

Carved in Stone

Embracing God's Value System

Teen Lesson Five

The Power of Names

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name (Exodus 20:7, NRSV).

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:7
- James 3:3-12

WHAT YOU NEED

- Bibles
- Baby name book
- Paper
- Pencils or pens



PURPOSE

To know: A name reflects the inner quality and character of what is named.

To value: There is power when we speak in the name of God. When we speak using the name of God, we are invoking God himself—in prayer and in conversations with people.

To apply: We are called to testify of God's works to the people with whom we share life. We are called to "name" God to people who may not understand or see clearly. This will be discussed more in the section titled The Master Detective.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The Hebrew word for "word" is *dabar*. The definition can either mean "word" or "thing." For the Israelites there wasn't much difference between a word and the "thing" it represented. There were no "empty words." The reason curses and vows were so important was because once something was spoken it became a reality. A name carried with it an even stronger significance. The names of people were windows into who they were. God's name was so holy that the people would not even speak it. Rather than say Yahweh, the people would substitute the name Adonai. A person's name shaped another's perspective of who they were. This is why we find God occasionally changing people's name. With the change of their identity and calling came with it a change of name (Abraham, Peter, Paul).

There could be several ways that one could misuse the name of the Lord but it basically came down to one central issue: the people must not ascribe something to God that was not of God nor fail to acknowledge something that was of God. To use the name of God rightly is to be in right alignment with him and know what is of God and what is not and to be able to speak accordingly.

WHAT'S IT SAYING?

We tend to use words and names flippantly today. While we may not view someone's name with as much seriousness as the Israelites did, names still carry a lot of importance. The childhood saying "sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me" just isn't true. The names we give to people make a significant impact on their identity. For example, it has been shown that if you continually tell children that they are dumb, they will eventually believe it and live up to that reality, even if it was not initially true.

There is a reason this commandment is situated where it is. This command is central to what it means to be the people of God. The way that we speak is a direct reflection of who we are. It is essential that we name things as God does. It is vital that we understand the significance of God's name and speak it in a way that is worthy of who he is.

Why is it wrong to use God's name in vain? The emphasis in this text is not directly targeted at vulgar speech, but it does include it. The problem with using God's name in vain is that it trivializes what is most sacred. As we have already stated, words are not empty. To refer to God casually or to use his name in ways that are not to his glory is a failure to understand the power that his name evokes.

The Master Detective. Christians in the world in many ways are like Sherlock Holmes. They are able to see what others are unable to see and it's their job to bring others to that place of awareness. They are on the scene and are able to put the pieces together and make sense out of clues that just don't fit. The Christian as a master detective is the one who says "that's God at work in your life." Their responsibility is to name God as he works in the lives of people. Many people are unable to see God at work and it's the job of the Christian to name what God is doing and who he is so that people can come to that place at the end of the story where the person says "ah-hah, I see." The importance of using God's name correctly is not just that we avoid profane language, it's also that we speak the reality of who he is in the world. Our language (as well as our lives) testifies to God and bears witness to his work in our lives.

South Pacific Story. There was a story told of a village on a South Pacific island that possessed a very interesting marriage ritual. The village still worked on the barter system and men looking to marry needed to consult the fathers of prospective brides. There was this one particular young man who was from the wealthiest home and was the most revered in the entire village. He was able to select any bride that he chose. When the day came for him to marry, he decided that he wanted to marry a girl from the Delondeal family. This family was without much livestock and the name carried little weight in the village. She was not very attractive and no one understood why he was taking her as his bride. As was their custom, the groom agreed to pay the father of the bride a certain number of cattle in exchange for her hand in marriage. Most bride prices ranged around two or three cattle. When the village heard that he had paid the family six cattle, they were astounded! Why would he do that? It was the talk of the town for weeks. As was also their custom, the newly married couple retreated to the other side of the island for about six weeks. Once the six-week period had ended, the couple returned and to the amazement of everyone, the bride looked radiant. Her entire demeanor had changed. This man saw her as a queen. She was beginning to reflect the reality that her husband spoke into her life.

This story was told at a marriage seminar to illustrate the importance of words. While some of the practices within this culture can seem foreign and/or degrading, the point it makes is powerful. Words can literally speak worlds into existence in the lives of people. With the spoken word, God brought the created world into existence and with the spoken word we can do the same in the lives of people.

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Spend a few moments discussing last week's lesson. Recap the major points that were discussed and invite the students to share how they reflected or failed to reflect the characteristics of God throughout the week. Ask **How did the lesson speak to you? What questions do you have about idolatry in our current culture after being more aware of it this week?**

In the introduction to this lesson, you want the teens to begin thinking about the power of names and words. Begin with the biblical names and then move to our present context.

If you have a chalk- or whiteboard, write the names Shear-jashaub and Lo-ruhamah on the board. Ask **Why do you think the names in the Old Testament sound so strange?** Parents in the Old Testament did not attempt to come up with the latest or most appealing names when naming their children. Names were windows into people's identity. Shear-jashaub was Isaiah's son and his name meant "a remnant will return." Lo-ruhamah was Hosea's daughter and her name meant "no pity."

Ask **How many names (in the Bible) can you think of for God? What do these names tell you about God?** These names tell us who God is. By naming God Immanuel, Provider, and El Shaddai, we are saying that God is present in the midst of our lives and that he will keep and sustain us.

Ask **Do you know what your name means?** You might want to bring a copy of a baby name book. **Are you named after a family member? Is there a special story behind how your name was chosen by your parents?**

Ask **Have you ever noticed that God often changed a person's name in the Bible? Why would he do that?** Since names told you a great deal about the one to whom you referred, God would change people's name when he called them to a specific task. Abraham, Sarah, Peter, Jacob, and Paul were all called to a specific task and God changed their names to reflect that reality.

Ask **Is God the only one who changes people's names? How do people re-name each other?** People attempt to redefine each other's identity by attaching labels and names.

Say **You've heard the saying "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Is that true?** No! Words can leave a scar deeper than physical wounds. Say **Just as words sometimes damage human relationships, so we can betray God when we speak poorly.**

DIG IT

Read James 3:3-12. Ask **How many images does James provide to show the power of the tongue? What do all of these images have in common?** Even though the tongue is small, it possesses a power greater than anything else.

Ask **What are some of the ways we use speech wrongly?** One of the main things you will want the teens to learn from this specific text is the seriousness of our spoken words. God is very concerned with the way that we speak. Our words are never empty. Out of the mouth the heart speaks! People will sometimes say something hurtful to someone else and then say, "I'm just kidding." James 3 dispels this notion and says that words should not be taken lightly.

Say **One of the ways we speak poorly is when we misuse the name of the Lord.** Ask someone to read Exodus 20:7. Ask **What's wrong with using God's name in vain?** Refer back to earlier material and the opening conversation. Summarize the What's It Saying? section. Ask the students what the implications are for such a commandment. Say **There could be several ways that a person could misuse the name of the Lord, but it basically comes down to one central issue: the people must not ascribe something to God that wasn't of God nor fail to acknowledge something that was of God. We need to speak the truth about God. To use the name of God rightly is to be in right relationship with him and know what is of God and what is not and to be able to speak accordingly.**

You may need to discuss this further with the teens. **What does it mean to ascribe something to God?** When you invoke God's name, you are saying something about who he is. This is why it is important to avoid saying "God" as a choice word. Such an act trivializes God.

A helpful image is that of the Master Detective. (See previous section.) Share with the teens the plot of a murder mystery from *Sherlock Holmes*, *Perry Mason*, *Murder She Wrote*, *C.S.I.*, or other source. Typically a murder occurs and no one knows who is responsible. The majority of the show is given to uncovering the events that led to the person's death. The master detective is the one who is able to put together all of the clues and make sense of the evidence. He or she is able to see what no one else can see. At the end of the show, there is always an "ah-hah" moment when the detective describes what happened and who was responsible. Say **As Christians we are to discern God at work among us, then tell others what we have discovered.**

Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Each group is to prepare a list of names that would describe the youth group, something that would identify them as followers of Jesus Christ. As the groups share their lists with the class, ask them to talk about the significance and meaning of each name.

Ask **How do our words reveal God to others? As you think about this class, what are we saying (or not saying) that is constructing people's view of God? What can we do to make our words a better witness for God?**

TAKE OUT

Review the first three commandments. Explore the relationship between them. You might begin by asking **What does the commandment about speech have to do with avoiding idols and worshipping only God?** The first three commandments are the basis for those that follow. Before God instructs the people how to live, he instructs them as to who they were. The first three commandments portray the unique relationship God wants to have with his people, a relationship that would bear witness of God to the world through the life and speech of the God's people.

Share story of South Pacific village. Discuss situations in the teens' lives where you have seen the power of words to build up and encourage. Pledge to each other that this week you will speak well of each other and in doing so bring honor to God.

Close by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.