

life group study guide

November 29, 2015

The Untamable Tongue (James 3: 1-12, ESV)

Opening Discussion Question:

Which one of following descriptions fits you best:

- The one who usually speaks without thinking?
- The one who is easily hurt by the words of others?
- The one who is quiet and stays out of most conversations?
- The one who doesn't usually take what others say very seriously?

Today's Text:

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

James 3: 1-12, ESV

Our words reveal our loyalties and our loyalties shape our identity. James say when we praise God with our tongues one moment but then curse others who are created in God's image the next, we demonstrate a sort of identity crisis.

Q: Do you think this is true that ultimately our words reveal our identity? How so?

With it (our tongue) we bless our lord and father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of god. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:9-10, ESV)

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Q: How do you describe the disconnect between how we talk about/talk to God and how we often talk about/talk to people who are made in His image? Do you see that disconnect show up in your own life?

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29 ESV)

Q: Which of these directives is most eye-opening or convicting to you right now in your walk with Christ and in your present day situations? Why?

- *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths* (Corrupting talk is anything that damages another person or takes away their innocence.)
- *...but only such as is good for building up* (Even when you have difficult conversations you approach those conversations with as much grace as possible so that even after a hard conversation both people leave in a better place than where they started.)
- *As fits the occasion.* (Some conversations are appropriate for certain contexts but not others. A wise person not only chooses the right words, they deliver them in the right way. Make sure what you say is fitting for the situation at hand.)
- *That it may give grace to those who hear.* (This last thought challenges us to consider not only the individual or group we're talking to and how they'll receive what we say, but also to consider anyone who may overhear what we say or catch it through the grapevine. Again, if you think about it, this should make us think twice about how we use social media.)

... even though the tongue may be small, it's powerful. James say it will direct the course of your life, for good or ill. It can stain your reputation. It can poison your relationships. It can end careers. It can and even has torn families apart.

Q: If the tongue is really as destructive and powerful as James says, then why don't we as Christian communities "battle" or "hold highly accountable" persons who are using their tongues in wrong ways? Why is the sins of the tongue not on our radars as much as other sins? Why are we not more likely to overlook the sins of the tongue more than other sins?

Our tongues have the power to make the best parts of others disappear. Many of us know this because we've felt part of ourselves die at the words of another or we've stolen someone else's innocence through our careless words. But the good news is our tongues also have the power to heal.

- **Q:** If appropriate, share a time when words spoken to you have hurt you, stolen your innocence, or changed you for the worst?
- **Q:** If appropriate, share a time when words spoken to you healed you, freed you, built you up?
- **Q:** Does anyone come to mind who might need an encouraging words from you? How could you deliver that this week?

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Q: Which is hardest for you?

- Die to the need to make yourself look good?
- Die to the need to be right?
- Hold back a criticism?
- Justify yourself to your boss?
- Not always get in the last dig or last word?

If you regularly [struggle with these], it might be helpful for you to step back and ask “Why?” We need to examine why we say what we say. Proverbs tell us “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters. (Proverbs 18:4a, ESV) What comes out of your mouth reflects things that are going on deep within your heart. Jesus told us the same thing. If you’re having a hard time controlling your tongue, it means you don’t have a good handle on what’s happening deep inside your soul.

Q: Do you see any obvious connections between your heart and your mouth right now? What is something in your heart that needs to be resolved, forgiven, healed, etc. in order for you to have victory in your speech?

The tongue has a mind of its own. It’s uncontrollable like a flame. And if you give a small spark some air (or gasoline) it doesn’t get snuffed out. It becomes a wildfire.

Q: Have you found this to be true? How does a small step into gossip, criticism, cursing, etc. quickly snowball into additional sinful speech?

In order to get a handle on both our speech and ourselves, we need to find some time for silence. Silence doesn’t simply teach us that words are powerful or that it’s important to control our tongues, it also creates space for God to reveal those broken places within that cause us to lash out at others.

Q: Have you ever considered actively practicing in the discipline of silence? Why or why not? If yes, what came out of it? If no, would you ever consider it? Do you think it would actually help you to develop a “tamer” tongue?

And of all the things that amaze us about Jesus, perhaps what should amaze us the most is that he controlled his tongue to the very end. Consider the account of his crucifixion.

“Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’” Luke 23: 32-37, ESV

Q: How does Christ’s example inspire you in your ability to control your words?

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And if Jesus spoke words of grace to those who crucified him, he has words of grace for you today. Let his words direct your words. Let his grace set the course of your life, not your anger or bitterness, not your need to be right or appear strong.

Q: When you look at your life since you have accepted Christ and at your life as you grow to be more like Him, do you see a change in your words? If not, what do you think the obstacle is?



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