

OH, TO BE WISE 6: THE RIGHT WORD

*To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!
 (Proverbs 15:23, ESV)*

FOR MANY YEARS, our caddies were add-ons, a sidecar more than a sidekick. The caddies had friendly nicknames for one another and the players knew what name to write on the check at the end of the week, but only the most avid fans could identify the caddies, and then only a few.

Caddies get much greater due these days. Broadcasters speak of them by name and players include them in the first person plural: *we*. Caddies today are part of the team, the one member who walks side by side with the player when it counts most. We see them on TV. More than that, we hear them. And the conversations between player-caddie duos have become one of the most popular parts of a telecast. You might even say that some caddies are hired for their words. Do they say the right thing at the right moment when their player is in the hunt?

We should all understand the value of the right word at the right time. The same phrase can mean very different things when spoken in different contexts. Sweet nothings between you and your spouse may be deeply appreciated when the two of you are alone, but said in front of a group, they can come across as gratuitous or sappy.

Today’s proverb speaks to the idea of meaningful words made more meaningful when they are delivered “in season.” While it is common to hear the importance of words downplayed, Scripture never does this. God wants us to think about what we say and then to say good words.

What may be the Bible’s oldest book, Job, is an extended lesson on the worth of words. Amid his distress and doubtful questioning, Job’s friends show up. They do their best work when they say nothing. It’s when they start talking that the trouble begins. The content of their words is not bad at all; they are theologically sound. But the spirit and the timing of their words are all wrong. Job’s friends presume knowledge they do not have and add criticism to Job’s pain. It’s a big miss.

Perhaps Solomon had Job’s friends in mind—though more likely it was friends of his own—when he presented his case for the opposite approach: Give a good answer at a good time. If you’re praying for wisdom, you can count on God to give you the right handle on the content and context you need.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2021 Links Players International. An accompanying introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/HqmsfNAwPbs>

Opening questions Time for a guesstimate: What percentage of words you hear in a day are throwaway words with no real meaning? How can you tell when you’re hearing truly meaningful words?

READING Proverbs 10:31-32; Mark 13:9-11; 1 Peter 3:8-9

Righteous words (Proverbs 10)
 Consider these proverbs in connection with Proverbs 15:23. Who knows what’s good to say and when to say it? Where does such wisdom and righteousness come from?

The Spirit at work (Mark 13)
 Although these words are given in the context of theological and legal challenges, how do they assure you that the Holy Spirit can guide your words? How do you attain such a relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Your blessing (1 Peter 3)
 Comparing this passage with Jesus’ words in Luke 6:28, what should our default approach to others be when we are speaking to them? How are you rewarded when you bless others?
