

**SERIES: Win the Day! Wk. 5**  
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Real change, even in pockets of flourishing, will not be possible without leaders. That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 16. We want to see what Proverbs has to say, remembering that this is written by Solomon, the son of David. So we do have a fairly good understanding of the context into which it is written.

We pick it up in Verse 10:

**A divine decision is in the lips of the king;**  
**His mouth should not err in judgment.** (\*NASB, Proverbs 16:10)

So, a little bit about the terminology. The **divine** is referring basically to an *inspired judgment*, an *inspired verdict*. The king, acting in his official role needs to, in essence, be inspired by God, because he's representing God in the decisions he makes. The second part of that proverb, **His mouth should not err in judgment**, literally *go astray*.

So you remember we talked about, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is misery, but the way of life is the path of God.*" Therefore, what this proverb is saying, is in Israel God was the King, but God ruled through a human king. It was the responsibility of the human king to rightly represent the vision, the values and the truth of God.

So the proverb is saying that when the king acts, the king acts on behalf of God. So it should be an inspired verdict, and it is a very serious thing when the king drifts off the path. So, in the same way, part of your responsibility as a Christ-follower, is to rightly represent the value system of God, to rightly represent the truth of Christ, to rightly represent God's vision for *shalom* in our world.

Verse 11:

**A just balance and scales belong to the LORD;**  
**All the weights of the bag are His concern.**

Now this is a little more difficult for us to understand in a modern culture, but it's talking about the scales that were about the only way used to do commerce. For us, when something is five dollars, we can give somebody a five-dollar bill. In the ancient world, it was a variety of coins, a variety of weights. They all had different weights to them, so they would have to weigh them: *There's this much weight; therefore it has this much value.* The problem was that the scales were consistently rigged, so that the rich got richer, the poor got poorer, and there was virtually nothing the poor could do. They had no one to go to, no one to talk to. They just suffered more

and more at the hands of the rich. So what Verse Eleven is saying is, it was the job of the king to make sure that there was true justice in the land. That was part of a necessary culture for flourishing.

We learned that *shalom* happens when the righteous are promoted, when the righteous do well, when the righteous succeed. The other term that we learned was the Hebrew word *mishpat*, which is the term for justice. It carries the idea of true justice for everyone, regardless of the color of your skin, regardless of your socio-economic status, regardless of your gender. There was the expectation of honest and true justice for everyone.

Those two concepts are absolutely foundational or there will never be flourishing in the land. So Verse 11 is saying, it was the job of the king to make sure there was true justice in the land, so that even the poor had opportunity to succeed and were not consistently disadvantaged.

Verse 12:

**It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts,  
For a throne is established on righteousness.**

**Righteousness** is this idea of flourishing. It's this idea of community, of the world as God intended it to be. That's why God gave kings power—to act on His behalf to create that. When it says, **It is an abomination** - I'm going to use the word, *it is disgusting* - **it is disgusting** to God, when God puts people in positions of authority and influence, and they use it to advantage themselves, to the demise of the community. Again, remember the word **wicked** is not just a bunch of evil, nasty things. It is the idea of selfishness, of greed; it's the idea that, "I'm in it for myself, and I will advantage myself in any way possible, even if it disadvantages the greater community."

This is very interesting to think about. God established kings on the throne to represent Him and His vision for the world, and He is absolutely disgusted with them, when they use it for their own personal advantage. That's why God reacted so strongly when David used his power and position to commit adultery with Bathsheba.

It's this core idea that God has given you life. God has given you talent. God has given you skill. God has given you opportunity. God has given you the ability to function today right where He has you, in order to create at least glimpses of *shalom*, at least a taste of the world as God intended it to be. But God is absolutely disgusted when you take what you have been given and use it for your own selfish personal advantage. For you to take God's magnificent gift and use it in such a destructive, selfish way is **an abomination** to God.

That's kind of the heartbeat of Verse Twelve.

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Verse 13:

**Righteous lips are the delight of kings,  
And he who speaks right is loved.**

What it's saying in Verse 13 is: **Righteous lips**, the lips of the *tzadik*, the lips that bring life and encouragement and healing, they **are the delight of kings. And he who speaks right is loved.** There's kind of two parts to that: The king must model that, and the king must delight in that. So again, thinking about what are the words that come out of my mouth. Are they words of life? Are they words of healing and compassion and encouragement, or are they words of devastation? Are they words that do damage to *shalom* and flourishing in the people around us? Let's think in terms of our politicians in Washington, D.C. Would you say, the overwhelming majority, that consistently get behind a microphone and talk, are giving evidence that what they're passionate about is flourishing in the land? Or are they more likely advantaging themselves, about power and significance, about an agenda, about winning? But at what cost? This is the danger of a subject like this. All the Republicans think, "*I know exactly what you mean, Pastor Clark; it's those Democrats!*" And all the Democrats are thinking, "*I know exactly what you're saying; it's those crazy Republicans!*" Let me offer a suggestion. In my judgment, it's the majority of politicians in Washington, who consistently get behind a microphone, are there to advantage themselves, and they do great damage to our communities. You say, "That's rather judgmental!" I say, "It's not!" Just listen to what they say. Assess it for yourself. Do you hear words of healing? Do you hear words of peace? Do you hear words of flourishing? Do you hear words of life? Do you hear words that feel like it's a taste of the *Tree of Life*? Or are they words of destruction...anger...devastation? Are they words of conflict that are devastating our communities? You need to go back to the Book of Proverbs, and remind yourself again, that God is disgusted with anyone that uses their power and position, to create conflict and devastation in our streets.

At some point, if we don't change something, there are real people whose lives are going to be devastated in significant ways. Words shatter human lives, but this isn't just our politicians. It's in our preachers. It's in our media, our entertainment, our athletes, our comedians and our musicians. We need to create a grid and listen. Things that are being said that devastate our communities are not funny. It's not entertainment. It's not news. At some point you have to create a grid and say, "If that disgusts God, it disgusts me." And we need to learn to delight in the words that bring peace and life and healing and *shalom*. Who is going to lead the way, if it's not us? The Proverbs talks a lot about words in the mouth, even in Chapter 16.

Some examples of that, Verse 21:

**The wise in heart will be called understanding,  
And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.**

When deep in your heart you get it, you have understanding that what is in your heart will affect what comes out of your mouth. If you have a mouth problem, it's because you have a heart problem. That's where it has to change. And when the heart is right— when you get it—what comes out of my mouth is **sweetness**, and it's actually **persuasive**. We who have experienced life change through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, have a commission to rightly present the message in such a way that it is persuasive, that it is desirable, that people want to hear what we have to say. That takes a high level of skill!

Verse 23:

**The heart of the wise instructs his mouth  
And adds persuasiveness to his lips.**

Verse 24:

**Pleasant words are a honeycomb,  
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.**

Verses 26 and 27 have to be taken together:

**A worker's appetite works for him,  
For his hunger urges him on.**

(What this is saying is in the ancient world if you were hungry, you were motivated to work, because you had to work in order to get paid, in order to eat. It was like a driving force within you and that creates a metaphor for Verse 27):

**A worthless man digs up evil,**

(The appetite in this person is worthless and has no interest in God's vision for the world.)

**While his words are like scorching fire.**

Verse 28:

**A perverse (that's twisted, a twisted person) man spreads strife,  
And a slanderer separates intimate friends.**

Someone who is twisted inside, who has no real sense of God's vision for the world, just continually creates conflict. So let me say a couple of things related to this.

There are some of you—you have a problem with your mouth. But you know that. There's something deep in your heart that says, "I know that's my problem, and I need to change. I need to do better; I don't want to be that way." For you we say, "That's awesome! You're learning; you're growing; you're changing. You're becoming more like Jesus. We want to encourage you and celebrate you. Something significant is happening. Good for you!"

But there are others of you, you are virtually clueless. We're having this discussion about a mouth that scorches, and you have no idea we're talking about you. Your family knows it. The people at work know it. Everybody seems to know it but you. You seem either unwilling or unable to face the fact you have a problem, and it's doing significant damage, often to the people you care about the most. If something doesn't change, you're going to find yourself isolated, all alone and miserable—and likely you are going to blame everybody else. There's always a way to excuse it; there's always a way to justify it. Somehow life's been unfair and it isn't your fault. Proverbs would call you a *fool*.

The mouth is a powerful thing for good. You can actually give people a taste of the *Tree of Life*. For people that otherwise are hurting and struggling and desperately in need of some word of encouragement, that is a powerful moment. But you can use that same instrument to utterly devastate a human life. *Kings delight in the words of life*, and so should we.

Verse 14:

**The fury of a king is like messengers of death,**

**But a wise man will appease it.**

Almost all Hebrew scholars agree that the **fury** talked about here is not quick-tempered anger, out-of-control fury. It's actually the appropriate wrath of a king. In other words, if the role of the king is to promote good and to punish evil, if the king is to celebrate righteousness and deal with wickedness, then there is an appropriate wrath, to deal with those who are determined to do violence to *shalom*.

So the idea here is, then, if you are wise, if you are skillful at living, then you should fall in line. What sense does it make to consistently fight God? That's a fight I can't win. Therefore, I fall in line; I walk God's path, believing that's ultimately where life is found.

And finally, Verse 15:

**In the light of a king's face is life,  
And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain.**

Actually I love the metaphors in that verse. What it's saying is, when the king is a righteous king, the face of the king is like a sunrise. It is filled with hope for a new day. A king like that is like a rain cloud in the spring, which brings gentle life-healing rain.

So just stop and think about this. If you understand God's vision for *shalom*, God's vision for flourishing, then when you go to school, when you go to the team, when you go to work, when you go home, when you go to the neighborhood, when you go to class, when you go wherever you go, your appearance in that environment is like a sunrise. Or it's like a spring cloud full of rain to a dry and barren soil, and what you bring into that environment is life. What you bring is renewal. What you bring is a taste of the world as God intended it to be. Imagine, five thousand people catching a vision for that, and living that way every day in our community. It would virtually change our community.

How important is wisdom? Verse 16:

**How much better it is to get wisdom than gold!  
And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver.**

Verse 19:

**It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly  
Than to divide the spoil with the proud.**

I'd rather be counted among the disadvantaged and the down-and-out and get it, than to be wildly successful and not get it.

Verse 20:

**He who gives attention to the word will find good,  
And blessed (or happy) is he who trusts in the LORD.**

And finally, familiar words, Verse 25:

**There is a way *which* seems right to a man,  
But its end is the way of death.**

*There is a way that seems right, but the end is utter misery.*

Life is found on God's path.

Throughout the Old and New Testament, there are so many images that describe this, but one of the most vivid images is the image of the potter and the clay. God is the Potter; we are the clay. He centers us; He molds us; He shapes us; He forms us through the experiences of life, through His truth, and He makes us into something useful for Him. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."*

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A couple of years ago, I read Sebastian Junger's bestselling book, *Tribe*, and in the book he talks about the difference between ancient tribes, or cultures, where there was such a strong sense of community, a strong sense that we're in this together, or we're not going to survive, contrasted with 21st century American culture, where we're just a collection of individuals. He talked about the fact that in these tribes, the most serious violations of the law, the most serious sins, as we might call them, were things that did violence to the flourishing of the communities: so things like stealing and selfishness and greed. How many of those crimes were actually crimes where they sentenced people to death, because they did so much damage to the flourishing of the community and the surviving together of the community?

And just think about what a contrast that is in 21st Century America, where we prize the individual, we're autonomous ourselves, we've almost made selfishness a virtue. So we're a collection of individuals, but we don't really see who we are together as community.

It's really important to understand. The proverb is clear, that **as long as we're a collection of individuals, there's virtually no chance for flourishing.** We're going to ultimately create a culture in which we will destroy ourselves. So here's the deal. It's virtually impossible to create a community of flourishing, when you have nothing more than a collection of selfish individuals. It's not that it's harder that way. It's absolutely impossible. So the question I leave you with is, what could we do to change that? We can't change everything, but **think about the opportunities you have to just create pockets of flourishing, where a group of people come together for the greater good,** in order to create at least a pocket of flourishing. That becomes a platform from which we can share the Gospel. One thing I know for sure is, **it's not going to happen, unless it's starts somewhere.** And my prayer is, it starts with you.