Words that Wound
Proverbs

Death and life are in the power of our words, either spoken or typed. Discover four simple rules from Proverbs that will help you avoid words that wound.

Back from sabbatical
- Lots of reading, writing, reflecting – truly grateful!
- Turkey with Brian and Guff
  - See some of the most important cities in early church history
  - Ephesus, Pergamum, Laodicea, Constantinople = Istanbul
  - Traveler’s tip: if you visit a mosque in Istanbul, don’t wear shorts – dress!
  - Amazing place: ate breakfast on balcony looking up at Haggia Sofia – 1500 yrs old
  - Will talk more about what we saw when we get into Acts – our series for the fall

This morning – continue our study of Proverbs

Begin with a LIE
- you’ve all heard it – most of us have told it to friends, our kids, ourselves
- try to convince yourself it’s true... but it’s not
- incredibly destructive lie used to excuse awful sin

“Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.”
- Really? Then why don’t I remember getting hit with sticks?!
  - grew up in piney woods... brother and I hit each other with sticks & pine combs
  - first to bleed loses!
  - I don’t remember any of those hits
- But I do remember being made fun of... nicknames & jokes in elementary...
- Sticks and stones leave a cut that heals in a few days
- But words cut deeper – leave scars on your psyche that may never heal in this life

So many adults carry shame or insecurity because of something a parent, teacher, peer said
- grown men weighed down by anxiety because of what their dads said 40 yrs ago
- women who struggle every time they look in the mirror because of something said in Jr High
- marriages devastated by a stupid thing said in the heat of an argument

Words are powerful, both for good and evil. Common theme in the Bible.

Gen 1 – how did God create the universe?
Not with deeds, tools, or raw materials... with WORDS – “Let there be light!”

Proverbs 18:21 – our words can give life, or take it away - can heal or can destroy

That theme is echoed in the NT... James 3:6
- “tongue” = a metaphor for our speech
- In the ancient world few could write – so communication primarily through speech
- But in today’s world we must broaden this idea to include all we type, text, or post
- “Death and life are in the power of the words you speak or type...”
And that’s a problem because we speak and type SO MANY WORDS!
- Scientific American: average American, male or female, speaks 16,000 words A DAY!
- That’s a lot of opportunities to hurt people with our words! 16,000 chances a day!

So how do we create life instead of death; blessing instead of pain with our words?

4 rules to help you avoid words that wound...

1. **BE SLOW TO SPEAK**

   I’ve only hunted a few times
   - Not my cup of tea – nervous around guns - device that can kill if used improperly
   - But what I do like: hunting with someone who really knows what he’s doing
     - Brad Evans – grew up hunting on his farm – shot more guns than I could count
     - I love seeing how careful & deliberate he is around guns – has respect for them
     - Takes it slow – double checks environment – checks distance to target – takes aim slowly – calms breathing – squeezes trigger slowly

   What concerns me:
   - **we are so slow and careful when using a gun**
   - **but so fast and reckless with our words which are just as dangerous!**

   **When you speak or type without thinking the result is almost always regret**
   - get caught up in the moment, get careless, say or send something you can never take back

   Proverbs has much to say about that... **Proverbs 29:20**
   - You cannot avoid sin and harm to other people if you speak or write in a hurry
   - When I speak rashly without thinking it through it makes me worse than a fool

   **Proverbs 18:13**
   - We’ve all violated this rule before
     - failed to stop and listen – spoken or posted before we had all the facts
   - Early in my marriage: would cause my wife to weep
     - because I wouldn’t really listen – speak carelessly & say something hurtful
   - **If I could give engaged men one rule for first year of marriage... “Be slow to speak”**
     - When talking to your newlywed bride and you suddenly feel the urge to
       - say something funny or sarcastic; give advice; defend yourself...
     - Please just shut your trap and listen to her
       - give yourself time to think and pray before you speak!

   - **No matter what conversation you’re in... stop and think...**
     - Have I really listened? Do I understand what they’re saying & feeling?
     - Have I taken time to think about my emotions & desires? Are they legit?
     - Have I prayed about what I’m about to say or send?
     - Have I taken time to think through the consequences of what I’m about to say?
       - because you can’t get those words back – like bullets fired from a gun
   - Just stop for a minute and think carefully about what you’re about to say/type

   - **If in doubt just shut your mouth**
     - save that conversation for later... or save that email for tomorrow
     - I have on occasion written emails in the heat of the moment... save... delete...
     - My life would be much worse right now if I had rushed into sending those emails!
   - Be slow to speak, slow to type. Give yourself time to think and pray
Give yourself time so you can ask yourself 3 questions about the words you want to speak
If your words don’t pass these 3 tests... then don’t speak it and don’t send it.

2. **ASK: Is it true?**

Proverbs 6:12
- “perverse” = that which is false – a lie
- Helpful: corrects a common misperception in our culture
  - we tend to assume that lying is no big deal – not like murder or racism
  - just what we all do to make it through life
- No... in God’s eyes, lying is wicked. It’s as bad as any sin on the list.

Proverbs 6:16–19
- Notice: lying mentioned twice! Murder 1 time. Sexual immorality not at all.
- God takes lying very seriously!
  - Because He is a God of absolute truth – never lies, never deceives
  - So He cares greatly that His children are honest, too
- **This is something I’m trying to teach my kids**
  - If they say something mean about each other – that’s bad
  - Hit each other – that’s bad too
  - But if they lie to Julie or I – that’s the worst of all
- You start lying and it takes you down a path that leads to destruction

So if it’s not true don’t say it or type it.
- No white lies; no exaggerations; no distortions; no deception

3. **ASK: Is it beneficial?**

Many things we could say are true... but not helpful – don’t benefit the other person
Here’s a few examples

**Bragging**
- = praising yourself or your accomplishments to others
- unless writing resume or in job interview, don’t do it – ugly & makes you look foolish
- **Proverbs 16:18**
  - The higher you lift yourself up the more it hurts when you fall
  - Bragging dishonors God because He gave you the abilities you have
  - And it sets you up for failure and shame in the future
- **So instead of bragging: Proverbs 27:2**
- **Before you speak ask, “Am I just trying to make myself look good?”**
  - Think about your motives – if you see pride, pause and reconsider
  - Can’t count how many times I’ve held back because I realized it was pride
  - Regret the times I didn’t hold back and then felt convicted

**Complaining**
- **Proverbs 21:9**
  - “contentious” = complaining; argumentative
  - NOT JUST ABOUT WOMEN!
  - Solomon was writing to his son – so wrote about good wives
  - If he wrote to his daughter would have been about contentious husband
- **His point:** Complaining, bickering, whining, arguing... are **torture** to listen to
  - I know that because I have 2 five year olds
  - They have mastered art of complaining – fluent in it
  - 6pm – I’ve had enough of it – about to lose it
  - Then God reminds me: I’m just as bad!
    - More sophisticated – disguise as “prayer request” or “filling you in”
    - I’m just as tempted to complain
    - Ugly when you’re 5... ugly when you’re 45!!

**Sarcasm**
- **Proverbs 3:34**
  - *scoff = to mock others*; cut them down to make yourself look better
- **Seems harmless**
  - with friends ribbing on each other – trading put downs – everyone laughing
  - guarantee someone goes home grieving/hurting!
- **Sarcasm hurts people and God takes it seriously**
  - He mocks those who mock others = VENGEANCE
- Sarcasm or humor at the expense of another person or group is never acceptable

**Gossip**
- **Proverbs 18:8**
  - *whisperer* = a gossip, one who slanderers others behind their back
  - gossip like **delicious morsels**
    - food you crave full of sugar & fat – you wolf it down
    - but then it goes down deep inside and becomes part of you
    - you can’t forget it – defiles you – alters how you see the person
  - Like CINNABON...
    - in the mall, catch sent of it – you crave it, your mouth is watering
    - taste it and it’s so good – no one ever regretted cinnabon while eating it
    - not till you’re done that regret sinks in
    - that bun is part of you – look at your waste – there it is! not coming off
    - So good at first; so bad for you after.
  - That’s gossip. Tastes great... but does a world of hurt

So even if something is true – it’s **passed the first test** – ask, “Is it beneficial?”
Is it good for me and for others if I say or type these words?
Not if it’s bragging, complaining, sarcastic, or gossip – those are never acceptable.

But if your words pass the truth test and the beneficial test...then ask yourself a 3rd question...

4. **ASK:** Is it timely?

**Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 3... read v1,7**
- Even if something is true and beneficial... it may not be the right time to say it

**Proverbs 27:14**
- A blessing is both true and beneficial, but at 3am, it’s not timely!

**Julie and I struggled with infertility for a long time**
- when we got a negative – not the time to give her a lesson on God’s sovereignty
- what she needed was for me to listen to her & grieve with her
I know a lot about theology & a lot about the Bible – but when I meet someone who’s grieving
- best thing to do is usually just say “I’m so sorry” and then grieve with them
- not the time for theology lectures or Christian platitudes

_Same goes for when we’re called to confront or challenge someone about sin or error_
- Proverbs 27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend”
- We should hold each other accountable and confront sin
- But there is a right time and a right place – and it may not be this moment
  - if others are around; if emotions running high; if exhausted... wait
- Proverbs 25:11
- Your words can have great power to bless... if they are timely

_So 4 rules before you speak, email, or text._
- Be slow to speak so you have time to listen, pray, and think
- Ask: Is it true? If not, don’t say it.
- Ask: Is it beneficial? If it’s bragging, complaining, sarcastic, or gossip don’t say it.
- Ask: Is it timely? Is this the right time to say it, send it, or post it?

_And finally ..._
- Let’s be honest: we are going to break these rules!
  - we’re human – we’re going to say and write dumb and hurtful things
  - At some point soon you will hurt someone by what you say or write
  - Maybe already happened today! Rushing kids out door is danger zone!
  - Flip side: sometime soon someone will hurt you by what they say or write
- 16000 words a day is just too much opportunity for sin to rear its ugly head
- You will wound and be wounded by words
- That’s why it’s such good news that God forgiveness sinners like us!
  - All those hurtful words we’ve spoken in anger or in jest... Jesus died for them
  - He took those awful words placed them on His shoulders and paid the price
  - Result: there is forgiveness from God no matter what we’ve said
  - Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more
- And because God has forgiven us, we can forgive each other
- Jesus has paid for all our sinful words
  - What sinful words do you need to confess to God?
  - Who do you need to forgive for wounding you with their words?