

Good morning, everyone. How's everyone doing? It's good to be back with you this morning as we continue our look at the book of Proverbs in a series we've titled, "Guidelines." This series is all about us receiving and applying godly wisdom to our lives. We desperately need God's wisdom in a culture and world filled with foolishness.

I have shared pieces of my story with you before and want to do the same today. As many of you know, I became a Christian in high school. I almost immediately knew I wanted to go into ministry. Growing up in Louisiana, I had to decide to not attend my beloved LSU and instead went to a small Christian school in Arkansas – Ouachita Baptist University. In my sophomore year, at the age of 19, only 3 years into being a Christian I became a Youth Pastor at a small church in Southwest Arkansas. I spent the next 3 ½ years there – investing in the lives of students and families. We started with a group of 15 kids and over that 3 ½ year period, we saw the group grow to close to 50. We were seeing kids and families come to faith and so in my head, things were going really well.

That was until one Sunday morning, I walked into my Pastor's office before our services. I let him know there was an event that I wanted to attend with some of the students and I wanted to be out of the office that Thursday to attend. His response was more than shocking to me. He said, "Richard, you can't go. You have to stay. You have lost the support of this church." As he talked, tears began streaming down my face. Then he shared more, "You are immature. You are irresponsible. And it's time for you to move on from here." He then began to list people – people that I was very close to – and told me that they had all agreed it was time for me to move on. I later found out that part of the story wasn't true – that he had gone to those people and explained I needed to move on for different reasons and was asking them to support me in my future pursuits. In other words, he lied to them and to me.

His words and the way my time ended there were devastating to me. It was still hard to write about this week. To have someone say terrible things about me – to my face – to speak lies into and over me – that situation impacted me for years. The next couple of churches I went to – I showed up wounded and in fear. I kept my distance from senior leadership – fearing that one wrong step and I'd be fired without cause and told terrible things about me. I am happy to say my time here at Fellowship has been a healing one.

If I asked each of you this morning to raise your hands if you've had a similar experience, it wouldn't take long for almost every hand in this room to go up. Most of us have had that moment when someone close to us or someone we thought we were close to blasted us with words that hurt us – words that penetrated our hearts and left a wound that took years to heal or maybe for some of us – is still healing. It could have been a parent when you were 5 years old, your best friend or a teacher when you were 8, your first boyfriend or girlfriend in middle school, the bully in high school, your first boss, or maybe a husband or wife now. Most of us have had moments, where the words of someone else had a devastating impact on us.

**That's because words possess incredible power – both the words spoken into you and the words that come out of you.** Each of us can look back on our lives – many of us can look back over the last week – and know that statement is true. Words carry life-giving or life-crushing weight. They have the ability to tear down and the ability to build-up. Proverbs 18:21 says it this way, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." Our tongues, our words, our speech possess the power to give life and death. We can destroy. We can create. **Our words possess incredible power.**

Every time we open our mouths, there's the potential to create life or cause death. And, we open our mouths a lot. Some of us more than others. We speak, on average, about 700 times a day. As an introvert, I know some of y'all are skewing that number up a bit and I am thankful for y'all. Last week, Erin and I celebrated our 10-year anniversary and we got home I was exhausted. We got into the Uber and she's talking non-stop. Me, I am sitting in silence. Speaking is the only thing we do voluntarily 700 times a day. In those 700 moments a day we open our mouths, we speak almost 16,000 words. That's 16,000 opportunities every single day to give life or trigger death. That doesn't even take into account the words that we type through text and social media these days. Because of the frequency and the potential power that can be unleashed in those moments, Proverbs speaks to this topic more than any other topic in the book.

This morning, I want us to focus on just two ways our words possess power and I want to give you a couple of challenges at the end. Here's what I want to do this morning. I am going to do something different for a sermon and go ahead and from the beginning tell you the two ways our words possess power. Here's why - these two ways are completely different and yet they're so interconnected we can't talk about one without talking about the other. You ready?

**Your words possess the power to reveal your heart.**

**Your words possess the power to shape the hearts of others.**

Let's start with the idea that **your words possess the power to reveal your heart**. There are several passages that communicate this idea in the book of Proverbs. In 15:2, we read, "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly." In 15:7, "The lips of the wise spread knowledge, not so the hearts of fools." 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." 10:20 reads, "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth."

In these few passages, we see that when we possess wisdom – we speak knowledge and truth. When we possess wisdom, we're able to discern when to speak and what comes out of our mouths is valuable. When we don't possess wisdom, we speak foolishness and from our mouths we pour out evil. When we don't possess wisdom, what comes out of our mouths has little to no value. And in 15:7, specifically, the writer ties all of this to our hearts. So that, what comes out of our mouths reveals the inner workings of our hearts.

Jesus said something similar in the New Testament. In Matthew 12:34b-37, He says: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Jesus confirms that when we treasure good, we produce good. When we treasure evil, we produce evil. If we continuously ingest evil, our mouths will begin to speak evil. If we continuously ingest good, our mouths will speak good.

**Your words externalize what you have internalized. What you have put in is what comes out. Death and life are in the power of the tongue but death and life really come from what's inside us. Your words are the litmus test of your heart.** You want to know what's going on in someone's heart? Listen to their words. If you are around someone and they're constantly fighting, lying, gossiping, and slandering with their

words, or if they're constantly critical, judgmental, pessimistic, negative, and sarcastic – you can get a sense of what they're storing up in their hearts.

You know this is true because there have been these moments in your life, I am sure of it, when you say something and sometime later think to yourself, “Man – where did that come from?” Someone pulls out in front of you on Central and you just let out a barrage of words directed at this person. Some of y'all may choose to use sign language instead in that moment. Or – someone says or does something and you just lose your temper – it's a co-worker, it's a spouse, a kid, a good friend – and you've let loose on them. Maybe someone is sharing with you about a great moment in their lives and instead of celebrating with them – you give them the pessimistic outlook or make a passive-aggressive comment or gossip about that person.

**In those moments, your words have revealed there's something off in your heart.** What might be off? It could be you've constantly got your face in the news – only listening to stories of disaster, disunity, and disease and it's caused you to have an anxious and fearful heart. It could be you're constantly involved in social media and that love-fest has created a heart of jealousy. It could be you have an old wound that has never healed or haven't extended forgiveness to someone you need to and so you have a heart of bitterness, resentment, and anger. Maybe it's a fresh wound – still raw and sore from the sword that opened your skin. It could be the Netflix shows or music you're listening to. It could be that someone else has spoken into your heart and so what is coming out is what someone else spoke into you. It could be that the prevailing messages in culture have overtaken your heart, and so the words that come out of your mouth are more in-line with what culture says instead of what the Word of God says.

Some of you know this story, but all of us need to. It's the story of a young boy born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago. Only to his mom, he wasn't just a boy but a young man. While his mother worked long 12-hour shifts, he took care of his siblings and the house. In August of 1955, this young man left his home in Chicago, IL to visit family in Mississippi. After a long day of picking cotton, he – along with his cousins – went to the local grocery and meat market. While in the store, the clerk – Carolyn Bryant – reported that this young man – Emmett Till – flirted with her, grabbed her, whistled at her, and was sexually crude towards her. A few days later, when her husband heard her version of the incident – he and a friend went to Emmett's uncle's house – drug Emmett from the house – beat him, brutally murdered him, tied him to a cotton gin fan, and threw his body in a river. Three days later the corpse was found and sent back to Chicago for a proper burial. The men who committed this crime went unpunished.

60 years later, Carolyn Bryant admitted that parts of her story weren't true – specifically that Emmett never touched, threatened, or harassed her. In an interview she said, “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him.” She had lied. And her lie came with incredible consequences. Her lie had literally caused death. Her lies were steeped in a culture filled with fear, anger, and hate. They were steeped in a culture that was okay with treating others as less than. Her words and accusations and her husband's actions were the overflow of a culture gone mad – in a culture of foolishness. Her lies were an externalization of what she had internalized and literally brought death to a young boy.

I read that story and it angers me. But then I am quickly reminded that my words may not cause literal death but they do still cause harm. In my own life, when I am not spending time with the Lord – when I am not paying attention to what I am putting in my heart and when I am feeling stressed – I get quite snappy. Just a few weeks ago, I yelled at my

boys for yelling at each other. For a brief moment, I brought death – not literally obviously – into my relationship with them. And, immediately felt embarrassed but it was a revelation of my own heart and I had to confess that to my boys and ask for forgiveness.

**Your words possess the power to reveal your heart and the power to impact the lives of others.**

For the flip side of this conversation, we can ask the same question we asked earlier. You want to know how someone's relationship with the Lord is going? You want to know what is going on in their hearts? Listen to their words. You want to know if someone is letting the Word of God soak into their lives – just listen. If you constantly experience someone's words as kind, encouraging, graciously truthful, filled with joy, hope, and peace – know that more than likely they are spending time in the Word of God, they're spending time in prayer, and they're letting that time soak deep into the roots of who they are. You can assume they are ingesting the truth of God's word rather than the true experiences they have in this world. They aren't getting caught up in this world, but rather are focused on the one to come and seeing how they bring what is happening THERE to HERE. If you've been around these kinds of people, you know how beneficial it can be.

If I had to guess, I would assume that most of us in here hope that's us. We hope or long to be those kinds of people. Here's what Proverbs 4:23 tells us we must do, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." That verse is asking us to protect ourselves. It's telling us we must shield our hearts in order for our hearts to give life to others. And Proverbs 16:1 says, "To a man belongs the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue." You want to be that kind of person that people love being around because of how your words shape them? **Fill your hearts with the Word of God.**

When your heart is full of the Word of God – your words will be full of God's Words. Why? Because throughout Scripture God uses His Words to give life and meaning to us. Think about Genesis 1. God creates life out of nothing by just speaking it into existence. In that same passage, He brings light from darkness. In the New Testament, we see Jesus referred to as what? The Word. And the Word – Jesus – comes and dwells among us and teaches us who He wants us to be.

And how do we see Him act powerfully in the New Testament – by speaking. He and the disciples are out on the water in a boat. A storm comes up and the waves start to rock the boat and what does Jesus do? He doesn't get up and do some magician hand wands. He stands up and says to the storm, "Quiet! Be Still!" And the storm obeys Him. When Jesus and His disciples encounter a man possessed by a demon – now listen. I say that phrase and that already scares me a little. We see them encounter this man and what does Jesus do. He gives the demon permission – He speaks His approval to this demon – to go and enter into a group of pigs. Throughout the Bible – God speaks life and healing into His creation – into us specifically. **And now He's given us the privilege – the opportunity – to speak life into others. We have the ability to speak God's Words – His power-possessing Words – into the lives of those around us. He has given your words the power to shape the hearts of others.**

And in Proverbs, we're told about 3 specific types of people that we can shape. We're told our words can shape and impact the anxious, the angry, and the wounded. We're told that a kind or good word cheers up the anxious. We're told a soft answer turns away

wrath. We're told that wise and gentle tongue will bring healing to the wounded – that our words can be like the tree of life. In 16:24 we're told, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body."

Every single day, we are surrounded by people who are wounded and their wounding causes them to struggle. Every single day we are surrounded by people who are walking around with anxiety and anger. We are walking around people who have been struck by the sword of a sharp tongue. There are people all around us who aren't filling their hearts with godly wisdom and Truth. We have people near us who are in pain and are broken. And they desperately need us to speak up and to speak God's Word into them.

Listen, this is important. I need your heart to be filled with the Word of God so that in moments of weakness you can speak God's Word over and into me. I need your heart to be filled with the Word of God so that no matter who you come in contact with – even if that person is your greatest enemy – they hear these great words from you. They need it. There are people in your life desperate for you to hear this, today. All around you are the anxious, the angry, the broken and they need you to inform them, to teach them, to remind them what God says about them. We need each other.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way: "The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him...the Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's sure."

When you fill your soul with the Word of God your words will be personal and kind. They will be pleasant, sweet, and tender. They will be few. They will be calm. They will be apt. They will be discerning. They will be seasoned with grace and filled with Truth. They will be timely and thoughtful. They will be encouraging and filled with blessing. They will mold others into who God has called them to be.

I want to tell you one more story and then end with a challenge.

If you don't know Lysa Terkeurst – she is a Christian author, blogger, and speaker. She's phenomenal. She shared this story on her blog: "There is a little piece of nylon rope attached around my wrist that boosts my heart on a daily basis. Bob Goff put it there last June. He burned the ends together creating an astoundingly strong bond. "You belong," he whispered. And something deep in my heart settled. If you've been visiting the blog for a while, you know my story (when she wrote this she and her husband weren't together due to repeated infidelity on his part). But for those of you who haven't heard me share a bit about my growing up years, parts of my story are hard. Really hard. I was the little girl very much unwanted by the dad who gave me life. He doesn't talk to me to this day. And while healing has been doing its thing in deep places within me, I still have moments where this whole deal reeks. Like cigarette smoke that suddenly swirls past me in a restaurant. I don't like it. It stinks. I didn't ask for this. I am frustrated that I can't block it from coming in my direction. And sometimes it even sticks to me for a while with an annoying lingering that's hard to get rid of. That's a bum deal, right? So Bob, this dude with a crazy sense of breathless wonder oozing with the sincerest Jesus love I've ever seen, crosses my path and stops to see me. Really see me. He prioritizes me for a few moments above all else to whisper words of life into the very part of my soul that needed it the most. The part that never heard those words from my dad. The part that sometimes still wishes for something that a broken dad can't give. And Bob places this bracelet of belonging on my wrist for me to see daily. Jesus has done so many things to rewrite the truth of my identity... and this is certainly one of the sweetest. Never doubt the power of speaking words of life into another. Hit the pause button on all of the projects that are

screaming at you from your to-do list today and speak life into another person. It doesn't have to be complicated or well-crafted. Simple words of encouragement are simply powerful. We need to make sure it's people, not projects, that occupy the sacred places of our hearts."

This morning – I want to close with a challenge. You ready? This week, I want you to get up in the morning and I want you to read a passage. Read 1 chapter of Ephesians per day. In fact, I am going to be more specific and I am going to suggest a particular book in the Bible. I want you to read the book of Ephesians. 1 chapter a day from now until Saturday. And each day I want you to draw out one truth for your life. I have put examples of those in my notes on-line if you want to look at those to help you. Here's the second part of the challenge. Draw out one truth to meditate on. Believe that truth for yourself – let that truth sink deep into your heart. If you don't believe it for yourself – make it a goal to believe it for yourself that day. Then pray. Pray that the Lord would let it sink deep – that you'd believe it and understand it and grasp it for yourself. And then pray that God would give you an opportunity this week to share that same truth with someone else. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and discernment on when and how to share it. When the opportunity presents itself share it. Share it with someone who needs to hear it. Or just share it with someone letting them know what you're believing for yourself that day. That moment alone might be what someone else needs to hear. Let your words this week reveal your heart that is filled with Scripture and then pray the Lord uses that truth – those words – to shape others.

Pray.

- Ephesians 1
  - God has given me more grace than I know what to do with, and I can extend that to others.
- Ephesians 2
  - God loves me so much He died for me even when I was trapped in my sin.
- Ephesians 3
  - The Lord wants to strengthen me to endure no matter my circumstances.
- Ephesians 4
  - The Lord has paved the way for me to be kind and forgiving to others.
- Ephesians 5
  - I have much to be thankful for because of Jesus.
- Ephesians 6
  - God has given me the tools to stand up against temptation.

At this time, our ushers are going to come forward and pass out the elements for communion. If you are a Christian, we invite you to take part in communion with us. If not, you may let that tray pass by you. I'd invite you during this time to ask the Lord to change your hearts from the inside out so that you might speak words of life into your own soul and into the souls of others.

When Jesus was on the cross, He uttered some of the most powerful words ever when He announced, "It Is Finished." Those 3 words were an announcement that with His death and resurrection, His people would be reconciled to Him. Jesus gave up His body – His body was broken for us. So today, we eat in remembrance of Him. In the same way, His blood was poured out, restoring our relationship with Him and changing our identity and so today we drink in remembrance of Him. Thank you for being here today, go and take life with you and speak it into the lives of others. We'll see you next week.