



JAMES 3:1-12

TAMING THE TONGUE

BEGIN BY READING JAMES 3:1-12 TOGETHER:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² 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. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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! ⁶ 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. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

NOTE: *After you read the passage together, pray, and then allow for a few minutes of silence so that you and your students can read over the passage again and start to think about it. This may feel awkward at first, but it's vital to allow for some reflection time before diving into the questions.*

When you're ready, begin the discussion by going through the following questions:

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

1. How does James 3:1-12 connect to James 1:26-27?

NOTE: In James 1:26-27, James introduces key ideas that will make up the rest of the letter. In vs. 26 he introduces the idea of taming the tongue saying, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.”

This follows James’ theme of hearing and doing the Word. The way we use our tongues reflects whether our hearts have truly been transformed by hearing and believing the good news about Jesus.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

NOTE: As you go through these questions, give your students time and silence to really look at the text to see what God is revealing to them personally. Be patient with them as they seek to flesh out what they are seeing in God’s Word.

1. **Is there anything that encourages you as you read this passage?**
2. **Is there anything that challenges you as you read this passage?**

RESPONSE QUESTIONS

NOTE: This is a striking, convicting passage. In these verses James uses powerful illustrations to paint a picture of how dangerous our words are. The tongue is a small part of our body, but like the bridle of a horse or the rudder of a ship it can move us in a certain direction, and often it directs us into sin. The tongue is a small fire that sets us ablaze in unrighteousness, it is a restless evil full of deadly poison. It is used one moment to bless God, and the next to curse those made in God’s image. These illustrations show us the seriousness of the sin we are often led into by our tongues, and they call us to repent or turn away from this sin.

1. **What kind of illustrations does James use to describe the tongue?**

2. Why do you think he uses these illustrations?

3. How are you doing with taming your tongue?

CHRIST CONNECTION

NOTE: *This section reveals to us the importance of our words. How we use our tongues reveals the true nature of our hearts, and often our words show us how selfish and broken we are. It's important for us to see the reality of our sin, because it is godly sorrow over sin that leads to repentance; to turning away from sin and back to Christ.*

Jesus is the perfect Word of God, who took on human flesh (John 1). He is God's perfect Word to us, the perfect revelation of the Father. During His time on earth Christ perfectly used his words: to teach, to heal, to forgive sins, to pray. He never used His words destructively or carelessly. He always glorified God in how he talked, without any hint of hypocrisy or falsehood.

When Jesus went to the cross, He exchanged His perfection for our sin. He bore the full weight of God's judgment for the sins we commit with our tongues, and His perfect record was given to us. In Christ we can stand before God and be declared innocent, as if we never uttered a sinful word in our lives. This is because when we come to God in Christ, when we place our faith in Him, our sin is forgiven and we are covered by His perfect righteousness.

So when we use our words sinfully, we can turn to Christ and find forgiveness, and we can remember that we are accepted not because of our own perfection, but because of Christ, the perfect Word of God. Knowing this, believing this, and remembering this should give us a greater desire to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, use our words to glorify God and bless other people.