



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 10, 2005
James 3:1-12

OVERVIEW

Throughout the letter James wrote, we will come back again and again to revisit recurring themes. One of those themes is the Christian and his or her speech. He touched on the subject in chapter one and now revisits it in chapter three. And it is an issue needing to be addressed. How Christians talk—to one another and to those who don't know the Lord—can be a huge (and often overlooked!) problem.

DISCUSSION

Most of us don't think of our "tongue" (words/speech) as being as dangerous and damaging as James appears to think. Because of that, opening the discussion about things that may be unsuspected dangers can help set the stage. Once you've explored this idea of hidden dangers around the home, you are set to turn to James and explore the "hidden dangers around the mouth!"

James uses a lot of metaphors; this portion uses lots of images. Don't just read the words; make sure that you discuss what James is saying. None of the images are really difficult to understand. But don't simply let James' words be repeated by those in your group. Encourage them to reframe James' imagery and explain what he is getting at. Make sure you note, for example, that James wants us to see:

1. That we think the tongue is "no big deal" when it is.
2. That we think the tongue is not really dangerous when it is.
3. That we think speaking both pleasant and unpleasant words is normal when it's not.

One of the most troubling images is that James speaks of the tongue (and, hence, our words) as a fire amidst a forest. This is just a tragedy waiting to happen! Once that fire gets going, you know disaster is not far behind. And James tells us that controlling that fire that is our own tongue—our own speaking—is a huge challenge. That should cause us some appropriate holy fear. We might be "arsonists of the mouth!"

One of the things that seems to be lacking in this section of James is any advice about what to do with the troubling tongue! He warns us and describes the problem, but doesn't really tell us what to do. Where does that leave us? Maybe he simply wants us to be much more aware of the potential risk of damage that we could cause by what we say. Maybe at this point he is simply calling our attention to danger, like a "high voltage" warning sign. The sign doesn't tell you what to do, it only warns of the danger. Earlier, James did give us a little sound advice. Notice what he has already told us in 1:19-22. If we really are "doers" and not merely hearers of the word, it should affect our words. We should be quick listeners and slow speakers. That makes sense if speaking risks starting a fire that can't be put out.

BIG IDEA

Warning! Unless your faith reaches your mouth and controls your tongue, there is no telling what kind of damage you might do.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 10, 2005
James 3:1-12

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Whenever a couple ends up with a child for the first time, they typically "baby proof" the house. That's because some stuff that we don't typically think of as dangerous really could be . . . in the wrong little hands. What kinds of things carry unexpected danger in a typical home? In your home?

It is startling to realize that something that seems relatively innocuous could actually do so much harm. That thought needs to be stirring in our minds as we read James 3:1-12.

James has a lot to tell us here about the "tongue." When he is speaking about the tongue, what really is the issue? What's he talking about?

What kinds of images does he use to talk about the tongue and talking? Try and summarize what he is saying through these various metaphors and images?

After you hear all that James has to say about the dangers of the "tongue," how does it leave you feeling? Do you think he's overstating the case? Why or why not?

James seems to be long on warning but short on practical advice. What do you think you should do in light of his warnings about the dangers that can be found in the "tongue"?

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