

Words

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[0 : 01] And now we come to our Bible reading, and today we're back in the book of Proverbs, reading all of chapter 12 together. Paul Brennan, one of our ministers, has been preaching through Proverbs for us over the past month or two, looking at true wisdom from God, walking in his wisdom, and how we as God's people may walk in his wise ways all the days of our lives.

So if you could get Proverbs chapter 12 open in front of you, that'd be very helpful. And we'll read together from verse 1. Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

A good man obtains favor from the Lord, but a man of evil devices he condemns. No one is established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved.

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. The thoughts of the righteous are just, the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.

The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers them. The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.

[1 : 33] A man is commended according to his good sense, but one of twisted mind is despised. Better to be lowly and have a servant than to play the great man and lack bread.

Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

Whoever is wicked covets the spoil of evildoers, but the root of the righteous bears fruit. An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble.

From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.

[2 : 50] There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy. No ill befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.

The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor. Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

[4 : 14] In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us today. Good morning, folks, and good to see you.

My name is Paul, one of the associate ministers here in the church. Please do have your Bibles open, and the passage that Stephen read for us, Proverbs 12, it would be very helpful to have that open in front of you.

As with other sermons and Proverbs, we'll be moving around Proverbs a wee bit, but we'll be focusing particularly here on chapter 12, and thinking about words, about our speech, our tongues. I'm going to begin with an anecdote from Winston Churchill. People keep giving me Christmas presents about Winston Churchill, so there might be more of these to come in the weeks to follow.

[5 : 18] But it's once said that an American general, an American army general, once gave Winston Churchill a copy of one of his speeches to have a look over for feedback.

And Churchill reviewed it, and the script was returned with the following comments. Churchill writes, Too many passives.

What would have been the impact if, instead of saying, we shall fight them on the beaches, I had instead chosen to say, hostilities will be engaged with our adversary on the coastal perimeter.

Point well made, I think. Churchill knew well the power of words. I think I'm booming here a bit, boys. It's quite loud. Is that just me? So you can see Churchill's point.

Words have power. And Churchill knew well the power of words. Words have great power. And so it's no surprise that the book of Proverbs deals with words in real detail.

[6 : 27] After wisdom itself, speech, words, is the topic that Proverbs tells us more about than anything else. You see, Proverbs knows well the power which we wield with our tongues.

Our words, your words, are powerful. Proverbs 18, 21 says, Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

How you speak will make or break your life. Your words can build a relationship or break a relationship.

Your words can win you or lose you a job. Your words can, according to Proverbs, bring life or death. Now, the human tongue, so I'm told, weighs about 0.4% of our total body weight.

I don't really want to think about how they work that out. But anyway, that's about the average. 0.4% of our body weight is in our tongues. From a statistical point of view, from bare numbers, it's fairly insignificant.

[7 : 38] But it wields huge influence, doesn't it? Far above the percentage of our body weight. For something so small, it has huge capacity for good or for ill.

Huge capacity to influence, to direct, to build up, to cut down. Our tongue, as James in his New Testament letter puts it, is like a rudder on a ship.

Those ships are so large and driven by strong winds, yet they are guided by a small rudder. And so also he writes, So given the power of the tongue, we would do well to listen to God's wisdom on the subject.

As I said, there's so much in the book of Proverbs about the tongue, about our speech. Just in chapter 12, which we read earlier, just go through Proverbs with a pencil, underline everything it says about our tongues and our words, and pretty quickly, Proverbs will fill up with underlined verses.

Just look at chapter 12 here briefly. Let me point out a few verses that deal with the tongue and with our words. So chapter 12, verse 6, The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers them.

[9 : 07] Verse 13, An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble. Verse 14, From the fruit of his mouth, a man is satisfied with good, and the work of his hand comes back to him.

Verse 17, Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Verse 22, Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Verse 25, Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

Well, there's a lot to say, isn't there? Just from chapter 12. We're going to focus our thinking on three things this morning, trying to distill some of what Proverbs says about our words, and we'll think about the consequences of our words, the content, and then also the source.

[10 : 23] So firstly, we think about the consequences of our words, because our words have power. There's great power in our words.

That is a consistent message, not only of Proverbs, but the whole Bible. Powerful to build up, and powerful to break down, powerful for good or for ill. And our words have great power over others. Look at chapter 12, verse 18. Our words have the power to wound. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

You see, our words, they leave a permanent mark on the world. As soon as we've uttered our words, we can't take them back, can we? They have had their effect.

Like a sword thrust into somebody's body, that's going to have an impact, isn't it? You can withdraw the sword, of course, but it leaves damage behind.

[11 : 28] At the very least, there'll be a permanent scar left behind. And our words are like that, says Proverbs. Once they are out there, the damage is done.

We can't undo them. Of course, we can repair some of the damage, but not all. Chapter 18, verse 21, says that death and life are in the power of the tongue.

See, our tongues not only have the power to wound, but also to kill. Words can do that. The child's proverb, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me, is just not true, is it? Words do hurt. They do wound. You know that. Almost as soon as you can start to understand words as a toddler, and start to speak, you know words hurt, and can cause great damage. And it's not so much what is done to you that matters, but what is done in you. You see, words get inside. Sticks and stones deal with the external, but words, they get into our very hearts, our very souls, don't they?

[12 : 41] Words do things, and they change. They can do real damage. And in particular, it's words that are written down, and not merely spoken, that can allow the damage inflicted to linger on.

When words are written down, the impact can be multiplied, because their message, it's repeated over and over, isn't it? From the computer screen, on our mobile phone, every time we read that message, every time we read that email, it's like it's being freshly spoken.

Just think about that last difficult email, or message you received. How many times did you read it? I can guarantee you, it's more than once. We read them over and over, don't we?

I remember often, and I encourage you to heed, wise words from Alistair Begg. He was here several years ago, speaking at Servants of the Word, and he was talking about this very thing, about our words, and about writing them down.

And he said that, if you've got something critical, or difficult to say, then say it in person, or over the phone. Don't fire off an email.

[13 : 53] On the other hand, if you've something encouraging, and positive to say, write that down, because that will be looked over again, and again. Send that an email. Why that advice?

Well, because you read words written down, over and over, don't you? Our words have power, great power over others. So take care, particularly of the words you write down.

Don't fire off the hasty email, sleep on it. Speak in person. Also be careful what you put, in the public domain. Proverbs 18, verse 2.

A fool, takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing, his opinion. That should be, written over Twitter, I think.

A fool takes no pleasure, and understanding, but only in expressing, his opinion. Everyone can express, their opinion now. There's no filter. There's no publishers. You just put it out there.

[14 : 56] See, our words have real power, to wounds. That's the warning, but also, more positively, our words can have, a real positive impact, on others as well. Just remember, the second half, of verse 18 there, in chapter 12.

Yes, are rash words, like sword thrust, but, the tongue of the wise, brings healing. The tongue of the wise, brings healing.

Or chapter 15, verse 4, the gentle tongue, is a tree of life. And you'll know, I'm sure, yourself, the power, of a good word, of encouragement.

A quiet word, unsolicited, can really, bring healing, and help, can't it? Real encouragement. Our words, can do great good, to others, can be a source, of real encouragement.

So, consider, using your words, for good. Our words, are more powerful, than we realize. We don't realize, do we? But, when somebody comes, and encourages you, it's probably a small thing, in their eyes, but for you, it's huge.

[16 : 08] It could be just the thing, you need to hear. They've got no idea, the power of that simple sentence, they've just spoken to you. So, let's think, as a church, how can we, be quicker, to offer words, of encouragement, rather than critique?

How can we build up, brothers and sisters, in the Lord here? It doesn't need to be much, but a quiet word, a small note, can bring you, encouragement.

That's the first key area, when I think, think about our, the consequences of our words, their impact on others, for good or ill. But there's another key consequence, of our words, and it's, the impact our words, have on ourselves.

See, our words have power, not just over others, but also, they have power, over us, the speaker. Look again, at chapter 12, and verses 13 and 14.

An evil man, is ensnared, by the transgression, of his lips, but the righteous, escapes, from trouble. [17:16] From the fruit of his mouth, a man is satisfied, with good. And the work of a man's hand, comes back to him. See, the evil man there, at the start of verse 13, makes a trap, designed, to snare the righteous.

But unwittingly, he's made, a trap for himself. His sinful talk, doesn't just impact others, it impacts himself. And here, he gets trapped himself.

You see, our words, don't just bring hurt, or harm to others, they have consequences, for us too. In verse 14, good words, fill us inwardly, with good things.

See, the words we use, they give flesh, to our thoughts. And those words, in turn, strengthen those thoughts. They reinforce them. So what we say, it reinforces, and fills up, our hearts.

Such is the power, of our words. A thought, uttered, is a thought, strengthened, isn't it? Proverbs 13, verse 3, whoever guards his mouth, preserves his life.

[18:28] He who opens, wide his lips, comes to ruin. See, our words have power, over ourselves. Our words, give rise, to our destiny.

We cannot, separate a man's words, from his future destiny, can we? Foolish speaking, will not lead, to a fruitful life. But on the other hand, wise speaking, wise words, will lead in the main, in general, more often than not, wise words, give rise, to fullness, of life.

As one writer, puts it, the fruit, of the lips, for good or ill, ripens, unavoidably. You cannot, avoid the consequences, of your words.

They will, ripen in the end. So that's the first, key plank of teaching, in the book of Proverbs. Our words are powerful, they have consequences, positive and negative, for those you speak to, but also for yourself.

And that leads naturally, to consider the second, key thing this morning. We've thought about, consequences, but second, what is the content, of our words? Think about the content, of your words, because your words, do things.

[19:45] We've seen that, they have consequences. So given that, they are powerful, given that they have consequences, we need to think about, the content of what we say. What is the character, of our words?

And Proverbs would urge us, would implore us, to speak the truth, to speak kindly, to speak wisely, to speak appropriately, to speak directly, to speak in a measured way.

And of course, none of us, is perfect, when it comes to our words, far from it. I'm sure you've been recalling, as I have, moments from the past, maybe the very recent past, when you've said terrible things, you've left a trail of disaster, in the wake, because of your words.

But we are not God, we're not being called, to speak perfectly. There is hope, as we'll see with our final point. We're not called, to perfection, that's beyond us.

But we are called, to faithfulness, and to the way of wisdom, which is a set, orientation in life, towards the Lord, a life, in relationship with God. So, hear me properly, I'm not saying, we must be perfect, with our words, that's beyond us.

[20:57] But we are called, to be faithful. And we are called, to heed, these words, in Proverbs. So as you think about, the content, of our words, three key things, three things that Proverbs, would say to us, about the content of our words.

There is a lot more, we could say, but here's three. And the first is, we are to speak truth, not deception. We are to speak truth, not deception. Look again, at verse 17, of chapter 12.

Whoever speaks the truth, gives honest evidence, but a false witness, utters deceit. If you are a person, who deceives, then you're not someone, who speaks the truth.

If you do not give, honest evidence, you bear false witness. Now this thing is like, an obvious thing to say. It's easy to understand, isn't it? It's not difficult. Of course the person, who gives honest evidence, is speaking the truth.

Of course someone, who utters deceit, is a false witness. It's easy to understand, but it's not something, to take for granted. Because it's very easy, to speak deceit, isn't it?

[22:10] To say the easy thing. To say what people, want to hear. We dare not take it, for granted in our culture, that people will give, honest evidence, and speak the truth.

Often it's easier not, to speak the truth. It's easy to understand, but it's sometimes, it's sometimes costly to do, isn't it? It's hard, to present the truth to someone, if you know, it's going to be hard, for them to hear.

I'm sure many of you, have seen the classic, X Factor auditions. This is a slightly, this is like the old, illustration, but I'm sure many of us, are familiar with the X Factor. But you remember, little Johnny would come on, and he cannot sing, to save his life.

It's absolutely terrible. And Simon Carroll, to his great credit, will give the honest evidence, and he'll tell Johnny, you cannot sing. It's awful. And little Johnny there, bursts into tears, because everybody around him, up to that point, has uttered deceit.

They've told Johnny, that he can sing, when he can't. Up until now, no one's had the courage, to speak the truth, to little Johnny. He's been surrounded, by those who utter deceit.

[23 : 21] He's told me, he's the best singer, since Michael W. Smith. Now, that's a slightly trivial example, but it's an illustration, of the fact, that it is difficult, sometimes, to speak the truth.

It can be very hard, to speak with a friend, and to give honest evidence. To point out, a difficult truth. To point out, where a friend has erred, and they need to be corrected.

That is hard. We must speak truthfully. But we do so, bearing in mind, the next thing, that Proverbs tells us, about the content, of our speech.

So yes, we're to speak truth, not lies, but we are to speak, kindly and gently, not harshly. Proverbs 15, verse 1, a soft answer, turns away wrath, but a hard word, stirs up, anger.

We are to speak, the truth, but how we do so, is just as key. We are to speak, kindly, not harshly. Sometimes, if a friend, is to be a true friend, a difficult truth, needs to be pointed out, and that may be painful, but it's a pain, that's inflicted, in order to save the friend, from even greater pain, and possibly real danger.

[24 : 44] As the Apostle Paul says, in Colossians, we are to let, the word of Christ, dwell in us, richly, teaching, and admonishing, one another, in all wisdom.

So to do that, requires wisdom, to speak the truth, requires wisdom, because it needs to be said, kindly and gently, not harshly. And when we're thinking, about speaking, the truth to a friend, a good thing to do, is to ask yourself, do I in any way, feel any eagerness, to correct my friend, on this matter?

Do I feel any sort of satisfaction, in putting them straight? If you do, then perhaps you're not the one, to speak to them. But if you do feel hesitation, if you do wrestle with, what to say, if you are agonized, about how to go about, speaking to your friends, then probably you are, the right person, to speak to them.

If you're wrestling with it, if you're struggling with it, if that's you, then you're going to speak gently, aren't you? Not harshly. You'll speak words, motivated by love, and kindness.

You'll maybe take, no pleasure at all, in saying those words, but you'll be praying, they have the right outcome. So we're to speak kindly, and gently, not to avoid, saying the true thing, but how we say it, Proverbs would urge us, is important.

[26 : 16] And so that follows, then, that we are, thirdly, to speak thoughtfully, and not rashly. We're to speak thoughtfully, not rashly. The heart, of the righteous, ponders, how to answer, but the mouth, of the wicked, pours out evil.

chapter 15, verse 28. If one gives an answer, before he hears, it is his folly, and shame. Chapter 18, verse 13.

You see, hasty speech, can land us, in hot water, can't it? The times, we've spoken too soon, Proverbs would urge us, to bide our time, to think carefully, before we speak, to ponder, how to answer, to properly listen, to someone, before offering, our opinion, to think about, what to say, and how to say it.

The heart, of the righteous, ponders, how to answer. My good friend, Terry, sent me a poem, he knew I was preaching, on words this week, and so, he texted me this, I'll share it with you.

I don't know, where it comes from. It's an Alistair Begg sermon, he quoted it, but I don't know, where it comes from. So here's a little poem. If all that we say, in a single day, with never a word left out, were printed, each night, in clear black and white, it would make strange reading, no doubt.

[27 : 47] And then just suppose, our eyes should close, we should read, the whole record through, then wouldn't we sigh, and wouldn't we try, a great deal less talking to do.

And I more than half think, that many a kink, would be smoother, in life's tangled web, if half what we say, in a single day, were to be left, forever, unsaid.

Well that, accords, with Proverbs, doesn't it? the heart of the righteous, the heart of the righteous ponders, how to answer. Chapter 17, verse 27, who understands his words, has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit, is a man of understanding.

Beware rash words, says Proverbs. Think about, what you're going to say. Remember who you're speaking to.

Take time, to think about the right words, for this particular person, in this particular circumstance. It may be, you've got two individuals, who answer to you at work.

[28 : 56] The two direct reports, that come into you. And they've both made, similar sorts of mistakes, in the workplace. Now the end goal, is identical isn't it? You want them to avoid, making that mistake in the future.

But how you speak, to each of those individuals, is going to be, completely different. Because they're different people, and they'll hear you differently. So how you speak, to one of them, will be very different, to how you speak to the other. But the issue is the same, the end goal is the same. But ponder, how you speak, to each of those different people. That is what Proverbs, is urging us to do. Think carefully, be thoughtful, not rash with our words.

The wise person, will speak with great thought, adapting, and crafting their words, to the hearer, so that they are hearable. So those are the three, key principles, from Proverbs, about the content, of our words.

We are to speak truth, not deception. We are to speak kindly, and gently, not harshly. We are to speak thoughtfully, not rashly. And no doubt, a bit like that poem, as we think about our words, as we reflect back, just on this morning, for the last few days, I'm sure we cringe, we regret, because inevitably, we do speak, we do speak, we do speak, we do speak, harshly, and rashly.

[30 : 19] And we do that, because, of the final thing, we must remember. The final thing, that Proverbs teaches us, about words. We thought about the consequences, we thought about the content, but Proverbs deals, thirdly, with the source, of our words.

Where do our words, come from? And our words, have their source, in our hearts. You see, our words, are inextricably linked, to the sort of people, we really are.

You can't claim, to be a wise person, if your words are foolish. You won't speak, foolish words, if you're a wise person. And so, if our words, are to be transformed, then our hearts, must first be transformed.

Proverbs 16, verse 23, the heart, of the wise man, makes his speech, judicious, and adds, persuasiveness, to his lips.

The heart, of the wise, makes his speech, judicious. See, it's our hearts, that direct our speech. And that ought, to come as no surprise, if you want to know, what you're really like, just open your mouth, stick out your tongue, and you'll find out, it will reveal to you, what you're really like.

[31 : 42] See, our speech, clothes, our thoughts. I don't know about you, but, until I write something down, or speak something out, I don't really know, what I think. Speaking, sort of, orders, my thoughts.

It articulates, what I really think. I'm not really sure, what I think, until I write it down. And our words, as we've said, our words reveal our hearts. And the Lord Jesus is clear, isn't he?

He makes us, the very same point, Matthew chapter 12, for out of the abundance, of the heart, the mouth speaks. So, someone who is at the very core, wise, will speak wise words.

Someone who is at the very core, fool, will speak foolish words. The tongue reveals, at the very core of our being, what we are. So, if you want to know somebody, then listen carefully, to their words.

Listen to what they say. What we say, flows out, from our hearts. Even the hearts of fools, will in the end be exposed. Proverbs 26, whoever hates, disguises himself, with his lips, and harbors deceit in his heart.

[32 : 59] When he speaks graciously, believe him not. For there are seven abominations, in his heart. Though his hatred, will be covered by deception, his wickedness, will in the end, be exposed, in the assembly.

You see, listen long enough, listen carefully enough, and the fool, will be seen to be a fool. So the key, it seems, to good speech, is the heart.

And Proverbs teaches us, that to be a wise person, to get wisdom, you must fear the Lord. You must relate wisely, to the Lord.

That is the fundamental characteristic, of a wise person. A wise person, is not the most well-read, well-read. It's not the person, who's read the most books, who's got the most university degrees. That is not the definition, of a wise person. You can have all the degrees, in the world, and be an absolute fool, according to Proverbs. No, the one who is wise, fears the Lord.

[34 : 05] The one who is wise, has submitted himself, to the Lord, and his son. Fear of the Lord, is the beginning of wisdom. So fear him, put your trust in him, follow him, repent, seek the Lord's forgiveness.

It's only by submitting to him, and seeking to follow him, that he will transform your heart. We can't do it ourselves. It's only as we fear the Lord, and submit to him.

So if you realize, that your speech, is deceptive, harsh, foolish, then let that persuade you, of your need, to turn your whole life around, to repent, and turn to Christ, to seek forgiveness in him, and to start living, the way of the wise.

That is the key, to good, wise speech. The first thing, is to be a right relationship, with the Lord who made you.

There's no other way. There's no other way, to a good tongue, than a transformed heart. And the more our hearts, are fixed on the Lord, and nothing else, for our joy, our hope, our salvation, our worth, our security, the more our hearts, are fixed on him, then the more our words, will resemble, will resemble, wise speech.

[35 : 36] For out of our hearts, pours forth, speech. So if you're concerned, about your tongue, you must come to Christ, and ask him, to transform your heart.

Let me pray, and then we'll sing, our final hymn. Father, let me pray, for the great grace, at the very centre, of, your words.

Lord, none of us, speaks wisely, all the time. Many of us, even this morning, have spoken foolish words. And so, we must ask you, to forgive us.

Please, transform our hearts, that our tongues, would speak good, wise words, and not foolish, harsh words.

So please, transform each one of us, transform us, as a church, that we would speak wisely, and so bring you, great glory. We ask in Jesus name.

[36 : 46] Amen.