

CREW Bible Study

Youth XP3 Message – The Power of Words

- **BOTTOM LINE:** Pay attention to the power of your words.
- **GOAL:** To help students recognize the power of their own words and choose their words carefully.
- **SCRIPTURE:**
 - *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. – James 3:6-10*
 - *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. – James 3:17*

MESSAGE

Have you ever noticed how much attention words get? Right now, in the middle of the countdown to election day, the words spoken by whichever candidate are immediately shared and scrutinized and made into sound bites for publicity. And then there's COVID. Words about what to do or what not to do about the coronavirus make us stop and listen. So do words spoken at a protest or a rally, or maybe at the school board meeting. Whether it's a politician, your principal, a tweet from a celebrity, a quote from an athlete, or comments on your social media feed, words are a big deal. Sometimes it's just a few words, but words say a lot.

Have you ever heard this phrase – "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"? I disagree. There's really no truth to this. We all know that there are some words that hurt each and every one of us.

- Words that cut people down in the hopes of getting a few laughs.
- Mean comments about someone or something that generate more likes from a certain group of people.
- Gossip that brings attention as the insider with breaking news.

- Profanity or hurtful phrases used so frequently it seems totally acceptable to say.

The interesting thing about words is how they shape the way we see ourselves and think about ourselves. And the same with the people around us. The words may not cause physical harm, but the emotional hurt they cause can be just as bad. Words can and do hurt feelings. Words have ruined reputations. Words have destroyed opportunities. Words have split friendships and relationships apart. Words have caused people to actually believe that their lives are worthless. Words have started conflicts among entire countries. Words have the potential to do a *lot* of damage.

It's probably no surprise to say that this isn't just something we're dealing with now. Sure, today's technology and media have given words new ways to be louder, more powerful, and spread to a wider audience. But words have always had the ability to cause harm.

We're going to look at a passage in the Bible today from James, who was the brother of Jesus. In this letter James wrote, you get the feeling that he just kind of tells it like it is. He doesn't try to sugar coat anything. He's honest and straightforward. And in this particular passage, he talks honestly about the power of words. He starts off by saying this in James chapter 3, verses 3-6.....

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

James isn't saying that your tongue is evil, he's saying that your tongue – and the word spoken through your tongue – is powerful. Your words are powerful. Like the rudder of a ship, words steer the direction a conversation goes. And that can steer the direction our relationships and opportunities go too. If we're not careful, our words can take us somewhere that we don't want to go. Like a small spark can start a fire, one word can ignite feelings.

And then James goes on in verses 7-10 to say this.....

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

I told you that James didn't sugar coat anything! Although this sounds harsh, James actually has some good news inside of this statement. If you listen carefully,

James reminds us that we have a choice. We can praise or we can curse. It's my choice – it's your choice – which comes out. So, what's it going to be?

Later on, in verse 17, James says this.....

But wisdom comes from heaven and is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

James is saying that when we only look out for ourselves, saying whatever we want to without consideration for others, things don't go well. But when we look past ourselves, look out for others, and intentionally go after peace, our lives reflect those things. And we become more of a reflection of God.

Think of it this way. When we plant an apple seed, we grow apples. It doesn't matter how badly we want oranges, we will get apples. Because that's what we planted. In the same way, when it comes to our words, we get what we plant. If we plant crude, sarcastic, mean words, our friendships, relationships, and opportunities will be rooted in those and affected by them.

So, what's the bottom line? Pay attention to the power of your words. And how can you do that? Here's a few things to keep in mind.....

1. **Buy yourself time to think.** Whether it's something your parents or your sibling said, or a text you just opened, when words frustrate you, don't respond right away. It's easy to let emotions take over, but take some time to think through your response.
2. **Ask yourself, "Does this situation need more words or less?"** Sometimes we need to talk more to clarify what we mean. Sometimes the less we speak the better. Think it through.
3. **Get in the habit of planting encouraging words that build others up.** Think twice about how you respond to or interact with someone. Ask yourself, "How can you build this person up instead of tearing them down?" Remember that choice James mentioned – praise or curse.

Words are powerful. James makes that clear, and our own life experiences back that up. But if we want to make a change, we have to do more than just change our words. We've got to make a change in our hearts and in our minds and choose a different way of seeing people. When we do that, we can use words to grow kindness. And *that* is powerful.

FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What's a word or phrase that someone said to you that has stuck with you over time, for good or bad?
2. On a scale of 1 (hardly ever) to 10 (frequently), how likely are you to say these types of words:

- a. Crude jokes
 - b. Sarcastic comments
 - c. Gossip
 - d. Profanity
 - e. Encouragement
3. How have you felt when someone said something about you that was positive? How have you seen something positive you've said affect someone else?
 4. Now think about how you felt when someone said something negative about you. How did it make you feel? How have you seen something negative you've said affect someone else?
 5. Read James 3:6. James compares words to a fire. Why do you think that is? Do you think he is exaggerating? Do you think it's true?
 6. It may feel difficult to control our words. Why do you think we say the words that we know we shouldn't say?
 7. What are some ways that we tend to justify the words we use? The jokes we tell? For example, "no offense", or "I was just telling the truth", or "just kidding".
 8. What would change if you were to ask yourself, "what can I say instead?"