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Title: The Edge of the Boomerang ("The Edge" Series)

Text: Proverbs 11:17-25

Today we're wrapping up our series called "The Edge." We've been in the book of Proverbs the last few weeks, talking about wisdom-related principles that will give you an EDGE – an advantage in life. Instead of living on the edge all the time, you can live WITH an edge that enables you to make the most of your situation.

In week ONE we talked about the *Edge of the Playbook*. The playbook, if you'll remember, is the Word of God. If you will become a student of the Word – and by becoming a student of the Word you become a student of wisdom – you will learn principles and develop habits that influence the decisions you make. The quality of your life reflects the quality of the wisdom upon which your life is built – so the first edge is to make time in the Word a top priority in your life. The better you know the playbook – God's Word – the better your game plan for life.

In week TWO we talked about the *Edge of Direction*. There are four elements to living a purpose-filled life. One of the questions we need to ask ourselves is "What do I want more than anything else?" To live a life filled with purpose, you need to Guard Your Heart, Watch Your Mouth, Fix Your Eyes on Jesus, and Point Your Feet in the direction God wants you to go – and start walking. Take care of those four things, and you will remain true to your purpose in life.

Last week, week THREE, we talked about the *Edge of Excellence* – which is committing yourself to a life of constant improvement. Each day we ask ourselves: What can I learn today? What can I do better today? What can I change about myself today? People who are serious about excellence and being at their best for God are always looking to KNOW MORE, and to DO BETTER, and to BE BETTER.

Today we'll look at a fourth principle that believers need to commit themselves to if they want to live life with an edge or advantage. I'm calling today's message the *Edge of the Boomerang*. We're talking about the rule of reciprocity. In other words: What you do comes back to you. This is a principle that is found throughout the Bible, in the Gospels, in the letters of Paul, and specifically in the book of Proverbs. You'll also hear the rule of reciprocity referred to as the Law of the Harvest. In the book of Galatians, Paul said, "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (6:7). Depending on your perspective, this verse could be good news or it could be bad news. It depends on what YOU sow. It could be a promise or it could be a threat. Again – it all depends on what you've been sowing lately. Billy Sunday was credited with saying, "Many people spend their early years sowing wild oats and their later years praying for crop failure." I'd suppose that most, if not all, at one time or another, have prayed for crop failure in some form or fashion, because we've ALL sinned and come short of God's glory. But there's no such thing as crop failure. There's forgiveness. There's mercy. There's the promise of a second chance. There's God's help to depend on when you're taking the steps to make things right. But the bottom line is that we ultimately REAP WHAT WE SOW; God cannot be mocked in this. So when the Bible says, "You reap what you sow," some may hear it as a THREAT and others may hear it as a PROMISE. But, I want you to know that today's message is about making this principle a promise, and making it the foundation of everything you do.

If you have been planting the wrong kind of harvest in the past – and by the past, I mean any time up until NOW – if you have been sowing wild oats or foolish oats or rebellious oats or lazy oats or selfish oats or any other kind of ill-advised oat, then, yes, there will be times when the consequences of your behavior will boomerang back your way and you'll have to deal with them. Everyone here experiences that. But here's what I want you to know. There's a great deal of power in this promise. The sooner you begin sowing the RIGHT KIND OF SEED, the sooner you will experience the RIGHT KIND OF HARVEST. And...there's no better time than TODAY to begin. When Solomon said, "*A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself*" (11:17) – he was talking about the principle of the Boomerang. What you throw out there in life eventually circles back in your direction. What you do eventually finds its way back to you. So don't be deceived about this, Paul said. Don't live as if there's no such thing as consequences. God is not to be mocked. Neither are the principles of Scripture. We need to take them seriously. Solomon said, "*The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward*" (11:18). So, instead of dreading the threat, let's start today treating this principle as the life-giving promise that it is. Let's build our lives and direct our actions on the foundation of this promise, knowing that we will certainly reap what we sow, and that means that the one who sows righteousness will reap a sure reward.

This principle applies to every area of your life. Today I want to talk to you about three areas where you can put this principle of the boomerang to work for you. In each area that we look at, I'll present a couple of suggestions for some

first steps – or next steps – you can take in order to implement this principle into your daily schedule.

- 1. The Way You Do Your WORK.** A few years ago *Business Insider* reported a study that shows that the average worker gets 3 hours of real work done in a typical 8-hour shift. I don't know when that study was done, but if it was before Facebook launched, then I'm guessing the three-hour number is a little lower today. Inefficiency at work can sometimes be blamed on management and it can sometimes be blamed on organizational structure, but I'm sure most, if we were completely honest, would admit that we could be more intentional in the way we perform our duties. I've heard it said, "It makes no difference how well I do my job or how poorly I do my job, nobody notices." I've heard people say, "Why bother going the extra mile when nobody will ever appreciate it?" If you have been in the workforce any time at all, you've probably felt that way: What's the use of giving 100%? I'll tell you what the use is. "*All hard work brings a profit*" (Proverbs 14:23). "*Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth*" (Proverbs 10:4). "*Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men*" (Proverbs 22:29). The Bible teaches that the effort you put into your job will ultimately pay off. We get a little impatient with this principle because we want it to pay off immediately. We want to put in a few extra hours this week and receive a promotion next week – and that's not typically how it works. But over the long haul, if you consistently sow the seed of diligence, you reap the harvest of success. In the book of Colossians, Paul said, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men*" (3:23). I'm encouraging you to take this attitude to work with you tomorrow – that you will do your work as unto the Lord – not begrudgingly, not with a "that's-close-enough-for-government-work" mindset, and certainly not expecting immediate results or the applause of men – but with an attitude that says, "I will give everything I have to the task at hand, because I believe the promise of Scripture, and my hard work will ultimately pay off and I will reap a sure reward. Apply the principle of the boomerang to your work life.
- 2. The Way You Use Your WORDS.** Proverbs has a lot to say about the WORDS WE CHOOSE and the words WE USE. What I have learned is that this is a habit that takes time to develop. I can't say that I have mastered it. Like I said, IT TAKES TIME! But, the rewards you reap from sowing the seeds of good conversation are worth the effort it takes. Solomon said, "*The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life...*" (Proverbs 15:4). Let that be your objective in the words you use – not only as you speak to others, but as you speak to YOURSELF. "*A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself*" (11:17). Kind words will bring you BENEFIT. Cruel words will bring you TROUBLE. That's the principle of the boomerang at work in your life. Now, obviously, kindness involves MORE than just the words you choose to use – but that's where it most often starts. Kindness begins with KIND WORDS SPOKEN. Chuck Swindoll told about a college president whose office wall bears a simple yet powerful sign containing three words: KINDNESS SPOKEN HERE. What a great idea! What a great philosophy to live by! I recently read the story of a Christian leader who was reported to have never said anything nice – not to the one writing the story, not to his staff, not to anyone. His job was such that people brought him problems throughout most of the day. His typical response to bad news was, first, a huge sigh, followed by harsh words spoken in a tone that made no effort to mask his state of perpetual irritation. Without fail, it was said, you left his office feeling WORSE than you did before. It was so unnecessary. Sure he had a tough job. My staff would likely tell you I, too, sigh sometimes when I hear bad news. MUCH of the time, it has been my experience, that it's EASIER to solve problems with pleasant words. I didn't say ALWAYS! Harsh words often make matters worse. In 2 Corinthians, when Paul was talking about the authenticity of his ministry, he said, "*We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, our sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit*" (6:6). Imagine that. According to Paul, kindness is just as important as perseverance, holiness and truth. That's why in Ephesians 4 he said, "*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 all who listen*" (vs. 29). Working on this sermon has brought to my attention that I've had the opportunity to be really testy with a few customer service representatives – the phone company, cable company, health insurance company, a supplement company. A couple of times they dropped the ball. The supplement company was very deceptive. I like to think I'm a nice, kind person, BUT on an odd occasion you get a person on the phone who doesn't understand nice. For me anyway, I've found that it does take more effort to be nice to a mean person. I confess I haven't always gotten an A+ when talking to a mean or deceptive person. Just this week, I made a call regarding the church's phone service. I asked a number of questions regarding the changes being made and pricing. At the end of the conversation, the customer service rep asked if I was the pastor. I hadn't identified myself earlier. I told her I was. Then she said to me, "I've attended an Assembly of God church since I was 19 years old." She then said, "Thank you pastor for doing what you do. We need more people like you." I'm thinking being kind might have had something to do

with her saying that. Can you imagine how embarrassed I would have been if I had been unkind to this lady and then she asked me if I was the pastor? NOTE: Many service reps deal with mean people all day, and sometimes, I suppose, they think why should you be any different? I think I've had a few times when I've been kept on the phone because I was nice. I confess, on rare occasions when someone besides me made the mistake, I have taken on a bit of a tone. But I had been thinking about this message and about what Paul and Solomon said about kindness, and I realized that I can resolve this matter without the bad attitude. Guess what? People really appreciate it. It's the right thing to do, to be kind to others. And what's more, when you're kind to others, Solomon says, it comes back to you. Your kindness benefits YOU. Kindness begins with the words you use. So, I'm encouraging you today to take a close look at how you speak to, and, ultimately, how you treat those around you. Make kindness a primary objective. When you build your life on kindness, it boomerangs back in your direction.

3. The Way You Handle Your WEALTH. Yes, I said "WEALTH." Some of you are thinking, "Okay, you lost me there, preacher. I have no wealth. You're talking to someone else." Well, actually, wealth is a relative term, and there are many who would consider everyone in this room to be a least a little wealthy. I'm talking here about the way you handle your money. Your attitude toward money reflects – maybe more than anything else – what you really believe about the GOODNESS OF GOD, and the FAITHFULNESS OF GOD, and the PROMISES OF SCRIPTURE. Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21). Interesting – your heart tends to follow your money. That means that we need to make sure we're investing our money in the right place, and distributing it in the right way. The Bible tells us we're to be GENEROUS with our money. It also tells us we're to be RESPONSIBLE with our money, and we're even to be STRATEGIC with our money. In Proverbs 11, Solomon says, *"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty"* (11:24). He's talking about the principle of the boomerang. He goes on to say, *"A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed"* (11:25). Along these lines, Jesus said, *"Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap"* (Luke 6:38). What's he talking about here? He's talking about the principle of the boomerang. It works in the area of your finances as well as in every area of life. First you sow, then you reap. When you bless others, you are blessed. Solomon also said, *"He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done"* (Proverbs 19:17). The principle of the boomerang. This is not about emptying out your savings account and maxing out your credit cards and giving it all to world missions. It IS about looking for ways to be more generous than perhaps you're naturally inclined to be. Here's what I'm saying: Allow yourself sometimes to give in to the whim of spontaneous generosity. When the opportunity to bless someone presents itself – and you have the wherewithal to do it – by being a blessing, you receive a blessing. Some of my friends are not rich by any means, but I find it interesting that they don't scratch and claw to pay every bill like some I know do. Why? Because they live by the principle of the boomerang. They help out the poor when they are able, and in doing so, they are loaning to God. And, God pays him back – with interest! We're still early enough in the New Year that you can amend your list of resolutions, so I'm encouraging you to add this item to the others. This year, dare to live according to this principle. Dare to be more generous, and dare to trust God to bring blessings back your way. You know, this is the one area where God says, "Try Me. Test Me. See what happens." In Malachi, talking about tithing, he said, *"Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it"* (Malachi 3:10).

4. Conclusion. It's been a long time since I've thrown a boomerang. I can't say that I was very successful with it. At least, I never got it to work the way they do in cartoons. There are a number of important considerations in flying a boomerang: the breeze (the direction and measure of the wind), the quality of the boomerang, the correct edge of the boomerang should be facing up, the wrist action, and the release. Another significant variable in the principle of the boomerang: Time. You WILL reap what you sow. Maybe not immediately, but certainly ultimately. That's why Paul said to the Galatians, *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for AT THE PROPER TIME we will reap a harvest IF we do not give up"* (6:9). The results are certain. The TIMING isn't. The Bible says that the harvest comes *"at the proper time"*. In other words, the BEST time. But, we don't know when that is. On this matter, we have to defer to the fact that God knows more about it than we do. In addition to believing in the underlying truth of the principles of God's Word, we must also trust His judgment, that the harvest will arrive at the proper time. So how can we gain the boomerang's edge in life? Live every moment like what you do matters. Because IT DOES! Live every moment as if your action will yield a corresponding harvest. Because IT WILL! Instead of hearing that as a potential threat, I challenge you to make it the promise upon which you build your life. What

you do matters. The way you WORK, the way you TALK, and the way you SPEND YOUR MONEY. These things – and the other things you do throughout the day – are the seeds that yield your next harvest. Today, I'm challenging you to decide to become more serious than you've ever been about the harvest you're creating for yourself. What you do finds its way back to you.