

STICKS + STONES

"WORDS THAT HURT"

PROVERBS 18:21; 12:18

This Week's Core Competency

Self-control – I have the power, through Christ, to control myself. Titus 2:11-13, *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

The old saying, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me" is quite the misnomer. In fact, it is downright untrue. According to a Harvard University study (2007; see also the 2014 University of Pittsburgh study), "Scolding, swearing, yelling, blaming, insulting, threatening, ridiculing, demeaning, and criticizing [particularly toward a child] can be as harmful as physical abuse, sexual abuse outside the home, or witnessing physical abuse at home." This sounds shocking. Unfortunately, it appears to be shockingly true. "Many studies tie physical and sexual abuse to lasting effects on the brain and behavior, but emotional mistreatment has not received the same focus. 'Exposure to verbal aggression has received little attention as a specific form of abuse,' notes Martin Teicher, associate professor of psychiatry at

Scolding, swearing, yelling, blaming, insulting, threatening, ridiculing, demeaning, and criticizing can be as harmful as physical abuse . . .

McLean Hospital, a Harvard-affiliated psychiatric facility. 'This despite the fact that one national study found that 63 percent of American parents reported one or more instances of verbal aggression, such as swearing at and insulting their child.'

"Other researchers have associated childhood verbal abuse with a significantly higher risk of developing unstable, angry personalities, narcissistic behavior, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and paranoia. 'Verbal abuse may also have more lasting consequences than other forms of abuse, because it's often more continuous,' says Teicher. 'And in combination with physical abuse and neglect [it] may produce the most dire outcome. However, child protective service agencies, doctors, and lawyers are most concerned about the impact and prevention of physical or sexual abuse.'"

As heart-breaking as the notion of a child receiving persistent verbal abuse in the home is, the potential for harassment via peers remains a constant threat as well. In the past, bullying was typically "relegated" to the playground or before/after school and in front of a limited audience. However, in the social media saturated society we are enveloped by today, bullying has taken on a whole new dimension in the form of "cyber-bullying." This can include: Sending mean messages or threats to a person's email account or cell phone; spreading rumors online or through texts; posting hurtful or threatening messages on social networking sites or web pages; stealing a person's account information to break into their account and send damaging messages; pretending to be someone else online to hurt another person; taking unflattering pictures of a person and

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spreading them through cell phones or the Internet. And it goes without saying that the potential 'audience' for this form of bullying is exponentially greater than that of the bullying of yesteryears. "Cyber bullying can be very damaging to adolescents and teens. It can lead to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Also, once things are circulated on the Internet, they may never disappear, resurfacing at later times to renew the pain of cyber bullying."

Research shows that these incidents are not isolated occurrences. "According to cyber bullying statistics from the i-SAFE foundation: Over half of adolescents and teens have been bullied online, and about the same number have engaged in cyber bullying; more than 1 in 3 young people have experienced cyber threats online; over 25 percent of adolescents and teens have been bullied repeatedly through their cell phones or the Internet; and well over half of young people do not tell their parents when cyber bullying occurs." (Visit www.bullyingstatistics.org for more information)

These are not comforting studies. Yet knowing the truth is foundational to taking the right steps in our efforts to eradicate verbal (physical, sexual) abuse amongst the most vulnerable around us. These research findings highlight that the truthfulness of our proverbial texts today apply to all of us—young, old and in-between. We would do well to impress these truths (and every bit of biblical wisdom we can) upon our children (cf. Dt 6:4-9) in hopes that they will, in turn, do the same with their children. And, in all of our relationships, may we be authentic, self-controlled role models of the behaviors we long to see expressed in them.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

READ:

Proverbs 18:21

*The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

Cf. another translation

*The tongue can bring death or life;
those who love to talk will reap the consequences.*
(NLT)

Proverbs 12:18

*Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Cf. another translation

*There is one who talks on and on, like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise, healing!*
(Murphy, WBC)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle the subject of 18:21.
- * Underline the 'trait' ascribed to the tongue in 18:21.
- * Highlight the 'realm' of the tongue's influence in 18:21.
- * Draw an arrow from "it" to "the tongue in 18:21.
- * Circle the *first* subject of 12:18.
- * Underline the *modifier* to this first subject in 12:18.
- * Highlight the effect of "reckless words" in 12:18.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in 12:18.
- * Circle the *second* subject of 12:18.
- * Underline the *modifier* to the second subject in 12:18.
- * Highlight the effect of a wise tongue in 12:18.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What is the subject of Proverb 18:21? What *trait* is identified with the subject?
2. The phrase "life and death" is a figure of speech known as a *merism*. What makes its usage here so significant to the subject at hand?
3. What are some contemporary examples of the power of the spoken word?
4. To "love" something is typically a *positive* expression. Is that the case here as well? Explain.
5. What do you infer is the meaning of the phrase "will eat its fruit?"
6. What then is a contemporary example of a person reaping what they have sown?
7. Identify any biblical themes or examples that reflect this concept?
8. When does a spoken word become "reckless?"
9. In what sense do you think such words "pierce like a sword?"
10. Describe the speech of a wise person? Whose name(s) comes to mind that fit your description?
11. **Discussion:** Part 1: Talk about the concept of reaping what one sows. Part 2: Bring the discussion to bear upon 2Co 9:6-8?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

In this, our second week in our "Sticks and Stones" series, we survey the depth and the breadth in which the spoken word impacts our life and the lives of those to whom we speak. Just how deep and broad is the influence of our words? Well, according to Pr 18:21, which contains the *merism* "life and death," its scope includes the polar opposites of human experience *and* all points in between. As such, there are many contemporary examples that validate the first half of this passage. A jury pronounces 'guilt' or 'innocence' upon a defendant. A hopeless person is comforted by the words of close friend. A referee's decision alters the outcome of a game. A father's blessing quickens a confidence and success in life. A person yells "Fire" causing great disruption in a crowd. A financial advisor gives salient counsel regarding financial planning. A bully's threats terrorize the weak. A military commander gives an order to either 'retreat' or 'advance' - either of which foster life/death implications for both sides of the battle. Many more examples could be cited and other passages speak to this truth as well (Pr 10:20-21, 11:9, 11, 12:6, 13, 13:2-3, 16:29-30, 18:7, 26:28).

Brief Excursus: Before we move forward, it is important to understand that neither this passage, Pr 12:18, nor any other passage affirm the so-called 'name it, claim it' doctrine espoused by 'Word of Faith' proponents today. That system of thought reflects a noticeable deviation away from sound biblical interpretation and, in the process, advances an in-the-moment man-centered preoccupation with personal 'health, wealth and prosperity' - a vacuous theme throughout Scripture. Our 'faith-filled' words are not to flow out of man's present-day preoccupations with comfort but in response to the perpetual promises of God—all of which find their ultimate fulfillment in the life to come (2Co 1:20, 7:1; Heb 10:23, 35-39 w/11:1ff; especially vv 39-40). With historic roots in metaphysical thought, this doctrine is, at best, an aberrant teaching in Christendom. (For further study see: *The Word of Faith Controversy* by Robert M. Bowman.)

Back to our passage at hand, what makes this passage particularly interesting is how it ends: "Those who love it will eat of its fruit." In context, this phrase seems to express the notion that when one exercises their influence upon others by their speech, whether to promote "life," "death," etc., the intended outcome of

this utterance can and often does 'return' to the speaker. Proverbs 15:1 speaks to this nugget of wisdom. "A gentle word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pr 15:1). Words gently spoken avail the 'ingestion' of a pleasant reply. Conversely, harsh words prompt 'ingestion' of a gruff response. This seems to reflect the spiritual 'currency' of "reap what you sow" (Gal 6:7-8) regarding our speech. As we survey Scripture, we find several notable themes that reflect this proverbial truth—all of which relate to God's plans, purposes and promises for his people.

In Genesis 12 God reveals that a blessing bestowed upon his people will bring blessing back upon the one who pronounces it. To Abraham he spoke, "I will make you into a great nation and will bless you I will make your name great and you will be a blessing" (vv. 1-2; note God's plan, purpose and promise for those who were to be his people). Then, verse 3 begins, "*I will bless those who bless you.*" This clearly communicates a positive outcome. However, the opposite is also true. Verse 3 continues, "and whoever curses you I will curse." In both instances the speaker will "eat the fruit" of their utterance.

Interestingly, this understanding of God's promise to Abraham maintained great prevalence even a millennium after his passing. As the nation of Israel appeared poised to enter the Promised Land (Nu 22:1), Balak the king of Moab was "filled with dread" by their near-arrival (v. 3). In response, he summons a pagan prophet known for his sorcery and divination (Jos 13:22) to do his dirty work for him—lest he be subjected to eat any 'bad' fruit himself. The Lord requires Balaam to pronounce blessings upon Israel rather than a curse (for to do otherwise would violate his then-present plans and purposes for them). Balaam could have walked away from this experience blessed by Israel's God. Unfortunately, for him, he privately told Balak how he could bring about Israel's demise anyway—by having them worship Baal through idolatrous practices common to the land. (cf. Rev 2:14). His suggestion worked (Nu 25:1-3). Yet, shortly thereafter, Balaam was slain by Israel under God's providence (cf. Jos 13:22). Bad fruit indeed. So, how about you? Do you love to 'bless' or 'curse'?

In the New Testament, the community of faith is warned of the consequences of unforgiveness and a self-righteous judgmental disposition in much the

same way as we found in the Old Testament regarding blessing and cursing. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. *For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*" (Lk 6:37-38; Italics for emphasis). As followers of Christ we are unified by the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We deserved God's judgment. We received his mercy, grace and covenantal love instead. Therefore, we have no right to demand God execute justice upon another. If he chooses to do so, that is his prerogative alone. Nor do we have any right to withhold forgiveness. Scripture is replete in its communication of the fullness of God's forgiveness of all our sins Read in order: Da 9:9; Isa 1:18, 43:25-26; Ro 5:8; Acts 3:19; Col 1:13-14; Ps 103:12; 2Co 5:17; Col 2:13, 3:13; Mt 6:12, 14-15. The last passage speaks to our practice of daily confession for cleansing from daily sin (1Jn 1:9). While it has no bearing on our salvation, a spirit of unforgiveness toward others

crimps the flow of God's daily forgiveness, and many of his blessings, for our sins against him. When we speak self-righteous words of judgment upon others or refuse to forgive, we are inviting the same to be done of us, yet, not by them . . . but by God. So, how about you? Do you love to speak words of forgiveness and grace toward others or do you prefer (as deemed by your practice) to withhold forgiveness and hold others in contempt for wrong-doing?

In all of these cases, the proclamation of Galatians 6:7-10 rings true. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good [and speak well] to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." May we take heed these verses lest we dare mock the grace of God so richly manifest in our life through Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord.

The Message of the Passage

*Foolish words can induce lethal harm, but wise speech
blesses both you and those with whom you speak.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 21 "There is little doubt that [vv. 20-21] go together; what is much more in question is the meaning of the verses. Some scholars take 'fruit' to refer to consequences, good or evil, that follow upon one's own words. The point would be that one must bear the consequences of one's words. An alternative view is that 'fruit' here is good fruit as opposed to barrenness. The meaning would be that speech is powerful and the wise use it economically in order to achieve the intended result. Through the careful choice of words, their language is fruitful.

"In my view neither is satisfactory. On the one hand, the statement that people are satisfied with the fruit (v. 20) excludes the view that good or bad consequences are in view. No one is satisfied with something that does not have its intended effect. On the other hand, not all fruit is good, as the text implies in speaking of tongues' having the power of death, a destructive force (v. 21).

"Rather, v. 20 asserts that people have a sense of self-satisfaction about their own words. To put it in another way, they delight in airing their own opinions. And yet the tongue can be highly dangerous. The purpose of these verses is to warn against being too much in love with one's own words. One should recognize the power of words and use them with restraint. Voicing one's own views, here ironically described as eating the fruit of the tongue, can be an addictive habit with dangerous results" (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 166-67).

v. 21 **tongue** "The *Midrash* shows one way the tongue [what is said] can cause death: 'The evil tongue slays three, the slanderer, the slandered, and the listener' (*Midrash Tehillim*, 52:2)" (*The NET Bible*, **tn** 1, 1112).

v. 21 **death/life** "'Death and life' refer to the impact of speech on others. They are extreme ways of describing the harm and blessing of what we say. Moreover death and life mark the poles of human existence and include everything in between. We call this rhetorical device a merism; it states the boundaries and embraces all the territory marked off by them" (David A. Hubbard, *The Preacher's Commentary*, vol. 15, *Proverbs*, 279)

v. 21 **love** One scholar embraces "love" in a positive sense: "To 'love' the tongue ("it") means to understand this power and to use it with great care" (Hubbard, 279). Another scholar suggests a negative tone, "But what does it mean to love the tongue? Perhaps it refers to those who love to hear themselves speak. Proverbs has much negative to say about those who talk too much (10:14; 13:3). They will suffer the consequences ('fruit') of their verbosity" (Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, BCOT Wisdom and Psalms, 359).

v. 21 **it** "The referent of 'it' must be the tongue, i.e., what the tongue says (= 'its use'). So those who enjoy talking, indulging in it, must 'eat' its fruit, whether good or bad. The 'eating the fruit' is an implied comparison; it means to accept the consequences of loving to talk" (*The NET Bible*, **tn** 3, 1112).

v. 18 **reckless** "'Reckless words' has the idea of speaking hastily and inadvisably (see Lev 5:4; Nu 30:7). Such talk is like a piercing sword—it wounds" (Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs*, EBC, 971). "'Reckless words' may occur in any setting: in the making of vows (Lev 5:4, or in a fit of rage (Nu 20:10; Ps 106:33). The tragic story of Jephthah and his daughter illustrates the rash vow (Jdg 11), as does the nearly tragic tale of Saul and Jonathan (1Sa 14:25-45). Once a word has been uttered, it cannot be called back" (Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs*, NIB, 127).

v. 18 **piercing** "The wisdom teachers felt that the fewer words the better. To speak mindlessly about a matter is to invite great harm—thus the image of the stabbing sword" (Longman, 276). Perhaps the counsel of Job's 'friends' serves as a good biblical example.

v. 18 **healing** A figure of speech (*metonymy*) that describes the effect that "the tongue of the wise" has upon others (i.e. healing). "This definition [of healing] can easily be expanded by reading other proverbs that help draw the parameters of wise speech. The consequence of wise speech, just like the consequences of wisdom itself, is life, so the metaphor of healing is certainly appropriate" (Longman, 277).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

The second I said it I wished I could take it back. They were careless words spoken in a moment of frustration. While my friend has forgiven me, I know those words must come to her mind occasionally. As much as words can heal and help, they can hurt. There are days in my parenting journey when I go to bed wondering if I said anything positive that day. Did I complain all day about the house being a mess? Did I ignore the kid who was trying to get my attention because I was too busy? Did I misdirect my frustration at something else and snap at the people I love the most? Maybe we need to take an inventory of the words being spoken in our homes. Are they helpful, loving and encouraging? How is our tone? Do we sound frustrated, annoyed, angry? If this has been struggle for you, there's hope. Recognize you have been speaking hurtful words and then ask for forgiveness from the people you may have hurt. Come up with a good accountability system in your home. When things start getting negative or heated, have a plan. It might be to walk away or a code word that diffuses the situation and redirects everyone in the room. Whatever it takes, let's make our homes places of healing, not hurting.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Pr 18:21; 12:18

1. What do you think "those who love it will eat its fruit" means?
2. What do reckless words do?
3. What does the tongue of the wise do?

What Do You Think

Think about a time when someone said something unkind or hurtful to you. How did you feel? Think about a time you said something hurtful to someone else? How did you feel? How do you think they felt?

What R U Going To Do

Is there someone you have hurt with your words? If so, write a note or talk to them and ask forgiveness. Is there someone who has hurt you with words? Pray for them and ask God to help you forgive. Tell your small group on Sunday about your experience.

Core Comp

Self Control - I can take charge of myself with Jesus' help.

Memory Verse

Proverbs 18:21 - *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.