

Proverbs 15:1

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Date: 06 November 2022

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[0 : 00] With that in mind, let's take a look at one of the proverbs tonight that will help us in the way that we speak to others. Communication is key in life, and if you get communication right, you're going to get, I'll leave the percentage to you, but I'm thinking 70% to 80% of your life is going to be okay if you learn how to communicate well and how to not communicate badly.

And I'm not talking about just being able to speak in public. I mean how we relate to each other, of course. So this will be helpful if we can get our heads around how to communicate, how to use our tongues.

It's going to help you at home, it's going to help you at work, and it's going to help you with your friends. So here's our proverb, our takeaway proverb for today. Proverbs 15, chapter 15, verse 1. Chapter 15, verse 1. It's well known. It's also easily forgotten. A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. That's the NIV. The message has this. A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

[1 : 19] Same thing. Just a bit more accessible maybe. So guys, the end of the year is approaching. What happens to our stress levels? They don't stay. They don't go down. They go up.

Conversations get heated. Deadlines are approaching. Things must happen. Tensions go over, and you find yourself in a heated conversation. Now, you can't control what others say, but you can control what you say with a lot of help.

The problem is we generally default to what we know in a stressful situation, in a heated conversation, where someone is coming at you with, they're angry. So this proverb is about people who are already angry.

It's assuming you're not causing the anger. That does happen, but we're assuming that you're just going along with your daily life, and someone comes with, bam, with a bunch of anger. Now, how do you deal with that situation?

So our problem is we default to what we know. If you're fortunate and had a good upbringing with both parents, knowing this proverb and living Christian lives, you wouldn't have learned all the bad words and how to communicate badly.

[2 : 21] Most of us grew up with families that had heated conversations fairly regularly, and actually, to be honest, which of us haven't been through that through our lives? Harsh words, fighting, shouting, maybe even escalating to the point of hitting.

But just to make that point about how important it is parents that this is modeled to your children because they're going to, of course they're going to pick it up. And then that becomes their default, their baseline.

So if there's lots of shouting, lots of chaos, lots of drama, that's their baseline. They think that's normal, and then they will perpetuate that. So moms and dads, you want to grab hold of this. Also for your workplace, you don't want to be that guy that knows that just escalates conversations. You want to be known as someone who de-escalates conversations. So just to think through us, through how we relate, how our words go out from us, think through what your default is when other people upset you.

Do you generally get upset back to the same level or higher? Or are you able to respond, but not react or overreact? And are you able to de-escalate?

[3 : 42] Do you get defensive? I don't think anyone, I mean there's no one who enjoys being attacked. And so anytime that happens, you can almost feel you get that reaction.

Your heart beats faster, your sweaty bits. And so it happens, but when you get defensive, is your defensive level one or straight up to ten, straight away?

Or does it climb slowly and sort of wave around three or four and then up to ten? Like you've got that time number and then you just had enough. Does your defense, what's this guy doing? Why is he talking like this to me? Look like, why are you talking like that to me? Okay, so does it look like attack? Are there aims, is the aim of your words when you're in a crisis situation, crucial conversation I think is known in psychology terms.

We had training when I was at Uten and had crucial conversations which are difficult conversations. As you're having the conversation, do you have the aim in your head to restore relationship or to maintain truth and to maintain your point?

[4 : 48] Sometimes those two don't work together. Now people who attack or escalate could feel that way for a number of reasons. Sometimes it's the easiest thing to do. I'm tired, I haven't eaten, my sugar levels are low, I haven't slept and you're the third person who's told me about this and this and then bam!

Okay, it happens. Sin slips out just because we just don't have the power to fight it, we're just a little bit lazy, it's the easiest thing to do. Although generally you're able to hold it in, to control it.

Sometimes we respond, we escalate because we've been holding grudges.

that person has done things and I didn't say anything and he did nothing and he didn't say nothing and eventually he says something and now is the time that I want to let you know how really upset I am about all the other things but it's just about this little thing and he doesn't know why you're upset with him.

Because you haven't dealt with, you haven't forgiven him. Most often, people who are overly defensive that looks like attack is they're not feeling adequate for the situation.

They're feeling unsettled in general. They're not grounded. They're probably carrying a lot of guilt about things they've done that haven't really settled or they've been hurt and they haven't sorted that out either.

[6 : 03] So they've done things wrong and that guilt is still playing underneath in the underground or they've been wronged against and they haven't been able to really sort it out. And so it comes out as a really overly strong defense or just simply attack.

Not willing to give any ground because then I'm going to get taken advantage of like I have in the past and I'm not going to have that. So that's why it comes out as vicious anger and the whole thing escalates.

Now friends, this is where the gospel comes into Proverbs. Jesus didn't just die for our current sins. He died for the sins that were the things we've done wrong our whole life.

He's also died for the things that were done wrong to us so that either way you're able to let go of them and have Christ deal with them and pay for them and wash them away.

He can clean out your past. He can wash away either your guilt or your hurt and then when you find peace and strength because you've been adopted into his family as his child you get that inner peace.

[7 : 14] You get that inner core, that inner stability that says there's something much more stronger and solid in my life than your valuation of me whether I did it right or wrong.

And let's be honest, in any situation where someone is shouting at you, you either totally caused it, it's totally your fault, often sometimes the case, it might be a little bit your fault or a lot, you know, it could be from 99% down to 3% your fault.

On the very odd occasion, it's not your fault. We all go through that but don't think, yes, I'm innocent and then every time someone attacks you but I'm innocent and I, you know, just think, okay, you know, which, how much, how involved were you in causing this person to flare up?

But when you come to Christ, the things you've done wrong, you don't have to carry that guilt, the things that have wronged you, you don't have to carry that pain, Jesus gives you a solid, settled base of forgiveness and acceptance that should change how you interact.

Does that make sense? But what if they win? What if they take advantage of me if I don't fight back? Well, what about it?

[8 : 33] What if they win? Jesus was taken advantage of for you. Imagine he had fought back at the Garden of Gethsemane. No, forget this.

Not dying today, boys. Okay, well then, you and me wouldn't have the blessings of Ephesians 1. You'd be dead in your sins because Jesus couldn't be bothered to save your sins.

And then every situation in your life is going to escalate and escalate and who knows where it's going to stop. 1 Peter says this, when they hurled the insults at him, he didn't retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bought our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds, you have been healed. So he himself bought our sins on the cross so that we might die to our sins so that when we're faced with an escalating situation and someone is angry at us, we can fall back on what Christ has done for me.

[9 : 45] And I don't have to retaliate from my past mistakes or my past sins. I'm clean, I'm new, I can start again here now. Alright, so if people want to fight and call you names, you know what?

That's fine. You're not those things anymore. God knows you. You're a child of God. You've been washed inside and out and you can trust him to defend your cause when you're slandered against. Now, that doesn't mean you mustn't say anything. You can. Many of the proverbs are like, you know what? Just keep quiet. And learn times out of ten if you do that, it's actually probably the best thing.

You can say something back but you're not going to fight back with the same broken weapons of fear and anger and blame.

But peace and love and reconciliation, you're going to be constructive. In every encounter you want to ask, how gentle, how gentle can I be?

[10 : 48] How can I put the fire out? You've got to be a spiritual fireman. Hey guys, it's cool to be a fireman. So, you know, how can I defend myself so that they know they can't mess with me?

Who cares about that? Not Jesus. He wants you to restore and to help. You're going to talk back in calm, gentle tones and speak the truth.

So, a gentle answer turns away wrath. The Hebrew is delicate, soft, gentle.

How gentle can your words be in the next week? Hey, just do it nine to five. It doesn't have to be in an escalating situation. Practice when you're not. Practice. So here's the practical bit.

Practice when people aren't shouting at you. That's the time to practice gentleness. And then when they are shouting at you, you'll find that you, let's say, like your harsh level was ten, it'll be eight. Or your gentle level will be from one, it'll be like a three.

[11 : 53] Typically, when someone, what you want to aim at is when someone is escalating, so there's levels of being angry, isn't there?

There's like slight irritation. How would that go? Slight irritation, a little bit of frustration, really frustrated, seriously upset. I've had it up to here.

Or, you know, you remember that? Had it up to here. That was death, man. Whatever level of anger is being pushed at you or that you're receiving, try, so practice coming, responding underneath that level of stress and anxiety.

I'm not saying you must, well, okay, you've got to be like Jesus, but calibrate yourself. Like, just try and come under. Don't match it and don't go over that level of anger and stress.

So, in a confrontation, so-and-so, I can see you're upset. I can't help you if you're shouting at me or calling me names or coming at me with this emotion.

[13 : 01] It'll be helpful if you can lower your voice, if you need to take a few breaths. Let's try and sort this out together. And, I'm not saying the fire will go away, but you're going to get far better results than if you fight back fire with fire.

Does that make sense? Of course, you know that. If they continue shouting or calling you names or doing whatever that you really can't cope with it, or you can, but not in a godly way and you're going to fight back, excuse yourself from the conversation.

It doesn't seem like we're going to resolve this right now. I'm going to leave, but I'll be happy to talk once there's less tension. So, you're letting them know that you're interested, you want to try and work it out, and then leave and say, please excuse me, I'll see you in a bit.

Often, they're just, and ten minutes later, well, you'd be surprised. They'll come back and apologize and say, listen, I'm really sorry I shouted at you, and then you've got to be forgiving and say, that's fine, let's sort it out. All right, so, in the week ahead, you'll face tense conversations.

Make sure you're not the one that starts them. But when they happen to you, it's a perfect opportunity to practice Proverbs 15, verse 1.

[14 : 24] Take a deep breath, send out a quick, Lord, please help me do this, because I'm not going to be able to. I actually feel like fighting back, but I know you don't want me to, and I don't have to.

Recite the proverb in your mind. A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Is it still there? Why don't we say it together? A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

And speak in soft, gentle tones, like I'm speaking to you now. If you can make it more gentle, then by all means, be as helpful as you can, be as constructive as you can, and trust God to undertake for you.

And then you'll be working with wisdom instead of against it, and you'll see how much easier and more pleasant your life can be. Well, let's pray and ask God to help him for us to do this.

Lord God, your word is so full of life, giving truth and help, and Lord, we are so slow to get it, and so quick to do whatever we want, and to undermine our own happiness, and our witness, and your kingdom, and everything by just being angry and silly and foolish, as the Proverbs tell us.

[15 : 50] Lord, we want to live with wisdom, we want to work with you in this world, to have an easier life, Lord, as you promise, but we need your help, we need your spirit, and we need Christ to do that inward work in us, Lord, to clean us, to cleanse us, to stand us firm in the faith that we are your sons and daughters, and that we've got a new life that we can live, and we don't have to respond out of the things we've done in the past.

Help us, Lord, to hang on to those truths in the crunch moment, to practice them well, and to honor you by the words that come out of our mouth. In Jesus' name, Amen.