Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out Crazy World
Sermon Title: The Power of Death and Life

Text: **Proverbs 18:20-21 -- From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips. 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.**

Introduction: I want to begin this morning by saying something that all of you already know. **WORDS ARE IMPORTANT**. They are important for at least two reasons: (**1**) **Because of the sheer quantity of words we use**. Listen to this: According to ***Today in the Word***, the average person spends one-fifth of his or her life talking. That's what the statistics say. In fact, if all of your words were put into print, the result would be this: **A single day's words would fill a 50-page book, while in a year's time the average person's words would fill ninety-one and a half books of 200 pages each! If you were to live eighty years this means that you would pour forth from your mouth enough words to fill 7,300 books**. It seems that while few people will ever become **PROLIFIC WRITERS**, most of us are **PROLIFIC TALKERS. (2) The second reason why words are important is because of their amazing power. Words have the ability to change the way we and others look at things in the world. Don't believe me! Consider this…for every word in Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, 125 people died during WWII? Words have power! Solomon reminds us of this in the verses I just read to you. DEATH AND LIFE ARE IN THE POWER OF THE TONGUE.**

This morning, in the twelve message of our series, **Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out, Crazy World,** I want to look at some good uses of the tongue and some not so good uses. Among all the words that we are bound to speak, certainly some are spoken in ANGER, CARELESSNESS OR HASTE. These kinds of words are part of what I refer to as "***noise***." They serve as hindrances to meaningful communication in the same way that a television or crying baby does. ***They prevent us from being able to focus THE MATTER AT HAND by distracting us with verbal flak that commandeers our immediate attention***. What Solomon wants us to know in the book of Proverbs is that wise men or women know how to make good use of their words so that they are life-giving.

Proverbs 22:11 -- He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend. GRACIOUS SPEECH involves the use of one's words in such a way that they build up (*edify*) our listeners. In **Ephesians 4:29** we're told, "**Let no corrupting (evil) talk come out your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear**." What are we to know from these passages? It's simple…EDIFYING SPEECH IS GRACIOUS SPEECH!

Now, let me share some characteristics of GRACIOUS SPEECH that blesses others and some characteristics of NEGATIVE SPEECH that inevitably hurts others by tearing them apart.

Gracious speech is speech that encourages. Here are a couple of proverbs that make this point: **Proverbs 12:25 -- Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad – This is saying that a word of encouragement brings the joy of confidence and hope to the person who is struggling with anxious thoughts; Proverbs 16:24 -- Gracious words are like a**

honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body – A well spoken word is sweet to the soul and brings healing to the one who receives it. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in some of his letters to the churches: **1 Corinthians 11:2 -- I praise (laud) you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you**; **Philippians 1:7-8 – For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me**; **Romans 1:8 -- First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world**. **While we should never seek the praise of men more than the praise of God, it is far from an ungodly act to express approval and affection for others**. ***I know of no one who, when completely honest, would say that if he never received another word of praise or affection from a fellow human being, his life would be the better for it***.

Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy, the real-life couple portrayed in the movie ***Blindside***, share the following story in their book ***In a Heartbeat***: There is a little-known congressional program that awards internships to young people who have aged out of the foster care system. These are kids who were never adopted, and are no longer eligible for state support. [A senator we've met] employed one such man as an intern. One morning the senator breezed in for a meeting and discovered that his intern was already in the office, reorganizing the entire mailroom. The senator said to the intern, "***This is amazing—the mailroom has never looked so clean. You did a great job***." A few minutes later the senator saw that the intern had tears streaming down his face. [He] said, "***Son, are you okay***?" "***Yes***," the intern answered quietly. "***Did I say something to offend you***?" "***No, sir***." "***Well, what's wrong***?" The young man said, "***That's the first time in my life anyone's told me that I did something good***." The authors' comment, "***A little bit of attention and a kind (gracious) word—that's how little it takes to affect someone's life for the better***." (**Review: Gracious speech is speech that encourages**)

Gracious speech is speech that corrects. Yes, even our correction of others should be done graciously. The message shouldn't be, "***I reject you***," but "***I reject your behavior***." Listen again to the words of the Apostle Paul, this time in **Galatians 6:1: Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness**… He says something very similar to his disciple, Timothy, in **2 Timothy 2:24-25a – And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone…correcting his opponents with gentleness**. **Meekness**, as you may already know, is the "***gentleness of strength***." **D. A. Carson calls it "a controlled desire to see another's interests advance instead of one's own**." That's why meek people are humble and gentle in how they correct others. Solomon talks about the value of a well-placed rebuke in these verses: **Proverbs 25:12 -- Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear; Proverbs 27:5-6 – Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend**. **A great example of this is found in Paul's gracious response to the Corinthians**. In his first letter to them he addresses several issues including: **(1) division** (**1:10-13**); **(2) jealousy and strife** (**3:1-3**); **(3) sexual immorality** (**5:1-5**); **(4) believers taking one another to court before unbelieving judges** (**6:1-8**); **(5) idolatrous feasts** (**10:14-22**); **and (6) disorder in the assembly** (**11:17-22**). Any one of these might have been enough to provoke many unkind remarks from certain leaders, but not Paul. **Listen to his words** (**4:14**) **in response to their foolishness**: ***I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to***

admonish you as my beloved children. Gracious speech always looks to bring about a good result. (**Review: Gracious speech is speech that encourages; it is speech that corrects**)

Gracious speech is speech that brings peace. A gracious person, who out of the overflow of his heart, speaks graciously to others is patient, slow to anger and eager to be at peace with others. Here what Solomon says about it. **(1) Proverbs 15:1 – a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**; **(2) Proverbs 15:18 -- A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.** Listen: we all have strong opinions about issues (the election?), but note what Paul told the church in Rome about what to do when it came to matters of opinion -- **do the things which make for peace and the building up of one another – Romans 14:19**. Christians should speak graciously with others who share different opinions and look for ways to come to peaceful terms regarding them. (**Review: Gracious speech is speech that encourages; it is speech that corrects; it is speech that brings peace**)

Gracious speech is speech that is well-mannered. **Show perfect courtesy toward all people -- Titus 3:2b**. I want to talk about this for a moment because it seems that simple courtesies like saying "***please***," "***thank you***," "***excuse me***," "***you're welcome***," "***hello***," "***I'm sorry***," "***it's very nice to meet you,***" "***sir***," and "***ma'am***" are not being taught in some homes today. These kinds of expressions are right because they display **mutual respect and consideration** for others. That's one way to be gracious in your speech. Let me give you two more ways to express grace as we wrap up the first part of this message:

- **Pay attention when someone else is talking to you.** You may benefit from what he says! (**Proverbs 12:15** – TLB -- **A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others**).
- **Don't interrupt someone else who is speaking** (**Proverbs 18:13 – if one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame**). Many of us spend too much of our time in a conversation thinking about what we're going to say in response to someone and not enough time listening to what is being said. Solomon advises against it. How important is it to listen well? **Author Simon Greer** argues that if more people took the time to hear what others are saying, there would be less of a **political divide** in America. "Listening deeply means silencing that noise, listening not just with your ears but with every sense you've got, every cell in your body. It means listening to all that is said and unsaid, to the body language, the tone, the eye movement. It's full-body listening. This type of listening builds trust, opens doors, and offers a path to deep discovery and a sacred connection that forms the basis for new understandings and otherwise unimaginable possibilities. Study after study shows in sector after sector—in medicine, marriage, real estate sales, and more—that true listening generates better results. And yet most of us go through our entire (lives) without having learned how to do it." *Simon Greer, "Can Deep Listening Heal Our Divisions?" Greater Good (1-19-21)*

Now let's talk about NEGATIVE SPEECH and what is said about it in the book of Proverbs. From Satan's speech to Eve in the garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:1-6**) to the teaching of the false prophet in Revelation (**Revelation 13:11-18**), the Bible warns us that words can be used to harm others. Here are some negative uses of speech according to Solomon.

Negative speech is expressed in flattery. The Hebrew word means "**smooth**." That's a good description of what it means to flatter someone. **It refers to the smooth talker who compliments you but the praise is insincere. He has a selfish goal in mind. Proverbs 29:5** says, "**A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet**." Or as someone else has said, "**The flatterer pats you on the back, but only to locate a soft spot in which to stick a knife**." **Proverbs 26:28** reminds us that flattery is a form of deceit. "**A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin**." Satan flattered Eve when he said, "**For God knows that when you eat of (the fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**" – **Genesis 3:5**. If it weren't for our pride, flattery would not affect us. So, the best way to deal with it is to cultivate humility in our lives. ***That's when flattery loses its appeal***.

Negative speech is expressed in quarreling. I'm not talking about sharing a different view that someone else doesn't agree with. Sometimes we have to do this. **I'm talking about doing it in a way that fosters anger and resentment rather than understanding**. Listen to these verses from Solomon on fighting. (**1**) **Proverbs 15:18 – NLT -- A hot-tempered person starts fights; a cool-tempered person stops them**; (**2**) **Proverbs 17:14 -- Starting a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so stop before a dispute breaks out**; and (**3**) **Proverbs 20:3 -- It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling**. It was **Ambrose Bierce** who said, "**Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret**."

Negative speech is expressed in gossip. **Proverbs 11:13 -- A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret**. The KJV translates gossip as **a talebearer**. It means to "**go about**" and was used of **a merchant who would travel around selling his wares**. The idea is that the talebearer goes about peddling juicy morsels about the lives of others when they have not been given permission to do so. **Proverbs 18:8** tells us that people who listen to gossip never seem to get enough of it -- **The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body**. Beware if this is something you struggle with. It may cost you more than you're willing to pay. The gossiper separates the close friends according to **Proverbs 16:28**.

Negative speech is expressed in lying. God is pleased with those who are truthful with one another. Lying lips, on the other hand, are an abomination to the Lord (**Proverbs 12:22**). To put it in perspective, consider these other things that are abhorrent to the Lord: (**1**) Idolatry – worshipping something other than God – **1 Kings 21:26**; (**2**) the deeds of the foolish man who denies the existence of God – **Proverbs 14:1**; and (**3**) His own people who whored after the gods of other nations – **Ezekiel 16:25**. I think you get the picture. When the Bible describes something as an abomination, it is usually because of the unfaithfulness of the people to God Himself. When we lie, we are choosing deceit over truth. **And make no mistake, God is the God of truth – Psalm 31:5. Satan is the father of lies – John 8:44**.

Let's review what we've talked about: **Gracious speech** is speech that encourages, speech that corrects, speech that brings peace and speech that is well-manner. **Negative speech** is expressed in flattery, quarreling, gossip and lying. **James 3:2** tells us this about the tongue -- **For we all often stumble and fall and offend in many things. And if anyone does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things], he is a fully developed character and a perfect man, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature** – AMP. **It may be that the**

greatest evidence of spiritual maturity in the life of a believer is the ability to control his or her tongue. This can only be accomplished as we continually walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Learn to ask yourself these questions before you speak. They're in the form of an acronym to make it easier to remember.

T **- Is what you're going to say TRUE?**
H **– Is what you're going to say HELPFUL?**
I **– Is what you're going to say INSPIRING?**
N **– Is what you're going to say NECESSARY?**
K **– Is what you're going to say KIND?**

Conclusion: What kind of speech will you choose? Gracious speech or negative speech? Speaking gracious words does not demand that we speak many words. In fact, the Bible says that we are to be **quick to listen and slow to speak**. Too often our many words are what lead us into trouble. The famous **Polish Pianist Arthur Rubenstein** once told this story on himself: Some years ago, he was assailed by a stubborn case of hoarseness. The newspapers were full of reports about smoking and cancer; so, he decided to consult a throat specialist. "***I searched his face for a clue during the 30-minute examination***," Rubenstein said, "***but it was expressionless. He told me to come back the next day. I went home full of fears, and I didn't sleep that night***." The next day there was another long examination and again an ominous silence. "***Tell me***," the pianist exclaimed. "***I can stand the truth. I've lived a full, rich life. What's wrong with me***?" The physician said, "***You talk too much***." **We speak a lot of words in any given day, as we learned earlier…enough to fill fifty pages in a book. If most of them are lacking grace and favor for others, if they negatively impact others, then we're talking too much**.