



Study SERIES

Week Four - AM: Marc Rader

Life HACKS: Pocket tips from Proverbs for better living

Proverbs are among the most intensely practical of all the biblical literature; they are designed to be used in our day-to-day life. They are, as the title of this series suggests, “pocket tips”; short statements of generalised truth to lead us toward better living.

Bible

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Sermon Outline

Words are powerful. What we say, how we say it, when we say it, and to whom we speak are all important factors to consider when we think about words. The book of Proverbs has quite a bit to say about the wise use of words. For example, the wise are careful not to speak too much; they listen more than they speak.

Today's proverb identifies another characteristic of the words of the wise: they are calm. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." The wise realise that what they say and how they say it can diffuse a dangerous situation or make things worse and seek the gentle word. When we speak the gentle word we can keep ourselves and those we care about from the trouble that often accompanies anger.

As is the case with nearly all proverbs, there are some times when the proverb is not "true". Wisdom is contextual. When, for example, do many hands make light work and when do too many cooks spoil the broth? When is appeasing anger with a gentle word not the best way forward?

There are a few situations that spring to mind. First, in domestic violence situations. One of the key features of DV situations is that people are living in fear. The gentle word to appease someone else who is making you frightened is not what this proverb is about. When we are walking on eggshells around someone we are not necessarily exhibiting the wisdom this proverb is about.

*[If you, or someone you know, is in a situation where you are living in fear, you can contact these services in Australia directly: **National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service** - (24/7 service), Tel: 1800 737 732, www.1800respect.org.au or: **Lifeline** - (24/7 service), Tel: 13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au]*

Second, there may be times when the truth, even gently spoken, leads to an angry response. We should be thoughtful in how we have hard conversations, but the truth is important to speak.

Third, a gentle word may turn away wrath, but if we spend a great deal of time with people who are angry we are playing with fire. The proverbs have a few things to say about the hot-tempered person and warn against befriending them, as we will end up caught in the trouble that they inevitably get themselves into (22:24-25; 29:22).

While these are times when this proverb may not be immediately applicable, we can easily identify times when a gentle answer turns away wrath. The truth of this proverb does not require a revelation from God to comprehend; it is an observational truth. There is, however, a consideration for those who fear the Lord and that is the connection

between our hearts and our words. Jesus puts it this way in Matthew 12:34, "The mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

So, what is in your heart? If you hope to speak the gentle word at the right time and to exercise self-control to hold back the harsh word, our hearts must be changed. For those of us who follow Jesus we have the promise that the Holy Spirit will bring about the fruit of righteousness including gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

If we are to be truly wise we cannot just memorise the proverbs and apply them willy-nilly to situations we face. We need discernment to know when to use these proverbs and a change of heart to live a truly wise life.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective here is to engage in a conversation around a Biblical idea, and begin to consider its implications for our everyday lives. Take some time to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

1. Opening Discussion: When have you seen or experienced gentle words calming a situation? Share your reflections on that moment with the group.
2. For a couple of minutes in silence, reflect on Proverbs 15:1. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead your thinking. What challenges you here, and what situations are you reminded of? Discuss these with the group.
3. There are at least three situations described in this summary, when this proverb may not be applicable. What other complications might arise from speaking a gentle word?
4. What do you observe is the interaction between modern, electronic methods of communication, such as social media, texts, or even the telephone (I appreciate that this isn't that modern, but it's still relevant :), and 'angry' speech?
5. Many of us are all too aware of the nature of our hearts, but often we aren't all that keen to take a prolonged look at them. However, identifying where we need God to be at work in us, by the power of His Holy Spirit, is an important step in seeing our lives changed by Jesus. Take some time in pairs, to reflect on your own tendency to speak harsh words. In what situations do you observe a desire for improvement? What might be behind that tendency?

Prayer

The fruit of the Holy Spirit includes gentleness and self-control. Take some time to pray for each other's responses to question 5. Invite the Holy Spirit to help cultivate these characteristics in your own lives. Invite Him to lead you towards helpful practices and habits that will see your current tendencies change. Jesus invites us into a changed life, it is His work, and He is able to lead us into it, if we are willing to follow Him.