



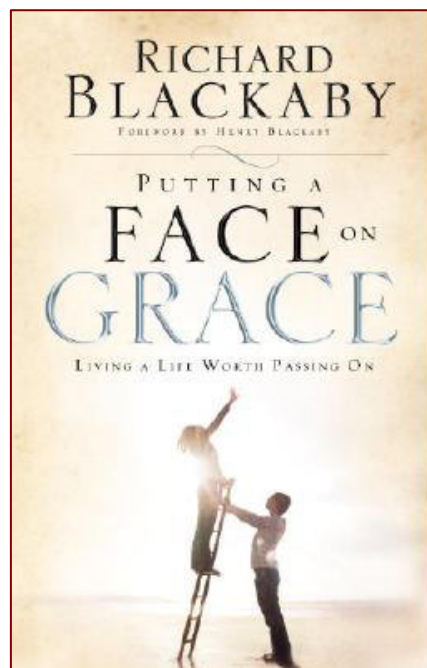
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

**JUNE 21, 2009**

**LESSON #3** FROM THE **MASTER WORKS** SERIES STUDY OF:



## STICKS & STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES ...BUT

[WEEK #3—PUTTING A FACE ON GRACE]

**T** rue or false: “*Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?*” **ANGH!** Clearly false!

It's a nice little saying, but one which most of us know is completely untrue. The truth is most physical wounds heal given time, but the wounds that words produce, though hidden, often stay with us for years, and sometimes a lifetime. When it comes to causing pain, the power of words may still be vastly underestimated, as seen in this clip from the recent movie, *Origins of the X-Men: The Wolverine*, when Logan is mistaken to have insulted a rather overweight Fred Dukes:

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Some of us know the power of words all too well. We can all think of times when someone said words to us that wounded our spirit, words spoken by a parent, a friend, a co-worker, a teacher, and so on. We have never forgotten them. Some of us carry around an emptiness caused by words we longed to hear but never heard from some key people in our lives. And our lives, to some extent, have been shaped by that void. Some of us carry around with us deep regret over words we have spoken which caused another pain.

*I recently heard a story about an extremely courageous lady. She was courageous for several reasons. For one thing, she was waging an uphill battle against alcoholism. For another, she was doing all she could to restore her relationship with God. It's tough to start over. It's even tougher to start over when people won't let you. She chose a small church to attend, a church where she knew many members. She thought she'd be received there. One Sunday she parked her car near the church building and got out. As she walked toward the front door, she overheard two ladies talking nearby. The stinging words were not meant for her ears, but she heard them anyway.*

*"How long is that alcoholic going to hang around here?" She turned and went back to the car. She never entered another church building until she died. Those ladies meant no harm, yet seemingly painless gossip did irreparable damage.*

On the other hand, aren't some of our most cherished memories those times when someone said loving, affirming words to us at the right time? Their words made a difference in our lives and who we are today. Recall with me the words from a prior memory verse, **PROVERBS 15: 1 (NIV)**, *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."*

*Did you hear the story about the quick thinking young man who got a job at a grocery store? It was his first day on the job and he was a new clerk in the produce department. A lady came up to him and said she wanted to buy half of a head of lettuce. He tried to dissuade her from that goal, but she persisted. Finally he said, "I'll have to go back and talk to the manager." He went to the rear of the store to talk to the manager, not noticing that the woman was walking right behind him. When he got into the back of the store, he said to the manager, "There's some stupid old bag out there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce. What should I tell her?" Seeing the horrified look on the face of the manager, he turned about and, seeing the woman, added, "And this nice lady wants to buy the other half. Will it be all right?" Considerably relieved, the manager said, "That would be fine."*

*Later in the day, he congratulated the boy on his quick thinking. He then asked, "Where are you from, son?" The boy said, "I'm from Toronto, Canada, the home of beautiful hockey players and ugly women." The manager looked at him and said, "My wife is from Toronto." The boy said, "Oh, what team did she play for?"* I think we all understand just how much trouble our words can get us into. This problem is nothing new.

Today is our third lesson in the series from Dr. Richard Blackaby's book, *Putting A Face On Grace*. You will remember that for the past two weeks, we've looked at what grace **IS** and

that we are to **EXPRESS IT** to others and not keep it for ourselves. This week, and for the next three weeks, we're shifting our focus and will be looking at ways to put a face on grace! Today, obviously, we're talking about the power of our words in expressing grace. **Do you think most Christians today are known for their grace-filled words? Why?**

Our focal verse for this lesson is **EPHESIANS 4:29**. Listen as I read the words of Paul written to the church at Ephesus as well as to each of us today in 2009: *Let no **rotten word** come out of your mouth, but if something is good for the upbuilding of a need, (let that come out of your mouth) in order that it might give grace to those who hear.* As I read the verse, did you notice that I said that Paul used the phrase "rotten word." So you won't miss what this verse is really saying, I have handed out a sheet with various translations of the same verse. Notice the Holman Christian Standard Bible translates it, *"No foul language is to come from your mouth."* The NIV and NASB use the word *"unwholesome."* And the King James version says, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."* This is a big deal and I want us to think for a few moments about the meaning behind the words, "evil," "unwholesome," and "corrupt."

Some of us got early lessons when our language was *"corrupt"* or *"unwholesome."* *As a matter of fact, I remember as a child my mother actually washing my mouth out with soap when I said something that just "sounded unwholesome" or "evil." She literally took me to the bathroom sink, rubbed the bar of soap around in my mouth (Ivory, I think), and then rinsed it out and made me go to my room. Do you know what I had said? Nothing so evil or profane that would justify such drastic action in my mind. I think I had said, "Shut up!" to my one of my brothers.*

Now why should my mother wash my mouth out with soap for saying, "Shut up!" to my brother? She did it because she believed the words in **MATTHEW 15:11 (NIV)** when Jesus said, *"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."* It's based on the

same basic principle that I've shared with this class before from Beverly's childhood when her grandmother used to remind her, *"What's down in the well comes up in the bucket."*

So you won't miss the point of what Paul is really saying to us today in the first part of **Ephesians 4:29**, I need to point out that the various translations of the word *"corrupt,"* *"unwholesome"* and *"evil"* are from the Greek word **SAPROS**. The word **SAPROS** is used in only one other context in the New Testament, namely, the places in Matthew and Luke where Jesus says, *"It is not the good tree that bears bad fruit"* (Luke 6:43; Matt. 7:17f; Matt. 12:33). The term for "bad" fruit here is the same word for evil or unwholesome or corrupt in Ephesians 4:29: *"Let no evil talk come out of your mouth!"* The image in Paul's mind is probably one of rottenness and decay, something that is spoiled.

**How can unwholesome talk damage the body of Christ—or can it?** Did you know that Scripture tells us that our talk should always be filled with grace? **How'd you do this week with your conversation?** Turn to **COLOSSIANS 4:6 (NIV)** and follow along as I read what the exact words are about our conversation: *Let your conversation be always **FULL OF GRACE**, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.* I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*, but want to read verses **5 and 6** of the same chapter: *<sup>5</sup>Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup>When you **TALK**, you should always **BE KIND** and **PLEASANT** so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.*

Words are powerful and we know how they can influence what others think about us—and even more what we think about ourselves. Robert Schuller said, *"I am not who I think I am. I am not who you think I am. I am who I think you think I am."* You might need to hear that twice. *"I am not who I think I am. I am not who you think I am. I am who I think you think I am."* Right or wrong, we define ourselves through other people's eyes. Tell

me enough times that I'm stupid, and I'll believe you. Tell me enough times that I'm bright, and I might agree.

Robert Rosenthal demonstrated this in a famous classroom study. *He and an elementary-school principal tested a group of students. They then mentioned to the students' teachers that some of the kids had done extremely well on the tests. The teachers were led to believe that five or six of the students had exceptional learning ability. What the teachers did not know was that the names of the "exceptional" students had been chosen entirely at random. They were no different from the others, but since the teachers thought they were, the teachers treated them differently. By the end of the year the ones the teachers **THOUGHT** were brighter actually were! They scored ahead of their peers and gained as much as fifteen to twenty-seven IQ points. The teachers described the students as happier, more curious, more affectionate than the average, and having a better chance of success later in life. This was all due to the attitude of the teachers! The teachers thought the students were special, and the students lived up to their treatment. Teachers communicate their expectations to their pupils, directly and indirectly. Such communication may help a child by changing his perception of himself.*

We are reminded in **JAMES 3** that our words matter! Listen to verses **6-8 (CEV)**: ***6**The tongue is like a spark. It is an evil power that dirties the rest of the body and sets a person's entire life on fire with flames that come from hell itself. **7**All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed and have been tamed. **8**But our tongues get out of control. They are restless and evil, and always spreading deadly poison.*

**Why is it we struggle with our talk when we know how we are to talk? How does not using grace-filled words affect our Christian witness? How does not using grace-filled words cost us personally?** As a friend struggles with depression, another "friend" passes along condemnation about

his or her lifestyle and lack of faith as the “probable” problem. **Do you ever do that? Wonder what the other person did wrong to result in such problems?** To get a better concept of this is practice, read the Book of JOB today when you go home. You see, Christians are not free from trials and adversity once they accept Christ. Just the opposite. Life is hard enough as it is, to not add the pressure of being good Christians to the burdens on so many backs. And what makes this even more tragic is that the added pressure is coming from the only true source of hope anyone has – those who are ambassadors of the grace of God. I think Paul reminds us in **2 Corinthians 5:20** that we are “ambassadors for Christ” and that God is making His appeal through **US**. When those who represent the unconditional love of God start laying down conditions for acceptance, love and understanding, where are the rest of us going to go? We need to come alongside each other and help—no questions asked—not run our spiritual Geiger counters up and down everybody's faith.

*Imagine you are a single mom with three kids to drop off at school before going to your first day at a new job. On a slippery, rain-soaked street, you go into a slide and skid into an accident that all but totals your car. Compounding the problem is the fact that it isn't your car -- you borrowed it from a friend because yours needed to be fixed and you didn't have the money yet to fix it. So in fear and trembling you call the owner of the car to let him know what happened, and all he wants to know are the answers to three questions: 1) Are you okay? 2) Are the kids okay? 3) Do you have enough money for a cab? Yes, yes, and yes, you say. Good, he says, then get on your way, lady. You have an important day ahead of you and you can't let this stop you. Leave the car, I'll send for a tow truck. Now be off, and God be with you. What happened there? 1) No judgment. 2) Help. A lessening of the load, not another burden. 3) Encouragement with dignity. Now that's the kind of help we could all use! That expressing God's grace in our words.*

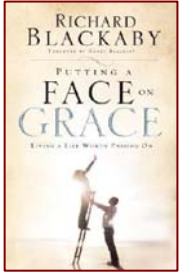
I end with another story of how words not only show our belief in someone but the impact the words actually can have on that

person. *Nat came home heartbroken. He'd just been fired from his job. His wife, rather than responding with anxiety, surprised him with joy. "Now you can write your book!" He wasn't so positive. "And what shall we live on while I'm writing it?" To his amazement she opened a drawer and revealed a wad of money she'd saved out of her housekeeping budget. "I always knew you were a man of genius," she told him. "I always knew you'd write a masterpiece." Nat's wife believed in her husband and told him in words. And because she did, he wrote. And because he wrote, every library in America has a copy of The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne.* What if she'd been like Mrs. Job after all that had happened to her family and husband and cried the words recorded in **JOB 2: 9?** *"Why not just curse God and die?"*

You have the power to change someone's life simply by the words that you speak. **PROVERBS 18:21 (NKJV)** says, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."* That's why Paul urges you and me to be careful in our focal verse today from Ephesians 4:29 (NCV) when he says, *"When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger."*

In the last two weeks, we've talked about graceless Christians and about how each of us is to express God's Heart to others. We've learned that grace is not static and that is similar to love. Just like there's a test for love, I want to give you a test for the tongue. Before you speak, ask: Will what I'm about to say help others become stronger? You have the ability, with your words, to make a person stronger. Your words are to their soul what a vitamin is to their body. If you had food and saw someone starving, would you not share it? If you had water and saw someone dying of thirst, would you not give it? Of course you would. Then won't you do the same for their hearts? Your words are food and water! Do not withhold encouragement from the discouraged. Do not keep affirmation from the beaten down! Speak words that make people stronger. Believe in them as God has believed in you.

Let's pray!



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