

Mastering my Mouth

Proverbs 12:13-20 and 15:1?

Last week Wally started us off on our quick run through the book of Proverbs by taking a look at the major theme that runs through most of the book – *wisdom*. Solomon wrote in 2:2, “*Tune your ears to the world of wisdom; set your heart on a life of understanding.*” These words almost sound discordant in our world today. I suppose I must be getting old, but as I look at the way our western world is going with the cult of the celebrity and the pursuit of the frivolous, I really fear for our society. ‘Tune your ears to the world of wisdom?’ I don’t see much of that, do you? “Set your heart on a life of understanding?” More likely people today will set their heart on 15 minutes of fame. In our technologically advanced times we desperately need the ancient Wisdom of Solomon to illuminate our lives. I suppose if I’d to sum up Proverbs in a few words I would say that it is wisdom to live by in our everyday lives.

A number of years ago I was conducting a funeral and at the wake afterwards an extremely successful businessman came over to speak to me. By his own admission he wasn’t a Christian but he told me that every single morning in life, no matter where he was or what pressure he was under, he took time out to sit quietly and read and meditate upon a few verses from the Proverbs. He said to me that much of the foundation for his success came from the wisdom contained in this book. The Wisdom of Solomon is not just for believers.

You see the wisdom of Proverbs is practical; it’s detailed; it’s fearless; it’s probing; its accessible to everyone; it is truth. I’m excited about this series and I’ll tell you why. Over the next few weeks on Sunday mornings you are going to

be exposed to foundational teaching that has the potential to change the way you think. Teaching on relationships, money management, time management and tongue management! Today it's the matter of mastering our mouths.

I suppose the most famous passage on the tongue is in James 3 where James says that the equivalent of a great forest fire can be set alight by the tiny little tongue. If its not controlled, or mastered, it can cause devastation and inject poison into situations. We know from experience that James is right! I remember one time when May and I went on holiday. Before we left May had stocked up the fruit bowl for our children who weren't coming with us. However, when we came back a fortnight later the bowl seemed strangely undisturbed! May lifted up the top apple, which looked okay on top, but underneath it was rotten. Every single apple had been tainted by one at the bottom that had started to become over ripe. You know what its like. It might have looked nice but the reality was that the old cliché was true - one bad apple had spoiled the whole bunch.

It's much the same with the words we use. One careless or hurtful word can wreak havoc in a church or a marriage or a working relationship. In fact wherever people get together. Our words can destroy so much that is good. As we heard in our reading from [Prov 12:18](#), "*Rash language cuts and maims...*" That's fairly outrageous words, isn't it? Reckless words pierce like a sword.

You know reckless words can come out in many ways. One of the most obvious is in temper tantrums and in December Pete Watson will be looking at the

subject of 'Taming my Temper' so I'm not going to cover that today except to say that *losing your temper is a choice*. I hear people who have volatile tempers saying, "Oh its just my personality," or, "I can't help it it's the way I was brought up." No, that is just so much nonsense. Let's call it for what it is. It's not your personality, its sin. It's not your parents' fault – its sin! You might easily forget words spoken in the middle of a temper tantrum but they can leave devastation behind them by those you chose to abuse in this way. The start to overcoming the curse of a bad temper is to call it for what it is – SIN. Pete will elaborate I'm sure in a few weeks time.

For me, and maybe for many people here this morning, a bad temper is not the problem. We perhaps feel a bit superior because we don't tend to explode in anger. I can count on one hand the number of times I've completely lost my temper – that's not an issue I struggle with at all. Where I do struggle is with the temptation to cut people down with a quiet, sarcastic comment. I don't go for the machete, I prefer the stiletto. I prefer to slip in the dagger with a few well-chosen words that can cut a person to the core. That's my struggle. Let's call *that* what it is – it's SIN! It can wreak as much havoc in a church as volatility. Let's not make the mistake of thinking that because someone doesn't shout that they're not doing any damage. Regardless of whether we are shouters or subtle assassins we need to learn to master our mouths? How do we do it? Let's get practical.

???. Our First Task Is To Identify The Toxic Words In Our Speech And Get Rid Of ?Them.??

My mother was a very gracious and peace-loving woman and she always encouraged me in that direction as well. One of the ways she encouraged me, and this is true, was to pin Bible verses onto the toilet door in big letters. One of the verses that sunk into my consciousness over the years of reading every day was Proverbs 15:1, *“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”??*

Now I know that the ‘soft answer’ can be misconstrued as weakness but I can assure you from years of endeavouring to follow that instruction – it takes real strength *not* to fly off the handle and snap back an angry response. Looking for the soft answer is the *hard* option and only for people with real backbone. Try it next time someone has a go at you. Watch their response. I remember sitting at a board meeting led by our managing director who was a particularly volatile character. He once picked up the phone when I was in his office and threw it straight through the window in a temper rage. That’s the type of guy he was. Well anyway, at the meeting he was having a real go at the Chief Engineer who had made some suggestions for improving a situation. He yelled at him, “Oh, so you think you can do my job. Well let’s swap for a week. I’ll do your job and you do mine and we’ll see how you get on.” Without a trace of anger the Chief Engineer quietly said, “David, I’m sure you could do my job but I couldn’t possibly do yours.” It immediately defused the whole situation. His soft words stopped the anger almost immediately. Try it.

The types of toxic words we need to get rid of from our own lives are:

1. Name Calling – all the usual racist and xenophobic words but also other words that are more subtle but still are hurtful. "Stupid - Idiot - Worthless". Name calling focuses on the character of the individual rather than on the particular problem at hand. For example, "You're a liar" instead of "You lied."
2. Words that wear down the soul - Some words are just ugly and negative. "Shut up" - "Swear words" - "Vulgar words"??
3. Words that take the heart out of people. One such word is "divorce" when used by a couple when fighting. It's like pulling out a gun in the middle of an argument. The argument shifts from the argument to the gun. It becomes a life and death struggle.
4. Words that overstate the point. When you are upset - its easy to exaggerate. "Never" – You're never on time. "Always" – You're always late. "Just like" – You're just like your mother. Exaggerations leave little room for hope. Nobody is always late - nobody is just like anybody?? else.
5. Words that rub salt into a wound. - bringing up "old business."; "old mistakes."; "old fights"; "old differences" ; "old failures"; "old sins"; "past unfaithfulness". Recalling past issues, unless the intent is to bring a resolution to it, is bad news. Get rid of them.

I believe, as Christians, that we need consider four things before we say anything to anybody. We need to ask ourselves:

#1: Is It True? #2: Is It Complete? #3: Is It Necessary? #4: Is It Kind?

Prov 10:11 *"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.."*

Prov 10:19 *"When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise."*

Prov 11:9 *"With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbour...."*

Ephesians 4:15 *'Speak the truth in love that we may be more like Christ.'*

Prov 15:23 *"A man finds joy in giving an apt reply: and how good is a timely word!???"*

Very briefly in closing I want to mention two more dangers of negative talk.

Two more reasons to master my mouth. The first is this:

1. If we constantly misuse our mouths to gossip, lie, swear, abuse and so on the principle of sowing and reaping will kick in eventually. You will be judged in exactly the area where you abuse others. Think about this, do you know a single person with a volatile temper who is actually a happy person? Do you know a popular gossip? Do you know a liar who is content? If you persist in speaking toxic words your mouth will be your master.

2. I have a great concern, especially in Christian circles, that there is too much negative talk goes on about ourselves. We actually speak failure into our own lives never mind anyone else's.
 - I'll never achieve this.
 - I'm hopeless at that.
 - I could never do that because I'm just not gifted enough.
 - I'm too old. I'm too young.

If we continue to abuse ourselves with negative thinking and negative speaking we will consistently fail to achieve our true potential and it will be no-one's fault except our own. Of all people, we should be the most positive in our thoughts and our language. Our sins are forgiven, we have a loving Father, we have all been given abundant gifts from God, we have a loving family around us, we have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What is there to be negative about and to talk ourselves down? Remember 'Careless talk costs lives!'

I want to ask you all this morning to go easy on yourselves and others. Start to love yourselves a bit more. Start telling yourselves, out loud if necessary, that you are abundant children of God. Start mastering your mouth from this day forward. OFFER PRAYER