

The Wise Use of Words

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[0 : 00] I don't even want to answer out loud, but how many weapons do you think are in this room right now? Well, my guess is there's several pistols and knives that could be produced if needed.

No doubt. But those are not the kind of weapons I want you to think about right now. The weapons that I'm thinking about are our tongues.

For you see, this weapon, that tongue, on a daily basis is used more dangerously and causes more damage than the guns and knives that we have in our possession right now.

The book of Proverbs describes the human tongue or human speech as something that is very powerful, so powerful that it has the power of life and death.

Look at something we looked at two weeks ago from Proverbs chapter 18. He writes, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

[1 : 36] For the past two weeks, we've been looking at the destructive power of the tongue, haven't we? We've been looking at the wrong use of our tongues. And it's there. It's present in our lives.

We're talking about the wrong use of our words. We've noted over these past two weeks the harmful effect of things like gossip, slander, lying, boasting, or bragging.

We also looked beyond the speech problem to the real source of our problem. It's a heart problem. If we have corrupt words, it's because we have a corrupt heart. And Jesus is the one who pointed that out very clearly in Luke chapter 6.

Look at it. The good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good. And the evil person, out of his evil treasure, produces evil.

[2 : 37] For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. Make it personal. Out of the abundance of your heart, your mouth speaks.

And I pointed out last week, that is very convicting to me. And I'm going to guess it's convicting to a lot of people.

Proverbs has much to say about the destructive power of the tongue. But that's not all it says. Look again. Chapter 18.

There is life-giving power in the tongue. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. And that's what I want us to focus on today and next week. I want us to think about the right use of words.

Or to be more Proverbs-like, let's think about it in terms of the wise use of words. The first thing I want us to notice is, wise people speak truthfully.

[3 : 49] That's just the opposite of what we saw two weeks ago. Or no, really that one was last week. The destructive power of lying.

But today we're going to look at the flip side. The positive side. Wise people speak truthfully. And you know, Proverbs describes this in several ways.

It sort of sheds light on what we're talking about from different perspectives. Look at the first one. In chapter 15 it says, A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

The word gentle is sometimes translated soothing, and sometimes healthy. A healthy tongue, a soothing tongue, is a tree of life.

Healthy speech communicates complete truth. Healthy speech is not a sick form of the truth.

[4 : 57] Not a perverted form of the truth. Now the reference to a tree of life points out that this is the kind of speech that is life-giving. It provides wisdom, truthful words, soothing words, healthy words, provide wisdom for right living.

Now this form of speaking truthfully, what it means is you state the facts as they really are, not like you want them to be. This kind of truthful speech means that you shoot straight.

You actually say what the facts require you to say. On the negative side, it means you don't twist the truth. You don't mislead a person.

You don't pervert the truth. Now, let's look at it from a different perspective. From Proverbs 24. Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

The NIV translates this in a more, what we might call poetic form, and shows the comparison being made better. Look at it from the NIV.

[6 : 11] An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips. Now, the meaning here is that speaking the truth is not only right, but it's good.

It's beneficial. It's even pleasurable. Old Testament commentator, Tripper Longman, he makes this comment about that verse.

He says, Kissing and truth-telling are two positive and pleasurable acts one can perform or receive from the lips.

I know what you're thinking. I thought the same thing. The kiss has got to come from the right person in order for it to be pleasurable. You know, there's some people you just want to spit, you know.

Now, we're being honest here. It comes to your mind. But, let's be true to the text. A kiss in the ancient world and in some other cultures today.

[7 : 24] It was looked upon very differently from what we look at here in American culture. The kiss in Proverbs should be thought of as an expression of friendship or even sometimes hospitality.

It is not a kiss that implies romance or designed to be sexually stimulating or anything like that. The idea is that speaking the truth is a positive experience both to the one who speaks it and to the one who is on the receiving end. Now, let's stop and think.

You think about yourself. Is speaking the truth like what we're talking about? Does that come naturally to you? Because that's what's naturally in your heart.

Now, the red flag went up when I use the word natural for some people here. Because naturally, we're born sinners.

[8 : 28] We're born with a selfish heart. We're born with a heart that would cause us to say whatever we need to say to get our way, to make life simple for us. And so when I use the word naturally this morning to talk about, is your heart naturally such that you are inclined to speak the truth?

I'm talking about someone who's a Christian in whom the Spirit of God lives. It's the Spirit of God working in us that gives us the desire to be truthful, to be real.

Because that's just what we want to be, we desire to be. And so our words will naturally be this way as well.

Is it your heart's desire to be honest? Is it your heart's desire that what you say, how you come across, you are genuine?

I mean, you are truly sincere. Does it bring pleasure to you to be this way? In not just what you say, but in everything that you do.

[9 : 44] Does it feel wrong? Is there something within you that just causes you to think, this is not right, when you twist the truth? When you don't come all the way out with it?

When you're trying to hide? When you're trying to deceive? You know, speaking truthfully is really one of the most healthy, freeing, life-enriching things that we can do.

If you're someone who always speaks the truth, you don't have to worry when you're around a certain person and think to yourself, now what did I tell them? If you're someone who always speaks the truth, it doesn't matter if you're in this setting having to scratch your head.

Now what was it I told them? See, that's a sign of somebody who is either just a point-blank liar, or they just want to be deceptive, or free with the truth.

That's hard because you've got to remember what you said, where you said it, who you said it to, if you say things that are other than the truth.

[11 : 02] But when you speak the truth, when you live it, when that's who you are, you can just go and be who you are wherever, you can relax because you're hiding nothing.

There's nothing for anyone to find out. That's why it's so freeing. Wise people speak truthfully. They think truthfully because that's what's in their heart by the grace of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

They're a person of truth just like Jesus, embodied truth. As His followers, that's just who we are as Christians. But that's not all Proverbs says about this matter of speaking truth.

Wise people also speak appropriately. You've heard the saying, timing is everything. Well, that applies to just about everything under the sun, including our speech.

our speech. Look at how Proverbs makes this clear. Chapter 15. A person has joy in giving an appropriate answer and a word at the right time how good it is.

[12:20] That's from the New English Translation, Internet Bible. Look at it. A person has joy in giving an appropriate answer and a word at the right time how good it is.

Look at another one from chapter 25. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. The word fitly can be translated skillfully or even timely.

You know, speaking the truth cannot be overstated. overstated. But wisdom requires that we learn to speak the truth in the right way at the right time.

I like the way Proverbs uses humor to stress this point. Chapter 27. If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

If you call me at 4 a.m. in the morning to tell me you'd really enjoy this message, I won't like it. It will not be you are blessing me. If you call me at 4 o'clock in the morning and even tell me how wonderful my wife is or grandchildren are, I won't like it.

[13:42] If you call me at 4 o'clock in the morning, somebody should have died. Isn't that true? Or something similar.

That's what is intended to be funny. What he's saying here. As we grow in wisdom, we not only learn the value of speaking the truth, but we learn the value of being appropriate with it.

Saying the right words at the right time and in the right way. that's important. That's what wise people do.

And let's go a step further. Wise people speak calmly. We'll look at other words for this, but let's talk now. Wise people speak calmly.

Here's what I'm talking about. Proverbs 15. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Most translations say a gentle answer.

[14:49] A gentle, a soft, a calm answer turns away wrath. Think about it. It's describing a stressful situation.

Maybe you're in a group. Maybe you're just with an individual. And you can tell some tempers are beginning to flare.

People are getting on edge. You could cut the tension with a knife. And what Proverbs is trying to tell us is a wise person in such a situation, they're not just going to blurt out the truth.

They're going to try to speak the truth in an appropriate way, and in this case, it'll be a calm word, a gentle word, a soft answer.

Because speaking like that has a way of diffusing the situation, has a way of not escalating things, but calming things down.

[16:03] Now, such calm, wise words are not weak words. We're not talking about being afraid to engage in conflict when conflict has to be.

We're not talking about you just, you don't like conflict, and so you just do whatever's necessary, even evading what's right and what's truthful.

We're not talking about that. Calm, gentle words are powerful words.

Look at Proverbs 25. with patience, a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone. Speaking figuratively here, a soft word is a powerful word. It's persuasive. This calm, gentle, appropriate word of truth can persuade someone who's in power above you.

[17:19] It is helpful. It is useful. You know, another way to describe what we're talking about here is we need to learn to act rather than react.

That's a hard lesson to do, isn't it? In some situations, you know, tempers are already boiling. you know what you want to say, you know what you want to do, and so you just react to the situation rather than taking the time to be calm, to think, and to act.

You've heard it said, if something happens, piece of advice, you're angry, you're upset, you're sort of stressed out, instead of just saying what you think, pause, count to ten before you respond.

Sometimes you need to count to a hundred and ten, because the way we're going to respond is not going to be good. Sometimes we need to learn to just do whatever it takes to get our emotions under control so we can speak calmly, instead of harshly, so that we can help the situation, not hurt the situation.

You know, calm, soft, or gentle words will help all of our relationships. Everywhere. But they will help especially at home.

[18 : 49] Why is it that we come to church? As a general rule, we are going to be, we are going to use more calm and gentle and soft language at church.

You might at work, you know, you don't say everything you think, you just, you try to be calm and in control. You may be that way at school, but at home, we let down all guards.

They know me, I know them. We know each other at our worst, so we don't even think. We react instead of act.

we say what we think, the way that we think it, and it causes stress, it causes conflict, it causes hurt feelings.

Your spouse, your parent, or parents, your children would greatly benefit from calmer words, more gentle words, less reactive words.

[20 : 21] That's one thing that I wish I had worked on a whole lot harder when I was younger. younger. See, when I was younger, I thought too much in terms of just doing the right thing.

Always, you just got to speak the truth, do the truth, do what's right, and when I was younger, every hill was worth shedding blood on, if there was something right or so forth about it.

it's amazing how as you get older, you think about such things, you think about some of the damage you've done, you see it in other people, and you come to a conclusion, or you start thinking about it, this is not only not wise, this is foolish, foolish, this not only does not please and help the situation with my family, this doesn't please God at all.

You know, it's good for us to speak the truth, but it's not enough. We need to learn to do what else Paul said in that Ephesians passage, we need to learn to speak the truth in love.

You know, if I think about myself, I've never had a problem stating the facts as they really are. In fact, I've took pride in being a straight shooter, but again, the older I get, I realize it's not necessarily good just to be a straight shooter, just to state the facts as they really are.

[22 : 21] The truth needs to be spoken appropriately, in the right way, at the right time, and that will include speaking the truth calmly, gently, with more control, and more love, and more concern for the other person.

I know better than I act even today. I talked about, I wish I had learned those lessons earlier, and I sure do.

I still haven't mastered them. I'm still working on it, but I am aware. I am more conscious.

I am asking God to help me to think, to speak more calmly, to speak more under control.

And let's go ahead and look at the next one, and to speak less. Wise people speak less. You know, if you just read through the book of Proverbs, that's a great devotional study.

[23 : 33] There's 31 chapters. Read a chapter a day. Read it every month. You'll find there's a lot in Proverbs about just keeping your mouth closed.

Look, here's some examples. Chapter 13. Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life. He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

That's just real clear, isn't it? Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life. Whoever opens wide his lips comes to ruin. Look at another one, Proverbs 11.

The one who has understanding holds their tongue. You know, the word understanding is used not exactly but almost interchangeably with wisdom a lot of times in Proverbs.

The one who has wisdom holds their tongue. One more, Proverbs 9, chapter 10 from the New American Standard. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

[24 : 41] Can you argue with that? Everybody in this room doesn't just talk and have problems all the time.

some of us have a problem more than others. But all of us really do need to think before we speak and realize that the world would not be better off.

The world would not be missing something if we didn't say everything that we thought. we didn't contribute to every discussion. We know this is true.

Just think with me. How many times have you held your tongue but later on you wished you said something? There are some times.

There's a few times where you look back and you think, I wish I would have spoken up. That's true. But how many times have you said something and then later on you thought to yourself, I'd give anything if I had not said a word.

[25 : 57] If I had not opened my mouth. If I could somehow or another see all those times in my life, I'd have to have a calculator. Wouldn't some of you?

We need to learn to speak less and listen more. James, the proverb guy of the New Testament says this, Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Great advice, isn't it? How do you need to respond to this message? speech? As we've gone through this, trying to look at more positive aspects of speech, Scripture is real clear, we need to speak truthfully.

But it's also clear, we need to speak appropriately in a timely way. And we need to learn to be under control when we speak and speak calmly and gently, at least a lot of times.

And most of us would profit from speaking less. So as we think about how we should respond, think about it.

[27 : 22] Ask God to make it clear to you. And understand, again, what we're talking about, if you see some problems here, it's not a problem with your tongue, it's a problem with your heart.

Because what comes out of our mouths, it's in us. It's who we are. And so if God's speaking to you, He's not saying just try to clean up your language, try to just be more positive.

He's telling us to look within at who we are, at our character. If you are a Christian truly indwelt by the Spirit of God, He is convicting you about some of this.

Confess sin if there's sin. Make a commitment that you're going to seek to be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence and be one who is more calm, more you're going to just work on with His help to be aware and then to just do it.

Be more calm, be more timely in speaking and in speaking the truth. It may be that you're not a Christian and as we've gone through this, the Lord's just shown you the problem's you.

[28 : 39] You're just not a truthful person, you're not anything like what we're talking about. It's a heart issue. And if God's showing you that, admit to Him your sin and your separation from Him, that you're not the person that He wants you to be.

Change your mind about that. Turn from that sin. Put your trust in Jesus Christ believing, knowing that when He died on the cross, He actually took the punishment for that sin, for all your sins.

Call upon Him to save you. Our words matter. They matter for all kinds of reasons. But I want to conclude as I have for the last three weeks now.

our words matter because they reveal the condition of our heart and they will be recalled by God on judgment day.

Jesus said in Matthew 12, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak.

[29 : 45] For by your words, you will be justified. And by your words, you will be condemned. Let's pray together. Dear God, drive home the point to us that our words do matter.

And Father, help us to see that it's important that we don't just speak negatively and critically, but that we also speak positively, wisely, speaking the truth in a timely and an appropriate way, calmly, gently, having a calming effect on people and situations.

Father, show us how we should respond and help us to do that.

If I could pray with you in this attitude of prayer, just be prayerful, listen to the Lord and obey Him.

And if I could pray with you, help you during this time, I'll be here at the front, happy to do that. Let's just listen to the Lord and respond as He speaks now.