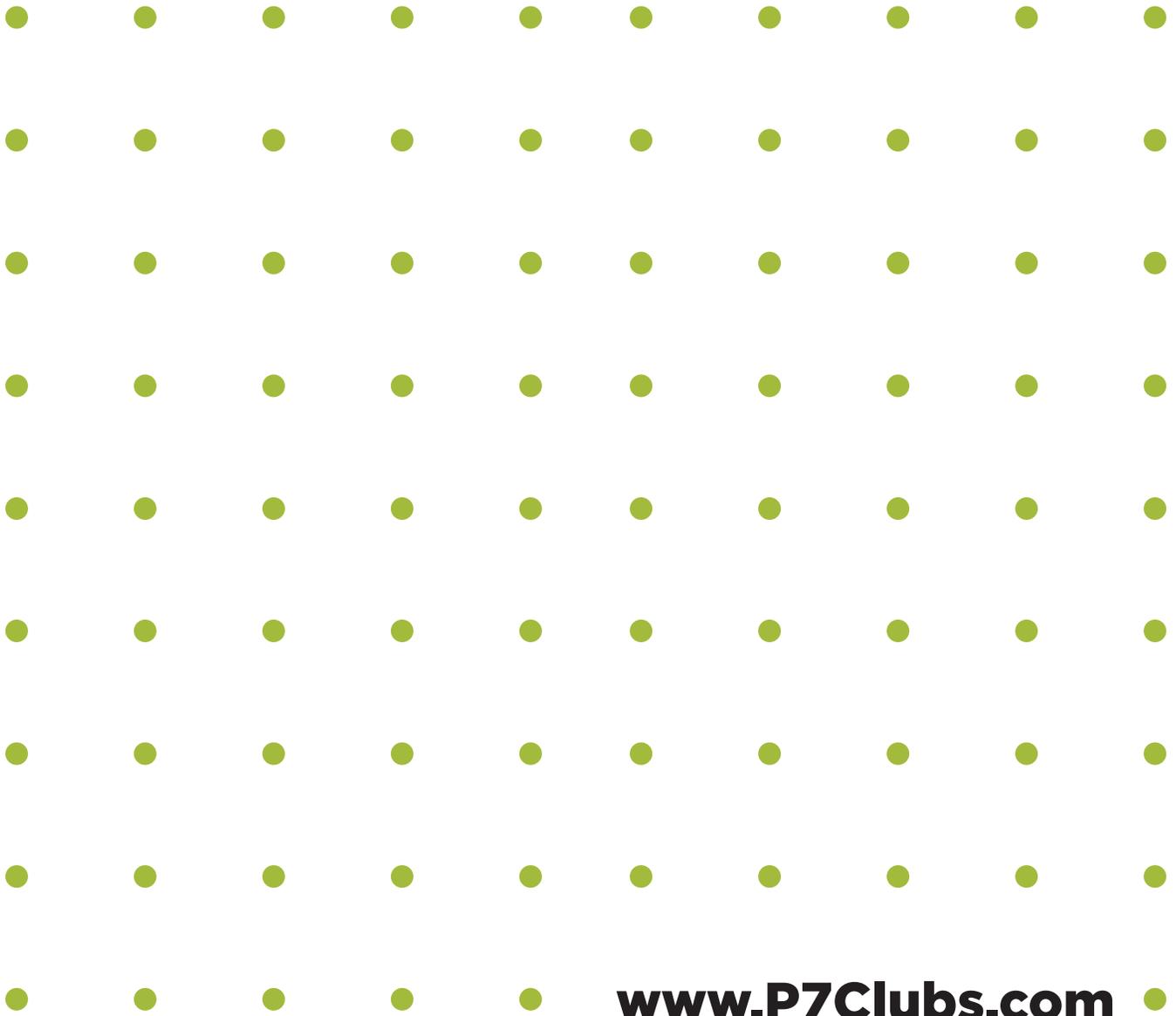




P7Clubs

Lesson Bundle

Volume 5



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Use Your Words: Connecting with People

Preview

God created us to have connections with other people and with Him. We can connect with Him through our words in prayer, and we can connect others to Him by speaking into their lives with inspiring words of kindness. Proverbs 18:21 (NIV) says, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Praise

We should be intentional in encouraging other people. When we use our words to connect with those around us, we are connecting them with grace. Solicit feedback here: Share a time when someone helped you with their words. What about a time someone gave you a compliment and it made your day?

Parable

Have you recently seen a public figure who blurted out something he or she later regretted? What happened after they said it? Do you think this person would change what they said after they saw the impact it had? Get four large tubes of toothpaste and four paper plates. Ask for four volunteers.

- Give the volunteers sixty seconds to squeeze as much toothpaste out of the tubes onto the plates as possible.
- Once the sixty seconds are up, instruct the volunteers to get as much toothpaste back into the tubes as they can in sixty seconds.
- After the final sixty seconds are up, explain how the toothpaste is like our words. They're very easy to let out, but much more difficult—even impossible—to take back. As we relate to each other as the body of Christ, we must intentionally speak in ways that give God glory.

Present

Read Proverbs 18:21 again.
God cast Lucifer out of Heaven with words.

God separated the darkness and created life with words. Joseph and Mary were comforted with words; they would be the earthly parents of the Savior.

Jesus healed sicknesses, performed miracles, and forgave sins with words.

Jesus' disciples evangelized a good portion of the planet with words.

Words—both good and bad—have power. Words are the delivery method for a message to be received:

“Your baby is healthy and looks beautiful.”

“I'm afraid we're going to need to let you go.”

“It looks like the cancer has spread.”

“I would like to offer you this promotion.”

Read James 3:1–8. These verses urge us to consider the power of the tongue—we shouldn't be quick to dominate all conversations.

A horse's powerful body is directed by a small bit in its mouth. Ships are driven by strong winds but are controlled by a tiny rudder. Massive wildfires are usually started by a very small spark. James even goes on to say that “no man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8, NKJV).

At the end of the day, our words should connect people with grace. “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6, NIV).

a) When people are in need, connect them with grace. When people are upset, connect them with grace. When people are hurting, connect them with grace.

b) In a world full of bad news, we can be the light in someone's world to encourage and offer hope in Jesus.

c) We can bring a smile to someone's face who is weighed down by the cares of life. How? By connecting that person with grace.

Grace can be defined as “unmerited favor.” When we're connecting with people in our church, our words should reflect the grace we've been given. “But they don't deserve it”—neither did we! “But they didn't speak kindly to me”—we're still called to connect them with grace.

Matthew 12:34 says the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart. So to speak with grace, you

need grace in your heart. A person who says mean things has a mean heart; a person who says negative things has a negative heart, and vice versa.

Practice

Depending on how much time you have, either read through each of these verses or just give a quick overview:

1. Get wisdom points just by staying silent.
 - a) Read Proverbs 17:28.
 - b) Depending on the situation, it may be best to simply stay silent instead of saying the first thing that comes to mind.
2. Say your words aloud and ask yourself if they're gentle.
 - c) Read Proverbs 15:1.
 - d) If you're struggling with how to respond to someone, ask a friend to listen to what you want to say and give you honest feedback.
3. Pray that your words would be acceptable to God.
 - e) Read Psalm 19:14.
 - f) Frequently ask this convicting question: "Are these words acceptable to You, God?"
4. Pray that God would guard your mouth.
 - g) Read Psalm 141:3.
 - h) If you're needing God to give you wisdom with your words, ask Him to help you.
5. Listen before answering.
 - i) Read Proverbs 18:13.
 - j) Ever speak with someone and you can tell they're itching to answer before you're even done speaking? It's frustrating and does not connect others with grace. How much better it is to listen gracefully.
6. Speak gracefully in Jesus' name.
 - k) Read Colossians 3:17.
 - l) It's hard to yell at someone in Jesus' name. It's difficult to say unkind things to someone in Jesus' name. To speak on behalf of the name of Jesus, we need grace in our hearts.

Pray

Lord, help me to consider the power of my words and stay silent when I should. When I do speak, let me be gentle and full of wisdom. I want my words to reflect who You are, so help my speech to be acceptable to You. Help me to guard

my tongue whenever I'm angry, upset, or frustrated. Help me to be quick to listen and speak gracefully.

Plus

Challenge for this week:

1. Send text messages to others in your P7 Club (or anyone in the school) letting them know you're praying for them, you believe in them, and so on (anything to encourage them and connect them with grace).
2. Write handwritten notes to others letting them know you support them and you see what God is doing in their lives.

Use Your Words 2 (Don't Gossip)

Preview

It's probably safe to assume that at some point in our lives, we have seen the effects of gossip—the hurt, pain, and destruction it causes. Yet somehow, we still participate. It's hard to stop the gossip train sometimes because of how fast it travels, who carries it, and the information it carries. The bottom line, however, is simple: God hates when we use our words to bring destruction on other people.

Praise

Read James 1:26 (NIV):

“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.”

Parable

An old proverb relates the story of a person we'll call Demas, who repeated some gossip about a neighbor. Soon the rumor spread through the whole community. Demas learned later that the rumor was untrue and felt sorry, so he sought advice from an elder in the community who had a reputation for great wisdom. The elder told Demas, “Go home and take a feather pillow outside. Rip it open and scatter the feathers, and then return to me tomorrow.” Demas did as the elder had instructed. The next day he revisited the elder, who then told him, “Go and collect the feathers you scattered yesterday and bring them back to me.” Demas went home and searched for the feathers, but the wind had carried them all away. He returned to the elder and said, “I could find none of the feathers I scattered yesterday.” “You see,” said the elder, “it's easy to scatter the feathers, but impossible to get them back.” So it is with gossip; it doesn't take much to spread hurtful words, but once you do, you can never completely undo the damage.

Present

The definition of gossip is casual or unconstrained

conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true. Whether the information you have is 100 percent true, 100 percent false, or somewhere in between, an honest evaluation should be done of the importance of sharing that information.

Socrates had a great “Triple-Filter Test” to evaluate gossip.

- Truth Test: Are you absolutely sure it's true?
- Goodness Test: Is what you're wanting to share good?
- Usefulness Test: Is what you're wanting to share useful?

Proverbs 16:28 says, “A gossip separates close friends” (NIV). Ever have a friend who talked about you behind your back? Even more frustrating, was it false information? Those types of conversations can throw a wrench into the works of continuing friendships. This is especially true because Proverbs 11:13 (NIV) says, “A gossip betrays a confidence.”

God made us to be social creatures. “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18, NIV). However, sin corrupts this desire for relationship. Instead of building healthy relationships, we may end up gossiping about someone else just so we can be accepted. In most cases, gossip is a basic betrayal of trust. Trust is very hard to come by for a lot of people. Trust is the foundational element for any significant relationship. Without trust, many of us would never share our inner selves with anyone.

Write down a couple of key points about our words from Proverbs 6 to share with the group. We see some strong language in Proverbs 6, where it says God hates people who stir up conflict in the community. That's harsh. I don't think it's a stretch to say that gossip stirs up conflict. In addition to God hating it, gossip made it into the “Top Ten”: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16).

Read Romans 1:28–32 to the group. This is perhaps one of the most straightforward biblical messages about this topic. It describes things that stir up God's wrath. Guess what's

on the list? Gossipers and slanderers—in the same list as murderers and haters of God! The big message is this: God despises the practice of causing pain to others by what we say.

Practice

No matter how fast the gossip train is traveling, it must be stopped if we are to be like God.

Prevent Gossip

1. Don't share information that's not yours to share. This is one of the easiest ways not to get caught up in gossip.
2. Ask God to make you aware of conversations that don't bring honor to Him.

Ignore Gossip

1. Don't participate in conversations about others unless it is building them up.
2. Implement a personal mentality that the train stops with you. When someone shares something with you, you do not have to pass it on.
3. Even when someone gossips about you, you don't have the right to repay him or her with gossip. "Do not repay evil with evil" (I Peter 3:9).

Confront Gossip

Of all the methods of preventing gossip, this one could be one of the most challenging. However, when coupled with a truckload of love, it can be the most rewarding.

1. If you have an issue with someone, don't gossip about them; go directly to them. It takes a lot more courage to confront someone than it does to ignore that person or talk behind their back.
2. If someone tries to pass gossip to you, it's OK to tell them you're not interested in hearing it. Heads up: the conversation can spiral downward quickly, though, if it is said in an arrogant way. Say it with love and grace (Proverbs 12:18, NIV)!
3. Reward: stop the gossip train enough times, and people eventually will quit sharing gossip with you.

Pray

Lord, thank You for the opportunity we have to live for

You. We ask that You give us the strength, courage, and boldness not to gossip about people whom You died to save. We understand that we reflect You, so when we are seen as gossipers, it hurts the gospel that You have called us to represent. Help us to be a source of honesty and truth so that we can continually encourage others, not tear them down. Let us always speak the truth in love and stop any gossip that enters our life. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

Plus

Today's challenge:

Tell students to write on a piece of paper one item of gossip they heard during the last week. By writing it down, they can start to become more aware of these types of conversations in the future. Once they have it written down, have some fun with it. Have them fold it, hold it up in the air, and collectively say "Jesus, we give these conversations to You. Help us not to do it again." Encourage them to allow God's grace to get rid of these conversations in the future and be more intentional about eliminating them. (Collect the papers and discard them.)

Use Your Words 3 (All about Prayer)

Preview

Prayer: Sometimes prayer can seem like a “super spiritual” thing to do, reserved for the most important people.

However, it is something all of us can do and should do. It’s simply connecting with God like we connect with a friend.

Praise

Read I John 5:14 (NIV): “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Parable

Use this opening game:

1. Before P7 starts, choose a volunteer to help. Make sure they have another friend in P7 with whom they’re familiar (sibling or close friend).
2. Instruct the volunteer to stand in the center of the room. Blindfold the volunteer and create a path they should walk, with obstacles obstructing the path (chairs, etc). Direct the volunteer to walk through the path. Everyone should give wrong directions except for the one person with whom they’re familiar. The goal of this should be the student listening to the one person they know and following their instructions.
3. Explain how [volunteer’s name] knows his or her friend’s voice because it is familiar. [Volunteer’s name] has conversations with his or her friend every day. Explain that we need to have conversations with God every day so His voice will be familiar to us.

Present

What Prayer Is:

Prayer is connecting.

1. If you enjoy talking with your friends, consider having the same dedication regarding your relationship with God.
2. Sometimes after not seeing school friends for three months during the summer, it can take a few days to

reconnect with those friends.

3. The same can happen with God when we don’t stay connected with Him.

Prayer expresses our need for Jesus.

1. Sickness, temptation, desires, sins, joys, adoration—all can be expressed to Jesus.
2. We depend on Jesus for everything—even life itself. This connection re-establishes that understanding. Prayer is hearing God’s voice.

1. Connecting with friends isn’t just about talking—it’s about listening to them too. The same principle applies with God.

2. John 10:27 says that God’s sheep know His voice.
3. Proverbs 2:1–5 instructs us to receive God’s words and commandments as treasures and to desire God’s wisdom like silver and gold.

4. God typically will not speak in a loud booming voice, but through His Word, your pastor, or a still small nudging of the Holy Spirit.

What Prayer Is Not:

1. Prayer is not some mystical process in which we call out to some “force.”
2. Prayer is not a “power” to create things or speak them into existence, ordering God around like a servant.
3. Prayer is not quoting empty phrases for attention. Jesus denounced this behavior in Matthew 6:7 by saying, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”

Why Should I Pray?

Because Jesus Said To

Read Luke 18:1. Jesus told us to pray. He made sure to point out that it was important. He Himself prayed. There really is no better reason to pray than that.

Prayer Protects Us in Times of Temptation

1. Matthew 26:41 shares with us some key insights (if we didn’t know already). Our flesh is weak.
2. Prayer makes us ready to say no the minute temptation shows up.

So We Can Receive

1. If you don’t know God’s will, maybe it’s because

you haven't asked (James 4:2).

2. God wants us to experience seeing our prayers answered (salvation of a loved one, healing, provision, etc.), but we must ask.

Practice

The Bible identifies multiple ways and types of prayers we can pray. One working model uses the acronym ACTS as a guide. Each letter stands for a specific aspect of prayer following a natural order.

A—Adoration (worship)

1. In Matthew 6:9, the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to start each prayer by putting things in perspective. When we see how great God is, we will immediately understand how small our problems are in His hands.

2. As a result, our problems and needs come into their proper perspective.

C—Confession (of specific sins)

1. The more we draw near to God, the more we will become aware of our own sin. Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone" as he came into God's presence (Isaiah 6:5). Confession of our sin removes any barriers and clears the air of anything that would cause God not to hear our prayers.

2. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

T—Thanksgiving (gratitude)

1. Our immediate response after confessing our sins and repenting of them should be to thank God. He is faithful and will forgive a repentant heart.

2. We should be thankful that God would forgive us and cleanse us of unrighteousness. In Psalm 32:1 David said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." We are indeed blessed.

S—Supplication (specific requests)

1. Too often we start our prayers with requests instead of spending time in thanksgiving, praise, and cleaning out the junk. However, God does want to hear our needs and requests: Philippians 4:6 instructs us, "Let your requests be made known unto God."

2. We are also promised in Philippians 4:19, "God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

If you were instructed exactly what to say and when to say it to someone, it would be an awkward conversation. True friendship happens when you can open your heart, share your feelings, and really talk with someone. While ACTS is

a method to help give your prayer some structure instead of just rambling, there's no method for prayer that works perfectly for everyone and that should be spoken exactly the same way every time. Keep speaking with God, hearing His voice by reading His Word, and connecting on deeper levels.

Pray

In a closing prayer, focus on these three points:

1. That God would help us be intentional about connecting with Him daily.

2. That each time we pray, we are honest with God and have real dialogue, not simply a recited prayer that doesn't mean anything to us.

3. That God would give us perspective through our time of connecting with Him.

Plus

Today's Challenge:

Encourage your P7 club to write out prayers to God in a journal, notebook, or on paper. Then have them write down how they plan to connect with God more intentionally. Use this time to reflect on the last few days or weeks and consider areas that need improvement. What can you remove from your life to allow time to connect with God?

Recalibrating for a New Year

Preview

Whether we have been intentionally living for God or if we have let some things slip, we all need to recalibrate at times. Even the best cars need a tune-up now and then. Sometimes we go to the doctor when we know we are sick; other times we go for a routine checkup. Let's make sure we are heading into our future with the right priorities and mindset!

Praise

We give thanks to God because He always guides us and directs our paths. He has made His ways known to us, and He has given us clear direction on how to live our lives. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," and as we live our lives to bring glory to God, He walks with us and shows us where to go. As we compare ourselves to His perfect Word and example, we see ourselves more clearly so we can become more like Him.

Parable

Have you ever been in the passenger seat and noticed the driver turning his head to look at something on the side of the road? Inevitably, he starts to drift. It isn't that he wants to go in the direction he is looking; it just happens. The same is true for us. If we don't keep our eyes on Jesus, we will begin to drift toward things in life that don't really matter.

Drifting may not look like leaving the church or participating in every sin on the planet. It may look like settling for less than God has for you. If we lose focus on what matters most, before we know it, we can find ourselves heading in a direction that we never intended.

Have you ever looked at your life and wondered, How did I end up here? Take a moment and write down (or talk about) some areas of your life in which you know you could do better. What are some aspects of your walk with God that need recalibrating?

Present

If we want to stay on the right track, we need to remember our first love. We don't live for God out of obligation or fear. We live for God out of love—and love is the only motivator that will consistently keep us headed in the right direction. If our love for God begins to falter, eventually our walk with God will falter as well. In Revelation 2, Jesus had many good things to say about the church in Ephesus, but He corrected them on the issue of love. "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!" (Revelation 2:4, NLT).

Even though the Ephesians were doing a great work for God, He knew that if they didn't recalibrate their lives on the issue of love, they would get off track. Likewise, let's not get so busy with life that we forget the ultimate reason why we are here.

Once we refocus on God, we are in a great position to address other potential areas of drift in our lives. Are we being faithful to the mission of Jesus? Are we living to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)? Are we setting ourselves apart for God's purpose and living lives of holiness (Romans 12:1)? Are we spending time with God in prayer and Bible reading? Are we representing Him well in every area of our life?

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31, NLT). We must remember that whatever we do, we are called to do it in a way that brings glory to God. Every action we take and every decision we make reflects on the God we serve. It's not only the "spiritual" things that matter. When we don't do our best work (at our job, at school, at home, etc.) it reflects on our God (Romans 12:11). When we focus on the negative and are quick to fixate on what is wrong, it reflects on our God (Philippians 4:8). Yet if we realize that everything we do cultivates the soil for spiritual growth in ourselves and those around us, we gain the opportunity to make a greater, lasting impact in our world.

Practice

1. Prioritize devotion to God; fall in love with Jesus again! Give Him your time in Bible-reading, prayer, fasting, and church attendance.

2. Commit to the mission of Jesus and share the gospel with someone you're connected to.

3. Make sure you aren't slacking in areas of your life. Are you bringing glory to God by your work and behavior at school?

4. Reflect daily and weekly on where your life is headed. Are you prioritizing the right things? Are you focused on Jesus or have you begun to drift?

Pray

Lord, help us to stay focused on what truly matters. Help us to see ourselves clearly through Your Word and help us to recalibrate our lives so we can boldly walk in Your plan for our lives. We pray that our love for You will never falter, and that we will live as powerful examples of Your grace and glory. Help us to represent You in everything we do.

Plus

Discuss the following questions:

1. How does everything we do reflect on Jesus (even the "non-spiritual" stuff)?

2. Can a wrong attitude or laziness at school or work make people less likely to listen to us when we talk about Jesus?

3. How can we help each other be accountable in our devotion and daily walk with God?

4 Truths about Habits

Preview

You probably don't think intentionally about the habits you have. You might not even be aware that you have any. But the truth is we all have lots of habits. Take our morning routine, for example: the way we get dressed, comb our hair, brush our teeth, and so on. Even the way we eat can reveal certain habits.

Praise

Try crossing your arms. Which arm ended up on top of the other arm? Did you think about arranging your arms that way? Probably not. It is just a habit you created, and now you perform it subconsciously. Even something as simple as eating your Oreos is a habit. Or how about this one? A babysitter said she took care of two siblings, and they both ate their lunchtime sandwiches the say way: they lifted off the top piece of bread, ate the filling by scooping it out with their fingers, then they ate the two pieces of bread. Go figure.

Parable

One day a teacher and his student were hiking through the woods. They came across a tree sprout, newly pushed above the ground. The teacher suggested, "Try pulling up that sprout." With ease, the student bent down and uprooted the sprout. They kept walking until they came across a three-foot-tall seedling. Once again the teacher said, "Try pulling up that seedling." The student again did as the teacher asked, but this time uprooting the seedling took a little more effort. The teacher then led the student to a mature tree, much older and established than the past two. Once again the teacher challenged, "Try pulling this tree out of the ground." With a puzzled face, the student responded, "But that would be impossible!"

Moral of the story: Habits that are short-lived are easier to change/stop/uproot than older habits that have been around a long time.

Present

Truth 1: Bad Habits Die Hard

Just as we have seen in this parable, habits can be hard to break, especially long-term, die-hard bad habits that set up like cement in our lives. Why are they so hard to break? Over time they have become a part of who we are, and we do them over and over without thinking. You might be asking yourself, "Then how do I break a long-standing habit?" It takes hard work, but when you are motivated and decide to do it, you can break any habit. And don't neglect the fact that God can help. Ask Him to give you the strength and the wisdom you lack to break that habit. Keep in mind the moral of the tree parable: Uproot bad habits while they're sprouts. You will save yourself a lot of effort, discouragement, and grief.

Truth 2: Establishing Good Habits Takes Hard Work

We all wish that good habits would just appear like a rabbit jumping out of hat. But the truth is establishing good habits is hard work. Research Fellow Phillippa Lally and her team of researchers at the Economic & Social Research Council found that it takes the average person sixty-six days to create a new habit.

Truth 3: Habits Lead to Destinations

Depending on what they are, our habits will either make us or break us. "We become what we repeatedly do." – Sean Covey

Some people ruin their lives with the foolish things they do, and then they blame the Lord for it. (See Proverbs 19:3, ESV.)

Do you play a musical instrument or participate in a certain sport? What did you have to do to get good at it? Practice! For football, you condition the muscles with leg presses, leg curls, deadlifts, squats, etc.; for music, you condition the fingers and wrists with scales and etudes. Practice builds habits that will show up while you are playing in the finals or performing the masterpiece. If you want to excel at something, you have to develop the habits you need to succeed. This is why it is so important to develop

good habits while you are younger. When you grow older, bad habits are harder to break and will work against your efforts to get to the desired destination.

Truth 4: Habits Help Make Your Dream Reality

What are your dreams? Habits can cause you to realize your dreams or fail to reach those dreams. Maybe one of your dreams is becoming a successful Bible quizzier. Do you think you can become a great Bible quizzier if you don't have a habit of reading your Bible and memorizing the prescribed verses? If this is your dream, start practicing! Maybe you want to become an artist. Do you think if you dab some paint on a canvas every six months or so you will become an artist? No, it will take hard work and creating habits that will help you achieve your goal.

Practice

We need to develop habits that align with biblical truth and break habits that don't move us in the direction of Christ.

We need to decide every day if we are going to take one more step closer to Christ, stay in the same place, or take a step away from Christ. Our daily habits play a huge part in our daily walk with Christ.

Pray

God, give us wisdom in choosing the correct habits that will lead us in the direction You want us to go. Give us the strength to break the bad habits we have created and the fortitude to develop good habits, even if they take longer than sixty-six days to learn.

Plus

Follow the link below for a 66-day habit tracker. We have added ten spaces for ten new habits. Don't feel like you have to have ten; you can do one or two. We just added that number so you have enough space for the new habit you would like to learn.



Cycles of Sin

Preview

Have you ever said to yourself, “I thought I conquered this last year! Why does it keep cropping up? Why can’t I kick this?” One of the devil’s biggest tricks is to make you believe you are stuck in a sinful cycle with no way out.

During World War I, the military used trench warfare. At the officer’s command, troops would swarm over the top of the trench, bayonets fixed to their rifles, shouting the battle cry. Unfortunately, they often were charging into a barrage of machine gun fire and other explosives, and casualties were high. The men were often trapped in the trenches, sometimes as long as eighteen months at a stretch, under nearly constant bombardment. Many of them suffered from shell shock (now known as PTSD). Conditions were unsanitary, and disease was widespread: typhoid fever, cholera, even a type of gum infection labeled “trench mouth.” You could say they were like rats stuck in a maze full of twists and turns, and the only way out was to face enemy bullets. Thus, for many soldiers, the trench was their grave.

Praise

Read Romans 8:31–39 and summarize the passage for the students. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger . . . nothing on this list can overcome us because Christ has made us more than conquerors. To this list we can add one more item: we can conquer ourselves as well. We can break out of the sinful cycle. We can swarm out of the trench (rut) and overcome the enemy with the help of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Parable

Do you know what a rut is? It is a grave with both ends knocked out. If we are not careful, we can spiritually die in the trench—it is a sinful cycle we cannot overcome.

Present

Satan’s greatest pleasure is to keep us trapped in the

trench. He enjoys taking advantage of our weaknesses and tendencies and actions, and every time we cycle, we dig ourselves in deeper. How does he know what our weaknesses are? Simple. He watches and waits, like a lion sizing up its prey. He’s been studying mankind a long, long time—ever since Adam and Eve—and is familiar not only with the common human weaknesses but also with your individual set of weaknesses. He studies you as diligently as a student cramming for a test. He takes his job seriously; he wants to score.

The song “Cycles” by Jonathan McReynolds states, “The devil learns from your mistakes, even if you don’t.” What a simple yet profound truth! Satan has watched and waited so long that he can tell when you’re going to do “it” again and moves in to take advantage. But it doesn’t have to be that way; according to II Corinthians 2:11, you can watch and wait too. You can learn from your mistakes! “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (II Corinthians 2:11).

It’s a basic war tactic to study your enemy. You can find out what Satan’s devices are by studying the war manual—the Word of God. Become aware of Satan’s tactics so you can anticipate them and shore up your defenses. Return to Romans 8:37. How can people abstain from certain things? How can they keep from making the same mistakes over and over again?

In addition to the battle plan in the Word of God, you can obtain strength for spiritual warfare through the Spirit of God. His Spirit can make you strong enough to conquer the enemy and break out of the sinful cycle.

The main battlefield is in your mind. This means learning to control your thoughts, because thoughts, when dwelt upon, become actions, and when the thoughts are sinful, the actions will be sinful. Therefore, you must constantly make sure you are putting Jesus first in all things as well as evicting the things that should not be in your mind and heart. A practical way to address cycles of sin is when you are in a sober frame of mind. Maybe it’s the morning after

the sin or maybe it's when you have hit rock bottom and there's nowhere else to turn. In moments like these, you clearly know that you have done wrong. It should be a time of repentance and a shoring up of defenses. It should be a time of putting on the armor that God provides and also spending time with Him to receive spiritual strength. Then when the temptation comes again (which it surely will), you will be prepared to meet and conquer it. Employing these tactics will help you to break out of the cycle.

Practice

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor" (Ecclesiastes 4:9, NKJV).

"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV).

By now you are aware that you can't conquer these sinful cycles alone. Just like a vehicle that needs help to be pulled out of the ditch, you need a friend that will help pull you out of the rut and keep you from falling into future ones. This individual can be called an accountability partner; he or she will help you to stay on the straight and narrow. Don't try this journey alone—you are better when united together!

However, be sure to choose your accountability partner wisely. This partner needs to be spiritually strong and worthy of your trust, because he or she will be confronting you with your own mistakes. If you respect and trust your partner, you will be willing to listen. And if your partner is trustworthy, he or she will not reveal to anyone else the things you have confided in them.

Pray

God, give us the strength to break these sinful cycles and the wisdom we need to navigate around the pitfalls the devil has set before us. Give us boldness to ask for help when we need it the most, and above all, let us decrease so You can increase.

Plus

Listen to the song "Cycles" by Jonathan McReynolds.

Bullying Stops with Me

Preview

No one thinks they're a bully, but what if ending bullying had nothing to do with everyone else and everything to do with me? How can I transform my life so that I become part of the solution instead of the problem?

Praise

We thank God because He died for everyone. He has shown us that everyone is worthy of love and grace. There isn't anyone so bad that Jesus doesn't love them. No one has gone so far that hope and salvation isn't available to them. What about you? God doesn't care how much money you have or the brand of clothes you wear. He doesn't care if you're getting all A's or struggling to get a C. You are loved and adored by God. When Jesus saw you at your worst, He still chose Calvary. You are valuable. You matter.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NKJV).

Parable

Have you ever seen someone who was bullied either in person or online? Have you been the victim of bullying? What was your response to that situation? What was the response of others?

Here's a harder question: Have you ever been a bully? Typically, we don't like to think of ourselves this way, and perhaps many of us would say that we've never done it. Yet if we think harder, we may be able to remember times that we laughed at the expense of someone else or excluded someone for no good reason. Have we remained silent even when we knew the right thing to do, thus enabling someone else to be bullied?

We all have the capacity to do what is right or what is wrong, and on the issue of bullying, we must make up our mind to let our voice be heard. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." We cannot afford to be silent. We must show the world the love of God!

Present

If we want to be like Jesus, we must stop following the crowd. The crowd very rarely understood what Jesus was doing. Jesus showed love unconditionally; He showed love when people didn't deserve it. You could always find Jesus befriending the people that society hated, mocked, and rejected. The crowd said to stone the woman who was caught in adultery, but Jesus saved her (John 8:7). The crowd mocked when Mary anointed Jesus with oil, but Jesus accepted her sacrifice (John 12:7-8). Never forget that it was the crowd that chose to release Barabbas, the murderer, and crucify Jesus. If you're truly walking with Jesus, you're rarely going to fit in with the crowd.

If we're to stop bullying and spread the love of Jesus to the world, we must lose the need to fit in. We must intentionally choose to live according to His call and not bow to peer pressure. When we stand up for those in need, the crowd will not accept us, but neither did they accept Jesus. When we befriend the friendless and love those who are "unlovable," the crowd will criticize and mock us, but we are not living for their approval. We are living for the approval of God! The responsibility is on us to go and love those in need of love. Jesus didn't make us ascend to Heaven to save ourselves; He came down to us. We must follow His example.

We also must lose any negative talk about other people. Under the name of "just playing around," many people have been bullied. If we're laughing at someone else's expense and pointing out negative things about them (publicly or privately) we need to stop (Proverbs 6:19). If that is what we are engaging in, we are part of the problem. Remember that God knows every negative thing about us but chooses to give us grace. If we're to be like Jesus, we must choose to act with grace, even when people don't deserve it. Let your speech be used to encourage others and build them up. The crowd often focuses on the negative, but the Christian seeks opportunities to uplift others.

Finally, we need to intentionally make new friends—genuinely befriend new people. Go out of your way to

include others and invite them to join you. Get to know as many people as you can; make sure they know you're someone they can talk to, turn to, and count on. Extend the love of God to everyone that you meet.

Practice

Make a list of people with whom you are connected (perhaps have a class together) but don't know very well.

Pray over your list and ask God to guide and help you show His love to these people. Afterward, make intentional efforts to befriend them and get to know them.

Pray

Thank You for loving us unconditionally beyond all our faults and failures. We pray that You will help us to become more like You and to show love to everyone around us. We ask that You give us opportunities to stand up for those in need and the boldness to follow Your call instead of the crowd.

Plus

Are there any people who missed P7 today that are usually there? Is it their first time or are they getting disconnected? Reach out to them and be a true friend. Let them know that they are missed and valued!

Speak Life

Preview

You may have heard the hype about a study conducted at the University of Maryland indicating that women speak three times as much as men. It has appeared all over the internet, talk shows, science mags, and journals for years. The phenomenon has been cited hundreds of times: women speak an average twenty thousand words a day, while men speak only seven thousand words a day.

The U of M researchers concluded this after they assembled a group of ten kids ages 3–5 and tested them for levels of Foxp2, the protein in the brain that's key to language. They found that the girls had 30 percent more Foxp2 than the boys did. However, many professionals have complained that the scope of this study was way too narrow and should be taken with a grain of salt. On the other hand, many real-world studies of gender differences in language usage indicate that men and women are equally talkative. One recent study tested six samples of university students and found that both men and women speak about sixteen thousand words a day. But who's counting?

Praise

Which study do you think is correct? Can you guess how many words you average per day? Can you remember every conversation you had today? Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much? (Allow for discussion)

Parable

Words spill out of us so easily. It's like a person scooping up a large handful of dry sand. What happens? Some of it spills out, and there's no way the person can retrieve those same grains of sand. The same thing can happen with our words. We speak volumes every day, and if we are not careful some will cause harm to someone.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

Words can be a matter of life and death. As mentioned

above, we speak an average of sixteen thousand words per day. Upon reflection, what percentage of the words you spoke, say yesterday, were conducive to life? By that, did they help to edify or build up someone else? Were your words encouraging or strengthening? Such conversation is approved by God. He loves it when you speak life to someone. It not only blesses the person you are speaking to, but it blesses you as well.

On the other hand, some words bring death—both to the one speaking the words and the one hearing the words. This includes useless, unprofitable conversation that does not edify but that brings people down. It's a sinful waste of time. In the context of Matthew 12, the word "idle" in verse 36 means words that are injurious, false, or even malicious. In effect, Jesus was saying, "People who love to talk, whether in a good or in a bad way, will eventually be paid back; they will enjoy the advantages or disadvantages arising from their words." (See also Proverbs 18:21.) Use the tongue for good, not evil, because eventually you will have to eat your words!

Present

It takes four words—or maybe less—to bring death. Maybe you know how it feels to be on the receiving end of words that bring "death." Perhaps while growing up, your parents spoke words that put you down or discouraged or even disparaged you (made you feel worthless). Or maybe someone ruined your whole day today by saying something derogatory. It has been said that it may take four or five positive affirmations to undo one negative affirmation. Yes, only a few words can make or break you.

Practice

Jesus' statement in Matthew 12:36–37 should cause us to think soberly. One of the consequences of our words is that they will reveal who we really are and what is in our heart. Our words are powerful, and we need to take them seriously.

An example of how powerful words are is found in the

Creation account in Genesis. In Genesis 1, God used the power of the spoken word to create the universe. Then in Genesis 3, the serpent spoke to the woman, causing her to sin and to eat from the forbidden tree. This short conversation between the serpent and the woman was so powerful it changed mankind forever.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the serpent's words were not true, yet they had a far-reaching outcome that eventually brought forth death to every man. This shows us that no matter if words are true or false, once we believe them, they can become reality.

Another example of how important words are is found in John 1:1-5 (NKJV): "In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

This is amazing! In Genesis, God spoke a word to create the universe, and now, in his Gospel, John introduces Jesus as the Word.

Your words mean more than you know. Speak life today!

Pray

Have you ever had a friend who loved to hear you talk? If the answer is no, let me tell you that you do have such a friend. Song of Solomon 2:14 (NKJV) says, "Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet." God is your friend, and He loves to hear you talk to Him. Let's do it right now.

Lord, I pray that we will realize the power and weight of each word we speak. Let every word that proceeds from our mouth bring life to others. I pray that our words will reflect who You are.

Plus

Try counting all the words you speak in one day and tag us on social media with the answer. There's a reason God gave us two ears and one mouth. "Listen well so that you can speak with purpose." – Joshua Carson

Guarding your Heart on Social Media

Preview

What we allow our eyes to view is directly linked to what flows out of our hearts. Social media can be a great tool that we can use to glorify God, but it can also be an unhealthy and damaging stronghold in our lives.

Praise

Encourage everyone to share a time in their lives where God kept them from something bad.

Parable

We've all been there before: we're scrolling through our feeds online and then BAM, we see something that we know isn't pleasing to God. This can pop up in ads or in posts from our friends. With this culture's rampant focus on gratifying our sinful desires, it can seem really hard to guard our hearts and our eyes. If we go it alone, it is nearly impossible to conquer, but when we have God on our side, we can overcome.

Present

The Bible puts it in simple terms in Proverbs 4:23 (NIV © 2011): "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Here we see a direct commandment from the Word of God. Everything that comes from us, whether it be actions or words, comes from our hearts. In today's culture, we're told to follow our hearts. However, the Bible gives us some significant insights about our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things," and Mark 7:21–22 (NIV) tells us, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

Does that sound like something we should follow? While our culture wants us to follow our hearts, God wants us to give our hearts to Him. Psalm 51:10 is a prayer that says, "Create in me a pure heart, O God." If we want God to give

us a pure heart, we need to make sure that we guard it from the things that are not of God. This includes posts that have the potential to create a pitfall in our walk with God.

If we visit a website that brings us closer to our friends but also has ads that cause us to view men or women in a lustful way, then we need to stop visiting that website. If we follow an account that makes us overly jealous of someone else's possessions, we need to unfollow them. Our souls are much more important to God than the amount of followers we have.

Matthew 5:29–30 (NIV) says, "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." This sounds really serious but let me bring it into a modern context. If your Instagram feed causes you to stumble, delete it; it is better for you to lose a couple followers than for you to continue to lust.

The fight for our hearts is a serious one, and if we don't get serious about guarding our hearts on social media, we may lose that battle. When we go into this battle alone, we are almost destined to fail. However, when we allow God to hold our hearts in His hands, He will fight for us. Never forget Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." God gave us a way to win the war for our hearts, and it is by laying our lives at His feet.

Practice

Measure everything you follow on social media by the test in Philippians 4:8 (NIV © 2011). The verse states, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." It is hard to think about things that aren't noble or pure when we follow

things on social media that are noble or pure. We need to make sure we aren't intentionally placing stumbling blocks in our lives.

Pray

Lord, help me to guard my heart in all facets of my life. Create in me a clean heart, one that is pleasing to You. Thank you, Lord, for giving me a way to combat the sin inside of my heart. Thank you for giving Your life to give me freedom in this fight.

Plus

Encourage everyone to put the things in their life to the Philippians 4:8 test. Try and make it something you come back to and encourage in future lessons.

How To Elevate Christ on Social Media

Preview

Social media is nearly inescapable in today's culture. Raise your hand if you have some type of social media account (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). This technology has the ability to bridge the gap between us and the people we know or even people we may never meet. If used to elevate Christ, it can be one of our greatest assets in the modern age.

Praise

Go around the room and have everyone give one way they can praise God on social media.

Parable

In biblical times, the roads built by the Romans were seen as a breakthrough in infrastructure. These roads allowed the message of the gospel to travel faster than ever before. It was on one of these roads that Saul was converted, and his name was changed to Paul (Acts 9:1-17). Much like the road to Damascus, social media is a road that allows the gospel to spread at a much faster rate than before. With such a valuable tool at our disposal, it would be a waste to not use it for the kingdom of God. Let's look at some practical ways to utilize this instrument for the Lord using Project 7's mission statement: "Unlock faith, unleash truth, elevate Christ, serve others."

Present

Unlock Faith: Testimonies are a great way to bolster people's faith. By seeing how good God has been to others, people may give God a chance they otherwise may not have given Him. If you use social media to highlight these testimonies, you have the potential to reach countless students in your school. Don't be ashamed of what God has done in your life; share it!

Unleash Truth: Quality content grounded in biblical truth is a great way to get your message out to the digital world.

You can unleash this truth through social media! By posting a simple Bible verse on your feed or an uplifting devotional, God's impact can go beyond the classroom and into people's personal lives.

Elevate Christ: As Christians, we need to seek to elevate Christ in everything we do, and this includes on social media! I'm not saying every single selfie needs to have a Bible verse in the caption, but I am saying that what we post should be God honoring. Nothing we post should pull our followers farther away from God. Before posting something, it's good to put it up against the "Philippians 4:8 Test." This verse states, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (NKJV). Another translation says to "think on these things." Elevate Christ by posting things that are true, that are noble, that are pure.

This also goes both ways; what you post matters, but also what you follow matters. If the things you are following aren't pure, aren't true, and aren't noble, it may be time to hit the unfollow or unfriend button. Your relationship with God is much more important than your relationship with others. If something or someone you are following is pulling you farther from God, it's time to get that out of your life.

Serve Others: Serving others is a great way to show the love of Christ to those around us. Many P7 clubs around America donate their time to helping others in their community. When we use social media to show these acts of kindness, we open a door that allows us to reach those outside of the classroom. I'm not saying we need to post our good works as a brag, which is unbiblical. However, if we make a post or create a story about our time helping out in a soup kitchen, we can inspire others (even other P7 clubs) to go out and do the same.

Practice

We have a unique tool that generations before us never had. At the outset, the gospel had to travel by foot, but now we can share it with the tap of a button. What a shame it would be to fail to use the gifts God has given us in this day and age! Social media is our Roman road.

Pray

- Lord, help me to use the tools You have given me to their full potential. Help me to be unashamed of Your name, whether it is in my classroom or on my profile. Let Your glory be evident in my life and help me to reach those around me.

Plus

- Encourage everyone to get in a group selfie and post it to their accounts. This can be a great way to get your club out there and encourage others to join.



Slow To Speak

Preview

This lesson teaches us how to be slow to speak and quick to listen, and the benefits that come with following this biblical instruction.

Praise

Share times in your life when you were thankful God listened to you. Have you ever had a foot-in-mouth moment that you spoke too quickly?

Parable

Imagine how many conflicts would never materialize if we would just listen and understand a person's concern or complaint. What would happen if we waited to respond until we prayed, asked clarifying questions, and gave thought to someone's criticism? What if, when we responded, we spoke with patience, grace, honesty, and clarity?

Today in our age of instant information, we have quick access to the news. We don't have to wait for the newspaper to come out anymore; we can go right to Twitter or other websites. We can get all the updated information sometimes in seconds or minutes or even in real time. Because of this, it sometimes can be hard to slow down and listen to God.

James 1:19 (NKJV) tells us, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Present

James tells us we should be swift to listen, but we also should be slow to speak and slow to get angry. How many times have you blurted out something, only to regret it the moment you said it? Jesus said, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37, NKJV). It's so easy to rationalize our

outbursts of anger in our sinful reasoning. But Proverbs 29:11 (NLT) says, "Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back."

In our world that tends to rage-post on social media, there's not much time to think, just to react. I want to encourage you to think twice before you respond, whether on social media or in person. Here are three encouragements for you in times of frustration or tension: listen, wait, respond.

Listen

A sign of humility is a quickness to listen to somebody. Anyone will listen when they respect the speaker and place greater significance on them than they do on themselves. When we respect someone, we want to hear what they have to say. Philippians 2:3 says when we show signs of humility, we value others above ourselves. Listening to understand someone before we respond is a sign that we're not trying to be "wise in our own eyes," but rather trying to grow in grace. Proverbs 3:6 encourages us not to lean on our own understanding, so let's seek to understand others.

Wait

Paul, in I Corinthians 13:4, teaches us that true love is patient. Waiting before we respond to a concern or a complaint (and being slow to speak) is often a way God calls us to love others—even if they don't expect or want us to. A lot of times our initial impulse is wrong, especially when the criticism is about us. We don't like feeling attacked, judged, or confronted. However, if we take the advice from Proverbs 10:19, we will hold back. This verse instructs us to prudently restrain our lips. To be prudent means to act with or show care and thought for the future. When we're frustrated, we should think more about our future relationship with someone than our initial feeling in the moment. That concern for the future can direct our current conversations.

Respond

A beautiful portrayal of gracious words is found in Proverbs

16:24 (ESV). It says, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." When we speak, it is important that our words lift up those around us and give life. Ephesians 4:29 says that our words can give grace to those who hear them. Now, does this infer that speaking gracefully means we shouldn't ever have conflict with anyone? Absolutely not. Proverbs 27:6 (NKJV) says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." At times, we need to be real with those around us; we need to speak the truth in love to our friends. However, our responses should always be measured, clear, honest, and aimed at relationship restoration and agreement.

Practice

Let's review. We are called to be slow to speak, slow to anger, and quick to listen. This takes practice. We can practice by remembering the three encouragements mentioned above: "listen, wait, respond"—and in that order! Listening is a sign of humility. Waiting gives us time to gather the facts and ask any clarifying questions. Responding with grace helps us throw water (not gasoline) on a fire.

When there is conflict in your life and you genuinely aim to work through a situation, try the phrase "help me understand." When you graciously ask someone to help you understand why they are frustrated, you can get to the bottom of what's really going on. Share a real-life example to which this could apply. What are other "help me understand" phrases you can use to dissolve tension?

Pray

Dear Lord, whatever it takes, make me humble so I can be quick to hear others. I want to grow until I can truly understand those around me. Do whatever it takes to teach me to love so that I am slow to speak in a moment of tension or frustration. Help me to respond with gracious words. More than anything, I want to be like You, Jesus. Help me to be quick to listen and slow to speak according to your Word. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Plus

Remember this week to be quick to listen and slow to

respond! When you're on social media and someone says something bad about you, give it twenty-four hours before responding to anything. If a response is necessary, listen (or read), wait, and then respond! You can do this!



Learning From Failure

Preview

Failure is an unwanted but inevitable part of life. Everyone will experience failure(s) at some point. How can we make the most of our failures? Is it possible that our struggles can serve to take us to a higher level? How can God work through everything in our lives, even our failures, to make us into who we need to be?

Praise

We give honor to a God who is perfect! He has never made a mistake, but He understands our struggles; He was tempted in the same manner we are. God is not looking to find the worst in us. Rather, He wants to bring out the best in us. He guides us through our successes and failures and helps us to grow through it all!

Parable

Have you ever tried something that ended hilariously bad? Maybe it was a recipe you saw on the internet or a craft that didn't end up quite right. (You can look up Pinterest Fails for examples, but make sure to preview everything to check for appropriate content.)

We all experience failure. No doubt in the process of learning to ride a bike, you fell off more than a few times. If you play music or sports, you've probably had your share of missed notes, missed shots, and missed assignments. Yet if you want to learn and reach your potential, you've got to embrace the possibility of failure. Few people enjoy the weight room and the practice room, but resistance builds strength. Without adversity and resistance, we would never become who we need to be. Likewise, we must remember that failures in the spiritual realm are not final; our struggles are only temporary. If we keep our attitude right, our failures will help to propel us into a better relationship with Jesus.

(In this section, you might ask people to talk about some of their more comical failures or about learning something

difficult that involved failure and struggle along the way.)

Present

Failing does not make you a failure. If that were the case, everyone on the planet would be hopeless. At some point, we've all fallen short of living the life that we know we need to live. The difference in failing and being a failure comes in our ability to pick ourselves back up and start again. Sometimes when we pick ourselves up, we realize that we need to go in a different direction. Other times, we may realize that we simply need to try harder and keep pushing. We cannot change the fact that falling and failing are part of life, but we can make sure that we have the right attitude toward it!

"Do not gloat over me, my enemies! For though I fall, I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light" (Micah 7:8, NLT). However, persistence and a good attitude aren't always enough. We need something that will keep us from falling into the same sins and mistakes repeatedly. The Bible tells us the grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-12). If we will wrap ourselves up in the love of God and His sacrifice for us, our desire for wrong things will fade away. When we focus on the price that Jesus paid, we allow the grace of God to teach us how to live.

It is important to note that all of our struggles are not caused by our own mistakes. For instance, the apostle Paul dealt with his own problems, and on three occasions, he prayed that God would release him from his struggle. God answered Paul's prayer in a way that many of us wouldn't expect. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (II Corinthians 12:9, NIV © 1984).

Our struggles and shortcomings teach us to rely on Jesus. If we could do everything God has called us to do without His help, it wouldn't be much of a calling. If we didn't need Him, there would be no such thing as a miracle and no such

thing as deliverance. Often, we don't allow God to fully have His way in our life until we realize that His plan for us is greater than our own ability. Is it possible that our struggles are setting the stage for God to do some of His greatest work in us and through us?

Practice

Think about some past mistakes and failures in your life. Write down what you could have learned from that situation. Did you "rise again" from it or did you let failure have the final word? Did you ever address the problem?

Sometimes we need to keep heading in the same direction we were going; sometimes we need to change course. Did you experience failure because you strayed from the path God intended, or was the adversity you faced due to everyday circumstances?

When we find ourselves struggling or facing failure, we must reflect on what we can do differently. When we do this, failure ceases to be final. Rather, it becomes a significant step toward success!

Pray

Lord, help us to have the right mindset toward failure. We know that You love us despite our mistakes, faults, failures, and insecurities. We ask that You always give us the strength to persevere through the difficult times. Help us to always remember the grace You have shown us. We know it is nothing but Your grace that teaches us how to live lives that glorify You. When we are faced with our own inabilities, we ask that You help us to see how Your strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Plus

Discuss some ways you can help one another when you struggle. As the body of Christ, we are called to lift each other up. Nobody is made to go through life alone. How can your P7 club help people overcome their failures through godly friendships, community, and the Spirit of God?



Instagram Filters and the Bible

Preview

If you're like me, you check Instagram about five hundred times a day (I may be slightly exaggerating). We scroll through the lives of our friends, noting what we like and ignoring what we don't. In most cases, these pictures are a small snapshot of what people's lives are like. Let's go around the room and give each other a "snapshot" of what our week has been like so far. (Encourage everyone to participate.)

Praise

Invite everyone to talk about something good that happened to them this week and tie it in with how God's blessings are evident throughout our lives.

Parable

One of the more popular features that Instagram has is the preset filters we can apply to the pictures we post. These filters change how our pictures look. While the picture may be in black and white now, the image underneath is still the same. Let's delve into that concept a little more and learn how it can be used to look at things through God's eyes.

Present

The many filters that Instagram has can be compared to some of the filters that God places into our lives. Let's look at some of these filters:

Attitude—The Bible says in Philippians 2:14 to "do all things without complaining and disputing" (NKJV). It is easier to say that we shouldn't complain than it is to refrain from complaining. However, we need to apply God's filter to our attitude. When we get upset with a classmate, we need to remember that we are called to be a light in this world, and losing our temper for something insignificant is the opposite of being a light. Our attitude is a choice, and we need to choose to view it through the filter God has given us in His Word.

Perspective—Sometimes it's hard for us to put things into the right perspective. When we fail a math test or get hurt by a friend, it may seem like everything is tumbling down around us. But the Bible says in Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV), "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you." The very God that hung the stars in their place is always with us, in every season of our lives. When we view our situation through the filter of perspective that God gave us, we can surely know that He is with us always. When everything is crashing down around us, God is the rock that will never move.

The Future—The future can be a scary thing to think about for some people. We may worry about college or getting a good job or finding the "right" person. However, there is a filter we can apply to this as well. In Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV) we are told to "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." When we apply this filter to our lives, we can have peace in our hearts, knowing that God is the One who is directing our paths. In every season of our lives, whether we are making the jump to high school or college, God is directing our paths. Our future is being crafted in the hands of God.

Practice

So let's review the three filters we've learned about.

1. **Attitude:** When we let God take control of our attitude, we can be a brighter light for His kingdom.
2. **Perspective:** When we step back from our situation and let God take control of our lives, we can be comforted by the fact that He is always with us.
3. **The Future:** When we allow God to have control of our future, we allow His perfect will to take place in our lives.

Let's make sure we remember to view our lives through the filters that God has placed there. Do you want to know where to find all of them? Read your Bible! God isn't trying to hide these filters from you. In fact, He gave you the

guidebook that shows you how to live your life to its full potential.

Pray

Lord, help me to view my life through the filters you have placed in it. I pray that I can become the young person You desire me to be. I give You my life and I place it in Your hands. Help me to trust You in every season of my life, the good and the bad. Thank You for your Word and for the help that You provide.

Plus

Encourage everyone to look for practical ways to apply these filters in their everyday lives.

A Proper Perspective

Preview

Have you ever expected a class to be really bad, but it turned out that it was actually pretty good? Or have you ever met someone who was much nicer than what their reputation led you to believe they would be? How about a time you read through a chapter in the Bible and gained a new, exciting insight? Every one of these examples is the result of a changed perspective. If you can change your perspective, you can change your outlook.

Praise

Even though we may not understand everything that's going on in our lives, we have a perspective that God gives us through His Word. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." All things—that's quite a perspective!

Parable

There was a man named Paul in the Bible who was an apostle. One of Paul's ultimate goals was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ in Rome. He eventually got there, but he arrived as a prisoner, having first been arrested in Palestine. Jews religious leaders had stirred up violent public emotions against Paul because of his stand that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The Romans arrested Paul, even though they didn't think he had done anything wrong. They just didn't want the riled-up Jews to kill him.

After several years of imprisonment in Palestine, Paul was no nearer being released, so he appealed to Caesar and was shipped out in the charge of a Roman centurion. In Rome, he was allowed to live in a rented house, but under constant guard, possibly even chained to a guard. He may have thought, God, I asked You to open a door for me to be a preacher and share the gospel in Rome, but I didn't expect it to turn out like this. How can I spread the gospel while I'm under house arrest? I imagine most of us would be just as frustrated.

However, Paul had a different perspective. We know this because of what he wrote to one of the churches: "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (Philippians 1:12–13, NIV). Wait a minute! How could he advance the gospel as a prisoner? The reason is that on the other side of his imprisonment people came to know why he was imprisoned—because of his stand for the gospel Christ.

Instead of moping and crying all day, Paul shared his testimony with every one of his guards. His goal was to reach some of the most powerful leaders in Rome with the gospel, and God gave him the opportunity to do just that. The gospel even penetrated Caesar's household: slaves, freedmen, and palace guards (Philippians 4:22). Paul couldn't necessarily change his circumstance, so he changed his perspective. He knew with confidence that God was working behind the scenes. He knew with confidence that all things work together for good because he loved God and was called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Present

Paul was chained to a Roman guard. What are you chained to? What kind of situation is out of your control? Perhaps it's a family dynamic like a divorce. Maybe it's sickness. Maybe it's relationship challenges. When you go through difficult times in life, ask God to give you a fresh perspective so you can be productive in His kingdom. After you get through this difficult time, you will be able to look back and see how God was preparing you and growing you and using you.

Let's remember a couple of things:

Be on the lookout for reasons to praise God: "Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with

love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things” (Psalm 103:2-5, NLT).

God has great plans for you: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

Practice

- What is God teaching you in this season of life?
- What situation or person requires a fresh perspective on your part with God’s help?
- Is there an example where you have had a perspective change?
- How can you encourage someone going through a difficult time?

Pray

Lord, we thank You that Your Word tells us that all things work together for the good of them who love you and are called according to your purpose. We know there are many things in our lives that aren’t good, but we trust in Your promise that good can come out of them. We ask today that You will help us to have a proper perspective so we can see things the way You see them. And help us to trust You completely for the things we cannot understand. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Plus

[Note: The following exercise also appeared in the lesson “Dealing with Stress.”]

Here’s a unique challenge I’d like each of you to consider. Divide a piece of paper in half. On the left side of the page, write down reasons you’re stressed. On the right side, write down reasons you’re blessed. You have to be honest for this exercise to work. The goal is to help you have a change of perspective.

How To Deal with Difficult People

Preview

How many of you have ever had to deal with a difficult person? Everyone's hand should be up, including mine.

Whether it's the person taking too long to order their coffee or the guy who reminds the teacher that we had homework due, there will be people who will get on our nerves. However, the way we treat these people may make or break our opportunity to witness to them.

Praise

The main point of this lesson is learning how to deal with people in a loving way. Go around the room and talk about what Jesus' love means to you.

Parable

With 7.4 billion people on Earth, we are bound to have disagreements with at least one of them. More than likely you will encounter many situations that require you to deal with difficult people, whether they're in your classroom, workplace, or your own family. A little secret: that's okay. Being a Christian in this world means we will meet people who don't share the same opinions as we. (Spoiler alert: Jesus dealt with people like this as well). Let's look at how we can use Christ as an example for how we should deal with conflict when it arises.

Present

I'd like to give you some points that may help you when dealing with difficult people. Let's use Jesus as an example.

1. Jesus loves everyone. Romans 5:8 (NKJV) says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When we boil this verse down, we see that when Jesus was on the cross, He was fully aware that every single person He was dying for was a sinner. This verse demonstrates that Jesus' love for us is not limited by our sin. The person who cut you off in traffic? Jesus died for him. The student who may bully you? Jesus died for her. The person you see in the mirror every

morning? Yep, him too. It is hard to treat a difficult person poorly when we realize Jesus doesn't love him or her any less than He loves us. Every person, whether they are difficult or not, has value to offer to the kingdom of God.

2. Jesus didn't isolate Himself from difficult people. Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. These people were liars, cheaters, scam artists, and the like. And yet Jesus and His disciples sat and ate with them. When people saw this, they were perplexed and wondered how a man of Jesus' stature could eat with such vile people. Jesus responded to them in Mark 2:17 (NKJV) by saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Now, I'm not saying we need to go out of our way to sit at the same lunch table as the difficult person, but I am saying that we need to go out of our way to be accessible to them. What a shame it would be for us to cut off access to the gospel for someone simply because they share a different opinion than ours. As Christians, we cannot isolate ourselves from difficult people. We need to look to Jesus as our example for how to deal with the difficult people in our lives.

3. Jesus responded with love. Jesus gave us pretty clear directions on how to deal with our enemies. In Matthew 5:43-44 (NKJV), Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." That is straightforward and up front. Jesus left no room for options in this verse; He gave us one specific way to deal with difficult people: treat them with love. Is there a difficult someone in your life? Love them. Pray for them. Jesus was a man adored by many and hated by just as many. He was seen as a threat and He had a lot of enemies. If anyone deserved to be spiteful toward the difficult people in their life, it was Jesus. Yet when teaching about this very issue, He responded with love. When someone is beginning to get under your skin, I encourage you to fall back to the teaching of Jesus, who loved perfectly.

Practice

Let's review.

1) Jesus loves everyone. There is not a single person on this Earth who has existed, currently exists, or will exist that Jesus didn't die for. Jesus died for sinner and saint alike, and when we begin to grasp this concept, it becomes easier for us to deal with difficult people positively.

2) Jesus didn't isolate Himself. Jesus and His love and mercy are accessible to everyone. Jesus never reserved Himself for believers only. Likewise, we cannot isolate ourselves from those with whom we disagree. When we truly know what we believe, we can't withhold that information from anyone. The gospel deserves to be shared with everyone.

3) Jesus responded with love. When we come in contact with adversity, how we respond is critical to our credibility as Christians. When Jesus taught the people how they should treat their enemies, He told them to love them and pray for them. We must do the same.

Pray

Lord, help me to spread Your love to everyone. When I am faced with a difficult person, help me to respond in love. You know the intentions of everyone's hearts; let the intentions of my heart be to love those who may hate me. Help me to grow in this area every day.

Plus

Encourage everyone to start praying for those with whom they may disagree. Encourage them to respond with love.



Dealing with Stress

Preview

We live in a fast-paced world in which we are constantly dealing with mountains of homework, complicated relationships, family members, work issues, and the list goes on. It is easy to allow all of these factors to overwhelm us and cause stress in our lives, but when we take a step back and look at the goodness of God, we can see there are many more reasons to feel blessed than to feel stressed.

Praise

Invite each person to give an example of how he or she is blessed by God.

Parable

The Bible gives us a telling example of a stressed-out woman in Luke 10:40–42 (NKJV). Jesus entered the village of Bethany and was greeted by a woman named Martha, who invited Him into her home to eat and rest. Martha had a sister named Mary who was so eager to hear Jesus' teaching that she ignored her responsibilities as one of the hostesses and instead sat at Jesus' feet. That left all the work of feeding Jesus and His disciples to Martha. Feeling overwhelmed, Martha finally snapped, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me" (v. 40).

Martha was clearly stressed at this point; the Lord and His disciples were crowded into her house, and it was up to her to fix and serve food and drinks to nearly twenty people. However, Jesus replied, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41–42). Martha was all in a dither, but Mary was cool. What was the difference? Which sister enjoyed Jesus' presence more? How does this example relate to us as teenagers in the twenty-first century? Part of the answer revolves around knowing the best way to deal with stress.

Present

Stress is a fact of life. Things that stress out some people don't cause others to be troubled. In other words, everyone has their own stressors, and everyone tries to cope in their own way, whether healthy or unhealthy. Some people turn to binge eating, compulsive spending, or taking drugs, while others just let the stress build and build until they eventually lash out in anger at someone. These are unhealthy ways to deal with stress. What is the best and healthiest way? The answer is in the Bible.

I Peter 5:6–7 says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

We see in this verse that we are to cast all of our cares on the Lord because He cares about us.

Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

This verse teaches us that it's okay to let God know we're feeling stressful. In fact, this verse encourages us to tell Him! When we cast our cares on the Lord and bring our requests to Him, it relieves our anxiety knowing that the Creator of all things can take care of our problem.

Jesus said in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He gives peace in ways no one else can. This is how we know that turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms are not of God. Jesus tells us to not be afraid and troubled, and we can accomplish this by trusting in the Lord with all of our hearts, knowing He is always with us and will continue to bless us through every season of life. Placing our entire lives into His care includes the stressful times.

The Lord will not be shocked by our confession of stress. He knows it is a common human condition. That's why He

included teachings about it in His Word. When we look to the Bible, we can see the framework for dealing with stress: basically, we are called to give it all to God. By surrendering our stress to God, we are placing the situation in His hands, and there is no better person for the job than our great Creator.

Practice

- A good stress reliever is to simply divide a paper into two sections, with one side labeled "Reason I'm Stressed."
- This is where you can go crazy. Write down everything that stresses you out. Label the other side "Reasons I'm Blessed." Go equally as crazy on this side, writing things such as having a home, having food, having clothes, having a school to go to, having breath in your lungs, having eyes to see, and so on. When we put these two lists side by side, we begin to see that we have so much to be thankful for.
- We may be stressed at the present time, but we are blessed to such a high degree that our stressful situations are dwarfed by the goodness of God.

Pray

- Lord, I give You all of my worries, all of my doubt, and all of my fears. I place my life in Your capable hands and rely on You to take care of my anxieties. Thank You for all of the countless blessings You have given to me in my life, and I pray that I may be able to turn to You in my times of stress. Thank You for all that You do in my life.

Plus

- Throughout this week, when you feel stressed, sit down and say a small prayer, giving your stress back to God. Think of how blessed you really are and encourage others around you to do the same.



Trusting God's Timing

Preview

It can be frustrating when we want something to happen, but it doesn't happen in our preferred timeframe. It can be frustrating when we are doing everything we know to do and yet feel stuck in a holding pattern. How can we learn to trust the perfect timing of God? How can we learn to "run with patience" and allow the author and finisher of our faith to write our story?

Praise

Praise you, Lord, for Your perfect timing. While we don't always understand why everything happens when it does, we know that You are working out everything for our good. You will never put us in a situation that is too much for us to handle, and You will never forsake us. We know that as we stay faithful and humble, You will exalt us in due season.

Parable

Have any of you ever been on a vacation or a school trip, and the long ride was so boring you could hardly wait to get there? Have you ever ridden a school bus whose seats were so uncomfortable you couldn't wait until the bus stopped at your driveway?

Have you ever planted a flower or a garden? You plant the seed and then work, water, and wait (with the emphasis being on the wait) for weeks—or maybe months—before you see the result. It's easy to get frustrated with how slow the garden seems to be growing.

Maybe you've participated in some off-season training and have experienced what it's like to prepare for months and months without a game in sight.

Instruct everyone to write down and discuss times when they've had to wait. How did it make them feel? What did they do while they were waiting?

Present

There's good news and bad news. The bad news is that waiting is going to be a part of your life forever. When you finally arrive at the destination you're waiting on now (perhaps it's graduation, your first job, or the upcoming weekend), you'll quickly replace it with a new goal. It's simply a fact of life that everyone is constantly waiting on something.

Yet the good news is that if you feel like you're waiting on God, you're in good company! Joseph waited thirteen years. David waited fifteen years. Abraham waited twenty-five years, and Moses waited forty years! When you wait, you aren't experiencing the disapproval of God. Quite the contrary. Instead, you likely are experiencing a great season of personal growth if you'll embrace it.

Waiting on the Lord isn't the same as waiting in line at the supermarket, and pursuing the will of God isn't as fast and easy as plugging money into the soda machine. In fact, Paul compared it to preparing for a harvest.

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9, NIV).

We must make sure that we don't allow our perceived lack of results to discourage us to the extent that we give up. If we will continually sow seeds of devotion and faithfulness to God, we will eventually see the harvest. When the farmer plants, he doesn't expect to see results the next day or week. Likewise, we must be patient, consistent, and faithful, because we grow in God at the speed of the harvest.

Even when we don't see any results, we must keep planting, working, and making sure we are ready to be used by God when the opportunity arises. In sports, teams train and build strength in the off-season when there are no games to play. This may be your spiritual off-season, but make sure you are doing everything it takes to be ready for game day!

Next, we've got to be humble and trust God, being careful not to force doors open that God has shut. When we self-promote and try to create spiritual opportunities for ourselves, God will let us do it on our own, but if we are humbly submitted to God, He will open the right doors for us at the right time (I Peter 5:6).

Finally, we must remember that God has our best interest in mind. He has a plan for our lives, and while it may not happen when we expect, it will be more incredible than anything we could have imagined (Jeremiah 29:11; Isaiah 40:31). He has not forgotten us; He is preparing us for what He has already planned for us!

Practice

What are some things you can do today to prepare yourself for the dreams and goals God has put inside of you? How can you put seeds in the ground today that will bring a harvest in your life when the time is ripe? How can you train in this off-season of your life?

Discuss some practical steps we all can take to prepare ourselves for the things God has planned for us in the future.

Pray

God, thank You for Your Word that guides us and helps us grow in every season of our lives. We pray that we will recognize the value of every season we walk through. Give us the wisdom to plant when it's time to sow and to reap when it's time for harvest. Help us to be patient and to trust Your perfect timing. We ask that You keep us from growing weary in well-doing and that You will help us faithfully and expectantly to wait on You.

Plus

There are times we must help someone else reach their God-given dreams before our own dreams are realized. David served King Saul. Elisha served Elijah faithfully. The disciples followed and submitted to Jesus. Humbling ourselves before God oftentimes looks like serving our spiritual leadership. Discuss some ways you can serve spiritual leaders in your life. How can you help others reach their potential in God?

Taming the Tongue

Preview

Life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), but what are we speaking? How can we get control over our tongue—the most unruly member of our body? How can we intentionally use our words to speak life into people with whom we interact?

Praise

We give glory to God, whose Word will never fail! Situations change. Politics change. People change. But the Word of God is forever settled in Heaven (Psalm 119:89). The Word of God guides our decision-making and informs our actions. It lifts us up to a new, higher standard and place of living. The Word of God directs us from death to life. It lets us see ourselves clearly so we can become more like Jesus. We are thankful for the life-giving Word of God!

Parable

Have you ever said something you immediately regretted? When you're upset, it's so easy to get caught up in the moment and say something you don't really mean. Yet it doesn't always have to be when you're upset that you say the wrong things. Have you ever tried to compliment someone, but it came out the wrong way? Have you ever been trying to say the right thing, but the wrong thing came out? (If someone has a funny story to share about this, let them share it.) Even with the best intentions, our tongue can get us in trouble.

Present

If you struggle with what you say, you've got plenty of company. It's such a big issue that the Bible specifically mentions it several times. James especially had a few strong words to say about the tongue:

"If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless" (James 1:26, NLT).

"But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8, NKJV).

This is what we call a big issue. If we don't get control of our tongue, our religious efforts are worthless. Yet James indicates that no one can tame the tongue. So, what are we supposed to do?

Jesus gave us the answer in Luke 6:45 when He said, "Out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks." Our untamed tongue, therefore, is a heart issue. While we cannot solve that issue, Jesus can! As we repent, get baptized in Jesus' name, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, our heart changes. When we make sure we are filled with the things of God, the right things will start coming out of our mouth. This is not a one-time experience, however. Just like a car needs to refuel, so does your heart. Take intentional time out of your day to connect with God in prayer and reading the Bible so that when the opportunity arises, you will have the right things in your heart. If you want to be able to speak life to others, you must first make sure you have life inside of you!

The Bible gives us some specific directions on how to tame our tongue: we should be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (James 1:19, NLT). Too often we're the opposite of this verse: slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to get angry. Does that describe a lot of people you see in person and online? Yet Jesus calls you to a different standard. You should listen closely and diligently try not to jump to conclusions and become angry. Try to understand where others are coming from, even when they say things the wrong way. Then only after you've thought about how to respond, should you begin to speak. Don't let your mouth outrun your brain! Always take a moment to consider how to respond with grace so the love of Jesus can be shown.

Finally, we've got to control our environment. It's not enough just to put good things into our heart; we must intentionally keep the bad things out. For instance, it's great if you ate some broccoli for dinner, but if you followed it up with an entire gallon of ice cream, that broccoli might not

do you much good. Anytime you take a moment to pray and connect with God is time well-spent. Yet if you spend the rest of your day “consuming” inappropriate music and media, you may be surprised what finds its way into your heart. We all have hobbies and activities we enjoy, but we all must make sure those hobbies aren’t contrary to the Word of God. If we want to speak life to others in public, we can’t be putting evil before our eyes and heart in private

(Psalm 101:3).

Practice

- Think about the media you consume and the people you surround yourself with. Are they creating an environment for you to be successful? Are they focusing on the positive or the negative? Is the language of your friends and the media you consume godly or perverse? Are you in an environment that allows your heart to be filled with the things of God?
- Write down what you could change about your devotion to God and your environment (friends, media, etc.) to keep your heart full of the things of God.

Pray

Thank You for filling us with Your Spirit so we can have control over the things we say. We pray that our words will be used to lift others up and bring life to the people and situations we face. We ask that You help us to fill our hearts with the right things and give us the wisdom to know when something is becoming a weight in our lives. Help us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger so we can represent You wherever we go.

Plus

- Make a habit of saying positive things (online and in person). Start each day with the goal of saying something uplifting to someone else. Use your words to bring encouragement, joy, and life to others.

Do Hard Things

Preview

You are made for more! You are called not to simply survive in this world, but to lead overcoming, world-changing lives.

- What is the biblical view of success? What are some ways the Bible challenges us to push against the status quo and live beyond what is ordinary?

Praise

- We give glory to God who gives us His all! Jesus did not give some of Himself at Calvary; He gave according to the abundance of His grace and power. Jesus has never done anything halfway. He didn't halfway heal the blind, and He didn't halfway make the lame walk. He didn't halfway save us, and He didn't halfway forgive us. We are blessed to serve a God who always gives us His very best.

Parable

- Tell everyone to reach as high as they can with their right hand. Next, tell them to reach it "just a little bit higher." (Most people will stretch a bit more.)
- We oftentimes don't know what our best is. If we would have truly given our best the first time, we wouldn't have been able to reach any higher. We don't just do this with raising our hand; there are probably lots of times we have settled for doing less than what we could have accomplished.
- Have you ever said, "I did my best" (on a test, job, or activity) when you know that you didn't? Why did you say that? We've all done it, but why do we settle for less than we're capable of?

Present

While there have always been those in society who believe that young people can't do anything well, God certainly doesn't agree with them. He makes it incredibly plain for us in 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV): "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love,

in spirit, in faith, in purity."

We are charged by God in every area of our lives to live as an example. Don't give someone an excuse to say that you're too young to make a difference. Don't give someone an excuse to say your generation is no good. Be an example!

We must be examples by what we say and what we do. We must demonstrate how to have the right attitude and how to love others. We've got to be examples by living holy and pure. It is not a competition, but the Bible tells us as young people to show the believers how it is done.

Yet success in the kingdom of God is more than that. We must make the most of the abilities and opportunities God gives us. Jesus related this in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Those who received five talents and two talents made the most of what they had, but the man with one talent put in no effort. The man with two talents was never expected to do all that the man with five talents could do, but he was expected to do his part. Likewise, we are supposed to optimize the abilities and opportunities God places in front of us so we can make an impact for His kingdom.

This means you will have to prepare for opportunities you don't have yet. You work hard to be ready when God calls you. It may mean reading the Bible, studying, and praying even though you've never been given a chance to preach. It may mean working hard learning how to do graphic design and work with computers even though you're not yet part of your church's media team. It may mean practicing music when you don't yet have a place to sing or play. Whatever it means for you, make sure you're growing what God has placed inside of you. It's much better to be prepared for an opportunity that you don't have than to have an opportunity for which you are not prepared!

Finally, God calls us to not be lazy in any area of our lives. In fact, the Bible says to do all things "heartily, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). You are a representative of Jesus no matter where you go. Don't be late turning in homework.

Study hard and work hard. Even when it doesn't seem like it's for God, make sure that you are representing Him well. Could it be that your math class could be providing you with the skills that will one day allow you, as an architect, to design a church? Could it be that your English class is giving you the skills you need to write a book? Treat your education as an opportunity to represent Jesus and develop the abilities He has put inside of you.

Practice

1. List some specific talents, abilities, and interests you have.
2. Write down ways these things can be used to further the kingdom of God.
3. What are some ways you can further develop and fine-tune these skills?

Pray

Thank You, God, for the talents and abilities You have put inside of us. Help us to develop them and use those talents for Your glory and Your kingdom. Give us a desire and vision to do great things for You and help us to prepare today for the incredible things You have planned for us tomorrow.

Plus

What are some ways your P7 club can further impact your school and community right now? Brainstorm some service and outreach ideas. Are there talents within the members of your club that can be used to bring glory to God? If so, make a plan and use them!

Crushing Fear

Preview

We all face fear and anxiety, but are we inviting these feelings into our lives? How can we shut the door on fear and live in victory?

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

Praise

We thank God because He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He knows exactly where we are and the direction we are going (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 29:11). There is no storm—physical, spiritual, or emotional—that He cannot calm. There is no problem so great that He cannot solve and no issue so small that He will ignore. He has proven His goodness and faithfulness time and time again and will continue to do so no matter how undeserving we are. He is our Prince of Peace!

Take a moment to write down some things that God has done in your life. Remember to write not only about times when God has blessed you, but also about times that He brought you through tough situations. As people are comfortable, share with each other.

Parable

There are some crazy fears out there. Some fears are reasonable (come on, who really likes spiders anyway?), but others seem a bit outlandish. There is geliophobia, which is the fear of laughter, and dextrophobia, which is the fear of having objects to your right. Not to be outdone, anatidaephobia is the fear that somewhere a duck or goose is watching you. We could go on naming crazy fears all day, but I think we could all agree that sometimes people are afraid and anxious over some silly stuff.

Have you ever found yourself getting anxious or scared about something, but in your mind you knew it didn't make sense to be afraid? Even when we know our fears are unreasonable and unfounded, they can be hard to shake.

Present

The Bible tells us that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but instead has filled us with power, love, and a sound mind. If we aren't supposed to be filled with the spirit of fear, we must make sure that we are filled with the Spirit of God! We need to be filled with the power that comes only when we receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:8).

There is power in knowing that the very God who created the universe now dwells inside of us. He will not forsake us, and He will not place any more on us than we can handle (I Corinthians 10:13). As we pray and take our fears to God, situations shift and circumstances change (I John 4:4). If we are worried about something, we need to pray about it. Jesus is greater than the fears we face!

Not only do we need to be filled with the power of God, but we also need to be filled with love. We don't often associate fear and love as contrary emotions, but the Bible sets them at odds. We need to make certain that we aren't allowing fear to be the determining factor in our decision-making. Oftentimes, when God is calling us to respond to Him, we experience fear. Yet our love for God should be greater than our fear!

Peter didn't let his fear of the water keep him from stepping out of the boat and walking toward Jesus, and thankfully, Jesus didn't let His fear of the cross keep Him from giving His life for us at Calvary. Likewise, don't let your fear keep you from doing what God is calling you to do. Fear says, “Don't share the gospel; they might reject it,” but love says, “Jesus died so that everyone could have abundant life!” Fear is always looking for a reason to take the easy way out, but love calls us to do the right thing no matter the cost.

Finally, Scripture says that God has given us a sound mind. We don't have to be controlled by emotion; we can think and respond logically. We should take a moment to remember all the times when God has been faithful. If God has done it for us before, He will do it again. If God has helped us through hard times before, He will do it again. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)! If

life has knocked you down before, you are living proof that you can get back up (Micah 7:8). Let the memory of your past victories remind you to fear not!

Practice

1. If you haven't received the Holy Ghost, you need to seek it! If you have been filled with the Holy Ghost, you need to renew it. Pray about the situations, anxiety, and fear that you face. His power can liberate you from fear!
2. If you feel like God is calling you to do something, don't let fear control your actions! Pull a Nike, and "Just do it!"
3. Keep a journal and write down one thing you're grateful for each day. Write down times that God has answered prayers and helped you in the past. When you are in tough situations, read back over all the things God has done in your life.

Pray

Thank you, Jesus, for allowing us the opportunity to be filled with your Spirit. We pray that we will remember your goodness and faithfulness to us, and that we will let love determine the decisions we make. Don't allow us to be filled with the spirit of fear, but fill us with power, love, and a sound mind!

Plus

Think of something God has been calling you to do. Maybe He's calling you to share the gospel with a friend. Maybe He's calling you to be baptized in Jesus' name or seek the Holy Ghost. Maybe He's calling you to give up that bad habit or end that relationship. If you will listen, God will put something on your heart for you to do. You'll likely feel anxious about acting on the word that God has given you; you will probably feel fear. Yet, prayerfully, let your love for God be the motivation for your action. Take the step and crush your fear!

