

WORDS THAT BRING LIFE (PROVERBS 18:21)

*This message is adapted from JD Greear's series called "Still Standing."

Tonight, we're going to explore one of the most important elements in all our relationships: *our words*. The average person speaks close to 700 times a day. For a woman that averages to about 20,000 words each day, and for a man 7,000 words per day. But we all have that one friend who speaks about a *million* words per day! 😊

The topic of our words is a major theme in Proverbs. Solomon brings it up over 90 times. But, here's the verse we'll focus on tonight...

Proverbs 18:21 "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

Did you know that your tongue is one of the most powerful things on earth? Death and life are in the power of that little muscle. For example, many of your greatest memories are built around words that were said to you. And sadly, many of your most painful memories come from words that were said to you.

So, if you learn how to use words the way God intends, then you could revolutionize your life, your relationships, your church, your community – even your world! Words are literally the power of life and death.

For example, creation itself came into existence through words...

- In Genesis 1 God speaks and says, "Let there be _____" and whatever He said came into existence.
- Most of Jesus' miracles happened through His words. He *spoke* and lame men walked, lepers were healed, storms were stopped, dead men came out of graves.
- When a person is saved, it's because they believe the *words* of God – "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17).

The point is: God's words give life. And because we're created in the image of God, Solomon says our words have awesome power too. But, if we're going to be like God then our words should be *life-giving* NOT

death-causing. In fact, Jesus gives us two characteristics of life-giving words – His words were full of *grace* and *truth* (John 1:14)...

1. Our words must be filled with truth.

Over the past couple of weeks, we've talked about speaking the truth to a friend even if it's painful. We've talked about that enough for now. But what about speaking truth to all the other people we come in contact with. Lost people and saved people. People we know and people we don't know.

And I want to use myself as an example because I don't want you to think I'm asking you to do something I'm not willing to do. I want to show you how this affects me as a pastor/youth pastor.

You see, it's easy for me to say and teach things in the Bible that make people feel warm and fuzzy. But there are times when I know there is something you need to hear and I think, "Lord, do I have to say this or teach this?" But if I love you as your pastor, then I have to say it to you.

So, let me give you some examples where I have to share truth even when it's painful or awkward for the other person and for me...

- **Weddings** – Former students often come to me wanting me to marry them and their fiancé, which is great, EXCEPT when I have to share some hard truth with them. For example...
 - **When a believer is marrying an unbeliever**. I have to tell them the truth – a believer should NEVER marry an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:14-18).

You see, when I (the pastor) stand to perform a wedding ceremony, I'm God's representative. I'm saying before God and all the witnesses that this relationship is honoring to Christ and His Word. But if I know their relationship is in direct contradiction to God's Word, then I cannot (in good conscience) marry them.

And you can imagine how that answer is sometimes received by the couple. It's painful for them *and* me, but it's true.

- **When the couple is already sexually active before their wedding**. They both may be Christians but Hebrews 13:4 says that sex within the "*marriage bed is undefiled*." It does NOT

say sex within the “dating bed” or even the “engagement bed” is undefiled. In other words, until your wedding night, ALL sexual activity is off limits for the believer.

So, I have to say to the couple, “Do you take God’s commands seriously enough to abstain from sex from this point until your wedding night?” If not, then I cannot (in good conscience) marry them.

- **When the couple is already living together before their wedding.** Couples live together for all sorts of *well-meaning* reasons. But notice how Jesus describes the importance of marriage *and* the order of things...

Mark 10:6–9 “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.⁹ What therefore God has joined together [in marriage], let not man separate.”

In this passage, the religious leaders (Pharisees) are asking Jesus about marriage. So, Jesus explains that when God is “joining together” a couple, the man is to leave his father and mother to start a home with his “wife” (vs.7) – meaning he has *already* married her before they start a home together.



Why does any of this matter as long as the couple is really in love? It matters because, according to the Bible, marriage is a picture of salvation (Eph. 5:30-31).

In other words, your marriage is meant to be a living picture of the gospel. For example...

- Christ is the Groom and the Church is His bride, right?
- Christ cannot be joined together with a person who remains unsaved can He? In the same way, if a believer joins himself in marriage with a person who is unsaved, it distorts the picture of salvation. It presents a false gospel.
- Because the believer is “married” (joined) with Christ, we should never give ourselves to anyone other than Jesus, right? In the same way, if the believer gives himself sexually to anyone but the

person he marries, it distorts the picture of salvation and presents a false gospel.

- An unsaved person should not walk around acting like they are saved (“married” to Christ), right? In the same way, if an unmarried couple is living together (acting like they’re married when they’re not), it distorts the picture of salvation and presents a false gospel.

You see, to a lost culture, none of this matters. It’s not important to them because many of them have never heard this truth. But the Christian should want their marriage to accurately depict salvation and the true gospel!

But that same passage in Mark also leads to yet another awkward truth that I have to share with people – especially teenagers...

- **Same sex attraction & Gender Confusion** – If you go back to that passage, notice that Jesus is very clear about two things...
 - **There are only two genders.** In verse 6, Jesus said, *“From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.”* That’s not a political statement. In fact, it’s never been a controversial statement until the past several years. Jesus is not being insensitive; He’s simply stating the truth. But as you can imagine, this truth is painful for some people to hear.
 - **Marriage is only between a male and female.** Again, Jesus says that God’s design for marriage – FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION – is for one *man* and one *woman* for life. Again, this truth is extremely painful for some people to hear. But it’s true.

These are just a few of the hard truths I often have to speak to people even when it’s painful for *them* and *me*.



It may seem “unloving” for me to say these things but how loving would it be for me to withhold the truth or outright lie to those people? What kind of Christian or pastor would I be?

Illustration: If you went to someone’s house and you noticed a black widow’s nest in their kid’s room, would you just NOT tell them because you’re afraid they might get embarrassed because they have a spider in their house?

Or, if a fish somehow flops out of his bowl because he sees something he

likes *outside* the bowl, would it be more loving to put the fish back in the water or just let him think he's going to be ok outside the bowl? The fish is pursuing something he likes – something he wants – but what's the most loving thing to do regardless of how the fish feels?

You see, if I love someone who is living contrary to God's reality, I'm responsible before God to tell them the truth. It is NOT loving to ignore or go along with something that is not true.

So, if we're going to speak like God, we MUST speak the truth, even when it's painful for us *or* the other person. But there's another important aspect to keep in mind...

2. Our words must be filled with grace.

Proverbs 15:4 "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit."

The *Christian Standard Bible* (that Lifeway produced) puts it this way...

Proverbs 15:4 (CSB) "The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit."

You see, the "*gentle*" tongue, or the "*healing*" tongue brings life. When we speak the truth, it should always be for the purpose of healing. But, if we speak the truth in the wrong way – to shame someone or to simply win an argument – it can "break their spirit." That's not the goal. The goal is to *heal* someone, not to *break* them.

Colossians 4:6 "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

Let me give you an example of how we often speak truth *without* healing:

- **When we gossip** – Almost without exception, when we talk negatively about someone, we're not trying to bring healing, even if we call it a "prayer request."

Proverbs 20:19 "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbling."

Again, the *Christian Standard Bible* puts it this way...

Proverbs 20:19 (CSB) “The one who reveals secrets is a constant gossip; avoid someone with a big mouth.”

You may be thinking, “Aren’t there times when you really do have to explain something negative about someone?” Yes, but let me leave you with some tips to avoid gossiping:

- If it really is a prayer request, it will typically remain between you and God.
- Make sure the motivation of your heart is love.
- If you enjoy telling it, then it’s not love. It should pain you to say something negative about a person you love. Don’t glory in their shame.
- If you must speak negatively about someone, first speak *to* them, not *about* them.

Illustration: I heard a pastor say if someone comes into his office and starts to gossip about someone, the pastor says, “Have you talked with *them* about this?” If they say no, the pastor picks up the phone and begins calling that person. And the pastor can immediately tell by their response whether or not they are speaking out of love!

I know I’ve given you a lot to chew on, but you can recap and process together in your **Small Groups**.