



# WISDOM

## WISDOM: Death and Life are in the Tongue

May 30, 2021 | Speaker: Richard Fredericks, Director of Adult Pathway

### SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Summer challenge: take a long, slow, careful...prayerful walk thru Proverbs this summer. Our culture makes us addicts; to shallow reading, to shallow, sound-bite thinking, to scrolling. You cannot read Proverbs that way. But if you read it carefully/prayerfully—you will gain a **wisdom whose worth**, Proverbs tells us, **is far greater than gold**:

#### Proverbs 22:17-19

“Pay attention [**focus**] and listen carefully [**be attentive**] to the **wisdom** of the wise; **apply your mind** to these words...**store them in your heart**...then you will have **confidence** and **trust** in the LORD.”

Proverbs presents two key characters: the **WISE** and the **FOOLISH**: personified as two women in **Proverbs 9: Lady Wisdom** and **Lady Folly**—**each actively inviting us into their embrace**.

We, the **READER**, **are not binary** in this story. None of us are all **THIS** but **NOT** at all **THAT**. If we think we are **always wise**, Proverbs tell us, **we are the fool**.

If we are honest, we see ourselves on both sides of this **CONTINUUM**: The goal of Proverbs is to help us **live more and more consistently** on the side of **WISDOM**.

My theme today is what Proverbs teaches about the role or impact of our **WORDS**. I want to forever lay to rest the **non-wisdom** of the old saying: “**Sticks and stones may break my bones...but words will never hurt me**.” That is **so NOT** true: **not** biblically, psychologically, relationally, inwardly. Proverbs says **words can kill or heal**: a soul, a relationship or a whole community. It says things like this:

#### Proverbs 18:21

**Death and life** are in the **power of our tongue**—and we will all eat the fruit of what our tongues have sown.

### Proverbs 12:18; 10:11

The **words** of the reckless [**the fool**] pierce [thrust] like a sword—but the **tongue** of **the wise** brings healing.

The **mouth** of the righteous is a fountain of life.

In the NT, the entire **3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of James** is an elaboration of this fact. James tell us that **the tongue**, though a small part of our body, can set an entire life, an entire community or even an entire nation on raging fire. And James tells us we **cannot tame it on our own—apart from** God’s wisdom and Spirit.

**Words—*what*** we say and ***how*** we say it—are that crucial.

So what does Proverbs **teach us** about ***how to use words***?

For Proverbs the key to everything good is to embrace the “**fear of the LORD.**” The fear of the LORD is to grasp that over every part of my life there is **one true God—and it is not me!** It is to FEAR, ***above all else***, separation from God, disconnected from God’s wisdom and life.

Psalms 86:11: “**LORD, give me an undivided heart—that I might fear Your name.**” Stated positively: the fear of the LORD is the settled conviction that **abundant life/lasting joy are found only in God:**

### The fear of the LORD:

- Is the beginning of knowledge (the most basic true fact: Prov 1:7)
- Is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10)
- Brings **healing** to your body and **guidance** in all your ways (Prov 3:5-7)
- Adds **length** to your life (10:27)
- Is a **refuge** for our children (Prov 14:26)
- Is a **life-giving** fountain (Prov 14:27)
- Is **better** than great wealth (15:16)

### Isaiah 8:11-14

The LORD said to me in the strongest terms: “**Do not** think like everyone else. **Do not** be afraid that some plan conceived behind closed doors will be the end of you. **Do not** fear ANYTHING except the LORD Almighty. He **alone** is the Holy One. **If you fear Him, you need not fear anything else. He will guard your life.**

### Proverbs 22:4

**Humility IS** the fear of the LORD. With it comes riches, honor and life.

God honors those who have the **humility to honor Him as God—above self**, the **humility to honor all others as His image-bearers**, worthy of dignity and respect. The fear of the LORD is the **humility to turn over** every *part* of our life to God, **allowing His wisdom** to shape our lives.

Proverbs says **God** unequivocally **hates**, detests and stands irrevocably opposed to **3 attitudes: the arrogant**, the one who **uses lies** and the one who **creates division**.

### **Proverbs 6:16-19**

There are 6 things the LORD **hates**, no, 7 things He detests: **Haughty eyes**, a **lying tongue**, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plans evil, feet that race to do wrong, **a false witness who pours out lies**, **a person who sows discord**.

### **Proverbs 16:5, 18**

The LORD **detests** all the proud in heart. Be sure of this: they will **not** go unpunished. For **pride** goes before a fall; a **haughty spirit** before destruction.

Pride always sees itself as better, more right, more deserving. It is offended when it is challenged. In Proverbs **pride is the chief characteristic of the fool**.

God's wisdom brings **humility**. It is the opposite of self-puffing pride:

### **Proverbs 11:2; 15:33; 18:12**

Pride brings disgrace, but **with humility** comes honor.

Wisdom's advice is **to fear the LORD**, for **humility** comes before honor.

Before destruction there is **pride**, just as **humility** comes before honor.

The problem with **both wisdom and humility** is that if we are quite *sure we have them in abundance* we probably **don't!** Proverbs steps in to help us by telling us that **our words** are an accurate **barometer of the true condition of our heart**.

### **Proverbs 13:10; 10:19; 13:3**

Where there is **STRIFE**, there is **PRIDE**...

Wherever there is an abundance of words, **sin is never absent!**

The one who **talks constantly** invites his/her own ruin.

Let's look at **3 positive principles** on gaining wisdom through **our words**:

#### **1. Don't be in a rush to speak. Listen well first:**

- The heart of the godly **weighs its answers** (Proverbs 15:28).
- A truly wise person **uses few words** (Proverbs 17:27).
- To answer before **carefully listening** is foolish (Proverbs 18:13).

The more we say—the **less we listen**. The more we say—the **less others listen**.

One of the **marks of wisdom** is the patience to **ask questions**. The **only completely wise human who ever walked the face of the earth** began most conversations with **a question**; and He often answered other's questions with a **clarifying question**. **Jesus listened**.

## 2. The wise speak calmly and gently—especially in tense situations:

- A **gentle answer** turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath (15:1).
- A hot-tempered person creates conflict, but whoever is **slow to anger** calms strife (15:18).

### Proverbs 16:32; 17:27

**Better** a patient person than a warrior,  
one with **self-control** than one who conquers a city.  
The one who has knowledge uses words with **restraint**;  
and whoever has understanding is **even-tempered**.

## 3. Seek out mentors, those who are wiser than you—and listen:

- Those who **walk with the wise** become wise (13:20).
- The fool is always sure he is right, but the **wise seek counsel** (12:15).

Mentors can be up close and personal, or at a distance—especially in a **book**.

**John Stott** mentored me Biblically. I read **biographies/histories**: more than any other source they have taught me so much about **why leaders succeed—and fail**.

**Team of Rivals**: the *humility of Lincoln* in the face of slander and insult.  
William Manchester's **The Last Lion, vol 2: Alone**.

And the **beauty of being a Christ-follower** is that, above all others,  
**we have the ultimate Mentor**—who is Himself **God's ultimate WORD**:

### John 1:1-4

In the beginning was **the WORD**, and **the WORD** was with God,  
and **the WORD was God**. He was with God in the beginning.

**Through Him** all things were made;  
**without Him** nothing was made that has been made.

**In Him** was Life, and that Life is the Light of all humanity.

### John 1:14

**The WORD became flesh** and made His dwelling among us. We have seen  
His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father,  
full of **grace** and **truth**.

Do you want to know *how to live well*—with true wisdom? The answer is a life guided by **grace and truth**—in that order. And **both are found in Him**—this **crucified but risen Christ**.

I invite you: go beyond believing to **following**: make Jesus the **primary Mentor** of your life.  
If we turn to Him daily, study Him, **follow Him and obey Him**—ours will be a life of deepening  
love and eternal impact. If we do that **together**, we can change the world.

**John 8:31-32**

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, “**IF** you truly hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. **THEN** you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.”

**Revelation 19:11-13**

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose Rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in **a robe dipped in blood**, and His name is **the WORD** of God.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

*(for personal and small group discussion)*

1. What was most impactful to you from this weekend’s service?
2. Reread **Proverbs 12:18** and **10:11** together, then discuss times when words have brought healing or wounds to your life.
3. Read again **Isaiah 8:11-14 (NLT)** in your study notes. Discuss together what you think the last two sentences mean in how we think about the future, money and politics.
4. The first of our three positive principles advises us to not be in a rush to speak—to listen carefully first: **To answer before carefully listening is foolish** (Proverbs 18:13). Discuss together how being intentional about that would affect your closest relationships.
5. **“Those who walk with the wise become wise”** (Proverbs 13:20)  
Who are the mentors [personal, at a distance, in books] in your life?  
Share one valuable lesson you learned from a mentor.
6. **“IF** you truly hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.  
**THEN** you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.”  
John 8:31-32. Discuss together the “IF-THEN” qualifier in this verse.  
How are you doing with line one?

## **NOTES**

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