

Proverbs 25-03-12b

We're back now from our break and we're ready to pick up here in Proverbs chapter 16 with this very practical section. I often used to wish around the time I started wearing a ring, you go to high school and they want to sell you a ring and so you have it and it's got a little rock in it. And I remember thinking as a teenager, I wish that this stone was like a little indicator and that God would make it glow bright red or something when I'm messing up.

If I'm doing something wrong, I could just glance down and stop in the moment and not wait till afterward and realize I should have seen that coming. And if I just had an alert, if my phone would go off and say, sinning, sinning, saying the wrong thing, bad attitude, stop what you're doing, call a halt, it would be a great thing. There ought to be an app for that.

There ought to be an app that would just stop me in my tracks. We've got a dog collar that you put a geographical fence on a map and it uses GPS. And if your dog leaves the designated rectangle, it makes a noise and can send a vibration or even a slight shock, nothing harmful, but it gets their attention.

And so if they're transgressing the line, they get three different kinds of alert. It makes a noise, it vibrates. And if you turn that on, it will give them a little shock like you threw a spark to a doorknob.

And I've often wondered, wouldn't it be great? Why wouldn't God give that and stop me in my tracks? And it would be wonderful. This guidance in our souls, if we remember what these Proverbs say, what these quatrains deliver by way of divine truth, this is something the Holy Spirit can use to convict us in the moment. Now we know that we've got to be more careful if we're talking to someone and maybe we're not sure if they're receptive to the truth spoken in love, whether they have any foundation for wisdom where this can be taken on board.

And even if they have a momentary reaction, when they calm down and think about it, they'll say, well, you know, I overreacted that that really was a good piece of information or advice or perspective or a wonderful observation from the word of God. And because I'm a believer and I love the word of God, I don't want to push back against that. And I appreciate you sharing it with me and so on.

So that's what this is. It's the next best thing to a GPS dog collar for us is to have these principles, to understand them and to have them become more than knowledge, to practice them, to test them out. We're going to be almost all of us, I think we'll be talking to somebody tomorrow and it could be any number of topics.

Might be work, might be family, might be entertainment, might be any number of things. I know people who stand in line at the store and strike up a conversation with the person in front of them or the person behind them or, oh, isn't that a cute child? Or I see you brought your dog in or whatever. And you never know when a conversation is something that God has put in our

path to practice what we know, to have the opportunity to share the truth with someone who might be seeking.

Maybe it's an opportunity for their eternal salvation. Maybe it's an opportunity for them to latch onto a better source of truth. Maybe they're frustrated at their church or they're starving when they go out to try to do devotions or whatever.

Who knows what it might be? But to be ready always to speak a word in season and also to know when it's a false alarm and you think, oh, this person could really benefit from what I know, let me just tell them. And to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is why we're here.

We are here to be spirit-led people who have truth that He can bring to our minds and use us for God's purposes. There is no other purpose. Can you think of something more important than representing the Lord Jesus Christ as His body with the Spirit and the Word to enable us and to guide us? That is the only reason God had us be born, gave us breath, brought us to Christ, has put us in a place where we can learn the truth of God's Word from any number of sources.

But the purpose is to apply it, to lay hold of righteousness by faith, to implement wisdom. That's why we're here. So this is a great, helpful, practical section.

How can I govern my mouth? As it says in James, bridle the tongue, the rest of the body is no problem. You can bring your whole body into subjection if you can master the tongue. It is the most difficult thing to control.

This is the information the Holy Spirit will use to give us that self-control. So we saw that understanding is a wellspring of life. This is eternal life.

This is the rivers of living water that can gush forth from within us that the Lord Jesus spoke about on the last great day of the feast. This is what builds our future in eternity. We do it now.

Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of deliverance. Now is our chance.

Understanding it is a wellspring of life to him who possesses it, who guards it, who keeps it, who treasures it, who recognizes its value. It isn't a birthright that we trade away for a mess of pottage. And we have to be careful that we don't inadvertently trade it away or throw our pearls away by trying to correct those who aren't ready for correction.

They're not in the right place. They are on a foolish path. They are thinking and practicing foolishness.

I'm not as ready as the Bible is to call someone a fool. The Lord Jesus said, you can say various things to your brother, but don't call him a fool. You'll be in danger of the judgment.

So I would rather think that someone is on a foolish path or has foolish priorities or has

adopted foolishness into their viewpoint. I don't like to just say, well, that person's a fool. I think we can work our way around that in more tactful ways.

But it is inevitably necessary in the same way that I wouldn't call someone a swine. The Lord Jesus can do it, and he's the Lord Jesus. But I can recognize the principle that he's teaching.

So here, the heart of the wise teaches his mouth. It adds learning to his lips. The heart of the wise instructs the lips.

Our lips become wise on how much to say and what to leave unsaid, when to speak and when to remain silent. Pleasant words in verse 24 are like a honeycomb. Now, these are not just flattery.

This isn't the words of the crafty harlot that we saw in earlier chapters. Those are pleasant words, seductive, enticing, promising, self-gratifying pleasures. Is that a word? Gratifying.

Self-indulgence and leading us down a road that we kind of want to go down anyway because we're foolish. These are pleasant words that are pleasant because they come from God. They partake of the green pastures and the still waters.

They restore our soul. They lead us in paths of righteousness for the Lord's name's sake. Those are the pleasant words that are not only pleasant to us.

One of my mother's favorite verses talks about how thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were in my mouth as pleasant as honey. This is the wonderful spiritual enjoyment we have of spending time by the oasis of God's word. But it is not only good for pleasure.

It is good in practical ways, health to the bones. There is a way that seems right, but its end is the way of death. So how do we know? If it seems right, how do I know that it isn't right? I can't assume that because I've gone to Bible class, whatever I feel and whatever I think is automatically right.

I need to go back to the wisdom and the understanding that God's word brings. I need to pray. I need to ask God, please stop me.

Put the angel with the sword in the path of my donkey before I, like Balaam, go down a bad road for the wrong reasons. Balaam still ends up going, but his priorities and his attitudes, as we saw in those earlier quatrains, that angel changes Balaam's mind, and now he's doing the same thing. He's going to address Balak's concerns about Israel, but he's going to do it in a completely different way, with a completely different attitude and with completely different priorities, and that allows God to use Balaam to bless Israel.

Same thing here. Don't trust the feeling that I'm right. Anybody can feel like they're right.

It's like being young. We regularly tease each other here that anybody can do young. It takes real guts to live a life as an older, aging, or aged person.

That will thin out the herd. Anybody can do young. Can you do old and do it gracefully and do it elegantly and do it in a way that glorifies God? That takes extra wisdom.

Same thing. Anybody can feel right. Everybody feels right, but most of them aren't.

It is a truth that most of the people in the world are thinking wrong, and yet they believe they're right. It's just a fact, so we don't want to be one of them. The end is the way of death, and this brings us now to the third quatrain, which is verse 26 and 27.

The person who labors, labors for himself, for his hungry mouth drives him on. Now, it says hungry. You notice that's in italics.

The person who is laboring for himself, his craving, his appetite, and often his words. Sometimes people say a thing, and they've kind of painted themselves into a corner with what they said, and they can't reverse course. They've talked about it too much.

They've boasted. They have expressed confidence. They have told people that this is right, that they're doing the best thing, and their mouth, not just in the sense of appetite, but in the sense of what they have said.

This is about speech, so the person who is laboring for himself, his mouth often gets him in trouble. His mouth drives him. His words.

He's talking out loud. Remember the man that the Lord described and said, he in the evening said, I've got houses and barns and fields, and I'm going to build more, and the Lord Jesus said, you fool. Do you not know that this night your soul will be required of you? He's talking a great strategy.

He's got great plans, and he's talking out loud about how he has ambitions, and he's going to fulfill them, and he's being driven on by these verbal plans, and he's working for himself. We are here to serve. How does Paul, and Peter, and John, in so many cases, how does Paul in particular begin a letter? Paul, a slave, a doulos, a servant of Jesus Christ.

This is the view we should have of ourselves. We're here to serve, not to labor for ourselves. You can't keep anything you gain by that kind of labor anyway, but we can inform people of what we are going to do, and now we're kind of trapped in it.

You wind up hearing from people who say, well, I thought you said you were going to do this, and that person, we should not be driven by what we say. We should be driven by what God says. What are his goals, and values, and priorities? That should be our motivation.

What has God given us by way of promise? The hope of the fulfillment of those promises, that's our motivation. We're not driven on by our mouth, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That's how we live.

So this is the speech quatrains, the first part here, these three that introduce to us the

transition from what's going on in our heart, the wisdom and understanding that we should be gaining, and how it affects the way we communicate. Now we see, and these are the bad man sayings. These aren't so much quatrains, but this is the bad man section.

Just superficially, before we even read them, notice in verse 27, it's an ungodly man. I used my number two pencil, and just drew a little rectangle around that. The ungodly man, something about him.

Verse 28, the perverse man, little box around that. Verse 29, a violent man, there's going to be something about that. So these are people who are not characterized by understanding and wisdom.

And specifically here, there's a lot you can say about an ungodly man, a perverse man, or a violent man. You could even back up to verse 26 and say a self-interested man, the man who works for himself. And it's going to say something about them.

There are many different things you could say. These sayings in these verses, watch for it, are going to be about how he talks. So in verse 26, the way he talks moves him.

The way he talks, that's his motivation. He talks a big fight, and then he tries to fulfill what he says. But here in verse 27, an ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips.

He goes out looking for it. Remember in Proverbs chapter 2, if we lift up our voice for wisdom, if we cry out for understanding, if we seek it as silver and search for it as for hid treasures, then we understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. That's when the Lord gives wisdom and expresses to us his understanding.

You go back and review those verses, we've memorized them out of Proverbs chapter 2. But look at this. This man is not digging up wisdom. He's not digging up understanding and the knowledge of God like treasure.

He's digging up evil. He's seeking it with the same level of vitality and enthusiasm and aggressive energy that we want to be using for spiritual things. He's digging up evil.

And what happens? In the same way that understanding should work itself out of our heart into our conversation, his priority of digging up evil, finding the dirt, bad-mouthing, criticizing is going to come out verbally, his speech. And you can work backward if all you hear from someone is criticism and negativity and finding fault and impugning motives. Look at the reporting on a lot of our political figures on either side of the fence.

I don't want to hear people constantly bad-mouthing somebody that I disagree with politically. If they are doing nefarious things, okay, report that they have done a nefarious thing, but to just casually insult them and in an offhand way, talk about them, mock them, deride them. How are you any different than the people you oppose? We should be better than that.

We don't have to go dig up evil and then have it come out of our lips. But the ungodly, that's what they do. If we're godly, we should not be guilty of this.

An ungodly man digs up evil. It is on his lips like a burning fire. What happens? Why is it just on his lips and it's ugly? It's a burning fire because like James says, the tongue is a flaming fire and it is set on fire by the flames of hell.

This is judgment and destruction. We don't want to be setting fires with our lips, harming the reputation, disparaging and undercutting and undermining the perception of others, the reputation of others, impugning their motives and so on. Ungodly man digs up evil.

It's on his lips like a burning fire. So if you find evil on someone's lips and they are actively destroying reputations and impressions and so on, you know what's going on in their heart because that's where it comes from. They're digging up evil.

And in the next line, a perverse man sows strife, creates division, divides people, separates others, causes them to be suspicious and lose confidence and trust in someone else. Perverse man sows strife and a whisperer. This is innuendo.

This is gossip. This is bad suggestions and ideas that, well, this is what this person is thinking and that's why they're doing what they're doing. You see this with Mr. Musk.

He's been put in charge of trying to find waste, fraud and abuse in the government. And so people say, well, he's there because he's got government contracts and he wants to get more money. He's the richest man in the world.

He doesn't need money. But to whisper and impugn without any basis in fact, without any evidence, you know, is anything that he's done up there caused him to actually gain more money? They say, well, he will. Or, you know, the president is doing this or somebody in the Senate or the Congress is doing that or our governor or our mayor is doing this side or the other when there is no hard evidence, there's no proof.

We just want to create a scandal by lighting a fire with our lips. We want to sow strife and create division, separate the best of friends, divide people and families by sowing the seeds of mistrust, innuendo, things that aren't even factual, but it creates strife and division. That is perverse.

That is evil. Read the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians. I hear that there are wars and divisions among you because people say, I am of Paul.

It's conversation. It is the fruit of the lips. It is the flame of the mouth that is dividing those who ought to be united.

Whisper separates the best of friends. Then you come to verse 29, a violent man entices his neighbor. People like this that are perverse and ungodly are not content to ride their own horse

and do their own damage.

They want to recruit. They want to be in a group. There's safety in numbers.

There is affirmation and mutual admiration that we're all in this together. So you find this in clusters. It's like cancer.

It wants to create a tumor. It wants to metastasize and convert other cells to perversity. And so the violent man entices his neighbor.

Let me recruit you. Let me bring you on board. Jesus said the Pharisees canvassed heaven and earth to make a convert and then turned him into twofold the child of hell that they were recruit the neighbor, entice the neighbor and lead him in a bad way, a way that is not good.

And notice 29 and 30. This is a quatrain. This is a four line conclusion to this section.

The violent, perverse and ungodly man does all of these things. He winks his eye to devise perverse things. He purses his lips and brings about evil.

He harbors evil in his own soul. He is evil, perverse and violent, and he's not happy unless he's spreading it. Winking the eye, looking askance.

This is the dark side of speech when it comes from a unregenerate, unimproved soul and heart that has not sought understanding and wisdom, that hasn't done the things that we saw earlier. So you can look here and see connections. There is in this ungodly, perverse and violent man section, a lot of symmetry.

So, and it's very much chiastic. You see in verse 27, the ungodly man digs up evil. You can circle that word evil and go all the way down to verse 30.

He brings about evil. It's the same word. So there's an outside bracket.

Within that, you can see the perverse man in verse 28 that sows strife. And in verse 30, he devises perverse things. Same word, symmetrical.

And what do you have in the center? Separating friends and enticing neighbors, dividing those who are good and recruiting those who are evil. This is an active, metastasizing, spreading problem. And we should be as far away from this as we can be.

If we observe it, get away from it. Don't participate in it. Separate from it and preserve our heart and soul.

Bad company corrupts good morals, Paul says to Titus. So this entire section, really beginning up in verse 18, getting the attitude right. Verse 16 and 17, getting the priorities straight, leads us into this section that actually begins in verse 22 and comes down here through verse 30.

The upper half, the top half is the benefits of wise speech conditioned and sourced in an

understanding heart. The second half in verse 26 through 30 is the evil side. Someone who lacks understanding and wisdom, who isn't seeking them and pursuing them.

All they do is destroy. They themselves are evil, perverse and violent, and they spread it to others. So important to cultivate the right kind of heart and to source our conversation in the wisdom and understanding that can reside in our heart when it is cleansed and conditioned by God.

This is the end of this section. We begin a new section there in verse 31 with the silver haired head, and it is a departure in a new and fresh direction. And I occasionally keep you long.

Today I'm going to finish early. I think there's plenty here for us to chew on. So at this point, we will close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this tremendous exhortation that enables us to look at ourselves, to examine ourselves, to look at the state of our heart, what we are seeking, what we are motivated by. Is it our own words, our own plans, or is it those that come from wisdom and understanding? We pray that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate these truths, that they will shine brightly in our own heart to help us to not only think correctly, but also to interact with others, that our speech will be a blessing, that our communication will be uplifting and upbuilding, and we will be as far as possible from this latter description, those who spread dissension, discord, and harm and evil to others. We want to represent the Lord Jesus as fully and as effectively as possible.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless this truth through our heart toward that end, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.