



Chapter 29

Trash Talk

*“I will extol the LORD at all times; his
praise will always be on my lips.”*

PSALM 34:1

In the summer evenings, the guys in the neighborhood would gather at the camp to play basketball. The families lined up around the court to cheer on their favorite team. If you were anywhere near the court when they played, you would get a chance to play, too. Tonight there was a visitor at the camp who wanted to join in on the action.

“Jump on in,” Alex shouted, waving his arms until he had attracted the guest’s attention. “We can always use one more body.” Alex loved playing basketball, and would get a game started whenever he could. The court was full of action that night. Sweaty players knocked elbows, shoulders, and calves. At one point, I saw Alex and the young guest exchange words on the court, but I did not give it much thought.

The evening passed quickly. Before we knew it, the automatic lights on the court shut off, and it was time to go home. We grabbed our lawn chairs and water bottles and strolled up the hill. After Alex cooled down with a shower and some lemonade, we decided to take out the trash.

“Come on, Mom. Let’s walk down to the dumpster.” With a flashlight tucked under his arm and a trash bag in each of our hands, we headed out the door. It was about ten o’ clock, and the only light we saw was from our neighbor’s porch illuminating small portions of the inky night.



We walked down the hill to the dumpster. The only sounds we heard were the crunching of gravel under our footsteps and the swishing of our heavy bags. Alex opened the large, metal dumpster with a “one, two, three, plunk!” The trash landed perfectly in the dumpster with a swoosh—just like a slam dunk. “Good shot, Alex, especially in the dark!” The heavy, metal top came down with a crash.

As we walked back up the hill, I asked, “How was the game tonight?”

“*Right off the bat*, the guy that was guarding me was talking trash on the court trying to make me lose my focus,” said Alex. “I tried to ignore him and guard my own words.”

“I’m so sorry, Alex. It looked like everything was just fine from where I was standing.”

“Things aren’t always what they seem, Mother. But, I was grateful for the chance to play basketball tonight,” he said candidly.

As we walked home, we noticed a cat ahead of us crossing the road in front of our house. He seemed to be walking kind of funny—maybe even limping. As we got closer, Alex turned his flashlight in the animal’s direction, and then immediately turned it off.

“Mom, it’s not a cat. It’s a skunk! Shhh, quiet, tiptoe. Don’t let him hear us,” Alex directed. *How do I tiptoe on gravel?* I thought. Alex held my arm and whispered, “Freeze, Mom. Don’t move. We don’t want to startle him.” We stood still, not moving a muscle.

We could see his little body strut up toward the house, stopping and snooping around the bushes along the way. We tried to keep the skunk in our view, but he disappeared into the darkness. Thinking it was safe, we darted across the road and hid behind our car. We wanted to be sure we would not cross his path again.

“I don’t want to get any closer, Alex, until we’re sure he’s gone for good.” With my back pressed against the car, I could hear my heartbeat. We waited patiently to make sure the inquisitive visitor did not reappear.

Skunk Tales

We could still smell strong traces of his stinky little body even though he was a good distance away. Our eyes were fixed in his direction, watching for any movement in the brush. Suddenly, he appeared from the shadowy bushes. The familiar white stripe on his back swayed back and forth as he hobbled toward us. We both froze, not wanting to excite the skunk.

“Alex, I have an idea. Grab a stick and throw it into the bushes down the hill. Hopefully that will distract him enough to let us escape!”

Alex inched toward a broken branch lying in the middle of the road, picked it up, and hurled it toward a bush. When the skunk heard the curious sound, he turned away just long enough for us to scurry away. *Whew, That was a close call!* We cautiously ran the rest of the way home without getting sprayed.

Once we were safely inside the house, we talked about our unexpected encounter that night, thankful for the great escape. It was a vivid reminder that we should pay close attention to our surroundings.

“Mom, I had no idea that was a skunk on the road in front of us. It looked just like a cat.”

“Let’s remember that things are not always like they appear, Son. It’s wise to be discerning about people, places, and things.”

“Yes, and now I appreciate even more the value of encouraging words,” he added. “Trash talk is for the dumpster, not for the basketball court!”

It is comforting to know that God is always with us, even when we don’t see trouble around us. I was prayerful that Alex would remember these lessons the next time he played basketball.

Skunks have small, short legs that make them walk with a slow, rolling gait. Skunks raise their tails when startled as a warning to their predators. Skunks have poor eyesight, but they can smell and hear well. Skunks have been known to approach people who are standing still. If you are approached by a skunk, slowly move away in the opposite direction.



Discussion

Why is it important to choose wise companions? How has discernment helped you avoid trouble? How would you respond if confronted with unwholesome words? When is it helpful to be silent? How can praising the Lord help us overcome the temptation to return unkind words?



Scripture

“He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.” Proverbs 13:20

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:29

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4:6

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Song

“Leaning On The Everlasting Arms” and “Awesome God”

Application

Choose a chore to do alongside your child. Teach him to pay close attention to details. Plan a neighborhood trash pickup day; serve lemonade afterward. Start a Bible reading group (e.g., read the Bible through in a year). Include a time of praise and worship at your gathering. Allow time for a basketball game, ping pong, or board game.

Idiom

Right off the bat means immediately.

Close call means a narrow escape.

Prayer

Thank the Lord for your Godly friendships. Ask Him to help you choose encouraging words and deeds.