

Series: Wisdom For Today
Lesson 06: Choose Your Words Carefully

BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 10:19

Proverbs 10:19 – *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

Proverbs 10:19 (The Message) – *The more talk, the less truth; the wise measure their words.*

Proverbs 10:19 (TEV) – *The more you talk, the more likely you are to sin. If you are wise, you will keep quiet.*

Proverbs 10:19 (NIV) – *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

Proverbs 10:19 (New Living Translation) – *Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut.*

I read the other day that the Ten Commandments contain 297 words, Psalm 23 has 118 words, and the Lord's Prayer is 56 words long.

- Yet, in a recent report, the Department of Agriculture needed 15,629 words to discuss the pricing of cabbage.
 - I think that points out that it's not being able to use a lot of words that makes a difference, it's being able to use the right words.

This evening, as we continue to study what God's Word says to us about being wise in today's world, we are going to look at choosing and using words in a wise manner.

- You can be the most knowledgeable person in the world and not know how to choose – and use – words properly and you will wind up in trouble all of the time.

Usually our troubles come because we develop an inflated opinion of ourselves and we think that we are smarter than everyone else.

- The result of that is that we then usually feel the need to impart the sum of all of our wisdom to others and, if and when they cannot handle it, it is their problem.
- But, rarely are we ever as smart as we really think we are.
- And, even when we do have knowledge in a given area, the Bible instructs us to choose our words wisely.

READ: Ephesians 4:14-15

In fact, when Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he gave them some indications of the purposes of specific offices and ministries and he said in **Ephesians 4:14-15...**

- *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

Maybe you are familiar with this passage, or at least the phrase, “...*speaking the truth in love...*” But note the context here:

- We are definitely to speak the truth.
- Truth is our message.
- But, just as importantly, we are to speak the truth *in love*.
 - That is our method of operation.
 - And, note again that speaking truth – in a loving way – is not a sign of weakness or ignorance.
 - It is the sign of a “grown-up,” or mature, child of God who is not tossed back and forth with any new idea that comes along.

Remember in Matthew 10, when Jesus commissioned His disciples?

- Look at what He told them in **Matthew 10:16**.
 - *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

The Lord knew that the message that these men would carry was powerful and quick and sharper than any double-edged sword.

- He knew that the message that Jesus Christ was the only hope for Israel and mankind would pierce a world full of people filled with their own ideas about how to draw close to God.
- But, He also knew that the way the message was handled was just as important.
- His disciples had to wield a piercing and dividing message without being the slaughterers themselves.

As a church, we have a commission to preach to lost and hopeless people that there is hope for eternity in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But within that commission is understood the duty to proclaim that this hope cannot be found anywhere else BUT Jesus Christ. The message itself will draw some and it will repel others. Also, in the fulfilling of that commission, we never have the license to kill or wound others with our words.

That is speaking in a corporate sense.

- But, what about how we deal with each other on a day-to-day basis?
- What about how we should talk with and to each other, as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Well, the Bible, and specifically the book of Proverbs, has much to say about how we manage our words.

- Your ability or inability to control your tongue will determine – more than anything else – the level of success you enjoy in your relationships.
- If you can't seem to say the right thing, and you constantly seem to say the wrong thing, you will find yourself someday all alone, alienated from everyone in your life.
- The Bible has a lot to say about that...

READ: Proverbs 18:21; James 3:5-6

Proverbs 18:21 – *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*

Proverbs 18:21 (TEV) – *What you say can preserve life or destroy it; so you must accept the consequences of your words.*

James 3:5-6

5 *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*

6 *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

James 3:5-6 (The Message)

5 *A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything — or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire.*

6 *A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.*

The Greek meaning of the phrase “boasteth great things” (James 3:5) indicates any kind of haughty speech that stirs up strife or provokes others.

John McArthur states in his commentary on I Thessalonians 5:15:

- *For Christians, the severest, most painful disappointments come not from the wickedness of the unbelieving world but from other sheep within the church.*
- *Sheep are definitely capable of harming other sheep, sinning against them in a variety of ways, such as attacking them with wicked words...that include gossip and slander...ostracizing them from fellowship and ministry opportunities, or harming them more overtly by helping break up a marriage...influencing someone toward sinful behavior.*

We all know people who find it easy to express themselves, and have no trouble saying what is on their mind.

- Some of them can even do it quite eloquently.

- But they have no concern for the consequences of their words as long as they have “communicated” their opinions.
- However, there is more to communicating effectively than being able to string words together.

Dwayne Woerple was standing in a reception line following his speech at a women’s organization, greeting the ladies, all of who were all saying nice things to him concerning his speech.

- There was a young boy, however, who came through the line four different times, each time with a new criticism.
 - The first time, the young lad looked up at Mr. Woerple and said, ***“Your speech stunk!”***
 - The second time through the line he said, ***“We heard all your jokes before – and they weren’t even very funny.”***
 - The third time through the boy said, ***“You’ll never be invited back here again!”***
 - As the boy made his fourth tour of duty through the reception line to express his distaste for Mr. Woerple’s speech, the boy’s mother came running over to him and said, ***“Oh, Mr. Woerple – that’s my son, Billy. Please don’t pay any attention to him. He’s only five years old. You know, he’s just at that age where he repeats everything he hears.”***

The Bible teaches a different approach to conversation.

- It teaches us to use our words sparingly, and to speak with caution.

PASTORAL NOTE: We need to get into the habit of speaking carefully. We need to watch the language we use. We need to tell the truth. No one could see what the Bible says and argue against either of those.

READ: Exodus 20:7; 1 Peter 3:10; Proverbs 4:24; Proverbs 6:16-19

Exodus 20:7 – Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

I Peter 3:10 – *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:*

Proverbs 4:24 – *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.*

Proverbs 4:24 (The Message) – *Don't talk out of both sides of your mouth; avoid careless banter, white lies, and gossip.*

Proverbs 6:16-19

16 *These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:*

17 *A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

18 *An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,*

19 *A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

Proverbs 6:16-19 (Amplified)

16 *These six things the Lord hates, indeed, seven are an abomination to Him:*

17 *A proud look [the spirit that makes one overestimate himself and underestimate others], a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

18 *A heart that manufactures wicked thoughts and plans, feet that are swift in running to evil,*

19 *A false witness who breathes out lies [even under oath], and he who sows discord among his brethren.*

NOTE: Three of the seven things that the Bible says God hates have to do with speaking lies or in a destructive way.

Vulgar language and evil speaking should not be habits that we indulge ourselves in.

- But for us to stop at, “Don’t cuss, don’t gossip and don’t lie,” would be stopping way short of God’s instruction on how to be wise with our words.

There are going to be plenty of times when you have to determine when and if to say something that has nothing to do with lying, gossiping or cussing.

- We need to know what guiding principles for managing our tongues the Bible gives us, even when we must speak.

We need to learn – from what the Bible teaches – to think first and speak second.

I. CONSIDER NOT SAYING ANYTHING AT ALL

I'm going to tell you something that took me a long time to learn – and I am still working on it!

- Here it is...

A. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY EVERYTHING YOU KNOW.

How much better off would we be today if we could have only learned this truth so much earlier in life.

- There are going to be times in life when you have knowledge of things that you will have to be discreet in dispensing to others.
- Your words may have the power to tear down a newborn babe in Christ, or to damage a father's credibility with his children, or to taint someone's opinion of a brother or sister in Christ.
- You have to determine whether or not the time is right – or even if it is necessary – to say something about it.
 - And remember, just because you've heard something about someone, doesn't necessarily mean it is true.
 - And even if it is true, that doesn't mean you have to say it.

If what you say it does not build up others and bring glory to the name of Christ, then you're better off keeping your mouth shut.

READ: Proverbs 17:27 (NIV)

Proverbs 17:27 – *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.*

James 1:19 admonishes us to *“...be swift to hear, (and) slow to speak...”*

- We have two ears and one mouth, which ought to remind us to listen more than we speak.

Before you speak, consider saying nothing at all, because you don't have to say everything you know.

B. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY EVERYTHING YOU THINK.

Have you ever known people who were the type that functioned in such a way that anytime they had a thought pass through their minds, it spilled out of their mouths?

Some people believe they know a little bit more about every subject than anyone else, and they believe it is their duty to wax eloquent whenever the chance presents itself.

- Whatever subject comes up in conversation, whether it's the stock market, computers, football, politics, or religion, they believe they have the first and final word on the matter.
- And, of course, they share it with you.

We can fall into this habit unintentionally, but we need to watch out for it.

- One wife said to her rather "knowledgeable" husband:
 - ***"I would love to bring up a topic in conversation without having to listen to you psychoanalyze it and pontificate about it for half an hour."***

We should think about what Solomon said in **Proverbs 17:28...**

READ: Proverbs 17:28

Proverbs 17:28 (NIV) – ***Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.***

IMPORTANT: Before you speak, keep this old adage in mind: *it is better to remain silent and appear a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.*

C. YOU DON'T HAVE TO REPEAT EVERYTHING YOU HEAR.

The problem with repeating gossip is that there is a better than even chance that what you heard isn't completely true. Gossip tends to get embellished as it is passed from person to person.

The subject of gossip is one that we do not take seriously enough.

- We say things like, "I'm going to go visit 'so and so' and catch up on the latest gossip."
- We say it like there's nothing wrong with doing that.
- To a certain extent, "catching up on gossip" is just a figure of speech, but it's all too often all too accurate of the way we make conversation.

We need to begin to take gossip seriously.

- Do you know what Proverbs says about gossips?

READ: Proverbs 16:28.

Proverbs 16:28 – *A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.*

That's something new to think about.

- That word, "**froward**," means "**evil, perverted.**"

Proverbs 16:28 (NIV) – *A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*

Did it ever occur to you that when you talk bad about someone, God considers your actions perverted?

- It may seem hard to believe, but that is what the Bible says.
- God would much rather you keep quiet.

Proverbs 16:28 (TEV) – *Gossip is spread by wicked people; they stir up trouble and break up friendships.*

Proverbs 16:28 (The Message) – *Troublemakers start fights; gossips break up friendships.*

READ: Proverbs 17:9

Proverbs 17:9 – *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.*

Proverbs 17:9 (TEV) – *If you want people to like you, forgive them when they wrong you. Remembering wrongs can break up a friendship.*

Repeating everything you hear destroys friendships. This is why you need to think before you speak, and consider whether you should say anything at all. You don't have to repeat everything you hear.

The first step to managing your mouth is to consider not saying anything at all.

- The second step is...

II. CONSIDER WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ALL THE FACTS

Do you remember Richard Jewell?

- He was the security officer who was first on the scene when the bomb exploded at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.
- He acted conscientiously and courageously, and he was, indeed, quite a hero.
- Then, as is typical in such events, the FBI developed suspicions about Jewell, and began to consider him a suspect in the bombing.
- The FBI was simply doing their job; they need to suspect everyone; but the media went wild with the story.
 - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution printed a story packed with innuendo and misleading comments.
 - The New York Post called him a “fat, former failed sheriff’s deputy” in a story that crossed the line between reporting him as a possible suspect and declaring him guilty.
 - Even Tom Brokaw compromised his credibility by saying, “They probably have enough to arrest him right now, probably enough to prosecute him. But you always want enough to convict him.”

Well, you know how the story turned out.

- Richard Jewell didn't plant the bomb.
- He really was a hero.
- He put his life in danger to save other people, and he was ripped to shreds by the press.
- But this time (for once) the media was held accountable.
- A number of news organizations, including NBC, settled with Jewell for an undisclosed amount, rather than go through the humiliation of a public trial.

This event taught us a couple of things.

- Number one, just because Tom Brokaw says something doesn't mean it's true.
 - You need to remember when you watch the news that there is a very real possibility you are getting only a fraction of the story – or a biased viewpoint.
- Another thing it taught is this: You can do a lot of damage by speaking before you get the facts, and some of the damage will come back your way.
 - You may never find yourself in the kind of jam NBC was in after reporting lies about Richard Jewell, but you can be sure that if you open your mouth before you get the facts, you are courting disaster for yourself and everyone else involved.

READ: Proverbs 18:13.

Proverbs 18:13 – *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*

Proverbs 18:13 (TEV) – *Listen before you answer. If you don't, you are being stupid and insulting.*

Proverbs 18:13 (The Message) – *Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.*

One must learn to think first and speak second. Remember **Proverbs 17:27**, *“He that hath knowledge spareth his words...”*

Speak carefully; consider whether or not you have the facts before you open your mouth.

III. CONSIDER THE BEST WAY TO SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID

We don't live in a Utopian world, and sometimes you have to say some things that aren't pleasant to say, but your words will carry more weight if you take the effort to say them well.

READ: Proverbs 15:23.

Proverbs 15:23 – *A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!*

Proverbs 15:23 (TEV) – *What a joy it is to find just the right word for the right occasion!*

It takes effort—and a lot of thought—to make sure you say the right thing the right way.

A state trooper pulled an older man and his wife over for speeding on a deserted road.

- Since the road was clear and the weather was fine, the trooper told them he would let them off with a warning.
- He even complimented the man and his wife for wearing their seat belts.
- At that point, the woman leaned over and said, ***“Well, officer, when you drive at the speeds he does, you have to wear your seat belt.”***
- The trooper decided to write the ticket after all.

That's an example of not thinking first.

- That's an example of not considering the best way to say something.
- The opposite would be found in **Proverbs 15:1**...
 - **Proverbs 15:1 – *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.***

James 3:2 – For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

- The NIV translates that verse as follows: *If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man.*
 - Perfect here means mature or complete.

Many people may think that it is impossible to control the tongue, but most people haven't even begun to try.

- The ability to control the tongue is the mark of true maturity for the Christian.
- When Jesus confronted the religious leaders about their accusations against Him, He said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks – showing that what is inside of a person affects what they do with their speech (Matthew 12:33-37).
- He also said that we must give account for every careless word we utter (Matthew 12:36).

If there is a need to confront one's spouse, or child, or a friend, or an employee about a problem in one's relationship, one would need to take the time to find the right way to go about saying it.

- You need to ask yourself, "How can I say this in such a way that it will build them up, and encourage them to do what is best for them to do?"

It is entirely possible to say something in such a way that one can cause others to do the exact opposite of whatever is desired.

- If an individual has a habit of doing this, it would be best if that individual learned how to communicate in a kinder, gentler manner.

We must look for the best way to way to say what needs to be said. Remember **Proverbs 18:21...**

Proverbs 18:21 – Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

We can build people up with our words or we can rip them apart. We can do it to their face or we can do it behind their back. When we speak to one another, as well as when we speak about one another, we should keep these words in mind.

IV. CONCLUSION

As you know, this message is just one part of a nine-part series.

- The Bible says so much about speaking carefully that we could easily do a nine-part series on this subject alone.
- Words have tremendous power, and we need to make sure we use them carefully.

READ: Proverbs 13:3.

Proverbs 13:3 – *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.*

Proverbs 13:3 (The Message) – *Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything.*

And while it is ***not*** true that God only gives us a certain number of words to speak in our lifetime, and when our words are used up our life comes to end—it is true that there is great danger in talking too much, especially when talk before we think. Look at **Proverbs 10:19**.

Proverbs 10:19 – *The more you talk, the more likely you are to sin. If you are wise, you will keep quiet.*

You don't have to take a vow of silence, but all of us would benefit from making a commitment to think first and speak second.

- And while we're thinking, we can consider whether or not we should say anything at all;
- We can consider whether or not we have all the facts, and we can consider the best way to say what needs to be said.

In guarding our lips this way, we guard our lives, we strengthen our relationships, and we build up others to a closer walk with Christ.