

Wisdom for Speaking

1. Intro: The Power of Words

- The playground jingle *'sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me'* is often recited by children being picked on by others
- It's the thing that's said in response to someone calling you a name or saying something nasty about you
- Of course it's a whopping great big lie
- If the name calling didn't hurt us ... then there'd be no need to reply with such a jingle ... we'd probably just go about our way and ignore them
- But the very fact that we come back with these words of our own shows us that deep down that words are powerful and words can affect us and hurt us

- **Illustration – Cowboys & Indians**
 - When I was about 5yrs old I was playing cowboys and Indians with my next door neighbour
 - I was the Indian > he was the cowboy and as the Indian I had a spear ... which happened to be a wooden garden stake used to help grow tomato plants
 - In the course of our battle ... I hurled the tomato stake at my cowboy neighbour and got him right in the back of the leg
 - For some sad reason I thought this was pretty funny ... until I realised it had left a hole in his leg about the size of 50c coin that required he be taken to hospital for stitching ... I realised it wasn't really a laughing matter
- My friend got over it pretty quickly
 - The tears were soon gone > the pain quickly passed
 - We remained friends > no malice > we got on with life together
- But contrast that with the times that I have said hurtful things to people ...
 - Family
 - People at church
 - And it's caused a pain that wasn't quickly forgotten
 - Took much repentance and effort to restore the relationship
- And what it that highlights is there's great power in words
 - And we have the ability to use words in constructive ways or destructive ways
 - We can use words to build others up or

- Or we can use words to tear them down and ridicule them
- And this is something that the OT book of Proverbs agrees with
 - As Solomon and the wisdom writers sit back and observe life in this world they see the power of a person's words
- What Proverbs shows us is that the wise and righteous person uses words well ... and the foolish and wicked person doesn't
- If we're to be wise in the way that we speak ... then we need to understand the power of our words
- Proverbs points out the power of our words in Proverbs 12:18
 - *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
 - Words of sarcasm, ridicule, words spoken without thought ... they hurt > they pierce the heart and wound the soul
- **Application**
- Of course such reckless words aren't limited to the words we speak
 - It applies just as much to the words we write
 - In the age of digital communication where we can tap out an email or a FB post or a Tweet on our phone or on the laptop ... it's so easy to say something reckless
- Especially vulnerable to this when we get a critical email ... or see a provocative FB post
 - So easy to go ... tap, tap tap ... Enter > BOOM! > cop that!
- Of course ... there are great benefits email, FB and Twitter
 - But there's great danger in firing of a response in the heat of the moment that's reckless
- Very often we sit there with our laptop, iPad, smartphone ... ready to fire away with an email, post or Tweet ... and we forget there's a real person sitting at the other end who's going to be receiving that message
 - And so we fire off a message ... and we cause them bleed when we pierce them with our words
- Can I say ... don't have arguments on FB
 - Don't have arguments via SMS or email

- They will never ever end well > only end up piercing one another and cause lots of blood to be spilt
- Don't do it > not worth > too much headache to clean up and repair the damage that's been done
- If you get wind that there's angst in a person's email or message ... then don't reply
 - Stop the online conversation ... get on the phone, arrange to meet them ... and have a face to face conversation
 - You'll be much less likely to say something reckless you'll regret and you'll resolve the problem with much less tension than bouncing messages back and forth that will inevitably end up hurting the other person
- *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*
- There's great power in our words > they can be used destructively and recklessly ... but our words can also be used constructively with others
 - Proverbs 10:21 – *The lips of the righteous nourish many ...*
 - Proverbs 12:25 – *... a kind word cheers him up.*
 - Proverbs 15:4 – *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life ...*
- So often when things are hard and we're struggling with in life ... it's the words of others that restore a person's soul and self esteem
- **Application**
- A parenting book we read talks about how as parents we set the weather pattern for the household
- That is
 - The things we choose to say
 - The tone we use
 - Will create the atmosphere in within the home
 - That can either be an atmosphere of cheer, healing, joy and encouragement
 - Or it can be an atmosphere of criticism, crushed spirits and tension
- There's tremendous power in our words
- Same is true in the work place, uni, growth group, church
 - There's a tangible difference in a group dynamic when a person chooses to use their words well ... compared to when they choose to be critical, negative and thoughtless with what they say

- There is great power in the words you use
 - Wisdom shows us to use our words well
 - Not to hurt or bring down or criticise others
 - But to heal, and nourish, encourage and build others up

2. Foolish words

- So if our words are powerful and can be used constructively or destructively ... how can we use words well?
- The book of Proverbs shows us this by contrasting the speech of the fool with the speech of the wise

• **Babble**

- One thing that characterises foolish talk ... is talking too much
 - Proverbs 10:19 – *When words are many, sin is not absent ...*
 - 18:6-7 – *A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating. ⁷ A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul.*
 - This is talking about the person who just talks for the sake of talking
 - They don't think before they speak ... and as a result they get themselves into trouble by saying foolish things, or things that hurt others or things that are just plain dumb
- Not saying the extraverted person who's confident to talk with others and help carry the conversation is a fool ... and the quiet introverted person is therefore wise
 - Talking about those who open their mouth without thinking
- This is the person who's constantly
 - making wise cracks to try and draw attention to themselves
 - saying things that are provocative in order to get a reaction
 - makes insensitive remarks about or to others that hurt them and undermine relationships

• **Gossip**

- Another way we can speak foolishly is to gossip
- Benjamin Franklin once said
 - "three people can keep a secret, as long as two of them are dead"
- Gossip is to speak about another person behind their back
 - Normally when we gossip it's slanderous and or malicious because what we're doing is talking about another person's failures or faults
 - Gossip doesn't do anything constructive

- All it does is make the gossip feel good about themselves ... by bringing down and highlighting the faults of others
- Gossip is alluring ... yet its so destructive
 - *18:8 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.*
- Think of the best tasting hors d'oeuvres that you've ever tasted at a wedding reception
 - Not talking about party pies and sausage rolls
 - Talking about smoked salmon and prawns and avocado and stuffed peppers and prosciutto and char grilled vegetables
 - Got that in your mind ... got you salivating?!
- That's what gossip is like
 - Especially those really juicy bits of gossip
- The problem is when we gossip we undermine relationships
 - *11:13 – A gossip betrays a confidence ...*
 - *16:28 ... separates close friends.*¹
- Not only does gossip undermine the relationship with the person being gossiped about
 - It undermines you and your character with the person your gossiping to
 - Shows the other person you're a gossip > and if you gossip about others ... makes them wonder are you gossiping about them
 - Means they're less likely to trust you and be open and honest with you
 - Put some distance in their relationship with you
- **Application**
- As Christians we can be especially prone to gossip
 - We're not immune from having a whinge to someone about
 - Sermon > leadership > morning tea / supper > lack of programmes > the thing someone said to you the other day
 - We don't want to be gossips
 - It betrays a confidence and it separates close friends
- But as Christians we can fall into a more subtle form of gossip

¹ 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

- One of the blessings of being a church ... being brothers and sisters in Christ ... is we share our lives with one another > we have deep relationships with each other
- We're concerned for each other > we're concerned for what's going on in each other's lives
- Yet it's so easy for all that good stuff ... all that Godly concern ... to spill over in the guise of a concerned conversation with another friend ... into gossip
 - "Hey John, I'm really concerned for Paul ... he's started using his tarot cards again. He's looking for some sign as to whether Jesus really did rise from the dead. We should really be praying for him"
- One way to guard ourselves against gossiping with others ... is to gossip with God
 - Whatever it is that concerns you ... bring it to God in prayer
 - Tell him about it ... and ask him to intervene
 - If you're not willing to speak to God about it ... then that's probably a pretty good clue that your concern may not be that genuine or godly
- **Empty**
- Words are not always powerful > sometimes our words can be quite empty ... especially when they're not matched by our actions
 - Proverbs 14:23 – *All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.*
- In other words, all the words in the world don't mean a thing if they're not backed up by actions
- How many times do we find ourselves saying things to people like this
 - I'll pray for you this week
 - I'll call you later
 - I'll meet you there at 4 o'clock
 - Put me down for the house party, I'll be there
 - Yeah, I'll come to that dinner
 - I'm sorry for doing that
- How many times do we find ourselves saying these types of things to ppl and not following through?
- Our words are empty when they're not matched by our actions

3. Wise words

- Book of Proverbs not only shows us what foolish when it comes to our words ... it also shows us how to be wise with our words

- **Restraint**
- One of the constant messages Proverbs has to say about speaking wisely is to show restraint
- Rather than be a babbler when speaking, Proverbs says we're wise to be restrained in what we say
 - Proverbs 17:27-28 – *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.*
 - ²⁸ *Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue*

- The less we babble and speak without thinking ...
 - The less ammunition we give to those who want to criticise us
 - The less opportunity there is to blurt out something foolish

- So there are times when it is best to be silent
 - Proverbs 10:19 – *he who holds his tongue is wise ... especially in the face of criticism or rising anger*
 - When you're feeling angry or provoked ... hold your tongue lest you say something you regret

- The mark of the wise is to think before speaking
 - Proverbs 18:13 – *He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame.*
 - *Proverbs 15:28 – The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.*
 - Don't blurt out the first thing that comes into your head
 - Better to process and think through the appropriateness of that you want to say

- **Gentleness**
- In a similar vein to us being restrained with our words ... is to be gentle with our words
- It's very easy when we're provoked or hurt by others to get angry with them
- But Proverbs warns us that this is foolish
 - Proverbs 29:11 – *A fool gives full vent to his anger*

- And the reason it's foolish ... is because it brings pain upon ourselves and others
- Proverbs 29:22 – *An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.*²

- **Illustration – Gotcha Calls**
- Triple M > gotcha calls
 - Girl set up her friend who was getting stressed about her wedding which was still 11 mths away
 - So keen to get a particular reception venue, she booked it before she got engaged
 - Prank call came claiming to be the manager of the reception venue and asking her if she could change the date of her wedding because the venue was double booked
- She went off like a firecracker
 - Yelling and screaming down the phone at this guy with a tirade of abuse because she was so angry

- How often are we provoked or angry ...
 - We lash out at people > physically or verbally
 - We feel hurt ... so we try and hurt them back
 - We say and do things we will later regret

- We do it with
 - Spouse
 - Kids
 - Grandkids
 - Work colleagues / boss
 - Driving
- But much better ... much wiser according to Proverbs is to be gentle with our words
 - 15:1 – *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*

- The times when we've had the most constructive conversations with our kids about their poor behaviour ... is when we've calmly sat down with them and talked them through their actions without raising our voice

² Proverbs 30:33 – *For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.*"

- Every time ... they're more receptive to our words, more humble and our relationship strengthened
- Contrast that with the times we've raised our voice and spoken harshly with them ... often it ends up escalating into an argument and everyone ends up feeling bitter and angry and the relationship is strained
- *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*

- **Honesty**
- Another mark of wise words is honesty
- God is a God of truth ... and he expects us to be people of truth³
 - *Proverbs 12:22 – The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.*⁴

- The Bible says ... Devil is the father of lies⁵
 - So we are aligning ourselves with him if lying characterises our speech

- But it's not just the straight out lie
 - It's when we're being economical with the truth
 - *Proverbs 26:24 – A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbours deceit.*
 - Telling half truths ... holding back the truth ... not revealing all the truth
 - There's no difference

- So we're to be honest with our words
 - *Proverbs 24:26 – An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.*
 - I'm assuming that's meant to be a nice kiss ... not the kiss that your old aunty plants on you when you were a kid

- We can be so comfortable with lying
 - Especially those little white lies we say when we've done something wrong ... or not done what we said we would do ... so we tell a little 'porky pie' to get out of it
 - I was stuck in traffic
 - I got held up
 - Something came up

- The Lord detests lying lips but he delights in those who are truthful

³ Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16; 1 Tim 3:15; Titus 1:1

⁴ Proverbs 6:19 – *There are six things the Lord hates ... a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.*

⁵ John 8:44

- We must put off any habit we have of lying
- And be willing to tell the truth ... even if it makes you look bad
- Because at the end of the day ... God knows the truth ... and you're not deceiving him

- **Aptness**

- Final mark of wise words ... are words that are appropriate
 - *Proverbs 10:32* ³² *The lips of the righteous know what is fitting,*
 - *Proverbs 15:23* ²³ *A man finds joy in giving an apt reply-- and how good is a timely word!*
- We all know the frustration of those times when we've put our foot in our mouth
 - We say something that's just not appropriate
 - Joke we thought was hilarious ... insensitive to someone listening
 - Person who asks a lady "When's the baby due?" and she replies ... "15 years ago"
- bBut the wise say what is appropriate for the situation
 - And such a person and their words are a blessing to those around them
 - *Proverbs 25:11* ¹¹ *A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*
- Wisdom of knowing
 - How to respond to a person's grief
 - What to say when someone is frustrated
 - The awareness to acknowledge the very personal thing someone has just shared with you ... rather than quickly changing subject because it felt a bit awkward
 - That's being wise with your words

4. Redeemed words

- As I was preparing this talk I was confronted with all the ways I fail to be wise with the way I use my words ... and the frequency with which I am a fool with my words
- In Mark 7:18-23 ... Jesus teaches that the things that come out of us are a reflection of our hearts
 - *Mark 7:20-22* *"What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'*
²¹ *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual*

immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

- Its confronting to realise that our foolish speech ...
 - Our babble, our gossip, our empty words, our lies, our anger ... stem from sinful hearts that desperately need reforming

- Which is why the gospel of Jesus is such good news
 - Because Jesus came to deal with the problem of our sinful hearts
 - Not only did he die to take away the wrath of God we deserve for all our foolish words
 - But he gave us his HS to help transform and redeem our hearts

- For the person who's trust is in Jesus ... we have the HS living in us
 - Molding us, shaping us, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus ... and this includes our words and they way we use them

- Romans 8:5 Paul says
 - "Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires ...
 - As we listen to and obey the work of the Spirit ... he will produce in us the fruit of the Spirit which is
 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.⁶
 - These are the Christ-like virtues will all need to ensure our speech is wise and godly

- If you want wisdom for speaking ... you need to know Jesus
 - The one who embodies wisdom
 - The one who gives us is HS for speaking wisely

PRAY

⁶ Galatians 5:22-23