

"Just Kidding"

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Theme: Say what you mean and mean what you say.

Text: Proverbs 26:18-19

Here's a thought: "Having perfected our disguise, we spend our lives searching for someone we don't fool." - Robert Brault

Watch the AMA Roadside Comfort Pet Program video clip at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPqLB9k81Qk.

This video was published on YouTube on March 31, 2016 and includes my nephew, Mitch Brown, as an "AMA Comfort Pet Coordinator". What a great April Fool's joke!

Such a prank brings a smile to everyone's face. However, King Solomon warns us against hurtful jesting in Proverbs 26:18-19:

18 Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows 19 is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I was only joking!" NIV

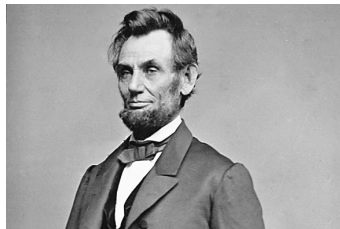
This proverb speaks to a greater issue – the power of words in relationships.

Trust is built by:

Honesty
Responsibility

Trust is built by:

Honesty



Abraham Lincoln was first labeled "Honest Abe" when he was a young store clerk who went out of his way to ensure customers were not shortchanged. Lincoln's honest nature led to many calling on him to help mediate disputes. As a lawyer, Lincoln was said to have trouble arguing cases in which there was a morality issue. His honest nature extended to his personal relationships, including with his wife. When Lincoln became the 16th President of the United States in 1861, his honesty helped him to negotiate difficult situations, including the issue of slavery. He also was upfront with his staff about their work ethic and character (www.reference.com/history/abraham-lincoln-called-honest-abe-eb581894ae23900d#).

The berserk archer is referred to in Proverbs 26:18-19 to picture a troublemaker. After deceiving his neighbour, he tries to avoid being accused by saying he was only joking. But that is humor in bad taste. His deception, like a deadly arrow, has already done its damage (from Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.).

Solomon uses a graphic and powerful word picture. Cutting, sarcastic remarks can be made then when we pull out the knife we say with a smile, "Just kidding!" I can be quite sarcastic but I have tried to steer my humour in different directions such as puns, cartoons and unusual signs.

Sincerity goes a long way in building credibility with others. To be sincere is to be whole, clean, pure, unmixed and free from falsehood (www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sincere). When people start to question if what we *say* can be trusted they start to wonder if what we *do* can be trusted.

Riki Robbins explains

(www.innerself.com/Relationships/Four_Stages_of_Trust.htm):

Trust evolves. We start off as babies with perfect trust. Inevitably, trust is damaged by our parents or other family members. Depending on the severity, we may experience devastated trust, in which the trust is completely broken. In order to heal, we must learn when and how trust can be restored. As part of this final step, if we cannot fully trust someone then we establish guarded, conditional, or selective trust.

The first people besides ourselves that we learn to trust - or mistrust - are our parents. If they behave with integrity, tell us the truth, and keep their promises, then we are inclined to believe that other people will do the same thing. If our parents tell us to trust them, and then break their word, we may never learn to trust at all.

Our image of God and relationship with Him can be affected dramatically when we are children as trust is built or broken by our parents, family, friends and other authority figures. We can start to see why Jesus warned so bluntly in Mark 9:42:

And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. NIV

Whether we want to admit it or not, as people made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and as followers of Jesus we represent Him in varying degrees to the world around us. Many people will *not* pick up a Bible but they *will* read our lives as His followers.

Living and speaking the truth is foundational for relationship with God and people, as Jesus teaches in John 3:19-21:

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. NIV

The degree of closeness in our relationships is determined by the degree of our honesty. We can choose to keep the Lord and those around us at arm's length by withholding the truth or we can be open and draw them in.

American freelance writer Robert Brault makes this profound observation, "Having perfected our disguise, we spend our lives searching for someone we don't fool."

After much discussion, debate, and research, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2016 is "post-truth" – an adjective defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>).

While trust is built by honesty, trust is broken by lies. In an age of moral relativity – where the line between right and wrong is increasingly blurred - we find that many politicians, salespeople and humans in general cannot be trusted to tell the truth. The end result is lack of community and intimacy. The tree of honesty bears the sweet fruit of trust and relationship. The tree of lies bears the bitter fruit of suspicion and isolation.

When you say, "Can I be honest with you?" I think to myself, "Yes. But why do you have to ask? Aren't you *always* honest with me?"

Can people trust what you say to be true? Will you commit to use words to build up rather than tear down?

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Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States from 1901 to 1909, delivered a speech in 1910 called “Citizenship in a Republic,” which, among some, would come to be known as “The Man in the Arena” (from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/63389/roosevelts-man-arena>):

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

While most people enjoy being armchair quarterbacks, few step up to take the risks and to enjoy the rewards that come with taking responsibility.

What is at the core of what Solomon is saying in Proverbs 26:18-19? A lie is a lie whether it is intended to be funny or not. “Just kidding” can be an escape route when the heat is turned up.

Remember what happened in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:12-13:

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." NIV

Adam and Eve sinned and they tried to make an excuse for their sin. Rather than repenting they tried to blame someone else. This is what happens when I lie and try to claim, "I was only joking."

While trust is built by responsibility, trust is broken by excuses. The moment we make an excuse to cover up our sin we drive a bigger wedge into our relationship with the Lord and with other people. Would you please do yourself and those around you a favour? When saying you are sorry and asking someone to forgive you, do not use the word "but" then go on to justify yourself. "But" can be like a verbal eraser, wiping out your expression of remorse or repentance.

Kimberly Johnson warns, "Never ruin an apology with an excuse."

We have all felt the pain of being a scapegoat, when we have been blamed for someone else's mistake. Even though Eve became the first scapegoat when Adam blamed her for his disobedience, there was a literal scapegoat in Leviticus 16:6-10:

6 Aaron [the Israelites' high priest] is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. 7 Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8 He is to cast lots for the two goats — one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. 9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat. NIV

Whether we look at the division that arose between Adam and Eve or the isolation the scapegoat endured when banished to the desert, we see that blaming someone else for our sin results in agonizing loneliness.

I enjoy a good April Fool's joke as much as anyone but this hoax at Google was not well received. "Google disables April fool joke amid user fury after prank backfires" (www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/01/google-disables-april-fools-joke-gmail-mic-drop):

Google's April Fools' Day prank 2016 backfired, leaving the company looking the fool and a number of concerned users fearing for their jobs – or worse.

As April 1st began in Australia, the company announced its latest stunt: "Gmail Mic Drop", a special version of the send button which appends a gif of a minion (from the Despicable Me series) dressed as the queen dropping a microphone to the end of your email.

“Everyone will get your message, but that’s the last you’ll ever hear about it,” Google added in a blogpost announcing the feature. “Yes, even if folks try to respond, you won’t see it.”

As a result of the complaints, Google announced it had turned off the feature. The company told the Guardian: “Well, it looks like we pranked ourselves this year. 😞 Due to a bug, the MicDrop feature inadvertently caused more headaches than laughs. We’re truly sorry. The feature has been turned off. If you are still seeing it, please reload your Gmail page.”

Mic drop wasn’t the only April Fools’ Day prank launched by Google. The company, clearly filled with practical jokers, launched at least five others that day, including “Google Cardboard Plastic” (a transparent box that you strap to your face to enable “Actual Reality”), Searchable Socks (which lets you find your socks with the Google app) and Google Maps Disco (which lets you watch Pegman dancing to Funky Town). But none of those appear to have got users fired, yet.

We can become careless with harmless teasing and drift into the oncoming traffic of hurtful joking very quickly. I get the sense that Jesus loved and embraced humour as much as anyone, yet He teaches us in Matthew 5:37, “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” NIV

Mature people have broad shoulders. They step up to shoulder the criticism and consequences for the mistakes they make. Rather than try to shift the blame to someone else, they repent and do all they can to make restitution.

A traveller reports:

I couldn't find my luggage at the airport baggage area. So, I went to the lost luggage office and told the woman there that my bags never showed up. She smiled and told me not to worry because she was a trained professional and I was in good hands.

"Now," she asked me, "has your plane arrived yet?"

The tree of responsibility bears the sweet fruit of trust and relationship. The tree of excuses bears the bitter fruit of blame and isolation.

Do you accept responsibility when you make a mistake and when you sin?
When was the last time you said you were sorry and asked someone to forgive you?

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