

James: Where Faith Gets Real: In Our Words
Glen Elliott - October 1, 2017

Series Big Idea: James is one of the most practical books in the Bible, tackling the real life issues and struggles that all of us face: temptation, self-control, work, anger, poverty, our words, prejudice and more. The book challenges our consumeristic and complacent nature as Americans and challenges us to live out a faith that is active and makes a difference. It is a book that combines the teachings of Jesus with the wisdom of the Proverbs to show us the perfect law that gives freedom. James' whole purpose is to help us make sure our faith gets real in everyday life.

Message Big Idea: Words are powerful. They have the power to give life or destroy. But where do our words come from? They come from inside. And because our words come from inside, they give us a clear picture as to what our heart is made of. Words that hurt come from our human pride. Words that give life come from a place of humility. No one can control the tongue, but we can allow God to change our heart - the source of our words.

Main Idea: Watch your words, they reveal your true heart.

Main Text: James 3:1-12

Supporting texts: Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Share a time when someone spoke words that were not just encouraging, but life giving. How did those words affect you?
2. Share an experience where someone wounded and hurt you with words. How did the words affect you?
3. James says no one can tame the tongue (James 3:8). How does that make you feel? Hopeless? If James says that and it is true, then why does he even talk about our words? Is there a path or way to control our words? James suggests that the way we control our words is for our heart to be transformed. Why is our heart the key to our words (see also Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18)?
4. What's the connection of our words with our actions according to James 3:3-6?
5. Take an inventory of our words for one day. How many of those conversations are life-giving and how many are diminishing and hurtful? How many are focused on helping others and how many are focused on you and what you want or need?
6. To control our words, we need to transform our heart. How can you allow God to transform you heart to be a spring that doesn't produce "saltwater" but "fresh water?"

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Message:

Words have incredible power. I want you to think of a time when someone said something that was so helpful and encouraging. It might have been healing or motivating. Can you remember where you were, who said the words and why? Just last week I got this email from a man who was a pastor, author, college president and professor. I am a bit reluctant to share it as I'm not trying to promote myself. Rather, this short email is an amazing example of the power of words to encourage: *This note is just to say thanks for the memories. I know I've told you before of my high regard, but the thought bears repeating. So many things you've done right: answering the call to ministry, marrying the best possible partner, staying put through various phases of Pantano's growth and challenges and expanding influence, serving selflessly on a couple of boards on which I got to see your wisdom and vision, and through all this and much more evidencing a positive, encouraging character. I appreciate you, brother.* I know this man well, but this is the first note I've ever received from him. Words have power. They have a power to build us up.

And in the age of Facebook posts and Tweets, it is so easy to use words to hurt. I have the wonderful privilege of being a target on social media. Here's a few posted about me. Now, don't take an offense for me, that's not my purpose. But just as words can give life, they also have the power to hurt... "Looks like Glen spends more time in the tanning booth than prepping for his teachings." "Glen looks so young for 70 - he must be taking steroids." "Glen isn't just frugal, he's cheap, dining out is McD's dollar menu." And this one from Yelp - "The pastor must have spent a lot of time at a salon with his perfectly coiffed hair." Well, there you go.

Words have the power to hurt. We all know the childhood defense: sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Oh how we wish that were true. As I was preparing this message I thought of all the times I said things to my wife and kids that were so hurtful and so unnecessary. In our first year of marriage I would often comment to my wife that she was illogical. It hurt her. But you know what in fact I was doing? I'm very logical and I was telling her I wanted her to be more like me. I was actually promoting myself while tearing her down. Words have the power to hurt!

My pastor, mentor and friend, his name is Dick, was preaching a message that talked about how damaging words are and he used gossip as one of the key examples of that. He hit the issue of gossip hard. The next Sunday, he stood in front of the podium and started by saying this. "I don't preach to get a paycheck. I'm not here to be popular!" He got my attention! He said he speaks each Sunday to help us understand God and allow God to transform us. He went on to say that just last Sunday he had spoken about the horrible effect of gossip and then went on to admonish the church for continuing to gossip that very week. He was passionate about how we needed to take the teaching to heart. It was an intense moment.

There was a married couple in front of me. The wife said to her husband; "I wonder who's he talking about?" I was watching gossip to start to happen right in front of me.

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Then the husband replied to her; “He’s talking about all of us.” Nailed it! We all use words that hurt others. Sometimes it is gossip. Sometimes we judge people. Sometimes we label people and put them in a box. Sometimes we are insensitive.

We are continuing our series from the book of James. James is a very practical book that helps us see how our faith applies to real life. Today James addresses our words. Let’s read from James 3:1-12 (pg. 826 - NIV) - ***1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*** Now this seems like a strange way to start a conversation on words. Why would James warn us not to become “teachers?” He’s not talking about being a teacher in a public or private school. He is addressing what is common in every culture in every age. There are those of us who think they have it all figured out. Today, everyone can be a teacher or preacher. Just log on to your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account. Everyone’s an expert! We love to give advice or think we are an expert in some area. We love to argue and even pick a fight. We can’t help but push our agenda onto others. It is so tempting to set people straight. Many of us take on the role of being teachers, even if that is not our profession. Down deep, our problem is what Nick talked about a couple weeks ago - pride. We think we know more, we know best, we know what’s right.

So James gives us a warning. God judges teacher types more strictly - because our words matter. Whenever and however we take on the role of one who thinks they can teach someone something or direct someone, we must be careful. God will judge our words, whether spoken or digital. Our words matter!

And James reminds us that we all mess up. We all stumble. But if you ever come across someone who seems to be “perfect,” then you’ll notice that their words are under control. The word “perfect” here means a mature or complete person - not sinless. We all sin and stumble to some extent, but the mature person is able to control their words. And their actions match their words. That’s what we want for our lives! We want our words and actions to reflect Jesus - the model of a perfect person and the maturity we are growing into. Shortly, we are going to find the secret to being able to be mature that allows us to have our words and actions under control.

But first, James gives us more warnings about our words in James 3:3-6 (pg. 826 - NIV) - ***3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.***

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Our words are prone to making “great boasts.” Our words reveal the pride in our hearts. Our words reveal and even betray our real heart which is often full of ourselves. Our words show us that in our heart we put ourselves first. And that’s the point I want to make clear today: **Watch your words, they reveal your true heart.** Want to know the condition of your heart or your character? Listen to your own words!

And our words are like a small spark that can set off an Arizona wildfire in June. While the tongue is small and almost hidden, it has great power. Words have great power. And careless words destroy. Everything James has said we already know! We know how powerful words are. We know that when our words are hurtful they come from the hurt inside us. Remember what we’ve said several times this past year - hurting people hurt people and words are the main way we do that.

So we want to know how do we control our words. I want to control my words. I’ll bet you do too! James continues in James 3:7-8 - ***7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*** Okay, if we stop here we can be totally discouraged. James says no one can tame the tongue. No one can really control their words. It is not as easy as putting a bit in our mouth or just being trained to say nice, good things. The poison just seems to keep flowing out of our mouths!

But we are not done yet. James continues in James 3:9-12 - ***9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*** How can the same mouth produce good words and bad words? We see this on facebook all the time. A person rants about someone or something that is laced with judgement and hate. Then they post a scripture. I cringe! God mourns! Even today, I’ll bet there were some of you that said some things to others in the car on the way here that were unkind and maybe even mean and then we come here and sing praises to God.

But it is here that now we get to the heart of matter. Let me review what James has said so far. Our words matter and they can damage and hurt people. Only the mature are able to control their words. But no human can control their words. Why? What are we to do? We have to go deeper than our words. Here’s the key question: where do our words come from?

James uses an analogy that our lives are like a spring of water. The spring is a picture that what comes out of us comes from somewhere deeper inside. The words come from our heart - from who we are inside. You see, our words reveal what is actually filling our heart. And that’s my point today from this scripture - **Watch your words, they reveal your true heart.** Do you want to know your heart is like? Listen to your words.

Now here’s a fascinating observation. We can come to church or in our prayer time use our words to praise God. And then as parents or spouses we can judge others as being

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“stupid,” “lazy,” “dumb,” or worse. Now here’s a critical conclusion that God through James wants us to see. When we use our words to praise God but hurt people it reveals something about our heart. It means we are religious. Religious people know what they are supposed to say in a religious context. But their words that hurt others reveals that their heart has not really been transformed by God. Religious people can say and even do some good things. And at the same time they can say and do some really ugly and even evil things. We call them hypocrites. That is what James is calling out. There is something wrong when good words and evil words come out of the same heart!

Jesus wants to transform our heart. For out of the heart flows everything. You probably don’t remember this, but when I introduced James a few weeks ago, I said that James takes the wisdom of Proverbs and mixes it with the teaching of Jesus. And right here we have an example. Let’s read Proverbs 4:23 (pg. 435 - NIV) - ***Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*** So we see this principle again. Everything flows from your heart - your words and actions! Then notice what Jesus says in Matthew 15:18 (pg. 668 - NIV) - ***But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.*** What comes out of our mouth is from our heart. Our words show us how messed up we are and reveal the condition of our heart.

Look at what comes out of your mouth! Imagine if for one week every word you spoke was digitally posted on your body for all to see. What would they see? If our words are continually negative, if we slander someone, if we continually gossip, if we curse people to their face or behind their back, if all we do is criticize and stop there, then we have to own up to the fact that our heart has not been transformed to be like Jesus. James says “THIS SHOULD NOT BE!” You have to look at where your words and actions are coming from. You have to look inside! What’s inside?

So here’s your assignment this week. It flows out of my main point. **Watch your words, they reveal your true heart.** So this week, watch your words. Notice what you say. Notice how you say things. To make it easier, pick one person that you regularly talk to. Or pick someone you struggle with. Watch your words this week. Take an inventory of what you say. Then before next Sunday answer this question: What do my words say about the condition of my heart?

If you know right now or discover this week that you are consistently critical, hurtful, negative, then you have a heart problem. If you can’t seem to control your words, then you have a heart problem. And there is only one cure for heart problems. Your heart needs to be cleaned up. You need to clean up the poison inside which at its root is pride. Your heart needs a make-over. It needs to be transformed. All change happens from the inside first and then it comes outside. Transformation is a inside then outside job - and not the reverse. And only God can change your heart. Only God can turn our pride and our selfishness into humility (I’ll talk more about that next week).

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So the place to start is in humility. Here's the core of humility - we admit to God our heart is full of ugly stuff. That's the starting point of any change. That's a church word called confession. We confess, we admit the ugly inside us.

Then you have to truly want God to change your heart. So you ask him. And that is no flippant request. That is an ask born out of internal pain. You come to the place where you really want to change. That's also a church word called repentance. You ask God to change your heart and you are willing to cooperate with him.

Now, there is one main application that applies to two kinds of people. The one application is this: our words and actions reveal the condition of our heart. You might be one of two kinds of people. First, you might be a person that has never really asked God to transform you on the inside. I urge you to get serious about that. You'll never be able to control your words and actions on your own. So don't wait. Be honest about your life, your words and actions. God gives you the choice and opportunity to decide to let him change you...or not. Make the decision to follow Jesus. Ask God to change you from the inside out. And next Sunday we are going to have an opportunity to complete that decision in baptism. Next Sunday is what we call baptism Sunday. Baptism is how you make your promise or vow to God to allow him to change your heart and your life. It is the beginning of a journey of following Jesus.

Now there's the second kind of person that James was writing to. Your words and actions also reflect a poison in your heart. But you made a decision once to follow Jesus already. You know the Bible. You go to church. You are religious, but not transformed. You learned to quit cussing, but you judge others, gossip, are hyper-critical and sometimes mean and it shows in your words. People can know the right stuff, go to the right church and on occasion do the right things - but resisted allowing God to change their heart. And your hurtful words are telling you that your heart needs to be transformed. It is never too late. Today is the day God wants to be invited to transform your heart. If you are ready, go over to Launching Point. It is a room with some godly people who can direct you to the resources to help you allow God to transform your heart.

What is so tempting for me in this message is just to encourage you to say nice things. The first part of my main point is "Watch your words." And we can hear that as "control your words." And the fact is, most of us want to say nice things, especially to those we truly love. There are some moms and dads here who really want to speak words of encouragement to their kids rather than harp on them all the time. There are some husbands and wives here who want to say how much they love and appreciate the other person on a regular basis. There are some bosses and managers here who want to be more encouraging and kind with their words to those they lead or supervise. So just do it! But we don't. Why? It is a matter of the heart. So, **Watch your words, they reveal your true heart.** We watch our words to see what our heart is like. So I've asked our band to lead us in a song. For this song, please stay seated. You can sing if you

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want to or not, but what I really want you to do is reflect on your words and what they reveal about your heart. Use this time to be real and honest before God.