

James 3:1-12 — The Power Of Words

June 4, 2023

Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We have many exciting things taking place this summer. This week begins VBS for the kids. If you haven't signed up, there is still time. Scan the QR code in the bulletin to register your child.

If you are new, I encourage you to use the response card in the pews. The green one is a way you can share prayer requests with the pastors and elders. The red one is for those who are new. Fill it out to let us know a bit about you, that way, we can do a better job of welcoming you. If you fill out either of those cards, just leave them in the pews after the service, and the ushers will pick them up. You can also place them in the offering boxes in the back of the room after the service when you leave.

Last week, the elders launched a capital campaign. We hope to raise \$110,000. That will help us take the next step in our mission to reach people with Jesus. That capital campaign is to complete the much-needed garage for storage space off of the gym plus finish updating of this room. That will involve moving from pew to chairs, a fresh coat of paint that will match the colors we used in the Spencer Campus, plus LED lighting and fixtures. When you give, please designate Capital Fund on your check or in the church app. We look forward to working together as a church family on these projects.

At CrossWinds, our mission is *to reach people with Jesus*. I usually begin with a story of how ordinary people, like you and me, are at work reaching others with Jesus in ordinary ways. I want to do something a little different this morning.

Instead of telling a story about other people, I want to give each of us one or two very simple but practical ways you can join us this summer in our mission of reaching people with Jesus.

At CrossWinds, we have seven core values. Those core values are what make CrossWinds unique across all our campuses.

The fifth core value is Discipleship. It reads this way, *“We believe God called us to be disciples and to make disciples.”* At CrossWinds, we do not want people just to attend church, but we want those who attend church to be serving and helping others in the church. We are not just looking for a handout in the faith, but we want to give others a hand up in their faith. We are not just people who come to sit in church. We also come to serve others in the church. One of the worst things a Christian can do is become the Dead Sea. If you know about the Dead Sea, you know water runs into it, but no water runs out of it. As a result, it has such a high salt concentration in the water that nothing can live. The same can be true of Christians. One of the worst things we can do is consistently have others pour into our faith, but we never pour the truth of Christ into others. If we are constant spiritual takers but never spiritual givers, that can lead to a spiritually dead heart.

This fall, there will be many ways for people to serve. This summer, there are a few places where we need help on Sunday mornings.

The areas where we need help are the greeters who shake hands when people come in the door and the ushers who give bulletins and help people find a seat. We also need help in the nursery, which makes sure the younger children

are cared for. In addition, we need help on the tech team to run cameras and turn slides. For greeters and ushers, all they need to do is come a little early to greet people as they arrive at the service. They can attend the service and leave with everyone else. Nursery workers can serve in one service and attend the other service. How old do you need to be to serve? You can be in junior or senior high. My hope is that those who sign up to serve will only need to serve once every five or six weeks.

Either before you leave today or before you put your head on the pillow tonight, would you scan the QR code on the bulletin insert or go to the “Serve” button under the Spirit Lake section in the church app and sign up to serve at church to help us in our mission of reaching people with Jesus.

This morning, we begin a short series that will last until the middle of July. It is called Taming the Tongue. We are looking at the power of words and the importance of honoring God with our speech. We live in a world filled with lies, deception, and hatred. We are surrounded by so many hateful and hurtful words that negative speech has become acceptable for many Christians. The world has rubbed off on us. God’s plan is that one of the ways we reach people with Jesus is through our speech. The words of a Christian are to be notably different from the world around us. We are to speak graciously and wisely, not hatefully.

This morning, to kick off our series, we will look at James 3:1-12. For the rest of the series, Pastor Jordan — our Spencer Campus pastor — and I will rotate back and forth between campuses. That will give me a chance to know the

Spencer Campus better, and it will give you a chance to know Pastor Jordan better.

To show you the power of words, let's begin with a true story. In 1899 four newspaper reporters from Denver, Colorado, met by chance on a Saturday night in the Denver railway station. They were Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, and Hal Wilshire. They were reporters for four different Denver papers: The Post, The Times, The Republican, and the Rocky Mountain News.

Each was sent by their respective papers to dig up a story, any story, for the Sunday edition of the paper. The reporters were in the railway station hoping to snag an interview with a celebrity, if any happened to arrive by rail that evening. None did. The reporters bemoaned the fact that they had nothing to write about. One of them suggested they have a beer together. Off they went to the bar. While drinking, Al said that he was so frustrated that he would make up a story. As they drank, that idea became appealing to the rest of them. They decided to make up the same story. After another round of beers, they decided a phony domestic story would be too easy to discover, so they considered a foreign angle that would be much harder to check. They decided to write about something on the other side of the world. They would write about China.

One of the drunk men suggested they write a story about a group of American engineers that stopped at the Denver train station on their way to China to bid for a job to help the Chinese government demolish the Great Wall of China.

By 11:00 PM, the drunk reporters worked out the details of their preposterous story. The next morning, all four Sunday papers carried the story. It was on the front page of each of them. The problem was that the story was taken seriously. It was picked up by other newspapers and eventually by newspapers on the east coast. Finally, it was carried by newspapers overseas.

When the Chinese learned the Americans were sending a crew of engineers to tear down the great wall of China, a national monument and proud piece of their history, they were furious. Especially upset were the members of a secret Chinese society known as the boxers. They were against Chinese involvement with Western nations. As a result of this rumor, they attacked foreign embassies in Peking and slaughtered hundreds of Western missionaries.

The bloodshed that followed is known as the Boxer Rebellion in China, where 100,000 Chinese died, 33,000 of them were Chinese Christians, and over 200 Western missionaries were killed. The spark that set it off all of that bloodshed was four drunk newspaper reporters in Denver, Colorado, who made up a lie. Paul Harvey first told this story. It is a reminder to never, never, never underestimate the power of our words to cause incredible damage.

That is the focus of James 3:1-12. Turn to that passage in your Bible. It doesn't matter if you use a phone or a paper Bible. Stand out of reverence for the Word of God and follow along in your copy as I read God's Word.

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)

James wants us to understand the power of our words. We will look at these verses under the heading of the question, “Why do my words matter?”

The words of a teacher direct the course of a life.

Teachers have incredible power. Young untaught minds in the hands of a teacher are like clay in the hands of a potter. We see that with our children who go to woke schools. They sit under godless professors. They come home confused about their gender. They are told they are just a product of chance evolution, not the special creation of God. They come home either having denied the faith or having their faith undermined.

Casual advice from a teacher can direct the course of a student’s life. Phrases like “Have you considered sales?” or “I think you would make a good doctor.” Can propel young life into one career or another. Teachers have great power over young adults at a crucial time in their life. A teacher can crush a student down or catapult a student forward.

James writes these words about teachers.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers,... James 3:1a (ESV)

Why would James discourage people from becoming teachers? The early church, especially the early Jewish church, to which James was writing, was the heir of synagogue traditions. Jewish synagogues highly honored teachers. In the synagogue, the teachers were known as rabbis. That means “my great one.” Jewish rabbis were given high respect. Your duty to your rabbi was greater than your duty to your own parents. The Jews taught that if your rabbi and your parents were taken prisoner, you should ransom your rabbi before your own parents. Your parents brought you into the world, but your rabbi held the keys to the next world.

It was considered a good thing to house and care for all the needs of a rabbi and to do it indefinitely. Some Jewish rabbis were housed by widows and sponged off of them for all their needs.

This high respect and the benefits of free housing and food were given to Jewish Christian teachers in the early church. There meant there were many people who wanted to be a teacher, even if they were not qualified as a teacher. These wannabe Christian teachers promoted themselves, and caused controversy in the church. They acted like they knew everything when they knew little to nothing. There were a lot of unqualified people running around that wanted to be teachers so they could soak up the benefits of being a teacher.

The problem then, as is the problem now, is that many of these people wanted to be teachers not because they genuinely loved Jesus but because they wanted public attention, respect, influence, power, and control. They were using the church to build up their ego, not to serve others.

Jesus said it this way.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. Matthew 23:5–7 (ESV)

In the church of that day, and in many churches today, people want to be pastors or teachers because they love the power and control that comes with the position. They want to be teachers to build up their ego, status, and pride.

While it is easy to want to be a teacher for the wrong reason, why else should people be careful about wanting to become a teacher?

Teachers will be judged more strictly by God.

...for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1b (ESV)

Being a teacher of others, especially a spiritual teacher who communicates the Word of God, carries a serious responsibility. God will judge teachers more seriously because of their power to influence others. Just as you and I know many young people led astray by teachers in college teaching evolution or deconstructionism, in the global church, there are many pastors who are teaching heresy. They teach that Jesus did not rise from the dead. They teach that homosexuality is a lifestyle to be celebrated, not a sin of which we need to repent. They teach that premarital sex and living together are normal and healthy things. They teach that marriage is a mere social formality. Those kinds of religious teachers lead thousands astray with their slick words that are absent of biblical truth. The Bible teaches that with the increased responsibility of being a teacher of God's word comes increased accountability.

...Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:48b (ESV)

The more we know the truth, the more accountable we are for rightly handling the truth. Pastors, who specialize in the Bible, need to take their responsibility seriously.

In addition, the Bible tells us that as Christians, each of us will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Bible is clear that, as Christians, we will not be judged for our sins. We are completely forgiven of our sins by our trust in Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (ESV)

While we are saved by Jesus and forgiven of our sins by Jesus, as Christians, the works we have done with our life after trusting in Jesus will be judged by Jesus.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:12 (ESV)

The picture the Bible gives of this judgment is that individual believers will present the works of their lives to Christ as a building. The eternal foundation of every Christian's life is Jesus and what God has done for us through him. Each of us uses the rest of our life to build upon the foundation of Jesus. What we build with the rest of our life will vary. Some will build on the foundation of Jesus a building of wood, hay, or straw. Others will build on the foundation of Jesus with

gold, silver, or precious stones. Most of us will have a life built with a mixture of these materials.

At our judgment before Jesus, everyone's life will be publicly subjected to the revealing fire of Christ's judgment. What we have built with our lives will either survive or be burned up.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (ESV)

James says that at this judgment, those who are teachers of others, especially spiritual teachers, will face much stricter judgment because their lives and their teaching have a significant impact on others.

Personally, this has produced a lot of fear in me. By this, I do not mean a bad fear but a real sense that I must take my job seriously. This is why I research the best I can. I write the best I can. I memorize the best I can and pray not that you will be pleased by my teaching but that Jesus will be pleased. After all, the only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks of me on the day I stand before him.

This is why pastors or teachers who prepare while watching television on Saturday night are in serious trouble. This is why pastors that fill their sermons with politics instead of the Bible are in a scary place. There is no shortage of spiritual fruitcakes in this world.

Teachers will not only be judged based on what they teach. They will also be judged based on how they live. More is caught by watching a teacher than is taught by listening to the words of a teacher. Those who teach will not just be

measured by what they say but by how they live. My mind drifts to a pastor who recently had a bunch of his books secretly purchased. That helped it look like he was a popular author when the demand for his books wasn't happening. He was a good teacher but dishonest techniques to inflate book sales ruined much of the good he was trying to accomplish.

We all stumble in our words.

For we all stumble in many ways... James 3:2a (ESV)

The word stumble is sometimes translated as sin. It means more than sin. It means to err, to offend, to fall short, to fail in the line of duty. It means to be just off and not do things the way we want or intend. All of us are just off. Things don't turn out the way we intend. This is especially true in our words.

...And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. James 3:2b (ESV)

How many of us have tried to say the right thing, but it came out the wrong way? It was just off. It missed the mark. You intended to be an encouragement to people, but you hurt people. Has anybody been there? This is the problem with being a teacher in any capacity. Teachers use words, which is an area of our life where we are most prevalent to stumble. Even if we intend to communicate one thing, it is so easy to be off the mark and communicate something different or to communicate the right thing in the wrong way.

There is a piece of practical application in this verse we should take to heart. James says that if anyone does not stumble in what they say, they are able to keep the rest of their body in check. That means if we focus on getting our words pleasing to Christ, the rest of our life will naturally fall in line.

Regarding spiritual maturity, the most important thing to focus on is our words. If we can focus on that area, the rest of our life comes along for the ride.

Look at how many people in the Bible struggled with their words.

Job was a great man of God whom God called blameless and upright, but Job struggled to control his tongue, especially when life fell apart around him, his words got the better of him.

“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.” Job 40:4 (ESV)

Isaiah was a man of God who wrote a Book of the Bible. Look what he says about the struggle he has with his words.

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

Moses was one of God’s truly great men. He was called the humblest man on the face of the earth, but his words also got the better of him.

...for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips. Psalm 106:33 (ESV)

This reminds us of what James says. One who is never at fault in what he says is perfect. That doesn’t mean sinless. It means spiritually mature. If someone consistently has control of their tongue, and they consistently speak gracious words, that is evidence of great spiritual maturity in their life. If someone gossips, criticizes, grumbles, tears others down, or complains, that is evidence of a lack of spiritual maturity. The tongue reflects the state of the heart. It reflects the true state of the mind.

The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. Matthew 12:35 (ESV)

James says it that if anyone is a teacher or preacher, it doesn't matter how much spiritual insight they have. It doesn't matter how much verbal eloquence they possess. It doesn't matter how captivating they are to listen to. If they cannot get control of their tongue, they better hang it up. Our words are that powerful. Our words are too important. We dare not misuse them if we are teachers claiming to represent God. Period.

My words make a big difference.

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. James 3:3 (ESV)

James gives us some practical illustrations of the power of a tongue. If we take a horse and put a 550-pound pack on its back, it will barely stress as it stands, breathing easily under the load.

That same horse can run a quarter mile in about 25 seconds. There is a breed of horse called the Shire that are known for incredible power. In 1924 two Shires in the



logging industry pulled a record 45 tons. Yet, to control such a powerful animal, you only need a bit in its mouth to pull on its tongue.

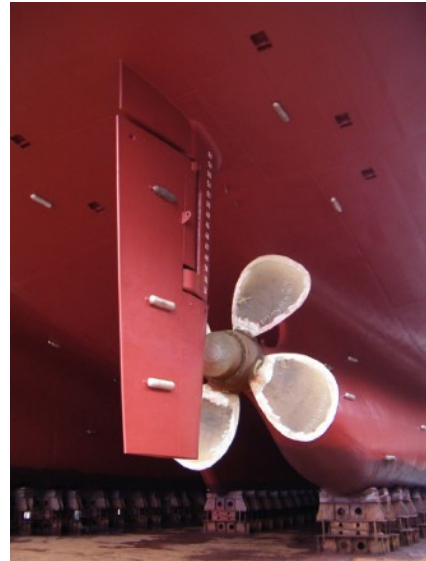
The same principle is true of ships.

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... James 3:4–5a (ESV)

Big ships are steered by a small rudder. Looking at the size of the rudder in the picture, that doesn't look like a small rudder. The problem is you haven't seen the rest of the ship. This ship weighs 120,000 tons empty and can carry

750,000 tons of oil. From that perspective, it is a relatively small rudder that is steering a big ship.

The tongue is the same way. It is a small part of our body. Yet it controls human destiny. Adolf Hitler used his tongue to move a nation to start World War II. Winston Churchill used his tongue to hold England together in the war for England's finest hour.



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

If you use your words well, you will do well in life. If you use your words poorly, it may cost you your life. We saw this in the news recently with the death of Jordan Neely. If I read the news reports correctly, they said Jordan Neely hadn't hurt anyone. He hadn't physically touched anyone. It was his words that were a threat. He said, "I am ready to die. I didn't care anymore. I don't have any food. I don't care if I go to jail and they give me life in prison." His words led to the conflict which led to his death.

[A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. Proverbs 15:4 \(ESV\)](#)

Kind words bring life when someone is heartbroken, but a lying tongue that speaks dishonest words breaks a person's spirit. It is hard to forget and to forgive someone when they lie to your face. Has anyone experienced that? I also have experienced people in my life, when I was down and depressed, who used gentle words that were healing words. Those words helped me make it through.

James wants us to understand that words are not just words. Our words have a huge impact on our lives and the lives of others, either for good or for ill. We can use our words to heal a broken heart or to crush a healthy heart. The problem is that while physical wounds heal, the wounds inflicted by our words often don't heal, but they feel infected for years.

My words can be incredibly destructive.

...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. James 3:5b-6 (ESV)

When I was at summer camp, my favorite summer camp song was "It only takes a spark to get a fire going." That can be a good thing when you are starting a campfire, but it can be a bad thing when a fire gets out of control.

It was a gender-reveal party that started the El Dorado wildfire. One firecracker that launched pink streamers, left a spark on a piece of brush that started a fire that burned 23,000 acres and 5 homes.

In 1996, a teenager in Norway decided to celebrate the last day of school by burning his textbooks. The problem was that he burned his books too close to a shed, which was too close to the school. By the time school was out, his book fire burned down the entire school.

This is the way we need to think about our words. They carry incredibly destructive power, far more destructive power than we realize. The problem is that when we get upset, we let the sparks fly from our mouths. We don't think our flaming words will do much harm until they land on the dry kindling of another's heart. That starts a raging fire that is hard to control. Before we know it, people

are yelling at one another. Relationships are burned to ashes. Once the damage is done, it doesn't matter if the damage was intentional or not. The damage is done.

Sometimes I counsel couples in marital distress. Do you know where the problems lie? Couples have almost never physically hurt one another. That damage has been done by their words. It was a sharp word, an angry answer, or a sarcastic comment that burned a hole in their spouse's heart that hurt. Their spouse sends fire back with their own hot words. Before you know it, a marriage of 30 years of marriage with four children is burned to the ground, all because of destructive words.

Would you burn to the ground the house of someone in the church? I hope not. That would be arson. While we wouldn't burn down the houses of our brothers and sisters in Christ at church, we have no problem using fiery, destructive words from our mouths to incinerate another's reputation.

Using our tongues, we can destroy another's name and reputation when we gossip and say unhelpful things about others. When we throw people's lives and reputations under the bus, we run through the forest of their lives, starting little fires to see how much of a person's life we can burn to the ground.

When I was young, my mother used to say, "If you don't have anything nice to say, it is better not to say it at all." The older I get, the more I agree with her words.

Most churches do not burn to the ground and die. If a church burns to the ground, the people of the church rebuild. There is a way a church can burn to the

ground so that it doesn't get rebuilt. That is through the gossipy, backbiting, grumbling, and prideful words of the people that tear apart relationships. That leaves a church empty, but the building still standing.

At one time, the leaders in CrossWinds were so concerned about the way conflict in the church was handled between staff and people in the church that we created a conflict resolution policy. It is biblically based and guides all conflicts in the church. It is a fire prevention policy that is designed to prevent conflict in the church from incinerating the relationships between us.

James also says words can stain the whole body. A stain is a spot in a pair of pants or a shirt that you cannot remove. Every time you look at that shirt or pair of pants, you can see the stain. The shirt or pants are completely functional, but in other ways ruined by that stain. It will never be the same. This is what hurtful words, fiery words, can do to people. Our fiery words stain our reputation in the lives of those around us. We are a church so of course, we forgive, but that doesn't mean the stain of bitter words we spoke don't stain the memories of those who heard our words. They may forgive us, but every time they look at us, they can still hear those hateful words that came out of us. Yes, we forgive others, but the hateful words we said to other people are hard to forget.

[I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, Matthew 12:36 \(ESV\)](#)

This is a sobering thought. The words we say are powerful. They make a difference. We will be held accountable by Jesus for the things we said, even the careless words, the snide side comments we make without thinking about them.

Words are especially powerful to children. Ninety-five percent of children ages 13 to 17 are on social media and are exposed to all kinds of written, not just spoken, words. Those words have a huge influence on a child's life. In 2017, Molly Russel was struggling with depression. She committed suicide. In the six months leading up to her suicide, she interacted with 2,100 posts on suicide and self-harm on social media. Those written words convinced her not to seek help but to take her life. A British court held Facebook and Instagram liable for her death because they didn't limit words encouraging her to take her life and instructing her to how to do it. She was a child that was powerfully influenced by words.

My words can't be tamed by my own strength.

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. James 3:7-8 (ESV)

If you check out Youtube, there is no shortage of trained animals. There are elephants who play soccer, birds that can sing songs, and who can forget Air Bud. He plays every sport better than I can. We can tame animals, but in our own strength, there is no way to tame the tongue.

James describes the tongue as a restless evil full of deadly poison. People can overcome gambling addictions, alcohol addictions, and drug addictions. The one thing no one can flawlessly tame in their own tongue. It is so easy to use words that hurt instead of words that heal. It is so easy to get angry at people. It is so easy to gossip and justify our actions when we do it.

The words I speak reveal a double standard in my heart.

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 3:9–12 (ESV)

James zeroes in on the problem he saw among the Christians to whom he wrote. It was the double standard in the way they used their tongues. They came to church and put on the Christian face. They used the Christian lingo, but when they went home, they cursed other people in the church who didn't see things the way they did. They yelled at their spouse when dinner was late. They got on the Internet and used harsh words in comments on a post.

James says the goal should be consistency in our speech. A spring doesn't put out fresh water and salt water. A fig tree cannot bear olives. A salt pond doesn't give fresh water. As a Christian, how we act on Sundays and the words we use on Monday should not differ. The graciousness we have toward others in the church should be the same kind of graciousness we have with our family at home.

As James said at the beginning, someone whose words are consistently gracious has great spiritual maturity. Someone whose words are godly one minute and sarcastic the next minute is struggling with spiritual immaturity. It doesn't matter how much a person knows or how engaging they are as an individual. Gracious, godly, and gentle words will come from the heart of a mature Christian. Grumbling, gossiping, and whining words will come from immature Christians.

Application

My first goal this morning was to sensitize you to the power of our words. Too many Christians look for spiritual maturity in every place but their mouth. Our words are the most important place to seek maturity. If we can get maturity in our words, most other areas of spiritual maturity in our life will fall into line by themselves.

My second goal was to give you an idea of what spiritual immaturity looks like. It is not having a tongue that speaks one way on Sunday and a different way on Monday. It is a tongue that speaks truthfully, lovingly, and kindly in a consistent manner.

My third goal is to give you a few steps we can take this week to begin to address the disparity between our words and our faith to help our speech be more pleasing to Jesus.

- A. **Ask God for help to speak and act in ways that are consistently pleasing to Him.** James reminded us that the tongue is untamable. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. While we cannot change our speech, God can change our hearts. When God changes our hearts, he changes our speech.
- B. **Be quick to listen and slow to speak.** James 1:19 tells us that many times we need to keep our mouths shut and not say the first thing that comes to mind. We need to listen carefully and speak slowly. This week, when our anger starts to get hot, or when you think of a great verbal jab that will make your spouse look bad... bite your tongue.

C. **Remember that we will give an account for our words at the final judgment.** We learned this earlier. This is incredibly helpful for me. If Jesus will not give a two-thumbs up to my words, it is better to stay quiet. Each of us will give account for every careless word we speak at the judgment seat of Christ.

D. **Refuse to engage in unwholesome, gossiping, and whiny conversations.** Our world is full of these. Daytime television specializes in this kind of talk. It is so easy to get drawn into these kinds of conversations and spread these kinds of conversations. This week make a decision to turn away from those kinds of words.

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)

E. **Let the struggle to master our mouth remind us of the depth of our sin and our desperate need for the grace of Jesus.** As James reminds us, it is only by the Holy Spirit changing our hearts that our words will change in our life. Our words are a reflection of our hearts. The only one who changes our hearts is Jesus. We are dependent on Jesus for any good thing in us. As we struggle to make all of our speech pleasing to God, let that drive you back to the cross and the desperate need all of us have for the grace of Jesus.

F. **Immerse yourself in the living word and watch how it transforms your spoken words.**

As we close, I have one final story to illustrate the power of words. The Chicago Tribune had an article about the aftermath of a state playoff football

game in northwestern Illinois. The game was close. It went into overtime. When one of the teams was finally declared the victor, the other team was a sore loser. Many on the losing team blamed a particular referee. One fan even followed him home, driving the 65 miles to his house. That fan sat outside of the referee's house for two hours. In the week that followed, parents, and teachers, sent threatening emails and made threatening phone calls to the referee berating him and a referee and human being. As a result of so much hatred, the 36-year-old referee attempted suicide. Thankfully he was unsuccessful.

To the fans of the defeated team, they were upset. They wanted to get their anger out. To them, their fiery words were nothing more than words. To the well-meaning referee, who was doing his best in a difficult game, the words were deadly poison when email after email, and phone call after phone call, hit their target, driving him to despair. All of this hatred and verbal abuse came from the outcome of a lousy high school football game that nobody would remember 48 hours after it was over.

If the referee had successfully committed suicide, and you were one of the parents who wrote a hateful email or made a berating phone call, could you have gone to his funeral and looked into the eyes of that referee's mother and father after that lost their son? Could you have gone to the funeral and looked into the eyes of the widow who lost her husband and the children that would face all the pain of growing up without their father? How would you feel about all the flaming words you spoke or wrote after they took a life?

The referee didn't successfully commit suicide, but don't you think from that time forward, every time that referee saw one of those hate-filled parents, their reputation would be permanently stained in his mind because of their threatening words that drove him to such despair?

I don't know about you, but I would much rather learn to control my tongue than use it to tear someone else's life apart. I don't want to be remembered as the man whose words tore people apart. I want to be remembered as the man whose words built hurting people up. I always want to speak truthful words, but speak them in a helpful way that brings honor to God.

Friends, our words are powerful. Will you join Pastor Jordan and me for the next five weeks in learning how to tame our tongues? If you are able to let this series change your heart and your words, it may be one of the most important series in your life.



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