

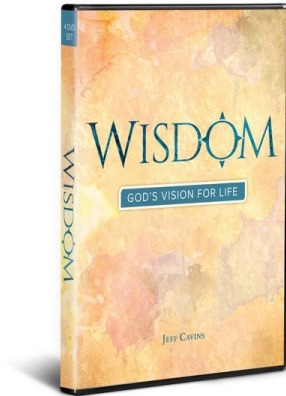
The Power of Words - A Reflection on the Bible Study on Wisdom

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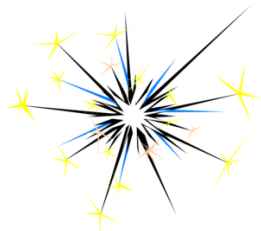
In the Great Adventure Bible Study on Wisdom, I was fascinated by the sages who taught us about the power of words in the Old Testament. In our contemporary world, the wisdom of speech is not obsolete, but the treasure which we should value and explore deeper into.

“Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment,
and do not hide your wisdom,
For wisdom becomes known through speech,
and education through the words of the tongue.
Never speak against the truth,
but be ashamed of your ignorance.” (Sirach 4:23-25)

“Stand firm for what you know,
and let your speech be consistent.
Be quick to hear,
but deliberate in answering.” (Sirach 5:10-11)



In the era of social media, our daily lives are flooded and bombarded with verbal messages sent through different media platforms. However, words are now passed across any moral and behavioural boundaries and delivered from one to another in an irresponsible manner. Thus, instead of praising and complimenting each other, words become weapons which destroy one's reputation and confidence easily. Those who abuse the power of speech and attack others with words not only create wounds that last for a long while, but also bring about mental and physical conflict and harm.



“If you blow on a spark, it will glow;
If you spit on it, it will be put out;
Yet both come out of your mouth.
Curse the gossips and the double-tongued;
For they destroy the peace of many.” (Sirach 28:12-13)

In British Columbia, it was reported that most of the deadly forest fires just started by mere sparks resulted from lightning or from the smokers' or picnickers' negligence. How true are the words of James: “See how small a fire it takes to set a great forest ablaze!” (James 3:5). The point of James' illustration is made clear in verse 6. “The tongue is also a fire.” Like fire, our speech has the potential for causing great harm. The Bible even says that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21) It does not mean that we stop talking just because of being afraid of saying something harmful as like our refusing to use fire because we fear the damage it might cause. The key is to control. If we tame our tongue, we can use its power to honour God and to benefit others.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalms 19:14)

A general of King Solomon sought to learn the way of becoming a sage like his king. He humbly asked a meditation master who lived in the wilderness. The general asked respectfully, "Master, how can I become a sage?" The master kept his eyes shut and held silence. As the general lost patience and waited no longer, the master opened his eyes. He glared and shouted all in a sudden, "You idiot! What a silly question you have asked of me?"

Enraged, the general whipped out of his sword and bawled, "How dare you insult me? I am going to kill you!"

"See, you are far from being a sage! To become a sage, you should know how to control your emotion and your tongue."

The master's reply shocked the general who immediately sheathed his sword. "I'm so sorry! Please forgive me for my outrage!" The master replied, "Ah, the door of wisdom is now opened to you!"



The words we verbalize are powerful. On one hand, our speech can ignite hatred and violence. On the other hand, it can bring reconciliation, and even awaken the truth within us.

"Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12:18)

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise rebuke to a listening ear." (Proverbs 25:11-12)

It is so true that our words are invisible weapons with the power to penetrate deep within our human souls. Abusive messages such as slander, insult and abusive language create wounds which are difficult to heal, and even potentially destroy lives. Hurtful words linger years after being spoken, causing the recipients to struggle with sadness, helplessness, loneliness, or simply withdraw from the communities. As many people define themselves as self-worth according to the secular standards, their exposure to abusive speech will adversely influence their ways of seeing and valuing themselves.

Jessica Laney, 16, was found dead at her home in Hudson, Florida, on a Sunday night in 2012 after users on social networking sites branded her 'fat', a 'slut' and tormented her over her looks and love life. The abusive messages on the teen's profile online pushed Jessica over the edge. Several similar suicide cases were reported in recent years. One happened in October, 2017 that a 14-year-old-boy shot and killed two classmates and injured four others in Brazil after being continually teased by the classmates. Not long after, a 13-year-old California girl killed herself in November, 2017. She had been bullied through years by callous comments relentlessly toward her, calling her "ugly" and making fun of her teeth and braces.

The power of words is far greater than what we can imagine. Words can bring love, inspiration, motivation, warmth, and healing whereas it can also harm, tear families and communities apart, and destroy harmony and relationships. Words can sparkle retaliation. As Christians, we must be mindful and aware of how our words may land with the listeners. In our church community, we can learn and appreciate the beauty of praise, gratitude and encouragement. From the Beatitudes preached by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, we can learn how to use compassionate words to pass warmth, hope and happiness to others.