

JUNK FOOD vs. HEALTH FOOD

PROVERBS 18:1-24

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

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I never realized before our study through the book of Proverbs how many of the Proverbs have to do with the words that come out of our mouths. It's a real eye-opener to me, since most of my sins have to do with my mouth. I think that I could eliminate 90 % of my sins, if I could just learn to keep my mouth shut.

But the more I study through Proverbs, especially through passages like this morning's, ... and as I connect them to the teachings of Jesus, I am convinced that it is not just a matter of keeping my mouth shut, the problem goes much deeper. The words that come out of our mouths betray what's going on in our minds, our hearts, and our very souls. After all, the poet has told us several times that even a fool can appear to be wise if he keeps his mouth shut.

So the poet invites us to reflect on our speech, and take a deeper look into what gives birth to those words, deep in our souls. The reason is that since we are all created in God's image, we have great potential to do great good or great harm.

You know there are some people who think they are so clever. They have an answer for everything. But there is always someone who is quicker, wittier, more sarcastic and more cutting. I'm not that type of guy. In fact, it's only when I'm lying in bed reviewing the day that I say to myself, "I could have said this or that." It's always too late since I never think of good comebacks on the spot.

But these quick-witted guys were pretty common as chaplains in the military. Our platoon was assigned to handle the chapel service one week. Naturally, all the

ministers thought they should be the main speaker. As they argued, one guy said, “Last Sunday, when I preached, I had my congregation glued to their seats.”

One of the other chaplains said, “Why how clever of you to think of it!” We don’t need that sarcastic wit here at church, right? We simply promise you coffee and doughnuts if you make it through the service.

I have to say again that I’m a little more than surprised at how many times the Bible writers address the issue of what comes out of our mouths, and often times they talk as if our words are food that we must chew on and swallow. If we really do have to eat our words, I hope that we are eating health food and not junk food. But each time I come across these passages, I am convinced that I need to examine my soul as well as my mouth because here is the main idea: **OUR SPEECH UNCOVERS WHAT IS IN OUR MINDS, OUR HEARTS, AND OUR SOULS. OUR WORDS AFFECT US AND THOSE AROUND US.** The Bible writers of both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures remind us of two things: First, what comes out of our mouths are a reflection of what is going on in our inner lives. And second, our words are powerful; they have the power to do great harm or great good to others.

I. **SELF-CENTEREDNESS TO SELF-DESTRUCTION (Vs. 1-8)
EVEN THOUGH SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE SPEND THEIR LIVES TRYING
TO SATISFY THEMSELVES THEY END UP BEING MISERABLE, AND IN
THE END SELF-DESTRUCT.**

The dead give-a-way to a spiritually bankrupt person is that they are self-absorbed, as verses 1-8 point out, self-centeredness leads to self-destruction. Here is the reality: **EVEN THOUGH SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE SPEND THEIR LIVES**

**TRYING TO SATISFY THEMSELVES, THEY END UP BEING MISERABLE
AND IN THE END SELF-DESTRUCT.**

A. SELF-CENTERED ATTITUDES (Vs.1-2)

Verses 1-2 give us a clear picture of what self-centered attitudes look like. People who are self-absorbed have no concern or awareness for other people. The first line of verse 1 reads, literally in the Hebrew, “To his own desire seeks him who separates himself.” Self-absorbed people refuse to engage in community. There are people ... even people who claim to be Christians and love the Lord, who refuse to be part of the body of Christ. In other words, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God gave birth to the church. The New Testament is filled with “one another” commands. God has given us talents, abilities, resources, and spiritual gifts, they are meant to be used in the context of community. Yet there are some people who believe they can come to church on Sunday, and as long as they don’t bother anybody during the week, they are good to go. Look at the second line in verse 1: The poet says this attitude, “defies all judgment.” Both the NIV and NLT catch the full impact of this person. The NLT says, “A recluse, (a loner) is self-indulgent.” The NIV says, “An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends.”

So, one type of self-absorbed person never engages in community. However, there is another type of self-absorbed, selfish, self-indulgent person and even though he does engage in community, everything has to be about him. This type of person is involved in the community, but she is actually a drain on the community, because everything has to be about her. The second line in verse 2 reads in the Hebrew, “But only in uncovering his heart.” The self-absorbed person is not a good listener; he is not interested in joining you in your journey. He is only interested in his feelings, his desires,

and what he is doing. She finds no pleasure in listening or really understanding you. And just like the self-absorbed person was described as defying all sound judgment in verse 1, verse 2 describes him as a fool.

B. SELF-CENTERED ROOTS (Vs. 3-5)

How does a person get like this? Verses 3-5 point us to the self-centered roots. Verse 4 gives us the clue; our words and our actions come from deep inside our being. Wise words and genuinely good deeds come from hearts that are filled with the love of God. It is only when our hearts are overflowing with God's love that we can do good to others. When we feel totally loved and accepted by God, we are free to speak and act graciously to others because we are not using them to make ourselves feel better.

The wicked are only interested in promoting themselves and making themselves feel better. They will use anyone or anything to get what they want, and they have no concern for justice, or for what is right and wrong. Their sole purpose is to make themselves feel better.

The sad thing is that there are many Christians that are as self-absorbed as the wicked running around doing all sorts of good works, but here is the dead give-a-way; they are usually highly judgmental of others and they rarely experience authentic joy in their lives. In reality, they are religious Pharisees. The interesting thing is that the word Pharisee means, "The separated ones," which brings us back to verse 1.

Now to be sure, sometimes the reason people are self-absorbed is because of hurts or disappointments from their past that they have not resolved or let God heal, and some don't want to move on because they enjoy wallowing in the hurt, it often gives them an excuse not to move on.

C. SELF-DESTRUCTIVE RESULTS (Vs. 6-8)

But we have to be careful because as verses 6-8 point out, being self-centered leads to some very serious self-destructive results. In verse 6 we see that this self-absorption often leads to alienation. Ultimately, nobody wants to be around the self-absorbed person or have anything to do with her, in fact they can become so alienated that they invite physical altercations. Probably most fights are started by someone saying something or acting out of selfish or egotistical motives.

Verse 7 talks about the damage self-centeredness does to one's soul. Really, if you listen to people talk long enough, they will give away what's going on in their soul. Usually the consequences of verses 6 and 7 kick in. The self-absorbed person ends up alone, alienated, and depressed.

Verse 8 is almost cartoonish it's like taking a small bomb and hiding it in a cake. The person gobbles down the cake because it tastes so good, but then when the cake is way down in his stomach, the bomb goes off and blows the guy to smithereens. That's the way gossip is. The person who gossips or tells stories about others is actually trying to make themselves look good. Listen, when we gossip or talk about others, what we are really saying is, "At least I'm not as foolish or bad as she is." Gossip is just another form of self-centeredness. Here is the sad fact about being self-absorbed: **EVEN THOUGH SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE SPEND THEIR LIVES TRYING TO SATISFY THEMSELVES, THEY END UP BEING MISERABLE AND IN THE END SELF-DESTRUCT.**

II. GOD-CENTERED TO BLESSEDNESS (Vs. 9-12)

THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS TO HAPPINESS. IT TAKES RIGHTEOUS THINKING AND RIGHTEOUS BEHAVING.

As surely as self-centeredness leads to self-destruction, verses 9-12 remind us that being God-centered leads to Blessedness. We have really got to work to understand and accept this truth: **THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS TO HAPPINESS. IT TAKES RIGHTEOUS THINKING AND RIGHTEOUS BEHAVING.** The old hymn says, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” That says it all.

A. LAZINESS AND WORLDLINESS (Vs. 9 & 11)

But verse 9 and 11 describe some modern obstacles to our finding true happiness and they are laziness and worldliness. It seems to me that we in the West are always looking for quick, easy solutions. We want to lose weight without cutting back on our eating. We look for diets that claim to allow us to eat all we want and still lose weight. We want to get over negative feelings and negative behavior, but we don’t want it to hurt at all. In fact, we want to hold on to all our thoughts and desires, whether or not, they are in God’s plans, and to be happy. It is our desire that everybody around us change to accommodate us. I have worked with both youth and adults now for about 30 years. I find that those who are humble enough to submit to God’s will, and work hard at developing their faith through diligent study and a commitment to put it into practice, usually find a lot of happiness in life. I have to say this after 30 years of observation: There are very few people who really want to put the work it takes to find true happiness in being a Christian. Look at the second line in verse 9. Being lazy in our walk with God is self-destructive. If we are lazy when it comes to studying our Bibles, praying, submitting ourselves to God’s will and changing our behavior and thoughts... then we are simply doomed to a life of unhappiness.

Being worldly is just as self-defeating. Somehow we have become proud and comfortable with our accomplishments and our abilities. We have fooled ourselves into thinking that we have earned our degrees and we have earned our promotions and successes at work. We have earned our money and deserve all we have in life. The problem with proud, worldly people is that they can never receive a gift from God. The people in verse 11 think that they are safe and secure in life because of their hard work and accomplishments. They have deluded themselves into thinking that everything they have is a result of their own hard work and careful planning. You see, we are a people who have a strong sense of entitlement. When we put this sense of entitlement together with our laziness, we have a dangerous combination. We think we are entitled to everything, but we aren't willing to go out and work for anything. I would venture to say that most Christians in the United States (say 80% or more) will never find the joy, peace, happiness and contentment that Jesus promises us because we are lazy and worldly. To me that is truly sad; most Christians have all sorts of excuses why they are not moving on in life, and growing in Christ.

B. RIGHTEOUSNESS (V. 10)

Laziness and worldliness really stand in the way of our happiness. On the other hand verse 10 clearly points the way to happiness: It comes through righteousness. Righteous people understand the nature of life, they understand the nature of God and most of all they understand their own nature. Worldly people depend on their own power. But look where the godly people run. They run to God, they find their meaning in life from God and they realize that they are not entitled to a thing. Oh excuse me! We are entitled to something. Because of our sin and our rebellion against God, because of

our selfishness, we are entitled to spend an eternity in Hell. The righteous person expects everything in life, all of life as a gift from God. Once we realize that we are nothing and that God is everything, we can start on the road to happiness. People who find lasting peace, joy, happiness, and contentment in life humble themselves, they work hard at Bible study, prayer, and putting into practice what God is teaching them. Look at the second line in verse 10: They run to God. We can describe righteous people as people who love God with All their heart, with All their mind, with All their soul, and with All their strength. Here is their attitude: The righteous understand that everything they have, everything they have become, and even life itself is a gift from God. Since life is a gift, they use all of their energy to live it in a way that pleases God. That's love.

C. BLESSEDNESS (V. 12)

Verse 12 describes blessedness. The Greeks used to have a saying, "Those the gods wish to destroy, they first make proud." I'm always amazed when I hear successful sports figures, successful business people, and winning politicians take credit for their success. They actually think that they are the reason they have succeeded. But I'm wondering, when the great hitter goes into a batting slump, who gets credit for his failure? When the economy goes bad, who gets credit for the businesses failures? When things in the country go badly, which politician stands up and takes credit for the disaster?

Here is the moral of this sentence in verse 12. If you want to take all the credit for the successes in your life, then you better be right there to take credit for all the failures in your life as well. Pride really does come right before the fall. When we refuse to let go of our wrong thinking and wrong behavior, when we insist on having our own way, when

we continue to want what we want, you can be sure that is pride... and we can be equally sure that a downfall is right around the corner. As a pastor, I watch every day with both sadness and bewilderment, people train wreck their lives over and over and over again. To be sure, they blame others for their situation, but the fact is that their pride is what is killing them.

On the other hand, blessedness comes through humility. In the Bible, the word used for blessed can also be translated happy. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and blessed are the peacemakers.” What Jesus is saying is this, “We find happiness in life by being humble.” The humble are the ones who find the Kingdom of God. The humble are the ones who find forgiveness and satisfaction in life. The humble are the ones who find peace. The attitude of humility, submission, and diligence in following Christ is the way we find happiness in life: **THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS TO HAPPINESS. IT TAKES RIGHTEOUS THINKING AND RIGHTEOUS BEHAVING.**

III. THE POWER OF LISTENING (Vs. 13-19) **GOOD LISTENING HELPS TO BRING HEALING TO INDIVIDUALS AND TO A COMMUNITY.**

This passage focuses on how we use our mouths. But there is a very good lesson right here in the middle of the passage. Verses 13-19 inform us that there is great power in listening: **GOOD LISTENING HELPS TO BRING HEALING TO INDIVIDUALS AND TO A COMMUNITY.** I have found over the years that the biggest problem people face in relationships is that we are not good listeners. Most marital conflicts are a result of poor listening skills. Most conflicts on the job or in

church are a result of poor listening skills. Again, this is an estimate on my part, but I'm sure it's a very conservative estimate; if people would just learn some good empathic listening skills, over 90% of the conflicts would resolve themselves. But alas, we don't like to listen. We would rather be talking than listening. We would rather make sure that people understand what we're saying than ensure that we understand what they are saying.

A. RESOLVING HURTS (Vs. 13-17)

Verses 13-17 emphasize the point that good listening is very powerful in resolving hurts. Before we can speak healing words into someone's life, we have to really understand the pain.

Verse 13 describes most of our approaches to hurting people. We often start talking, solving problems, and criticizing before we have the complete story. People that want to solve my problems before they know what they are, drive me crazy, people who criticize me without a clue as to what the facts are, cause me to quit listening. I don't even take them seriously. Good listeners are able to address the real pain and the real issues. People who have their own agenda and start talking before they know anything are fools. They will end up bringing shame to themselves and also make hurting people feel shame.

Verse 14 reminds us that we can weather almost any storm in life if we have hope. But once we lose hope, we are dead. Good listeners are able to bring hope and encouragement to people, not by solving their problems, but through empathy remind them that someone understands and that they are not alone.

Verse 15 illustrates the wisdom that comes through good listening. Good listeners listen and learn to be better assets to those around them. There is nothing more tragic than fools giving a fools advice. I don't know why this is, but fools always seem to gravitate towards fools. Jesus was right when He said that when the blind lead the blind around, they both end up falling into a pit.

Verse 16 reminds us that good listeners are humble and know how to break the ice. I think that for the most part, we are pretty arrogant. We think that the way we do things is the right way, and all other cultures are wrong. Good listeners know how to respect the customs, the language, and the ways of others. Good listeners know how to meet people where they are, and are always willing to take a lower position.

Verse 17 instructs us about a very important point: Good listeners listen for the whole story. During my internship, a very long time ago, the senior pastor told me this, "John, before you snap the picture you have to make sure everybody is in the frame." That stuck with me for over 25 years. Before you start to assess any situation or make any determination, you better be sure that you have all the facts and the whole story. Remember we already said that fools seek out fools and when you talk to a fool, you are only going to get one side of the story. Be careful when dealing with fools. But remember that even honest, mature people can give us only their side of the story. We must have all sides of the story in order to speak words of wisdom and healing.

B. RESOLVING CONFLICTS (Vs. 18-19)

That is true of resolving conflicts as well. Good listening is imperative in resolving conflicts as described in verses 18-19. Verse 19 reminds us that the longer conflicts go on, the more unlikely it becomes that they will ever be resolved. That's why

the Apostle Paul commands us to settle our differences before going to bed. Often times, people have held a grudge so long, that their response to it years later becomes illogical and irrational. Look at verse 18: The poet says, “Look, it’s better to flip a coin than to carry on an argument.” In order to settle a conflict, we have to be willing to listen and to graciously let go of something we want. Good relationships are built on humility, love, and grace. There is a great deal of power that is released into relationships by good listening: **GOOD LISTENING HELPS TO BRING HEALING TO INDIVIDUALS AND TO A COMMUNITY.**

IV. THE POWER OF SPEAKING (Vs. 20-24) **THERE IS POWER IN HOW WE SPEAK AND ACT TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER.**

Many times, just being a good listener is enough. But as verses 20-24 point out, there is power in speaking as well: **THERE IS POWER IN HOW WE SPEAK AND ACT TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER.**

A. THE POWER OF WORDS (Vs. 20-21)

Verses 20-21 remind us of the power of words. Verse 20 illustrates for us the cycle of thoughts and words. Our speech completes what is going on in our thoughts, our hearts, and in our souls. I used to think that all I had to do was control my mouth. But after studying today’s passage, I find it necessary to examine my words, and then look deeper at where those words come from.

It’s important because as verse 21 points out, we have a great deal of power in what we say. We can bring healing into people’s lives, or we can crush them with our words. Jesus said that what comes out of our mouths is a good indication of what our hearts are filled with. I want to make sure my heart is filled with the love of Jesus and

my words demonstrate that because the alternative is horrible to think about. James says that an evil tongue is like a little spark. It can set a whole forest on fire and destroy it. Whether or not it is true, we still talk about how Mrs. O'leary's cow kicked over a lantern that burned down the city of Chicago. I want to be remembered for bring healing into people's lives, not destruction. How about you? The way we speak to others has a great deal of power for good or evil.

B. THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS (Vs. 22-24)

And verses 22-24 remind us that there is a lot of power in relationships. We know that life is qualitatively better when we have good people in our lives. And, we also know that life is qualitatively worse with negative people in our lives. Good spouses, good friends, and good people make life good. For all of you who are not married, remember this: Having no husband or wife is better than having the wrong husband or wife. When choosing your friends, remember this: Choosing the wrong friends, choosing fools for friends, will lead your life to misery. When surrounding yourself with people, surround yourself with positive people, godly people, and wise people because negative people, confused people and foolish people will bring you depression. Just as words have power to heal or destroy, so do relationships: **THERE IS POWER IN HOW WE SPEAK AND ACT TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER.**

This passage focuses on words and the way we use them. But keep this in mind:

OUR SPEECH UNCOVERS WHAT IS IN OUR MINDS, OUR HEARTS, AND OUR SOULS. OUR WORDS AFFECT US AND THOSE AROUND US.

Many of us are continuing to self-destruct because we insist on being self-centered and self-absorbed. We are killing ourselves and aren't even aware of it.

Paul Harvey tells the story of how Eskimos hunt wolves.

“First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another... until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood.

Next, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster... more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now... harder and harder... the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, ... nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his ‘own’ warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more – until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!”

Many of us have become so selfish, so self-centered, and so self-absorbed, that we have lost touch with what God wants for our lives. We are self-destructing with each passing moment.

Please, let’s take some time to examine what we spend time talking about and examining the actual words that come out of our mouths, and then let’s examine what’s on our minds and in our hearts that give birth to these words. The Apostle Paul tells us to fill our mouths and our hearts with spiritual hymns, psalms, and praises to God.