

# *Becoming a Woman of Proverbs*

THE POWER  
OF HER WORDS





# Proverbs

## *The Power of Her Words*

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Before I retired, I worked with Christians. All day long, I heard their encouraging words, heartfelt thanks, praise, and thanksgiving to God, the retelling of miraculous events, and generally uplifting speech. My husband is a Christian, and most of our friends are believers. I don't really live a completely sheltered life, but those I spend the most time with are people of faith, and our conversations show it. When we watch TV in the evenings, we don't watch shows with suggestive or filthy language. I choose my reading materials carefully.

Perhaps I am so careful about the words I allow into my ears because I have a vivid imagination; I can't get words and images out of my head once they have taken up residence. I can't ignore them. I can't just shrug them off as if it has not affected me. I know how powerful words are. If someone around me takes the Lord's name in vain, my heart aches. If someone is speaking harshly to a child, I want to take them aside to tell them a better way. I still remember images my mind created from the words in books I read 50 or more years ago.

One day recently, a teen boy and girl walked by my house. The girl was on a tirade about something, and as they passed, I heard some extremely foul words coming from her mouth. Every third or fourth word was particularly offensive. This went on until they were out of earshot. The boy never said anything in reply, as far as I could hear. Of all the words I heard throughout that day, those are the only ones I remember!

And then, when I prayed, guess what words I had to fight against entering my mind? That's right. The offensive ones. Satan knows that once the words are in my head, I will struggle not to think of them. They seem to just float in on their own accord, and if I'm not paying attention, they will settle in. If I watch a TV show where the wife is finding fault with her husband, her words are in my head; then, when I have occasion to find fault with my husband, I may think those very words—and more than once, I have said them aloud. Then I think, where did that come from? I can't even remember when I heard them!

I have taken this quote for some good advice for life: "See that you get a regular stream of clear, constructive, life-giving, soul-feeding words into your ears and hearts." I wish I could credit the person who wrote it; I read it somewhere during the early days of COVID lockdown when I wasn't seeing friends or attending church. I felt very alone, and I knew I had to make more than the usual effort to fight all the bad news we were hearing (and living) by my intake of the good news of the Word of God, as well as the uplifting words of other believers.

The Bible speaks plainly and often about our words. They have great power—even the ability to bring life or death. Words can hurt, or they can bind up hurt. Words can release from prison or fasten the chains around a life forever. Our own words do have limitations—but thankfully, God's Word has no limitations. It always gets where it needs to go in order to do what He intends it to do.

Let's look at both the power and the limitations of our own words this week.



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When the proverbs of our Bible were written, of course, there was nothing like the social media of today, nor TV, movies, printed books, or glossy magazines. People talked to each other face to face. Facial expressions can tell a lot about the words being spoken.

The Bible calls the look on our face our **countenance**. “*And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before*” (Genesis 31:2).

God notices our countenance: “*...but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?’*” (Genesis 4:5-6)

God Himself has a countenance! “*The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace*” (Numbers 6:26).

When we speak face to face with someone, it is helpful to remember that our face will help to interpret our words. For instance, when I say something to my husband that is meant to be a kindness, if he detects some expression that tells him otherwise, he will (rightly) call me on it. He won’t believe my words.

### **The Power of our Words—Life and Death**

1. Proverbs 12:6 “*The \_\_\_\_\_ of the wicked are, ‘Lie in wait for blood,’ but the \_\_\_\_\_ of the upright will deliver them.*” What delivers the upright?

2. Proverbs 3:14 “*The law of the \_\_\_\_\_ is a fountain of \_\_\_\_\_, to turn one away from the snares of \_\_\_\_\_.*” What turns one away from the snares of death?

3. Proverbs 15:4 “*A \_\_\_\_\_ tongue is a tree of \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_ in it breaks the spirit.*” What are the two types of words (tongues) mentioned in this verse?

4. Proverbs 18:21 “*Death and life are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*” The notes from the Spirit-Filled Life Bible explain that...

- to “speak life” is to say what God’s perspective is;
- to “speak death” is to declare the negatives about life, to declare defeat, or to complain constantly.



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Let's do a quick heart check here: Looking back over the last week or so...

5. When did you speak life? What was the person's response?

6. When did you speak death? What can you do to make this right?

7. What did someone once speak to you that was instrumental in bringing you life?

8. What did someone once speak to you that made you want to die? (You may not want to share this in your group, but please answer the question for yourself.)

David Guzik shares this point about words that cause death: "The Midrash mentions this point, showing one way [words] can cause death: 'The evil tongue slays three: the slanderer, the slandered, and the listener.'" (Midrash Tehillim 52:2).

### **The Power of our Words to Heal or to Wound**

Not only do our words have the power to bring life or cause death, but they can also heal wounds. I like to think of life and death as being the bookends, the best and the worst, or the first and the last that happens in this life. (Death and life, of course, don't mean literally being born or leaving this earth. There are many ways for life to come, and death comes in many forms as well.) Between the bookends of life and death, healings and wounds take place in all of us. Let's look at a few proverbs that deal with words that heal or wound.

9. Proverbs 11:9, 11 *"The hypocrite with his \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ his neighbor, but through knowledge the upright will be delivered... By the \_\_\_\_\_ of the upright the city is \_\_\_\_\_, but it is \_\_\_\_\_ by the \_\_\_\_\_ of the wicked."*

a. What are the two words used to show healing?

b. What are the two words used to show wounding?



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10. Proverbs 12:18 “*There is one who \_\_\_\_\_ like the piercing of a \_\_\_\_\_, but the \_\_\_\_\_ of the wise promotes \_\_\_\_\_.*”

a. Think of two words that would pierce and wound like a sword:

b. Think of two words that would promote health:

c. Have you used any of these four words this past week?

11. Proverbs 15:4, 30 “*A \_\_\_\_\_ tongue is a tree of life, but \_\_\_\_\_ in it breaks the spirit.... The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ makes the bones \_\_\_\_\_.*”

a. What phrase in one of these two Scriptures speaks of an aspect of countenance?

b. What phrase is another way to say **wound**?

12. Proverbs 16:24 “*\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ are like a honeycomb, \_\_\_\_\_ to the soul and \_\_\_\_\_ to the bones.*”

a. When have your words this week been as sweet as honey?

b. Were your words received as you intended?



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For deeper thought (optional):

Perhaps the ultimate example of words bringing life or death, healing or wounding, can be found in the life of Christ. For each example, tell whether Christ's words were bringing life, death, healing, or wounding (some may have more than one answer):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lazarus (John 11:38-44)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Woman at the well (John 4:13-14)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The fig tree (Matthew 21:18-19)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:27-28)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The leper (Mark 1:40-42)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Unfruitful branches (John 15:5-8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Martha (Luke 10:41-42)
- \_\_\_\_\_ The synagogue ruler's daughter (Mark 5:39-42)

### **The Limitations of our Words**

Now let's look at some of the limitations our words have. Although words are powerful, they are not "all-powerful" as the words of God are (although we've all met people who seem to think their words are the most important ones in the room—and I confess that I have been that person at times.) I don't know who said this, but it sure helps me control my tongue: "Some people have something to say, and some people just have to say something."

One limitation of our words is that they are no substitute for deeds.

13. Proverbs 14:23 "*In all labor there is \_\_\_\_\_, but idle chatter leads only to \_\_\_\_\_.*"
14. What is the general principle about hard work, according to this verse?
15. What is the contrast between hard work and idle chatter, according to this verse?
16. What other kind of profit have you found in hard work besides a paycheck?
17. Read Matthew 12:36. In your own words, what does this passage teach us?



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In particular, we should be aware of saying we will obey God but never quite get around to doing what He says.

18. Write out 1 John 3:18.

A second limitation of our words is that they cannot alter the facts. Read Proverbs 26:23-26.

We read some very descriptive phrases in these verses: *Fervent lips*. *Wicked heart*. *Silver dross*. And we read some strong words: *Hate/hatred*. *Disguise*. *Deceit*. *Abominations*. *Wickedness*.

19. What are we told to do when someone with a wicked heart speaks kindly to us?

20. What are we told will eventually happen to the wicked-hearted person?

Just because a person is fervent in their words doesn't mean we should believe them. We must always take our truth from God's Word. Many times, we hear passionate words from someone, but when their lives are examined, we will see that they are no better than a clay pot covered with a thin covering or shell (like silver dross that covers what is inside)—promising great things but with no way of delivering it. Whether in this life or the life to come, God will wipe that varnish right off of the wicked person.

A third limitation of our words is that words cannot compel a response. No matter how persuasive our words might be, we can't make others do what we want, and we can't make them be what we wish they were if they are determined to do and be otherwise.

21. One proverb illustrating the fact that words cannot compel a response is 29:19. "*A servant will not be \_\_\_\_\_ by mere words; for though he \_\_\_\_\_, he \_\_\_\_\_.*"

We can perhaps understand that a servant would not want to respond to a master, especially if the master had been cruel, if the servant did not care what punishment was doled out to him, or if he thought that it would make no difference what he said.

The servant that won't respond to his master's words is someone with the mentality of a slave, as opposed to someone with a heart of honorable, devoted service. We can easily see the difference when we remember the slave labor of the Hebrews under Pharaoh's cruel rule in Egypt. They cried and cried for deliverance from slavery, and finally, everything was in place for God to free them, which He did with a grand show of miraculous works. His intention was that they would forever freely serve Him with a thankful heart. (We all know how that turned out.)



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I don't know if you think of yourself as a "slave" of Jesus. God makes it clear in His Word that we are to serve Him with gladness, for He loves us and continually does good to us. Jesus said, "*If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will also be. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor*" (John 12:26). As servants, we do not fear His wrath or punishment—rather, we look forward to His honor and blessing.

21. Jesus goes one better than calling us servants. Read John 15:15 and fill in the blanks.

*"No longer do I call you \_\_\_\_\_, for a \_\_\_\_\_ does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you \_\_\_\_\_, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*

22. What does Peter say about our words in 1 Peter 3:10-11?

This week, let's remember the injunction from James 1:26: "*If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*" We have seen the power of our words for good and for evil. Let us bridle our tongues and pray that we hear how our words sound to others.

23. What spoke to you most loudly in this week's lesson?

24. What will your response be?