

Series: Navigating relationships - Wisdom from the book of Proverbs

Sermon: The Power of Words

Texts: Proverbs 16:24, 18:21, 15:1-2

Speaker: Kevin White

Writers: Kevin White, Bethany Nolson, Kerri McIntosh

Date: Sunday July 21, 2024

Have you ever seen those action movies where they are diffusing a bomb? There's usually a few people on the team. One in another location who's the expert but then the other person is the one who stumbles across the bomb. Obviously they've somehow set it off and have 5 minutes to figure out how to diffuse it or else...

The next few minutes of the movie we're all in for the ride as they carefully navigate one wire, then another, then a button, then right when there's like 10 seconds left they get down to two wires. The expert is not 100% sure which one is right because of course, there's the chance the enemy switched the set up to throw everyone off.

3 seconds left...

2 seconds...

1 second...

She cuts the wire...

Silence...

It's the right wire! Everyone survives!

This bomb, which had the power to destroy the stadium or city or whatever, is diffused.

You know what I've never seen? I've never seen that same scenario where they walk in, see a bomb, freak out, trip the timer so that it's set to 5 minutes and then just randomly start cutting wires without any idea of what's what.

You know why? The stakes are too high. They would never take that risk.

But we take that risk all the time.

We have access to something that has the power of life and death. We use it every day. Sadly, we often don't think much about it.

Anyone know what I'm talking about?

Words.

Good morning! Last week, Pastor Jeremy started us off in a new series called “Navigating Relationships.”

He talked about how we are created for relationships.

- We need them to have meaning
- We need them to thrive
- We need them to be part of something bigger than ourselves

Relationships are essential to our lives. They bring us joy and offer so much support. And yet they can also be frustrating, painful, confusing and complex. We'll be looking at the Book of Proverbs and using its timeless wisdom to guide us through this topic.

Today, we'll be looking at “The Power of Words.”

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

I want you to take a moment to think about something that someone has said to you that just boosted you up.

I love you

I believe in you

I'm glad you're in my life

Think about how that made you feel. How much life it gave you.

Now think about something negative somebody said to you. Think about how that made you feel.

I remember someone saying to me when I was a kid that I had no sense. The reason you guys are going to hear a 25 minute sermon instead of a 10 minute sermon is because I'm taking 15 extra minutes to try to prove that what I'm saying makes sense. You see how powerful words are?

Words have power. They can uplift or destroy. Build up, or tear down.

I listened to a Tim Keller sermon on this topic and the image he shared was that of someone stabbing you with a sword. Eventually the physical pain of that injury would go away, but would always be scarred.

Like a sword, words can cause wounds that leave lasting scars. Once you say them, words can't be taken back

One of the clearest signs of wisdom is the ability to control your tongue.

Look at what Jesus' brother James says in his book, "... the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." (James 3:5)

Words are powerful and can do a lot of damage. Careless words hurt three groups of people - the people the words are said to, the people who say it, and the people who hear it.

Your words will catch up to you. Whether it's a good way or a bad way will depend on how you speak.

Words are powerful - so **BE CAREFUL**

BE CAREFUL

The message translation puts it this way: "Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit - you choose."

The book of James also says we should be quick to listen and slow to speak. I was talking to someone about this and they were telling me that I have to be careful with how I share this part because many women suffer in silence - they are told to submit or be silent. I'm not saying that as the text is not saying that.

I think we're trying to say that all of us need to be careful about how we speak. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't speak.

Let's look at Jesus as an example. Some men bring a woman caught in adultery to trap Jesus. They say that the law says she should be stoned. Look at how Jesus responds. First off, he's listening. The accusers are pressuring him to respond. He's quick to listen and slow to speak.

When he does speak, it's one powerful sentence, "Let anyone of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)

With this one line, Jesus uses words in a powerful way to give this woman life - and to challenge the men to a new life - sadly they don't see it and walk away unchanged.

So as an application, let's consider slowing ourselves down before we speak. Someone has said that we have 2 ears and 1 mouth so we should listen twice as much as we speak.

Here's a practical tool for that. It's called active listening. I was at a function the other day and MY youth pastor was there. He was sharing about this. Normally, when people are talking, we're just waiting for them to finish and rehearsing how we are going to respond. With active listening,

it slows the conversation down. Instead of saying your point after, you try to repeat what the person was just saying. Then you give them the chance to say you got it or no you missed it and clarify.

In terms of navigating relationships, this is a great tool to have in the toolbox. Active listening.

Use your words to help people feel heard.

Our second Proverbs says this, "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24)

Words are powerful so be gracious.

BE GRACIOUS

We don't really appreciate honey the way people in the past did. It's not as big a deal to us because we are so saturated with artificial sugar. But in the past, honey was hard (and even dangerous to get). It was quite special.

For the Israelites, they viewed honey not just as a sweetener, but as a source of health. It contains antioxidants, has antibacterial properties, can soothe sore throats, and promotes digestive health.

I bet some of you are pulling out your phone now to add honey to your shopping list.

(give away some honey)

Isn't that sweet of me :)

Like honey, gracious words are sweet and healing.

Words are powerful, so be gracious with our words

Tim Keller in his sermon was talking about how our words should be motivated by love, not the desire to put someone in their place. When we speak graciously, it shows our care and love. Even if someone disagrees with us, they should still feel loved. He also talked about being "apt" - saying the right thing at the right time.

I heard Pastor Andrew say, "the right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing." I want to disagree with him so badly. For me, the right thing is the right thing.

Sometimes people are not in a place to hear the right thing. You need wisdom and discernment. That comes from being guided by the Spirit.

At the same time, it's not loving to never say the right thing. So we have to learn how to say the right thing, at the right time, in the right way.

Going back to Jesus and the woman.

Notice his order. He said a word that made all the judgmental people go away. Then he was alone with the woman. How gracious. He waited until she was safe. He waited until all those who threatened her were gone and the emotions had passed. He loved her first and cared for her physical situation first, and then spoke when she was ready and able to hear it. THEN he said a hard word to her, "Go and sin no more." So gracious. Jesus wasn't afraid of the truth. But he said it in the right way and at the right time. He wasn't afraid of the mess. He entered into it, said what needed to be said. He wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers or flip tables when needed. But he did it all in love.

Some of us need to speak more truth - we are too scared to confront. Some of us need to say less. We beat people over the head with our righteousness. I once heard someone say, "It's more important to be righteous than to be right."

The message translation says, "Gracious speech is like clover honey - good taste to the soul, quick energy to the body."

Words are powerful. We have the chance to say words that will bring life, give people energy. What an opportunity.

Saying nice things costs us nothing - but it can be priceless to the person receiving it.

Just like honey sweet and healing, our words can be healing. Let's try to make our speech a source of healing and sweetness in our relationships.

Application: say positive things. Imagine what this world would be like if we walked around blessing people all the time? I went to the grocery store and the lady who was helping me had nails that were all fancy with diamonds and stuff. So I said, "nice nails." Her whole countenance changed. She stood more straight, smiled and told me the story of her nails

We had an event last week for the condo next door. If you know me, you know I'm not really a dog person. But there were a couple of teenagers with a dog. So I went up to them and saw they had Jordans on. I said, "I see those shoes." They started smiling and we had a conversation.

Try "blessing" people. Be a blessing bandit. Just go around saying nice things to people. Especially your family. Kids... say nice things to your brothers and sisters. Say nice things to people at camp, people at school, people on your teams. Say nice things to your parents.

People who are older than kids. Say nice things to your kids. Say nice things to your friends, co-workers, your spouse, your parents.

Being gracious with our words is a great tool to have in the toolbox.

There's one more Proverb to look at, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1)

Words are powerful so be gentle.

BE GENTLE

John Ortberg in his book "I'd like you more if you were more like me" says that the right words spoken in the right way lower stress levels, which keep our hearts from racing and protects us from feeling flooded. It gives us a better chance to think about what we want to say.

Think back to the last time you argued with someone.

Think about how that conversation started and how it ended.

I was reading that 96% of the time it's possible to predict the outcome of a 15 minute conversation based on what happens in the first 3 minutes.

It usually ends the way it begins. If you start with defensiveness, criticism and blame, you'll probably end up there. If you start with grace, courage and honesty, you'll probably end up there.

Be gentle.

I joke around a lot - but sometimes humour and sarcasm can be used in a way to be unkind.

One of the ladies helping me with this sermon said the way you speak to your children will become the voice in their head. That's power

Be gentle.

That doesn't mean that you are vague or that you avoid things. It doesn't mean you go along with whatever or that you're weak. It means that you are mindful of things like your body language, your face and your voice so that your response opens up communication and doesn't shut it down.

There's an example of this in 1 Samuel 25

David is traveling from one place to another. He's passing by a guy named Nabal's property. Nabal is a rich guy and David sends some men to ask if Nabal can spare any food. Long story short, Nabal responds in a rude way.

David is angry and - Nabal's harsh word stirs up anger. David tells his men to get ready to go to war against Nabal. Nabal's wife hears about it and catches David before he gets to the town. She speaks wisely to David about not shedding blood and convinces him to leave it up to God - which he does. A gentle answer turns away wrath.

What if we worked on our communication so that we could have a tone that let people know that our goal is to deepen the relationship and not damage it?

Here's a hack I found in one of the books I was studying - try arguing in a whisper.

It will be hard to argue if you insist on being gentle, to answer softly. On the other hand, if you raise your voice, it's easy to see how it will trigger an angry response.

Try it

Even when you disagree with others you can still be gentle.

I was watching a show and in it, a husband and wife were about to have an argument. The husband froze the frame and said that because he knew his wife so well, he could say something to really hurt her, or he could take the high road. He said the hurtful thing. You Just like your family. The whole rest of the episode showed how they went back and forth hurting each other and saying really painful jabs. They drifted further and further apart. By the end their relationship was critically strained. Then, they reversed the whole episode and went back to that first moment. Instead of saying that hurtful jab, he said something like, 'oh babe, that sounds tough, I'm sorry that happened to you" She ran over and gave him a hug and they went on to have a nice evening.

What if, in that critical moment, we took a pause before we spoke, lowered our voices and were gentle with our words?

What types of bombs could we diffuse in our families, at jobs, with our friends, in our relationships?

We talked about the power of words.

We talked about how the tongue has the power of life and death so we need to be careful, gracious and gentle.

To take this further, we have some practical tools for you.

We're offering a Crucial Conversations Workshop. This two-part workshop will give you key insights and strategies to have difficult conversations. So go to our resource page and sign-up for this workshop using the QR code on the screen. This workshop is based on the book Crucial Conversations which you can also find on our resource page and purchase on your own. Another great resource is the book How to Have That Difficult Conversation. These tools can help you to grow in things like: confronting well, setting healthy boundaries and improving relationships.

Let me pray for you

Heavenly Father, we thank-you for relationships and we thank you for communication. Help us to use our words wisely. Help us to be gracious and gentle and careful. Fill our hearts with your Spirit so that we will love others with our words and so that they may bring healing and life. Thank-you Jesus for your example on how to love others. Thank-you Jesus for your love for us. Help us to draw closer to you - so that we may be closer with others.

In Jesus name, Amen