

Getting Serious About Our Speech

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Date: 15 January 2017

[0 : 00] 15 days into a brand new year. How are you coming with your New Year's resolutions? You know, I know a lot of people don't make them.

I rarely ever hear anyone talk about their New Year's resolutions, but evidently many people do make them. The Nielsen organization, the one that measures TV viewing, they did a survey a couple of years ago, and they came out, as you see on the screen, with a top 10 New Year's resolution list in 2015.

Only 16% of the people, if you look down, do not make resolutions. As you look at that list, what's missing?

Two things are not on that list that really do surprise me. First, there's no mention of God on there. I mean, there's no mention of God, of spirituality, of religion.

And that was a poll taken among Americans, where we profess to believe in God. Many still profess to be Christians.

[1 : 17] But out of the top 10 New Year's resolutions, drawing closer to God was not on there. Learning more about how to please Him, how to live like a Christian was not on there.

The other thing that was not on the list that surprises me, there was nothing there about controlling your tongue. The other thing on there about watching your words.

Don't you get into more trouble with your words than anything else? I mean, I do. And I know you do, too. If you don't think you do, you're in bigger trouble than you think.

Because people who know you would say, yes, he, she does say things they ought not say sometimes.

Young people, you think about it. How many times have you gotten in trouble at home or school because of something you said or the way you said it?

[2 : 26] Wouldn't that be the reason why you get in trouble more times than not? It always was when I was growing up. Adults. How many conflicts have you had recently over something you said or was said to you, either in person, in an email, or on social media?

You know, if you keep up with the news, just about every week, you read where an athlete, entertainer, business person, or politician has gotten into trouble over the words they spoke, tweeted, or posted.

It's just happening all the time. We know words have power. Words have tremendous power. They can help. They can hurt. That's why the book of Proverbs has so much to say about our speech.

Chuck Swindoll does a good job of pointing out the wealth of teaching about our words in Proverbs. Look at it. He says, Solomon had a lot to say about what we say.

[3 : 42] In fact, the terms tongue, mouth, lips, and words occur almost 150 times in Proverbs. On average, a reference to speech appears five times in each of the 31 chapters.

Seems to me any subject mentioned that often calls for extended attention in our examination of the book of Proverbs. He's right, isn't he?

If God filled this great book of wisdom with so much about our speech, we need to pay close attention.

We need to look closely at what he says. So I would like to do this for the next two or three weeks. And I want to begin today by looking at why we need to be serious about our speech.

And the first thing I want you to notice is the power of our words as seen in Proverbs chapter 18. Our words are powerful. We know that.

[4 : 45] But look at how they're described here in this one verse, Proverbs 18, 21. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

And those who love it will eat its fruits. The first part of this verse is simple to understand. The tongue, which is a reference to our speech, our words.

It has the power of life and death, literally and figuratively. The second part is not as straightforward, but we can figure it out.

Look at it. Those who love it. That's referring to the tongue. He's just been talking about the power of the tongue and those who love it. The tongue will eat its fruits.

The idea is those who love to talk or listen to themselves talk will eventually taste the fruit of their lips. Eventually, we will experience the consequences of our speech.

[5 : 55] This is a warning. We need to be careful. We need to be very careful with our tongue because it is a powerful weapon. And it can do lasting damage.

Many of us, we've got powerful handguns and rifles in our homes. You may like to hunt with yours. You may like to target practice.

You may like to just have it. Just to look at. But regardless, when you handle that weapon, you are very, very careful.

You don't play with it. It's not a toy. You handle it carefully and responsibly. Well, all of us, we've got a powerful tongue that can do more than kill the body.

I want you to think about the power of the tongue, the power of our speech, the power of your words. With your words, with your words, you can kill someone's reputation just like that.

[7 : 13] With your words, you can kill the closeness of your family. Your relationships can be hurt.

They can be crippled. With your words, you can kill the trust of a friend. You know, just think about it.

Through the choice of your words, you could destroy the fellowship of this church this week. You could destroy the morale of the place where you work or on your team if you're playing a sport.

God's word is warning us and we're going to look at several of these warnings over the course of the next couple of weeks. But God's word is warning us here we need to be careful.

Our speech, our words have the power to destroy, to destroy people, to destroy relationships, to destroy community.

[8 : 26] just like we need, just like we do know how to handle our guns carefully, we need to learn to handle our words carefully.

But words don't just have destructive power. That's not all that's said here in this verse, is it? On the positive side, words also have life-giving power. power.

Our words can encourage. Our words can inspire. Our words can lift someone up in such a way as to change the course of their life.

It may be that you have experienced that yourself. That what a parent or a grandparent or a teacher or coach or some friend said to you.

Just let you know they cared, they noticed, that they saw potential in you. They encouraged you and it made a difference in your life. Think about this.

[9 : 33] Our words can always communicate love in any situation. They can communicate our love, our care.

our concern. Have you ever thought about why our words are so powerful? You really can't argue with it. You really can't argue with the fact that words are so powerful.

Why? Well, having the ability to communicate with words is one of the ways we're like God. Think about it. Our words, our being able to speak as we do, identifies us as human beings created in God's image.

You know, Genesis 1 tells us that God created this world by speaking it into existence. If you turn to Genesis 1 and just read through the account of creation, every act of creation begins with this phrase, and God said, God spoke the world into creation.

Well, as His image bearers, He has entrusted to us the power of speech. and we can be like Him in that we can use words in just a great and positive and helpful way.

[11 : 05] We can create trust. We can build relationships. But we're not always like God this way, are we? And when we're not, when we don't want to be like God, we can use our words to destroy trust, to break relationships.

And you know what I'm talking about. You've experienced that to some degree, I'm sure. There's another reason why our words are so powerful.

They can penetrate into a person's heart and soul. I want you to look at one more proverb this morning. It's chapter 12, verse 18.

He writes, There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts. There is one whose rash words are like thrusting a sword into someone.

But the tongue of the wise brings healing. Some words are spoken like a sword thrusting into a person.

[12:19] Some words are spoken with the intention of penetrating all the way to a person's heart, to a person's spirit, and causing real pain.

You know, you think about it. We call such words cutting words. We cut someone or we've been cut down by someone.

some of those cutting words are sometimes spoken rashly, impulsively. Sometimes we just don't think.

Sometimes such words are unfiltered. And we just don't, you know, we just don't really think about what we've done. But the person on the receiving end, they can't stop thinking about them because those words, our words, cut to their heart.

They created a painful wound. They may have left a permanent scar. You know, this brings to mind, thinking like this, brings to mind that most untrue statement ever told a child.

[13:41] You know where I'm going. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me. Sticks and stones can break bones, but bones usually heal in six weeks, don't they?

You get over it. Words can break a child's heart, crush a child's spirit, and it takes a whole lot longer than six weeks for that heart and spirit to heal if it ever does.

I could have some teachers in this room to stand up right now and tell us stories about children in their classroom, children they teach, whose heart has been pierced, their spirit has been crushed, and they haven't gotten over it.

it's seen in the way that they look, in the way that they interact with their peers, in the way that they just live life every day.

Words can penetrate a person's heart and do damage that just can't ever be healed except by the grace of God.

[15:10] You know, you've heard the saying, time heals all wounds. Well, it doesn't. Time heals some things. Time makes a lot of things better. Time does not heal all wounds, including wounds that come about as a result of someone's words.

Now, words can penetrate the heart and spirit in a good way. look at the second part of that proverb. But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

The right kind of words can bring healing to some broken relationships. The right kind of words can offer hope in some hopeless situations.

If you watch the Clemson Tiger National Championship celebration yesterday in Death Valley or were there in person, you heard several young men tell of the impact that a special coach, family member, or teammate has made on them.

And one of the ways that these young men were helped by that special person was through that person's words. Words of encouragement.

[16:35] Words of affirmation. Words of correction sometimes. times. And one thing that impressed me is those big, strong men spoke about words of love that came from a coach or a parent or a teammate.

Words make a difference. They can destroy a life. but they can also heal. They can also build up. The book of Proverbs goes to great lengths to make it clear that our words matter. Your words matter. My words matter.

Words have the power of life and death. The word of God says. That's why we need to learn to be careful with our speech. We need to learn to watch our words.

words. But there's one other thing I want to point out this morning in this first message about words that we need to hear and think about.

[17:49] This is something that every commentator I read pointed to. I'm going to call this the revealing nature of our words. words. All of us have problems with our words.

If you don't think you do, you really are deceived. All of us have problems with our words.

The book of James says that no human being can tame their tongue. Do you know why? The problem with our speech is not really a tongue problem.

It's a heart problem. And Jesus pointed this out in no uncertain terms. This is what we need to see about the revealing nature of our words.

Look at it. One verse, Luke 6, 45. Jesus said this, The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.

[18 : 55] and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Look at Chuck Swindoll's comments on that. He says, Just as a bucket draws water from a well, so the tongue dips down and draws up whatever fills the heart.

If the source is clean, that is what the tongue communicates. If it is contaminated, again, the tongue will expose it.

Hear what Jesus says. Our words are a reflection of the condition of our heart. If your words are filthy, it's because your heart's filthy.

If your words are deceptive, it's because your heart is deceptive. But if your words are true and wise, that indicates that your heart is true and wise.

[20 : 03] So let's just look at ourselves now. What do your words, don't think about somebody else, what do your words reveal about the condition of your heart?

do they reveal that Jesus Christ is at work? Now that doesn't mean that you've got a perfect heart that produces just perfect speech, but it will mean that your heart and words have the Spirit of God acting as a filter.

Think about it. In the life of every Christian, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. All three names are found in Scripture to describe the Holy Spirit.

He is the Spirit of God. He's the Spirit of Christ. He's at work in the life of every Christian, and it's the Spirit of God who actually causes us to desire, to be able to develop, and then to demonstrate Christ-like character.

See, the fruit of the Spirit, the Scripture says in Galatians 5, is love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control. That's the character of Jesus.

[21 : 32] There is a struggle in everyone, every Christian's life. There's a struggle about this, over this, because we all have sinful desires within us, and there's sinful temptations all around us.

When we give in to those sinful desires and temptations, the Holy Spirit will convict us of our sin. He will inflict guilt on us.

The Spirit of God will not allow a true child of God to be at peace with themselves or with God.

When there is sin in our lives and we refuse to confess it, turn from it, and seek God's forgiveness. I want to ask you, is the Holy Spirit convicting you of anything right now?

Not just your words, attitudes, some things you're involved in that you shouldn't be. I want you to hear this. If you're a Christian, and the Spirit of God is convicting you about some particular sin in your life, He is not going to let up until you give up and come back to the Lord.

[23 : 02] Now you need to be thankful for that because that is a sign that you're a Christian. If the Spirit of God does not live within you, if He does not convict you of sin, if He does not cause you to desire Christ-like character, if that is absent, you have no reason to think that you are a child of God.

But if there is that struggle, there is that conviction, it's a sign that you're a child of God and you can rest assured God will never give up on His children.

God loves us enough to discipline us. And God will do whatever it takes to bring us back to Himself. If we're His, if we're hard-headed, if we won't confess our sins, God will make our lives miserable He won't let us alone.

And His purpose is to get us to wake up, confess our sin, turn from it, seek His forgiveness, and be restored to a right relationship with Him and have good fellowship with Him.

Let me ask you, do your words reveal that your heart has been changed by the Lord, is being changed by the Lord?

[24 : 36] Does your, do your words reveal that your heart is the heart of a Christian? Secondly, do your words reveal that your heart has never been changed, that it's just cold, there's some indifference?

it doesn't bother you, the words that you say. I want you to think about this. If your words are mostly selfish, hateful, worldly, deceptive, and hurtful of others, that's an indication that you've got a sinful, unchanged heart.

And I want you to wake up to that. You know, every one of us who are Christians, there are times when we do speak selfishly, hatefully, there's times when we do hurt other people. But that's not the normal pattern of our lives. That's not just who we are, because the Spirit of God won't let us be.

But if that's who you are, your greatest need is not to clean up your speech. Your greatest need is to be changed by God, to let Him clean up your heart, and that'll clean up your speech.

[26 : 04] But the only way that's going to happen is if you will humbly and wholeheartedly ask God to save you, and change you this way.

And if that's your desire, right now, confess your sin. Ask God to help you to truly turn from it. Express to God your sorrow for the way that you have lived and dishonored and displeased Him. Trust that when Jesus died on the cross, He actually paid the penalty for your sins. He took your punishment. Call upon Him to save you now. Surrender control of your life to Him. He's the Lord Jesus Christ. God cares about the way we use our words because they're a gift from Him, and they are so powerful.

That's why we need to care about our words as well. We need to care about our words because Jesus said that our words will be a part of the criteria for judgment, judgment at the end of our lives.

[27 : 16] And I want to conclude, this is it, with these most sobering words of Jesus about our words. Look at it, Matthew 12.

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. Father, Father, help us all this morning to see the seriousness of our speech.

Father, help us to see the power of our words. Father, help us to admit that our words are normal speech is an indication of what's in our heart.

Show us, Father, how we should respond to you now. Father, so work to call people in this room who are not Christians to faith in Jesus now.

[28 : 57] We pray. Father, call Christians who have become indifferent, uncooperative to your indwelling spirit.

And it comes, it's come out in their words. Help them to see it's more than the speech problem, it's a heart problem. Help that man or woman or young person your God, right now, to confess their sin, to humble themselves before you and toward anyone they have wronged.

Help them to seek your forgiveness. Help them to seek that other person's forgiveness. Dear God, do heart work in all of our lives, not just this moment, but every day.

So that our speech will do more building up than tearing down.

And in an attitude of prayer, you listen to the Lord, you respond to Him, do what He's telling you to do. If I could pray with you about this, help you in any way, I'll be here at the front. What's important is you listen to the Lord and respond to Him.