

Choose Your Words Carefully

What you say reveals a lot about you. So, what do you say?

We use words all the time to communicate with others, but we don't often stop to think about the 'flavour' of that communication. It can be easy to develop habits in the way we talk without realising what those habits are – things like being overly negative or cynical in our replies, or speaking before really listening. The Book of Proverbs talks a lot about 'speaking'. This study draws from some of those proverbs with the aim of helping us take a fresh look at how we use our words. As Proverbs 18:21 says, *"Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit - you choose."* Let us choose wisely...



Things to do/ Questions to consider

Letting Proverbs 'speak' to us

- Pray and ask the Lord to get your attention on anything He may want to say to you about your speaking.
- There is a list of proverbs over the page which relate to 'speaking'. These are grouped in proverbs which have similar themes. Start by looking at these group theme titles. Is there any group title that draws your attention? Start reading the proverbs in that group.
- Mark any words, phrases, or whole proverbs that catch your attention, for whatever reason.
- Go back over the things *you* marked and see if there are any common themes. Do you sense God saying anything to you about this?
- Note down any questions, thoughts, or practical actions that come to mind as you do this.
- As you are able, share your reflections.
- If you have time, go to the next group theme that interests you and repeat these steps.

Heart in mouth

➔ **Read Matthew 15:11,17-20** (see text box on right).

- If, as Jesus says, your speech and heart are linked, how do you think this should affect your prayers and actions as you seek to be more godly in your speaking?
- As the Spirit changes you from the inside out, how much improvement in your speaking will happen naturally and how much will you have to work at it?

How to read Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs has some very useful practical wisdom. But as we read Proverbs, we need to keep in mind a few things:

- The 'Fear of the Lord' – the reverential awe of God – is the beginning of wisdom and life (Prov 1:7, 2:5, 9:10, 14:27, 19:23). This is the basic theme and underlying idea of the Book.
- Individual proverbs are designed as short, memorable statements to point you in the direction of attitudes and behaviours that will help you grow. They are more like observations and generalisations of what happens rather than black and white contract-like statements.
- Most individual proverbs are in two related parts. Sometimes those parts are opposite ideas, and sometimes the second half uses different words to say the same thing as the first half.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 11 "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."...

17 "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts--murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

Matthew 15:11,17-20

Verses from the Book of Proverbs on 'Speaking'

Gossip	<p>11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. 16:28 A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends. 18:8 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts. 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down. 26:22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts. 26:22 (MSG) Listening to gossip is like eating cheap candy; do you want junk like that in your belly?</p>
Lying & Flattery	<p>10:18 Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips and spreads slander is a fool. 12:17 An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies. 12:19 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. 12:22 The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy. 26:23 Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. 26:24 Enemies disguise themselves with their lips, but in their hearts they harbour deceit. 26:25 Though their speech is charming, do not believe them, for seven abominations fill their hearts. 26:26 Their malice may be concealed by deception, but their wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. 26:28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin. 28:23 Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favour rather than one who has a flattering tongue. 29:5 Those who flatter their neighbours are spreading nets for their feet.</p>
Stirring up conflict	<p>10:12 Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs. 12:18 The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 16:27 A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire. 16:28 A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends. 24:28-29 Do not testify against your neighbour without cause - would you use your lips to mislead? Do not say, "I'll do to them as they have done to me; I'll pay them back for what they did." 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down. 26:21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.</p>
Self-harm caused by your words	<p>12:13 Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk, and so the innocent escape trouble. 18:6 The lips of fools bring them strife, and their mouths invite a beating. 18:7 The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives. 20:17 Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.</p>
Speaking too much	<p>10:8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin. 10:10 Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin. 10:19 Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues. 12:13 Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk, and so the innocent escape trouble. 12:23 The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves, but a fool's heart blurts out folly. 15:2 The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. 18:2 Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.</p>
Holding your tongue	<p>10:19 Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues. 11:12 Whoever derides their neighbour has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue. 11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. 12:16 Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult. 12:23 The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves, but a fool's heart blurts out folly. 17:28 Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.</p>
Good speech blessing others	<p>10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. 10:21 The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense. 11:11 Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. 12:14 From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward. 12:18 The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 15:2 The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. 15:4 The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit. 16:21 The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction. 16:23 The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction. 16:24 Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. 24:26 An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.</p>