



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 17, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God, you spoke, and the world was ordered. Through studying your Word today, may I remember the power of my speech, too. May I recommit to speak in ways that help create hope and not harm, justice and not suffering. May my words flow forth faithfully and truthfully to honor you and care for others. Amen.

Monday, September 18

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1-4

A sensitive answer turns back wrath,
but an offensive word stirs up anger.
The tongue of the wise enhances knowledge,
but the mouth of a fool gushes with stupidity.
The LORD's eyes are everywhere,
keeping watch on evil and good people.
Wholesome speech is a tree of life,
but dishonest talk breaks the spirit.

Observation

Many of the Proverbs have a bit of a scattershot quality to them. But in these four verses, the Hebrew sages put together four wise sayings that address the quality of human speech, both in its ability to wound and damage, but also to heal and give life.

Application

These proverbs do more than simply urge us to watch what we say and how; they also inspire us to examine the intentions of our hearts. Have you ever found, when you were (maybe reluctantly) honest with yourself, that the inner sources of your "righteous indignation" were not as "righteous" as you at first thought they were? Does responding to anger with more anger usually make things better or worse?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help my mouth to not "gush" with foolish words. Grow in me your spirit that can make my speech more and more a "tree of life" for the people I meet. Amen.

Tuesday, September 19

Scripture: James 1:19-21

Know this, my dear brothers and sisters: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry. This is because an angry person doesn't produce God's righteousness. Therefore, with humility, set aside all moral filth and the growth of wickedness, and welcome the word planted deep inside you—the very word that is able to save you.

Observation

James, Jesus' half-brother, apparently became a Christ-follower when Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). He became an influential leader in the early church. In this short letter, he linked hasty, angry speech with "moral filth." To James, a cutting outburst was no small matter, but something hurtful and wrong.

Application

Scholar David Allan Hubbard wrote, "Harsh, vindictive speech—even though apparently based on God's Word—is not the way to accomplish God's justice." Through the centuries, issues like circumcision, slavery, the role of women in ministry, and (today) homosexuality have triggered such speech from Christians against other Christians. How can the "humility" of which James wrote move us away from destructive speech and toward living into what James called "the word planted deep inside you"?

Prayer

O God, make me ever more "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry." You know that's not my natural condition, Lord—but I know you can change me from the inside out. Amen.

Wednesday, September 20

Scripture: James 1:22-25

You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do.

Observation

After describing the danger of hasty, ugly words, James moved on to describe "the word planted deep inside you" (James 1:21) that we should follow. He called it "the law of freedom," God's wisdom, above all as Jesus taught it. He did not drop the subject of wise

speech in these verses. He highlighted the wisdom and freedom of making all our actions, including our speech, accord with God's directions for optimal living.

Application

James' words about the law of freedom were rooted in Jesus' teaching. Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (John 13:34-35). In what ways have you found greater freedom as you've grown in your ability to love even those you dislike or disagree with?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, I want my life to bear your signature. So fill my life with your fruit. As others watch me, may they daily see me growing more and more like the person you want to shape me to be. Amen.

Thursday, September 21

Scripture: James 1:26-27

If those who claim devotion to God don't control what they say, they mislead themselves. Their devotion is worthless. True devotion, the kind that is pure and faultless before God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficulties and to keep the world from contaminating us.

Observation

James used strong language—not angry, but strong. He said if people don't control their words, "their devotion is worthless." Some people then (and now) used angry, ugly criticisms of "the wicked" (however they defined that) to try to show everyone else how devoted they were to God. It didn't work, James said—speaking that way was disobedience to God, not devotion. True devotion, he said, shows when we care for and help the weak, not in reckless speech.

Application

We live in a world where tweets, anonymous comment boards, and a 24-hour news cycle seem, at times, to bombard us with contentious, belittling speech. James wrote that one aspect of devotion to God is "to keep the world from contaminating us." How do you actively seek to keep our world's barrage of negativity from contaminating you? What choices help you do that?

Prayer

Almighty God, you love me. You know that elevated blood pressure and a pulse racing from anger are hurtful, not helpful. Guide me toward your pure, peaceable approach to life. Amen.

Friday, September 22

Scripture: Colossians 3:8-10

But now set aside these things, such as anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language. Don't lie to each other. Take off the old human nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge by conforming to the image of the one who created it.

Observation

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, he recognized that there is an unbreakable connection between who we are on the inside and what we say for others to hear. He named anger, rage, malice, slander, obscene language and lying as things to "set aside." The first three are attitudes, but they inevitably show themselves in the harmful kinds of speech the apostle named in the last three items on the list.

Application

Scholar William Barclay said we can turn the items in this list about speech into positive commands. The first two, he said, tell us that a Christian's speech must be KIND, and it must be PURE. How easy or hard do you find it to speak in those ways if you feel anger, rage, or malice toward someone? How can we be kind in our speech even when it is necessary to make an honest appraisal of another person?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when Paul said I should "set aside" these bad things, he used a word that means "taking off a garment." Help me discard nurtured anger, and the ugly speech it produces, as I would a dirty, worn-out shirt, and to put on your new way of life. Amen.

Saturday, September 23

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32 and Psalm 19:9-14

Therefore, after you have gotten rid of lying, *Each of you must tell the truth to your neighbor* because we are parts of each other in the same body. *Be angry without sinning.* Don't let the sun set on your anger. Don't provide an opportunity for the devil. Thieves should no longer steal. Instead, they should go to work, using their hands to do good so that they will have something to share with whoever is in need.

Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say. Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

Honoring the LORD is correct,
lasting forever.
The LORD's judgments are true.

All of these are righteous!
They are more desirable than gold—
than tons of pure gold!
They are sweeter than honey—
even dripping off the honeycomb!
No doubt about it:
your servant is enlightened by them;
there is great reward in keeping them.
But can anyone know
what they've accidentally done wrong?
Clear me of any unknown sin
and save your servant from willful sins.
Don't let them rule me.
Then I'll be completely blameless;
I'll be innocent of great wrongdoing.
Let the words of my mouth
and the meditations of my heart
be pleasing to you,
LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Observation

As you read these passages, consider memorizing Ephesians 4:29 and Psalm 19:14. Changing our speech requires letting God change the inner sources from which our speech springs. We want the words of our mouth, AND the meditations of our heart, to be pleasing to God. We aim to be a community in which we “Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say.”

Application

Scholar N. T. Wright, commenting on Ephesians 4:25-32, said, “Living as a Christian demands that we grow up in our thinking: you have to learn to identify your own moods and behavior patterns, to see which ones are going in the right direction and which ones in the wrong direction ... we should regard our moods, and the speech which flows from them, as we might a strong but willful horse, which needs to be reminded frequently of the direction we're supposed to be going in.” When did you last say words that hurt, and then ask yourself, “Why did I say that?” What helps you to understand your “interior landscape” better, to keep you from blurting out words you regret and wish you could take back?

Prayer

Lord of my life, be Lord of my words. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. Amen.