

Proverbs: What We Say

Proverbs 12:14-25

Politicians (like Churchill and Hitler) have used the power of words to stir and provoke nations. But the power of words is not reserved for political leaders. So it's not surprising that the Book of Proverbs has lots to say about what we say.

Words of grace (or not): Proverbs tells us what you know from experience, that what people say to you, and what you say to others can cause great hurt. Proverbs 12:18 'There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts.' Proverbs 16:27 'A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.' Words that are like sword thrusts and scorching fire cause pain and devastation in relationships. But there is another side to this. Proverbs also says that our tongues have the ability to heal, to bind up, to give life, to nourish, to make glad. (Proverbs 12:18; 10:11; 10:21; 12:25). Don't you want to be someone like that? Proverbs 18:21 says 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.' The tongue has the ability to impart death or life. Which is it with you? And the amazing thing is that what goes around comes around: if you deal out life and grace and encouragement and blessing through what you say, you'll start eating its fruit.

Words of Influence: Proverbs highlights the area it calls 'discord' as one where we can influence for bad (Proverbs 6:14; 16:28; 18:8). It is conversations that turn people against one another, divide and cause factions. But that kind of influence comes at a price. Proverbs 6:16-19 says God hates it and none of us want to be engaged in conversation that God hates. So Proverbs 26:20 says 'For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.' By deciding that you are going to honour God, by what you do or don't say, you will still be an influence on others but it will be for good.

Proverbs says you can positively impact the lives of those around you by both the content and the character of what you say. Proverbs says that if you want to influence people, how you speak matters (Proverbs 16:21; 25:15): sweetness of speech and a soft tongue are persuasive. But it's not just the way you say it. Content matters. Proverbs 15:7 says: 'the lips of the wise spread knowledge'. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ we have something to share, something to spread.

Words under control: Proverbs recognizes that getting control of our tongues is a battlefield. It spells out some areas where this is especially needed: in debate (18:2); when counseling others (25:20); and when joking (26:18-19). But it is especially necessary in arguments, when you are tempted to anger (29:22; 15:18; 15:1; 16:32; 29:11). 'A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.' So how in control of your tongue are you? However, it's not your mouth that's the problem, it's your heart: Jesus said the mouth is just the overflow of the heart.

Words of Life: Proverbs says that words have tremendous power. So where can we go to find words that can bring about lasting change in our hearts? The disciples recognized that there was nowhere else to turn than Jesus (John 6:68): He alone has the words of eternal life. It's as we become Christians, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and allow him to daily transform us to be more like Jesus, that our hearts get changed, so that what we say is blessing to others.