

**The Way of Skillful Living Described:
The Proverbs**

THOUGHTS

1. The book is a collection of several men apparently known for their wise sayings, predominately Solomon, King of Israel in the 9th century.
2. Of the Solomonic sayings, these were gathered in the time of the king and during the reign of Hezekiah three hundred years later.
3. It seem viable that the function of the collections was to teach promising youth in the service of the state.
4. The foundation of skillful living, according to Proverbs 1:7, is the fear of God, the reverential respect for the authority of God. In the world of the Bible, theism is the foundation of ethics (morals). Sadly, we live in a culture in the primary (God) has been separated from the structure of duty (morals). Thus, our culture has lost it moral compass!
5. Since Proverbs is a collection of pithy statements that speak to topics of importance in two-liners, it cannot be examined as either the telling of a linear story as in narrative literature or in a linear argument as in the epistles of the New Testament. Typically, therefore, most teachers approach the book topically by speaking to subjects that reoccur through the book.

The topic today is that, not so much speech, as the use of words in speech. The Bible frequently addresses the issue both positively and negatively, using the word *tongue* metaphorically for speech.

So also the tongue is a small part of the body,
and yet it boasts of great things.
See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire (James 3:5)!

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men,
who have been made in the likeness of God;
from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing.
My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.
Does a fountain send out from the same opening
both fresh and bitter water?
Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives,
or a vine produce figs?
Nor can saltwater produce fresh (James 3:9-12).

BENEFITS OF THE ABILITY TO SPEAK:

A man has joy in an apt answer,
And how delightful is a timely word (15:23)!

1. The lines of this verse are in the form of a synonymous parallelism.
2. To say the right thing at the right time is a source of satisfaction to both the source and the recipient.

3. A profitable response requires knowledge and insight.

Pleasant words are a honeycomb,

Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (16:24).

1. Words can be a source of comfort and encouragement.
2. As Jonathan's eyes were brightened when he tasted honey so are fitting words appropriately stated.
3. There is real and true healing of body and mind through compassionate speech.

The wise in heart will be called understanding,

And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness (15:1).

1. The use of comforting words must be rooted in compassion and understanding.
2. People listen first to our approach and interpret the meaning of our words second.
3. To convince a person to care is a more powerful tool than forcefulness of argument.

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,

But a good word makes it glad (12:25).

1. The power of kindness overcomes the pains of life, being our deepest need.
2. The pains of life leave us empty and feeling alienated, but the word of a trusted friend brightens the heart.
3. We all need the expression of care; it comes in togetherness and perspective expressed in words.

He who guards his mouth and his tongue,

Guards his soul from troubles (21:23).

1. How we must have troubled ourselves with words without thinking first.
2. Misspoken words call for many more to bring about recovery and restoration. How many times have we hurt ourselves in saying something with the wrong attitude, with overstatement, or in poor timing.
3. I think the lesson for this is a rhyme we sang to our children, "O, be careful little lips what you say."

The heart of the wise instructs his mouth.

And adds persuasiveness to his lips (16:23).

1. The center of our being according to the Bible is the heart; it is our choosing faculty. It is not a power to enact; it selects between options or sets our course of reaction.
2. What is formed out of proper motive in the heart is expressed by our conduct as well as words.
3. Words that are motivated in a compassionate, spiritually informed heart add effectiveness to attempts to help people.

CAUTIONS WHEN SPEAKING

Do not go out hastily to argue your case.

Otherwise, what will you do in the end,

When your neighbor puts you to shame (25:8)?

1. There are times when self-defense is more damaging; we all want it to be.
2. Pause, collect the facts, think of the other person's perspective.

3. It is best not to judge a person's motives. Speak to actions that are apparent, not character that impugns to win an argument.

A soothing tongue is a tree of life,

But perversion in it crushes the spirit (15:4).

1. The picture in the metaphor, using comforting speech causes the flourishing of people we know in that encouragement is nourishing; it builds confidence. Also, it affirms the person's significance and competence.
2. The reverse is also true. We have all been crushed by words.
3. Truth motivated by a corrective desire need not be destructive of a person's character and confidence.

He who loves purity of heart

And whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend (22:11).

1. Again, verbal expression reveals a person's heart condition.
2. Purity of motive and caring, not hostile, words are the way to make and keep relations.
3. Gentle words show respect and gathers many friends.

The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;

The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin (13:3).

1. Life would be less tumultuous if we would guard our words learning, how, and in what manner we should express ourselves.
2. Inappropriate speech can hurt the one who speaks as well as hears.

PROMISES IN SPEAKING

With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied;

He will be satisfied with the product of his lips (18:20).

1. Words well-spoken become are a promised source of delight because we find peace and significance when we benefit others.
2. We all desire to be meaningful and helpful in the lives of others: here is God's promise to you.

The wise in heart will be called understanding,

And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness (16:21).

1. Good advice giving emanates from wisdom, wisdom from the wisdom of God.
2. Good, sound advice, delivered in an appropriate manner, has a deep impact.

The lips of the wise spread knowledge,

But the hearts of fools are not so (15:7).

1. What a promise. If we have speech capacity and use our words wisely, we will never be unproductive.
2. There appear to be a lot of poor advice-givers in this world.

Like apples of gold in settings of silver

Is a word spoken in right circumstances (25:11).

1. We must never underestimate the fruit of a kind, accurate comment.
2. Timing for such is as important as the words themselves.

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
But he who restrains his lips is wise (10:19).

1. Too many words can be as disconcerting as too few at time.
2. We must be careful when giving advice. It is better to speak meaningfully than in a lengthy manner. Know your audience.