

Big Idea: Our words are more powerful than we realize.

Primary Scripture: Proverbs 18:21

Supporting Scripture: Proverbs 12:18; Proverbs 15:4; James 3:3-6; Ephesians 4:29

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- Imagine you just sent a text to your friend. It was meant to be funny, a little sarcastic, maybe a little edgy.
 - You didn't really think about it. You just typed it out and hit send.
 - Two minutes go by. Then you see the three dots pop up... they're typing something back. You wait. And then the dots stop. No response. Nothing.
 - Now you're spiraling. Did they take it the wrong way? Are they upset? Should you send another text to explain what you meant?
 - You're sitting there staring at your phone, waiting... but there's just silence.
 - In that moment, it hits you... you can't unsend it. You can't un-read them for the other person. And the thing you didn't even think about before hitting send just did something to someone you care about.
- We've all had a moment where we realized our words just did something we didn't intend.
 - Maybe it's not something you said but it's something someone said to you.
 - A comment that caught you off guard. Something that hit way harder than it should have.
 - And even though you laughed it off or acted like it didn't bother you, those words are still sitting there months later. The person who said them probably forgot about it the next day. But you didn't. You can't.
- Words stick. Words wound. Words shape how we see ourselves and how we see the people around us.
 - But here's what we don't talk about enough. Words also *heal*. Words *encourage*. Words *build people up*.

- o So the question is... what are your words doing?
- We're in week 3 of **Choose Your Own Adventure**, and this week we're looking at one of the choices you make more often than any other... what you do with your words.
- Proverbs says our words have the power to bring life or death. And every time you open your mouth, send a text, or post something online... you're choosing which one you're bringing into the world.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- In the ancient world, words carried enormous weight. There was no delete button, no editing a message after it sent. What you said was what you said.
- Solomon had watched enough of human life to know that the words people spoke had the power to build entire relationships and destroy them completely.

²¹ The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences. (Proverbs 18:21 – NLT)

- The author is saying that words aren't neutral. They always land somewhere. They always do something.
- That should make all of us pause for a second because most of us don't think of our words as life-or-death.
- This theme runs all the way through Proverbs.

¹⁸ Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. (Proverbs 12:18 – NLT)

- Notice the author connects wisdom to using your words to bring healing to the people around you. That's what a wise person does.

⁴ Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4 – NLT)

- The wrong words don't just hurt someone's feelings for an afternoon. They can crush something inside a person.
- Gentle words are a tree of life. Something that grows. Something that gives shade and shelter and oxygen to the people around it.
- Our words are one of the most powerful forces in our lives.
- The question isn't whether they have power. They do. The question is what we're doing with that power.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Your words can hurt or heal.

- Most of the time, we don't think of our words as weapons.

³We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. ⁴And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. ⁵In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. ⁶And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. (James 3:3-6 – NLT)

- One comment. One joke. One sentence that slips out before you think about it can destroy someone's confidence, wreck a friendship, and change how someone sees themselves for years.
- How many of you have had someone say something to you that they probably forgot about five minutes later, but you still remember it?
- Your words can hurt or heal. And every single time you open your mouth, you're choosing which one it's going to be.

2. Your words reveal your heart.

- Our words aren't just random things that come out of our mouths. They're a window into what's actually going on inside of us.
- You can bite your tongue for a while. You can force yourself to say something nice when you're seething on the inside. But eventually, what's really in there comes out. It always does.
- Most of us go straight to trying to control what comes out. We tell ourselves we'll be more careful, we'll think before we speak, we'll be better. And it works for a little while. Until it doesn't.
- The words were never the real problem. They were just showing you what was already there.
- It's time to let God work on what's happening on the inside. Because when that changes, your words will follow.

3. Your words can reflect God's heart.

- Think about how God uses His words in Scripture. He creates. He heals. He restores. He encourages. He comforts. He challenges. Every word God speaks brings life to whoever hears it.

29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (Ephesians 4:29 – NLT)

- Does that mean we can never joke around? That we have to walk on eggshells and be serious all the time? No.
- It means we should ask ourselves whether the things we say are giving life or taking it.
- We live in a world that's full of negativity, sarcasm, gossip, and criticism. People hear words that tear them down every single day.
- What if you became someone people wanted to be around because they always left the conversation feeling built up.
- That happens when you start paying attention to what your words are actually doing to the people around you.
- And it starts with asking God to change what's on the inside so that what comes out reflects who He is.
- That's what it looks like when your words start to reflect God's heart. And that's a path worth choosing.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Replace criticism with encouragement.

- Pay attention to how often you say something negative this week. Not just the obvious stuff like gossip or insults but the subtle stuff too.
- Most of us don't realize how much of our default communication is critical.
 - Sarcasm is funny. Complaining is bonding. Gossip is just "venting." We've normalized it to the point where we don't even notice we're doing it.
- Before you try to change anything, ask God to show you where your words have been causing damage you haven't noticed.
 - Pray something simple like, "God, show me where my words are tearing down instead of building up."
 - Then pay attention to what He brings to mind. You might be surprised what surfaces.

- Every time you catch yourself about to say something critical... stop. And replace it with something encouraging instead.
- It's going to feel strange at first. It might even feel difficult. But by the end of the week, pay attention to what changes... in your mood, in your relationships, and in how people respond to you.

2. Say the thing you've been holding back.

- Think about someone in your life you've been meaning to encourage but haven't gotten around to it.
- This week, say the specific thing. Something like, "I've been meaning to tell you this for a while, but you've made more of a difference in my life than you probably know."
- Specific words stick. They show someone that you actually see them.
- That kind of encouragement can change someone's week. It might even change how they see themselves.
- Take a moment and ask God to give you the boldness to say the thing. Just a simple prayer. Then trust Him to use it for the other persons good.
- If saying it out loud feels like too much, send a text or write a note. The medium doesn't matter. The words do.
- Just don't let another week go by without saying the thing you've been holding back.

3. Pause before you speak.

- This week, before you respond to someone, especially in a tense moment, take a breath and ask yourself one question: "Will what I'm about to say build this person up or tear them down?"
- In that second, ask God for help. Just a breath and a quick "*God give me the right words here.*"
- That one second gives you just enough space to choose your words instead of just reacting.
- Over time you'll find that the more you invite God into these moments, the less you need to fight your instincts alone.