

Theme: The wise person, knowing words hold the power of life and death, uses them with care and integrity to heal, bless, and build up rather than harm, deceive, or destroy.

I. The Power of Words and Communication

- A. The promises related to increased communications
- B. If humans can communicate more quickly with more people, it will enable us to greatly reduce conflict.
- C. That was a false prophecy!
- D. Increased communication has brought about great change – but not for the good!
- E. More words mean people seem to value them less
- F. But wisdom teaches us how to use words wisely.

II. Wisdom Understands the Power of Words

A. Words are powerful!

From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips. ²¹ Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. Proverbs 18:20-21

- 1. Words produce fruit – they create results! (v20)
- 2. The tongue has the power of life and death!
 - a. This is not a type of magic or prosperity theology
 - b. It is the recognition that words have great effect.
- 3. A wise person loves the tongue, knowing how it is used will determine the fruit produced.
- 4. This is a consistent theme in Proverbs

From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him. Proverbs 12:14

- a. The mouth produces fruit as surely as the hands!
- b. We must be diligent with our words!

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Proverbs 12:18

- c. Words are like a sword – they can do great harm is used rashly!
- d. Words can also be like a scalpel in the hands of a surgeon – they can bring healing!

B. The wise person will watch their tongue and use words carefully and properly!

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. James 3:2-8

- 1. What a powerful warning about the tongue and our words!

2. The wise person knows the great power of the tongue and is careful with it!
3. He or she knows they can set their world on fire if they are not careful – so they use words wisely!

III. Using Words Wisely

A. Wisdom knows when to speak and when to be silent

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. ²⁸**Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.** Proverbs 17:27-28

1. Sometimes wisdom stays silent!
2. A wise person restrains their words if they will not accomplish anything other than produce trouble!
3. Wisdom discerns when to speak and when to be silent – both are needed at different times
Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. ⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Proverbs 26:4-5
 - a. This is not contradictory – it is wisdom!
 - b. As we grow in wisdom, we learn when words are unlikely to produce positive change – so we are silent.
 - c. As we grow in wisdom, we learn when words are likely to produce positive change – so we speak.
4. The modern world tells us we need to give our opinion on everything, but this is the way of the fool!

B. Wisdom listens and then responds carefully

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. Proverbs 18:2

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. Proverbs 18:13

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; James 1:19

1. The fool does not take time to listen but only wants to air their own opinion or hot take.
2. Wisdom is quick to listen, to hear empathetically, to make sure the other person's words are understood.
3. Wisdom is slow to speak – it thinks through its words carefully to try and prevent misunderstanding or producing conflict rather than understanding.
4. Sometimes the wise person disagrees because the other person is speaking folly – but wisdom is careful and courteous to make sure we are not talking past one another.

C. Wisdom does not love quarrels and strife

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling. Proverbs 20:3

The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so **quit before the quarrel breaks out.** Proverbs 17:14

Whoever loves transgression loves strife; he who makes his door high seeks destruction. Proverbs 17:19

1. Wisdom avoids strife if possible
2. Wisdom sees that more words will only lead to strife and not understanding and it decides to stop the conversation until a more opportune time.

3. Wisdom NEVER loves strife and quarrels – it will only enter them reluctantly.
4. Our culture REWARDS harsh words that stir up strife – this is how you garner attention. But this is the way of the fool!
5. Rather than seeking it to garner attention or “score points”, the wise person tries to avoid strife.

D. Wisdom uses words of integrity (not lies/half-truths)

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight. Proverbs 12:22

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Proverbs 12:19

1. Lies are an ABOMINATION to God! Strong words!
2. God wants words of integrity – fully truthful, not half-lies to score points or sway others through misinformation.
3. We have a major problem in our culture of changing the definition of words or using words without clearly and carefully being consistent – and this is done purposefully.
4. Clear words lead to clear thought, which leads to righteous behavior. Use words clearly and consistently.
5. In the end, integrity is blessed by God and lasts, but spinning the facts fades and leads to trouble.
6. Example: “But don’t you think he is a bad person?”
7. The wise person will not share information that they do not KNOW is true (example: a Facebook friend)
8. Better to say nothing than to spread falsehood

9. This also means we cannot speak falsehood to go with the crowd or to avoid hurting someone’s feelings – if we speak, it must be truthful.

10. Better to say nothing than to confirm a person in a deception, error, or lie.

E. Wisdom uses words of purity, not foul or coarse words
Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Proverbs 4:24 NIV

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4

1. Wisdom shuns perverse, coarse, crude language.
2. This was challenging in the Marine Corps and with workout friends, but the wise person wants to speak like Jesus, not the crowd!
3. Movies, music, and the culture at large have become much worse in this area, but we have to follow Jesus, the Way of Wisdom.

F. Wisdom uses words to bless and build up

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

1. The wise use their tongue to speak words of life.
2. God spoke words of blessing over creation to bring forth life and fruitfulness – and we should do the same!
3. This is especially important with our spouse and children!
4. This includes speaking formal blessings (like in a worship service) but also our general words of affirmation, love, support, encouragement, and blessing.

5. This is one of the biggest areas I have seen bring blessing or trouble to families! (After Hours)
6. Words of blessing breathe life into these relationships, while harsh, demeaning words breathe death into them.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I use my words wisely?

1. This is one of the most common themes in Proverbs
2. How I use my words is no small matter!
3. We are created through Jesus the Word, and we are called to increasingly be conformed to the image of Jesus the Word – so this is essential!
4. James tells us we all fail at this, so we all have areas where the Spirit wants to work in us related to our words!
5. Where is the Spirit bringing conviction?
 - a. Wisdom knows when to speak and when to be silent
 - b. Wisdom listens and then responds carefully
 - c. Wisdom does not love quarrels and strife
 - d. Wisdom uses words of integrity (not lies/half-truths)
 - e. Wisdom uses words of purity, not foul or coarse words
 - f. Wisdom uses words to bless and build up
6. Think of how this applies in key areas of life
 - a. Family – spouses/kids/parents/grandkids

- b. Friends and coworkers
 - c. Social media and public conversations
7. Let the Spirit work in this area to make you wise!
 - a. At the Lord's Table!
 - b. Pray daily this week to grow in this area
 - c. Memorize a verse that really spoke to you

B. The Table of Law and Gospel

1. Wisdom is not legalism or self-improvement
2. The Spirit works through Law and Gospel
3. The Law convicts us of our sin in our words
4. We use words to confess our sin
5. God pronounces the word of forgiveness!
6. Psalm 32 confession and absolution

Using Words Wisely

Proverbs 18:20-21

October 4, 2026

Communion

Numbers 6:24-26

Teaching keywords: Tongue and words; wisdom and knowledge; integrity, honesty, and faithfulness

The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26