

PARENTING THE HEART: SESSION SIX

The Heart Speaks

Various Proverbs

It's time to get a little more practical. I spent the first five sessions trying to press home the theme that the greatest thing you can give your child is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is an ancient Jewish expression that meant a right relationship with the one true God. Our relationship with the Lord is where true, heaven-given wisdom is found—where knowledge begins. In Jesus, our hearts are made new and whole, and by faith in Jesus, we inherit all the blessings of wisdom and righteousness.

Over the next three weeks, beginning today, I will be teaching on how our hearts, saved by grace and filled with Christ's spirit of wisdom and power, ought to speak, work, share and love.

From a child-raising perspective—this is so helpful because it shows us what we should desire, pray for and expect from our children. Personally, this is huge as well, because it shows us what God's plans for our new life in Jesus really look like. So today, the Lord God, speaking through his Word, will show you how you should communicate with others.

If you're with us today, and you're not a Christian, but you're seeking—you're here because God is tugging in some way on your heart—then it's vital to know this. What I'm about to teach is the expectation God has for all people ... but is only possible when he changes our hearts. If this is how you want to be, then you need to receive Christ Jesus as Lord, and the Spirit of God will begin this work in you.

**"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good,
and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil,
for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."**

Luke 6:45 ESV

The heart made new by faith in Jesus, is committed to truth and love in equal balance. When that heart speaks, it speaks the truth in love.

COMMITTED TO THE TRUTH

"Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips." Proverbs 24:26 ESV

This is a great Proverb because it's so surprising and memorable. You've probably never done a word study on kissing in the Bible ... but if you had, you would have seen that greeting people with a kiss was very common. When Jacob called his young son Isaac over to him, he kissed him and blessed him. When Jacob died, Joseph wept and kissed his face. When a general named Joab appeared before King Absalom, he bowed down and Absalom kissed him. When Aaron went out into the wilderness to find his brother Moses, he greeted him with a kiss. This Proverb says when someone asks you a question, and you give them an honest answer—when you tell the truth—you have treated them like a close friend, someone you love and even honor.

But what if you don't give an honest answer? What if you chose to lie or deceive?

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight."
Proverbs 12:22 ESV

"Abomination" is strong language. In Scripture, God says that worshipping idols is an abomination, sexual perversion is an abomination. Lying is on the same scale.

Why though? Why is being committed to the truth so delightful to God, and lying so awful? Because lying is an assault on God himself. God is truth. Jesus said to Pilate, right before his execution, **"You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."** (John 18:37 ESV)

Every time we lie, every time we purposefully twist the truth to hide our sin, to falsely blame others, to defraud people, we are assaulting God. We are siding with the Devil, the great liar. Think about all the harm that lying did in Scripture: from Satan's lie to Eve that she will be like God, to the false accusations which caused the crucifixion of Jesus—lying has wrecked our world.

And conversely, every time we speak the truth—every time we answer honestly—even if people don't like the answer—we are siding with Jesus Christ. And catch this: it doesn't matter what you're talking about—whether you're giving an honest answer at work, on your tax forms, to your parents, or whether you're telling the truth about Jesus Christ, every time we speak the truth—we reveal that our hearts are committed to God's glory and purposes more than our own. Because sometimes speaking the truth costs us sometime—but God is teaching us in these little Proverbs, it's worth.

Lying lips are an abomination—but **"those who act faithfully are his delight."** Acting faithfully means acting with honesty and trust ... people who live that way are "his delight." You'd like to delight God, wouldn't you? Acting faithfully and rejecting the temptation to lie and cover over the things you want to hide is one way you bring joy to the Father's heart.

But as I said at the beginning, a heart in a right relationship with God doesn't simply speak the truth, it speaks the truth with love, gentleness and a desire to help, not hurt people.

Let's read some Proverbs that bring that point home.

COMMITTED TO LOVE

1. **"Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent."**
Proverbs 11:12 ESV

The neighbor may be foolish—but choosing to insult them, *even with the truth*, is not how a "man of understanding" talks. There is no love when we chose to insult and belittle others with the truth. You may feel vindicated because you're just, "telling it like is!"—but you're not. "If I speak in the tongues of men or angels, but have not love ... I'm a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13:1)

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

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

In the first Proverb, we are taught that a “gentle tongue is a tree of life.” The word translated ‘gentle’ can also be translated, “healing” or “soothing.” Speaking the truth with an intent to heal someone, not harm them, is exactly what Jesus did. Sometimes, like Jesus, we need to come firmly and directly, other times, more softly and indirectly—but always with the intent to bring healing and repentance.

So many times we choose a different path. We choose to shout and argue and fight—or the opposite—we choose to cut off all communication, in order to win. But that’s no “tree of life,” is it? That’s a dead end. That’s the kind of “perverseness” that breaks the spirit of other people. Are you hearing this wisdom from God? Proverbs 12:18 reinforces some of this theme, “the tongue of the wise brings what?” Brings healing. If you are a Christian, you have words of healing—gospel truths—that can be used for so much good in your family and in our community. Sometimes I go on the Facebook pages for our towns. Usually they’re pretty benign, but every once in a while the knives come out. The insults are flying—really nasty things are said about other people. Rash words. Sword thrust—meant to cut and hurt and break the spirit.

Our town needs people committed to wisdom, patience and speaking the truth in love. This is a constant testimony to God’s grace. Why not rush to judge? Why not join in the pile-on that someone else deserves? Because God is merciful, and he wants me to be merciful, too.

Truth is not a weapon meant to bludgeon and break people. Truth is always good—but it can be used for great harm when spoken in hatred and anger. Paul famously wrote that “love is patient and kind.” That’s the truth about love. Look at how wisdom applies that:

- **“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”** Proverbs 19:11 ESV

You don’t need to right every wrong. It is in your glory—to your credit—to overlook an offense. Not every sin is a great injustice that needs your correction. Wisdom knows the difference. Love calls us not simply to be slow to anger, but even to be slow to speak. Remember, God gave us two ears—but only one mouth!

- **“Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”** Proverbs 17:27 ESV
- **“It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.”** Proverbs 20:3 ESV
- **“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”** Proverbs 10:19 ESV

Look at the connection between these Proverbs. Each of them builds off the same idea: when we are committed to speaking the truth out of love for others, we stay cool when things get hot. We avoid quarreling if we can. We watch our words when others don’t.

In each of these there is an emphasis on not talking. “Restraining” your words. “Keeping aloof—that is away from—strife,” “restraining your lips.” Wise people who are committed to love know that entering into quarrels and arguments is a breeding ground for sin. If your home is plagued with arguing, between

you and your kids, you and your spouse, you and the world—first examine your heart. How much are you contributing to the mess? How desperately do you need to be heard and to be right?

This is convicting stuff; but God doesn't just leave us with the law—he gives us grace and more grace. Pray for God to touch your heart and replace your anger and your easily offended spirit with His love.

Children—some of you love to argue. You argue with your friends, your parents, your siblings. The Bible says that **“every fool will be quarreling.”** Don't be a fool.

Why do you want your way so much that you're willing to argue and fight? What is more important than loving each other? I can think of a few things that merit intense confrontations—but they are major breaches of trust; big-time sins. Most quarreling in the home is not about that, but it's about a lack of love for each other, pushing each other's buttons and a gradual erosion of kindness and compassion.

If there's a lot of arguing and fighting in your home—and you have kids—trust me; they're watching and learning. They may be in their rooms, but they hear. And they're also being negatively impacted. When parents raise their voices, children experience stress and fear, which can turn into their own set of sins and troubles. That may have been your experience as a child—but it is in your power to stop—because you have the power of Christ in you. The Spirit of the living God is warring against your flesh. But you must join the fight.

So, how do we raise honest kids?

We watched America's Funniest Home Videos—and every once in a while they run a series of vignettes where kids, usually toddlers, are caught in these bold-faced lies. Mom's there with her video camera, and they just took some chocolate cake when they weren't supposed to. They approached the cake, looked “around” and then took a chunk and ate it. The cake is literally smudged across their face and hands.

Mom, on video, asks the kids, “Did you eat that cake you weren't supposed to?” And, with cake all over their face, their hands, the floor—what do they say? “No!” No cake!” Sometimes these cute little sinners have very serious expressions, shaking their hands. The mom gives them another chance: “Are you sure you didn't eat that cake?” “No!” “Well, why is there cake all over your face and hands?” Some kids come clean and rush toward their mommy in tears to try and hug it out. Others will lie to the bitter end: “I don't know!”

But it's not just a toddler thing, is it? We don't get more honest naturally; we just get more crafty. That's not good. An author I was reading this week talked about a time when he was driving home from a dinner out with his wife. They had some teen girls at home and had told them, no TV while we're gone—do your homework. However, as they returned home, these sneaky parents went into stealth mode. They turned off the car lights and pulled in super quietly. Sure enough, through the window, they saw their girls watching TV on the couch. The mom stayed in the car, and the dad went around back. He noisily entered the house and they rushed to turn off the TV and get out their books. The dad asked, “Were you watching TV?” “No, we were just studying.” “Really, no TV?” “Nope.” “Well, mom and I saw the TV on, and she's been watching you from the car this whole time.”

So, how do we raise honest kids?

I'll give you three starter thoughts on this: Personal Obedience, Discipline & Gospel Teaching.

- **Personal Obedience:** Honesty isn't just for kids. Even though some adults would like to think it is; it's not. Everyone is called to be committed to the truth. Your children watch you. If you want to raise arrogant kids—be arrogant. If you want to raise snobs—be a snob. If you want to raise honest kids; be honest. AND ... when you're not—if there are occasions where you lie to your children, confess your lies to them and ask for forgiveness.

Related to that; don't make promises you can't keep. Don't say things that aren't true. If you threaten your child with a punishment that you know you won't do—and they call your bluff—you're a liar. If you promise your child something, let's say play time afterward, and you decide to skip it just because you don't feel like it—you're a liar. I feel like I've had to learn this the hard way. I really enjoy doing things with my boys, but I know that sometimes I won't feel like it, for whatever reason—so I've had to tell the truth more consistently—because good intentions don't justify lies. One way we raise honest children is by asking God to make us honest adults. Another way is through discipline.

- **Discipline:** This is important. The balance here is really crucial. When you know your child is lying—the cake is on their face—you'll need to figure out the appropriate punishment for eating your cake. But, you'll also need to reinforce how the lie is just as bad, without scaring them away from confessing to the truth later. As you confront them, if they do confess to the truth, though, remember this—that's significant. That's good—because we will justify ourselves till the cows come home. Even under duress, for your child to choose the truth means they are choosing God's glory above their own.

What if you're seeing a pattern of lies? Pray for wisdom—wherever sin patterns emerge, there are reasons for it. Some questions to consider:

1. **Is your discipline too severe?** i.e. Are they lying because they're afraid to tell you the truth?
2. **Do you often lie about things?** Small things? Big things? Do you ever boast about tricking or deceiving people (or the government)? Are they picking it up from you?
3. **Are they addicted to a sin they're too weak to break by themselves?** Addictive sins will quickly turn your honest child into a liar. If you discover deep sin patterns, this calls for tremendous parental care and strength. Remember the sins that entrapped you. Ask yourself, how were those chains broken? By Jesus' love, patience and power. By accountability to others? By having people encouraging you, not just scolding you? By learning how to resist evil and flee temptation? Join with your child in this spiritual work: Have compassion on their weaknesses the way Jesus has compassion on your weaknesses.
4. **Have they experienced very significant trauma or abuse in their early years?** This will seriously impact their ability to bond with you and value the truth. Their lies may seem useless, almost illogical to you—they don't help the child or cover over anything—but there are reasons there. Seek help and pray for wisdom to understand why they're doing what they're doing. You will still need to discipline them, but there ought to be great care and caution.

- **Gospel Teaching:** Honesty is often a form of dying to ourselves, because it means admitting our failures. But as we live the gospel life, we experience the freedom of not living for other people's approval. Your kids need to hear this. Teach and explain over and over how honesty is beautiful to the Lord. **"Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment."** **Proverbs 12:19** Impress upon your children how solid and eternal the truth is. Lies are fleeting, and often get exposed over time. The truth endures forever.

Lady Wisdom said in **Proverbs 8:8**, **"All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them."** That's really Jesus talking. All of his words are righteous. But Jesus came not simply to save us from our sins, but to mature us into his likeness—to make you more like him, so that it can be said of you, "there is nothing twisted or crooked in the words you speak." What a testimony to God's grace in your life that will be, won't it!

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has also made you righteous. That should shock you every time you hear it—because we all know we're not righteous. But God says, 'by faith in the Messiah, you are.'

So live out these truths, righteous children of the living God: "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver ... The lips of the righteous feed many..." (Proverbs 10:20a; 21a).

The words you speak can bring tremendous healing and help to others. You can feed many, many people when you are committed to speaking the truth in love. The same for your children. Don't let them settle into endless battles of arguing and insulting each other—or you. Force them to stop. Use your power and authority for good in their life. Model, Teach and Discipline as best as you can. Be cool spirited, so that you are not drawn into their arguments and fights, but can show the restraint that God has given you the power to have.

I know it's hard. No one said it was easy, right? But we know what God is looking for and we know he has given us renewed hearts in Jesus Christ that can, and should, speak the truth in love.