

Week 27

July 2 - July 8

Psalms 1-2, 10, 33, 42-49, 71, 84-85, 87, 91-100, 102, 104; Proverbs 25-31

The theme this week is communication. The wisdom literature of the Proverbs and the poetry of the Psalms have much to say about how we communicate. Sometimes this communication happens internally, sometimes it happens with other people, and sometimes it happens between us and God. So much of life involves communication, so I hope that you are able to glean much from the devotionals this week.

July 2nd

Proverbs 25:1-29:27. "Flattery"

I assume you have heard of the TV show American Idol. Basically, the show is a singing competition. My favorite part of the show is the audition segment in the first few weeks. It never fails that a few people will audition who are poor singers, but think they are good because all their friends say they are good. Either these friends are terrible judges of musical talent, or they were saying flattering words to boost this person's self-esteem.

This is the danger of flattery. It is terribly misleading, if not entirely wrong. Proverbs tells us that flattery causes ruin (26:28), that it is a trap for people (29:5), and that it is less appreciated than frankness (28:23).

Flattery can be as subtle as it is destructive. It can be easy to justify the use of flattery as well. How bad can something we say be if it results in someone feeling better about themselves. Even though you love and care for the person that you are speaking with, the Bible tells us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), not speak a half-truth or choose to omit the truth.

Flattery may sound nice, but in the end someone will get hurt.

July 3rd

Proverbs 30:1-31:31. "Pinocchio"

Sometimes I wish that we could all be a little more like Pinocchio. Not because of the strings or being made out of wood, but because of his nose. If you recall, Pinocchio's nose gets him into all sorts of trouble because it grows when he tells a lie. In many ways, it would make life far easier if there was some easy way to tell if someone were lying.

We all know the damage that can come when we choose to lie. It is such a significant issue that Agur, the author of Proverbs 30, asked for help from the Lord to never do it.

As a parent of young children, I have learned that you do not need to teach a child to lie, rather you must teach them the importance of telling the truth. As sinful humans, we naturally lie to protect ourselves or others. We lie because we fear what might happen if we tell the truth and because, ultimately, we do not trust that God is in control.

May you come to trust that God does know the future and is in control and that you can confidently speak the truth regardless of the outcome.

July 4th

Psalm 42-46. "Silence"

"He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

Why was Jesus able to be silent in the midst of the mistreatment and accusations He faced? Confidence. Jesus was confident in the fact that His Father was working out His perfect plan of redemption. He did not feel compelled to fight back or argue with His accusers because he knew his Father was in control.

Silence is a sign of assurance and confidence and strength. As it says in Psalm 46:10, "Be silent, and know that I am God." What does it mean to know that He is God? It means to know who God truly is, the sovereign almighty, all-knowing God whose plans are never frustrated and whose will is always accomplished. Silence demonstrates a genuine trust in God. God does not need a multiplicity of words to defend Himself or to reveal Himself in this world.

May you learn that sometimes the very best response to God is in the form of silence.

July 5th

Psalm 47-49; 84-85, 87. "Listening"

"My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." (James 1:19)

A while back, I watched a TV program about how children learn the grammatical structures of language by listening to the people speaking around them. This got me thinking, because, before we can ever learn to speak, we can already listen. In fact, we can listen and distinguish voices while still in the womb.

So, if listening is such a natural and easy thing to do, except for the hearing impaired, why is it that once we start speaking, we listen so poorly? Why else would James feel led to write the verse above if in actuality we didn't practice the opposite? So many times, I find myself rushing to judgments or giving my input or trying to offer solutions when all I really need to do is just listen.

Is it out of pure laziness that we don't listen, or is it a deeper spiritual reason that we don't listen, like pride or rebelliousness? The reasons for not listening may be as many as the times that we fail to do so.

July 6th

Psalm 1-2, 10, 33, 71, 91. "Boasting"

"As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead." – Galatians 6:14

In making the above statement, the Apostle Paul sets the standard regarding boasting quite high. This stands in stark contrast to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 10:3 about how the wicked people brag about their evil desires.

What is it about boasting or bragging that creates a problem in our lives? Could it be that it isn't so much the boasting itself, but rather that boasting is a symptom of a deeper issue, pride? When you look at the surrounding verses in Psalm 10, you will notice that the psalmist indeed connects boasting and pride. Paul also connects these two traits in two separate lists of vices or sinful tendencies of mankind (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2).

Are you struggling with boasting? Let me first encourage you to examine your heart for pride. Second, allow me to remind you that every good and perfect thing in your life is from God so, really, your boasting is pointless (James 1:17).

July 7th

Psalm 92-97. "Thanksgiving"

"Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic." – John Henry Jowett

Yesterday we thought about boasting and pride. One way to approach reducing our tendency towards boasting is to respond with gratitude. As Pastor Jowett so aptly noted, gratitude is good medicine especially towards pride which leads to boastfulness.

We have all seen this difference in the professional athletes of the 21st century. Those who are truly thankful for their opportunity and God-given talent do not boast of their personal exploits.

Thankfulness should be a constant theme of our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote, "no matter what happens, always be thankful" (1 Thess. 5:18). The psalmist in our readings today has declared that it is "good to give thanks to the Lord" (92:1), and that we are to "come before Him with thanksgiving" (95:2). Clearly, thanksgiving should be a significant component of our relationship with the Lord.

How else are we to respond and approach the One who has done so much for us?

July 8th

Psalm 98-100, 102, 104. "The Power of the Spoken Word"

"The tongue is mightier than the blade" – Euripides, Greek poet ca. 5th century B.C.

The power of the spoken word is often under-appreciated. The tongue, or our speech, can do much damage, oftentimes without our planning it or even our awareness of it at the time. James compares the potential for damage by the tongue to a small spark in a forest (James 3:5). We are all familiar with cases where someone's reputation is damaged or their career is ruined because they said the wrong thing. There is a tremendous power in the spoken word. This is also true of God, who spoke creation into existence (Psalm 104:7). We also see this in Jesus, who was able to speak healing directly into people's lives (Luke 7:1-10).

So why do we struggle so mightily with taming our tongues? Why do we so often hurt people with our words? It is because speech is permanent and conversation is often spontaneous. Unlike the written word which can be edited, the spoken word is raw and cannot be taken back.

May your speech be filled with grace (Colossians 4:6).

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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

Week 27— July 2nd-8th

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Bible Discussion Guide:

How can you tell the difference between genuine sincere compliments and flattery?

What kind of damage can happen to a relationship when we use flattery?

Why is it so difficult to tell the truth sometimes?

Is it ever okay to lie?

What does it mean to be still and know that He is God?

Why can it be so difficult to be silent?

Why is it that, once we start speaking, we listen so poorly?

What does it communicate when we listen poorly? How does that affect a relationship?

What is it about boasting or bragging that creates a problem in our lives?

What can we tell ourselves in order to avoid boasting?

What do you have in life to be thankful for?

How does being thankful impact the way we communicate with ourselves, others and with God?

Can you share a time when you said something that you wish you could have taken back?

Personal application: What changes can you make to avoid hurting people with your words?