

Lesson 14 – Words That Build or Destroy

(Wisdom in Speech)

Text: Proverbs 12:14; 12:17–19; 12:22; 12:25

Audience: Youth, College Students, Young Professionals

Purpose: To understand how words reveal the heart, why God delights in truthful speech, and how wise words bring life while careless or dishonest words cause harm.

Opening Reflection

Icebreaker:

Can you remember a time when someone’s words deeply encouraged you—or deeply hurt you?
How did those words affect you afterward?

Key Transition:

Proverbs 12 reminds us that words are never neutral. What we say reveals what is in our hearts and shapes the lives of others. God cares deeply about our speech because words have the power to build or destroy.

Main Idea

Wisdom shapes our speech so that our words reflect truth, bring healing, and give life, while folly reveals itself through dishonesty, recklessness, and harmful speech.

Reading the Scripture

Read the following verses aloud together:

- Proverbs 12:14
- Proverbs 12:17–19
- Proverbs 12:22
- Proverbs 12:25

Observation Prompt:

What patterns or contrasts do you notice about words, truth, and their effects?

Exegetical Teaching, Discussion & Life Application

1. Words Reveal the Heart (Proverbs 12:17, 22)

“Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.”

“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.”

Exegetical Insight:

Speech is not just communication—it is moral revelation. Truthful words flow from a heart shaped by integrity, while dishonest speech exposes a divided heart. God delights in truth because He Himself is truthful and faithful.

Biblical Emphasis:

- Words reveal inner character
- Truth reflects God’s nature
- Dishonesty offends God and erodes trust

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it sometimes tempting to bend or hide the truth?
- How do small lies affect trust over time?

- What does it mean that God *delights* in truthful speech?

Life Application:

Are there situations where I speak carefully to protect myself rather than speaking truthfully to honor God?

2. Words Can Heal or Harm (Proverbs 12:14, 18–19)

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

Exegetical Insight:

Reckless speech is compared to violence—it cuts quickly and deeply. Wise speech, however, brings healing and peace. Truth may take longer to be received, but it endures, while lies fade quickly.

Biblical Emphasis:

- Reckless words wound deeply
- Wise words heal and restore
- Truth lasts; lies collapse

Discussion Questions:

- Why are words often more damaging than actions?
- What makes a word “rash” rather than wise?
- How does patience shape godly speech?

Life Application:

Before speaking, do I consider how my words might wound or heal?

3. Words Shape Emotional and Spiritual Health (Proverbs 12:25)

“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.”

Exegetical Insight:

Wisdom recognizes emotional burdens in others. A timely, kind word can lift a heavy heart. Encouragement is not shallow optimism—it is a form of wisdom that brings life and strength.

Biblical Emphasis:

- Words influence emotional well-being
- Encouragement reflects compassion
- Wisdom notices when others are weighed down

Discussion Questions:

- Why do encouraging words matter so much during anxiety or stress?
- Who in your life might need a “good word” right now?
- What prevents us from speaking encouragement more often?

Life Application:

Who can I intentionally encourage with my words this week?

4. Wisdom Chooses Speech That Leads to Life**Exegetical Insight:**

Across Proverbs 12, speech becomes a measure of wisdom. The wise do not speak impulsively, deceptively, or carelessly. They speak truthfully, thoughtfully, and compassionately because they fear the LORD and care for others.

Biblical Emphasis:

- Truth and kindness work together
- God-honoring words give life
- Wisdom governs speech

Discussion Questions:

- How does the fear of the LORD shape the way we speak?
- What habits help us grow in wise speech?
- How can silence sometimes be the wisest response?

Life Application:

What pattern of speech does God want to reshape in me?

Wise vs. Foolish Speech (Summary Contrast)

Wise Speech	Foolish Speech
Truthful	Deceptive
Thoughtful	Rash
Healing	Wounding
Encouraging	Discouraging
Builds trust	Destroys relationships

Core Truth:

Words shaped by wisdom bring life, healing, and peace; words shaped by folly bring harm and regret.

Group Discussion

1. What kind of speech is most dangerous in our current culture (gossip, exaggeration, online comments, silence)?
2. Why is honest speech sometimes harder than silence or half-truths?
3. What practical habits help us grow in wise speech?

Personal Reflection & Application

- Do my words usually build others up or tear them down?
- Where am I tempted to exaggerate, gossip, or speak carelessly?
- What is one concrete change God is calling me to make in my speech?

Weekly Challenge:

- Speak **one intentional encouragement each day**.
- Pause before speaking and ask: *"Will this bring life?"*
- Identify **one speech habit** to surrender to God this week.

Closing Prayer

Lord, teach us to speak words that reflect Your truth and love. Guard our tongues from dishonesty and carelessness. Use our words to heal, encourage, and give life, so that our speech honors You and blesses others. Amen.