

Wisdom for Life from Proverbs The Power of Our Words

Introduction: Perhaps in your daily prayers you pray for wisdom. It's a worthy goal. James urged the people of God to do that:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

But we might ask, "How does God impart wisdom to us?" And one way He does that is through the wisdom literature of the Scriptures. Books like Proverbs can educate us in true wisdom. So with that understanding we are studying once a month what wise men said about different topics.

No part of life requires more wisdom than our speech. The realization of that prompted James to write:

"For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." (James 3:2)

Solomon offers many wise proverbs to help us mature in this area; but one thing that he strongly stressed was the need to appreciate the power of our words. *He extols the value and blessings of wise speech, while affirming the destructive power of the tongue.*

We must appreciate the power of our words.

Talk can be cheap for sure; but listen to what Solomon says:

The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. (10:20)

Solomon wants us to see that the speech of the righteous can have great value to others

There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; but the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing. (20:15)

A lot of people in this world would consider gold and jewelry the things of greatest value; but Solomon says that lips that communicate knowledge is a far more precious commodity.

But why can our speech be so valuable?

Our words can impart life to others by giving them the knowledge of the Lord and His will.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. (10:11)

Just as water is essential to life, so the wise words of the righteous are a fountain for the soul, to give spiritual life to those who hear. That is because...

The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not so. (15:7) And...

The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverted. (10:32) Thus..

The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, but the perverted tongue will be cut out. (10:31) And changing the figure slightly... The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding. (10:21)

What a testimony to what we can do with our words! We can be a source of life to others by giving them the knowledge of God and His will, by revealing truth that feeds the soul. And as we do this the blessing of our speech can return to us with God's blessing.

A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man's hands will return to him. (12:14)

Let this be an incentive to speak well and do good. We never give to get something back; yet it is an immutable principle of the divine economy. What we say and do for other returns to us in life to bless us.

But again, because we speak about God and make known His will...

Our words can save souls and correct the erring.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls. (11:30)

Rarely would any hear the expression "tree of life" and not think of the book of Genesis and the Garden of Eden. That tree was a source of eternal life to the first human pair. In a sense our words have the power to shape a person's eternal destiny. Think of how gratifying it will be to know that someone you shared the gospel with will be saved eternally.

But even in this life our words can save souls.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death. (13:14)

A while back I happened upon the Facebook page of a younger man who posted a photo of his wedding ceremony. Someone curiously asked, "who is the minister?" He mentioned my name; but I was not prepared for what he said next, "The man saved my life."

It is not easy to do; but sometimes our words must correct another.

Again Solomon observes its value:

Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear. (25:12)

Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. (27:5)

We are hesitant to correct others because we don't want to offend them or we fear that we may lose their friendship or respect. Solomon challenges us to think differently about that:

He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue. (28:23)

Being corrected is not usually pleasant for those who experience it, but they will later come to appreciate those who had their best interest at heart and sought to correct them rather than affirm their bad behavior.

Our words can comfort, heal, and refresh others.

An appropriately placed word is a beautiful thing. You may have seen this on someone's wall:

Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances. (25:11)

They can bring comfort to those with a troubled heart:

Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad. (12:25)

A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit. (15:4)

Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones. (15:30)

They can bring healing to relationships:

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (12:18)

A wicked messenger falls into adversity, but a faithful envoy brings healing. (13:17)

They can bring refreshment to the weary:

Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters. (25:13)

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. (25:25)

But our words can destroy and tear down!

Solomon described wrong speech with vivid figures of destruction:

A worthless man digs up evil, while his words are as a scorching fire. (16:27)

Incautious words can cause destructive anger and strife:

The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance. (25:23)

Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. (26:21)

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. (26:20)

Our words can destroy relationships and friendships:

With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. (11:9)

A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends. (16:28)

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip. (20:19)

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends. (17:9)

Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. (26:23)

Stay aware of the power of your words! What Solomon described in great detail the apostle Paul summarizes:

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29, NASB)
“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.”
(Colossians 4:6, NASB)

Conclusion: There’s plenty of wisdom in these proverbs and they will help us be a blessing to others and keep us from causing difficulty to ourselves and others. There is great power in our words! Let’s be wise in our speech!