



grow. pray. study.

February 17, 2019 “What Is All This Arguing About?”

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. *Mark 9:14-16 NIV*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Arguments that can kill

MONDAY 2.18.19 Mark 9:33-35, Matthew 5:21-22

Jesus’ disciples argued about who would rank highest in the kingdom they thought Jesus would set up. He noticed and asked, “What were you arguing about during the journey?” He said their argument about greatness completely missed his Kingdom’s point. In his Sermon on the Mount, he startlingly widened the sixth commandment’s reach. Contempt, anger and words that aim to tear down and destroy others are as morally destructive as the physical act of murder, he said.

- Scholar William Barclay said in Matthew 5 Jesus rebuked, first, “the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die;” then the Aramaic *raca*, which is “almost untranslatable, because it describes a tone...the whole accent of contempt;” and finally the Greek *mōros*: “To call a man *mōros* was not to criticize his mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on his moral character; to take his name and reputation.” * What must Jesus think of the heated tone of so much of the speech we hear and fling at each other today?
- Why do you think it often feels satisfying to argue with and tear down the reputation of people who disagree with you or are different? Are there relationships in which you have found it possible to disagree respectfully, seeking common ground rather than “victory”? If so, how can you extend those dynamics to more of your interactions?

Prayer: Dear God, help me in all my contacts with others to focus more on what connects us than on what divides us. Help me exercise discernment in a generous, unifying spirit. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 139-140.

“Quick to listen, slow to speak”

TUESDAY 2.19.19 James 1:19-21

James, Jesus’ half-brother, apparently became a Christ-follower when Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection (cf. [1 Corinthians 15:7](#)). He became a widely-respected leader in the early Jerusalem church. In his short letter, he linked hasty, angry speech with “moral filth.” To James, a cutting outburst was no small matter, but a hurtful, destructive force.

- Early Christians faced social rejection and legal persecution. (The historian Josephus said enemies stoned James to death in Jerusalem about 62 A.D.) Christians in those conditions must have felt like raging against people who treated them so unjustly. How does James 1:19-20 speak to you when you find yourself feeling angry and eager to denounce some person or group over a milder test of your faith?

- Scholar David Allan Hubbard wrote, “Harsh, vindictive speech—even though apparently based on God’s Word—is not the way to accomplish God’s justice.” * For centuries, some Christians have talked in harsh, vindictive ways about other Christians over issues like circumcision, slavery, women in ministry, and (today) same-gender marriage. How can the “humility” of which James wrote move us away from arguing and toward living out what James called “the word planted deep inside you”?

Prayer: O God, make me ever more “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry.” You know that’s not my natural condition, Lord—but I know you can change me from the inside out. Amen.

* David Allan Hubbard, *The Book of James: Wisdom that Works*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980, p. 36.

Blessing God, cursing human beings?

WEDNESDAY 2.20.19 James 3:4-12

The apostle James found one speech pattern painfully ironic. “With [our tongue] we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings made in God’s likeness. Blessing and cursing come from the same mouth,” he wrote. Applying this passage, Pastor Hamilton asked, “Does the Lord give us an exemption from practicing the Scriptures when it comes to our political leaders...and others with whom we disagree? Are we allowed to lay aside the Golden Rule?” *

- Sociologists note that in wars, soldiers use dehumanizing names for those on the other side. It seems to become easier to kill others if we stop realizing that they are people. Have you seen similar patterns in verbal “combat” when the “bullets” are words? Have you ever become friends with a person, later found that you hold some different opinions, and realized that the insulting labels you’ve used for “those people” may not be true?
- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “Part of the polarization...in our country today is a result of pastors and church leaders who have abandoned the teachings of Jesus and the apostles regarding the way we speak of those with whom we disagree. Part of the healing of our nation must come from the church modeling for our society how we are to love those with whom we disagree.” ** When James said that if we bless God and then curse people “it just shouldn’t be this way,” what can that teach you? What are you willing to rethink in your own use of words to help “the healing of our nation”?

Prayer: Lord God, when people disagree with me, sometimes I wonder “where they came from.” Remind me that they, like me, ultimately came from your creative heart. Help me move toward seeing them as you see them. Amen.

* Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008, p. 22.

** *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

The source of conflict

THURSDAY 2.21.19 James 4:1-6

James didn’t just speak to external behaviors. He focused on their inner sources long before Freud and modern psychiatry. In his day Romans, Jews and Samaritans fought each other, sometimes with weapons, but more often with bitter words. He challenged his readers to look inward. Conflict, he said, was (and still is) often rooted not in the noble motives we try to claim for it, but in selfish wishes for more power or wealth than others have.

- When you have negative feelings about someone who disagrees with you, do you ever look inside and ask, “What does this person threaten, annoy or frighten in me?” In what ways can James’ wisdom about the inner sources of conflict help you to relate in more Christ-like ways in areas where disagreement arises?
- God longs for us to cultivate humble hearts. When disagreeing with a person, one of the humblest positions we can take is to genuinely say, “I could be wrong.” This recognition (which can be hard!)

reminds us that we are not the all-knowing God. When was the last time you practiced such grace-filled humility as you dealt with another person?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to tame my tongue, and the inner fears and insecurities that so often set my tongue off. Help me respond to the grace you give me by living ever more humbly. Amen.

A new nature, free from malice and lying

FRIDAY 2.15.19 Colossians 3:8-10

The letter to the Colossians recognized a firm connection between who we are on the inside and how we speak to others. Christ-followers need to set aside anger, rage, malice, slander, obscene language and lying. The first three are attitudes, but they predictably show themselves in the harmful kinds of speech that were the last three items on the list.

- Scholar William Barclay said we can turn this list's items into positive commands. The first two, he said, tell us that a Christian's speech must be KIND, and it must be PURE. How easy or hard do you find it to speak in those ways if you feel anger, rage or malice toward someone? How can we be kind in our speech even when we need to offer an honest appraisal of another person?
- Barclay added that a Christian's speech must be TRUE. He noted, "It is easy to distort the truth; an alteration in the tone of voice or an eloquent look will do it; and there are silences which can be as false and misleading as any words." * In what ways can the goal of "true speech" help us avoid broad generalizations or judgments about people's inner motives? When have you been the receiver, or the giver, of false statements made in anger?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Paul said I should "take off" these things, as I'd "take off a garment." Help me discard anger, and the ugly speech it produces, as I would a worn-out shirt, and put on your new way of life. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 154.

Say "what is useful for building up"

SATURDAY 2.16.19 Ephesians 4:25-32

Changing our speech requires letting God change the inner sources from which our words come. Across our country, around the world we see what happens when words tear down community and set people against one another. We aim to be a community in which we "Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say."

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Living as a Christian demands that we grow up in our thinking: you have to learn to identify your own moods and behaviour patterns, to see which ones are going in the right direction and which ones in the wrong direction....we should regard our moods, and the speech which flows from them, as we might a strong but wilful horse, which needs to be reminded frequently of the direction we're supposed to be going in.... People who are enslaved to anger and malice may think they are 'free' to 'be themselves', but they are in bondage." * When have you said words that hurt, and then thought, "Why did I say that?" What helps you to understand your feelings better to keep you from blurting out words you wish you could take back? Before you forward that e-mail, or post that tart response on social media, are you willing to ask, "Does this give grace? Does it build up? Can I picture Jesus sending this?"

Prayer: Lord of my life, be Lord of my words. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Family Activity: When conflict arises in your family, especially between children, try this rhythm of conversation to make sure everyone involved is speaking carefully and listening to understand:

- 1) Each child states their version of what happened in no more than 3 sentences. No one may interrupt or correct.
- 2) Each child shares what he/she heard the other children say. The purpose is to make sure each child's position is heard and understood. If necessary, alternate steps 1 & 2 several times until consensus is reached.
- 3) Each child answers the question, "What did you do to participate in this conflict?" This gives children the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions. Children may resist this step at first, since blaming is often easier than examining their own actions.
- 4) Each person apologizes for what was under his/her control.

* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 55-56.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Gary Harmon and family on the death of Ruby Harmon, mother, 1/28/2019

Greg Withrow and family on the death of Russ Withrow, father, 2/1/2019

John Roan and family on the death of Ann Roan, mother, 2/6/2019

Aaron Ammon and family on the death of David Ammon, father, 2/7/2019

Jim Leonard and family on the death of Dianna Leonard, wife, 2/9/2019