

**Text: Proverbs 10; 15:28**

**Title: “Street Smarts ... For Your Words”**

**PHOTO ILLUSTRATION** – The finals for the National Spelling Bee were held two weeks ago. It actually ended in a tie between eleven year old Nihar Janga of Texas and thirteen year old Jairam Hathwar of New York. Jairam’s final word in the competition was “Feldenkrais,” (Felden-cray-a), referring to a system of body movements. CAN YOU SPELL THAT? Nihar correctly spelled “gesellschaft,” (Jes-shell-shoft) which refers to a type of social relationship. CAN YOU SPELL THAT?

Well, it takes book smarts to know how to spell words correctly. It takes street smarts to know how to use words wisely. And that’s why the Bible has so much to say about our speech. Open your Bibles to Proverbs 10. We’re talking today about “Street Smarts for our Words.” As we talk about using our words wisely we need to remember the righteousness and wisdom of God. Our memory verse reminds us:

**Proverbs 2:6 - For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.**

Everything that comes from God’s mouth is wise, and everything that comes from our mouths should be wise. As we’re going to see in a moment, that’s really hard for us ... in fact, it’s impossible. That’s why the Bible says that the Word of God (Jesus) became flesh ... became one of us ... so that our hearts could be changed and so that the words that come from our lips might be righteous words.

Around 150 times in Proverbs you will find reference to our speech. That’s an average of about five times in each chapter. But here in Proverbs 10 there’s a concentration of Solomon’s proverbs specifically directed at this matter. Here’s a sampling of the vast wisdom found in the Proverbs related to the words of our conversations: **Read Proverbs 10:10-14,18-21,31-32.**

I want you to think about the different realms of your life where you use your words ... with your family ... with your colleagues at work ... with a friend over lunch or on the golf course or the tennis court ... with your brothers and sisters in Christ at church ... in personal conversations, emails, texts or social media posts. We need street smarts for each of those. Here’s what we know from Scripture...

### **1. THERE’S TREMENDOUS POWER IN OUR WORDS.**

Stop to think about how much good can come from our words to others ... and how much bad. It’s more than most of us realize.

**Proverbs 10:11 - The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.**

## **Proverbs 18:21a - The tongue has the power of life and death...**

Our words can make someone's day or ruin someone's life. And as Christ-followers our words are used by God to proclaim the life-giving Gospel of Christ.

### **2. OUR TONGUES ARE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.**

Someone wrote on Facebook recently: "Some things are better left unsaid; which I generally realize right after I have said them." How many of you know that from experience?

The NT book of James is a lot like the Proverbs. Listen to what James says about the tongue:

**James 1:26 - If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.**

But having said that, James goes on to say...

**James 3:2 - We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.**

It's difficult, but if the Spirit of God has control of your tongue He probably has control of every other area of your life.

### **3. OUR WORDS CAN GET US INTO A LOT OF TROUBLE.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I heard about a lady who went to a grocery store and asked a guy in the produce department if she could buy just a half of a tomato. The guy says, "That's an odd request. I'll need to ask my manager." So he walks to another part of the store and tells the produce manager, "There's this crazy woman who wants to buy just a half of a tomato. Can you believe that? That's the weirdest thing I've ever heard." Just then he sees out of the corner of his eye that the lady has followed him and heard everything he had said about her. He quickly continued, "And, boss, this sweet lady has agreed to buy the other half."

Our words can certainly get us into trouble.

**Proverbs 10:14 - Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.**

**Proverbs 12:13 - An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk, but a righteous man escapes trouble.**

### **4. WORDS CAN BE DESTRUCTIVELY EVIL.**

**Proverbs 12:18 - Reckless words pierce like a sword...**

**Proverbs 26:28 - A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.**

Words have the power to wound others and wound them deeply. Sometimes even compliments aren't sincere; that's called flattery. But perhaps the most hideous form of sinful speech is gossip. It's amazing how much the Proverbs and other Scriptures have to say about gossip. It's a huge problem in the workplace, in neighborhoods and, yes, even in churches.

**Proverbs 11:13 - A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.**

We all need trustworthy friends, but there are some people you can't trust with sensitive information. Be careful. You'll usually find that if someone gossips *to* you they will also gossip *about* you.

**Proverbs 16:28 - A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.**

Gossip hurts relationships. Someone has said that "hurt people hurt people." People who love to gossip usually have been hurt in some way, and the way they deal with their own pain is to make themselves look better by bringing other people down.

**Proverbs 20:19 - A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.**

Just don't listen to gossip. Walk away. If you're not part of the problem or part of the solution, you don't need to be talking about it. Words can be destructively evil.

## **5. WE WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR WORDS.**

Jesus said...

**Matthew 12:36-37 - But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."**

Americans think they have the inalienable right to complain and gripe. That's our First Amendment right, right? But church we are to live to higher standard.

**Philippians 2:14 - Do everything without complaining or arguing,**

Let's not get sucked in to the bitter, vitriolic politicking that is going on in this election season in our nation. There are hateful things said about elected officials or candidates. And many Christians chime right with the unkind talk as if that verse doesn't apply to us. This is written to believers. Our talk should be different. Yes, there are some critical issues today that have to be discussed, but let's remember...

**Ephesians 4:29 - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

We need to remember that God is listening in on every conversation we have with others. So we need...

## **STREET SMARTS FOR USING YOUR WORDS WISELY:**

**Proverbs 15:28a - The heart of the righteous weighs its answers...**

The word “weigh” in that verse means to ponder or study on something. So I want to use a well-known acronym to remind us of what the Proverbs and other Scriptures teach us about choosing our words wisely ... **T.H.I.N.K.** The next time you’re about to unload on your wife, your husband, your child, your employee or someone at church ... think before you speak. Think before you post. Think before you press “send” or “reply.” There has to be a filter between our thoughts and our words. So ask, “Is it...”

### **T – TIMELY**

**Proverbs 15:23 - A man finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word!**

Ask yourself, “Is this the right time to say this, or should I wait for a better time? Also is it...

### **H – HONEST**

**Proverbs 12:19 - Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.**

Does it reflect what is really true, or is it an exaggeration ... or an outright lie? Also, is it ...

### **I – INSPIRING (ENCOURAGING)**

**Proverbs 16:24 - Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Nan and I were flying through an airport a few years ago. Our flight was delayed at departure which caused us to miss two connecting flights. And so we and hundreds of other people had to rebook our flights. I was standing in line at the ticket counter and the guy in front of me was furious that he had missed his flight, as if yelling at the lady at the counter was going to make it all the way up to the president of the airline that he was mad at. I felt so badly for the lady. Then I thought about how some of my own rants and complaining must sound to others. When it was my turn at the counter I said to her, “I’m sorry you had to listen to that.” Tears welled up in her eyes as she said, “It’s been a tough day.” Your words can either be discouraging or encouraging. Also, is it...

## **N – NECESSARY**

Does this need to be said at all? Just because you think it doesn't mean you need to say it. Certainly profanity has no place in the vocabulary of a Christ-follower.

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

I read about someone who makes it a habit to try to stop themselves when they find they are talking too much. They think of the word WAIT = Why Am I Talking? The writer said, "When I feel like I am gabbing, rambling, talking out of turn, talking over someone, filling the silence, I need to WAIT. Why am I talking so much? Also, is it ...

## **K – KIND**

**Proverbs 12:25 - An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.**

**Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

Think about the kindest and gentlest way to say what needs to be said.

When it comes right down to it, this is a heart issue. Sadly we're like the prophet Isaiah who said, "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips."

**Proverbs 15:28 - The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.**

Jesus said...

**Luke 6:45 - The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.**

So now we know why it's so hard to control our tongues. It's a heart problem. Whatever is down in the heart is going to eventually come up in our words. We can't deal with our words without dealing with our heart. And the Good News is that Jesus Christ came to change our heart. Have your words left a trail of casualties behind you? Confess that sin and repent of it. Let the cleansing love of Christ wash over you today. Do you need to go and apologize to someone for something you said to them or about them? Make it right today. What a change Jesus can make in your life. Let Him do that today.

Saul of Tarsus was a passionate religionist, consumed with destroying his enemies who were followers of Christ. The Bible says that he was "breathing out murderous threats." He used his

words as weapons to destroy others. Then Jesus captured Saul on the Damascus Road and Saul was never the same. After that he became the Apostle Paul whose words were used by God to become a large part of our NT. That's what can happen with our words when Jesus changes our hearts.