

Speak Life

Anybody here ever been hurt by the words someone said to you? Anyone ever hurt someone else by the words that you said to them?

Anybody here ever wish you could back and “undue” what you said to a friend, spouse, your child, your mom, dad, brother, sister, family member, boss, neighbor or a stranger?

Men speak on average 7000 words per day. Women on average, 20,000.

Teens – ever wish you could “undue” something you said to a parent in frustration or anger? *My story with my mom.* Parents?

We can never take back the careless words we have spoken. “I’m sorry” doesn’t take back the damage done. It’s kind of like squeezing toothpaste. Words come out so easily, but once it’s out, you can’t put them back in.

Our words can get us into trouble. Newscast: “*The war of words continues*”.

Words are powerful. What our mouth speaks, matters.

This is something I struggle with. This is something I consistently must guard against. Sometimes for me it’s an epic fail. It may be a struggle for you too.

And apparently the early church was struggling with something we often struggle with as well. There were some big issues with what was being said; the words that people are speaking to one another. Even the leaders are caught up in it.

James, who is a leader in the early church, writes this letter to the church, to Jewish Christ – followers, who are scattered from Jerusalem b/c of persecution.

James 1:26 – 27 (NIV) Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

James realized and is reminding the church, and we need to realize & be reminded as well that *words are powerful*. **What our mouth speaks, matters.**

Today we are going to be challenged to **Speak Life**. As followers of Jesus our mouths are to be used for what is good & true, to bless and not harm.

We can speak words that: heal or hurt. Are hopeful or hateful. Build - up or tear – down.

Words that boast in self, belittle others or brag about Christ. For many of us here today, our mouth is our undoing.

As Christ – followers we are called, we are commanded to **Speak Life**. Is that true of you? Is that true of me?

Do the words I speak honor the Savior I serve?

Think back on the past week. Think through your conversations at home, work, school, with your neighbor, with your friends, to your kids, spouse, parents, extended family.

Words are powerful. Words carry weight. What our mouth speaks, matters.

Proverbs 18:21a (ESV) Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

I would like to more consistently control what comes out of my mouth. My guess is many of you would like to as well. The natural question then would be, how? The real question we need to ask is “Why do I say what I say?”

James 3:1 (NIV) Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Why would teachers be judged more strictly? Teachers influence others to follow what they teach. Facilitate a Small group. Lead a Bible Study. Teach from this platform. Mentor men in Radical Mentoring or Mentor Women in Titus2 mentoring.

James doesn't say this, so we run away from teaching. It simply means that we should be careful how we *live* and in what we *teach*. We should study well & teach Biblical truth, knowing we will be accountable to God for *what we say* and *how we say it*.

James 3:2 (NIV) 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.

Anybody here perfect? Even if you're not a teacher you are not off the hook b/c we all have influence on others. We all stumble with our words at times.

Truth is, EVERY PERSON WHO HAS WALKED THE PLANET has had trouble keeping that little bitty powerful muscle (e.g. tongue) in its place. James reminds us that it totally impacts the rest of what we do with these bodies.

You see, *it's not the size of this that's so significant*. It's the incredible influence of this thing. James gives some examples that remind us that *words are powerful*. **What our mouth speaks, matters.**

James 3:3 – 4 (NIV) When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 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.

The tongue rests in the mouth much like a bit is in the horse's mouth. In both cases, a small thing moves & controls a large body.

The tongue is like the rudder of a ship. Just a small part of the ship turns the whole thing, so the tongue has great influence on the whole person.

James 3:5 (NIV) 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.

The tongue is like a spark of fire in the dry woods. Even a small spark can start a wildfire that can destroy land and lives.

One hateful word can destroy a fragile heart. One careless word can spark intense hurt that we never imagined. "But, I didn't mean too". A wound is no less painful when it's inflicted unintentionally. The tongue has the power to destroy relationships & decimate a community.

Words are powerful. What our mouth speaks, matters. It has influence.

Why do we say words that hurt others? That start a fire? That bring pain? That can be unkind & cutting?

Luke 6:45 (NLT) A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

The Tongue Reveals What the Heart Reflects.

Our speech is ultimately a heart issue. Whatever is reflected in our heart is eventually revealed by what we say. OUCH!

"What's down in the well will come up in the bucket".

Gossip - saying behind a person's back what you would never say face to face. **Lie & Slander** - saying what you KNOW is NOT TRUE to protect yourself or harm another.

Criticize - Willing to cut, but not willing to heal. **Boast** – make us the hero of the story. **Sarcasm** - Cutting comments sometimes camouflaged by humor.

James would say (and Jesus!), the tongue is revealing what the heart is reflecting.

James 3:6 (NIV) 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.

Why is the tongue called fire? Easily out of control. What it burns it destroys & is never the same again. It's a weapon Satan loves to use to set the record straight or have the last word. It does irreparable damage to others, especially those closest to us.

Satan knows all about hell (Gehenna). He knows his time is short. He knows he is going to hell & he wants to take as many people w/him as possible. It's what motivates him.

He knows this little muscle of the body can influence & corrupt the entire person. He wants Christ - followers to be burned by their words. He wants them to burn others with *their* poor choice of words. It happens in marriages, friendships, churches, business mtg.'s, parking lots after church & in cars on the way to church.

Our tongue can quickly & consistently be inflamed by hell itself. Nothing destroys community & our witness faster than sinful speech. Our words cannot only hurt others but lead them down a destructive path.

James 3:7 - 8 (NIV) All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Shamu at Sea World. Orca or *killer whales* weigh up to 6 tons. We can tame 12k whales but not this thing (tongue).

Notice James says “is”, not “was”. It didn’t become that; the tongue is that! James is describing his own tongue. And mine & yours. Elijah’s. Moses’s. King David’s. Abraham’s tongue. Peter. *He often opened his mouth to change feet*. Paul’s tongue.

“It’s not really that bad”. I can control it, for the most part.

Have you ever said something and as you were saying it thought, “I can’t believe this is coming out of my mouth”? Ever looked back after the emotion of a moment subsided and thought “I can’t believe I said that the way I did”?

I seldom regret what I did not say, but I often regret what I did say. Only Jesus was born w/o sin and lived a sinless life!

We shouldn’t be shocked when poison flows from our mouth. *The tongue is the official spokesman for our fallen nature*. If we are in this world there is going to be a struggle with our tongue. Our flesh and Satan will fight against it being tamed.

James 3:9 - 10 (NIV) With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

Many people misunderstand the biblical concept of cursing. When it condemns cursing, it’s not addressing profanity (it’s also not condoning it). In this verse cursing is clearly stated as a verbal attack, a hatred, a violence of heart towards *image bearers of our Creator*.

It’s a dehumanizing another person. It’s elevating myself above another human being created in the *likeness of God*.

We shouldn’t praise our great God and then curse those made in His likeness. If we leave this place, after praising our Creator, and begin to curse His creation...we have a problem. James says, “this should not be”. If it is, he has this to say to us:

James 3:11 – 12 (NIV) Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Springs are consistent. They pour out the same clear water, typically at the same temperature year-round. A fig tree cannot produce olives. If it keeps producing olives – it's an olive tree! A salt spring cannot produce fresh water. What it produces is the nature of what it is.

What James is saying is, as a Christ – follower, our tongue, the words we speak, should not be consistently inconsistent! “This should not be”.

I am not sharing anything new with most of us here. No earth-shattering revelation from God's Word today. But it is a HUGE REMINDER that James and Jesus want us to know that:

Words are powerful. What our mouth speaks, matters. **The Tongue Reveals What the Heart Reflects.**

What do we do? How can we speak life and not death? How can we consistently control the tongue when James says, “no human being can tame the tongue”? It's impossible! A human being cannot change a human heart. *Unless we turn somewhere else for help.*

Invite God to Consistently Control what we Consistently Cannot.

Our tongue is hopelessly inconsistent when we try to control it on our own. Only God has the power to control what we cannot.

You can try on your own. Double – down on your efforts. Try to change what and how you say things. Useless. It's frustrating. It's emotionally draining. Jesus didn't come for behavior modification but for *heart and life transformation*.

Start with Surrender – Humble admission that I can't do this on my own. My tongue is consistently inconsistent. God, please have your Spirit be my tongue filter today.

Speak with Caution – Once it's out, it's out. It can't go back in, just like toothpaste. The damage is done. Step back (pause) before you speak it.

Stay in Communication – Talk to God throughout the day. Stay close to him. We will fail. He knows that. If we stay close we can more readily sense his nudge to go and ask forgiveness for what we said that hurt, offended or cut someone else. God desires progress, not perfection.

Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging or timely for you in this week's teaching from James 3:1 – 12?

2. When have you personally felt the power of words to bless & encourage you? When have you comforted someone with the words you spoke?
3. Read James 3:1 – 2. Why do you think teachers will be judged more strictly? Are you “off the hook” if you are not in a teaching position? Why or why not?
4. Read James 3:3 – 8. What point do these illustrations make about our speech? Which illustration stood out the most vividly to you? Why?
5. How have you personally felt the destructive power of words? When have you hurt someone with your words?
6. What type of speech do you struggle with the most (gossip, judgmental, sarcastic, criticizing, jealous, prideful, slander, anger, etc.)? Around what group of people, or in what situations are you most likely to sin with your words? Is there a step you can take to help change that?
7. Read Luke 6:45. How do our words reveal what’s reflected in our hearts? How can careless words spoken by Christ – Followers be harmful to the reputation of the church and by association to Jesus Christ?
8. Read James 3:9 – 12. What point do these illustrations say about our speech? How can words reveal progress (not perfection) in “taming our tongue”?
9. Name three people to whom you can speak encouraging words of life this week (Do you need to start by apologizing for negative words you’ve said?). How can you bolster their confidence and/or their faith? Be as specific as possible as you speak words of life.

When you realize you are speaking badly about someone, *stop*, even if it’s in mid – sentence. Come up with a phrase to run through your mind in those cases. Close in prayer, reminding one another of the power of words & the opportunities to encourage, bless and **speak life** to others around us. What our mouth speaks, matters.