

Wisdom to Live By: Speech
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Many look to the New Year as an opportunity to make a change, to turn the tide in life. Instead of tumbling in the current, we want to surf a wave of success; maybe if we make some changes, some resolutions, in 2018 that's what will happen.

I don't think it's wrong to make New Year's resolutions; I think it's good and right to take stock of our lives from time to time, to do some self-evaluation, and then make the necessary changes (that's called repentance - we believe in that). But what does strike me as odd sometimes is that followers of Jesus seem to forget that God has given us the recipe, if you will, on what a successful life looks like. We tend to invent these formulas for life or adopt worldly values and strategies as if God hasn't laid out his a way of living that leads to a full life.

I want to draw your attention primarily to the Book of Proverbs these next 4 weeks to get at God's way towards a full life. Get this (I hope this rings true for you): we find a full and blessed life by seeking the wisdom of God in faith (REPEAT). Or let me say it another way and maybe a tad more provocatively: God's primary plan to help you, to encourage you, to resource you so you live a full, happy life is to give you wisdom to live by. God doesn't hand success on a silver platter; he hands wisdom on a silver platter and tells us when we follow that wisdom we'll find his blessings for life. We so often get that backwards; we're tempted to think that becoming a Christian automatically makes life easy. No, life, in fact, grows more challenging when we start following Jesus, but with his wisdom to live by we're given the necessary truth and direction to navigate troubled waters with the things we need.

One of the main reasons why we struggle through life is we neglect his wisdom. I hope this doesn't sound insensitive, but the first question we should ask ourselves when life isn't working well, when our relationships are in shambles, when we're lacking the finances we need, when we're filled with rage instead of peace, when we keep getting the short end of the stick at work, in the neighborhood, wherever - the first question we should ask ourselves when this is what our lives are like is: Am I living foolishly? Are my decisions reckless decisions? What mistakes am I making? Those kinds of questions aren't the ones we usually ask. We usually ask questions like: Why is this happening to me? Why does bad luck always find me? How come people are so unkind to me? We live as if we're passive victims who deserve better when we are active participants who largely pick the path we live based on what we believe is good.

Do you see the difference? We typically think our problems find us when in reality we oftentimes find our problems. Now, I'm nervous some of you might receive these words as punches to the gut. You're struggling and these words sound hurtful and insensitive rather than encouraging. Listen: I know sometimes our challenges find us; we didn't ask for them. Please hear me: not every problem or challenge is the result of our foolish decisions. And our struggles are not punishments from God; Jesus died for our sins so we've never have to experience

God's punishment. Sometimes, friends, hardships, challenges, trials find us by the good, sovereign purposes of God and not because we acted foolishly. But, I think if we're honest we'd have to admit that we oftentimes make these unwanted and unwelcome trials and hardships more difficult than they need to be by responding and reacting to them in foolish ways. We need to get over our pride and humbly admit that we are more foolish than we should be. And yes, God still loves me and yes, there's still hope for me even though I've acted foolishly; that's where forgiveness comes in. We'll be stuck in cycles of foolishness if we can't admit that we do act foolishly and then learn from those mistakes.

I remember spending time with a person many years ago who was struggling with almost every kind of challenge you could imagine. His important relationships were in jeopardy, his employer was about to let him go, money was tight, his health was deteriorating, and maybe worst of all was his mental health; he was plagued with depression, anxiety, and despondency; he was afraid God was through with him. As he recounted the last year of his life it became so clear; clear to me, but not to him. So I tried to lovingly tell him, "Don't you see?" All of his trouble, struggles, and pain were due to his own foolish decisions. The fruit of his foolish life was piling upon his shoulders and became a weight he could not bear. The solution was simple (but incredibly difficult because it required wholesale repentance): start living wisely. Turn away from a life of folly and be wise. Believe (you see, it's a matter of faith!) that God's way leads to life and when you go against God's way you find death.

So, I have 4 areas I want to highlight that are critically important to experience a blessed life. When I mean blessed I have Prov. 22:4 in mind, which reads, "The reward (the fruit) for humility and fear of the Lord (that's what it means to be wise - to fear the Lord) is riches and honor and life." So, wisdom leads to godly riches, honor, and life. Now, think of those things in a biblical way, not in some selfish, sanitized American Dream way. This isn't some promise of health and wealth; this is truth from God that says when we live a life that fears God in every aspect, with a life stripped of selfishness, we find the resources, honor, the full life in the Spirit that we long for. I want that, I hope you want that. Over the next 4 weeks we are going to study what the book of Proverbs says about speech, finances, purity, and anger. When you and I are foolish in speech, finances, purity, and anger things will not go well for us. But on the contrary, when we're wise with speech, finances, purity, and anger we will enjoy the blessings of God.

So, what does Proverbs say about speech? The first thing I want to show you is that Proverbs says the exact same thing Jesus says. You might remember that Jesus said what comes out of our mouths originates from our hearts. That there's this direct connection between what I really think and feel and believe and my words. Yes, sure, I can fake it for a while, but in time my heart is made known by the words that come out of my mouth. Proverbs says the same thing. Consider these two verses:

- Prov. 17:20, "A man of crooked heart does not discover good, and one with a dishonest tongue falls into calamity."
- Prov. 16:23, "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips."

Do you see how in both of these passages there is a connection between our hearts and our words both with good and evil? A crooked heart and dishonest tongue are put in parallel, which means we're supposed to see those as connected. And my crooked heart, my dishonest tongue brings calamity. The same thing is true in ch. 16. A person with a wise heart has judicious speech. A woman with a wise heart uses her words carefully to persuade others with all purity. How might she do that? With soft, inviting words; encouraging words; words that build up and strengthen rather than tear down.

We're always tempted to blame others just like our first parents; and our culture is growing more fondly of this victimhood mentality. Friends resist this. Your words come from your heart. Own your words; take responsibility for them. When they are mean-spirited and cruel, repent unto God. When your lips are dishonest, see that it comes from a heart that is willing to lie to get it's way. Plead to God for help as you rejoice that there's forgiveness from Jesus for such sins. Resist blaming others when your words cause trouble.

And they do cause trouble, don't they? Can you remember times when your mouth got you into trouble? Oh boy, can I ever. My whole life I've struggled with my words. Prov. 12:18 says, "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Several years ago Korby and I went to my 20th HS reunion. And while I was there I was reminded of some of the stupid things I had said when I was younger. I remembered some of them myself; when I saw certain people I wondered, "Do they remember those things I once said? I they still hurt by them?" They were sword thrusts into their soul. Also, my old HS friends would recount to me some of the things I said, but I didn't remember. They'd say, "Brian, do you remember when you said?" Or "I remember you telling me, Brian." When my buddy Mike recounted some of my words I kept on saying, "No, I didn't say that, I did?" "Did I really say that?" over and over again. Why was I so careless with my words?

Prov. 12 calls them rash words. Words that come out of your mouth with little thought or consideration. Sometimes, we don't mean our words to be inconsiderate, right? But they are more often than we like. That's why I love Prov. 10:19, which says, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent."

What a treasure of a verse. Here's what you can count on, FBC: the more you talk the more likely you're going to sin. There's this 1 to 1 correlation between sin and our lips. As our lips keep flapping, we're more likely to sin. It's going to happen. And we are responsible for careless words, friends. Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak." Careless words - we will answer for them. Friends, some of us (I'm included in this) just need to quit talking so much. Really. We need to learn to button our lips. I know this is a word for all of us here this morning, but this is a special word for some us. Those of us who use words to fill empty space; who use words to try and get

ourselves out of trouble; who think our words will smooth things over. Those of us who think we know so much and we can't help but tell other people what we think we know. Memorize Prov. 10:19, "When words are many transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." Learn to restrain your lips, friends. Learn to put a stop on your mouth. Learn to be a listener; learn to ask good questions to others to get others to talk (so they sin and not you!).

Now, can I qualify this quickly. Some of you need to talk more, not less. Some of you aren't tempted to talk your way out of trouble or to use your many words to draw all kinds of prideful attention to yourself; instead, you're tempted never to share what you're really feeling and thinking; you're afraid to be vulnerable and you know that if you share what's really going on inside you'll be left exposed and you won't dare do that. But you need to, my dear friends. You've locked yourself in a prison out of fear. You're right, the world is dangerous. But you're wrong thinking you can protect yourself. You can't. What you can do is trust God with your future and you can begin doing that by opening up and putting words to your fears. There are trusted people you can talk to who will point you to God's provision, but you have to start sharing your heart. I share that briefly because I don't want some of you to hear this important warning about restraining our lips and be more convinced that you shouldn't share what your feeling.

Another way our words get us into trouble is through deceit. The book of Proverbs repeatedly cautions us about lying. Here are a few examples.

- Prov. 12:19 - Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.
- Prov. 26:28 - A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.
- Prov. 20:17 - Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.
- Prov. 6:12, 15 - A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech... therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.

We've all been there, right? We want that thing, that praise, that attention. And it doesn't look like we're going to get it. So, what might we do? We might just lie; "Did you put this together?" "Why, yes; yes I did" when George is the one who put it together, but I want the praise. Or maybe we're afraid. We know we shouldn't have gone to that website, we know we're going to get that disapproving look or those corrective words so we answer, "No, that wasn't me." We are constantly tempted to lie with our lips.

One of the things I love about Proverbs is that embedded in the word of wisdom are some incentives. Did you see the motivation in the verses I listed before that will help us fight our temptation to lie? Let me show you.

- Prov. 12:19 - Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Lying will only help us for a moment or two. But down the road it makes the problem so much bigger. Don't sacrifice forever, eternity, for just a moment, FBC. Tell the truth.

- Prov. 26:28 - A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin. So get what this passage is saying: when we lie we are expressing hatred towards others. We flatter with our speech because we want to please people, but lying to them only hurts them. Tell yourself: every time I lie I'm working ruin in my life and the life of other people.
- Prov. 20:17 - Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel. What a great word picture, right? That's why we lie; we want a reward and that reward, we think, will taste sweet. But it won't taste sweet; it will be like having a mouth full of gravel. I'm going to choke and gag. Lying will not get me what I really want and need.
- Prov. 6:12, 15 - A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech... therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing. Look what will happen to us when we have crooked speech: disaster will come upon us. Our lies cause damage that can't be fixed.

Now, let's think about that for a minute. We teach and preach a gospel, a faith, that forgives sins. We teach and preach a gospel of second chances. Yes, let's rejoice in that. But that doesn't mean there are not enduring scars from our sin. Betrayal, lies are one of those things that certainly can be forgiven, but lies also erode trust. And while a relationship can be mended and restored after lies, chances are the relationship will always look differently. The trust that is damaged through lies is not easily built up again. Yes, there is forgiveness, but there is also enduring damage.

God tells us these things on purpose. He's trying to motivate us towards the truth and away from lies. He wants to spare us the damage our lies might do and he wants to encourage truth telling.

Here's what I'm hoping: I'm hoping that hearing God's wisdom this morning about our speech is an invitation towards repentance. Friends, repentance leads to life. Will you join me in prayerfully asking God to help us with our tongue. Let's pray that we believe the warnings. Let's pray we believe the glorious reward in following God's wisdom. Let's begin living wisely by watching what we say always using our words judiciously to encourage others and never to lie.

Key Vs. Prov. 10:19

Questions for the week

- Pastor Brian said something like God doesn't offer a blessed life, he offers wisdom that leads to a blessed life. What do you think of that? If that's true, what does that mean for how you live your life?
- How has your words or speech impacted your life for the better or worse?
- What changes would you like to make because of this sermon? Share that with another.