

## Wise Communication

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Good morning. If you have your Bible, I invite you to open it to the book of Proverbs chapter 8. We are going to be all over the book this morning, but we will begin in chapter 8. For the past several weeks this Summer, we have been walking through the series Proverbs: Wisdom for Life. We have been looking at different topics throughout this book and have sought to gain a biblical understanding and wisdom in these areas of life. Two weeks ago, we looked at friendship and marriage and last week Pastor Nathan walked through wise eating or gluttony. How many salads did you eat or meals did you skip last week after that message?

I told Pastor Nathan that that might have been the first sermon I've heard in my entire life that was focused on how we eat. And praise God, right?! We needed to hear it! Aren't you thankful that our pastor does not shy away from teaching the whole counsel of God and what he says about all areas of our life, including how we eat?

But today, we move on to another area of our lives and see what God's Word has to say about our communication with one another. But we are not going to necessarily be spending time on our speech (as in gossip, slander, lying) as I preached on that a few years ago when we were in Proverbs last time. You can find that message online if you'd like to hear specifically about our speech in that way.

While there are so many forms of communication today (verbal, written, nonverbal, visual, and maybe more), we are going to focus more specifically on verbal communication with others. How we interact and communicate with one another. While our focus is more on verbal communication, many of these truths

could be applied to other types of communication as well. For instance, with our communication on social media. So, what does Proverbs have to say about this topic?

I'd like for us to begin by reading the first 11 verses of chapter 8 as we think about this idea of wise communication. In this passage, we see this personification of Wisdom as she tells us what her communication or speech is like. So, would you follow along as I read Proverbs 8:1-11?

### **READ Proverbs 8:1-11**

Would you pray with me?...

## **INTRODUCTION**

Would anyone say that they have mastered the art of communication? You never have any moments of miscommunication with others. You never find yourself in an argument with other people. You have no issues in this area at all. No, right? We all struggle in how we communicate with other people.

I was having a conversation with someone a few months ago about what the best or most optimal time to go to sleep is. Being a parent of young kids, much of our life is lived through sleep deprivation. But I was talking with this person about whether it's better to go to bed early in the evening or late at night. I was on the position that going to bed earlier in the evening is actually better for you, physically and mentally, giving your body a lot more time to rest and recharge for the next day, getting plenty of hours of solid sleep. The other person was of the opinion that they felt like they didn't need that much sleep. They believed that their body was fine with only a few hours of sleep. So, they opted for going to sleep late in the evening to have more time in their day to get things done, because they are awake for more hours in the day.

I don't know about you, but sometimes a conversation can start out pretty harmless, and before you know it, you can find yourself in an argument. And you are not even sure why it is so important, but you believe to be and so the argument begins. And this is what happened with this conversation. I became adamant that going to bed earlier was better and healthier for the body than going to bed late. But the other person would not budge on their position either. I started to get frustrated because I felt like the person was not listening to what I was saying. To be honest, the harmless conversation turned into an argument escalated quickly out of nowhere.

It got to the point where I was raising my voice almost shouting. And then they started shouting and screaming at me. So, I stormed out of the room to go cool off. And I told Hannah, "You are going to have to do bedtime with Evelyn tonight. I just can't."

While I'd like to say that was a silly made up story, that has happened more than once in my life. Thankfully, we have come a long way in our bedtimes with Evelyn and she actually does an incredible job going to sleep and sleeping hard all night long.

But we have all had conversations with people that have resulted in an argument or frustration through miscommunication or lack of listening. What happens is we become careless with our words and lack the wisdom we need in those moments. This can happen from face-to-face conversations or even online through social media or texting.

The main point for us this morning is simple: Every Christian should be wise in how they communicate with others.

While the statement is simple, we need to unpack what that looks like. And as we look through the book of Proverbs to understand what the text has to say about wise communication, I'd like for us to consider four lessons on wise communication, three results, two choices, and one truth.

Let's start with **four lessons** that we can learn about wise communication from the book of Proverbs.

## FOUR LESSONS

The first lesson is this: **Know How to Be Silent**

When thinking about communication, this passing of information from one to another, I'm sure for many of us silence does not make the top of the list. For some of us, it may not even be on our list at all. However, I think this is probably one area that many of us need to focus on the most. And, it's one lesson on communication that is addressed multiple times throughout the book of Proverbs.

Let's look at some of the passages on being silent. One that might initially come to mind for many is Proverbs 10:19:

### **Proverbs 10:19**

<sup>19</sup> When words are many, transgression is not lacking,  
but whoever *restrains his lips* is prudent.

This proverb tells us that saying a lot usually gets us into trouble. I bet many of us have watched a guy (and probably have been that guy) that continually digs himself into a deeper and deeper hole the more he talks. He says one thing, then realizes "that wasn't the right thing to say" and in an effort to correct himself, he talks more and more and just makes it worse. Before you know it, he has dug his own grave with his words. I know I have been that guy before (just ask my wife).

This proverb indicates that silence, the restraining of our lips, is prudent. Which means to show care and thought for the future. But we see other proverbs that also commend silence or restraining the lips. Consider these:

### **Proverbs 11:12**

<sup>12</sup> Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense,  
but a man of understanding ***remains silent***.

### **Proverbs 13:3**

<sup>3</sup> Whoever ***guards his mouth*** preserves his life;  
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

### **Proverbs 17:27**

<sup>27</sup> Whoever ***restrains his words*** has knowledge,  
and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

### **Proverbs 29:11**

<sup>11</sup> A fool gives full vent to his spirit,  
but a wise man ***quietly holds it back***.

Clearly, wise communication must begin with knowing how to be silent. Over and over, we see that the fool “opens wide his lips” and “gives full vent to his spirit.” In fact, Proverbs 17:28 says:

### **Proverbs 17:28**

<sup>28</sup> Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;  
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

This is probably most evident in the book of Job. When calamity strikes Job, three of his friends show up. It says in Job 2:13:

### **Job 2:13**

And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights,  
and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

But we know from the rest of the book that they didn’t stay quiet. In fact, most of the text in the book of Job are speeches from his friends about what Job must

have done wrong to bring such calamity upon himself. Job, however, ends up responding to his friends, and he says in Job 13:5:

**Job 13:5**

<sup>5</sup>Oh that you would keep silent,  
and it would be your wisdom!

Which recalls to mind what we just read in Proverbs 17:28.

One thing I have learned in my eight years of serving on staff with Pastor Mike and witnessing different meetings or conversations he is in is that he is slow to speak. He's not typically the first one to share his opinion in the group nor does he respond quickly as the conversation takes place. Sometimes he keeps silent and offers no response at all. Now, he would probably joke and say that it's just old age. But I think you know as well as I do that, he has learned from the wisdom of Proverbs that silence, and the restraining of the lips, is an important lesson for communication.

I think it's very apparent that in our culture today, we are uncomfortable with silence.....Anyone start to feel uncomfortable? That was only 10 seconds. We've got to have our music playing, podcast talking, or a phone call taking place all the time. We get uncomfortable with silence in conversation. We want to immediately fill the awkward space with something. But what we learn from Proverbs is that fools rush in to talking.

How are you doing in this area? Do you feel like you always have to have a response or an answer for every conversation or situation? Do you always have to have the last word? Are you typically the first one to speak in a conversation or in a group?

Or how about in the realm of social media? Are you able to practice silence and not respond to everything that is said or posted out there? Do you feel the need

to respond when someone comments on your stuff or posts something you disagree with? Let us learn from wisdom about the lesson of silence.

As much as it is important to learn how and when to be silent, we must also learn a second lesson: **Know How to Listen.**

While there are times we need to remain silent or “restrain our lips,” probably the most important thing we do with our silence is learn to listen. Proverbs talks a lot about listening. In fact, the entire book is centered around a father teaching his son, telling him to *listen* to his instructions. Proverbs 1:8-9 say:

**Proverbs 1:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> **Hear**, my son, your father’s instruction,  
and forsake not your mother’s teaching,  
<sup>9</sup> for they are a graceful garland for your head  
and pendants for your neck.

Do you know how we hear sound? It’s pretty fascinating. I found this from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

1. “Sound waves enter the outer ear and travel through a narrow passageway called the ear canal, which leads to the eardrum.
2. The eardrum vibrates from the incoming sound waves and sends these vibrations to three tiny bones in the middle ear.
3. The bones in the middle ear amplify, or increase, the sound vibrations and send them to the cochlea, a snail-shaped structure filled with fluid, in the inner ear.
4. Once the vibrations cause the fluid inside the cochlea to ripple, a traveling wave forms along the basilar membrane. Hair cells ride the wave.
5. As the hair cells move up and down, microscopic hair-like projections that perch on top of the hair cells bump against an overlying structure and bend. When that happens, chemicals rush into the cells, creating an electrical signal.

6. The auditory nerve carries this electrical signal to the brain, which turns it into a sound that we recognize and understand.”<sup>1</sup>

Anybody understand any of that? I get lost after the eardrum part. You know what’s most fascinating about all of that? None of that helps you to listen. How many heard what I said, and how many listened? Sure, we hear sound, but that’s not actually listening, right?

We are constantly telling our daughter that listening means both hearing and doing. When we tell her to listen to us, what we are wanting is for her to hear the instructions and then follow the instructions she hears.

We see Solomon teach this as well:

**Proverbs 22:17**

<sup>17</sup> *Incline your ear*, and *hear* the words of the wise, and *apply* your heart to my knowledge.

Listening requires us to not just hear sound waves, but to intently listen to the other person and then apply that knowledge. This can go beyond just hearing instruction and then doing it. In a conversation with someone, we want to be good listeners. We want to listen to what the person is saying by hearing their words and their heart behind it. Then taking that information, we apply it by responding appropriately.

This is not what the fool does. Notice what Proverbs says about the fool:

**Proverbs 12:15**

<sup>15</sup> The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man *listens* to advice.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/how-do-we-hear#:~:text=Sound%20waves%20enter%20the%20outer,bones%20in%20the%20middle%20ear>



### Proverbs 18:13

<sup>13</sup> If one gives an answer before he *hears*,  
it is his folly and shame.

We continually see the fool painted as someone who rushes into conversations, who speaks before anyone else, who ignores the teachings or opinions of others, who does not stop to listen.

Do you know what often reveals whether or not you're a good listener? It's if you ask questions and follow-up questions. Someone who is listening well is able to hear what the person is saying and then ask more questions about what they have responded with.

Think about your own conversations with others. How are you doing in the area of listening? How much are you talking versus listening? Are you like the fool who only shares his opinion, or do you stop and listen to the advice of others? If you are married, try asking your spouse how you are doing in this area. I'm sure they'd be happy to give you an honest answer.

This lesson of listening can be difficult when communicating through other means like social media, text messages, emails, because we don't know how the person is actually saying it. We read into the text how we think they are saying the words. I think in these situations, we need to give the person the benefit of the doubt. Try to understand and read their text in the way you would want someone to do with yours, reading the words in the best possible light.

If we are going to be wise in our communication, we must be able to be good listeners. Not only do we need to learn to be silent and learn how to listen well, but we also need to learn a third lesson: **Know How to Speak.**

I know when I say that some of you may think, “I know how to speak. I learned that at the age of 2 and have no problem talking to people.” But what I mean is this: knowing when to speak and knowing how we should speak to others. There is a time to be silent, but there is also a time when words are needed. This is evident by Proverbs 26:4-5:

**Proverbs 26:4**

<sup>4</sup> **Answer not** a fool according to his folly,  
lest you be like him yourself.

**Proverbs 26:5**

<sup>5</sup> **Answer** a fool according to his folly,  
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

You may think, “How can the Bible say the exact opposite between two verses and still be true?” This is where wisdom comes in. As we saw in our first lesson, there are times we need to be silent. There is a time when it is not appropriate or advantageous to speak or address the fool for fear of becoming a fool yourself. But, there are also times when it is appropriate. Times when we need to speak up. Proverbs 15:23 says:

**Proverbs 15:23**

<sup>23</sup> To make an apt answer is a joy to a man,  
and a word in season, how good it is!

There is a time when words are needed. And when it is appropriate, it is good and brings joy to that person.

Some of this may have to do with your relationship to the person. Do you have a close relationship to them? Are you in a position to speak truth into that person’s life and for them to receive it well? Not every person who shouts something at you on the street or says something to you in public or posts something online

needs a response. We must think about what good will come from responding to them? We must prayerfully consider in wisdom *when* we need to speak.

But wise communication is more than just knowing when to speak but knowing *how* to speak. Wise speaking has to be more than just talking. Notice what Proverbs 18:2 says about the fool:

**Proverbs 18:2**

<sup>2</sup> A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,  
but only in expressing his opinion.

Here, a person is called a fool for only expressing oneself and only sharing their thoughts. Just talking. Giving no regard for other opinions or to understanding. Not listening, just talking. Or consider Proverbs 15:2:

**Proverbs 15:2**

<sup>2</sup> The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,  
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

It's clear that there is a way to speak that is foolish and a way to speak that is wise. As we think about *how* we should speak, Proverbs tells us that our words should be filled with gentleness or healing. Look at the verse just before that:

**Proverbs 15:1**

A ***soft answer*** turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

I think many times, we know the line on this, right? We know in a conversation whether we are antagonizing the person. We know if we say these few words or sentences, we can really aggravate someone and get under their skin. However, there are other times we may not even mean for this to happen. We speak to quickly, say the wrong thing, or say the right thing in the wrong way and it causes someone to become angry with us. Look at Proverbs 12:18:

### Proverbs 12:18

<sup>18</sup> There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,  
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

We need gentleness. We need healing words. Proverbs 15:4 tells us:

### Proverbs 15:4

<sup>4</sup> A ***gentle (healing) tongue*** is a tree of life,  
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Not only should our speech be gentle, but it should also be discerning or judicious. Consider Proverbs 16:21:

### Proverbs 16:21

<sup>21</sup> The wise of heart is called discerning,  
and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

### Proverbs 16:23

<sup>23</sup> The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious  
and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

When we know when and how to speak, our words become more persuasive. When our words are gentle and sweet, we are able to be more effectual in our communication.

Think about the words you use in your conversations with others. Are you self-controlled in your speech, knowing when you should say something? What about how you speak? Are your words gentle and sweet? Or are they harsh or rash? Even saying the right thing in the wrong way can be harmful. Do your words stir others to anger?

This leads us to our fourth lesson on wise communication: **Know How to Stay Calm.**

Why did I include this one in the lessons for wise communication? Well first of all, Proverbs has a lot to say about anger. But secondly, while we are a bunch of sinners *saved by grace*, we are still sinners. And this means that when we communicate with others, there will be times of miscommunication, confusion, frustration, and arguments. Anyone else experience this? Just me?

What does Proverbs have to teach us about anger? Look at Proverbs 15:18:

**Proverbs 15:18**

<sup>18</sup> A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,  
but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

When we get flustered in the conversation, when we allow our temper to rise, the situation gets worse. It “stirs up strife” rather than cooling down the situation. Or consider Proverbs 14:29:

**Proverbs 14:29**

<sup>29</sup> Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,  
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

**Proverbs 29:22**

<sup>22</sup> A man of wrath stirs up strife,  
and one given to anger causes much transgression.

I’m sure many of us would like to justify our outbursts of anger. Maybe even place the blame on the other person. “You know if they just weren’t so incompetent then this wouldn’t happen.” But when we blow up in anger, we are not making wise choices with our words or our actions. We exalt folly. We cause much

transgression. And we may think we are showing strength with our anger, but Proverbs reveals what true strength is.

**Proverbs 16:32**

<sup>32</sup> Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

The real test of strength is whether we are able to remain calm or not. How do we remain calm? How can we be slow to anger? Proverbs 19:11 helps us:

**Proverbs 19:11**

<sup>11</sup> Good sense makes one slow to anger,  
and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

The secret to being slow to anger is “good sense” or “discretion,” knowing what is right and what is wrong. And notice that these verses do not say, “is never angry.” But rather, “slow to anger.” Which means, we do get angry, but we are able to conceal it well. We are able to patiently endure. We do not react immediately to our emotion, but rather restrain it and use good sense. And this mirrors the very character of God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

This verse says that “it is his glory to overlook an offense.” This could mean that it is his reputation. That he is known for overlooking an offense. May this be true of us. That we may be known for how we patiently endure with others. How we love others. And not by how we combat with others or how we immediately react and respond. Proverbs 10:12 says:

**Proverbs 10:12**

<sup>12</sup> Hatred stirs up strife,  
but love covers all offenses.

How are you doing in this area of anger? Are you quick-tempered or slow to anger? Do you respond immediately to frustration and let the emotions overtake

you, or do you patiently endure and use good sense? Proverbs shows us that in order to be wise in our communication, we must know how to be slow to anger and stay calm.

We've looked at the four lessons of communication: Know how to be silent, known how to listen, know how to speak, and know how to stay calm. But what are the results from being wise in our communication?

### THREE RESULTS

I notice **three results**: Wise communication brings knowledge. Wise communication brings life. And wise communication brings freedom.

Let's consider the first result: **Wise Communication Brings Knowledge.**

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we see this intimate connection between wisdom and knowledge. Specifically in communication, we see how the wise are able to bring knowledge to others. We saw this verse earlier:

#### **Proverbs 15:2**

<sup>2</sup>The tongue of the wise *commends knowledge*,  
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

Another way to say that is that the wise person makes knowledge acceptable. This is similar to Proverbs 15:7:

#### **Proverbs 15:7**

<sup>7</sup>The lips of the wise spread knowledge;  
not so the hearts of fools.

When we are wise in our communication, we are able to share knowledge with others in a way that they will hear it and understand it and accept it.

Secondly, we see that: **Wise Communication Brings Life.**

People who are wise in their communication can bring life to others. Proverbs 10:11 says:

**Proverbs 10:11**

<sup>11</sup> The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

**Proverbs 13:14**

<sup>14</sup> The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,  
that one may turn away from the snares of death.

And this wise communication that brings life comes from the Lord:

**Proverbs 14:27**

<sup>27</sup> The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life,  
that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Our words are powerful as Proverbs 18:21 tells us:

**Proverbs 18:21**

<sup>21</sup> Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruits.

We have probably all been in conversations with people that just drain you. Every time you leave from talking with them, you are just exhausted and worn out. They are not life-giving. But I hope you have also experienced the joys of speaking with people who seem to just lift your spirits each time you talk with them. Those conversations are life-giving to your soul.



Those who are wise in their communication are able to bring life and encouragement to those they encounter.

Not only does wise communication bring knowledge and life to others, but we also see that: **Wise Communication Brings Freedom.**

As we just saw in Proverbs 13:14:

**Proverbs 13:14**

<sup>14</sup> The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,  
*that one may turn away from the snares of death.*

Wise communication brings life, but it also brings freedom. It can cause someone to turn away from the snares, the entanglements, the entrapments of death. Consider Proverbs 12:13:

**Proverbs 12:13**

<sup>13</sup> An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,  
but the righteous escapes from trouble.

Those who are foolish in their communication are trapped in their sin. They are held captive by their foolishness. But wise communication brings freedom from those bonds and protection from those traps.

**Proverbs 21:23**

<sup>23</sup> Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue  
keeps himself out of trouble.

Wise communication brings knowledge, it brings life, and it brings freedom. Here, we have our **two choices.**

## TWO CHOICES

From the first message of this series, we have been told that there are only two choices: **to follow the way of the fool or to follow the way of the wise.**

As we have looked at all of these passages in the book of Proverbs, we have seen the contrast between the wise person who is silent and the fool who continuously speaks. The wise person who listens and the fool who ignores instruction. The wise person who speaks gently and the fool who speaks harshly. The wise person who is slow to anger and the fool who is quick to anger.

As you examine your own life, where are you? There is no middle ground. We are either choosing foolishness or choosing wisdom. Are you following the path of foolishness, remaining careless with your words and in your communication with others? Or, are you choosing to walk in the way of wisdom and applying those four lessons of communication of silence, listening, speaking, and staying calm?

There are only two choices. Which will you choose?

## ONE TRUTH

This leads to our **One Truth: We need a new heart.**

One of the temptations we can often have in hearing this message (or really any of these kinds of messages) is to leave saying, "I'm just going to try harder to be wise." The problem is...that won't work. We can try to leave here and just change how we communicate, but Jesus shows us the reality of the situation. He says in Matthew 12:

**Matthew 12:34-37**

...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. <sup>36</sup> I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Our mouth is a mirror or reflection of our hearts. We won't get very far if we leave here just trying to muster up the strength to change how we communicate without having a new heart. The heart that has not been changed by the gospel will continue in the way of foolishness. And Jesus tells us that we will give an account for every careless word we speak. I don't know about you, but that makes me want to pay attention to how I'm communicating! He says we will be justified or declared right by our words. Why? Because our words reflect the reality of our hearts. A heart that is transformed and changed by the gospel will show itself in our words of humility, gentleness, and patience.

If we want our speech and communication to change, we need our hearts to change. And this is what Jesus came to do, to give us a new heart.

If you are here this morning and you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then I invite you to see the wonderful grace of Jesus. As we sang this morning, our God is holy forever. He is perfect and just. And we all stand guilty before him because we have broken his law. Jesus, however, came to earth to offer us redemption. He lived a perfect and sinless life, died on the cross in our place, rose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. Those who trust in his life, death, and resurrection for their salvation will find forgiveness and grace. If you've never done that, please talk to someone this morning (a pastor, a friend, or someone in this room) to know what trusting in Christ looks like. How you can receive a new heart. We'd be happy to walk through that with you.

For those of us who are believers, who have a new heart and the Spirit of God in us...fear the Lord. Don't leave here today saying, "I'll just try harder this week." You should leave here today saying, "I need more of Jesus." Proverbs 9:10 says:

**Proverbs 9:10**

<sup>10</sup>The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Wisdom does not come from trying harder, it comes from fearing the Lord. Ultimately, it comes from a heart that has been radically changed by the gospel and that fears the Lord. How are you fearing the Lord? Are you spending time in his Word? Are you praying for the Spirit to work in you? To change you? Are you growing in your knowledge of God and your faith in him?

If you want to be wise in your communication, you need a new heart that fears the Lord.

## **CONCLUSION**

Do you know what helped with our bedtimes with Evelyn? How we have moved beyond those arguments? By applying these four lessons. I've learned not to respond to every request or conversation she wants to start at bedtime in an effort to stay awake. I practice listening to hear her heart to recognize whether she is afraid of something or nervous about something which doesn't come out in the words she says. I've sought to speak gently with discernment, knowing when to speak and how to say it. Most importantly, I have had to practice remaining calm, not letting my own frustrations and emotions overtake me.

And do you know when I am successful at this? When I'm walking in the Spirit, relying on the Lord. My prayer is that all of us learn to fear the Lord and ask the Spirit of God to apply these truths from Proverbs so that we can be wise in our communication.

Would you pray with me?...