

# SERMON GUIDE

## Get Wisdom: Wisdom With Words

### Proverbs 18:21



Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

#### SERMON NOTES

The words we speak do a great amount of good or a great amount of harm. Words have a way of defining a person. Sometimes in a single sentence, your legacy is written. Let me give you some examples:

- George H. Bush's campaign promise: "Read my lips: No. New. Taxes." Because he raised taxes, this cost him a second term. People remembered what he said.
- Howard Dean was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President back in 2004. He had won the Iowa caucus and looked to be a front runner, but he went on a rant that ended with a weird yell, "BYAAHH" and he was done. We've come a long way since then.
- Allen Iverson at a press-conference amidst tensions between him and his coach famously said, "We're talking about practice." It stained his reputation despite how amazing he was on the court.
- Martin Luther King uttered those words, "I have a dream..."
- Neil Armstrong said "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" as he became the first man to walk on the moon. If you believe that kind of thing.

Words matter. They can build up, encourage, foster trust, breed courage, and ground your identity. But words can tear down, destroy, send you into anxiousness, depression, and self-doubt. We teach kids the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." But it's a lie. Words can and do hurt us. In fact, words often hurt so bad that they damage our soul, leaving scars more lasting than the bones, sticks and stones can break.

#### Exegesis

**Proverbs 18:21 – *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."***

This verse powerfully highlights the influence that our words can have—for good or for harm. The "power of the tongue" refers to the ability of speech to shape outcomes in human lives, relationships, and even our spiritual condition. Puritan pastor and theologian, Matthew Henry, once said: "A man may do a great deal of good, or a great deal of hurt, both to others and to himself, according to the use he makes of his tongue."

Jesus taught that our words are not neutral or trivial; they reveal the condition of the heart. Catch this: Your mouth is a heart monitor. Your words showcase your heart. Our words are a direct reflection of our inner character.

Constant profanity and even the hiding of profanity in certain circles can indicate: 1. unaddressed sin in your life, lack reverence for God, a disconnect between your public self and private self (integrity), and spiritual immaturity. The idea here is that you should stop cursing for appearances sake, but a transformation of the heart that desires to use godly speech. Your mouth is a heart monitor.

Another area we must guard against is constantly bringing negativity with our words. Do you know people like this? They are the raincloud in every room. Someone says, 'It's a beautiful day,' and you say, 'Yeah, but allergies are bad.' Someone celebrates a new job, and you say, 'Hope the economy holds up.' They have a negative lens for everything. And guess what? People start to feel drained around these people. Not because they don't love them, but because they think the worst of every person, complain about all plans determined it's not going to be good. They read into every conversation a negative bent. They assume the worst of every organization. You know these kinds of people. Why are they like this? The mouth is a heart monitor. At the root, there is ingratitude. There is a failure to love others (love hopes all things, believes all things, etc.). And in some cases, people just get into ruts of speech patterns and habits that they don't even realize. If they could hear a playback of their words throughout the day and had a printout of whether their words were positive or negative, they'd be shocked to see the habit they've fallen into. So give this to the Lord.

Words can bless, encourage, tell truth, and lead others toward God, or they can deceive, wound, slander, and destroy. "Death and life" is a stark contrast: words can bring emotional, spiritual, and even physical consequences. For example, hateful or discouraging words can crush a person's spirit and contribute to alienation or despair ("death"), while wise, truthful, and loving words can heal, build up, reconcile, and point people toward Christ ("life").

**James 3:1-12 – Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup> Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.**

James vividly illustrates how the tongue, though small, has enormous influence—comparing it to a bit in a horse's mouth or a rudder steering a ship. This directly echoes Proverbs 18:21's warning that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Both passages emphasize the disproportionate impact our words can have, for good or evil. He warns that the tongue is a "restless evil, full of deadly poison," showing how words can bring "death". Unchecked, our speech can cause destruction, spark conflict, and wound others deeply. James calls out the hypocrisy of blessing God and cursing people with the same mouth. Proverbs 18:21 reminds us the fruit of our words matters; we cannot compartmentalize our speech and must seek that our words bring life, not harm, at all times.

The last part—"those who love it will eat its fruits"—means that people who make much of speaking (love to talk) will inevitably experience consequences, whether positive or negative, from what they say. Our words "bear fruit," impacting ourselves and others. What you sow with your words, you will also reap.

You are a steward of the words you use. You are responsible for what you say. You're accountable to God for how you talk to yourself and others.

## **Application**

### **1. The Words We Speak to Ourselves.**

Our self-talk matters. And we all talk to ourselves. The question is: what are you saying? Your inner dialogue can shape the trajectory of your entire day, even your entire life. If you've convinced yourself that everyone is against you, you'll respond to them in that way (hence, pushing people away). If you tell yourself everyone is lying to you, you'll grow cynical and unable to form close bonds with people. What you say to yourself matters.

#### **Foolish self-talk:**

- "I'm going to fail"
- "My situation is hopeless"
- "Nobody likes me"
- "No one sees me or values me"

#### **Wise self-talk:**

**Psalm 42:5 - Why are you cast down, O my soul,**

**and why are you in turmoil within me?**

**Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,**

**my salvation and my God.**

What you tell yourself every day matters because it shapes your spiritual health and resilience. As Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." The Christian life involves not just resisting temptation outwardly, but renewing your mind inwardly (Romans 12:2)—and wise self-talk is how you participate in that renewal.

Choose words of truth, not lies—words that build faith, not fear; that reflect reality as God sees it, not just as circumstances suggest. This is how you align your life with God’s good purposes and walk in the life He intends.

## **2. The Words We Speak to Each Other**

Words build relationships or burn them down.

### **Proverbs 15:1–4**

**1 A soft answer turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

**2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,  
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.**

**3 The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
keeping watch on the evil and the good.**

**4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life,  
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.**

### **We see from this text that:**

- A gentle answer turns away wrath.
- A harsh word stirs up anger.
- Gracious words are a tree of life.

### **Practical Areas:**

- In marriage: Are you criticizing or encouraging?
- With your kids: Do your words lead to correction and growth—or shame and discouragement?
- With friends: Are you speaking truth in love, or flattery and gossip?
- At work: Do your words build up your team—or stir up division and cynicism?
- Online: Do your words reflect humility—or pride and sarcasm?

Friends, I imagine every single one of you right now can put yourself back in a conversation where you can recount something you said to somebody or that somebody said to you that you've never

forgotten. If someone followed you around this week and transcribed your words, what story would they tell about your heart?

### **Close**

This is where you lift their eyes from their own mouths to God's mercy. Speak life over them through Scripture. You could simply read these as a litany of gospel truth:

"You may have spoken foolishly this week. But here's what God says over you in Christ if you are His:"

"You are forgiven." – 1 John 1:9

"You are loved." – Romans 5:8

"You are chosen." – Ephesians 1:4

"You are a new creation." – 2 Corinthians 5:17

"You are His workmanship." – Ephesians 2:10

"You are no longer condemned." – Romans 8:1

"You are adopted." – Galatians 4:5

"You are sealed with His Spirit." – Ephesians 1:13

"You are being renewed." – Colossians 3:10

"You are victorious in Christ." – 1 Corinthians 15:57

You will only learn to speak words of life to others and yourself when you first receive the life-giving words God speaks over you in the gospel.



## LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



## LOOK UP

- **REVIEW**

- Read Proverbs 18:21 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
- Additional Scripture
  - Luke 6:45
  - James 3:1-12
  - Psalm 42:5
  - Proverbs 15:1-4

- **DISCUSS**

- According to the sermon, why do words have such a lasting impact on a person's life and legacy?
- What does Proverbs 18:21 teach us about the power of the tongue?
- How does the analogy "your mouth is a heart monitor" help us understand the connection between speech and spiritual condition?
- How does James 3:1-12 support the idea that words can be destructive?
- Why is negativity in our speech such a significant spiritual issue, according to the sermon?
- What are the potential consequences for someone who "loves" to talk, as described in Proverbs 18:21?
- How should Christians approach the words they speak to themselves?
- What are examples of foolish self-talk vs. wise self-talk, and why does this distinction matter?
- How should believers use their words in relationships according to Proverbs 15:1-4?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

## LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT**

- How are you making yourself known at church this week?
- How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
- How are you making Christ known this week?

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our team:** Anthony Knight (Equipping Pastor)
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
  - Kenya Team departing on June 29, 2025
  - Europe Student Team departing on July 6, 2025
  - Indonesia Team departing on August 11, 2025
  - Rome Team departing on November 15, 2025
- **Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:**
  - The Wilsons
  - The Grays
  - The Starks
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>