

“

SET A GUARD,
O Lord, over my mouth
KEEP WATCH OVER
the door of my lips

Psalm 141:3

”

VBS

20

16

Day 1

The Power of the Tongue



calvary chapel of philadelphia

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Power of the Tongue

The Objective is the key concept for this weeks lesson. It should be the main focus of the study

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The “Main passage” is the basis of the study, where the other verse support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the “reward box” found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God’s Word

Objective The goal of this lesson is to show that what we say matters and that the tongue is powerful and wicked through a study of James 3:1-12.

Key Verses

James 3:1-12—Main Teaching Passage

Memory Verse - Psalm 141:3

“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Hook

Ask the class to name the strongest, most powerful part of the body. When they offer suggestions such as arm or leg, have them come in front of the class and demonstrate the strength of that part of the body.

Inform the class that the Bible tells us that the most powerful part of the body is the tongue. It might not be as physically strong as the arm or leg, but the tongue has the power to do things those body parts couldn’t dream of.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

The book of James tells us about the incredible power of the tongue. It is important to clarify what James means by “the tongue.” He is not referring to the tongue itself and its ability to lick things. The Bible uses the word “tongue” to refer to our words, to the things we say. In chapter 3, James tells us that the perfect man is the one who can control his tongue. If you can control the tongue, the rest of the body is easy. To illustrate his point, he compares the tongue to a horse’s bridle and a ship’s rudder. Both of these things are small objects compared to a horse or a boat. But a tiny bridle is able to direct an entire horse. Likewise, just a small rudder controls the movement of the entire boat. The tongue is the same way. It may be a relatively small part of the body, but it has a disproportionate effect on how we live our lives. Then, James gets more specific and compares the tongue to a small flame. Not only is the tongue powerful, but its power can easily be used for destruction. Just as a small flame can ignite an entire forest, what we say can cause great evil and destruction. James calls the tongue evil, full of poison, and unable to be tamed. We can go to zoos and see some of the most powerful animals in the world who have been tamed, but the tongue cannot be tamed. As proof of the untamable tongue, James observes how men use the tongue to worship God, yet with the same part of the body we curse men, who are made in the image of God. It is used for worship, but also for lying, gossip, slander, complaining, and unkind words. It is no more appropriate for a tongue to be used for both good and evil than for a tree to produce good and bad fruit or a spring to produce fresh and bitter water. A more contemporary example could be a water fountain that squirts both good water and poison. Thus James shows how the tongue is both powerful and wicked.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK

When we think of the “big, bad” sins, we usually think of sinful actions. A person who believes himself to be good may point out that he has never murdered anyone, stolen anything, or kidnapped someone. Sins of the tongue—lying, gossip, slander, and complaining—are usually thought of as “lesser sins.” In general, we are much quicker to condemn the person who breaks the law and justify the person who tells a “little white lie.” However, Scripture does not take this view. According to James 3, the tongue is one of the most powerful and sinful parts of the body. The Bible has many things to say about the way we use our tongues. Contrary to popular belief, how we talk is a big deal to God.

James emphasizes the untamable nature of the tongue. Man has found ways to control mighty rivers through dams and canals and domesticate

LOOK (Continued)

lions and elephants in zoos and circuses, but no one has discovered a way to tame the tongue. No one is in such control of his speech that he never sins in word. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man. Only one man has ever exhibited such control over His tongue... and His name is Jesus. Other than Him, all of us struggle with one or more areas of our speech.

This week, we will be looking at many specific uses of the tongue. On Tuesday through Thursday, we will be contrasting positive and negative uses of the tongue by looking at the sins of lying, gossip, and complaining and the virtues of truth, encouragement, and thankfulness. The contrast is important because we cannot *just* eliminate the sins or add the virtues. We must do both. On Friday, we will look at the most important thing we can do with our tongues, confess Jesus Christ as Lord. However, before we get into those specific uses of the tongue, it is important to lay the groundwork here in James. We need to recognize the power of the tongue.

Most of our problems come when we fail to recognize the tongue's power. As long as we continue to believe that how we talk is not as important as what we do, we will continue to fail in controlling our tongues. If we think that we are able to overcome our sin nature and tame our tongues on our own, we will learn the hard way that the tongue is untamable. Instead, we need to ask Jesus, the only man in all of history who has been able to tame His tongue, to help us get our tongues under control. There are certainly practical steps we can and should take if we want to exhibit self-control over our mouths, but ultimately without the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, taming the tongue is a doomed effort. As we go throughout this week, let us remember that it is only by Christ's strength that we can tame the tongue.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life.

TOOK

As a class, memorize Psalm 141:3.

Ask the class to identify ways they struggle to control the tongue. Encourage the students to lift these issues up to Jesus.

Pray: Praise Jesus for being the One who tamed His tongue. Ask Him for help in taming our own tongues.

Parent Question: Why does James say that the tongue is powerful and dangerous?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on James 3:1-12 by David Guzik

Taming the Wild Tongue

A. The demonstration of a living faith in controlling what we say.

1. (1-2) Opening observations: the greater accountability of teachers and the difficulty of not stumbling.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

a. **Let not many of you become teachers:** James has a sober admonition for those who would **become teachers** in the church. They must take the responsibility seriously, because their accountability is greater, and they shall **receive a stricter judgment**.

i. It is easy to take the position of teacher lightly in the church, without considering its cost in terms of accountability. Jesus warned *to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much have been committed, of him they will ask the more.* ([Luke 12:48](#))

ii. "The comparative adjective *greater* implies degrees of treatment at the judgment seat." (Hiebert)

c. **For we all stumble in many things:** The greater accountability of teachers is especially sobering in light of our common weaknesses. After all, **we all stumble in many things**. The ancient Greek word translated **stumble** does not imply a fatal fall, but something that trips us up and hinders our progress with the Lord.

i. **We all stumble:** James included himself among those who **stumble**. But he does not excuse his or our stumbling. We know that **we all stumble**, but we should all press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by *less* stumbling.

d. **If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man:** By this, James provides a measure of spiritual maturity for teachers and for all Christians. To **not stumble in word** shows true spiritual maturity. This is especially relevant to teachers, who have so much more opportunity to sin with their tongue.

2. (3-6) The power of the tongue.

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

a. **We put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us:** A strong horse can be controlled by a small bit in its mouth. A large ship can be turned by a small rudder. Even so, if we have control over our tongue, it is an indication that we have control over our self. Whoever can control the tongue can *bridle the whole body* ([James 3:2](#)).

i. The bit and the rudder are small, but extremely important. If they are not controlled, the entire horse is out of control, and the entire ship is out of control. Something as small as the tongue can have tremendous power, for either good or evil.

ii. You don't solve the problem of an unruly horse by keeping it in the barn, or the problem of a hard-to-steer ship by keeping it tied to the dock. In the same way, even a vow of silence is not the ultimate answer for the misuse of our tongue.

b. **See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity:** The fire of the tongue has been used to burn many. Children are told *sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me*. But that child's rhyme isn't really true. The bitter pain of a word spoken against us can hurt us for a lifetime, long after a broken bone has healed.

i. What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life.

ii. Proverbs speaks of the person who doesn't consider the destructive power of his words. *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "I was only joking!"* ([Proverbs 26:18-19](#))

c. James echoes the testimony of Proverbs regarding the tongue.

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. ([Proverbs 10:19-21](#))

Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad. ([Proverbs 12:25](#))

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. ([Proverbs 16:24](#))

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. ([Proverbs 18:21](#))

3. (7-8) The difficulty of taming the tongue.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

a. **Every kind of beast and bird ... has been tamed by mankind:** A wild animal can be more easily tamed than the tongue. In fact, James tells us that **no man can tame the tongue**.

i. The human spirit has incredible capacity for sacrifice and self-control. Sometimes we hear a desperate survival story of someone who cuts off their own leg to get free from a tree that has fallen on them, then they drive to a hospital for medical treatment. Yet that same man can't **tame the tongue** perfectly.

b. **No man can tame the tongue:** Yet it can be brought under the power and the control of the Holy Spirit. We might say that only God Himself is mightier than the human tongue!

c. **It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison:** The untamable tongue is even more dangerous when we consider the **deadly poison** it can deliver.

i. A woman once came to John Wesley and said she knew what her talent was, and she said "I think my talent

from God is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "I don't think God would mind if you buried that talent." Speaking forth everything that comes to mind is unwise, poisonous speech.

4. (9-12) The contradictory character of the tongue.

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

a. **With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men:** The tongue can be used for the highest calling (to **bless our God**) and it can be used for the lowest evil (to **curse men**). But in those who are born again, it shouldn't be said that **out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing**.

b. **These things ought not to be so:** Our speech should be consistently glorifying to God. We shouldn't use one vocabulary or one tone of speaking at church, and a different one at home or on the job. Like a spring of water, our mouths shouldn't **send forth fresh ... and bitter from the same opening**.

c. **Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh:** James points to the ultimate *impossibility* of such a contradiction. If bad fruit and bitter water continue to come forth, it means that there is no contradiction. The tree is bad and the spring is bad.

i. Jesus taught in [Matthew 12:34-37](#) that a man's words are a reliable revelation of his inner character. What we say can indicate what we are.