

Listen: Wisdom is calling!

KSBC Sept. 27, 2009

Communication and Community

Proverbs 18:21

Intro. Community, fellowship, sharing of life with another depends on communication. It is hard to imagine an aspect of life, marriage, parenting, friendship, ministry or business that is not significantly dependent for its success on the use of words. Words, speech, talking . . . the power of the tongue is significant to shape and influence beliefs, affections and convictions. Note some of the Proverbs descriptions of the power of speech . . .

18:21 *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

12:18 *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

10:11 *The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.*

The message of the Bible is consistent throughout in teaching that a person who has submitted his life to the living God in obedient faith will manifest that faith in a new way of talking. The Proverbs help us understand the connection between knowing God and our speech patterns by contrasting the talk of the wise/righteous with the talk of the foolish/wicked. Jesus validates and confirms the amazingly helpful truth that you can diagnose a person's heart by listening to them talk (Matthew 12:33-37).

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Joyful relationships depend on talking right. Talking wrong can hurt you and others, sometimes seemingly beyond repair. Your eternal destiny is determined by your words. The absence of right talking is devastating to any relationship, family, small group, church or community. Let's listen carefully to God's words about the power of our words. Our assignment this morning is to acknowledge, repent and grow in the truth that our talk has power to both build and destroy community.

1. The power of speech to destroy community.

The destructive power of words are presented in Proverbs as both the way in which foolish people hurt themselves and the effect they have of inciting and alienating others. James and other apostles strongly warn us regarding the power and potential of the tongue (James 3). Extreme care and diligence is necessary for the follower of wisdom to bring the tongue under the authority and control of Jesus Christ.

A. Reactionary Speech 12:13-25

12:13-14 teach that a sinful person is trapped by the evil way they talk. The remaining verses in this section point us to look for 4 specific speech patterns that are both evil and personally harmful:

- Defensiveness 15 contrast with listen/ask 18:2
12:15 *The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.*
- Easily annoyed 16 contrast with overlooking mercy
12:16 *A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*
- Dishonesty 17, 19-22 contrast with clarity of 'tells lies'
12:17 *A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.*
- Insensitivity 18, 23 contrast with blurting out folly
12:23 *A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly.*

B. Alienating Speech 18:6-8; 16:28

18:6-8 teach that a fools speech damages both himself and others. Note the power of some speech habits according to 16:27-28:

*A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.
A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*

Stirring up dissension and separating friends describes the alienating and destructive power of two specific speech habits:

- Stirring up controversy 18:6; 16:28; 15:18 contrast w/ patience
Strife, quarrelsome, controversy – keeping things stirred up from a selfish perspective
15:18 *A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.*
- Gossip 18:8; 17:9; 26:20-22 contrast with covering the offense
Gossip, fault finding, tale bearing, grumbling, slander, meddling all misrepresent or distort the facts to put others in an unfavorable light behind their backs.
26:20-22 *Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.*

2. The power of speech to build community.

Perhaps from your perspective models and examples of destructive speech are far more available than those who speak with beneficial and desirable results. Truth spoken in love is powerfully enriching. There are 2 specific speech habits that produce joy, pleasure, clarity and strong community.

A. Appropriate speech. 15:1,23, 28; 24:26

These proverbs teach us the benefit of appropriate talk. It is about 'hitting the nail on the head!' This wise speech pattern is marked by 3 concerns:

- The response matches the situation. True & right to the circumstances

10:32 *The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.*

- The response is not hasty. Contrast with readiness, thoughtful

15:28 *The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.*

- The response is timely. Right thing, wrong time

15:23 *A man finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word!*

B. Truthful speech. 16:13; 8:6-9

16:13 reminds us that Kings take pleasure in honest lips, they value a man who speaks the truth. Speaking the truth involves giving a straight forward answer, not devious or distorted. Truthfulness is distinguished in the proverbs as bringing great benefit and joy in these 3 ways:

- Truth from a right motive. Why tell someone the truth? Power of motive.

22:11 *He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend.*

- Truth without exaggeration. Flattery – exaggeration/smooth mouth

26:28 *A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.*

- Truth intended to help. Rebuke – you are wrong

25:12 *Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.*

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- A. Reactionary Speech** 12:13-25
- B. Alienating Speech** 18:6-8; 16:28

2. The power of speech to build community.

- C. Appropriate speech.** 15:1,23, 28; 24:26
- D. Truthful speech.** 16:13; 8:6-9

Take Aways

1. What do your speech patterns reveal about your heart?
2. What relationships currently need to be restored due to your foolish speech?
3. Which speech pattern will you commit to repentance and obedience this week?

Discussion Questions

1. What observations or questions do you have from the study of communication and community?
2. Share with the group a recent incident in your life that illustrates the power of speech?
3. Share with the group a proverb from today's study that impressed you . . . you thought 'I have to remember that one!'
4. Discuss/share your thoughts about the statement:
The absence of right talking is devastating to any relationship, family, small group, church or community.
5. Which of the 4 types of reactionary speech trip you up most (1A)? Why? What are some of the root issues that cause this and how can they be dealt with? See Phil. 2:3-4; James 3:9-16
6. What is the difference between telling stories about people in a good way and gossip? What is the difference between asking a good question and stirring up controversy?
7. Reference Eph. 4:14-15. Why is speaking the truth in love so important/necessary according to verse 14? List as many reasons as you can come up with. How does this passage relate to the speech habits of appropriate and truthful speech (2A&B)?
8. Why do you not enjoy or receive rebukes well/with joy?
9. How can your small group help you repent and grow in talking right for the gospel sake?

For example . . . 'What I struggle with the most is _____. I know it is wrong and I can no longer justify it. Please pray for me, encourage me and rebuke me if you hear me talking this way. I desire to talk more in a way that _____.'