

Louder Than Words #6
Controlling Your Tongue

Word

Scripture Reference

James 3:1-12

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think people gossip about others? Are you guilty of doing it as well?
2. People usually talk without thinking about the consequences of what they say. Anyone can say something and unknowingly hurt or cause pain and distress to others. Words have power, and so James dedicated an entire section to talk about the danger of one's words and the need to control one's tongue, because what comes out of your mouth when you speak says a lot about your relationship with Jesus Christ. Read James 3:1-12. James begins this section giving a warning to teachers. What distinctive responsibility does a teacher carry (v. 1)? Why will God judge teachers more sternly than others? What is the importance of the way you talk (v. 2)?
3. Spiritual discipline in how you live your life is very important; it authenticates your spiritual relationship with the Lord. Your tongue and the words that come out from your mouth serve as a yardstick for your self-discipline and spiritual life. James discusses three things about the tongue that believers need to be aware of:
 - a. The tongue is small but powerful (v. 3-5). Explain the purpose of a bit in the horse's mouth (v. 3), the purpose of the rudder of a ship (v. 4), and the damage that a little fire can do to a great forest (v. 5). Discuss how a person's tongue is similar to these three illustrations. Share the positive effects when you tell someone, "I love you." What are negative effects brought by the words "I hate you"? Why do the words you say to your family members, friends, or even strangers have the power to give life or death, to hurt or to encourage (Proverbs 18:20-21)?
 - b. The tongue is a source of evil and is often uncontrollable (v. 6-8). How did James describe the tongue in his two examples? How does the tongue affect the whole body? James charges the tongue as the source of sin and evil as it can be used wrongly in many ways. Discuss the many ways that even Christians use the tongue wrongly. Why is it so difficult to tame the tongue (v. 7-8)? When someone comes to you with a juicy piece of gossip (e.g. "I know something about so-and-so, but you have to promise not to tell anyone"), have you ever refused and said, "I'd rather you not tell me, because I can't control my tongue"? How come only few people can actually

say that? Discuss.

- c. The tongue is inconsistent and hypocritical (v. 9-12). James speaks of the inconsistent and hypocritical words of the tongue because with the same mouth we bless and sing praises to God, and with it we curse. What examples from nature did James use to express disapproval of cursing? Discuss why the mouth of a Christian cannot have words of blessings and words of curses come out of the same source. Why should it not be done at all? How can your tongue be used rightly for many purposes?

Walk

In communications, there are no do-overs, because once you say something, you cannot take it back. So before you say something to someone, ask THINK and ask these questions:

T - Is it TRUE? There are always two sides to a story. Ask yourself, how do I know that what I believe to be true is really true? How did I get the information? Was it first hand or second hand information?

H - Is it HELPFUL? Is it helpful to call that person a name or define his whole character by just one action?

I - Is it INSPIRING? If you want to inspire someone to change then will berating him or her be good?

N - Is it NECESSARY? Is it your responsibility to be the one to tell that person what you want to say?

K - Is it KIND?

Ask the Holy Spirit to control your tongue. Think of what you need to take out from your speech habits, and turn them into words that are more pleasing to God.

Worship & Prayer

Father God, thank You for the reminder that more than what I say, controlling my tongue speaks louder about my faith in Jesus Christ. While I sing praise and worship you with my mouth, complaining, gossip, hurtful words, discouragement--these come out of that same mouth. Forgive me, Father. With Your Spirit enable me to learn to control it, that with my words I may encourage instead of hurt, thank instead of complain, offer kindness instead of spreading gossip, give hope instead of causing despair. Hold me accountable not just with what I do, but with what I say, especially when I'm not in church, so that I may bring honor to Your name. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.