

## Get Smarter - Study 4

# Two Ears, One mouth

## Wise Listening, Wise Speaking

A wise man once said, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." (Apparently, it was the Greek philosopher Epictetus, who was born around 55AD.) It's catchy, and it's probably true – and it's the theme of a large proportion of Solomon's wise proverbs.

Proverbs has a lot to say about **how and when to speak** and when to hold our tongue, the richness of a timely word and the destructiveness of a mistimed comment, and the way our words reflect what's in our hearts. In summary:

**The tongue has the power of life and death,  
and those who love it will eat its fruit.**

**Prov 18:21**

Proverbs also has a lot to say about the **way we listen** – whether we're prepared to take heed of timely words of rebuke and correction.

Do you ever have a problem with taming your tongue? Or with humbly accepting to correction? Then this quick tour of Proverbs is for you.

## 1. Speaking the Truth

We hear it all the time, "It's just a little white lie, nobody cares!" Is that true? Are there some areas in which we can be flexible with the truth and God doesn't mind? Well, we're not left in the dark about the answer to this question, Proverbs says plenty about what God's view of telling the truth is.

a) Summarise what the following Proverbs say about lying.

- Prov 6:16-19, 8:13 and 12:22

b) In contrast, how does "wisdom" speak? See Prov 8:7-9.

**Pause and Reflect:** Do you think there are circumstances in which it is acceptable to lie, or at least bend the truth? What are those, and why? What (if any) would be another option?

## 2. More tongue trouble...

c) Lying is not the only way we can misuse our tongues. Summarise these:

- 12:6,13,18

- 13:3

d) Now take the reverse of each of those statements, (which may or may not be included in the proverb) and describe the good things the tongue can do.

**He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.**

**Proverbs 21:v23**

e) There's a huge list of proverbs about chattering fools, mouths that invite ruin, lying lips that conceal hatred, lips that gossip or mock. According to Proverbs 10:19, what's the best way to prevent tongue-trauma?

### **3. A Deeper Problem...**

We might not want to admit it, but our words say more about us than we would care to admit. We might call it a careless word, or a throw away line – but Proverbs says our words say more about us than we imagine.

f) From Proverbs 16:23, 18:4, 26:23, 26:24-26, how would you describe the connection between a person's words and the state of their heart?

In Matthew 15:19, Jesus says something very similar: "...out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." We Christians are people with changed hearts. And if that's not reflected in the words of our lips, there's something very wrong!

**Pause and Reflect:** Think back to the last hard conversation you had with someone at work, church or even in your Growth Group.

During that conversation, what were you hoping would be the outcome of that conversation? Was the motivation for their good or yours?

## **4. A Listening Ear**

We've seen the way wisdom should affect the way we speak... so what about the way we listen? Proverbs has got a lot to say about taking heed of wise advice. In fact, chapters 1 to 7 are almost completely shaped as a 'father to son' chat, with a constant refrain – "Listen, my son, to your Father's instruction." (See 1:8, 2:1, 3:1-2, 4:1, 4:10, 4:20, 5:7...)

In fact, the Book of Proverbs says that listening to wise advice and gracious rebuke is the key ways we grow in wisdom. You'll only grow in wisdom if you're teachable: in other words, to be ready to listen instruction, correction and rebuke. Are you?

### **4.1 Listening to Instruction**

g) Read Proverbs 2:1-10. What sequence of good events is promised here?

### **4.2 Listening to Correction**

h) Read Proverbs 12:1. How are you going with this?

i) According to Proverbs 12:18, why is it better to heed correction?

### **4.3 Listening to Rebuke**

j) According to Proverbs 17:10, what does your reaction to a rebuke indicate?

k) According to Proverbs 25:11-12, how valuable is the right rebuke at the right time?

l) In the famous business book "A Complaint is a Gift," Janelle Barlow says that customers who take the trouble to complain are doing any business a huge favour. What does Proverbs 25:12 say about this?

When's the last time you actually **treasured** a rebuke?

#### **4.4 Listening to Advice**

Who do you turn to for advice when you're making key life decisions? Anyone? No-one? Friends? Spouse? Where can you look for such advisers?

m) What do Proverbs 12:1,15, 13:1,13 say about 'listening to advice'?

Strange, isn't it. We tend to think highly of those who don't seem to need advice from anyone... and yet Proverbs says that the wise man is the one who seeks out advice, and loves it! There's more on the same theme in Prov 13:13,18, 15:12,22. If a wise person is making plans, they'll seek the counsel of as many advisers as they can. Perhaps that's one of the biggest advantages of being part of a church family.

n) According to Prov 16:20, what are some of the benefits of listening to instruction?

o) Some people can only learn from the school of hard knocks. According to Prov 19:25, what will be the mark of true discernment?

It's a simple enough formula... the wiser you are, the more easily you'll listen to correction and advice.

## **5. The Wounds of a Friend**

Sometimes we hesitate to give advice or rebuke because we're afraid it will hurt the other person, and damage the relationship. And we're wise if we remember that we should listen twice as much as we speak! But often, the right word at the right time – even though it's hard to deliver – is a wonderful gift. And the hurt that results when the friend continues down the path to disaster causes much more lasting damage.

p) According to Prov 27:6 and 9, what is the value of the right words from a true friend?

**Reflect:** Can your growth group become a circle of true friends? What could help this to happen?

What could stop it happening?

What ground rules should a group adopt to encourage true and honest friendship?

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.  
Prov 27:17**

## **6. In Conclusion: Ready to Listen, Ready to Speak?**

It's one thing to dish up homespun advice and folksy wisdom. But when Christians are called to speak a word of instruction or rebuke, we have a much better source.

### **Read 2 Tim 3:16-4:4.**

q) As a pastor-teacher, what is Timothy told to do, and how does he do it? (4:2)

Correcting, rebuking and encouraging one another from God's word is what ministry to one another is all about. Presumably, in Growth Groups and one to one, wise members will be keen to both give and receive this kind of help. In fact, the wiser you are, the keener you'll be to be corrected!

c) What warning does Paul give about 'times to come'? Do you think he was right?

Why not commit yourself as a group to being "open to correction" as you meet together to encourage one another this year. Ask God to give both the wisdom and the opportunities to do this.

### **For the coming week...**

Remember...



Read...

**Proverbs 22:17-29**

### **March Challenge – Meet your street.**

Hold a street part for your neighbours.