

# WORDS OF LIFE

SERIES: CHOOSE WISELY



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Proverbs 5:1-20  
Seventh Message  
Dan Westman  
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*Proverbs - Various Verses*

## The Power of Words

We've spent the summer in the book of Proverbs, looking at various passages and themes from the book. This morning, we are going to look at what Proverbs has to teach us about how we use our words.

When I was six years old, I was in the first grade. On the bus on the way to school, a boy named Chris called me a name that is not repeatable at church. I still remember what he looked like, what his voice sounded like, and what he said to me.

When I was 25 years old, I was mentoring a high school student named Nate. During one lunch meeting, he thanked me for some piece of advice I had given him a year earlier. I had no recollection of what I had said.

While we may not remember much of what we say to others, they remember what we say to them. Do you remember something encouraging someone said to you? Do you remember something demeaning someone said to you?

King Solomon states:

### **Proverbs 18:21:**

**Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."**

Our words can be a source of life and blessing to those around us or a cause of incredible pain and destruction. Our words can lead us into a life of blessing, or they can bring us to a place of ruin.

We want to learn how to use the power of our words wisely, and we are going to learn how to do that from Proverbs today. Before we do that, we should keep in mind that Proverbs talks in extremes. Life and death are as far from each other as you can get. We want to learn to use our words to bring life.

Another extreme that Proverbs sets up is the wise person and the fool.

None of us is wise all the time. None of us is a fool all of the time. We live in between the two. And yet our goal is to grow in wisdom.

If you want to be wise, learn to talk like wise people. Wisdom is not knowledge. It's knowledge in practice. If you want to be wise, practice wise speech. How? We will look at three guidelines for learning to speak wisely.

## Speak Less

First of all, we should learn to speak less. This guideline is comforting to introverts(!), and disappointing for extroverts. Before we learn how to speak, we must learn to how to be silent.

Let's see how Proverbs makes this point:

### **Proverbs 10:19:**

**When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.**

The more often you open your mouth, the more likely you are to say something you shouldn't. But it can be so hard to keep our mouth shut, especially when we are right. We need to learn to speak less.

### **Proverbs 18:2:**

**A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.**

It's not enough to stay silent. We must stay silent so that we can understand other people before we speak.

Have you ever berated someone just to find out you didn't have the whole story? We must understand before we speak.

### **Proverbs 26:4-5:**

**Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.**

Sometimes you speak and sometimes you stay silent. Discernment is needed. As we learn to discern *when* to speak, it is helpful to know *how* to speak.

### **Speak Gently**

Secondly, we should speak gently. Often, what we say is not as important the way that we say it. Being wise with our words is not about having a lot of sage advice to give. The way that we talk—our tone, body language, etc.—are critical as well.

As a husband, I'm sure that 90% of my verbal mistakes toward my wife come back to this issue. If my wife asks, "How do you like my haircut?", there's only one right answer, and it's not, "um ...it's nice"!

Proverbs explains this idea in a few different places.

### **Proverbs 15:1, 4:**

**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger... A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.**

I'm sure we have all experienced this. The way that you engage a person often dictates how they will engage with you. Gentle words invite a gentle response and give life to others. Harsh words either incite anger or break the spirit of those around us. For example, watching a parent snap at their child in the grocery store, just to see that child's spirit break.

Have you ever done that? We all have. With our words, we can stir up anger, we can crush people's spirit, or we can be a tree of life in our families, among our friends, and in our communities through gentle speech.

### **Proverbs 25:15:**

**With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone.**

Here we see that gentle words are also more effective at achieving what outcome we are looking

for. Specifically, gentle words can be more effective at persuading people.

Perhaps you've experienced this at work. You've got an idea that you think could really improve your product or help your team, but your boss isn't on board. Persuade your boss with gentle speech.

Some otherwise very wise people seem to throw this principle out the window when it comes to social media. Being online doesn't give you permission to say things that you would never say to someone's face.

### **Speak Truth**

With this third guideline, we finally get to the appropriate content of wise speech. We are to speak that which is true. This is a fairly broad guideline with several different nuances throughout Proverbs.

### **Proverbs 10:18:**

**The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.**

One component of speaking truth is being honest. Don't lie or slander. Speaking the truth goes beyond that. We must also bring evil to light. While it is good to stay silent at times, when we see evil taking place we must speak up!

I'm thankful for several of our missions partners (IJM and Home of New Beginnings come to mind) for their work in social justice and taking action in the face of evil.

### **Proverbs 10:17:**

**Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.**

The theme of rebuke is common throughout Proverbs. But it is almost always encouraging us to *listen* to rebuke, like here in 10:17. This certainly implies that we must also be willing to rebuke others at times.

Don't forget the first two guidelines and jump to this one! Don't skip this one either! Rebuke can be difficult. It makes us feel uncomfortable. Rebuke requires difficult and painful conversations. Yet, when done with gentleness, it is one of the most loving things that we can do.

We see in the book of David that everyone knows that David is prideful, but no one tells him. That's not good for anyone.

It's easy to see your friends' weaknesses, but they may not see them. This is why we do life in community. At PBC, we are putting some energy into our community groups—now Connect Groups. If you aren't in one, you need to be! If you are in one, I bet you could look around the room and share at least one weakness about each person in your group. We've got to be willing to share talk about that together! Be honest. Speak the truth.

In summary, our three guidelines are Speak Less, Speak Gently, Speak Truth.

## **The Words of Jesus**

Part of the challenge of preaching Proverbs is that the message can sound moralistic; do these things, and you will be a better Christian. This is not the point. The Proverbs are meant to push towards the fear of the Lord. But they do also raise in us an awareness of our own shortcomings. When we look at Proverb in the context of the whole Bible, we realize what to do when we fall short. We turn to Jesus.

In John 6, Jesus had been teaching about as the bread of life. All who would truly live must abide in him, eating his body and drinking his blood—a reference to his coming death.

When the disciples heard this, they started grumbling, because this was a difficult saying. Jesus responds, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Our words are imperfect. Our words are sometimes sources of death rather than fountains of life. But Jesus' words are spirit and life! When we fail, turn to Jesus.

After Jesus spoke these words in John 6:63, many of his disciples left him, saying the way of Jesus is too hard. Jesus then asked the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Our words can be a fountain of life to those around us, but they will never lead to eternal life. The greatest thing that we can do with our words is use them to point people to Jesus. That is truly wise speech.