

Living a Wise Life

Six sessions applying Old Testament Wisdom Literature to 21st Century Living

Week 2: Wisdom about Words (*Proverbs 26*)

ICEBREAKER: Of all the words that have ever been said to you, which ones have had the biggest impact or consequence in your life? Either positively or negatively.

Start by painting a picture of what your pastorate, your friendship groups, your families, your workplaces would look like if everyone had complete wisdom with their words. Then **read Proverbs 26:4-9,17-28**

A: Introduction:

The book of Proverbs has a lot to tell us about how we use words.

1. Words reveal our character

The point: Proverbs has a whole range of characters: the Fool, the Drunkard, the Sluggard, the Adulteress. For all of them, their character is revealed by their words. “The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them” (12:6). “Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk” (12:13). “The talk of fools brings a rod to their backs, but the lips of the wise protect them” (14:3).

Sometimes we can disguise our character for a while with charming talk – but eventually we are found out like in **Proverbs 26:24-26**.

The illustration: Abraham Lincoln once said, “I would rather remain silent and be thought a fool than speak out and remove all doubt.”

2. Words result in consequences

The illustration: The tongue weighs approximately 0.4% of our total body weight. Yet it can have an influence far greater than we might expect, for good or for bad. Winston Churchill, during his time as Prime Minister, was being pestered as to whether he would or would not support a particular measure that was going to come before the House. He eventually got to his feet and bellowed, mischievously, “I will” (cheers from one side) “. . . not” (cheers from the other side) “. . . say!” He sat down to silence on both sides.

The point: Our words can have a powerful effect – for good or bad. For good – “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone” (25:15). For bad – “like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbour” (25:18). For both – “The tongue has the power of life and death” (18:21)

B: Using our words to bring life rather than death:

1. Be Restrained with Words

The point: Think before you speak. “When words are many, sin is not absent, but the wise hold their tongues” (10:19). “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (12:18). “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and those who have insight are even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue” (17:27-28).

The illustration: Bill Hybels says, ‘The less I talk, the less I exaggerate; the less I talk, the less I say things I regret. The less I talk, the fewer promises I make that I can’t keep. I suspect the same is true for you’.

The application: This doesn’t mean we should be silent. Silence is not necessarily golden. But we need to be wise with what we say. “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgement” (10:21). Proverbs 26:4-5 totally contradict each other – this reminds us that these are proverbs, not promises. We are to exercise our wisdom and judgment in the situation. Sometimes it is right to answer a fool, sometimes it is right not to answer them. It forces us to engage with life and with the dynamic will of God. We need to make a live connection between the varying circumstances of life and the wisdom of the living God. What would God have me say in this situation? “A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!” (15:23)

15 mins

BUZZ GROUPS: In groups, share a time when you have said something that you wished you hadn’t said, and explain the consequences and how it got you in to hot water.

2. Be Honest with Words

The point: We should not deceive with our words. “A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (26:28). “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (24:26).

The illustration: Give an example of when you were dishonest with what you said, and how it made you feel

The application: Being honest means saying the hard things as well as the easy things. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (27:5-6).

BUZZ GROUPS: Discuss when you find it hardest to be honest in what you say?

3. Be Loving with Words

The point: Being honest does not mean we should have no consideration about being loving. Quite the opposite. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1). “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value” (10:20). “Anxiety weights down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up” (12:25)

The illustration: Give an example of when someone has spoken loving words to you and how it affected you.

The application: Words can have such a positive benefit to bring life rather than death. There are three tests we need to apply before we speak. 1) is it necessary?, 2) is it true?, 3) is it kind?

30 mins

BUZZ GROUPS: Discuss whether you feel you are known to be someone who speaks loving words. Is this in all contexts – at work as well as amongst friends?

C: Conclusion:

To finish, it is worth answering two questions:

1. Why are words so important?

a) *Words are God's chosen method of communication from him to us*

God has not spoken to us primarily by symbol, picture or mime, but by word (e.g. **John 1:1, James 1:18,21**).

b) *Words are God's chosen method of communication from us to him*

Prayer is primarily about words, not silence or incense (e.g. **Matthew 6:9**).

c) *Words are God's chosen method of communication about him to others*

We are to speak the good news of Jesus to others. They can't just receive it by osmosis (e.g. **Romans 10:14-15**).

2. How can we be more wise in our words?

The point: Both Jesus, and the apostle James, tell us that there is a connection between what is going on in our hearts and what we say with our tongues. Jesus said - "out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (**Matthew 12:33**). James wrote, "those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, (a more literal translation of the Greek is – deceives not "themselves" but "their heart") and their religion is worthless" (**James 1:26**).

The illustration: The petrol indicator on the dashboard of a car gives an indication of what is going on where we can't see – in the petrol tank. Our words gives an indicator of what is going on where we can't see - in our heart.

The application: In each of us there will be an exaggerating tongue, or a manipulative tongue, or a savage tongue, or a boasting tongue, or an angry tongue, or a lying tongue, or an ill-tempered tongue, or a gossiping tongue, or a cruel tongue. It's humbling, but it's not meant to drive us to despair. Rather it's meant to drive us back to God who is the one who can bring about change in us, and in our words, by His Spirit.

45 mins

MINISTRY TIME:

In buzz groups, hear what particular aspect of their speech each person would like God to change, and then pray for each person in the group in turn.