

## Part 19: Relating to a relatable God

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What we are going to be looking at this morning is quite timely for me personally. This morning we will be reading about Truth. And in 2021 I don't think it's inaccurate to describe the idea of truth as controversial. And maybe not the word truth, everyone has a truth. You have your truth, I have my truth, that is celebrated and affirmed. But to make a distinction that there exists an absolute truth, or objective truth, that is most certainly objectionable.

Particularly when we talk about morality. Or spirituality. Or religion. I say that this text is timely for me, because my day job is to hang out with college students, disciple and share the gospel with them. And there probably isn't a space on our planet where the very idea of truth or objective truth is challenged more than college campuses. Again, especially regarding morality and faith and religion.

I think there is a mindset that makes this specifically challenging for us as a culture, we have taken two very different ideas, and conflated and entangled them so much, we have stopped making distinctions between the two. The two ideas we've conflated are truth and experience. We've taken objective truth and personal subjective experience, and merged the two into what we like to call 'my truth.'

So when we have a conversation, or read an article, or watch the news, or open our Bibles, it's all heard through this amorphous entanglement of our own experience and what we believe to be true, without really making a distinction between the two. This is as much a reality for Christians as it is for anyone. So much of how we define our faith is dependent on our life experiences, and our emotions and feelings.

There are versions of Christianity and church that are built entirely on this conflation. We've taken our lived experiences, how we feel about those lived experiences, and let them dictate and prescribe what it is we need, and how we want to relate to God and others. And what comes out is a religious experience that pleases us, not a worship of God that pleases Him.

We must untangle them. If we don't, we risk our experiences shaping what we believe to be true. When in fact, as a Christian, if we believe the Bible, as we'll see this morning, it's the exact opposite. The truth of his Word must shape our experiences, not the other way around.

The biblical reality of both truth and experience is that they are not one in the same. And yet, they both matter. **A heart of truth will shape the experience of the righteous.** The way we are going to see that this morning is beginning with the outward and working progressively inward. Starting with the practical realities of speech and digging deeper until we arrive at the most objective truth anyone can know. **The Truthful Lips of the Wise, The Faithful Heart of the Righteous, the Truth that Saves.**

**Proverbs 12:13-19.** This is where we see our first point this morning, **The Truthful Lips of the Wise.**

One of the first things we notice as we read this list of proverbs is words. Speech. V. 13-14. And as these proverbs come to a close, specifically truthful words and non-truthful words. Proverbs 12:17-19.

Through the entire text this morning, we see that words matter. Words matter deeply to the Christian. Consider the implications of speech and words as a Christian.

**Psalm 33:6**; Genesis 1 God spoke, and creation as we know it, happened. Through the words of God existence happened. God spoke and the universe came to be. From the outset of creation, words and speaking are tied to God's creative character. And as human beings we are image bearers of God. Created to reflect the very character of God. So speech, in and of itself, is a way in which we reflect the character of God. There is a seriousness and weight to words buried deep in our bones.

But there are limits to this reflection. We aren't creating suns and planets and galaxies with our words. Speaking oceans and animals into existence. Of course not. But we do relate to each other through words.

Consider how God relates to us. What is the primary way that God has chosen to communicate to us? How is it that we know who God is and what he is like? How is it that we know about the gospel and the trinity, salvation and grace, how is that we know about Jesus the son of man? Through the *Word* of God. It was through words that God *created*, and it was through words that God *related*. It is through words that God relates to us.

In this way we very obviously reflect the character of God. God relates to us through words and we relate to one another through words.

Everyone around you will experience you, so how is it that those around you are experiencing you? You don't have control over their experience, but you do over your speech. Your speech, your words have an effect, on you and those around you. The intent behind your words, the tone of your voice, the very words you choose to say, it all matters in our relating to other people.

The effort in our understanding of God's word is predicated upon this very idea. When we endeavor to understand the Bible we want to get the big picture, the intent behind a letter that Paul wrote. We want to understand the tone and emotion that the words are spoken with. And we even want to make note of and consider the very choice of words used in a text.

Anything less from us, any less concern on our part in relating to others is a cheap version of what God designed. Meaning, we should take great care of our words. **Proverbs 12:18**. Why, as Christians, if take the Word and words of God so seriously, why are we so frivolous with how we speak? If the mere act of speaking reflects our creator, why do we care so little what comes out of our mouth?

I think an urge from front to back of Solomon in this text this morning is an affirmation of the seriousness of words. Speak as if speaking itself is a gift! Because it is. Use words not as a frivolous tool but as a beautiful reflection of our creator.

There is a second element of relating to one another through words in our text this morning. There is what we say/how we say it, but there is also what we hear and how we hear it. In other words, there is the reality of what is said, and how we experience the reality of what is said. **Proverbs 12:15-16.**

The wise will measure their words, and yet not assume the worst when others don't. The wise will not assume to have it all figured out. The wise man knows that there are limits to his own understanding of truth and experience in life. And will therefore listen and hear the wisdom of their peers and pastors.

As I've wrestled with this text, I don't see as much a promise here. Rather I see an opportunity for assessment. We read this list of proverbs and see the destructive result of the lying fool, and the gentle and peaceful result of the lips of the wise. And I can't help but consider my own life. In honest introspection, do I see more evidence of a prideful fool or the humble wisdom of God? It can be a sobering question. Which of the two most resemble your experience?

Do you find yourself putting your foot in your mouth? Saying something that causes conflict with your spouse or roommate? Giving little regard for your words as they thrust like swords dividing friendships? Do you find yourself prone to outbursts of anger and rage unable to control yourself when your sensibilities are offended? Is it obvious when you are vexed or offended? Maybe taking it out on those around you? Do you find yourself rarely admitting you're wrong? Constantly blaming everyone else for your problems at work? At home?

There is an insidious pride sitting at the center of this first section that believes the lie that it is never wrong and always right. That doesn't take its words seriously because at its heart it never believes that it is the problem. That it could be wrong. An insidious heart that constantly justifies itself into believing that everyone else is the problem. At the heart of these verses is a fool that is always right in its own eyes, believing the lie that it doesn't need anyone or anything else to get along.

And if you find yourself, like I imagine some of us do, on the wrong side of these proverbs, then it's probably true that we are not the wise man but the fool. Thinking too highly of ourselves. Believing the lie of our own cleverness. **Proverbs 12:9, 15** Believing the lie of our own intuition. Our own abilities. Our own goodness. Our own something. Whether we've convinced ourselves of that lie, or whether we are still trying to believe it. It's the temptation of Adam, we are enough. That we don't need anyone or anything else.

But Solomon offers a better way. A way that humbly listens. A way that sees his limitations, shortsightedness and weakness. The way that measures his words and tongue before speaking. That way that knows of itself as lowly and isn't pretending otherwise. And when criticism arrives, rather than being vexed it considers deeply its own weakness and listens to the criticism.

What is true about the wise and righteous heart is a humility that knows it is lowly. Knows it needs all the help and advice it can get. And rather than pretending to be greater than it is, or convincing itself it's greater than it is, he humbly accepts the reality that it doesn't have it all figured out.

As we said earlier, this text digs. It already has. From what goes out of our mouths to how we receive and listen to what comes in, to the pride or humility at the center of it all. But as is sometimes the case when we read proverbs, we look for only the obvious, external, and horizontal implications of the verses. But Solomon provides for us deeper implications of our speech: That is truth

**Proverbs 12:17-19.** If speech itself is a gift from God. If it is an inherent reflection of the Imago Dei. If our deeply and profoundly affect others. How important must it be that the way in which we relate to one another, be built upon truthful words and not untruthful words? There is a distinction to be made here I think. There is a difference between truth and honesty.

Honesty is communicating what you genuinely believe to be true. My wife and I have a toddler, and this distinction is an imperative of parenting I think. An earnest toddler might try to convince you that she doesn't need a diaper anymore. And in that moment, she genuinely believes it to be true. Not speaking from experience or anything with a 2.5 year old. Just a stab in dark. She believes, in that moment, she's good to go with the potty training. We all know she isn't. So is it honest when she says she's ready to go diaperless? Sure it is, she believes it.

But is it true? Truth is true regardless of whether you earnestly believe it or not. It's not enough to be earnest and honest. Truth matters. Ignorance is not a defence. Speed limit is still the speed limit if you know it or not. God's laws and character are still God's laws and character whether we or Israel believe so or not. This is actually an idea that we will make our way back around to the very end of our text tonight.

So with this idea of truth, not honesty, it goes way deeper than intent, deeper than intent in the moment. Grabbing verse 19, we see the implication of our relating going much further than we consider. **Proverbs 12:19.** There is an endurance to truth. An enduring effect of truth and lies. What is spoken from our mouths has a further reach than the sound waves that emanate from them.

It would be easy to concern ourselves only with the cause/effect relationship of our actions and outcomes only in terms of how they affect ourselves and those around us. After all, that is what much of proverbs is about. Describing the good that is produced from wisdom and the harm that is produced from foolishness.

But look with me at **Proverbs 12:20-25.** Notice anything here? Where does our humility or pride come from? Where does the deceit or joy begin? Where does anxiety begin? The heart. **The Faithful Heart of the Righteous.**

There is greater significance to the truths or non-truths of our actions than mere words and their effect. There is an internal reality, a heart at the center of everything we say and do. There is a heart at the center of our experience. Deeper than the mere dichotomy of a humble heart and a prideful heart. There is a heart full of lies, or a heart full of truth.

The greatest and most profound reality of our wisdom and folly are their relationship to God himself. Look back with me at a couple of verses from previous weeks: **Proverbs 8:7, Proverbs 11:1, 20.** What is shaping the experience of either abomination or delight is the truth or the lie present in the heart.

The parallel in verse 22 of our text are the words of lying lips and acting faithfully. Lying lips and an overall body of work, a character. One is an abomination to the Lord, and one is a delight to the Lord. The New King James translates this verse “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.*”

Our relating to one another matters. The way we do it matters. How others experience us matters. But at the heart of our relating to each other, is our relating to God. And not our collective relationship, like as the church. That matters, that deeply matters. But that isn't our text this morning. It's you, singular you, and God. Individuals and God. What is at the heart of your relationship to God?

Do you read all of this and simply see a transaction? Is God's word, or more specifically, is Proverbs simply a vending machine to you? Put a couple quarters in, push the right buttons out here, and life will give you the peace and joy you ask for? That's certainly not an unreasonable way to read the book of Proverbs. It might be thoughtless, but not totally unreasonable.

Take a second, if your faith only goes this way, if your relationship to the Lord is an inch deep and a mile wide, take a second to consider what it is your life says about who God is. Because if what consumes and informs most of your faith are those around you and your own thoughts and feelings, it's likely that it isn't the Lord at the center of your affections but yourself.

The lie today, in our day and age, says that faith and spirituality is more about you, your experiences, and how you choose to relate to others. The lie is that the truth, the objective truth, of who God is matters little to none next to what it is you are feeling and experiencing. That what matters, is you! Not God!

This is precisely why truth matters! More specifically, truth about *who* God is! If experience is at the center of your faith, then you will be at the center. But if truth, truth about God, from the word that he gave us, if truth is at the center of your faith, then God will be at the center. If we don't get that right, everything else is going to be out of whack. If our experiences are shaping the truth we believe, we've got it so backwards.

Because it is the truth or the lies in your heart, that shape the experiences we have. “Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, the wicked are filled with trouble, the heart of fools proclaims folly, anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down.”

If you assess what's going on out here, in how we relate to others, or even relate to ourselves with things like anxiety, in the specific ways we've talked about this morning, and it isn't going how you expect, that's a good indication that what's going on in your heart is probably closer to folly and deceit than it is faith and truth.

What's the solution? What's the remedy things going wrong out here? Return to truth! Not your truth, but God's truth. Thus we find ourselves arriving at the promise of our text this morning.

**Proverbs 12:26-13:5.** There is repeated affirmation of our previous two points. There is the ruin and destruction and violence and shame and disgrace of falsehood, lying lips, and wicked counsel. There

is further connections between what is in the heart, and how we act and what we experience. But at the epicenter of our text this morning is the only one of the proverbs that doesn't give us a contrast between righteous and unrighteous or wise and fool, but repeats and emphasizes something good, something glorious. **Proverbs 12:28.**

This is the final point of our study in Proverbs 12 this morning, **The Enduring Truth that Saves.** There is only one pathway where there is no death. There is only one way that leads to life.

In John 13 and 14 Jesus is talking to and teaching his disciples. He is explaining to them eternity. He's explaining that he isn't long for the earth, giving hints of what he is going to do on the cross and through his death, and yet that death will not be the end....for him or them. And as usual, they are missing it a little. But when Thomas asks Jesus the way to get to eternity, to God, Jesus responds with words maybe we have heard before: **John 14:5-6**

The temptation when we read proverbs is to work harder. To read it like an Old Testament Israelite: to try harder to please God and get right with him. To be righteous enough to stay on the path of life in verse 28. The path where there is no death. And when we fail pay the penance of self-sacrifice and start over again.

That temptation is the great error that Israel would make centuries later. Rather than trusting in Jesus as the fulfillment of Proverbs 12:28, they would try to fulfill it themselves. Paul writes a letter to the Romans. And as he is speaking of his Israeli brothers and sisters who do not trust and love Jesus, he says this in **Romans 10:1-4.** There was zeal. There was honesty. There was a genuine desire to be righteous, to walk the path of righteousness. Romans 9:30-32.

The only righteousness that truly matters is the true righteousness by faith in Jesus. We read this complete picture of wisdom in proverbs. And I can't speak for all of you, but I can speak for me. I've often found myself on the wrong end of many of these proverbs. So much more often am I the guy with his foot in his mouth than the one guarding his mouth. So much more often do I experience the self-exalting pride of thinking I'm right, than I do admit that I am the fool, especially in my marriage!

Proverbs should be doing this. Shining a light on our lives, and on our hearts. Revealing to each and every one of us where we are weak and sinful. Where we believe un-truths about God over the truths of his Word. Where our prideful deceived hearts trust our own experiences over realities of what God has spoken in his Word! Finding the big and small ways that we reflect Adam more than we do Jesus the better Adam.

Here's the hard truth. None of it is easy. None of it is easy to change. There aren't a lot of struggles we have that we can snap our fingers and tomorrow be cured of our sin and the lies we believe. We want it to be that way. It just isn't.

But the easy truth? We still have Jesus. We still have righteousness by faith, not by works. In every way we are weak, foolish and screw ups, Jesus was perfectly righteous. And yet still carried his cross to a hill and died on it. Not for his own sin, but for yours. And mine. That is the path of righteousness where there is no death. Jesus.

While we are still here, yes we will struggle. And sometimes we'll sit under a sermon in proverbs, or just read proverbs and find ourselves on the wrong side of the law. And we will fight and calw our way out of that sin. And we will do the hard work of listening to our peers and pastors, and assessing our hearts, to find those lies. To root out the falsehood and deception. But not because we have to. Not because that's what keeps us on the path of righteousness, but if you're a christian, because Jesus already set you on the path of righteousness.

So dig deeper. Don't fight your sin without wrestling with the heart it came from.