

## Words (Part 2)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Yeah, again, we're looking this morning at our words, more specifically what God, through the Bible, in the book of Proverbs, has to say about our words. I was doing a little bit of research this week. According to a scientific study published a few years ago, humans speak on average 16,000 words per day, which is a lot.

That doesn't include how we use words in other ways, what we write, what we text, what we post. And so words are, as we saw last week, as we're going to continue to see this week, a big deal in everyday life.

Incidentally, the same study showed that men and women actually use about the same number of words per day. It had been previously assumed that that might not be the case, but that is true.

And so words here are a big deal for all of us. Wherever you're sitting, words are a big deal for you. Words are something that we need to use wisely.

And we shouldn't be surprised that words are a big deal in our life because the Bible says they're a big deal. The reason we're into our second week of looking at this topic is simply that there was kind of so much in the book of Proverbs, we couldn't do it justice kind of cramming it into one week.

[ 1 : 1 3 ]     In fact, we could have done weeks and weeks on this topic. The Bible has so much to say about this important issue. How we use our words is something that is important to God.

Our prayer is that through this time together we would learn how to use them well. How to be wise with our words. Because remember, that is the big idea of the book of Proverbs.

Wisdom. Wisdom is the key issue in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom in these various different aspects of life that we're looking at.

And remember as well, wisdom in Proverbs has really sort of two outcomes. Firstly, most importantly, it means that God is honored. It means living the way he designed us to live that brings him glory.

But secondly, the book of Proverbs also makes a point to say that wisdom tends to make our life work better. That wisdom is kind of going with the grain of God's creation.

[ 2 : 1 0 ]     It is living well in God's word. It is following the maker's instructions, as it were. So if we're able to get this right, if we're able to use our words properly, if we're able to show real wisdom, it makes a difference kind of at every level of our lives and the lives of those around us.

Words are a big deal. Now let me give a quick recap of what we said last week before we kind of move on this week. We saw really kind of foundationally that actually our words reveal our heart.

Our words, the Bible says, flow from our heart. That's what it says in the book of Proverbs. We saw that's what Jesus says. Words, what comes from the mouth, proceeds from the heart. Our words reveal our heart.

Why did we say that was important? Well, it reminds us that we cannot just change our words by themselves. That actually what all of us need is a change of heart.

It's like if a tree is giving out bad fruit, rotten fruit, you don't deal with that fruit. There's nothing you can do about that fruit unless you go to the root. Unless you deal with the issue at the heart of that tree.

[ 3 : 21 ] And that's what the book of Proverbs is all about. A change of heart, a change of attitude, a change of foundation that comes from recognizing who God is in relation to who we are.

Remember the fear of the Lord, the book of Proverbs calls it. That God is here. That God is perfect. That he is the creator of all things. That he is holy. And we are down here.

We are the creation. We are not perfect. We make mistakes. We are not holy. And yet remember Proverbs' message is that rather than run from that God, we should trust in that God.

We should depend fully on that God. We should look to Jesus who is the way and the only way that God has provided to bridge this gap. So actually we can have this right relationship with him.

Proverbs says, and we keep coming back to this week after week. Proverbs says unless you get that, really you can kind of forget the rest of it. That these kind of tips will not make any sense unless we have that foundation.

[ 4 : 24 ] That is where true wisdom comes from. That is what changes our hearts. And our hearts determine how we use our words. So our words and our hearts come together.

It's so important we remember that. It's so important that we remember that Proverbs is all about the gospel. All about knowing God and the results of that. And following that, last week we saw two things.

That the words of the wise are true. That truth is so important. And that the words of the wise are few. That idea of quality over quantity when it comes to our words.

We're going to look this morning then at how we're to put these words to use. Two key areas. You'll see them on your sheet there. First in terms of speaking about people.

Second in terms of speaking to people. And you'll see the verses on your sheet. So let's dig in. Let me start with a question. I wonder what you would expect to be one of the big issues in people's relationships in the ancient Middle East almost 3,000 years ago when these Proverbs were collected together and compiled.

[ 5 : 30 ] If you're anything like me, you may well think, I've not got a clue what were the issues all the way back then. I don't know what people were like then. I don't know how life worked.

I don't know what people's interactions were like. Well, one of the things I love about Proverbs, one of the things I love about the Bible, is it shows us how human nature does not change that much.

It shows us how constantly relevant and current the Bible is because when we look at these Proverbs, one of the big messages that comes up time and time again is simply this. Stop slugging each other off.

Stop gossiping. Stop talking about each other behind their backs. This could have been written yesterday, couldn't it? How we talk about people is a huge theme in Proverbs.

And it is a huge deal in our day-to-day lives today. And this idea of slander, as the book of Proverbs puts it. Let me read you a few of the verses on the sheet there.

[ 6 : 32 ] The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool. Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a babblers.

Time and time again there in these verses. Don't slander. Don't belittle your neighbor. Don't tell people's secrets. Don't speak about people behind their backs. This is a really concrete example, a really concrete outworking of what we talked about last week, that the words of the wise are few, especially in this area.

Now, gossip is an incredibly ugly thing, isn't it? Speaking badly about people. Looking to build ourselves up at the expense of others.

Sharing kind of half-truths or rumors. And we know how bad that is, don't we? Now, you could go and ask kind of anyone on the street, anyone you see day-to-day. They wouldn't need to be someone who comes to church.

[ 7 : 40 ] They wouldn't need to be someone who's read the Bible or the book of Proverbs. You could ask them that question, do you think gossip is okay? And I think almost universally you'd get the answer and say, no, no, no, gossip is not good.

We don't like gossip. Even though actually it's something that we're so quick to join in with. But it's recognized it is not a good thing. And yet one of the things I think is really interesting about these verses in Proverbs is that I think they go beyond what we might naturally assume.

They go further than the kind of worldly wisdom that is all around us. Because Proverbs here, I think, is not just addressing speaking badly about people.

We'll look at chapter 11, verse 12 there. It says, whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense. But a man of understanding, what is it? Says nice things? No, remains silent.

Now, what is the mark of the trustworthy person in 11, 13? As opposed to slandering, it's not actually that he tells the truth. It's that he keeps a thing covered.

[ 8 : 45 ] I keep on expecting these Proverbs to say, don't speak badly about people. Instead, speak well of them. Actually, I keep seeing that the idea behind all of these Proverbs is don't speak badly about people.

In fact, you probably don't need to speak much about people at all. It's interesting to see that. And I'm not saying, I don't think Proverbs is saying, never speak well of people when they're not around.

That's a lovely thing. It is not saying that other people won't come up in conversation when we live in community together. That's unavoidable. But I think it is saying, before we say anything about anyone, before we say, do you know X about Y?

Asking this question, is this my story to tell? What is my goal in speaking here? Why would I say this? Would I say this if they were here? In what context did I learn this information?

And remember, again, the kind of the standards for our words, for wise words, is not simply that they are true, but also that they are few. I think this is incredibly important for a church like ours, a church who want to grow relationships where we are genuine with one another, real relationships, who want to share what's going on, who want to be able to speak to people about where we're struggling, where we're suffering, where we need help.

[ 10 : 04 ] We can only say those things. We can only have those relationships where we know that information stays in the boundaries that we choose. And that is what the book of Proverbs is speaking about, I think.

Because it's very clear. I shouldn't spread lies about people. I shouldn't slag this person off. I shouldn't gossip. We get that. I think the challenge for us is more difficult. Hits home, comes to heart more.

The temptation is all the more kind of insidious when we're able to describe something as a prayer request or as kind of mutual concern of a friend or here so-and-so is struggling with this.

I think from these Proverbs, we really need to stop and be willing to kind of pull back, hold our tongue in those situations. I know people who will not share things with certain friends in their church because they've told them things before and it's not been a question of kind of gossip or slander or anything like that, but one way or another, that information has been spread and has come back to the first person, but through a third party.

I think that's what these Proverbs are warning about. I think it's a really practical thing. I think it's something that protects the church, that protects that unity, that builds that trust and relationships.

[ 11 : 22 ] Perhaps we need to just get used to asking the question, do you mind if I pass that on? Or can I mention this to so-and-so? Is it okay to talk about this, to pray about this with someone? And then acting in line with that.

I'm convinced that actually if we work out these Proverbs well in relation to our words, that that doesn't kind of push us apart and mean we're too frightened to say anything, but rather it builds a really strong community.

It builds a really genuine community. It builds a really deep community with real relationships where we're free to be honest with one another. How we speak about others is incredibly practical for us as a church looking to build that community.

It's also incredibly, makes a huge difference to how people outside the church relate to us. It would set us apart, wouldn't it, as people who can be trusted, as people with whom friends can safely share their worries, knowing that it will not leave, it will not go further than they want it to.

Again, building those relationships, being those good friends, showing people we genuinely care for them, and more than that, showing that God cares for them. That as we build these relationships with people who trust us, we get the chance to point to the gospel as the place, Jesus as the person where we put our trust.

[ 12 : 46 ] Speaking about others, it makes such a difference in our relationships at every level. One other aspect of this, I suppose the other side of the coin, the book of Proverbs is clear.

While our words about other people are to be few, we also have this responsibility, as well as how we speak, how we listen. I look at the bottom two Proverbs in that section there.

An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue. And then the words of the whisperer are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body.

Why is gossip so common? Why is it this universal thing across all places and all times? Why is speaking about other people so easy?

It is because we have always got a ready audience. We love to listen to this. These little bits of information, whether true or false, about other people's lives are like delicious morsels, Proverbs says.

[ 13 : 48 ] Who doesn't love a delicious morsel? But the book of Proverbs says that as listeners, we're responsible to show discernment, to refuse to listen to this type of chatter about other people.

And it says we do that, that it starves this speaking about others of the oxygen that it needs to carry on. Whether we're speaking or whether we're listening, Proverbs gives us this responsibility.

I was at the farmer's market down the road in Haddington a couple of months ago with Emily, our daughter. She's five. And the pipe organ, sorry, the pipe band were playing.

And we kind of listened for a while. And she just started getting closer and closer. And then she started showing this vague interest in wanting to learn how to play the bagpipes. And I don't know if this is good parenting or not, but I very quickly kind of snuffed out that idea, saying that that was not something good.

Why? Because I don't want to listen to the bagpipes. Can you imagine that? You know, saying here's something else you could play. Here's something else that we could listen to. And I was being entirely selfish.

[ 14 : 53 ] But I think overall the idea is the same. If we don't want to listen to something, if we don't want to hear that something, it discourages people from acting in that way. We can encourage people instead to use their words for better things, to speak about what is true of the gospel, to encourage one another.

We can encourage people to use their words for what is good. And so speaking about others, being willing to close our ears as well as our mouths. And before we move on from that, I want to think, so how does the gospel affect this idea of speaking about others?

What difference does the gospel make? We've tried to say this time and time again. Remember, Proverbs is a gospel book. Proverbs is not just a set of rules. Do this. Don't do that.

Live like this. Don't live like that. No, Proverbs, as we said at the start, is giving us the consequences of living out this wisdom that comes from knowing God that we spoke about earlier, of having this relationship made possible by Jesus.

Well, how does that make a difference to how we speak about other people? I think so often here that the key comes from recognizing our motivations. Why are we quick to speak about others?

[ 16 : 10 ] Why do we love to listen? Why are these whispers like delicious morsels? Well, psychologists will say that whether it's speaking or listening, the appeal of gossip is this, that it brings us into an inner circle.

It brings us together as we have this common knowledge. It unites us. You see that in workplaces. The people are brought together by this gossip. But not only that, it then elevates us above other people.

We know these things, and they don't know these things. We're aware. These people are unaware. It gives us that sense of importance. You can see the appeal in that, can't you? Perhaps you've felt the draw towards that.

Well, that is where the gospel changes everything. That is where the fear of the Lord, putting our trust in God, changes everything. The gospel says that in Jesus, there is something, someone far greater that unites us.

The gospel says that there is truth, that there are words which it is great to share with one another. Words that connect us as we hear them. Words that remind ourselves of all that Jesus has done for us.

[ 17 : 24 ] That it's something that we all need. That it's something that is true for all of us. As we remind ourselves, it is not, we draw ourselves together, not talking about what someone else has done, but talking about what Jesus has done.

And that is a truth that unites people. That is what gives, Proverbs gives the power behind these instructions. And it doesn't mean this is a kind of secret knowledge that then elevates us above others.

In fact, the gospel is the opposite. The gospel reminds us that we are all on a level. That we all need Jesus. We all need him to bridge that gap between us and God.

And that is his invitation. It is for all of us to come to trust in him. Ultimately, the gospel offers us what we really want from speaking about other people.

And yet it offers us in a way that draws us together, not at the expense of others, but in a way that motivates us, spurs us on to love and to serve one another as we're all in this together.

[ 18 : 27 ] And so that is speaking about people. The Proverbs are pretty clear that that is not kind of the way to live. Rather, we find our unity. We find our connection with one another.

We bond together by speaking about Jesus, speaking about the gospel, speaking about the good news of what he has done for us. Well, the other thing then that we see in these verses, again, as we've seen speaking about people, we see here speaking to people.

You'll see the long list of Proverbs there on your sheet. It could have been longer. This list really is, I suppose, reaffirming what we've been saying all about, all the way through about the power of the tongue, the extent to which our words can harm or help.

Let me pick out just a few. Chapter 12, verse 18. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts. That's harm. But the tongue of the wise brings healing. That's help.

Chapter 15, verse 4. A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. Or 18.21, perhaps the most extreme there.

[ 19 : 31 ] Death and life are in the power of the tongue. And those who love it will eat its fruits. Again here, Proverbs backs up what we're able to observe in the world around us.

Proverbs confirms what I'm sure we've learned from personal experience is that what we say to people and what people say to us has a huge effect, either for better or for worse.

Let me give you kind of a personal example about this from just the last few weeks. A couple of weeks ago, I had a few things on my mind that were worrying me, uncertain things that were kind of rattling around.

And then one morning, I just got a very simple text from someone quite out of the blue who knew nothing about those things, just saying that they were thinking about me and that they were praying for me. And just receiving that text was such a huge encouragement on that morning.

And so then when I'm looking at these verses, and I see chapter 12, verse 25 there, anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. I know the truth of that.

[ 20 : 34 ] I hope you've experienced the truth of that, that that is not an abstract concept. That is something that I've experienced in a very real and yet in a very simple way.

I suppose the encouragement there for me is to say, well, who can I be passing on these good words to? Who can I be building up with my words? Again, in very simple, but very real and day-to-day ways.

Again, this is something that makes a huge difference in the church and it makes a huge difference in the wider community as well. So often people are used to, people are used to words being used to tear down.

So often words are those sharp sword thrusts that the proverb said, how great would it be if we were known as people whose words brought healing, whose words brought life, whose words were not just hollow compliments, but were genuine encouragements backed up by genuine concern for those people.

If our words were lived out in our actions, encouraging one another. If having listened, as we spoke about last week, we were able to speak real words of knowledge and help and comfort in reply.

[ 21 : 46 ] Now wouldn't that make the church, wouldn't that make Christians a really kind of an attractive package that would ultimately point people not towards us, but point us to the goodness of God.

that he is the source of this. If we really use our words to build up. Now I was reading a book on these proverbs recently by a guy called Ray Ortland. He said how he and his wife would say this prayer on the way to church each week.

They would say, Lord, let every word we speak be of you. Let every word we speak be a blessing. And what a great prayer. Incredibly simple, incredibly helpful. And not just for our times at church, but at the start of every day, as we enter every new place, to be people that when we speak to others, what we say builds them up.

It encourages them. It brings them joy. They go away with their hearts lifted because we've been speaking wise words. And we've been speaking God's truth to them.

And so again, how do we do this? How does the book of Proverbs motivate us in this direction? How is this not just another kind of load of rules that we have to follow?

[ 22 : 54 ] How can our lips be these precious jewels, as Proverbs says? Well, I think really this kind of brings us back full circle to where we started last week, to where we recapped at the beginning of this week, that our tongue, our lips, our words reveal our hearts.

Remember what Jesus said, what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. If we want to be these people who speak life to others, who speak a word in season, who speak good words, wise words, all these other terms that Proverbs uses for this speech that builds up.

If we want to be those who speak these words to others, we first have to have our hearts right ourselves. How do we do that? We keep on coming back to God and to the gospel.

If we want our words to be wise, to be good, to build up, then we need to take care of our hearts. Proverbs 4, verse 23 at the bottom there, keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

What does that mean? It means ultimately, doesn't it? Coming back to the fountain, coming back to the source, coming back to the gospel as we find it in God's word, the Bible. That is what builds us up.

[ 24 : 07 ] That is what allows us to build others up. Pam said, I was delighted. It was completely unprompted. What was one of the things she's been learning in her life as a Christian to constantly be prioritizing and making that time for her as an individual to be spending time with God, spending time in his word, the Bible.

And that will be a huge encouragement to her. That will build her up. But that also enables her in turn to be able to build others up. I don't know if anyone here has got a new phone or laptop recently.

If you do, you might well find it. It's got USB-C. This is like the new technology that basically means anything that you used to be able to plug into your computer will no longer fit. So you have to get new stuff. It's a pain.

But apparently, one of the useful things about this is it means that if you have USB-C, my phone can charge your phone. We can just plug them together. Your phone can charge someone else's phone.

Their phone can charge their wireless headphones, whatever. That's kind of useful. Why am I talking about this? I figured some of you just need to get with the times a little bit. But I think as well, it's a great picture of a kind of an interconnected church community building one another up with their words, bringing life to one another, passing that on.

[ 25 : 22 ] But back to the technology, the key thing is this, that ultimately that phone needs to be regularly plugged into the mains power. And that phone cannot just keep on giving out or it will run out.

It can't help others if it's not being fed itself. That's the same for us, isn't it? If we want to help one another, if we want to speak well, if we want to speak wisely to each other, if we want to build each other up with our words, then we need to make sure our hearts are light.

That does not mean thinking that we've got it all sorted, but it does mean reminding ourselves of the gospel, coming back to the truths of the Bible, God's promises time and time again.

It means listening to God's word, the Bible, pointing us to Jesus, building our trust in him, the source of wisdom. It says we remind ourselves of the truths of God's word as we trust and depend on him more and more ourselves.

That is then when we're able to encourage one another with our words. And so our words are hugely important. Our words are hugely powerful. God cares greatly about our words.

[ 26 : 33 ] Our words are to be true and few. Our words are to build up, not drag down. But ultimately, our words reveal our heart. Our words depend on our heart.

And it is the gospel that changes our heart. It is seeing God's love in action through Jesus Christ that gives us a new heart. God says he'll take away a heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.

That is his promise to all who trust in him. And it is that heart, that change of heart, that changes our priorities, that changes where we find our value and security, that changes how we use our words so that we're able to build up and bring life and encourage.

Ultimately, that we're able to point people to the source of our hope, point people back to Jesus. And we are able to use words that ultimately give God the glory that he and he alone deserves.

As we use our words to help one another to grow together in the likeness of Christ. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.