

# PURPOSE

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## OF WORDS

### DATE

June 27-28

### WEEK

4 of 10

### OVERVIEW

Proverbs 18

### KEY VERSE

Proverbs 18:21

## SETTING THE STAGE

It is amazing how some things in this world can produce both good and bad results! Used one way, it may bring life and joy, but used another way, the same thing may bring pain and destruction. For example, consider medicine. When used properly, it brings healing and remedy to those in need. But when used improperly, it can bring sickness or even death. The same argument could be made for exercise. Every doctor in the world would endorse exercise as a key ingredient to a healthy life. However, extreme exercise can bring injuries, dehydration, and even heat strokes. If you take a walk outside today, the sunlight will bring your body much needed Vitamin D. But if you walk outside too long, the same sunlight could bring you a sunburn or even skin cancer down the road.

The truth is our tongues could be put into this same category of paradoxes. The same tongue that was used to praise the Lord in Worship can be used to yell at someone in a crowded church parking lot. Our words are used to compliment someone in one moment or belittle them minutes later. Our speech can be used to cast vision and hope, or it can be used to bring discouragement and fear. Indeed, the tongue wields an amazing power (*James 3*). Solomon put it this way,

**PROVERBS 18:21** *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

*Continued on page 28 >*

### LESSON OUTLINE

1. Unspoken Words
2. Life-Giving Words
3. Life-Taking Words
4. Empowered Words

### THINGS TO KNOW

- The word "tongue" is used 19 times in Proverbs and 113 times in the Old Testament.
- The word "word" or "words" is used 30 times in Proverbs and 1262 times in the Old Testament.

# PURPOSE

## OF WORDS

*Setting the Stage, continued >*

King Solomon understood the immense power that God gave each of us through communication. Words are our greatest tool to build up the Kingdom of God, but they also can be our greatest weapon to tear it down. Because of that, we must understand the purpose of our words. Fortunately, the book of Proverbs gives ample instruction on this topic. As one commentator says, “Accurate, honest, sensitive, prudent speaking is a theme threaded through Proverbs as consistently and strongly as any other.”<sup>1</sup> Examining this topic in the book of Proverbs we will discover the purpose of our words and learn how to steward them well.

### 1. UNSPOKEN WORDS

**PROVERBS 10:19** *When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*

Remember those fun science experiments in school that our teachers would demonstrate in class? Of course, the most memorable ones were the classic experiments that involved a big explosion at the end. One of the most common was the “Mentos Experiment,” where the teacher would combine breath mints with a diet cola. As soon as the mints are dropped into the bottle, the soda begins to shoot into the air like a geyser leaving a huge mess to clean up.

In our lives, some of us can identify with those mints. When we get dropped into a situation or a conflict, our words start flying out like that a geyser leaving a big mess to clean up. Most of the time, this is not our intention when we speak up. Many of us are just trying to be helpful and “fix things.” While this can be a blessing in some circumstances, it can also be a curse in others. Why? Because Solomon tells us it is better to “restrain” our lips at times.

James reiterates this point when he says it is often much wiser to be “*quick to hear and slow to speak*” (James 1:19). The truth is sometimes the most beneficial words we can provide are “unspoken words.” Contrary to some of our natural inclinations, every thought in our head does not have to

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be articulated. Inner dialogue should not always become an outer dialogue. Instead, the prudent man or woman of God uses their words wisely. The great C.S. Lewis said it this way, “I have often repented of speech but hardly ever of silence.” So, before we begin looking at the **quality** of our words, it would be wise to first examine the **quantity** of our words. Do you always have the first say and the final say? If so, God might be reminding you that the wisest words you could adopt today are “unspoken words.”

When Solomon says, “*restrains his lips*” he is saying to keep your words in “check.” In Ecclesiastes, Solomon put it this way, “*A time to be silent and a time to speak*” (Ecclesiastes 3:7b). Wisdom comes from knowing when it is time to speak and when it is time to be silent.



<sup>1</sup> David Hubbard, *The Preacher’s Commentary Vol 15*, Thomas Nelson, 2010, p. 406.

## 2. LIFE-GIVING WORDS

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

Think back to the start of the new year when some of us got back in the gym for the first time in a long time. Whether it was hopping on a treadmill, taking a workout class, or playing a game of pick-up basketball, undoubtedly those first few days were exhausting! And while we may have all suffered in different gyms and different classes, I bet we all sought relief in the same way: a water break. When we were exhausted and our bodies began to shut down, we all gravitated to a water fountain as a common source of restoration and revitalization. Why? Because water restores us and gives us the fuel we need to persevere in our race.

In the same way, Proverbs tells us that our words are like a beautiful water fountain. We are told that our mouths can be a “fountain of life” that brings nourishment to the world. Every day, we live in a broken world that is filled with emotionally and spiritually exhausted people. This is one reason why God gave us the gift of words. He wants us to speak life into others that desperately need it. *Proverbs 25:11* says “*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.*” When we open our mouths and speak encouragement and hope into someone’s life, we honor God by accepting His invitation to serve as His ambassador (*2 Corinthians 5:20*). Solomon says these kinds of words are sweeter than an apple and more precious than silver or gold. These comparisons remind us that words are nutritious to the soul and valuable to the spirit. It does not take a Ph.D. to utilize words to encourage and speak life into a person in need.

Words have the power to change someone’s outlook for the better. We are told in Proverbs, “*Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad*” (*Proverbs 12:25*). This good word is not always a solution to take away the problem. Instead, as one author explains, “A good word is wider than the good news which would remove the cause of the anxiety but is not always possible; a good word gives courage to face it.”<sup>2</sup>

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Many of us fail to speak up because we fear that we will not have the “right” word. Life-giving words are not always focused on offering solutions. Instead, they are focused on pointing them to the solution that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, referred to as the **Word** in John’s Gospel.

## 3. LIFE-TAKING WORDS

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**PROVERBS 25:18** *Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.*

As clearly as we can remember the people who spoke life into our souls, we can likely remember the people that spoke painful and damaging things into our hearts. Words do matter, and their messages are remembered long after the conversation ends. Because of that, we must be careful to not speak life-taking words. In Genesis 3, Satan took the good gift of words and he tainted it with sin to wreak havoc on the world. He used words to rob God of His glory, to deceive Adam and Eve, and to bring a wake of destruction that would permeate all future generations. Warren Wiersbe explains, “From Satan’s speech to Eve in Genesis 3 to the propaganda of the false prophet in the book of Revelation, the Bible warns us that words can be used to deceive, control, and destroy.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries*, Intervarsity Press, 2009, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Skillful*, p.144.

**When our words are  
weaponized, our  
speech no longer  
gives life.**

Indeed, words have ruined marriages, friendships, and businesses. They have brought more conflicts and wars in human history than we could count. When our words are weaponized, our speech no longer gives life. Instead, our verse above tells us that our words become clubs and swords that hurt everyone around them. Our words can bring lies and confusion (*Proverbs 26:19*). They can stoke the fire of someone's anger and solicit violence (*Proverbs 29:22*). They can spread gossip and end relationships (*Proverbs 20:19*). Because of that, we must do what any responsible weapon owner would do: lock them up. We have to understand the power of our words and not throw them out there carelessly. We must capture our thoughts (*2 Corinthians 10:5*) and consider the consequences of our words before we say them. Forgiveness can always be sought after, but words can never be taken back. Are you careless with your words and do they consistently take life away from those around you? Sometimes it merely takes a quick quiet breath to rethink what words to say and how to respond to a situation graciously rather than offensively.

#### 4. EMPOWERED WORDS

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**PROVERBS 4:23** *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*

**Our speech will only  
be transformed  
when we begin  
to let God's Word  
transform our lives.**

If we understand the danger of life-taking words and we desire to speak life-giving words instead, the simple question of application is, "How do we do it?" How do we learn to crucify those thoughtless words and begin speaking purposeful ones instead? Solomon tells us that we have to watch over our hearts. Solomon was wise enough to understand that our words are not just cavalier thoughts. They are an overflow of what is going on in our hearts. Jesus reinforced this point when He explained, "*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*" (*Matthew 12:34b*).

The two wisest men to walk on this earth, Jesus Christ and King Solomon, are in unanimous agreement on the secret to changing our speech. They both say that the only way we can transform our words is if we first let our hearts be transformed. Our speech will never change through reading books, expanding our vocabulary, or through sheer will power. Our speech will only be transformed when we begin to let God's Word transform our lives. Wiersbe says it this way:

People who speak wisely, saying the right thing at the right time in the right way, are people who store God's truth in their hearts. 'Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding' (*Proverbs 10:13*), and that understanding comes from the Word of God. 'Wise people store up knowledge' (*Proverbs 10:14*); they are filled 'richly' with the Word of God (*Colossians 3:16*). 'The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips' (*Proverbs 16:23*). If we devote our hearts to serious study of the Word, even while we're sharing the truth with others, God will teach us more of His truth. <sup>4</sup>

God does not want us to speak alone. That is in part why His Holy Spirit lives inside of us (*Ephesians 1:13, Luke 12:12*). God wants to empower my words and your words to make an eternal impact on others. He wants to redeem our speech and make it operate the way He designed it: to bring glory to Him and to build up His kingdom. But the only way we will achieve this is if we dedicate ourselves to His Word. As you begin reading God's Word more often, you find that your words begin to more closely imitate His. We all want to speak life and not death in this world. But our only hope at doing so is through a transformational commitment to God and His Word.

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Skillful*, p.144.

Words matter to others, but most importantly they matter to God. When we understand the purpose of our words, we will begin to use them for God's glory and to build up His Kingdom around us.

## HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Consider how the story began in the beginning. *Genesis 1:1* says, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” In the creation story, we are told very specifically that God spoke the world into existence, the ultimate power of words. *Genesis 1:3* says, “*Then God said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light.*” From the beginning, God's story impacted our story literally through the spoken word. Those true life-giving words laid a foundation of life to come, in relationship to Adam and Eve.

God then allowed Adam to speak authoritatively as he named the animals. Adam and Eve spoke to God when He asked what happened to cause them to hide in shame of their nakedness. God spoke to Adam and Eve in describing the consequences of their actions. Consider the times Moses would go up the mountain to talk to God and God would speak to Moses; then Moses would come down the mountain to speak to the people the truth of God. Words have always been part of our story. Our relationship with God and others is always impacted by words, both the Word of God and physically spoken words one to another.

Just as God spoke our life into existence, He wants us to speak life into others. Words are a beautiful gift from God that can be instrumental in bringing Him glory and expanding His Kingdom. Words come with responsibility and opportunity. The purpose of words is to encourage, empower and edify others for the glory of God.

**PSALM 19:14** *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*