

Proverbs: Skillful Living - Words

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[0 : 00] Thank you worship team. That was beautiful. Amen church. It's good to be here. Amen.

How we begin our week as God's people seek his face. Well, we're going to continue this morning in our study. We've got two more weeks here with our study in Proverbs.

This morning and then next Sunday. And this morning, we don't have a sign so you have no idea what the subject is. But you will find out very soon. So let me pray. Ask God's blessing on our time and then we will begin our study. Let's pray.

The psalmist writes, with my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies, I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word.

[1 : 16] Father, we've gathered here this morning that we might fix our eyes on your ways. And we thank you that you have not left us here without guidance. You have given us your spirit. You have recorded your words.

And Lord, you've given us the gift of the body of Christ. And for all of those, we say thank you. We pray Jesus that you would be glorified this morning in the way that we would hear and receive your word.

The way that we serve and bless and encourage one another. Lord, I pray that as a result of our gathering, we will have a sense that we have met with you. And Lord, that you might accomplish something significant in each of us.

So we thank you for this time. And we look forward to your voice. And it's in Jesus' name and all God's people said, amen. Words are subject this morning.

What is a word? A word is a sound or a combination of sounds that communicates meaning. And if you've ever seen or been a young parent, you can recall the anticipation of this baby at some point sharing their first word.

[2 : 58] Julie and myself were very excited on this. We're very competitive by nature. We did a lot of coaching prior to this first word with our oldest.

I was trying to get her to say, dad. And Julie had some other word, the counter to dad. I think I came out on top. I don't, it's true. Yeah.

It's a lot of work went into that. We were kind of obnoxious and sometimes young parents, we can be right. Wait for it. Wait for it. Listen. Do you hear that?

Then a transition occurs and young parents become not so young parents. And the delight in, in a child's words, all of a sudden you start saying things like, don't say so many words, right?

Let's play that quiet game. Let's invest in some noise canceling headphones. I have two pairs.

[4 : 15] We're going to consider this subject of words this morning and skillful living requires that we give attention to this subject.

Just as we talked about purity and riches the last couple of weeks, nothing betrays the heart of a worshiper. Quite like how we handle those three areas.

The purity, how we handle our sexuality, riches, how we handle our finances. And then finally this morning, what we do with our words.

It's one of the big three in Proverbs that really identifies the life of wisdom versus the life of foolishness. And Proverbs has much to say about words so much so that really this morning you may think we're going to talk, you were going to cover a lot and we're just, we're scraping the surface.

But let's begin this morning with Proverbs 29-30. And it says, do you see a man who is hasty in his words?

[5 : 36] There is more hope for a fool than for him. So foundationally right at the start here we're admonished to be a people that give careful thought to the utterances of our tongue.

In fact the writer of Proverbs is saying words matter. Why? Why?

I mean society at large doesn't do this. The media doesn't encourage this. What is the big deal with words?

Well the writer of Proverbs is on to tell us. Proverbs 18-21. He says, death and life are in the power of the tongue. And those who love it will eat its fruits.

So this proverb is telling us a couple of things here. First it's saying the content of our speech it will actually come back to us. Words of life or words of death we will eat the fruit or the consequences thereof.

[6 : 47] So if you're one that uses words in a divisive way you're going to experience the fruit of isolation. If you're one that uses words to edify others you will eat the fruit of community.

That which we say will return to us. The second thing that Proverbs 18-21 tells us is that we should be careful with the words we speak because they have great power.

In fact the proverb says death and life are in the power of the tongue. Think about this. God created the universe through words spoken.

Now we don't have capacity to manifest reality with words but that's how God did it. Sin entered the realm of man through the deception of words.

Did God really say, oh you surely won't die. Salvation comes to the here through the speaking of gospel words.

[8 : 10] Through words we understand the heart of God. And how to navigate life as God intends. And through the living word God tells us who he is in the person of Jesus.

And it's just so remarkable to me that something so ordinary or common. Just simple words has this capacity to impact, to affect, to alter the life of an individual, the life of a family, a church, a nation, a planet, so much so that the effects will resound in eternity.

And so words ought to be seen as this cherished resource that God has entrusted to each of us. A recent study measured vocabulary and they found that the average 20 year old native English speaker knows and on an average of 42,000 words.

And then of those 42,000 they use about 20,000 of them on a regular basis. Another study demonstrated that actually contrary to some of the myths out there that women speak more than men, it's not actually true.

In fact there's like 56 studies in the last 20 years that demonstrate that men and women actually use both of them about 16,000 words a day.

[9 : 56] And so the key question for us is what are we going to do with those words? How will we leverage their potency this week?

And Proverb delineates, basically gives us two sides of the coin. How the fool uses words and how the wise uses words. And it's a resource that God asks us to steward well.

And the large buckets that we will be thinking in terms of is are we using words like the fool to harm? Are we using words like the wise to bless?

And so first let's look at the fool. Let's look at three ways that the fool uses language to harm how he doesn't leverage this gift well.

Proverbs 12, 18, let's start there. It says there is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts.

[11 : 01] But the tongue of the wise brings healing. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts. First way that we can use words to harm is through the use of reckless words.

Through the use of reckless words. And sometimes, I mean no one in this room, but sometimes we intend to hurt with our words.

But even as the proverb says careless words can devastate. They can cut deep. I don't know if you live under a rock, probably not.

Because you know this phrase, this jingle, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

It's a lie. And the writer of Proverbs is telling us just that. It's not true. And if I was asked, you could probably recall some careless words spoken to you that still continue to maybe come back on occasion.

[12 : 14] I can think back to my adolescence and my middle school experience. It was anything but ordinary because I was a pretty sick kid to the point where surgery required that I would walk

around with a colostomy bag.

And I can recall times being in the locker room and just the unkind words that would come. And if I wanted to, I could conjure them up to this very day.

We remember these things and they cut. And proverb here paints this illustrative picture of thoughtless words being akin to sword thrusts.

And I sort of imagine like a birthday party, a kid's party and a kid blindfolded and given a stick and there's a pinata and then all of a sudden you spin them around and then you say have at it.

And you can just see like this stick and you're lucky to come out with your kneecaps and that's the image that Proverbs is giving us. Reckless words are like that.

[13:17] They're like sword thrusts. Well, what do reckless words look like in your life and in my life?

This was a painful sermon to write by the way because it's for me as much as it is for you as all sermons should be. But I would prefer that somebody else were giving this one.

When I think about reckless words, I think about retaliating words, which Jesus tells us not to use. Right? We know Matthew 5:39. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him, the other.

Right? And that's not a verse that is promoting pacifism. It's actually a verse talking about not returning an insult for an insult. A slap on the face.

Don't retaliate. How easy it is to come out swinging when somebody offends, someone confronts.

This is something the Lord continues to work in me and will till the day that I see him face to face.

[14:25] In the years that I Ubered in Seattle, I would often have to pull over into the bike lane because in Seattle everything's a bike lane. And it's difficult to be an Uber driver because invariably what happens is every time you're pulled over to pick up someone, you have a cyclist that goes by and smacks your car.

It's a thing. And the Lord had to work on me because initially I would have a word.

And it wasn't awful, but I would let them know that streets are for cars.

And it was said with a little more volume. And then you start to feel like, why am I? And the Lord did work to where I got to the place where I was able to just say thank you.

Sometimes it was pretty vocal, right? There was so much sanctifying work that there was a point where I could just be like...

[15:31] I'm thankful the Lord did that because there were occasions when I would pick someone up, the passenger was coming, they would see somebody smack my car, see me not retaliate, and they would get in and they would be like, oh, I'm so sorry.

And then it would allow for a conversation to occur. Can you imagine me having a conversation after I'm just like, hey, streets are for cars. Oh, hi. Yeah, come in. Yeah, hey, do you know the gospel?

Easy to retaliate. In an increasingly angry world, those without reckless words will shine.

They will shine in humility. They will shine in a good way, right? Let the world see your good works, good words or lack thereof. And let them glorify God in heaven.

And I would say if you have been reckless with your words, let the Spirit of God convict. And then apologize if it's within your power to do so.

[16:40] There's life that results. There's healing. I would say just as an insight on reckless, rash words, when we are prone to use these sorts of words, I think what it demonstrates is a scarcity within this.

In fact, I think what it actually reveals is that we have had a steady diet of many things other than communing with the Lord.

I think that's what it actually reveals. And obviously the words to harm, the fact that we don't commune with the Lord enough is revealed in all the ways we use harmful words.

But I think in particular this one. And for me, if I start seeing myself recognizing that I'm saying dumb, thoughtless things, there's like this internal alarm that goes off that, number one, says, stop talking, but it also says, Jay, you need to commune with the Lord.

And so let that be a barometer in all of our lives. Well, how else does the fool use waste this resource of words? Look at Proverbs 20, verse 14. It says this, bad, bad, says the buyer, but when he goes away, then he boasts.

[18:08] You see the scene here? How a buyer downplays the value of an item, only to then boast about the deal they secured through their negotiating skills.

When really at the heart, deception is at play. It's not actually a fair price. This buyer is using a false measure.

And I would say the second way that we harm others with our words is when we use words that are deceptive and manipulate.

I had a very strange experience the other day. I went into a coffee shop and there was a gentleman there who was in line and he looked down and he commented on my shoes and he was like, man, those are really nice shoes.

Now it's strange because I'm not sure why anybody is commenting on my fashion, so that was kind of strange. And then it was just like, wow, another guy complimented me.

[19 : 11] Thank you, thank you. And then all of a sudden, just talks a little more and then he turns the conversation and wants to share this business that he's involved in.

This marketing thing he wants me to... And I was like, oh, I see what's going on. Yeah. We harm others when we use words to deceive and to manipulate.

It's like the young man who charms a young lady with all sorts of overtures of love in order to advance their physical relationship.

Only to then boast to his buddies about the activities of the evening, right? Oh, I have your best interest. Oh, I'm going to be with you.

We're going to be together forever. No. Actually, I just want to feed my flesh. Deceptive words, manipulative words are so harmful to people.

[20 : 17] In fact, Proverbs 25.14 says it this way, like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts that he does not give.

So this proverb would be well understood in an agrarian society where water is essential for crops. And you look at the weather and it appears like the clouds and the wind and all of a sudden you're like, oh, we're going to be okay.

Rain's coming. Rain's coming. Only to then be let down that it doesn't rain. But the weather promised. Some of your kids in here are like, but the weather man said 12 inches of snow, no school in the morning.

And then there's no snow. Promise is not kept. It injures those who take us out of our word.

Third way that we can harm with our words. Proverbs 26.22 and 23 says it this way, the words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels.

[21 : 32] They go down into the inner parts of the body, like the glaze covering of an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart.

Words of a whisperer. Third way we can harm people with our words is by using our words to stir this unity.

Gossip, man. People love good bit of gossip. In fact, the proverb says it's like a delicious morsel. What's a delicious? Oh, it's delicious because it's special. It's food that only a select group get to eat. I don't know why I think of Edmund in the Narnia Chronicles eating Turkish delight here, but that's the image that I have in my mind.

Oh, it tastes even better because not everyone gets to enjoy it. Man, I'm special because I am in the know.

[22 : 37] And I would say that gossip, it stems from trying to derive joy from somehow feeling better than the one who's being spoken about.

Right? Oh, can you believe what so and so did? Oh, I would never.

It's just gross. It's just ugly. In fact, it's exposed, it says here in verse 23, like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart.

Like, what's that about? Well, glaze covering earthen vessel. You know, we owned a set of dishes that they just chipped if you looked at them wrong.

They were so beautiful and we invent and we don't own any of them. They've all been destroyed as pretty as they were.

[23 : 44] And the proverb here is saying that, you know, glaze attractive coating on pottery. It just is disguising poor workmanship.

And here the private saying that fervent lips. Oh, I have good intentions. This is important. And really at in the heart, it's ugly.

And sometimes churches, this is disguised as something noble. The person says, oh, I have a prayer request.

But it's really just a disguise for sharing information that isn't theirs to share. Under the guise of prayer, the glaze, the beautiful glaze of a prayer request.

But it's just simply disguising an evil heart. Oh, I just want to share the news instead of actually being broken over it.

[24 : 48] Gossip divides and it destroys churches and the enemy delights. The enemy loves this.

And I would say by the nature of this many people, somebody is going to offend somebody this morning at some point. And if it's me, great.

Then come and talk to me or talk to the other. And I think that is that's the pattern and the direction we're given in Scripture, right? Go to the individual. And Matthew 18 says, keep that circle as small as possible.

If you're offended, it's not time to rally your troops to make sure that you're thinking about this correctly. They really said, go to the individual and keep that circle small.

In fact, how do we respond related to gossip? Proverbs 26-20 says this, for lack of wood, the fire goes out. And where there is no whisper, quarreling ceases.

[25 : 52] Remove the wood. Be a person that can hold a confidence. If gossip is in your purview, man, let it die with you.

Remove the wood. Fire will go out, which is really perfect segue into the positive section of our sermon.

Three ways that we can bless with this incredible resource of words. And the first way that we can bless other with our words is when our words are few.

Proverbs 29-11 says it this way, a fool gives full vent to his spirit. But a wise man quietly holds it back.

Full vent! This is the individual that just starts ranting. Everybody has left the room, but they just continue.

[27 : 00] Maybe you've seen this individual driving down division and you look over and they're just like giving the what for to nobody, but they're just in their quiet space, whatever.

This is the person who they give an answer before the question is even asked. Think, Dads, we have to be careful on this.

I have aired here more than once. This is the individual that just can't stop talking to everyone about everything.

Like there's no discretion. The fool gives full vent to his spirit. In fact, Proverbs 15-28 says it this way, the heart of the righteous ponders how to answer.

But the mouth of the wicked pours or I think the NIV we use the word gushes out evil things. That a great illustrative picture.

[28 : 10] And I think this is akin to what James says on being quick to hear and slow to speak. Why? Why? Why should be slow to speak?

Proverbs 10-19 tells us because when words are many, transgression is not lacking. But whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

So church, just the law of averages tells us that the more that we talk, the greater the opportunity we're going to say something dumb.

Right? Mark Twain, how do you put it? It's better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than open it and remove all doubt.

Here's the critical piece. God has us gathered and He has us to be a body of believers and we're to have ministry in the lives of one another.

[29 : 14] We're to have ministry in the lives of those that we do life around. And people that cannot stop talking, they actually destroy their capacity to minister.

It's a significant cost. I was having a conversation with Scott. I don't know if it was this last week or a couple of weeks ago, but we were talking about a seminary class that he took about counseling. And he took this class and I don't know if it was a project or the entire class, but essentially you had to listen and only ask questions.

You were not allowed to actually give counsel. And I think Scott said this was like the hardest class he took because it's like, I can't even speak in. I've got to listen.

And it was so interesting to hear that. Yeah, we're so quick just to talk. And people that can't stop talking, they destroy ministry.

[30 : 16] In fact, Proverbs 18 to two says this, a fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. This is something the Lord has worked in me in my life.

In fact, I had a very dear friend years ago pull me aside and say, Jay, I feel like you're not listening very well. It was so good.

I'm a better pastor because of that conversation. Hard words to hear, but it's true. I had a painful conversation.

I think I've shared this before with a family member who just did not know how to listen. And things were compounded because this individual also felt like they were the expert on everything.

I shared some constructive words, try to listen. That did not go well. I was then attacked and on how I was failing as an individual and this person didn't learn a thing.

[31 : 28] They didn't change a thing. Their defense was like, well, you just don't understand. I'm just being misunderstood.

There was a cost. There was a cost. This individual lost. They had very few friends, actually, no deep friendships, including with their own family.

People that cannot stop talking, they will destroy ministry God wants to accomplish through them. They will also eat the fruit of isolation.

Words being few means we all are constantly in process, that we are learners, willing to receive counsel, and yes, even correction.

15 says it this way, the way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man, a wise woman, a wise child, listens to advice.

[32 : 42] Listen. I just want to highlight something here. We can decide to talk less and still not listen.

Some of us have perfected this skill. Some of you this morning, I'm speaking and you're remaining quiet, but you're not listening. Some of you are even, you've perfected the nod.

But it's nothing's sticking. To listen means that we are engaged and it requires that we would have the posture of humility.

You want to bless people with your words? Let them be few. Second way that we can bless others with our words is when we use words that are gentle, laced with kindness.

We know the Proverbs 15-1, soft answer, turns away wrath. I prefer Proverbs 16-24 because it shows how attractive, gentle words are. It says here, Proverbs 16-24, gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

[33 : 58] Gracious words are like a honeycomb. Man, in a world that is angry, that is critical, kind words are life.

They're like the treasure of a honeycomb. Delicious. I would say parents are the words at home, are they kind?

So easy to become a parent and all you do is correct, correct, correct, correct. And I would encourage moms, dads, if you see this pattern, this rut you've fallen into, let's alter it.

You see your kid doing something well, name it. Well, they just are supposed to, no, no, highlight it. Bake a pie, celebrate, do whatever you need to do because when you notice and you speak it, you will see life.

You will see accountants change. And I would say for dads, it's not simply enough for us not to use like critical corrective words.

[35 : 05] We actually have to speak. We have to be conscious. We have to be introspective and go, you know what? I've seen something good. I'm going to name it. There's great power there.

It's how we bless. It's how we bless. We know how we feel when someone gives a kind word to us. You know, the sky is a little bluer that day, right?

Mark Twain again. I can last two months on a good compliment. You have no idea the ministry you can have in the life of another if you would but be led of the spirit and share those kind words, those gentle words as God brings people to mind.

And I would tell you this that in the season when I was kind of going through my forties and I had like a lot of health issues and I was pretty much isolated for about a year, year and a half.

I mean, it was life when somebody would send me a text. Like I got the privilege of experiencing what it's like to be a shut-in. I was really pretty thoughtless to this prior to that.

[36 : 21] But then to receive a text or a phone call, a visit. Sometimes people would share kind words and they would attach really good food to it. That was the best.

Man, we can minister profoundly. And even when we don't know what to say, just to know that you're not alone. Man, it's life.

It's a blessing to be reminded. When you are in a place of despair that you're not alone, man, it's everything. Kind words are powerful.

How powerful? This proverb will get you. Proverbs 25-15, with patience a ruler may be persuaded, a soft tongue will break a bone.

Ho-ho-ho! Kind words. Great power. Enough to break a bone, to melt a heart.

[37 : 35] I don't know that my words can really accomplish. Leave that to the Lord. You could minister to your pastor by giving him a kind word on occasion.

In fact, Scott and myself this week, we were just sort of jokingly talking about, hey, wouldn't it be easier if we were just farmers and Scott's like, yes, that sounds so good.

Just in seasons where, you know, there's challenges, there's trial. Sometimes it's like, man, farming could be a good life. And sometimes you don't know when you send a kind word, like your shepherds are like, I can do this.

I can do this another day. I can do this another week. I can do this another year. It's profound. Kind words are powerful.

A friend of mine, when I was struggling with God's grace and mercy in my life, he sent me a text and I've kept it to this day because it just administered so profoundly to my soul.

[38 : 40] When he wrote, Jay, God is busy about preparing a feast, even as we wallow in the pig's dye. It's like the father in the prodigal.

It was so good. And maybe that's what you need to hear this morning. Which really leads me to the final way we bless with our words. Third way we bless and ultimately, this is the ultimate way we bless is by sharing words that are gospel words.

Proverbs 25-11 says, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. It's like putting a beautiful jewel on somebody's hand, having the right word.

I think there's no more fitting word than bringing the gospel to someone who doesn't know the Savior. It's like the father putting on the prodigal, here's the signet ring.

Did you know that you're forgiven? Gospel words. It's extraordinary to me that something as common, as simple words, that God has ordained these words to accomplish something so sacred, to see spiritual life come to someone who is spiritually dead.

[39 : 58] Salvation comes to the here through the speaking of gospel words. That's why the feet of the gospel speaker is beautiful to the individual.

I got to share the gospel last week with a passenger. He got in my car, having a conversation. He was sharing some words, some really colorful words.

Then he wanted to know what I did other than drive. I said I was a pastor at Fourth Memorial. And then all of a sudden he's like, oh man, I just want to apologize for all those colorful words that I just shared. I'm so sorry. I'm like, you know what, nothing I haven't heard at church.

No, I mean, I didn't say that. It's always interesting when they apologize for swearing in your car. But I was able to share the gospel with him.

And very succinct way, 30 seconds. And I invited him to Christmas Eve service. But it was such a joy to be able to hear the seed. I'm just sowing seed.

[41 : 00] I don't know what the Lord will do with that. I don't know. But we need to carry that burden with us. This burden that eternity lies in the balance. In fact, some of us just finished reading C.S. Lewis, the weight of glory.

And a part of the weight of glory that we will be with the Lord. And we get to be with God. But part of the burden is we need to walk in the burden of man's eternity. Like the fact that people are going to either move to a place of glory or move to a place of damnation.

And that's a burden. That's a weight that we carry. And we should live with this burden. So much so, this is what Lewis writes.

He says, all day long, we are in some degree helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities.

It is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all of our dealings. And I would add, measure our words with one another.

[42 : 13] Amen? We have this incredible resource. And maybe you've never thought of words that way. And I pray that you would see you have such capacity to bless.

Father, we want to be a people that use this gift well. Lord, we are... When we have said things, we ought not to have convict us.

Lord, if there's ways to make those things right, let us be a people that are able actually to apologize, to confess sin to one another. But Lord, would you just set a guard over our mouths? Would you keep watch over the door of our lips? And Lord, would you give us courage to speak about the beauty and the new life that we have experienced in you to those that we do life around? And Lord, we will give you thanks for how you accomplish the sacred in the midst of what we often just deem as common.