

The Healing Power of Positive Words

Texts: Proverbs 12:18, 16:24, 18:21

General Direction

To explore several of Solomon's proverbs related to wise speech. [Deliver this message after the reading for Week 7 is completed.]

Back Story

The first 17 books of the Old Testament (Genesis – Esther) are fairly chronological in their order. But the next 5 books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) are placed together because of their poetic nature. These are the 5 books of poetry. Much of this material, such as psalms written by David and proverbs penned by Solomon, give additional insight into Biblical characters whose lives were described earlier in your Bible reading.

It is believed that the book of Proverbs was compiled by Solomon, son of King David. One writer described a proverb as “The wisdom of many but the wit of one.” The Proverbs instruct us on how to live wisely, with skill, avoiding needless pitfalls.

Sermon Purpose and Outline

Words have power, and proper use of that power requires wisdom. This message explores the positive uses of the power of speech, and gives direction for exercising wisdom in what we say.

Sermon Question: How can my words bring healing to hurting people?

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| 1. Control your impulses and speak wisely | Proverbs 12:18 |
| 2. Conquer your bitterness and speak kindly | Proverbs 15:4 |
| 3. Correct your attitude and speak positively | Proverbs 16:24 |

Sermon Introduction

Many of us remember a rhyme from our grade school playground:

“Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me.”

We all probably know that this rhyme is not entirely true. Words have the power to do great harm and great good. In the words of Solomon:

The power of life and death is in the tongue. Proverbs 18:21

If you think Solomon is overstating things, just think back on your own life for a moment. Can you recall any words that were said to you, or about you, that brought about a death of some sort – the death of a dream, the death of a relationship, the death of your self-image? How about words like, “You’re just average,” or “You can’t do anything right,” or “It’s all your fault,” or “You’re ugly,” or “You’re a loser,” or “You’re stupid.”

Now, think back again, and this time, can you recall any words spoken to you or about you that brought you to life – gave you hope for your future, excitement about your purpose, or made you feel good about yourself? How about words like, “I believe in you,” or “You’ve got what it takes,” or “You are so talented,” or “You’re a winner.”

Today, we’re going to turn the tables. Instead of analyzing the cruel words that were said to you on the playground and how they have affected you as an adult ☺, we’re going to take a look at the power your words have in the lives of others. Funny, isn’t it, that we can be so bent out of shape about the things people say to us, without ever giving much thought to the impact that our words have on them!

Well, your words do have impact. In fact, you are probably far more influential in people’s lives than you realize. How can you harness that force and make sure you’re speaking the “power of life” into people, and not the “power of death”? What can you do to become the kind of person that people stop to listen to every time they open their mouths to speak? Remember the old ad slogan, “When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen”? Let’s discover what Solomon has to say to us in Proverbs that can transform us into that kind of person – “When Jason talks, people listen.” “When Linda talks, people listen.”

Connection to the Overarching Theme: The Journey of Faith

From the beginning of time, God has asked us to step out on faith and trust Him. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: *Without faith, it is impossible to please God.*

The journey of faith requires us to trust God in life's daily activities such as those touched upon in the book of Proverbs – even as simple or seemingly minor as the words we say. Proverbs provides direction in living life with wisdom and skill. It is God's wisdom we explore in Proverbs, and it will take faith to implement that wisdom at times, especially when you'd rather use your words to spout off or say what you feel or retaliate or defend yourself.

Let's continue on our journey of faith and discover the healing power of positive words.

Sermon Question: How can my words bring healing to hurting people?

1. Control your impulses and speak wisely

Proverbs 12:18

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing

Textual Explanation

In this proverb Solomon dramatically portrays how powerful our speech is. Reckless words are not something to be taken lightly – they have the power to wound as fiercely as a sword can!

Creative Teaching Tool

Hold up a sword

What are reckless words? These are the words you say without thinking, impulsive words that aren't checked by self-control. You're especially likely to speak recklessly when your defenses are at their lowest, such as when you're tired, stressed, irritated, frustrated, feeling put out, feeling used, or feeling ill.

Reckless words could be spoken by a dad, working on a household project, who sends his young son to find a tool. If he returns without it and the dad snaps, "Can't you ever find anything?", those are reckless words that wound the child's spirit.

What are healing words?

Creative Teaching Tool

Hold up a roll of gauze bandages

Healing words, according to this proverb, are wise words. These are words that are carefully chosen for the need of the person hearing them. Wise words are usually not spoken in haste or out of an emotional reaction, but words that reflect God's perspective on the situation.

What could our mythical dad have said that would have brought healing instead of wounding to his young son? His son returns without the tool, and instead of snapping in frustration, the dad could say something healing, like, “You’re usually good at finding things. That tool must have been misplaced. Let’s go look for it together.”

Cross References

Why is it so important to exercise self-control over our words and keep from speaking recklessly?

James 1:26

*Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and **their religion is worthless.***

Exercising self-control over our impulsive reactions can be difficult. How exactly can we speak wisely when we don’t feel like it? Pray for God’s restraint, and pause before you speak.

Psalm 141:3

Set a guard over my mouth, Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips.

Proverbs 16:23

*Intelligent people **think before they speak**; what they say is then more persuasive.*

So, don’t hurt hurting people more by speaking recklessly. Heal hurting people by speaking words of wisdom, which you can do by praying and pausing before you speak.

2. Conquer your bitterness and speak kindly

Proverbs 15:4

*The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life; but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. NIV
The tongue that soothes is a tree of life; the perverse tongue, a breaker of hearts. NJB
Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim. MSG*

Textual Explanation

In this proverb, as in the previous one we explored, the word pictures used for the impact of the tongue are very powerful. When you speak words of kindness, that has as dramatic an impact as the healing powers of a tree of life. In the Bible, the “tree of life” represents immortality.

On the other hand, words that come out of a hurtful spirit (our different scripture versions use terms such as deceitful words, or filthy language, or cutting words) have the power to “crush the spirit,” “break the heart,” or even “wound and maim.” The tongue has the power to permanently cripple another person.

When are you most likely to speak such damaging words? Hurtful words come out of a hurt heart. If you are finding yourself speaking cutting, crushing words to someone, examine what is in your

heart towards that person. Have you been nurturing bitterness against them? How about an unforgiven hurt? Or a streak of self-centeredness?

Cross References

James 4:1

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

So, if your self-centered desires are at the heart of your hurtful words, what do you do about it?

This next passage is rich with direction for a mean mouth. Paul tell us something to get rid of, something to be, and something to do.

Ephesians 4:31, 32

³¹ **Get rid of** all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² **Be** kind and compassionate to one another, **forgiving** each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The key to being able to speak kindly and be an agent of healing and life for another person is to clear any bitterness out of your relationship with them. You do that through forgiveness.

So, don't crush people with words of bitterness. Release them through forgiveness, and give life and healing to them with words of kindness.

3. Correct your attitude and speak positively

Proverbs 16:24

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Textual Explanation

In Solomon's day there was no milk chocolate or processed sugar. There was honey however, and its sweet taste was unlike anything else. There was literally nothing like it. When searching for an image for pleasant words, Solomon chose honey; sweet to the taste and healing to the body.

Creative Teaching Tool

Have the congregation experience the truth of this proverb through the sensation of taste. Since honey would be messy, distribute Hershey's Kisses and invite everyone to eat them to experience the proverb, "Pleasant words are sweet to the soul."

As you're experiencing the delicious chocolate sliding down your throat and coating your stomach, think about what you'd say to someone right when your stomach is smiling. You'd say pleasant words, wouldn't you? Things like, "Thank you for that wonderful chocolate. You're wonderful!" But, if you had a stomach ache, what kinds of words would we be more likely to

hear? “What did you give me that for? Are you trying to kill me or something?” Your words are affected by what’s inside you.

When you’re around someone who is habitually negative, whose words are not pleasant and sweet to the soul, you can just bet that what’s inside them is not pleasant. In fact, the Bible tells us that this is the case.

Cross References

Matthew 15:18

*But the things that come out of the mouth **come from the heart.***

If you were to examine your own words, and put the positive ones on one side of a scale, and the negative ones on the other side, which side would weigh more? If you have to admit that you tend to be more of a negative person, just trying harder is probably not going to make you speak more pleasantly or positively. The Bible tells us that it goes deeper than that. You need heart surgery.

Ezekiel 18:31

*Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and **get a new heart** and a new spirit.*

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Once you have your heart right before God, you will find that what’s coming out of your mouth is more pleasant, more sweet to the hearer, and more healing to their souls. Don’t you want to be known for that kind of speech? Another word for that type of speech is “encouragement.” Be an encourager. Find a way to work a word of encouragement into every conversation you have this week. Make it a goal to not leave a conversation without speaking a positive uplifting word to every person you talk to – you’ll be spreading around Hershey’s Kisses wherever you go!

Closing

We have uncovered some strong prescriptions for our mouths in Proverbs. Solomon has told us to not give in to our moods, but to speak **wisely**. He says to forgive bitterness so we can speak **kindly**. Finally, we are to let God clean out our hearts and correct our attitudes so that we can speak **positively**.

I have a closing challenge for you. If you want to be the next E.F. Hutton, so that when you talk, people listen, try this:

Cross Reference

Ephesians 4:29

*Do not let any **unwholesome talk** come out of your mouths, but **only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.***

There is no better summary of everything we have talked about than this verse. Ask God to help you get rid of any unwholesome talk – reckless words, cutting words, negative words. Try finding some way to build people up during every interaction you have this week. Speak wisely, speak kindly, and speak positively.