NO RESPECT

Will Penner

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for May 11–17, 2015.

MAKING THE CONNECTION
“The first time I ever read Matthew 5:22, I was as downtrodden as the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–25. As a kid, I didn’t feel I was good with comebacks or put-downs, and other kids seemed to be great at it. My feelings got hurt frequently. So I actively tried to get good at it; I learned plays on words and double entendrés so that I could match wits with the best of them, hoping that I would feel better about myself. It seemed to work for a little while; but I noticed that I started using words not only in my defense, but also to slam other people around just because I could. One day, I read Matthew 5:22 during a devotional time; and I realized all of the skills I had developed were doing precisely what the scripture told me not to do.” —Will

MEET THE WRITER
Will Penner has been in ministry with young people for more than two decades in Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, public and private schools, and as a popular speaker at youth retreats, camps, and conferences. He has served as the editor of both leading professional journals of youth ministry and has authored or edited numerous youth ministry curricula and books, the latest of which is It Happens: True Tales from the Trenches of Youth Ministry (http://www.amazon.com/It-Happens-Tales-Trenches-Ministry/dp/1937734048). But most important, he is the husband of his amazing wife, Christine, and the father of five fantastic children, ranging in age from six to twenty-three.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED
• Matthew 5:22 printed in fourteen different translations (included at the end of this session). Cut the list into strips so that each of the youth can read a different translation. (They can double-up if fewer than fourteen people are in the group.) I suggest you take the time to read the passages before beginning the lesson to get a sense of the differences among them.
• copies of the closing prayer

PLUGGED IN
• “Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones” is an interesting video about the power of words, both positive and negative; and it requires little debriefing. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLQTa07saqY)
"Sticks and Stones" is a short film on bullying. It highlights how a person feels when he or she is the target for people whose words hurt. If you use this one, you must take the time to talk about it because it highlights the fact that many young people commit suicide as the result of verbal abuse. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntq4IV38FRs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntq4IV38FRs))

CHECKING IN
Bring group members together for discussion:

- What is the meanest thing you have heard someone say to another person?
- How did the person being spoken to feel?

(NOTE: Some group members answering the questions may have been the one speaking mean things or the one to whom the mean words were directed. In either case, he or she should feel free to talk about it as a witness to the situation.)

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Matthew 5:13–48

Distribute the different translations of Matthew 5:22. Ask group members to read the verses silently, checking with you about any words they can’t pronounce or don’t understand. They should also take a moment to consider the impact of what the verse says. When everyone has read the translation(s) they were given, ask the group to discuss these questions:

- What are the transgressions listed?
- Have you been guilty of any of them?
- What are the punishments listed?

Ask each person to read the verse he or she was given, and invite others in the group to comment on what they hear. They will hear a different style of language used in the different versions. Ask how the differences in language add to or change their understanding of the verse’s meaning. If you can orchestrate the order of the readings, ask the person using *The Message* to read last.

At an appropriate point, say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Then ask group members why people say this to young children. Certainly helping a child overcome ridicule is helpful; but frankly, the saying isn’t true. To tell a child that words don’t hurt can have disastrous consequences. Matthew 5:22 clearly states that words can kill.

If we tend to have sharp tongues, we understand that they are incredibly powerful and that despite the children’s rhyme, they can do a lot of damage. If we recognize that everyone we encounter is a child of the Creator, crafted in the image of God and loved by Jesus, then shouldn’t we speak to him or her with respect? Ephesians 4:29 (NRSV) says, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” The scripture tells us to use language that builds others up and does not tear them down. The King James Version uses the term “edifying,” which is a derivative of the word *edifice*, which means “building” or “structure.” God intends that we use words that help to construct another human being, not to destroy him or her.
SHARING IN PRAYER
Invite group members to pray, saying,

“Loving Creator, thank you for fashioning us in your divine image. Please help us to see the same divine spark in other people. Give us grace so that the attitudes of our hearts and the words of our mouths build up the people around us rather than tearing them down. Help us to show respect to others in the way we speak and act as we bear witness to the love and grace that you have bestowed on us. In Jesus’ precious name, we pray. Amen.”

TAKING IT FURTHER
• Suggest that group members, at the end of each evening, look back over their day to see if they have shown anyone disrespect. If so, tell them to write down the person’s name, along with positive attributes about him or her. Encourage them to pray for God’s blessings on him or her and, at the first opportunity, to make amends for their disrespectful behavior and to look for ways to build up the person they have disrespected over the next week. Group members should be prepared to talk about their experiences at the next meeting.
• Encourage group members, when they feel that others have shown them disrespect, to ask themselves these questions: What is motivating the person to show me disrespect? How can I pray for his or her brokenness to be healed so that he or she doesn’t feel the need to show others disrespect? In what ways have I shown disrespect in the same way? What can I do to make amends?

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Different Biblical Translations for Matthew 5:22

American Standard Version (ASV) Matthew 5:22
But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.

Holman Christian Standard Bible (CSB) Matthew 5:22
But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Fool!’ will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, ‘You moron!’ will be subject to hellfire.
**English Standard Version (ESV) Matthew 5:22**
But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

**Good News Translation (GNT) Matthew 5:22**
But now I tell you: if you are angry with your brother you will be brought to trial, if you call your brother “You good-for-nothing!” you will be brought before the Council, and if you call your brother a worthless fool you will be in danger of going to the fire of hell.

**GOD’S WORD Translation (GW) Matthew 5:22**
But I can guarantee that whoever is angry with another believer will answer for it in court. Whoever calls another believer an insulting name will answer for it in the highest court. Whoever calls another believer a fool will answer for it in hellfire.

**Lexham English Bible (LEB) Matthew 5:22**
But I say to you that everyone who is angry at his brother will be subject to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘Stupid fool!’ will be subject to the council, and whoever says, ‘Obstinate fool!’ will be subject to fiery hell.

**The Message Bible (MSG) Matthew 5:22**
I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

**New American Standard Bible (NAS) Matthew 5:22**
“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

**New Century Version (NCV) Matthew 5:22**
But I tell you, if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be judged. If you say bad things to a brother or sister, you will be judged by the council. And if you call someone a fool, you will be in danger of the fire of hell.

**New King James Version (NKJV) Matthew 5:22**
But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.
New Living Translation (NLT) Matthew 5:22
But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.”

New Revised Standard (NRS) Matthew 5:22
But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Today’s New International Version (TNIV) Matthew 5:22
But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca, ‘ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) Matthew 5:22
But I—I say to you, that every one who is angry at his brother without cause, shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever may say to his brother, Empty fellow! shall be in danger of the sanhedrim, and whoever may say, Rebel! shall be in danger of the gehenna of the fire.