

Our Emotions, Words, and the Healing of Humility (Prov. 15)

Proverbs: The Wisdom of God as a Way of Life

Zionsville Fellowship | October 26, 2025 | Drew Hunter

Before we look at our text this morning, I want to give a bit of an extended introduction here.

I want to help us see a connection between the book of Proverbs and something that's going on in our culture right now.

I wonder if you've heard how many intellectual leaders are reconsidering Jesus. Several well-known atheists have now become open to Christianity, or even become Christians. And one of the reasons they are considering this is because of how the Christian worldview makes the most sense of reality.

For example, Louise Perry has been a non-Christian writer and social commentator. But a few weeks ago she wrote about how she became a Christian. She said that the start of her journey was her study of sex, gender, and marriage. Many Christians today think, "Oh no, you don't want to talk to people about the Christian view of marriage, gender, and sex. That will push them away from Christ. Talk about the resurrection, and then they can figure that out later." But the opposite happened for her. She saw that Christian beliefs provide the most comprehensive explanation of the realities she observed in society. And this led her to consider whether or not Christianity itself is true. She wrote "One of the reasons that I ended up becoming a Christian is because I realized that if it were supernaturally true, you would expect it to be sociologically true. And observing quite how sociologically true it is was very persuasive to me." She saw that Christianity is the best explanation for reality.

This is one way the book of Proverbs may be uniquely helpful to people today. Proverbs is about wisdom—and wisdom is about understanding the things that don't change. It shows us how God designed reality to work—and teaches us to live in line with it. Proverbs invites us to learn about a life lived well—and then to trace back its explanation to the God who designed the world this way.

Our text this morning is Proverbs 15: **This gives wisdom for our emotions and our words, and the help we need to change.**

Our emotions and words are powerful forces in the world—and Proverbs shows us that God designed it this way. He created us to feel, and he created us to speak. But because of sin, our emotions are often chaotic and unregulated. And our words have the power to either harm or heal people. Wisdom is about learning how to use our emotions and words according to God's design.

Proverbs 15 gives us wisdom for our emotions and words, and the help we need to change. We'll learn four insights: the value of our emotions, the power of our words, the desire for correction, and the need for humility.

1. The Value of Our Emotions (vv. 13–23)

First, the value of our emotions.

This is a main theme in Proverbs, and it's woven all through this chapter. This is especially prominent in the central section of verses 13–23.

Many of us either undervalue or overvalue emotions.

- If you undervalue emotions, you think God is interested in just what we think or do, but not what we feel. You think that what matters is only reason or action, and not emotion. You think that God doesn't care how you feel, as long as you have good theology and live obediently. You tend to think that we would all be better off ignoring emotions altogether.
- Others of us tend to overvalue emotions. You think what you feel is the defining part of who you are. You think you shouldn't do what you don't feel, because that would be inauthentic. This is the majority view in our modern culture right now—our feelings. We value authenticity, and we believe we can only be authentic if we live outwardly according to our inner feelings. In his book, *Strange New World*, Carl Trueman shows how this has led to some of the strangest aspects of our modern world—including the sexual and gender revolution.ⁱ

But Proverbs gives us a different vision of emotions—and one that maps onto reality. It says emotions should matter to us, but that they should not rule us. Wisdom is learning to understand and even change our emotions, and rather than submit to them. The wise don't ignore emotions, nor do they submit to them—they understand them and channel them in the right directions.

First, we see joy and sorrow.

Verse 13 shows us the impact of our emotions in our own lives: “A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.”

Your inner emotional state will be reflected in the appearance of your face. The implication of this verse is that a glad heart leads to a revived spirit, which leads to a joyful face. But a sad heart leads to a crushed spirit, which leads to a dejected face.

Verse 15 observes the difference this joy and sorrow makes for our lives: “All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.” Suffering makes life feel like a disaster; joy makes life feel satisfying.

Second, we see contentment versus discontentment in verses 16-17.

This isn't just about emotions, but about values—but it's close enough and I don't want us to miss it. Both verses show us something that is better than wealth.

Verse 16 says it's better to fear God and be poor than to be rich without God: "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it." This is getting us to reflect on which is better and worth prioritizing in life. Should we pursue wealth, or pursue God? If it comes down to it, and you have to choose, then choose God. Don't give yourself to your job to the neglect of knowing Christ.

Verse 17 is similar—this time leading us to choose relationships over wealth: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it." Which is better: a meager meal with love around the table, or a feast every night, but you all hate each other? Wealth is not the highest value. Relationships of love are way more important.

Many parents miss this until it's too late. For example, many men define being a dad in terms of providing financially for their family. They provide a big house, good food, and nice vacations, but they neglect connecting to the hearts of their family. Over time, the family doesn't really like each other. The kids grow to resent their dad. Proverbs says: Your family doesn't need your money as much as they need you and your love.

Third, we see how to handle our anger in verse 18.

This is about how quickly anger rises in our hearts, and it's connection to conflict: "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."

A hot-tempered man is someone who has a pattern of immediate bursts of anger. It's a quick surge of anger, frustration, and irritation. But someone who is slow to anger has learned to control their anger.

Notice the emphasis of this here—it is on the effect of our emotions on other people. The person who is quick to anger stirs up strife. The anger inside of you gets expressed to others, and then they get angry back at you. This then makes you angrier, because you don't control your anger. And the situation keeps escalating from there.

But if you are slow to anger, then even when someone has an outburst of anger around you, you calm the situation down.

- Are you the kind of person that creates conflict around you, or calms it down?

Here's how you can know: Think about your relationships in the home or at school or at work. Do you find that there's often conflict around you? Do you feel like people are angry at you? Do you feel like you're always battling people? Then it may be because of *you*. You may be able to blame everyone else, but maybe you're too quick to get angry.

Here's why it's so important to learn to regulate our emotions: Because if we don't take care of our emotions, other people will have to deal with the fallout. The chaos in your own heart will lead everyone else to walk on eggshells around you. And when you have your outbursts, everyone else has to absorb it and clean up your mess.

- Let's think about the relationships closest to us. Anger most often comes out against the people we're closest to. Many people are good at staying calm in public, but then they are angry in private. In fact, if you see someone who feels free to express anger in public, it's likely the case that they are even worse in the home.

If you are someone who yells in anger in the home, you don't just need to try hard to stop. You need to get to the source of the problem, which is your heart. You have to acknowledge that you have a problem, repent, apologize to your family, and seek help.

And sometimes this problem gets worse and worse to the point of abuse. The problem with those who are abusive with their anger is that they pretend it's just a phase. They treat each outburst as if it is an outlier. They either deceive themselves, or they deceive others into thinking it won't happen again. The abuser promises to never do it again—but then he does it again, and again.

If you have an anger problem, seek help from a leader or trusted friend. And if your spouse or a parent becomes abusive—please seek help. Seek safety, tell a friend, tell the leaders of the church, or our domestic abuse response team.

Finally, delighting in foolishness versus wisdom.

Wisdom and folly are not just things we do—they're things we *delight* in. Our emotions are *inclined* to either wisdom or folly, and then we live out of those emotions.

This is verse 21: "Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight ahead." When you act foolishly, it's not just that your actions are wrong. It's that your emotions are out of step with reality.

This is another way to understand the value of our emotions. Our emotions don't just have value in the sense that they are important. They have value in the sense that they express our values—they express our truest character. You can't disconnect your emotional maturity from your spiritual maturity. Your character and your emotions are tied together.

2. The Power of Our Words

This leads to the second theme, which is the power of our words.

Proverbs constantly holds this progression together: your character shapes your emotions, this then your emotions lead to the way you speak certain kinds of words, and this then has effects on the people around you.

This chapter shows us three kinds of words, and their powerful effect on others.

First, we see the power of harsh words versus gentle words.

- We see this in verse 1: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” This is the power of our words to either calm down or stir up anger. Soft words calm things down; harsh words stir things up.

This seems obvious, right? But this has so much explanatory power for the conflict in the world—in our homes, our workplaces, our churches, our governments, and social media.

This has been an important Proverb for my family—and not just with our kids, but with me. Sometimes we fill our house with frustration and anger. It starts small, and then it gets escalated. Why? Because both people involved start speaking harsh words back and forth. Anger leads to harsh words, which leads to more anger and more harsh words.

What do we need in those moments? We need someone to take the lead in speaking a soft answer. A soft answer is a drenched blanket to the fire of anger.

- Verse 4 is similar: “A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.” The tree of life is an image from Eden—it is the source of sustained life. And later in the Bible it is viewed as a source of healing. This is saying our words can be a source of life and healing to people.

Or our words can do the opposite by breaking their spirit. Maybe your harsh words have broken the spirits of your spouse, or your children, or a friend. Maybe you’ve never punched anyone in the face, but your words have bruised people. No one can see those bruises, but they are felt deeply.

Your words have the power to reverse this and bring healing. It starts with apologizing—simply, but clearly, taking responsibility and saying you’re sorry.

Second, we see the power of wise words versus foolish words.

We see this in verse 2: “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.”

The phrase “commends knowledge” can be translated “adorns knowledge.” The idea is that the wisdom is adorned by the way it is spoken.ⁱⁱ If you have wisdom, you commend that wisdom in the way you speak it. If you are truly wise, you don’t make everyone else feel like an idiot. You don’t brutalize people with your knowledge—using your brilliance as a weapon to make people submit to you. That will only push people away and repel them.

The wise speak in a way that make it clear they want to *help* people. So, think about how this works in a home. You may think you have the right answer, but you argue in such a way that your spouse or kids feel like idiots. You have knowledge—you think you’re right, and you’re quick thinking helps you dominate the conversation and win the argument. That’s not commending knowledge; that’s abusing with knowledge.

The truly wise people are those who make people feel helped by them. The people respect their wisdom because the way they speak adorns it.

Third, the power of thoughtful versus unthoughtful words.

Verse 23 shows us the emotional power of speaking thoughtful words: “To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!” Making an “apt answer” is about knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. The wise choose their words carefully, and they choose the time to speak them carefully as well. This is why their words are a joy and blessing to people. But the foolish just speak. Their words are half-baked, they say them however and whenever they want.

Notice verse 28 as well: “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.” The righteous don’t talk all the time. They stop, they think, they consider what is best to say for the moment. But the wicked just pour out words—they are always talking, they are always blurting out things. They are always giving their opinion about everything. They love giving hot takes.

Finally, the power of good news.

This is verse 30: “The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.” Notice the first part of this verse—“the light of the eyes rejoices the heart.” The light of the eyes refers to eyes that light up. This is the power of how we communicate with our facial expressions.

Some of you communicate love, joy, and acceptance through your eyes—and people feel loved and accepted by you. This is what Christians should be known for—we should be people who light up to see people, and this puts joy into their hearts.

Some of us do the opposite. Your countenance is typically gloomy or sad or annoyed. And so when you come into someone's presence, you're like, "hey..." What are you giving people when you do that? A bunch of blah.

Proverbs calls us to be the kinds of people who spread joy, and it starts with even when we do with our eyes when we greet people.

But we're focusing on words, and that's the second part: "good news refreshes the bones." Just like bright eyes bring joy, good news bring refreshment.

And Christians have the best news—the news of God's grace to us through Jesus. Every day, we can remind one another that God is alive and well. God is in charge and he is good. God is gracious and kind. And we have the best news to give this sad world—we have the news that Jesus died for foolish sinners like us, so that we could be forgiven and made wise in him. The gospel is the power of God for salvation—it has the power to save us and strengthen us and encourage us every day.

3. The Desire for Instruction

So far we've seen the value and power of our emotions and words.

If we are listening to this with humility and wisdom, we know we need help. This is why we all need instruction, correction, and feedback. This is the third theme in this chapter—*the desire for instruction*. Several verses show how the wise are not those who always get it right—they are those who know they don't, and so they are open to correction.

We see this in verse 5: "A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent."

Our openness to correction starts with listening to our parents. Many young children despise their parents' instruction. Many others do respect their parents, but then when they become teenagers, they start to roll their eyes.

Maybe some of you are in this stage right now. You're becoming less open to your parents' advice. This may be because you are growing in wisdom, and you're outpacing your parents. If you're immersed in God's word, you have wise friends, and your parents are immature—that may be the case. But it could also be the case that you are becoming prideful and closed off to them. But if you are truly wise, you will at least remain open to their guidance.

Verse 14 continues the theme: “The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.”

Notice the verbs here—the wise *seeks* knowledge, but the mouth of fools *feed on* folly. This is about what we desire, what we seek, what makes us feel satisfied.

The wise are hungry to learn and grow. They’re not just seeking knowledge, but true wisdom. They’re looking to learn about how God designed the world. They’re looking to understand the things that don’t change. They’re learning to shape their character.

Verse 32 takes this a step further and shows that the wise are open to correction: “Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.”

Reproof is when someone tells you that you have an area to grow in. They point out something you need to be corrected on.

The wise are open to this because they know it’s for their own good. But fools are closed off to it. This says they “despise themselves,” but they don’t see it that way. The insight of this verse is that if they are closed off to correction, they are actually against their own betterment. They are actually despising themselves because they are not open to growth.

So, this is the question for us—myself included: Are you the kind of person who receives feedback easily? Do you make it easy on the person who has the courage to offer you feedback? Do they feel safe to offer advice, or do you think you’ll get defensive or angry?

Now, of course, those who offer advice and correction often do it poorly—and Proverbs has a lot of say to us about doing this with grace and kindness. But here the focus is on receiving correction. We need to make it easier for people to give us advice.

What does it take to be the kind of person who is open to this kind of correction?

It takes humility. You have to be the kind of person who admits you need to grow. You have to be open to receiving their help.

4. The Need for Humility

This is the last theme we’ll look at in this chapter—the need for humility.

One way this chapter shows us this is by drawing attention to how God sees everything—which means he sees all the way into our hearts. He sees every emotion we have and every word we speak. We live all of life before the sight of God. He sees us more clearly than we even understand ourselves. This is humbling.

Here are two verses that make this clear.

- First, verse 3: “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” God sees every moral action. I think the point of this verse is its implication—that we are accountable to him. Which means everything we’ve learned about ourselves in this chapter—God sees it all even more clearly. He sees your emotions of anger when they flare up. He hears the words you speak to your spouse, or sibling, or children. He reads the words you write in the text, or email, or social media post. And he has an opinion about it all.
- Verse 11 says the same thing: “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man!” Sheol and Abaddon are words that refer to the place of death and destruction. And the point is: If God sees those places where we cannot see, how much more can he see into our hearts.
- And this leads us to the final verse of the chapter. It calls us to pursue the fear of the Lord and humility. This is verse 33: “The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.”

The fear of the Lord is the key concept in the book of Proverbs. It is the beginning of wisdom. It is the foundational posture that we need if we are going to live well in God’s world. The fear of the Lord means a trusting reverence in God as our creator and savior.

And here it is—placed in the very last verse of the section of chapters 10–15, which focused on elementary wisdom. This is the final verse because it’s what we need in order to keep progressing in wisdom from here.

And the fear of the Lord parallel to humility because the two are inseparable. You can’t fear God if you are proud. You can only fear God when you have a right sense of who he is, and who you are. God is the creator, you are not. God is the savior, and you are the one who needs saving. He is the wise one, you would be a fool without his help.

So, here are two implications for us—and we’ll end with this.

If you want your life to reflect the wisdom of Christ, this is what you need.

First, we humbly receive God’s forgiveness for the foolishness of our sin.

Proverbs doesn’t just show us how to live, it exposes how we’ve failed to live. Our emotions are disordered, our words have harmed people, and we’ve been closed off to correction.

The first step of wisdom is to seek God’s grace of forgiveness. It is to trust Christ as our wise savior. We see this in verse 8—we didn’t look at this verse yet. It invites us to humbly receive God’s forgiveness through sacrifice. It says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”

The sacrifice here is most likely the animal sacrifices. God's people could offer animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins. It's in parallel to prayer here—because these are our acts of humble dependence on God for his grace and mercy.

But notice—God does *not* accept the sacrifice of the wicked? Why? Because they are not using the sacrifices how they're intended. They are not humble, but prideful. They are making sacrifices, but without repentance. They are not committed to changing their ways—they continue to walk in wickedness. But God receives the sacrifices and prayers of those who humbly come to him with repentance and faith.

The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to the final sacrifice of Christ. Christ gave himself on the cross to forgive us of our foolishness and sin. So, we respond to this sermon by continually depending on the sacrifice of Christ. We come to God, again and again, to humbly receive his forgiveness and grace.

And he gladly gives it. Remember verse 30? This is how God looks at and speaks the gospel to us: “The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.”

The second implication is that we humbly receive the Spirit's power to make us wise.

The Christian life is about continuing to rely on God for two realities. We rely on God to forgive our sins and then to make us wise. The sacrifice of Christ provides our forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit provides our wisdom.

The Christian life is about being transformed into the image of Christ. And as we've seen in this series, Jesus is the wisest man who ever lived. This doesn't just mean he spoke with wisdom; it means he lived with wisdom. He lived a morally beautiful, compelling life. His emotions were always perfectly regulated, and his words were always perfectly pure.

He was the wisest person who ever lived. His life is the perfect example for us to strive to become like. And the wonder of the Christian life is that Jesus's way of life can become ours as well. This is what the Spirit does for us. He heals our emotions. He heals our speech. And he opens us to his correction.

ⁱ Carl Trueman, *Strange New World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 23–24.

ⁱⁱ Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary*, 240.