

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions: The Power of the Tongue

What is your earliest memory of words someone used to either build you up or tear you down? Why do you think those memories stick with us for so long?

In your experience do negative comments or positive comments last longer in your memories?

In your experience, do people usually use words in a positive way or negative?

Which is more difficult for you - to share your faith in the way you speak or the way you live? Explain.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:1-6.

At the beginning of Chapter 3 James says, “let not many of you become teachers”, why do you think he says this? What point is he trying to emphasize in this statement?

How do rudders on ships and bits in horses’ mouths relate to the tongue? A forest set on fire by a small spark? What is James doing with these analogies?

Why is the tongue so hard for us to control? When, in your life, is this most true?

Like the bit in a horse’s mouth, James likened the control of speech to a small rudder that turns a large ship. Compared to the overall size of a ship, the rudder is small, yet has the power to steer the much larger vessel wherever the will of the pilot directs. In a similar way, the tongue has great power to control the rest of the body.

How does the tongue “corrupt the whole body” and set “the whole course of one’s life on fire”? Is James overstating things here? Have you seen the power of words revealed to this extent?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:7-12.

If verse 8 is true, then what hope do we have? How does Proverbs 18:21 help answer this question?

The point of the analogies is that believers need their tongues to be in submission to God. We must recognize our inability to tame the tongue. We must also recognize that our words are an indication of the heart, and therefore one’s true spiritual condition. As such, we need wisdom from above.

What can’t you do at the same time, according to verses 7-10?

Why isn’t behavior modification enough to fix the problem of words in a person’s life?

How do James' words about the tongue relate to James' theme: faith works?

What does it look like to turn to God for the controlling of our tongues?

God shows us our responsibility to speak the truth in love, taking the gospel to our neighbors and the nations. When authentic faith is present, words are used to draw people to Christ.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do you respond to the fact that you can't tame your tongue - does that make you feel helpless or does it free you up? Explain.

In what situation or relationship do you need to better recognize the importance of words?

For self reflection: What do your words reflect about you in your family? In your social circle? In your workplace? In your church? Does it matter? Why? How can we do better?

PRAYER

Thank God for the gift of words, particularly His Word that points us to love and truth. Ask God to help us control and tame our words so that we can bless Him and build one another up.