

Proverbs 18:21, 10:19-20, 6:1-5.

What comes out of our mouths can either energize someone or wipe them out. As we utilize words of life, we'll build one another up instead of tearing each other down.

The Book of Proverbs is a guidebook for wisdom. How many of you are reading one chapter of Proverbs a day? That's great. Keep it up. Proverbs has a lot to say about what we say as it refers to our tongue, our mouth, or our lips over 150 times in 31 chapters!

Psalms 34:11-14, "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? 13 Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

Our primary text is **Proverbs 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit."**

Everything we say in any week can either assassinated or invigorated the people around you because words have the power to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble.

Could you stick your tongue out? Can you see it? Notice how small it is. But it's the most powerful force in the world. Turn to the person next to you and say, **"Death and life are in the power of your tongue."** Now let's personalize **Proverbs 18:21** by saying it together using the words "my" and "I": "Death and life are in the power of MY tongue, and I will eat its fruits."

Words are powerful for at least three reasons.

1. Words are everywhere.

- According to researchers, on an average day, we open our mouths to speak 700 times, using at least 7,000 words! Interestingly, one study found we only use about 700 words that have actual value. No wonder Jesus said in

Matthew 12:37, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

2. Words penetrate within.

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

- Our tongues torpedo relationships and ambush reputations. Like a sword, our speech can lacerate a life in a matter of seconds. The things we say can either bring emotional life or emotional death to others. Think of a time when someone spoke exactly the right words at the right time. Now think of a time when someone spoke recklessly. Some of us remember words that sliced through our souls decades ago.

3. Words spread far and wide.

- We say a lot of words and they go down deep. They also get spread far and wide. Perhaps you've experienced the pain that comes from a rumor that spreads like wild fire. It's no fun, is

it? Words don't just evaporate once they're spoken. They're like burning embers that engulf an entire forest.

Words are powerful. **Proverbs 18:21** says they are either used for life or death. Let's say this again: I will use my tongue to launch life instead of delivering death.

Proverbs lists several examples of how the tongue can be used to hurt, destroy, and kill.

1. Gossip.

Proverbs 20:19, "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbling."

Proverbs 18:8, "People love to hear gossip. It is like tasty food on its way to the stomach." ERV

- Remember this. The person who gossips to you will gossip about you.

2. Angry words.

Proverbs 29:22, "An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression."

3. Lying.

- **Proverbs 6:17 "a lying tongue"** is one of the six things that God hates. **Proverbs 12:19, "The truthful lip shall be established forever, But a lying tongue is but for a moment."**

4. Flattery.

- Most of us secretly enjoy flattery, but Proverbs warns us to be on our guard against those who sweet-talk: **"A man who flatters his neighbor Spreads a net for his feet." (29:5).** A flatterer is one who pats you on the back today only to locate a soft spot where he can insert a knife tomorrow.

5. Impulse Speech.

- **Proverbs 29:20: "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."** We've all experienced the horror of saying something too quickly as we open mouth and insert foot.

Words are powerful because they can enflame or encourage. They can be used to bring death and they can also resuscitate a floundering life. We can belittle or we can bless. **Proverbs 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit."**

Let's say this again: I will use my tongue to launch life instead of delivering death.

We've considered how our words can deliver death and now let's look at how our tongues can launch life. Proverbs gives us three-word pictures.

1. Refreshing water.

- **Proverbs 10:11:** “The mouth of the righteous is a well of life...” When we listen to wise words it’s like taking a long drink of fresh spring water on a hot summer day.

2. Tasty food.

- **Proverbs 16:24:** “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Honey was both a luxury and a medicine in ancient Israel. Have you ever put honey on a straight out of the oven biscuit? Yummy! When we talk tenderly with others, our words become priceless and provide healing to broken hearts.

3. Expensive jewelry.

- **Proverbs 25:11-12:** “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprove to a listening ear.” Like an expert jeweler, our words should be balanced just right, beautiful in their appearance, and as valuable as gold and silver.

After reading through the Book of Proverbs, I made a list of the “Top Ten Tongue-Taming Tools.” **Proverbs 21:23** challenges us to be careful about our conversations: “Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.”

1. Think more.

- Most of my mouth mistakes are made because I simply don’t engage my mind first. When I say something that is unkind to Kim it’s usually because I’ve not spent any time thinking about what I should say. Instead, I just let things fly out of my mouth.
- When we engage our minds, we’ll avoid messing up with our mouths. Sometimes it’s best to not answer at all according to **Proverbs 26:4:** “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.”
- Before you answer, hit the pause button. Speak when you’re angry and you’ll make the best speech you’ll ever regret. It might be helpful to get in the habit of taking a deep breath so that you can reflect before you respond.

2. Talk less.

- Our chances of blowing it with our words are directly related to the amount of time we spend with our mouth open. Abraham Lincoln was fond of saying, “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”
- The more we talk the more we trespass; the less we talk, the wiser we are. One of my favorite **Proverbs** to remind my mouth of is **17:28:** “Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.”
- **Ecclesiastes 3:7** says there’s a time to be silent and a time to speak.

Could you stick out your tongue again? Now grab it and try to talk. Here are seven situations when it’s good to hold your tongue.

- When you're tempted to say, "I told you so."
- When someone is upset about a problem, and you've had a similar experience.
- When you're tempted to judge or criticize someone.
- When you want to correct someone on a minor point as they tell a story.
- When someone has not asked for your opinion.
- When you want to tell something about yourself to impress someone.

3. Listen better.

James 1:19, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

- We have two ears and one mouth...Stop Talking!

Proverbs 15:31, "To be counted among the wise, you must learn to accept helpful criticism." ERV

Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future."

- It's tough to hear someone tell us something we don't want to hear, but it's really the only way to become wise. Have you been blowing off some advice recently? As hard as it is, take the time to listen to what God is trying to tell you through the individuals who care about you.

Proverbs 18:13, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him."

4. Encourage others.

- Do you realize there are people all around you who are discouraged and defeated? God can use your words to breathe life into a person who is piled by life's problems. **Proverbs 15:4** says: **"A gentle tongue is a tree of life."**
- How many of your words this week were words of encouragement? How many sentences were devoted to helping lift anxious hearts? If you were paid \$1.00 for every kind word you said and had to give away 50 cents for every critical comment, would you be rich or poor today?
- One way you can tell if you are an encourager, or a discourager is to honestly ask if people like being around you. Are you the kind of person others are glad to see coming into the room, or do they turn their face away when they see you? Let's work at inserting an encouraging word into every conversation we have this week.

5. Speak gently.

- One of the best ways to evaporate anger from your conversations is to work at being calm. **Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."** The next time you're talking to someone who is angry, instead of responding in turn, give a gentle answer.
- This week let us harness the power of a gentle word. As someone has said, "Keep your words soft and sweet; you never know when you may have to eat them!"

6. Cut others slack.

- Most of us are way too tough on others. We expect perfection from people while minimizing our own mistakes. We grow our grudges instead of giving grace.

Proverbs 17:9, “Forgive someone, and you will strengthen your friendship. Keep reminding them, and you will destroy it.”

7. Tell the truth.

- Tell the truth. It’s important to be known as a truth-teller, no matter the situation or cost involved. **Proverbs 12:17: “Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.”** People value those who speak truth, even when it hurts.
- Sometimes God calls us to speak truth into others. In Proverbs, this is known as a rebuke or correction. **Proverbs 27:6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”** Don’t hold back on truth telling but remember to do it gently and with the goal of encouraging the individual.
- Proverbs also mentions the importance of telling the truth to those who need to know the way of salvation. **Proverbs 10:21 says, “The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.”** That means you can use your lips to help bring spiritual nourishment to people by pointing them to a relationship with Jesus. **Proverbs 11:30: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.”**

8. Don’t brag.

- It’s not attractive to hear someone boast and brag, is it? **Proverbs 25:27: “It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one’s own glory.”** Honey is good but it’s pretty tough to sit down and chug a quart of it.
- When you sing your own praise, you always sing out of tune. If you feel the need to honk your own horn, then you may have a problem with boasting. Instead of seeking your own name in lights, focus on God’s honor and He will take care of you. When you feel yourself starting to talk about what you’ve done, look for ways to quickly give credit to others.

9. Stop Crying.

- Stop complaining about everything, all the time!

Philippians 2:14, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing,”

1 Peter 4:9, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”

10. Beware of excuses.

- Well, no one is perfect.

Matthew 12:36-37, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."

Conclusion

Make things right with others.

Yield your tongue to God.

Be part of the solution.

Obedience through surrender.

Feast on the Word of God.

Ask for a new heart.

Only God can give us the power we need to build others up instead of tearing them down. If you want to be a dispenser of life words instead of death words, you need to be rightly related to God. That's something we do through our words. **Romans 10:9-10: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."**

Our words are but the public pronouncement of the private place of the heart. What comes out of our mouths reveals what is in our hearts. Another way to say it is that our words reflect our true character.