

Get Smart: A Study in Proverbs

Growth Group Leader's Supplement

Study 4: Straight Talk

Growth Point Insights

Questions are always guidelines. Never feel obligated to cover every one. Always put a stress on participation. If someone has a different question, by all means pursue it.

Devotional Seed:

The devotional seed is intended to stimulate conversation as an introduction to the discussion.

Is Wisdom shown more in what is said or in what is not said

We often think that wisdom is knowing what to say, but a lot of wisdom is in avoiding the errors of the tongue. Perhaps wisdom is mostly about controlling what we say.

Deeper Roots

These questions are intended to promote study and deepen understanding.

1. Why do you think that wisdom in speech is so rare? (Refer to James 3:2-12 for some insight) How should this knowledge affect our life?

The passage in James indicates that it is profoundly difficult to control our tongues. Perhaps this is because words can slip out so easily. There also seems to be a spiritual force of evil associated with our tongue. (Lit by the fires of hell)

Knowing the severity of the danger should encourage caution in what we say. Do not be so glib to think that you can escape the negative power of the tongue.

2. Referring to Proverbs 11:9 and 12:6, what is it that the righteous is escaping from and from what is the upright escaping from?

It is hard to say if the righteous and upright are spared from the destruction and harm of words spoken by the wicked and godless, or if they are spared from doing the same as the wicked and godless. Are these verses saying that knowledge will be a defense

from evil words or are they saying that knowledge will help prevent a person from saying evil words. I am more inclined to the latter. If we exercise wisdom and righteousness, we will be rescued from the inappropriate use of our tongue.

However, the Expositor Bible Commentary says of 11:9 that “the righteous will have sufficient knowledge and experience to identify and end slander.” And of 12:6 says “the righteous will be able to make a skillful defense against false accusations.”

Perhaps we can say that with all the slander and potential for negative words, our best and only defense is integrity of character. Then people can speak ill of us, but nothing will stick.

3. What is the meaning of Proverbs 18:21

This verse is first of all saying that words can be used for good or for ill. It then goes on to say that if you love to talk, you must be ready to bear the fruit. This is a warning about too much talking or more specifically careless words. We must be aware of the power of the tongue.

4. What does it mean in Proverbs 25:15 that a “*gentle tongue can break a bone.*”

The funny thing about this verse is that it seems to go against the popular saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” It contradicts it in two ways. First of all it says that words can indeed break bones. Secondly and surprisingly, it is not harsh words, but gentle words that do the breaking. The basic meaning is that with patience and gentleness, stiff opposition can be overcome. This proverb shows us that we do not need to raise our voice or get agitated in order to prevail. In fact there is more power in gentle persuasion than in argument or going on the verbal attack.

5. Proverbs 10:18 seems to indicate that it is wrong to conceal our hatred. Does this seem true to you? Is this proverb always true? How could you apply this proverb? Do you consider it lying to withhold criticism?

Once again, we must be careful to see that a proverb is sometimes more descriptive than prescriptive. It says that if you are concealing your true feeling, you are a liar. It is describing reality. It is not necessarily saying that you should openly broadcast your hatred. In fact the second part of the proverbs criticizes slander which is nothing more than hatred revealed.

While this verse may in fact have nothing to do with criticism, it does bring up a good question. The key point however, should be that criticism should not be motivated by hatred, but rather by love. At times it could be false and unproductive to withhold criticism, for through criticism, we can be spared from sin and learn the truth. Some

things are however just petty and if the criticism is not meant for the good of the other person, it should not be spoken.

This proverb is more of a warning against hypocrisy rather than a call to sound your mouth off about everything you hate.

Perhaps in fact the best way to apply this proverb is to put aside hatred.

Bearing Fruit

These questions are designed to be a little more personal and application oriented. Use these questions to focus more on sharing. It helps if as a leader, you are willing to share your life with the group.

1. Is gossip wrong if you are telling the truth? What would make it wrong? What makes a statement gossip?

Sometimes gossip is gossip, because it is only a rumor or a half truth. Obviously we should only tell the truth, but just because something is true, does not mean that it is not gossip. It seems that the defining character of gossip is that the report makes the other person look bad. Gossip is a negative report. It would not be gossip if I told someone about how well a child was doing in Sunday School. It would be gossip if I mentioned that someone was misbehaving, even if it was true.

Gossip is also wrong because it often betrays a confidence. The knowledge comes from private conversation or observation.

Do you think that it is possible to gossip by making a prayer request?

Very definitely. We must be guarded in making prayer requests on behalf of another person. First of all, the matter should be public knowledge or we should have the person's permission and if we do not we should be careful to word our request in an appropriate manner.

Some negative examples could be:

- a) Please pray for my wife she is having difficulties with the Smith boy in Sunday School.

How could this one be reworded? First of all you could leave out the name or describe the situation more generally.

2. Is it always wiser to say very little. In what contexts do these proverbs on holding one's tongue seem most appropriate. In what situations would holding your tongue be foolish or wrong?

This is a fairly open ended question that could spark discussion.

This advice is most appropriate when there is a danger for us to say something inappropriate. Instances would include situations where we did not have first hand information, where we are forced to speculate, when we are talking about other people, when we are talking about sensitive issues, when we don't know the people we are talking to very well, when we might be tempted to inflate our own image.

It may be foolish to hold your tongue when the information is important, when you are voice positive things like appreciation or praise. Even then you do not want to over do it.

Branching Out

Each month your group will be asked to focus some time on outreach and service. Plan to spend some time planning and thinking about how your group can reach out together. We will use this space to help your group integrate with the larger outreach efforts of the church.

On Dec 10-12 we will have a Christmas outreach dinner called Together for Christmas. It will be a nice meal, conversation around the table along with a fun program filled with humor and interaction. It will be a great opportunity to invite guests. We need to help our groups get excited about inviting people. Create a list of possible invitees and pray for opportunity to invite and positive response.