving and seeking wise counsel is important. God wants us to do that. Look at Proverbs 15 again. And by the way, Proverbs chapter 15 has the most statements concerning our tongue of any chapter in this whole book.

The lips of the wise, it says, in Proverbs 15, the lips of the wise spread knowledge. And the meaning of this verse is that wise people speak wisely. It's real simple, isn't it?

[14 : 05] Wise people speak wisely. Therefore, when they speak, it's worth listening to. Do you know who is a wise person in your own little world that you go to and listen to?

You want to hear what they have to say? I want you to think about it this way. If God has blessed you with insight, about certain things, and people just seem to come to you and ask your thoughts, ask you to advise them, and it seems that there's just a pattern.

You have some understanding. You have some wisdom. People seek you out, and what you tell them actually helps them. They appreciate it. You need to make yourself available to people.

That's a sign that God's given you some wisdom, some understanding, some expertise, and if you're a Christian who is seeking to really and truly seek to be a faithful witness to influence people, well, you need to use what God's given you.

You need to make yourself available. Now, don't be prideful. Don't advertise yourself as some kind of dispenser of wisdom.

[15 : 41] Don't think, you got a question, I've got the answer. But don't make it hard for people to talk to you. Humbly accept.

God's put me in a position to have some influence, to be helpful to some people. You know, we can also see in this verse the importance of us identifying people in our lives who are wise about certain things and make a habit of seeking their advice.

When I was in my late 20s, God put two men in my life who were older and wiser than me and I've made it a point for over 30 years to call them, email them, get together with them and seek their guidance, their counsel, their wisdom about all kinds of things.

Personally, as a pastor, in just all kinds of ways. Now, the reason I was able to do that is because they made themselves available to me.

They allowed me to call them, to email them, to spend some time with them. They became my friend.

[17 : 05] They wouldn't say this, but they became my mentor and I took advantage of it. I made good use of that friendship in terms of just enjoying their friendship but also calling upon their wisdom, their insight because they were just smarter and wiser and more experienced than me.

I want to encourage you to make yourself available to younger people in your family, maybe in your workplace, in this church, or wherever God puts people in your life and you know they would like to have access to you.

They'd like to pick your brain. They would like for you to help them. Now don't act like you know it all. Don't act like you know all the answers.

No one does. But humbly, prayerfully, carefully seek to pass on what you've learned that will be helpful to others.

You need to do that. A godly person, a committed Christian, someone who has wisdom and insight about certain things. God's given it to you.

[18 : 34] He wants you to be sort of like a channel, a conduit through whom He works to help to meet needs in other people's lives. You know, today there's a tendency for everyone to just sort of mind their own business, isn't there?

We live in a world where everybody just basically does their own thing. We need to be careful about offering too much advice. We always need to be on guard and not assume that we are wiser than we really are.

But it is important for us as God's people to make ourselves available, to be willing to help, to go out of our way sometimes, to provide thoughtful, biblically sound, and practical counsel when appropriate.

Proverbs has much to say about teaching. The truth is, the majority of it falls under the category of what we might call negative teaching.

I'm going to call it constructive criticism. That's the next category. Some of the most valuable teaching in life is uncomfortable for the person who is doing the talking and for the person who is doing the listening.

[20 : 01] You've been there, done that. Proverbs often calls this giving reproof. Look at the example from Proverbs 15, verses 31 and 32.

It says, The ear that listens to life giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

That applies to all of us. But the younger you are, you've just not had the opportunity to experience a lot, to learn things that a lot of people older than you have learned.

So especially you take that to heart. The word reproof means correction. It's used in Proverbs to describe helpful correction or constructive criticism.

The New Living Translation actually translates to that word constructive criticism in verse 31 and correction in verse 32.

[21 : 16] The real point being made in these verses is that a wise person will listen to words of correction. A wise person will listen to constructive criticism because that's one of the characteristics wisdom.

The wisdom being teachable. In Proverbs a person who thinks they know it all, a person who is unteachable, they're considered a fool.

And Proverbs has much to say. Warnings against being foolish and acting like a fool. This is the kind of person who refuses to listen to constructive criticism, to any kind of correction because they're unwilling to admit they don't know it all.

In their mind they're always right. So other people are always wrong. But I want you to understand it is a characteristic of maturity to be open to correction and willing to change.

Change the way you think. Change what you are doing. People who do that are showing signs of maturity, of wisdom, of just growing even in godly character if they're Christians.

[22 : 45] Now, outside of the home, offering constructive criticism is rare in today's world. I mean, in today's world, everybody, thinks to themselves, you know, well, you have your thing, you believe this way, and I believe another way.

Your truth is this, my truth is that. It's crazy, it's wrong, it's ludicrous, but it's the way people think. Outside the home, offering constructive criticism just doesn't take place as it once did.

Unfortunately, it's not even being done in homes like it used to be, like it needs to be. When I was growing up, I had good parents.

In no way were they abusive. But my parents, they just didn't seem to sit up late at night and worry about if they were going to hurt my feelings when they corrected me.

You know that? You know that? My parents didn't look at me and beg and plead or apologize for pointing out something that was just absolutely foolish or stupid that I had said or done.

[24 : 04] I played sports all my life, growing up, little league and high school. And all the coaches I had back in those days, I never had any kind of abusive, mean, crazy guy.

Some of them were Christian, some of them were not. But they weren't worried about hurting my feelings either. But they would tell me this is wrong.

You can't do that. If you're going to play, you're going to change. You're going to do it this way.

You're going to do it my way. And you know, there were times I'm sure when a coach or my parents said something and it hurt my feelings, but you know what?

I got over it. And a lot of you, I can see some heads nodding, you experience the same thing. We have developed a mentality, we've developed a culture where we have to walk on pins and needles or we're going to offend someone today.

And sometimes that takes place at home. You can't be an effective parent if you're always worried about I might offend or hurt my child's feelings.

[25 : 25] No, you don't be abusive. No, you don't be mean spirited. No, it's wrong to be harsh. But it's not wrong for you to be the parent, to be in control, to make observations about what's wrong

and right, to give correction and constructive criticism.

It's needed. God expects it. Chuck Swindoll makes some very helpful observations about what we're talking about. Reproof, he says.

Look at it. How rare, yet how essential. Pause and think of an occasion when someone wisely, yet firmly, rebuked your behavior, your thinking, or your attitude, and you became a better person as a result.

That's what I was talking about my parents, my coaches, people in my life growing up. You can think that way. Think about it. Then Swindoll says, look at Proverbs 27, 6.

I will amplify it using the Hebrew text as our guide. Literally, the verse reads, trustworthy are the bruises caused by the wounding of one who loves you.

[26 : 47] Deceitful is the flattery of one who hates you. Swindoll makes a few points here that I want to stress. I want you to listen. Number one, the person who does the rebuking should be someone who loves the person he or she rebukes.

Now, this is essential. It's important sometimes to correct, to offer constructive criticism in your home in various settings. But you need to make sure that the constructive criticism you are offering is done in a spirit of love with the intent to help.

love with the person. If you do not love the person and care about the person, your criticism is not going to be constructive.

It's not going to be well received. It's going to do more harm than good. It is vitally important.

trustworthy are the bruises caused by the wounding of one who loves you.

It's got to be done in a loving way. This rebuking, this constructive criticism. Number two, Swindoll says, a bruise tends to linger long after the wounding.

[28 : 14] It is not soon forgotten. Some constructive criticism really hurts. And the blow was so severe that it does leave a bruise.

But you know, a lot of our egos needs to be bruised. Some constructive criticism gets people, gets their attention in such a way, or maybe it's so needed, so sharp, so direct, that there is bruising. You don't just forget it in a moment. But sometimes, when that is done in love, to really correct harmful or hurtful behavior, that bruise serves a good purpose.

it's a good reminder. It can be that which prevents a person from going down the wrong road.

Sometimes, trustworthy are the bruises caused by the wounding of one who loves you.

I want you to understand, some of you, you may think about bruises emotionally, but you know that whoever it was, you know really they loved you or they love you.

[29 : 54] They care. They didn't want to bruise you, but they did it for your well-being. You accept that bruise as something for your good.

it may have hurt that person more than it hurt you, but they cared too much about you to just let it go. Some things you cannot let go.

Some hills are worth spilling blood on. That's what Proverbs is saying. I want you to look at one more comment from Swindoll.

He says, so much of this matter of rebuking has to do with discernment and discretion. There's a right way and a right time, not to mention a right motive for rebuking a loved one.

If your friend's motive is to help you, those wounds will make the best use of timing. Be done privately. Focus on a specific issue.

[31 : 04] Lead to long-term improvement and include lots of affirmation and encouragement. I want you to understand, in the home and in certain other places in life, correction is needed.

But that's not all that's needed. The people that you live with, the people that you're responsible for trying to train, correct, help, they need to hear words of affirmation, words of encouragement, words of love, words that actually build them up.

Not just negative, critical, correcting words. This is just an aside here.

Unless you're a visitor, everybody here knows I'm a very conservative person. But I want to say to you who share my conservative views on most things.

Don't just expose yourself to things like Fox News and other news sources that it's just a consistent, continuous barrage of negativity, of arguments, of tearing people down, tearing things down, and nothing good, nothing affirming is ever said.

[32 : 36] We don't need to expose ourselves to just constant criticism, judgmentalism about anything. What Swindoll says here is vitally important.

Timing is important. Saying things in private is important. And there needs to be more words of affirmation and encouragement than there are criticism and correction. When you look at what Proverbs says about both positive and negative forms of teaching, there's one common requirement for teaching to be effective, and that is the person on the receiving end must be teachable, and that's where we're going to go next week. But the words of a godly teacher that is knowledgeable of God's word, that cares enough about us to speak up, speak the truth in love, you need to be thankful for. We need to learn to listen to them. We need to learn from their words. I just want to ask you, are you listening? Are you learning? [33 : 53] Are you growing? Are you teachable? If you're not, I want to encourage you to start today, because we all need it. We also need to be such teachers in the lives of people that God's placed in our lives, especially those who are close to us, that we can have an influence on them, a positive influence, a godly influence.

Are you seeking to do that? Are you seeking to be a wise counselor by thinking before you speak? And by making sure that your words are faithful to God's word, words matter. Your words matter. My words matter. And as we looked at every week, they're going to be brought up on judgment day. As Jesus said, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak.

for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to see the importance of being faithful teachers.

Help us to see that we need to pause, think, before we speak, and offer too much counsel.

[35 : 24] But dear God, help us to take what you've given us and pass it on to others. Lord, help us to be willing to do the hard things and even offer the constructive criticism.

Lord, help every single one of us in this room to understand we need to hear it. help us to see that when those people you've put in our lives that we know love us, it's because they love us that they say such things.

Help us to receive it well. And dear God, we ask that you would make it clear that as we speak about our words, they're just a reflection of what's within us, with who we are.

And Lord, if there are people in this room that you have convicted, that they're not your child, it's not just their words, they know the Spirit of God does not live within them.

Dear God, help them to be willing right now to admit that, to turn from their sin, to seek your forgiveness. Help them, dear God, to put their trust in Jesus that when he died on the cross, he paid the penalty for their sins.

[36 : 45] Help them right now to call upon Jesus, to be their Savior. Help them, dear God, to surrender their lives right now to him as Lord.

And in an attitude of prayer, let's just respond to the Lord. I'll be here at the front and would be happy to pray with you, listen to you. You just respond as God speaks in the next few minutes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.