

“WISDOM FOR WATCHING OUR MOUTH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

August 2, 2026, 10:30 AM

Text for Sermon: Proverbs 18:21; 10:11; 12:18; 13:3; 15:4

Introduction.

Last week in my sermon on Proverbs 3:5-8 I challenged us to live Coram Deo, before the face of God. It means living your entire life—every moment and place, every circumstance and situation—under the conscious awareness of God’s presence with us and His knowledge of our every thought, word and action.

Ken Quehrn, a member of our church, who is the middle school and high school band teacher at Lynden Christian School shared with me that every year for the past seven years he reminds his students to live that way. He made a big poster that hangs in his classrooms. He gave us a copy and we put one in all your boxes. Make it a conversation starter in your homes, around the table, during family devotions.

Are you willing to begin living more coram Deo, more consciously aware of the presence of God, living as if we are before the face of God?

Are you willing to let the book of Proverbs bring you into a deeper awareness of God’s wisdom and will for your life and for your family?
Are you willing to come under the Word of God, to submit your will to it, to come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit of God?

How about if we start with our tongues? Why start with the tongue? Well, it turns out Proverbs has a lot to say about what we say, about watching our mouth. The subject of our tongue and how we use our words is one of the most major themes in Proverbs. There are over 150 proverbs that deal with our lips, our mouth, our tongue, our words.

Does that give you a clue our tongues and our words are exceedingly important to God, of more importance than we give it? God cares about what comes out of our mouths.

Words are powerful. We all have experienced the power of words. Every one of us, from youngest to oldest, has said things we regret, things we wish we could un-speak, take back. And every one of us has had things said to us that have hurt us deeply, things we wish we had never heard.

We have all been eyewitnesses (ear-witnesses) to others doing great damage with their tongue, violent outbursts, terrible displays of anger, out of control tempers. Many people carry emotional wounds for decades because of words spoken by parents, siblings, teachers, spouses, or friends.

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Do you believe that verse? Is that really true, are our words that powerful, that they have the power of life and death, of blessings and curses? Is this exaggeration, hyperbole?

If that is true, we should be trembling over how we wield such a powerful sword that can kill and destroy and can heal and help.

Who knew that this whole business of talking was such serious business?

Every word you and I spoke this week was either life-giving or death-dealing.

James 3:9-10 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

It is staggering what the tongue can do, the power for both good and evil. this little three ounce piece of flesh in our mouth is the world's smallest and largest troublemaker. An uncontrolled tongue is one of the most deadly things in the world.

We all know the playground taunt, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

That's not true. Scripture declares that a false statement. Words do hurt, we have all been hurt by them and we have all hurt others with them.

Solomon in his great wisdom understands marriages and homes are built or broken, friendships formed or fractured, churches strengthened or divided, and careers and reputations established or ruined by the words people choose to speak.

Tongues can be weapons of mass destruction, with it we can tear down and destroy, curse, abuse, slander, put down, gossip, hurt.

Or it can be a tree of life, a fountain of life, a healing stream, reconciling people, bringing peace. With it we can build up, encourage, bless, counsel, save, heal. Tongues can make marriages sweet, families strong, and churches healthy.

Listen to these phrases and feel the power, the weight of them for good or ill:

“Think about how devastating and uplifting words can be. “I hate you.” “I love you.” “It’s all your fault.” “Good job!” “You are a failure.” “That was amazing!” “You’re fired.” “You’re hired!” “I want a divorce.” “Will you marry me?” “You have cancer.” “You are in full remission.” “I’m sorry, we did everything we could, but he didn’t make it.” “We are expecting!” Truly words have the power to build up, or tear down.”

Words are never just words. The tongue is never independent of the heart. Speech reveals character. What is in our hearts comes out our mouths.

Matthew 12:34-37 *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for ***by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.***

It is estimated that the average person speaks between 5000 and words per day which comes to between 120 million and 400 million in a lifetime. We will all give an account for every word we have spoken.

There are several people here this morning who can't help themselves, whenever they open their mouths to speak they betray their homeland, their accent gives them away. There are a several here with a Dutch accent, a few with a Canadian accent, a couple with a Mexican or Asian accent, one with a British accent, and maybe my favorite of all, our token southerner, Paul M.

With our mouths we communicate something about our heart's home and what's in them.

A critical heart produces a critical tongue. A self-righteous heart produces a judgmental tongue. A bitter heart produces a cutting tongue. An ungrateful heart produces a grumbling tongue. But a loving heart produces a gracious tongue. A faithful heart produces a truthful tongue. A peaceful heart produces a reconciling tongue. A trusting heart produces an encouraging tongue.

The words we speak will all depend on what's filling our heart. What fills your heart? What are you putting in your heart? What is coming out of your mouth? Is it like sword thrusts or is it like healing balm? What do you want it to be?

Husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, your words have tremendous power to hurt or help, to speak death or life. You don't know how far reaching your words are, how long they will last in the ears of your spouse or children.

Words are never just words. Our words don't just communicate, they are not just expressive, they are also consequential, they have consequences, they bear fruit.

Those who love it will eat its fruits.

What does that mean? Our words have great power, and we will live with the results of what we say. After pointing out the power of words, this proverb reminds us that the consequences of our words do not just affect other people, they come back and affect us.

In our love of talking and speaking many words, there will be a harvest. Every conversation plants seeds. Words are never "just words."

The sins of the tongue are some of the easiest to commit.
Does a day go by we don't sin with our mouths?

And our current culture and social media have made it easier than ever to sin with our words. Social media is full of sarcasm, ridicule, instant reactions and outrage. The anonymity of it encourages people to say things they would never say face to face. Everyone is now free to express their every thought.

Here is a quick piece of wisdom. Never post anything without attaching your name to it.

Proverbs teaches us the wisdom of silence, the wisdom of being slow to speak and slow to anger.

Proverbs 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

The gentle, gracious tongue is healing, the evil tongue is wounding. Wise people say words that give life because they fear the Lord, while fools use their tongues to wound, deceive, and destroy. What is on your tongue? Are you better at affirming or criticizing?

Here a beautiful image is given of what the tongue should be like, the blessing it is when it is like this. When there is grace in the heart, it comes out as healing on the tongue, life-giving words.

So what are we to do? How can we get control of this powerful force?

The Gospel of Jesus.

Jesus died on the cross for our tongues, to cleanse our lips. Like Isaiah when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, holy and righteous and he cried out, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips and I have seen the Lord." A seraphim took a burning coal from the altar and touched his lips and said, "Your sin is atoned for."

Jesus has done that for all who acknowledge their sin and repent. He bore on the cross the judgment every one of our words deserve. Our lies,

gossip, slander, exaggeration; our words spoken in anger; our words meant to wound. Jesus died for our sinful lips and words.

And He didn't just leave it at that.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ does more than forgive sinful speech. He gives us a new heart. As we abide in Him, the poisoned spring is gradually purified, and by His Spirit our words increasingly become a fountain of life, a tree of life, and a testimony to His presence and power in our hearts.

A renewed tongue is evidence of a renewed heart. The gospel changes speech because it changes the heart from which speech flows.

That is why Proverbs does not merely tell us to *watch our words*; it calls us to become wise people whose hearts have been shaped by the fear of the Lord and the love of the Lord.

How to pray for your tongue.

Controlling the tongue is like a super-power.

Proverbs 16:32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Whoever is able to control their tongue is stronger than the strongest guy at the gym.

The same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you and me. That same power is in us to change our hearts and enable us to control our tongue, to control our language, to control our anger. If we have the Spirit we have this super power in us.

Can you imagine kids bragging on the school playground. One kid brags, "My dad is so strong he can lift this swing set with one hand." Another kid brags, "Yeah well my dad is so strong he can think of a hurtful word or a mean thought and not say it."

None of this is natural for any of us. We tend to be slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to anger. We must pray for the grace of God to work in our hearts to change our hearts and so then to change our words.

Would you pray for your heart and mouth, pray for what you say. Pray the texts in the Bible that are about our words and tongue. Read Proverbs, pray Proverbs.

Pray Proverbs 18:21 Lord, I believe what you say about the power of life and death, and I don't want to speak death anymore. Change my heart. Pray Proverbs 10:11 and 12:18 Lord, make my mouth less like a sword and more like a fountain of life.

Pray Proverbs 4:23 Lord, guard my heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Pray Proverbs 15:28 and 16:23 Lord, give me a righteous heart that I might be wise.

Implications and applications.

Oh, that we would all be more earnest in asking God to purify our hearts and lips, that God would sanctify us inside and out. That He would redeem our hearts and tongues, save them, deliver them from evil, use them for His glory and for good.

To live *Coram Deo* is to have a clear sense of our own inability and our utter dependence on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We take no pride and self-satisfaction in our walk, rather we walk humbly, always conscious of our shortcomings and what God has accomplished.

1. If someone only listened to my words this past week, what would they conclude about the condition of my heart?
2. Do my words refresh people like a fountain of life, or do they leave others discouraged, or wounded?
3. Where am I most tempted to misuse my tongue—at home, at work, in church, behind a keyboard, or in private conversations?
4. Is there someone I need to encourage, apologize to, forgive, or speak truth to in love this week?
5. Before I speak, text, email, or post, do I ask whether my words are true, loving, necessary, and pleasing to Christ?

Ephesians 4:29–32 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give

grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Live and speak Coram Deo.

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending your Son, the One who perfectly walked His talk and talked His walk. Remind us to live by His example and follow it. Nourish us and our faith with what we need to live as Christ and impress on our hearts and minds a deeper sense of your omnipresence, that you really are right here with us all the time. Come Holy Spirit, create in us clean and wise hearts, for Jesus sake, Amen.