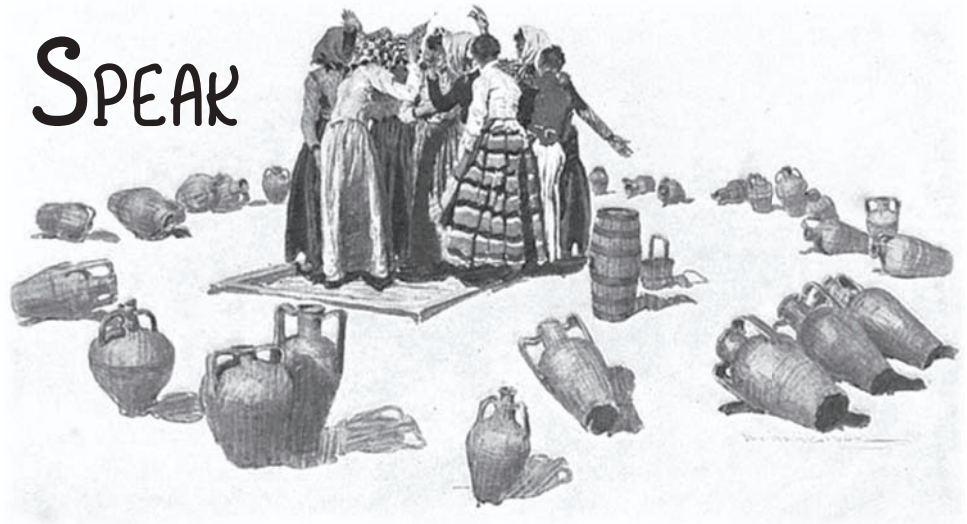


# WORDS WE SPEAK

A meditation based on Proverbs 25



by Clifford Fox

This morning in our family devotions time we read Proverbs 25. I was impressed with how much the Bible has to say about our words. It has plenty of warnings against sharp words, as well as encouragements to say the right word at the right time.

The words we speak are important. We can change many things by the words we say. A child learns early on how to persuade his parents to allow him a favor. An attorney chooses his words carefully to persuade the judge to decide in favor of his client. Words can be spoken to bring joy or sorrow, comfort or pain, love or hate. You may hear a president make a declaration of war and the course of history may be changed. When the auctioneer looked at me and said “Sold,” I immediately had the obligation to pay ten percent of the price I had bid on a house for myself and my bride-to-be. Later, we said “I do,” and we were pronounced husband and wife for as long as both of us would live. At another time, words expressed the deep feelings of my heart, and my eternal destiny was changed!

Although words can be momentous, many times they are not quite so life-changing. Yet they may have more effect than we realize. A kind word to a sad child or a lonely elderly widow—or perhaps an encouragement to one who is struggling with the perplexities of life—may be the spark that changes their outlook on life. One day soon after we were married I came home from work to find my wife in tears. What was wrong? It was the first time she had burned the food to serve her new husband! She needed some comforting, reassuring words to be spoken to her. It meant so much to her to hear that I still loved her just the same and it really didn’t matter if things weren’t perfect.

If we have a disagreement with someone or hear something negative about someone we do not appreciate, it is tempting to spread the gossip. Our hearts can be very deceitful in this. We persuade ourselves that we must ask others to pray for this individual, and then tell them all the details “so

they know how to pray for them.” However, the Bible tells us to work things out between ourselves where possible and not tell others. Proverbs 25:9-10 tells us, “Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.”

Turning to Matthew 18:15 we find, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Consider now how much good you can accomplish with your words. Remember how Abigail stopped David’s men from destroying her husband Nabal’s men by her humble, apologetic words. Remember also how a wise woman prevented a city from being destroyed when she spoke to Joab over the wall. Proverbs 25:11 teaches us that “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” (NKJV) I can just picture the person in charge of decorating Solomon’s mansion putting some golden apples on a silver platter for the centerpiece on his table. Perhaps Solomon came from the judgment hall to his dinner and thought how beautiful and precious it was, and realized that a word fitly spoken is just as precious and beautiful. Isaiah also knew the value of such words. He said: “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” Is. 50:4

A word of reproof to a willing learner is also of much value. When I correct my son and he amends his ways, it can save him from much heartache. If I am too busy to take the time to correct him, I may well regret it in later years. Proverbs 25:12 tells us that “As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear.” Proverbs 29:17 then instructs us to “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.”

Words spoken to lift up ourselves are obnoxious to the listeners. The bragging Pharisee who prayed in the temple did not go to his house justified. The lowly, humble publican did. Consider Proverbs 25:14: “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.” As a farmer is disappointed when clouds pass over and fail to bring much-needed rain, so we are disappointed when someone does not do what he promised to do. Proverbs 20:6 asks, “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”

Sometimes people will say “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” While a child has to learn not to take offense too easily, the Bible tells us that our words can “break” someone’s bones. Proverbs 25:15b says that “a soft tongue breaketh the bone.”

False words are among the worst words, especially when mixed with partial truth. Men have gone to prison for crimes they haven’t done because of a false testimony given in court under oath before God that they are speaking the truth. What pain we feel when someone unjustly accuses us of wrongdoing! Proverbs 25:18: “A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul [a mallet, or hammer], and a sword, and a sharp arrow.”

There are also times when silence is “golden.” Sometimes just a few compassionate words are better than many words. And lighthearted talk is not fitting for someone who is grieving. Proverbs 25:20 teaches us that “As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.”

Have you ever been with someone who is complaining and quarrelling? You just want to get away from the person because they find something bad to say about everything that happens. Maybe one of Solomon’s many wives was this way! Ponder Proverbs 25:24: “It is better to dwell in the

corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.”

Ah! How good to hear a word of good news from friends from far away. Maybe we haven’t heard from them for some time, and then they send a letter bringing good news, perhaps of a loved one giving their life to God. We rejoice with them, just as it says in Proverbs 25:25: “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”

Proverbs 18:21 says “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” I have heard someone interpret this verse to mean that I can claim life verbally for myself and God *will* heal me. (Unfortunately, that person died anyway.) I believe this is a wrong interpretation. The second half of the verse explains that the things we say affect those around us. Many times we say to our Christian friends, “God bless you.” Are we not asking God to give them the blessings of spiritual and physical life? And, conversely, you have probably heard an angry person say words of cursing on another person. Are they not asking for eternal death by those curses?

James has many warnings of the dangers of a tongue, calling it a world of iniquity! He tells us that if we do not offend with our words, we are perfect and are able to control the rest of our body. O Lord, teach us to be careful not to send any cutting, harsh, or hurtful words from our mouth!

Jesus told us that the words He speaks to us are spirit and life! The people who met Jesus were impressed with how gracious His words were. May it be said of us that we have been with Jesus, because of our gracious words.

*Clifford and Marlene Fox live at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where they—along with their five children—attend Living Hope Christian Fellowship. Clifford enjoys reading about how God has worked in the lives of others and how they faced the challenges of the circumstances God placed them in.*



**Death and life are in the power of the tongue.**

(Proverbs 18:21)

**Is your tongue an axe, or a cup of cold water?**

