

Proverbs 18:21

Everyday Wisdom: Wise Words

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On a Podcast I listened to recently one of the speakers talked about **barnacles**. Did you know that the **U.S. Navy** reports Barnacles can **slow down nuclear-powered ships** by as much as **40%**? Barnacles diminish the **arrow-dynamics** of boats, get **inside engines**, add **weight** on the **hull**, and can even **crack** the hull with **smaller vessels**. Barnacles **expand** and **breed** constantly and the navy spends **\$500 million** a year to scrape barnacles off ships. Are your **words** the **nuclear energy** that gives your **family, friends, workplace, and church** power? Or are they **barnacles**? Words can give us **life** or **slow us down**.¹

Proverbs 18:21

The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit. (NIV)

Your tongue can help **grow healthy life-giving fruit**, or it can **burn down the forest** (James 3:5-6). In our series on Proverbs we've encountered **lady wisdom** who speaks what is **good** and **true**. Hear what she says.

Proverbs 8:6-8

6 Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say;
I open my lips to speak what is right.
7 My mouth speaks what is true,
for my lips detest wickedness.
8 All the words of my mouth are just;
none of them is crooked or perverse. (NIV)

Lady wisdom is a **metaphor** for God **himself** one day fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 11:19). The words she speaks are the words **God speaks**, inviting us to speak words that **mirror Christ's goodness and character**. This stands in stark contrast to **lady folly**.

Proverbs 9:13

Folly is an unruly woman;
she is simple and knows nothing. (NIV)

Lady folly represents **Satan**, sin, and his powers, which are completely different than God's goodness. When we speak **Godly words** we pump **Godly power** and **goodness** into those around us. But when we use the **words of his enemy**, we become like **barnacles**, **multiplying** and **spreading** and causing **destruction**. So how can you know if your words are **of God** or in **opposition** to him? How can you know if your words are **nuclear power** or a **barnacle** slowing down the ship?

Foolish words cause harm.

When we say the wrong things it can **destroy a relationship**.

Proverbs 25:23

Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain
is a sly tongue—which provokes a horrified look. (NIV)

“Sticks and stones may **break my bones**, but words will **always crush my spirit**.” Words can destroy relationships, but also **institutions**, like a **business, government, or church**.

Proverbs 11:11

Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. (NIV)

When **Director J.J. Abrams** was filming **Star Wars Episode VII** he put up a **poster** at **Pinewood Studios** that said “**Loose lips bring down starships**” referencing posters from **WWII**.² **Darth Vader**’s hand is **muffling** the mouth of the **officer** who shared the plans to the Death Star. Abrams had a lot of visitors while filming the first movie and he made them all sign **non-disclosure agreements** (NDAs). If they told people what they saw, it could **spoil everything**.³ What we do with our words can bring our starship down too.

So **what type** of words am I talking about? **What are foolish words?**

Lies

A lie is anytime we **intentionally** say something that **isn’t true**. I don’t feel comfortable calling something a lie if it was **completely unintentional**. I think a better word for that is “**misspoken**.” Even **worse** than a lie is deceit. **Deceit** is when we intentionally **mislead** someone, with or without a lie. But where do lies and deceit come from? Proverbs tell us they are **symptoms** of a **sick heart**.

Proverbs 26:24-26

24 Enemies disguise themselves with their lips,
but in their hearts they harbor deceit.
25 Though their speech is charming, do not believe them,
for seven abominations fill their hearts.
26 Their malice may be concealed by deception,
but their wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. (NIV)

If you’re someone who **lies** or **distorts the truth**, it’s time to get your **heart checked**. I was reading Tremper Longman III’s commentary on *Proverbs* as I prepared again this week and he said that Proverbs **warns** us not only to not lie but also to not be too **quick to believe** what others say, to use **discernment** (*Proverbs* p. 562).⁴ Lying leads to **consequences**.

Proverbs 19:5

A false witness will not go unpunished,
and whoever pours out lies will not go free. (NIV)

Not only might you end up guilty in a **court-of-law** but **before God himself**. Lying doesn’t reflect the **heart of God**. It reflects the **heart of Satan**. **Jesus** said this about the **devil**.

John 8:44b He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (NIV)

Lies and deception are foolish words. Foolish words cause harm. Trust is the **foundation** of relationship and when you don’t have trust **relationship breaks down**. What **other** foolish words are there?

Gossip

Gossip is **what other people do...** and **let me tell you about it**. There’s **something about gossip** that makes it **easier** to identify **when others are doing it**, but incredibly **difficult to admit** when I’m doing it. Maybe

even when you saw the words “gossip” on the screen a **face popped** into your **mind**, someone you think is a **gossip**. Well I want to take that face and **replace it with your own** and ask yourself, “**Do I gossip?**” and “**How do I gossip?**” It helps to **define gossip**.

Gossip: saying something negative about anyone or anything to someone who can't do anything about it. (Stephen Mansfield - *The EntreLeadership Podcast #303*)

Inevitably you're going to have a conversation sometime soon that you will think **might be gossip**. When that happens here's what you should do. Say, “Can we **pause this conversation?** I recently heard a **sermon** about **gossip** and I've **felt convicted** to try not to **do it anymore**. **Before we talk further** can we run what we're about to talk about through my definition of gossip?” I doubt they'll say “no.” Then you say, “My definition of gossip is saying something negative about anyone or anything to someone who can't do anything about it. What do you think?” Hopefully this will **spark a conversation without accusing** anyone.

This isn't the **perfect definition**, but Proverbs helps us think it out one step further. I've taken what I've learned from Proverbs about gossip and summarized it with **Four Questions to Identify Gossip**:

1. Is it juicy?

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;
they go down to the inmost parts. (NIV)

Gossip can be a **lie**, a **made-up** or **twisted story**, it can also be **true**, but it's always something “**juicy**.” It's **sweet**. It's **interesting**. Your **ears perk up**. Oh, I **can't believe that happened!** **Tell me more**. It's almost always something **negative** (and I'd add **personal**). We don't tend to gossip about **positive things**.⁵

2. Is it secretive?

Proverbs 20:19

A gossip betrays a confidence;
so avoid anyone who talks too much. (NIV)

Gossip is when we tell information to people who **can't do anything about it** (or **shouldn't do anything about it**). It's **secretive in nature**. The **information** is secretive and the **act of telling** is **private**. It's said **behind closed doors** or in **hushed voices**. Apparently “**spilling tea**” is **slang** for gossip these days. That's what gossip is, a **spilling of secrets** (Prov 11:13). Proverbs warns us to **avoid those who spill tea**.

3. Does it stir up trouble?

Proverbs 16:28

A perverse person stirs up conflict,
and a gossip separates close friends. (NIV)

At first it might seem like gossip **doesn't hurt anyone** but it **sows seeds of resentment**. *So if it is juicy, secretive, or stirs up trouble, it's probably gossip*. But the **best way** to tell if something is gossip is to examine the heart.

4. Where's your heart?

Proverbs 26:23

Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware
are fervent lips with an evil heart. (NIV)

We gossip to **put others down** and **make ourselves feel big**. Gossip reflects a **heart-attitude** of **restlessness** and **dissatisfaction** with what God has **given us**. Although it's **not good** it makes sense that the world **loves gossip**. They don't know God. But we do. So if you're **prone to gossip**, the **cure is loving God** and **finding your satisfaction in him**. Gossip is **found in the heart** and **poisons** the heart. **Don't play** with poison.

Proverbs 26:20

Without wood a fire goes out;
without a gossip a quarrel dies down. (NIV)

Norman Rockwell was probably the most famous **American illustrator** who created covers for the **Saturday Evening Post**. He **depicted** normal scenes in everyday life. One of his most famous paintings is "**The Gossips**." The painting starts at the top left with the gossip who shares her **juicy tidbit**, and you can watch as the **news passes** from one person to the next through a game of "**telephone**."⁶ See how **it takes two to gossip**. These are paintings of **actual people** who lived in **Stockton Massachusetts**, Norman Rockwell's **friends and neighbors**. He painted his **wife** in the **third row** in the **second** and **third columns**. She's the woman with **brown hair** and a **telephone**. He **painted himself** too. He's the **brunt** of the gossip in the bottom right hand corner. You can see him getting **upset** at the woman who started it all. That woman was **actually hurt** by being painted this way. See! Even a **painting** of gossip can hurt a real relationship! When this picture was originally published **thousands** of people wrote letters asking what the gossip was. *Foolish words cause harm*. This painting recently sold for \$8.5 million.⁷ *Gossip is juicy*.

Slander

Slander is when we **intentionally** say things to not just deceive but to actually **harm others**.

Proverbs 10:18

Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips
and spreads slander is a fool. (NIV)

Today you can get sued for **defamation**, for hurting a **reputation**. Slander is like **gossip on steroids**. But maybe you don't lie or gossip or slander, but you do **talk too much** and you're **not a good listener**.

Speaking Hastily / Not Listening

Talking **too much** and **never stopping** to listen is also **foolishness**.

Proverbs 29:20

Do you see someone who speaks in haste?
There is more hope for a fool than for them. (NIV)

You're more likely to **lie** or **misspeak** or **gossip** if you're **not listening** and **talking too much**. So what can we do? **Talk less. Listen more. Speak words of life!** *Foolish words cause harm but...*

Wise words give life.

Wise words also spring forth from the heart (Prov 16:23).

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers,
but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil. (NIV)

What's on the inside will come out and hopefully it's good. When our hearts are in the right place we're going to talk differently. Our words are going to give life. So **what type of words** will we say?

Truthful

Truthful words are words that **accurately reflect reality**—**no distortion, no lies, no misrepresentation**, no making yourself **look better** than you actually are, just a **real** picture of what's really going on (Prov 14:25).⁸

Proverbs 12:19

Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. (NIV)

As one poster said, "**Speak with integrity**" and "**Say only what you mean.**"⁹ If **Satan** is the **father of lies** who is the truth? **Jesus!**

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (NIV)

With Jesus there's **no shadow**, no deceit, no gossip, just truth (James 1:17). It's **through Jesus** that we can know **ultimate truth**, ultimate **reality**. It's through him that we can have a **true relationship with God**. It's through him that we can **change** from **gossips** and **liars** to people that *speak truth*.

Wise words are not just about being truthful. We also need to speak truth **when others can hear it**.¹⁰

Timely

Tremper writes, "A wise word is one that is spoken at the right time. Good words are not inherently good; they must be spoken at the appropriate time." (*Proverbs* p. 571)

Proverbs 15:23

A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—
and how good is a timely word! (NIV)

If you yell "**I love you!**" at your spouse at **5am** it might be **true** but it's **not** going to **go over well** (Prov 27:14). Sometimes we need to **speak truth** to someone but **can't do so right away**. This might be the **most tempting time** to gossip. It **takes wisdom** to know when to **speak** and to know when to be **quiet** and **listen** (Prov 19:20; 26:9). Listening can **earn the opportunity to be heard**. *Wise words are timely and...*

Trustworthy (person)

It's about **character**. Wise people **speak words** that are **true** and are **themselves trustworthy people**.

Proverbs 11:13

A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. (NIV)

When you need **private advice** who do you go to that you know will **keep your confidence**? **Be that person**. Wise words are truthful, timely, trustworthy, and...

Encouraging

We have so many ways we can speak life into each other's lives.

Proverbs 12:25

Anxiety weighs down the heart,
but a kind word cheers it up. (NIV)

As a **new church** we have the **opportunity** to create a **new culture**, a new **DNA**. Let's create a **culture of encouragement**. Let's make visitors sense our **love** and **support** for each other (Eph 4:29; Titus 3:2). **One of the ways** we can encourage each other is by **sharing good news**.

Proverbs 15:30

Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart,
and good news gives health to the bones. (NIV)

As Christians we have the opportunity to be the **most encouraging** people on **planet earth** because we have the **best news of all**, the **news about Jesus**, the **gospel**. We have the good news that **Jesus died** and **rose again** and **whoever believes in him** will **not perish** but have **eternal life** (John 3:16).

Jesus is God's Word given for us.

If it's the **heart** that **produces foolish words** or the heart that produces **wise words** how can we **change our hearts** so we speak wise words? Well... we can't. **But Jesus can!** *Jesus is God's word come to rescue us.*

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV)

This means **the things Jesus spoke** are the **things God spoke**. This is so because Jesus is the **revelation** (or word) of God. It's **through Jesus** that we can **know** and **talk to God**. It's through Jesus that we can **hear God**. Even though Jesus is the word of God, and **had every right to speak and shout God's truth, what did he do for us?** **Jesus, the Word of God, became silent.**

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth. (NIV)

Jesus, the Son of God, the only one who has the right to speak, didn't protest as he was lead to the **cross, crucified, and died**. He **died quietly** to **forgive** us for all our **noise**. If you say a **prayer**, you don't even have to say it **out-loud**, of **repentance** and **faith** in him, if you tell him you **believe him** and **everything written** about him, he will come and **rescue you, give you eternal life**, and begin to **change you** from the **inside out**. **Christ came to save the liars and gossips and slanderers** and those who **speak too much** and have **trouble listening**. But he **won't leave us that way**. He came to **change us**. If you **need changing**, let's take a moment to **silently pray to receive Christ's forgiveness... amen**.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

¹ In this sermon I draw heavily on Tremper Longman III's commentary on Proverbs, especially his sections on: appropriate use of words (p. 551), lies (p. 562), rumors/gossip/slander/insult (p. 568), and speaking and listening (p. 570).

² Twitter. Frank Marshall @LeDoctor. Published October 6, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2019. https://twitter.com/LeDoctor/status/519221068767047680?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E519221068767047680&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.slashfilm.com%2Fj-j-abrams-spoiler-star-wars-7-poster%2F

³ *POTD: JJ. Abrams' On-Set 'Star Wars Episode VII' Spoiler Poster*. Slash Film. Published October 6, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://www.slashfilm.com/j-j-abrams-spoiler-star-wars-7-poster/>

⁴ Tremper Longman III. *Proverbs*. Page 562.

⁵ Phil Fox Rose, *The Gossip Test – How to tell if your interest is justified*. Patheos. Published October 10, 2012. Accessed October 12, 2019. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/philfoxrose/2012/10/i-probably-shouldnt-tell-you-this/>

⁶ Painting Tour: “The Gossips” (1948) Norman Rockwell Museum. Youtube. Published November 4, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VwcCv9HBDS>

⁷ Sotheby's. Norman Rockwell: 1894 - 1978. *The Gossips*. Published December 4, 2013. Accessed October 10, 2019. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/american-art-n09048/lot.16.html>

⁸ Tremper Longman III. *Proverbs*. Page 571.

⁹ Comes from “The Four Agreements” one page summary poster. *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom (A Toltec Wisdom Book)* by Don Miguel Ruiz. I have not read this book but I thought I should at least give credit to where the ideas of this sentence seem to have originated from.

¹⁰ Tremper Longman III. *Proverbs*. Page 571.