

## **BACK TO SCHOOL: PROVERBS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE**

### **The Careful Tongue**

**Proverbs 18:6-8; 25:11-13**

**Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri**

**August 27, 2017**

**LISTEN:** <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/back-to-school-proverbs-for-everyday-life-the-careful-tongue>

Someone once said that the Book of Proverbs is the entire 66 books of our Bible, compressed and packed down into 31 chapters. It's wisdom literature, and as we learned last week, God's wisdom is knowledge organized in order to build character, build community and honor God. And today, we're looking at a part of that wisdom that is about the use of our tongue, how we use words. The mouth, the tongue and lips are referenced 90 times in Proverbs.

In his novel *Of Human Bondage*, W. Somerset Maugham writes about Philip, a nine-year-old boy afflicted with talipes, or as we would know it, club foot. He shows up at school and all the children make fun of him mercilessly (kids can be cruel). They harass him at recess and because it's a boarding school, they verbally assault him at night. It's one of those stories which leaves you sick on the inside.

Proverbs 18:6-8. The power of words. They take on a life of their own! A ten-year-old was showing me his new tennis shoes and said, "Did you know if you have these, you'll be more popular? And if you don't, kids will make fun of you?"

And the writers of Proverbs knew nothing of the internet and cyber bullying. A young woman was recently convicted of manslaughter because she texted her boyfriend, encouraging him to complete suicide. Words matter.

Experts are making a distinction between hate speech (the motive is to incite violence) and dangerous speech (we speak out of fear or anger, with no intentions to do harm, but we do!). Proverbs 18:6-8. There is something about a morsel of gossip we can't refuse, like trying to walk by a bowl full of M&Ms and not take one. But as v. 8 says, it gets down inside us and we can't not think about that untruth or partial truth or juicy tidbit. We can't un-hear some things! When we forward things that are untrue or unkind, or send things without fact checking them, when we use words carelessly, God has some instruction for us. Recent events in our country remind us that words matter and that words can themselves be violent acts.

In our New Testaments, James 3 reminds us that the same tongue that cuts and destroys can be used to bless. And we, the ones doing the talking or typing, get to decide which. Henri Nouwen, a world-famous author and speaker, loved by thousands, always longed for a positive word from his own father. He was a grown man in his 60's when he called his dad and asked, "What did you think of my daily column in the newspaper?" Long pause, then his father said, "Some are better than others...It is not easy to write a column." Proverbs 25:11. Such words can refresh the soul (v. 13).

Mark Twain once remarked, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Proverbs 25:11. You simply never know when your words, fitly spoken, might breathe life into someone's soul. I

was attending a conference once and a British Baptist, David Coffey, was preaching. At the end of his sermon he had different groups stand: “Single moms, you’ve raised your kids doing both ends of the parenting. I bless you. Homemakers, women who work, senior adults, youth, you’re up against tough challenges but you’re not alone. I bless you.” And then this, “Dads, you aren’t perfect, but you’ve don’t the best you can. I bless in Jesus’ name.” I was going through a time when I just felt like a pretty lousy father. And tears started streaming down my face. The power of words! Proverbs 25:11.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus was baptized? Besides the dove, words! Words that blessed. “This is my Son; my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” And do you realize in the mystery of the Cross and resurrection, the mystery of coming into Christ through faith, we take on the same relationship with God that Jesus has? God uses words to bless us. We are favored. Yes, we are loved with deeds, but we are also loved with words. What is our Bible, if not God loving us with words? And what do you suppose God wants us to do with our words?