

July 19, 2015 by Steve Brandon & Phil Guske



Wisdom from Proverbs (Part 1)

Proverbs 19:20, Proverbs 4:14-18, Proverbs 18:21

1. Listen to Wisdom (Proverbs 19:20)

- a. Listen to others.
- b. Listen to God.

2. (Phil Guske - Proverbs 4:14-18)

3. Eat the Fruit of Your Tongue (Proverbs 18:21)

- a. The Human Perspective.
- b. The Divine Perspective.

Several weeks ago at Rock Valley Bible Church, we hosted a Vacation Bible School. It was a great success. We had a bunch of kids from the church, from our friends, and from the neighborhood. Over the course of five days, we enjoyed a bunch of games, snacks, crafts, songs, and Bible teaching.

The focus of our Bible time with the kids was upon wisdom from the book of Proverbs. And so, before we get to 1 John in the fall, I thought that it would be good for us to focus upon the book of Proverbs. Over the course of the next two weeks, we will be looking at some Proverbs.

Now, one of the difficulties of preaching the Proverbs is that there is often very little context surrounding the Proverbs. In other words, when you read one Proverb and it's full of wisdom. And then, you read the next one, and it also drips with wisdom, but, it is totally unrelated to the first. And then, you read the next, and it addresses a topic entirely different than the other two. And on it goes.

And, as a preacher, I was thinking about preaching through the Proverbs. How do you preach through Proverbs? Certainly, you can pick topics and pull out similar Proverbs to illuminate you point.

But, I had an interesting idea. Rather than preaching a 45-minute message, jumping from Proverb to Proverb to Proverb, I thought about preaching a mini-sermon on one Proverb. Just really digging into the Proverbs to mine it's riches. And so, for this morning, and next Sunday morning, that's what we are planning to do. We have three Proverbs. We will have three 15-minute messages. I will deliver the first one. Phil Guske will deliver the second one. And then, I will deliver the third one.

So, I invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs 19:20. This was one of the Proverbs that we taught to the children during Vacation Bible School. In fact, it was the first Proverb that we taught to the children. And really, it is the foundation to much in life. Here it is, ...

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.

This is a simple fact of life that much wisdom comes through listening to counsel and accepting it. This happens on the natural level. This happens on the theological level.

In fact, I want to look at this Proverb using these two points.

- a. The Natural Level
- b. The Theological Level

Or, you might say it like this:

- a. Listen to others.
- b. Listen to God.

Let's first think about listening to others. Listening to advice and instruction is a basic element of growing up as a child. If you read through the book of Proverbs, you will be struck by the many times that Solomon exhorts his son to listen to him.

Proverbs 1:8

Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
And forsake not your mother's teaching.

Proverbs 3:1

My son, do not forget my teaching.

Proverbs 4:1

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
And be attentive, that you may gain insight.

Proverbs 5:1

My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
Incline your ear to my understanding.

And on and on it goes.

For children to grow in wisdom, they must listen to the counsel of their parents. When they are little, they must listen to their parents and not run into the streets, lest they be hit by a car and severely injured. When they are little, they must listen to their parents and not touch a hot burner, lest they get burned on their hands. And as they get older, they must listen to their parents and avoid the wrong crowd, lest they get into trouble.

And as you grow up, the importance of listening to counsel continues. You must listen to your teachers and do well in school, lest you find hardship in life. You must listen to your boss and do well at your job, lest you find yourself unemployed. You must listen to the policemen, lest you find yourself in jail.

Those are big and general things. But, it also extends to the little things.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.

Listen to the mechanics, who recommend that you change your oil every 3,000 miles, lest you ruin your car engine. Listen to the bills that you receive in the mail, lest you have your water turned off in the midst of your shower. Listen to the weather man, lest you find yourself out in the cold or rain unprepared.

But, listening to advice and accepting instruction is far more than simply avoiding the dangers that come with foolish living. There is wisdom to be learned at the hands of others.

Suppose, for instance, that your vacuum cleaner breaks. You can take it to a vacuum repair place. Or, you can seek for wisdom on how to repair it. It's called "Google." Look up online how to fix your vacuum, and you may learn a thing or two and save a few bucks.

Suppose, for instance, that your ice-cube maker isn't making ice-cubes, or your drying isn't generating any heat, or your reverse osmosis system has lost its capacity, Ask "Google" and you may learn how to fix it. Gain some wisdom. Save some money.

Suppose, for instance, that you want to learn something like installing an invisible dog fence, or solving the Rubik's cube, or the best washer and dryer to purchase. Ask "Google." And you might gain some wisdom.

And, what's true about "Google" is true about many of us. If you want to learn about investments, talk to Phil. If you want to learn about your illness, talk to Brian. If you want to learn about home repairs, talk to Peter. If you want to learn about homeschooling, talk to many of the mothers in this church.

And Proverbs 19:20 says, "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future."

You can apply this on the golf course. Yesterday, our high school graduating class gathered for our 30th reunion. One of the activities was a golf outing. So, I played some golf yesterday (for the first time in a few years). I played in a "scramble." That means that four of us were playing on the same team. We all teed off, and we chose to play the best ball. We all hit from that location, and chose the best of our four shots. When we were on the green, we all putted from the same spot, and chose the best putt.

And when anyone was putting, all of the members of our team were behind the putt, watching which way it would break, that we might learn a thing or two and do it better when it came to our turn.

We were listening to the advice of the golf ball and accepting its instruction, and gaining wisdom as a result. Only a fool wouldn't watch to see how the ball was breaking.

And, when you think about life, this is really how it works. None of us can know everything about everything. We need the expertise of others. In fact, when it comes down to it, we are only experts in a few areas. For the most part of our life, we should learn from the wisdom of others and thereby gain wisdom ourselves.

And Proverbs 19:20 simply calls for us to listen to the counsel of others. And those who listen are the wise people of the world.

Proverbs 11:14 says that there is wisdom in many counselors. Proverbs 15:22 says that with many advisers, plans succeed. Proverbs 24:6 says that an abundance of counselors will bring victory. But, too often in this life, we try to do things our own ways. This is especially the fate of young men who think that they have the world by its tail. They can conquer the world their own way. Failing to heed the counsel of parents and teachers and faithful friends, they go their own way, and end up in trouble.

But, all of us to one degree or another can fall into this trap. Rather than seeking the counsel and advice and wisdom of others, we try our own thing. And we fail to experience the best of our lives today. It may cost us money if we needlessly break something. It may cost us time if we fail to ask for directions. It may cost us joy if we marry a spouse against the counsel of others. It may cost us health if we eat the wrong way and fail to exercise according the counsel of our friends.

So, my call to you from Proverbs 19:20 is to seek counsel, and listen to it, that you may be wise people. That you may avoid many troubles in this life. So, ...

a. Listen to others.

But, there's another level to this command. It's the theological level, ...

b. Listen to God.

Proverbs 19:20
Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.

The foremost (and best known) commandment for the Jewish people comes in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They repeat these words as often as we repeat the Lord's prayer. Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

It's from these words that these verses gets its name. It is called, "The Shema." "Shema" means "Listen!" It's the first word in verse 4, "Shema" O Israel. "Listen, O Israel." The call is to listen the counsel of God. And to obey the counsel of God.

And God's counsel is to love Him! To love Him with all of your being. To listen to what He says.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Jesus calls this the greatest commandment. But, notice how the commandment comes. It comes through the ear. It comes through listening. It comes through following the counsel of the LORD. And when it comes down to it, this is how anybody is ever made right with God -- through listening to the word of God.

We know that it is those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who are saved from their sin. The most famous verse in the Bible puts it this way, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

But, the question comes: "How does anyone come to believe?" Paul answers that question in Romans, chapter 10.

Romans 10:13-15
For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

The idea is this: Salvation comes when someone calls on the name of the Lord. But, you can't call on the name of the Lord, unless you have believed in him. And you can't believe, unless you hear. And you can't hear, unless someone preaches to you. And nobody can go to preach unless they are sent.

And so, the priority of sending. But, why are they "going"? They are going to "speak" that others might "hear" and "believe" and "call upon the name of the Lord." But, realize that the gospel comes through the ear. It comes when another speaks about it.

So, fundamentally, when it comes your relationship with the Lord, Proverbs 19:20 nails it.

Proverbs 19:20
Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.

You want to enjoy wisdom for eternity? Then listen to God! And heed His advice and instruction. And He has told us to believe in Jesus, His Son.

Do you remember the transfiguration? When Jesus ascended the mountain with Peter and James and John and His clothes began to shine bright. And Moses and Elijah appeared. And they were discussing His "exodus," that is, his coming death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). And the voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35). God told us to "listen" to Jesus. Listen to His counsel. Accept His instruction.

How are you doing? Have you heard the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)? Have you believed in the good news? Have you followed up on the good news?

We are going to begin working through 1 John in the fall. Over the past month or so, I have really set my heart to meditate upon the book. It says in 1 John 2:3, "By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." In other words, if you want to know if you have really believed upon Jesus, then look at your life. Are you listening to Him? Are you keeping his commandments?

These things are the fruit of belief. These things are the fruit of listening to the counsel and advice of God. The next verse in 1 John says, ...

1 John 2:4

Whoever says, "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

In other words, if you aren't listening to the counsel and instruction of the Lord, it is an indication that you don't know Him. And if you don't know Him, you are lost in your sin.

So, hear Him today! Follow His counsel today. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. And you will reap the benefits of wisdom forever.

Listen to others for wisdom in this life. Listen to God. for wisdom in the life to come.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.

2. (Phil Guske - Proverbs 4:14-18)
(listen to audio)

3. Eat the Fruit of Your Tongue (Proverbs 18:21)

And for our third (and final) mini-sermon this morning, I ask you to turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 18:21. This is another verse that we taught to our children at Vacation Bible School. This is another verse that contains a bushel full of wisdom!

I want to address this verse in much the same manner that I addressed Proverbs 19:20. I want to look at it from a human perspective. Then, I want to look at it from a divine perspective. Because, there is power in our words. And, there is power in God's words.

In fact, that's what this verse is all about. It's about the power of words.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruits.

Let's look at it, first of all from ...

a. The Human Perspective.

Your tongue is full of power. Your tongue is but a small muscle. It weighs but a few ounces. It lurks hidden within your mouth. But, this little muscle of yours holds more power than the strongest weight-lifter in the world. Oh, it's not that your tongue can lift more weights than an Olympic weight-lifter. But, your tongue can do more damage than the strongest of men.

When James speaks about the power of the tongue, he compares it to a small fire that can set the entire forest ablaze! (James 3:5). James says that our tongue is "full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). That is, it is able to destroy someone.

And if you know anything about life, you know of the damage that the tongue can do. It can rip people to shreds. The American Proverb that says, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, But words will never hurt me" is simply not true. Words can wound.

Proverbs 12:18

"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts."

In recent days, I have been using a discipleship tool with my two youngest children called, "The Brady Bunch." We have working our way through the entire run of the show. We are about half-way through season three. I have used it as a teaching opportunity for our children. It's not a Christian show by any stretch, but, there are a lot of good things in the Brady Bunch to teach us. I love how Mr. Brady takes the leadership role in the family. When there are problems (which takes place almost every show), he is often in the mix and deals with the problems head on.

As we have watched the episodes, I have often stopped the video and had a discussion with my children about what's taking place, trying to give a Biblical slant on what we just watched. I'm just trying to help my children be wise about life in a very fun way.

Well, in one episode, there is this bully named Buddy Hinton who teases Cindy because of her lisp. He stands by the tree and sasses at her as she walks home from school, "Baby talk, baby talk; it's a wonder you can walk." Such words crushed Cindy. She came home crying because of her lisp. Such treatment of her sister riled up Peter, Cindy's older brother. Peter eventually engaged Buddy Hinton in a few fights. All caused by the destructive power of the tongue.

Some grow up in homes where their parents were always nagging their children, constantly telling them that they weren't good enough, calling them names, filling their home with oppressive rules and regulations, shaming their children when they mess up in any way, telling them how worthless they were. Such homes are "abusive" in every sense of the word. And never under-estimate the damage that comes to such a child. It's the invisible scar that never goes away. Death is in the power of the tongue.

But, that's not all that the Proverb says. There is another side to it. It's the life side. Look again, ...

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruits.

You can give life to others. Consider the following example. You are walking in the wilderness with a friend, when you come upon a cliff overlooking some rocks below. And unknown to your friend, he is about to walk over the edge. And you shout out, "Stop!" And you save your friend from a certain death.

Proverbs 12:18 tells us that, "The tongue of the wise brings healing." In other words, your words can be the healing balm in the lives of others. And, as words tear you down, they can also build you up.

We saw this a few days ago in the Brady Bunch. Peter was really down on himself, because a guy at a party told him that he was "dull" and without "personality." And so, such hurtful words got into the psyche of Peter and he began to mope around, thinking that he was "dull." Not realizing, that all of us are interesting in our own sorts of ways. Well, seeing this, his sisters got together and decided to try to help him. Listen to what Marcia said: "Maybe there's a way we can help Peter. ... If one person can say something to make someone feel bad, then maybe another person can say something to make him feel good" [1]

So, Marcia brought a friend over who tried to go over the top by showing great interest in what Peter was saying. And thereby showing him that he wasn't so dull. And it was working. It was building him up. Until Peter found out that it was all a sham. And then, everything crumbled.

But, the point is this. Even the secular world realizes the power of the tongue to build up others. And did you know that this is a Biblical command? We are commanded to build up one another. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." In other words, don't speak the words that lead to death. But, speak the words that build up. Speak the words that give grace.

And you can give grace with your words. You can do so by affirming God's work in an individual. In Sam Crabtree's excellent book entitled, "Practicing Affirmation," he talks about how we can build people up in a God-centered way. You can praise people for their skills and abilities and character in an idolatrous way. Or, you can do so in a way that gives God the glory. Crabtree writes, ...

"Good affirmations are God-centered, pointing to the image of God in a person. The only commendable attributes in people were given to them. ... Affirmation should not be a self-esteem free-for-all. Don't affirm any old thing. Don't affirm empty trendiness. Don't stroke the ego. Commend the commendable! Value the valuable! Supremely value the supremely valuable. Worship Christ, and then commend his image in people" [2]. He gives many examples in the book.

The question of this Proverb comes in the last half:

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruits.

If you put forth hurtful, death-bringing words, you will eat of its fruits. But, if you put forth life-giving words, you will eat of its fruits as well. I simply want to encourage each and every one of you to use your tongue to give life! Eat its fruits. Enjoy the life that you give to others!

Now, I say all of that on the human level. And everything is true. And it is certainly the main force of these words. But, there is also a divine level as well.

b. The Divine Perspective.

When God speaks, His words are life and death. In the opening chapters of Genesis, we see God speaking and life comes forth.

Genesis 1:20

Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.

And it was so.

Genesis 1:24

Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds--livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so.

When God speaks, He gives life.

But, God can also speak death. In the closing chapters of Revelation, we hear Jesus, the judge, saying, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Just as the words of a judge are final, so will be the words of Jesus. Either life-giving. Or death-giving. In Matthew 25, Jesus gives the picture of the final judgment.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ...

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

But, here's the thing. Between the creation of the world and the end of time, he has given us His gospel to proclaim to others. This gospel has life-giving ability.

As I mentioned previously, our high school was celebrating its 30 year reunion this past weekend. Last night, our class rented a room with plenty of food and drink. I was there giving forth life-giving words. It was four hours of sharing the gospel with people. It worked like this. "Steve, you are in Rockford, right? How are things at the church? What kind of church are you? Tell me about your church."

As I spoke, I realized how much I love you all. I realized how much I have enjoyed what I am doing. I realized how much I love pastoring this church. I realized how much joy all of you have given to me. To think that we came to Rockford with nothing. And God has built this church into the healthy body that it is today, where we gather each Sunday.

Some were interested in what I had to say. Others were not. With some, our conversation stayed on the surface. With others, our conversation went deeper. I walked several through the book of Leviticus (because I just finished preaching it), explaining how the sacrifices pointed to Christ, explaining how the priests pointed to Christ, explaining how we need to be clean in coming to Christ, explaining the once-for-all sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

I walked through the book of Job with a skeptic. I talked about our recent series of the Solas with a man working through the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church.

In all, I was speaking life-giving words to all who would believe.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Are you giving life with your words? Are you giving eternal life with your words?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 19, 2015 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Brady Bunch, Season 3, Episode 6, at 7:00 mark

[2] Sam Crabtree, "Practicing Affirmation," p. 18, 30