



Dispensing Waters from the Fountain of Life

"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life."

Proverbs 10:11a

In ancient Israel, running water was a precious commodity. Communities could only be built in places where a reliable source of fresh water was available. A fountain of fresh, clean water meant life. A good water source was essential for a community's success. With that "fountain of life," the community could thrive.

As members of God's covenant people, we form a community. And just as a village in ancient Israel would rely on its source of fresh water for life, our covenant community relies on the words of our mouths as our fountain of life. Within our covenant relationships, our words must encourage our community to thrive and grow in love for each other and for our God. Our words, the fruit of our lips, must be sanctified because of who we are in Christ. The proverbs tell us that our words have power. Our words can either strengthen God's created order, or they can tear down and work against God's purposes.

God hasn't given us a technical manual on how to speak, or specific words for each situation we might find ourselves in. But what he has given us are principles that will work when they're put into practice – not because they're the habits of highly effective people, but because they're *his* principles. He created the mouth, the tongue, the lips, the words we speak, and the thought that goes into forming those words. He created our will and the intentions of our heart. And he created all of these things for his glory, for his pleasure, for the purpose of his Kingdom. Our words are tools. They can be either tools of life, or tools that bring death.

Our words can bring healing to others. Where there is brokenness, such as the brokenness of sin and sorrow and pain and frustration and grief, our words can be a balm that soothes, a medicine that brings relief and restoration. Gentleness in speech is like a tree of life; in a world that's full of death, godly words bring life.

How do you speak to a brother who's struggling in his faith? How do you speak to a brother who's just revealed a secret sin that he's fighting to overcome? How do you speak to a brother who's discouraged, who thinks there's no hope, who is battling against unbelief? Your response to a brother or sister in a situation like that can bring healing; it can lead to repentance; it can bring rejoicing and gladness and celebration.

The person who misuses his tongue causes strife and separation. With his words, he can tear apart relationships that have taken years to build up. Rumours, innuendo, slander, lies – they may be spoken quietly, they may be whispered, but their result is nothing but ruin. Words can drive people from the church, and they can drive people into their sins instead of away from them. Our words, poorly chosen, and poorly spoken, can drive people into the clutching grasp of the devil instead of into the loving arms of the Saviour. But godly wisdom means telling the truth, in the right way, to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons.

And ultimately, we need to look to the example of our Saviour as we seek to become more and more like him in our words as well as in our actions. *"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth"* (Isa 53:7). Even when he was falsely accused of terrible crimes against God and his people, he didn't use his words to fight back. He didn't seek his own

rights. He didn't fight fire with fire. He kept his mouth shut, and that should remind us of one of the other proverbs in Proverbs 10: *"When words are many, sin is not absent, but whoever holds his tongue is wise"* (v. 19).

Our words are meant to be a fountain of life. May they give healing. May they give encouragement. May they build up. May they give glory to God and joy to his people. May we in the power of the Holy Spirit become more like our Saviour so that when people hear us speak, they hear him and are brought to praise him, the Creator and the Redeemer of our tongues. Then our words, fitly spoken, will truly be a fountain of life to God's glory, and the praise of his Name.

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