

If You Don't Have Anything Good to Say...

(by Pastor Trent Boedicker)

Text: Proverbs 26:18-25

2/7/16

*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death,
So is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "Was I not joking?"
For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.
Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.
The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,
And they go down into the innermost parts of the body. (Proverbs 26:18-22)*

I brought something with me this morning that we use in our kitchen almost every day. If you're going to do any cooking, this is an invaluable tool. It would be pretty difficult to prepare most meals without one of these. But it requires special care, because it will cause injury, if you're not paying attention to what you're doing. Any guesses as to what it might be? ---It's a kitchen knife. I'm sure that most of you have a similar set in your kitchen. This particular knife is very sharp. It will slice through carrots, or potatoes, or just about anything with ease. I'm not as good as the chefs on TV, but maybe one day. One thing I have learned about handling this blade is that you have to respect it. If you don't, you're going to get hurt. I don't know how many times I've accidentally nicked my fingers, and it is painful, and bleeds like crazy. We never leave it out on the counter where little hands can reach, and I'm very aware of who is around me in the kitchen when I am using it. I certainly don't toss it around, willy-nilly. In fact, I took special precautions bringing it here today, keeping it locked in the file cabinet in the office until I came up here, and I'm going to put it back immediately to make sure that nothing bad happens.

In some ways, words are a lot like a knife. They are useful. It is hard to imagine going through life without being able to communicate, share ideas, or converse with one another. But when we are careless with our words, we can inflict a great deal of harm. Words can be sharper than a knife, piercing the hearts of those we love. Words can unleash tremendous pain. When I nick my finger with a knife I can put a Band-Aid on it and before long the bleeding stops. But when I cut someone with my words, it can a lifetime for that wound to heal, and the scars that are left behind may never completely go away.

Words are like a double-edged blade. They can accomplish great good, or unleash terrible evil. They can build up, or destroy. They can encourage, or crush a person's spirit. Too often, we speak without thinking, blurting out anything and everything that enters our mind. Many friendships have been ruined because a thoughtless word was spoken.

Because our words have the potential to inflict so much harm, we should think before we speak.

Weighing our words carefully, we ought to ask ourselves: "Is this helpful?" "Is this right?" "Will this cause harm?" It's important to remember that once a word is uttered, it cannot easily be retracted.

Our speech is a topic that is discussed in the book of Proverbs. In fact Solomon addresses this subject more frequently than almost any other topic in the book. There are over 100 verses through the book that touch on this issue. We learn that the wise person learns how to control his tongue. When God created our tongue, and gave us the capacity to speak, He did so that we might use it to give Him praise, not for us to injure one another. In our passage, this morning, we find several types of speech that cause harm:

1. First of all, our passage shows us that **quarrelsome tongue** causes much harm. (v.21)

Proverbs 26:21... “*Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.*” There are times when it is better to bite our tongue... when we ought to keep quiet and walk away... when we should think twice before opening our mouth / airing our opinions...

What happens when you spray lighter fluid over hot coals? A huge flame shoots up from the grill, and if your hands are anywhere close it will singe the hair on your knuckles. I’m not speaking from personal experience, or anything, that’s just what they tell me. Words can have that same effect, especially when they are spoken in anger, in the heat of the moment, when we’re frustrated, and are not thinking about the consequences. One careless word can ignite a full blown argument, even between friends.

A husband comes home after a hard day of work, he is tired and worn out. Meanwhile, his wife has had a long day herself, the kids have been wound up, and she is frustrated because they haven’t helped with the chores. The first thing the man says is, “so I take it that supper isn’t ready?” And she answers, “of course it’s not ready, I have to everything around here, it would be nice if I could get a little help.” And he replies, “I would be happy to help, if I wasn’t slaving away, for my family, in the office all day. It would be nice to have a warm meal waiting for me when I got home.” And she responds, “If you are that hungry, you should have brought something home.” And it just keeps escalating.

One thoughtless statement provokes another. Voices get louder and louder with each exchange. Tensions rise. Tempers flare. They say things that they don’t really mean, and will later regret. Before long the disagreement erupts into a shouting match. But it doesn’t have to go that far. As soon as things start to get a little tense, take a deep breath. Let yourself cool down, before speaking another word. Don’t say anything out of anger. Agree to drop it, for now, and come back to it later when both people are in a better frame of mind, and are thinking a little more clearly. Come back, and sort things out, when emotions are not running high. Even if you think the other person is totally wrong, try to look at it from their point of view. “If were in his shoes, how would I take that?” “If I were in her shoes, how would I feel if someone said that to me?” You don’t always need to have the last word. Sometimes it’s better to drop it, and let it go.

Turn to ***Proverbs 15:1***. “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.*” We can choose not to respond to people the same way that angry people speak to us. We don’t have to raise our voice when they raise theirs. We don’t have to match their intensity, or give them the same attitude they are giving us. We don’t have to take the same tone. It is amazing how staying calm, when others are upset, can help ease the tension. When we give a gentle answer, we can often avoid

much conflict. Wisdom tells us when to open our mouth, and when to keep it closed. We need to heed its voice.

It might help us, if we remembered how destructive those words, spoken in anger, can be. Look at ***Proverbs 12:18***. “*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.*” In the heat of the moment, when we are upset, when we are hurt, we can let words fly without realizing how deeply they cut. Every statement is like stabbing a blade into the heart of another person. But words also have the power to heal. When we hurt someone, we should use our words to set things right. Tell them you are sorry, let them know that you were wrong, ask for their forgiveness. Don’t ignore it and expect the hurt to just go away. Yes, it can difficult for some wounds to heal, but with Christ nothing is impossible, He can mend any wound if we let Him.

2. Our passage also shows us that a deceptive tongue causes much harm. (v.18-19)

Again, in verses 18-19 we read “*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘Was I not joking?’*” This is the person who has trouble telling the truth, and when he gets caught in his lie he makes excuses. “I was just kidding! Ha, ha! I can’t believe you thought I was being serious.” He might be laughing, but not for long. No one else finds it amusing. The one who throws lies around is about as dangerous as the person who shoots flaming arrows in every direction without thinking of the consequences.

It’s amazing how easy it is for us to rationalize dishonesty. “It was just a little white lie, no big deal.” “It was a fib, it won’t hurt anyone.” “I was only bending the truth.” But it is a bigger deal than we might imagine. It certainly matters to the people we deceive. How do we expect them to react when they find out we tried to pull the wool over their eyes? And it also matters to God.

Turn to ***Proverbs 12:22***. “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.*” That is a very strong statement of disapproval. The same word is used for God’s response when Israel worshipped idols, and it is even the same word that is used to describe God’s reaction when the pagans sacrificed their children in the fire. This is an abomination, detestable in the sight of the Lord. Why? Think about His character for a moment. Scripture tells us that the Lord is faithful in every way. There is not a sliver of deceit in anything He says. When God speaks, His words are completely reliable and will never lead us astray. We never have to wonder if He is exaggerating here, or if He is hammering things up there. “...*It is impossible for God to lie...*” (Hebrews 6:18) It doesn’t happen. God can do anything at all, nothing is beyond His ability, but He cannot act in a way that would contradict His nature. So when we lie, we are not following in the footsteps of our Heavenly Father, we are actually imitating the devil who is a liar and deceiver. If that’s the case, honesty is a much bigger deal than we might have guessed. Deception is deeply offensive to the Lord, but those act faithfully and tell the truth, no matter what, are His delight.

A person might be tempted to lie for a number of reasons. It might be to get out of trouble.

The student who forgot to do his homework makes up an excuse and tells his teacher “my dog ate it.” “Seriously, I spent hours working on that last night, and I would have gotten an A, so why don’t you give me a C and we’ll call it even?” I think she might have heard that one before.

Or the man who rolls down the window, after being pulled over, asks the officer “was I speeding? I should have my speedometer checked, it must not be working, it said I was doing 55.” I don’t think that’s going to work.

I went upstairs yesterday, and the girl’s bedroom was a total mess, blankets and toys were thrown everywhere. One minute it was neat and tidy, the next it was a disaster. I asked them, “Who did this?” And each one of them answered, “not me,” “not me,” “not me.” I knew at least one of them, probably all of them, were not being truthful – because I didn’t mess it up, and I was pretty sure Charity didn’t either considering she was the one who spent so much time helping them get it in order in the first place.

We might think that lying will help us avoid the consequences of our actions, but it doesn’t work. It always ends up making things worse. We’d be better off fessing up, from the beginning and seeking forgiveness. Look at ***Proverbs 28:13***. “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.*” Whether it is being honest with God about our sin, or being honest with each other about our mistakes, the truth will go a long ways. So don’t lie.

Sometimes people lie when they want something. A salesman is trying to close the deal, and so he leans close and says, “tell you what, because I like you so much, I am going to give you the best deal I possibly can, I’ve never given anyone a discount like this to anyone, this offer is only on the table if you buy from me right now...” But when the customer opens the sales flyer, and that sees that is the price that everyone is getting, how likely do you think it is he will do business with that guy?

Turn to ***Proverbs 21:6*** “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.” In the end, it deceit doesn’t pay. One way or another, it always catches up to us. The salesman is trying to get more sales, and it might work for awhile, but he will end up losing customers in the long run, because no one wants to buy from someone who is dishonest. When the manager finds out he has been lying to customers, he is going to be out of a job.

Once you have earned a reputation for being deceitful, you will have a difficult time getting people to take you seriously. It is much better to be honest. Colossians 3:9 says, “*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices...*” More than any other group of people, believers ought to be known for their honesty, because we follow the God of truth, and we bear the truth of His gospel.

3. Finally, our passage shows us that a gossiping tongue causes harm. (v.22)

Go back to ***Proverbs 26:22***. “The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.” The picture is that is being portrayed is of a person who can’t wait to sinking his teeth into something tasty, he gobbles up every last crumb. For me, that would be cheese popcorn. I just can’t resist tearing open the bag, and scooping handfuls of it into my mouth. But our appetite can get us into trouble. Some things tastes good, at the moment, but when our stomach is churning later on we regret it. That’s what gossip is like. A person can’t

wait to sink their teeth into the latest rumor. They enjoy listening to the drama in everyone else's life, and can't ever get enough. But sooner or later, it will make them sick to their stomach, when everyone is talking about them.

For some, gossip is a source of entertainment. It is better than reality TV. "What's the latest on Bob and Mary," "Oh, did you hear about their big argument?" "No, what were they fighting about?" "Oh, you won't believe what he said to her the other day when he came home from work..." There is a real life soap opera being lived out in front of us with characters we know and we get to interact with the story. Who needs television? But it is a problem when we take pleasure hearing about the problems of others.

What makes gossip so enticing? It might make us feel better about ourselves, when we learn that other people have bigger problems than our own. Maybe your kids have been getting into a little trouble. But when you hear about what so-and-so's kids did at school last week, you don't feel quite as bad. "Compared to their kids, mine our saints." And so you make sure everyone else knows, too. But that logic doesn't work. You don't solve your issues by spreading the news of everyone else's troubles. It might make you feel better for a moment, but afterwards your troubles are still there. And if these other people are really your friends, you wouldn't take pleasure in their struggles. Your heart would break for them. The last thing you would want to do is add to it.

Gossip is also enticing because we like to be "in the know." We feel special, when we are privileged to information that other people don't have, and we get to be the one to share it. It makes us feel important. We shouldn't feel good about sharing someone else's secrets. We should feel good because people can trust us with their secrets. But again, if we were really acting like a friend, we wouldn't spread our the troubles of people we cared about around town. ***Proverbs 11:13*** "*He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.*"

Gossip is unreliable. Mary confides to Suzie, but Suzie tells Nancy, Nancy tells Lisa, Lisa tells Amy, and Amy tells you. Who knows how much is true, and how much has been embellished? At any point in the chain, someone could have decided "Mary probably doesn't want this spread around, I should keep this to myself," and the gossip would have stopped.

Christians can be guilty, at times, of dressing up gossip in the guise of prayer requests. "We need to pray for so and so..." and then we go through the whole story of everything going on in so and so's life. It might be okay to share, if you have the person's permission, or if you know they won't mind. We should ask ourselves: did the other person tell me this in confidence? Would they want me sharing this with other people? Is it helpful for other people to know? If you're not sure, or if they specifically asked you to keep it private, then it isn't right to betray their trust. And we don't need to go into all the gory details. You don't need to say: "We should pray for Mary and Bob, their marriage is in trouble, they've been going to counseling, he has been sleeping on the couch for a month, and last night they got into a fight about dinner, and she threw a plate him, so they really need our prayers..." Just: "Mary asked us to pray for her and Bob" will do.

We need wisdom to know what is appropriate to discuss with others and what isn't. Just think before you open your mouth. Make sure your motives are what they should be.

Conclusion –

(1) We've looked at a number of verses this morning, and each of them have encouraged us to think before you speak. Do not allow careless words to roll off your tongue. Ask yourself: what will the impact of this statement be? Will this statement build up or tear down? Is this the kind of speech that is befitting for a child of God? If the Lord were sitting right here, beside me, would I be ashamed to say this out loud? --He is. Ask the Holy Spirit to filter our speech.

(2) Tell the truth, always. When you are tempted to tell a little white lie, remember that words of the Lord are faithful and true, and you are His representative in this world. Your speech, in everyday conversation, will impact the kind of testimony you are going to have, whether or not people will listen to you.

(3) Know when silence is golden. Proverbs 17:28 says, "*Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.*" Whether you are tempted to repeat some juicy bit of gossip, or if you really want to give the neighbor a piece of your mind...there are times when the best thing to say is nothing at all. That takes self-control, discipline. But you can always talk to the Lord. "Lord, you know what I want to say right now, give me the wisdom and the strength to keep my words pure."

(4) May the good news of Christ always be on our lips, eager to tell others about the Lord.