



LESSON 1: "A Man of His Word" **Date:** _____
KEY VERSE: Proverbs 18:21 – "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

INTRODUCTION

The college flute ensemble was always one of my favorite musical groups. The ensemble's lovely music was only matched by their breathtaking pink chiffon formals. Everyone anticipated a blessing when the 23 young ladies would walk out onto the stage. But you could almost hear the murmur when the final ensemble member entered from the wings. He wore a navy blue suit.

A friend of mine once shared a conversation that he had participated in at lunch following a particularly good flute ensemble number. Apparently one of the young ladies at his lunch table had been discussing what she assumed to be flaws in the character of the 24th member of the flute choir. As she openly castigated the unknown young man, my friend became somber and withdrawn. When the young lady had finally finished her discourse, my friend, who was wearing a navy blue suit, rather awkwardly told the young lady that he was member number 24. Her reaction was remarkable. She went from self-assured and boisterous to embarrassed, hurt, and withdrawn. She excused herself in shame and never finished her lunch. It wasn't until the next day that she learned that her lunch mate had never touched a flute in his life! She had been embarrassed by being the brunt of a joke, but she had also learned a great deal about the power of the tongue.

Proverbs has much to say about the use of the tongue, for the tongue is a study in contrasts. The tongue can both bless and destroy. The tongue can do good or evil. The tongue is an enormously powerful tool. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). In order to walk in wisdom we must guard our words.

Theme: Whether for good or for evil, you will be known by yours words.

Let's investigate the teaching of Proverbs regarding the danger and the blessing of words and attempt to identify exactly what would be called "good words." As we do so, let's begin by considering...

THE DANGER OF OUR WORDS

What would have happened if the young man from the flute choir actually had been at the lunch table with the thoughtless young lady? How would her comments have affected him? James says a great deal about the power of our words. He compares our words with a **fire** (James 3:6). Fire is necessary, but without proper control it can become one of the most destructive forces known to man. In the same way, our words can pose great danger.

1. **Words have power to deceive (Prov. 26:24-26).**

We need not tell a lie to deceive. Flattery, innuendo, inappropriate silence and false recommendations can deceive as certainly as a lie. In Romans 16:17-18 we discover that those who sow dissension and division among the brethren do so with "good words and fair speeches."

2. **Words have power to entice (Prov. 5:3-4).**

Virtually no one is exempt from the enticing power of the media. As the hunger pains mount, the television advertisements are certain to entice us with the delicious description of a freshly baked pizza. Who can resist such temptation? When you finally decide that your diet must start today, a well-intentioned friend will insist that you try just one delicious Toll House cookie. The Proverbs teach us that there are individuals who, through enticing words, can cause great pain. In Proverbs 5:3-4, the wise son is instructed to avoid the harlot, "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." The writer of the Proverbs does not deny the fact that the harlot's words are enticing. Throughout the Proverbs the strange woman is seen to use a flattering tongue to lead the wise son astray (7:5, 21). But no matter how enticing the words, the end must be kept in mind. The wise son must learn to consider the outcome of enticing words.

3. Words have power to entangle (Prov. 6:2).

All of us must carefully consider the messages that our words convey. We can literally become “tongue-tied” by the implications of our ill-thought words. All of us have met people who constantly over extend the truth in order to make themselves look good. With each passing day the compulsive braggart spins a web that will eventually lead to tragedy. How many young people have wrapped themselves up in their own words only to find themselves powerless over their own destiny? Be careful not to promise what you cannot, or should not, deliver.

4. Words have power to destroy (Prov. 11:9).

It takes some people longer than others to understand the enormous power of their words. Some never come to grips with the fact that the mouth is man’s strongest offensive weapon. There are some individuals who leave a path of carnage behind each conversation that they enter. When I was a junior in college, I was given the difficult task of informing another student of his brother’s death. It was one of the most difficult messages I have ever delivered. After the funeral I had the opportunity to speak with the grieving student. As he began to unfold the events leading up to his brother’s death, I came to know the full power of the tongue. An accident had very nearly ended his athletic 16-year-old brother’s life several months earlier, but miraculously his brother had survived, but the students in the high school to which the crippled youth returned mocked the recuperating athlete and began to call him, “The wimp with the limp.” In despair, my friend’s brother ended his life. Why?! Because words can destroy! Proverbs 11:9 says, “An hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor.”

We need to know that words can deceive, entice, entangle, and destroy. We will one day give account of every word spoken (Matt. 12:26). We are not known by our smile, our eyes, our profile—we are known by our words!

Transition: Realizing this, we must be careful to formulate our words so that they are the blessing that God intended.

Simply because we realize how powerful our words can be does not mean that we should avoid speaking altogether. Some groups have attempted to enforce prolonged periods of silence, but his is not God’s plan for our lives. The wise man can mold his speech into a great fountain of blessing. His conversations can become a source of refreshment, healing, and wisdom to men in great need.

1. Words can be a source of refreshment.

Have you ever considered the refreshing power of your words? Proverbs 10:11 compares the mouth of the righteous man to a “well of life” and Proverbs 10:21 says that “the lips of the righteous feed many.” We have all experienced this extraordinary power at some time in our life. Perhaps it was when you were just about to give up. Your coach screamed “You can do it” and the added boost helped you to put forth the effort to win. With the words “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11), Jesus was able to refresh the troubled soul. We must seek to refresh those around us. If we do so, our words will be a blessing.

2. Words can be a source of healing.

Phrases like “I care,” “I’ve been praying for you,” and “I love you” can help to heal great wounds. “The tongue of the wise is health” (Prov. 12:18). Many times our words can do more good than a doctor’s medicine, for “pleasant words are ... health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24). There is a tremendous ministry available to the man willing to administer healing words to the ailing soul.

3. Words can be a source of wisdom.

Godly, thoughtful, deliberate, honest, and loving words can be a great source of wisdom. Do people seek out your advice? Are you known for our good counsel? God gives men the ability to speak so that they can dispense wisdom. “In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found” (Prov. 10:13). Countless words are needed to construct a virtuous life. Are you a builder of the wise? Do you dispense wisdom?

Transition: Every word we speak is a potential blessing or a potential danger. This should cause us to seriously consider our words so that we can properly identify the right from the wrong.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF OUR WORDS

We don't have to guess which words to use. God has given us guidelines with which to discern good habits of conversation. Some of God's guidelines for determining what good words are and what good words are not are found in the Proverbs.

WHAT GOOD WORDS ARE —

1. **Good words are honest.**

Lies, half-truths, and "white lies" are not good words. Good words are honest (Prov. 24:25-28). You can't lie and be wise. You can't lie and remain free from the entangling power of your own words. In Ephesians 4:22-25, the New Testament believer is challenged to "put off the old man," and to "put on the new man." The very first characteristic of the new man is a willingness to "put away lying." Because Jesus is "The Truth" (John 14:6), His servants are to be people of truth!

2. **Good words are restrained.**

It is not always easy to restrain your tongue. At times it seems impossible. But you must keep it under control! "He that hath knowledge spareth his words" (Prov. 17:27). Good words are restrained for three good reasons.

- **Good words are restrained in order to be certain of the facts at hand.**

"He that answereth a matter before heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Prov. 18:13).

- **Good words are restrained in order to turn away wrath.**

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

- **Good words are restrained because silence can often be more powerful than unrestrained chatter.**

"By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Prov. 25:15).

The wise man that learns to restrain his words will find that he keeps friends and wins battles (Prov. 21:23).

3. **Good words are considered with care before they are put into the air.**

We must put our brain in gear before engaging our mouth. Thoughtless words are troublesome words and the "heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Prov. 15:28).

A professor once asked our class a when and where question for a quiz. I was so excited about the fact that I finally knew an answer that I wrote my response immediately. When the quizzes were graded, I learned a valuable lesson. My answer was wrong because I answered where and when not when and where. Yes, it was a little thing, but the value of thinking through a response was never forgotten!

4. **Good words are appropriate.**

A joke is inappropriate at a funeral! Words of anger are inappropriate at a wedding. The "Lips of the righteous know what is acceptable" (Prov. 10:32). Laughter does not seem fitting in a scene of violence nor jeering in scenes of despair. The wise man speaks good words because they are appropriate (Prov. 15:23, 25:11).

WHAT GOOD WORDS ARE NOT —

Proverbs teaches us through both positive and negative example. Here are some of the negatives.

1. **Good words are not a substitute for action.**

The man that says, "Do as I say not as I do" will have few followers. The authority of our instruction comes from the character of our actions. A preacher without a life to back up his sermon is a hypocrite. The parent who sets a bad example

provides a powerful pattern no matter how many fair speeches he offers in his home. “The talk of the lips tendeth to penury” (Prov. 14:23).

2. *Good words are not filled with boasting.*

You will never stay in tune with God if you are constantly “blowing your own horn” (Prov. 27:2 – “Let another man praise thee and not thine own lips.”). We learn not to boast when we consider the fact that we are not self-made but we are rather God-blessed. Cf. 1 Cor. 4:7—“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

3. *Good words are not forgotten.*

The stubborn soul turns away from reproof and falls headlong into failure (Prov. 29:19).

CONCLUSION

The tongue is a little member, but a powerful force. A word is a small noise, but it can move mountains. The wise man will understand the danger and the blessing of words. He will attempt to identify good words and in so doing he will become a “well of life” (Prov. 10:11).

Proverbs 18:21 – “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”