

Get Smart: A Study in Proverbs

Lesson 4: Straight Talk

One of the most significant powers we exercise in our life is the power of our words. If there is ever a place where we need wisdom, it is in our speech.

Proverbs 16:23 *A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.*

Perhaps one of the best ways to identify the wise and the foolish is in the way they speak.

Proverbs 15:2 *The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.*

Sadly, wisdom is so very often absent when it comes to the way we use our words.

Proverbs 20:15 *Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.*

Proverbs gives us much direction in this area. Perhaps much of what is taught is straight forward, yet often it is difficult to apply.

The Power of our Words

The book of Proverbs has much to say about power of our words. It shows us that our tongue has the ability to do much good or much harm. Although we are told that “sticks and stones can break bones and that names never hurt”, I think we know that this is not true. Words can bless and words can harm. Our words not only affect other, but they also affect ourselves.

Proverbs 10:20 *The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.*

Proverbs 10:31 *The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out.*

Proverbs 11:9 *With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape.*

Proverbs 12:6 *The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.*

Proverbs 12:14 *From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.*

- Proverbs 12:18 *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
- Proverbs 12:25 *An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.*
- Proverbs 15:23 *A man finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word!*
- Proverbs 16:24 *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*
- Proverbs 18:21 *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*
- Proverbs 21:23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.*
- Proverbs 25:11 *A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*
- Proverbs 25:15 *Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.*

Truth and Falsehood

Proverbs clearly teaches that wisdom is associated with truth and honesty and that liars are foolish. We might think this is obvious, but do we share this conviction with the same passion we see in Proverbs?

- Proverbs 6:16-19 *There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, 19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.*
- Proverbs 10:18 *He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.*
- Proverbs 12:19 *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.*
- Proverbs 14:25 *A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.*
- Proverbs 15:4 *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

- Proverbs 16:13 *Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.*
- Proverbs 17:20 *A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.*
- Proverbs 21:28 *A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.*
- Proverbs 26:28 *A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.*
- Proverbs 24:26 *An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.*
- Proverbs 25:18 *Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor.*

Flattery and Boasting

Proverbs also cautions us about false praise for ourselves and others.

- Proverbs 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*
- Proverbs 27:2 *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.*
- Proverbs 28:23 *He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.*

The Danger of Gossip

Many of us have probably experienced the damage and disappointment that comes with people talking behind our back.

- Proverbs 11:13 *A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.*
- Proverbs 16:28 *A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*
- Proverbs 18:8 *The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.*

Proverbs 20:19 *A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.*

Proverbs 26:20 *Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*

Wisdom Knows when Not to Speak.

One interesting piece of advice that is prevalent in Proverbs is to keep our mouths shut.

Proverbs 10:8 *The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.*

Proverbs 10:19-20 *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

Proverbs 11:12 *A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.*

Proverbs 13:3 *He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*

Proverbs 15:28 *The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.*

Proverbs 17:27-28 *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. 28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.*

Proverbs 18:13 *He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.*

Proverbs 29:20 *Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*