

LESSON 7

WHERE THERE IS NO WOOD

Proverbs 26:20-22; Proverbs 16:28; 1 Timothy 5:13; Philippians 2:14-16

PROVERBS 26:20-22 · PROVERBS 16:28

Reading before class: Proverbs 26 and Philippians 2.

I want to say at the front that this is the hardest lesson in the quarter, and it is hard for a reason that will not be obvious for another twenty minutes. Work it honestly.

1. Write your own definition of gossip. Whatever you have always understood it to be. Do not look anything up and do not soften it. We are coming back to this and it matters that you write what you actually think.

2. In your opinion, what percentage of the harmful talk in a congregation comes from people who would say they were gossiping?
percent.

HOW A FIRE DIES

3. Read Proverbs 26:20. Write out both halves.

4. I told you last week to notice what the verse does NOT say. It does not say somebody puts the fire out. What does it say happens instead?

5. So according to Solomon, what does a fire need in order to keep going?

6. Now put the two halves of the verse together. If the wood is what keeps a fire alive, then in the second half, who or what is the wood?
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7. Nobody in that proverb is a firefighter. What does that say about where the responsibility falls?
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LET'S SUMMARIZE HERE

1. Solomon does not tell anybody to put the fire out.
2. He says a fire without fuel goes out on its own.
3. The fuel is a person.
4. Therefore the way contention ends in a congregation is that somebody stops handing it wood.

WHY IT TASTES SO GOOD

8. Read Proverbs 26:22. What does Solomon compare the whisperer's words to?
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9. That is not a picture of something bitter or ugly. It is a picture of something you WANT. Why would Solomon describe it that way instead of making it sound repulsive?
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10. Read the second half of verse 22. Where do those words end up?
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11. In your own words, what is Solomon saying happens to information you receive that way? Can you give it back?
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12. Read Proverbs 26:21. What does the contentious man do, and what is he compared to?
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WHAT IT ACTUALLY DOES

13. Read Proverbs 16:28. Write the two things named in that verse.

14. Look at the second half. Who exactly gets separated? Solomon does not say people in general.

15. Why would the closest friendships be the ones that come apart? Think about what has to be true for a report to do that kind of damage.

16. Now go back through Proverbs 26:20-22 and 16:28 with one question in mind, and answer it from the text only. Does any one of those verses say a single word about whether the report was true?

TRACE THE CHAIN

Something gets said about a member of this congregation. It reaches you. You tell one person.

17. Draw the chain in the space below. Put the person the report is ABOUT at the far right. Put whoever started it at the far left. Put yourself where you actually are.

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18. How many links are between you and the person who started it?

19. How many links are between you and the person it is about?

20. Now cross yourself out of the chain. What happens to everything to the right of where you were standing?

- 21.** Most of us have never started one of these in our lives. Does Proverbs 26:20 have anything to say to a man who only ever stood in the middle?

WHERE IT GETS ITS START

- 22.** Read 1 Timothy 5:13. Paul names one condition first and then names what grows out of it. Write the condition.

- 23.** Write the two things Paul says they become, and then the phrase he uses for what they talk about.

- 24.** Notice the verb Paul uses at the front of that verse. He says they **LEARN** to be idle. What does that word do to the idea that some people are just naturally talkers?

- 25.** In your opinion, why would idleness and gossip run together? What does one supply the other?

THE SAME MAN, IN GREEK

The word study box explains why this is not a change of subject. Solomon's whisperer is defined as a grumbler, and here is Paul on grumbling.

- 26.** Read Philippians 2:14. Write the command and the two things forbidden.

- 27.** That is a large command. How many things does "all things" leave out?

28. Read Philippians 2:15. Paul attaches a purpose. What are we supposed to prove ourselves to be, and where?

WORD STUDY · WHISPERER

The word: the Hebrew word your Bible renders "whisperer" in Proverbs 26:20 and 26:22 comes off a root meaning to complain or grumble, and the root also carries the sense of slander.

Its definition, and read it slowly: to make complaining remarks or noises under one's breath.

So the volume really is part of the word. This is not a shouter. The lexicons give "murmur, whisper," "grumble, rebel, murmur," and older ones simply "to murmur, to repine." Solomon did not pick a word for a man who argues loudly. He picked a word for a man who keeps his voice down.

Now here is what that does to this lesson. Later in this study we go to Philippians 2:14, where Paul says to do all things without grumbling. That is not a second, related subject. The Hebrew word for the man who feeds the fire in Proverbs 26:20 is defined as a grumbler. Two languages, a thousand years apart, describing the same man under his breath.

(Careful with that, and here is the limit: Paul wrote Greek and Solomon wrote Hebrew, so these are not the same word. They are the same behavior, named twice.)

Source: Logos, 4 Aug. 2026. Proverbs 26:20, נָגַח, a Nif'al participle on the root נָגַח, "complain, grumble; appear sullen, slander," sense to grumble, "to make complaining remarks or noises under one's breath." Lexicons consulted: Brown et al.; Gesenius and Tregelles; Strong. Full entries in Works Cited.

And note this: the point survives without a word of Hebrew. Your English Bible says whisperer, and that already tells you how loudly this man talks.

BUT SOMEONE MAY ASK...

"But what if what I said was true?"

This is the question the whole lesson is built to reach, and I want to answer it from the passages we just worked rather than from anybody's opinion, mine included.

Go back to question 16. Read Proverbs 26:20, 26:21, 26:22 and 16:28 again and look for the word lie. Look for false. Look for slander in the sense of something made up. In the verses about the whisperer, it is not there. Solomon describes those words three ways: by what they do (kindle strife, separate intimate friends), by how they are received (dainty morsels, going down into the innermost parts) and by how they are delivered (whispered). He never once grades them for accuracy.

Now ask what that means. If a true report separates two intimate friends, the friends are just as separated. If a true report kindles strife, the strife burns the same. The fire in verse 20 does not check the wood for accuracy before it burns.

So truth is not the test this passage gives you. That does not make truth unimportant and it certainly does not make lying acceptable, which is condemned everywhere. It means truth is not by itself a defense, and most of us have used it as one.

Here is the harder half. There are times a true thing must be said, and said to somebody. A sin that needs confronting, a danger somebody needs warned about, a matter the elders have to know. Scripture provides for every one of those and none of them is whispered down a chain. The difference is not the truth of it. The difference is who you are telling and what you want to happen.

FOR YOUR LIFE

- 29.** Look back at your definition in question 1. Did your definition have anything in it about whether the report was true? If it did, what would you change now?

- 30.** Think of the last time you passed something along about somebody in this congregation. Who did it help?

31. Proverbs 26:22 says those words go down into the innermost parts. Is there somebody you think of differently today because of something you were told years ago and never checked?

32. In your opinion, what would actually change around here if every member simply stopped being the middle link? Not stopped starting. Stopped passing.

THIS WEEK

33. Write down what you will say the next time somebody begins one of these with you. Write the actual words. You will need them sooner than you think and it is easier to have them ready.

34. Is there somebody you owe a conversation to because you were a link in a chain about them? You do not have to write the name.

Bring this workbook back next week. After a lesson like this one we need the one that is coming.

NEXT WEEK. Lesson 8: A Word for the Weary.

Read before class: Proverbs 12, Proverbs 16 and Isaiah 50:4.

One thing to watch for: in Isaiah 50:4 the speaker says God gave him a tongue for a particular job, and then he says God does something to him every single morning. Find out what gets awakened, and notice it is not his mouth.