

引言 INTRODUCTION

Words can be powerful – both to build and to break. You may have heard of an old saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never break me.” The person who said that must have a strong self-esteem. After all these years, I can still recall some damaging remarks my parents made. Of course, I had forgiven them long time ago. I love and respect them completely. I have to decide what to retain and what to reject from what I heard. Also, those learning moments taught me what I should not say to my kids. They know I am far from perfect and I stumble all the time. Like them, I am still learning. On the flip side, encouraging words can boost our morale. A simple “good job” can motivate people to excel in what they do. Speaking in a right way also helps communication. There is the so-called 55-38-7 rule. Fifty-five percent of our message is conveyed through body language. Thirty-eight percent is determined by the tone of our voice and only seven percent is about the actual content. That is why emails, texts and phone calls are not as effective as a face-to-face chat. We will learn from the Proverbs today about communication. Let us use words to break down barriers and build relationship.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 破壞性的言語 Harmful Words

A. 閒言 Gossip Words

Words can be harmful if not used wisely. Let us consider three different kinds of destructive languages. First, it is gossip. Gossip is to pass along unverified information to hurt someone’s reputation. Proverbs 26:22 explains why people gossip: **The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.** Gossip is like craving after a favorite food. Some people lose control when they see steak, ice-cream or chocolate. Let us face it: it is our human nature to snoop around. We take pride that we know more secrets about others than the CIA. Some people also love to add extra flavors to the stories before spreading them to their friends. Gossip can bring severe damages to a community. Proverbs 16:28 says: **A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.** Gossip destroys trust. Who will share their personal matters to you if you cannot keep the secret? Others will question your credibility too if you love to make up stories. Since God is the Lord of truth, we must be honest with our words too. One day, God will evaluate every word we said as we stand before Him. How can we eliminate gossip? Proverbs 26:20 gives us a simple solution: **Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.** A fire will eventually extinguish if you stop adding fuel to it. You can stop a gossip. When a person tells you something negative about someone, you should interrupt and ask: “Have you checked whether or not that is true? Let’s go to the person and find out.” A few people saying the same thing does not mean it is valid. Nowadays, many people believe in the social media. People are quick to pass around information before they validate it. We should believe what our friends sent out. Right? Unfortunately, many people share their opinions before sharing the facts. In God’s family, we must cherish our relationship. There is a loving way to restore

people even when they actually did the bad thing you heard. We should edify one another, instead of tearing people down.

B. 惡言 Harsh Words

Gossip can ruin a relationship. Another form of harmful words is harsh talk. Proverbs 29:22 says: **An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.** It describes a person who loves to start a conflict in a group setting. Such a person will commit many sins. He will cause a division when he lobbies people to his side. In order to win, he may resort to personal attack. Then the other side may bring up more vicious criticism. You may have seen politicians fight with words and finally with their fists in a parliament. That is ugly. Mark Twain said: **“Never argue with a fool, onlookers may not be able to tell the difference.”** Do not argue with a fool because you do not want to argue like a fool. How to avoid using harsh words? Proverbs 17:14 suggests: **Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.** The wisest way to end a conflict is not to start one. There is a big difference between a heated argument and a quarrel. My parents fought a lot when I was a kid. They might start talking about money. Very quickly, they would drag the dead bones out of the closet to attack each other. It became a competition to see whose voice is louder. How could there be any resolution to the problem? In any relationship, it is not wise to win an argument at the expense of losing people’s trust on you. They will only conclude that you are an arrogant person who only want to win. Proverbs 15:1 gives us another tip to resolve conflict: **A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.** Your demeanor can be contagious. If you maintain your calmness, then your adversary may also cool down. I admire people who can debate with a smile. They attack the opposing viewpoints, without attacking the opponent. We must love our brothers and sisters, even though we may never agree on everything. We can agree to disagree if the matter does not contradict the Biblical truth. You may love Pepsi but others prefer Coke. I drink neither.

C. 莽言 Hasty Words

Besides gossip words and harsh words, another form of harmful language is hasty words. People who have a quick mind can talk fast. But here, it is about people who talk too soon. Proverbs 18:13 says: **He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.** The image is someone who are too hasty to speak even before the other person has finished talking. He may be cutting people off, or he finishes people’s sentence. In either situation, he does not show enough respect to the speaker. The problem is not only impatience or poor listening skill. While he should pay attention to hearing, he is thinking how to respond already. He wants to prove that he knows what is in the other person’s mind. His folly is revealed when he guesses incorrectly. An effective communication should go both ways. You express yourself so that people can know you more. But you also have to hear from others to know them more. A wise person understands that there is always something he can learn from others. A good way to show interest is to ask follow-up questions. For example, you say: “That’s something new to me. Can you elaborate further?” Then you remain silent and go back to a listening mode. Next, we will look at an interesting remark in Proverbs 17:28 – **Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.** An ignorant person can appear to be wise if he zips his mouth. No one will find out that he

knows very little until he talks too much. Therefore, do not be too hasty to join a conversation on a subject you are unfamiliar with. People will at least perceive that you are a good listener if you stay silent. Mark Twain put it in a sarcastic way: **“It is better to keep your mouth closed and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”** A wise person knows when not to talk. A good learner must also be a good listener.

2. 建設性的言語 Helpful Words

We should avoid using harmful words. On the other hand, we should also be mindful to use helpful words. Let us consider three kinds of helpful words.

A. 良言 Kind Words

First, there are kind words. Proverbs 12:25 reads: **An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.** This person is carrying a heavy load. A sincere encouragement from a friend is like coming alongside to share the burden with him. Another analogy I can think of is an audience cheering someone up in a running race. The athlete has to fight back fatigue and the desire to give up. The support from the crowd gives him strength. Sometimes we may feel that we are alone in this life journey. Despair goes a downward spiral to become a depression. We conclude that we are the most pitiful people in the world. Then a faithful friend helps us see things from another perspective. He may say: “God knows what you’re going through. He must have a purpose in this challenge. Rely on Him just like what you did in the past. Don’t give up yet!” We shift the focus from our suffering to God’s grace. He is always on our side. Besides saying “You can do it!,” the message is “God can do it!” Paul says in Philippians 4:13 – **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** Paul wrote the letter when he was in prison. He was unable to go around to share the gospel. But he encouraged the believers in Philippi to stand firm in their faith and to carry on the mission. Paul was also encouraged by the faithfulness of the church members. That was why Paul could find joy in a difficult situation. Indeed, kind words from a true friend can fill us with joy. Proverbs 16:24 says: **Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.** Kind words between Christians are more than a religious pep talk or positive thinking. We should get into a habit to use God’s Word to encourage others. Memorize some Bible verses so that you can recall them at any time. You do not need to spend a few dollars to buy a card. Those inspiring sayings may be helpful. But God’s Word enters into our hearts to lift us up from despair.

B. 諫言 Advising Words

Besides kind words, another helpful information is advising words. Proverbs 27:9 says: **Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel.** Good advice is like a fragrant perfume and incense that will make us feel glad. It is always a good idea to ask a friend for input when you are stuck. He may be able to help you think outside of the box. We all have a turning-on-a-light-bulb moment before. We marvel: “Why haven’t I thought of that before?” A friend can provide suggestions based on his expertise and experience. He understands your strengths and weaknesses. He knows your personality and preference too. His recommendation will be impartial and workable in your

situation. We can go to a friend for advice. Sometimes, they may come to us when they see something not right. Proverbs 25:12 reads: **Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.** A loyal friend will be eager to correct you when you steer to a wrong path. No one likes to be rebuked. Our natural reaction is to defend for ourselves. We protest: "How can you say that about me?" The reproof can only lead to a positive change if we are willing to listen. A wise person will get over with the initial discomfort and ponder on the message. He will distinguish between "you don't like me" versus "you don't like what I did." The goal of such advising words is not only to point out one's mistake. But it is also to reveal a blind-spot or even a hidden sin so that the wrongdoer will admit it and fix it. He will gain wisdom when he humbly reexamines his actions and motives. An effective communication is grounded on mutual trust and love. The person believes in the objective comment of his friend. He also understands that the friend brings up the matter out of love. An unknown stranger will not care about our conduct and character. Only a true friend always wants us to improve.

C. 慎言 Timely Words

Kind words and advising words are beneficial. Very often, the issue is not only about what to say, but when to say it. A wise person also speaks timely words. Proverbs 15:23 states: **A man finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!** A person receives your encouragement when he most needs it will be glad. You will surely find joy too. There is a win-win effect to be an encourager. In general, you have to pick the right moment to communicate when the person is ready to hear. It is not the best time to talk to a man when he is watching sports, or discuss with a lady while she is watching her favorite drama. The person will most likely pay more attention to the screen than what you say. I notice that a good time to talk to my sons is when we sit in a car. They have nowhere to hide! Besides the busyness of life, another factor that affects timing is our heart condition. A person who just lost a loved one may not be ready to listen to some doctrines on resurrection and future glory. A crying shoulder and a box of tissue are more appropriate. You just sit there silently to show your emotional support, or leave the person alone if she needs some time to grieve. Another situation is when a person is unwilling to accept correction of mistakes or even sins. Maybe he is filled with pride or guilt, or both. If the person does not want to touch on the subject, then you may have to wait for another opportunity. Another piece of advice on timely words is in Proverbs 15:28 – **The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.** The word "weighs" means to evaluate. A wise person will pick the right time to share his thoughts. A fool will open his mouth randomly. The Chinese describe such response as talking while bypassing one's brain. The content will most likely be a "no-brainer" that has little contribution.

結論 CONCLUSION

Let us use words to break down barriers and build relationship, and not to build barriers and break down relationship. You and I can choose which side we want to be on: saying harmful or helpful words. We cannot control how others use their mouths. We can only decide how we choose to speak. Let our lips be an outlet of God's grace.

引言 INTRODUCTION

言語是帶有能力的：既可以建造，也可以拆毀。你可能聽說過一句話：「棍棒和石頭可以打斷我的骨頭，但言語永遠不會傷害我。」說這句話的人一定有很強的自尊心。過了這麼多年，我還記得我父母說過的一些傷人的話。當然，我很久以前就原諒了他們。我完全愛和尊重他們。我必須決定從我聽到的內容中保留那些，拒絕那些。此外，那些經歷也讓我學會有什麼話是不應該對孩子說的。他們知道我遠非完美，我總是常常犯錯。和他們一樣，我還在學習中。另一方面，鼓勵的話可以提高別人的士氣。一句簡單的「你好棒」可以激勵他人更進一步。正確的說話方式也有助於溝通。有所謂的 55-38-7 原則。我們交流的信息中有百分之五十五是通過肢體語言傳達的。百分之三十八是由我們的語氣決定的，只有百分之七是講話的內容。因此電話、電子郵件和短信等的方式沒有面對面聊天那麼有效。今天我們將從箴言學習關於溝通。讓我們用言語來打破障礙，並建立關係。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 破壞性的言語 Harmful Words

A. 閒言 Gossip Words

沒有智慧的話會造成傷害。讓我們思考三種不同的破壞性言語。首先是閒言。閒言就是傳遞未經證實的消息來損害別人的聲譽。箴言 26:22 解釋為什麼人喜歡說閒言：**傳舌人的言語，如同美食，深入人的心腹**。閒言就像渴望吃到你最喜歡的食物。有些人在看到牛排、冰淇淋或巧克力時會失去控制。我們不得不承認，我們都喜歡到處八卦。我們希望比中央情報局了解更多別人的隱私。有些人還喜歡把故事加鹽添醋，然後再傳給他們的朋友。閒言會對一個群體帶來嚴重的傷害。箴言 16:28 說：**乖僻人播散分爭；傳舌的，離間密友**。閒言影響信任。如果你不能保守秘密，誰還會和你分享他們的私事？如果你喜歡編故事，別人也會質疑你的可信度。神是真理的主，因此我們也必須說誠實話。有一天，當我們站在神面前時，祂要評估我們所說的每一句話。我們怎樣才能消除閒言？箴言 26:20 給了我們一個簡單的解決辦法：**火缺了柴就必熄滅；無人傳舌，爭競便止息**。如果你不再加燃料，火最終便會熄滅。你可以停止閒言。當有人告訴你某人的負面消息時，你應該打斷並問：「你有沒有驗證過這是否事實？我們去找當事人問清楚吧。」好幾個人說同樣的話並不等於那一定是事實。如今，許多人相信社交媒體。很多人在搞清楚真相之前就馬上把消息傳出去。我們不應該相信我們的朋友嗎？可惜的是，許多人在分享事實之前先分享他們的觀點。在神的家裡，我們必須珍惜我們之間的關係。就算那個人真的做

了你所聽到的壞事，我們也要用愛心把他挽回過來。我們應該互相造就，而不是拆毀對方。

B. 惡言 Harsh Words

閒言會疏遠關係。另一種破壞性的言語是惡言。箴言 29:22 說：**好氣的人挑啟爭端；暴怒的人多多犯罪。**這幅圖畫描述一個喜歡在群體中引發衝突的人。這樣的人會犯很多罪。也許他會遊說一些人站在他的立場，如此便引起分裂。為了在爭辯中獲勝，他可能會採取人身攻擊。那麼對方可能會提出更多惡毒的批評。你可能看過一些政客在議會中用言語互相攻擊，最後還出動拳頭。那有多難看。馬克吐溫說：「不要和愚昧的人爭論，免得旁觀者分不清誰才是真正的傻瓜。」如何避免使用惡言？箴言 17:14 建議：**分爭的起頭如水放開，所以，在爭鬧之先必當止息爭競。**避免衝突最明智的方法就是不要開始。激烈的辯論和爭吵之間有很大的區別。在我小時候，我的父母經常吵架。他們可能剛開始時是談論金錢問題。很快，他們就會把舊帳通通翻出來互相攻擊。結果變成了一場比賽，看誰的聲音最大。那怎麼可能解決問題？在任何關係中，為了贏得爭論而失去他人對你的信任是沒有智慧的。對方只會得出結論，你是一個狂妄自大的人，只想贏。箴言 15:1 給了我們解決衝突的另一招：**回答柔和，使怒消退；言語暴戾，觸動怒氣。**你的情緒是會傳染給別人的。如果你保持冷靜，那麼你的對手也可能會冷靜下來。我很欣賞一些能帶著微笑辯論的人。他們攻擊對手的觀點，而不攻擊那個人。我們應該愛我們的弟兄姐妹，雖然我們不可能在所有事情上達成協議。如果事情與聖經真理不矛盾，我們可以尊重別人的立場。你可能喜歡百事可樂，但其他人更喜歡可口可樂。我是兩種牌子都不喝。

C. 莽言 Hasty Words

除了閒言和惡言之外，另一種破壞性的言語是莽言。腦筋動得快的人說話也會快。但這裡是關於說話太早的人。箴言 18:13 說：**未曾聽完先回答的，便是他的愚昧和羞辱。**經文是描述一個人在別人還沒有講完之前就開口。他可能是打斷別人的話，或者是完成對方的話。在任何一種情況下，他都沒有對講話的人表示足夠的尊重。問題不僅在於他沒有耐性或是不善於聆聽。他是一邊在聽，同時已經在思考如何回應了。他想要證明他知道對方在想什麼。但當他猜錯時，他的愚昧便會顯露出來。有效的溝通應該是雙向的。你表達自己的看法，以便別人可以更多地了解你。但你也必須聽取其他人的意見才能更多地了解他們。有智慧的人明白，他總是能從別人身上學到一些東西。表達興趣的一個好方法是提出問題。例如，你說：「這對我來說是新鮮事。能不能請你再進一步解釋一下？」然後你保持沉默並回到聆聽模式。箴言 17:28 中還有一句有趣的話：**愚昧人若靜默不言也可算為智慧；閉口不說也可算為聰明。**一個無知的人

如果閉上嘴巴，也許看起來很聰明。沒有人會發現他原來一竅不通，除非他說得太多。因此，如果你不熟悉那個話題，不要急著發言。如果你保持沉默，人們至少會認為你是一個很好的聆聽者。馬克吐溫諷刺地說：「寧願閉嘴看起來像個傻瓜，總比張口讓人家確認你是傻瓜更好。」有智慧的人知道什麼時候不該說話。一個好的學生也必須是一個好的聆聽者。

2. 建設性的言語 Helpful Words

我們應該避免使用破壞性的言語。但同時，我們也應該注意使用建設性的言語。讓我們來看三種有建設性的言語。

A. 良言 Kind Words

首先是良言。箴言 12:25 寫道：**人心憂慮，屈而不伸；一句良言，使心歡樂。**這個人背負著沉重的擔子。來自朋友真誠的鼓勵就像與他並肩重擔一樣。另一個我想到的類比是觀眾為賽跑的選手加油。運動員必須克服疲勞和想放棄的意念。群眾的支持給了他力量。有時，我們可能會覺得，我們在人生旅途中很孤單。沮喪的心情嚴重起來會變成憂鬱症。我們會以為自己是世界上最可憐的人。然而，忠實的朋友會幫助我們從另一個角度看待事物。他可能會說：「神知道你正在經歷難處。祂在這次挑戰中必然有祂的心意。你要像過去一樣依靠神。不要放棄！」我們將焦點從困難轉移到神的恩典上。祂總是與我們站在一起。我們除了向自己說：「你一定能做得到！」，還要記住一點：「神一定能做得到！」保羅在腓立比書 4:13 說：**我靠著那加給我力量的，凡事都能做。**保羅在監獄中寫了這封信。他無法四處傳道。但他鼓勵腓立比的信徒要堅定站穩，繼續傳揚福音。保羅也因為他們的忠心而受到鼓舞。因此保羅可以在困難的情況下仍然保持喜樂。真誠朋友的良言會讓我們充滿喜樂。箴言 16:24 說：**良言如同蜂房，使心覺甘甜，使骨得醫治。**基督徒之間的良言不僅僅是宗教口號或是鼓勵正面思考的言辭。我們應該習慣使用神的話語來鼓勵別人。你可以記住一些經文，以便你可以隨時使用。你不需要花錢買卡片。那些鼓舞人心的話可能會有所幫助。但是神的話語進入我們的內心，幫助我們從絕望中解脫出來。

B. 諫言 Advising Words

除了良言之外，另一種建議性的話是諫言。箴言 27:9 說：**膏油與香料使人心喜悅；朋友誠實的勸教也是如此甘美。**諫言就像芬芳的膏油和香料，會讓我們感到高興。當你遇到困難時，向朋友徵求意見是一個好主意。他或許能夠幫助你跳出固有的思維模式。我們之前都有過豁然開朗的時刻。我們驚嘆：「為什麼我之前沒有想到這一點？」忠心的朋友會根據他的知識和經驗提供建議。他了

解你的優缺點。他也知道你的個性和喜好。他的建議在你的情況下會是客觀且可行的。我們可以向朋友尋求建議。有時，他們可能會主動地指出我們不對的地方。箴言 25:12 寫道：**智慧人的勸戒，在順從的人耳中，好像金耳環和精金的妝飾。**當你走錯路時，忠誠的朋友會樂意糾正你。沒有人喜歡被責備。我們的自然反應是為自己辯護。我們會抗議：「你怎麼可以這樣說我？」但是如果願意聽，責備便會帶來積極的改變。一個有智慧的人會克服剛開始的不舒服並思考所聽到的信息。他會區分「你不喜歡我」和「你不喜歡我所做的」。這種諫言不僅僅是指出一個人的錯誤，也能揭露某些盲點甚至隱藏的罪，讓犯錯的人願意承認並糾正。當他謙卑地檢視自己的行為和動機時，他就會獲得智慧。有效的溝通是建立在相互信任和愛的基礎上。這個人相信他朋友的客觀評論。他也明白這位朋友是出於愛才提起這件事的。一個陌生人不會關心我們的行為和品格。只有真正的朋友才會希望我們進步。

C. 慎言 Timely Words

良言和諫言都對人有益處。很多時候，問題不僅在於說什麼，還在於什麼時候說。有智慧的人懂得慎言。箴言 15:23 說：**口善應對，自覺喜樂；話合其時，何等美好。**一個人在最需要的时候得到你的鼓勵，他肯定會很高興。你的心也會覺得喜樂。一般來說，你必須等對方準備好傾聽時才跟他交流。男人在看球賽時，或者女士在看連續劇時，都不會是最好交談的時間。他很可能只會釘住屏幕。我注意到與兒子談話的最好時機是坐車時。他們無處可躲！除了生活的忙碌之外，影響交流的另一個因素是我們的心靈狀況。剛剛失去親人的人可能還沒有準備好聆聽有關復活和將來榮耀的教義。她比較需要的是別人的安慰和一盒紙巾。你可能只需要靜靜地坐在那裡表達你的支持。如果她需要一些時間來處理她的情緒，你便暫時離開。另一種情況是一個人不願意承認自己的錯誤甚至是罪。也許他心中充滿驕傲或內疚，或兩者都有。如果他不想談的話，那麼你可能需要等待另一個機會。箴言 15:28 有另一個關於慎言的建議：**義人的心，思量如何回答；惡人的口吐出惡言。**有智慧的人會選擇適合的時間來分享他的想法。但是愚昧的人會隨意開口。中文說這種人是不經過大腦說話的。他講的內容很可能也沒有多大的貢獻。

結論 CONCLUSION

讓我們用言語來打破障礙，建立關係，而不是建立障礙，打破關係。你我可以選擇我們希望我站在哪一邊：說破壞性或是建設性的言語。我們無法控制別人如何使用他們的嘴巴。我們只能決定我們自己如何說話。願我們的嘴唇成為神恩典的出口。