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WHEN HAVE YOUR WORDS GOTTEN YOU IN TROUBLE?

Faith on Display in Your Conversations

The POINT >

When you rely on God, your words reflect His character.

> JAMES 3:1-5a,9-10,13-18

¹Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body. ³Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies. ⁴And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things.

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⁹With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.

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¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? By his good conduct he should show that his works are done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and deny the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. ¹⁸And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.

Message to Leaders

Through Scripture, God spoke to His people, revealing Himself and the ways He'd have us live. The Holy Spirit inspired real-life people to write down God's very words. Though Scripture has been completed, the Holy Spirit still works in the hearts and minds of God's people to communicate His truths to others. Our words certainly don't have the same authority as Scripture. Still, they matter a lot!

› Engage Option 1

Select two students to come up front for a challenge. Say the beginning of famous quotes or sayings from history, pop culture, and the Bible (e.g., "Four score and...", "In the beginning...", and "Never gonna give you up...") and challenge students to finish the quotes or sayings. Give bonus points for identifying where the quote comes from. Say, **"Words carry a great deal of weight, and we can point others to God when we use words that are reflective of His character."**

› Engage Option 2

Post harmful and encouraging words and phrases throughout the room that people say to each other. Say, **"We must carefully use our words to love others and point them to Christ rather than doing harm."**

› Engage Option 3

Search the internet for "The Power of Words - The Village Church Resources." Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **"Our words have the power to build others up and tear them down. As Christians, we're called to lift one another up with our speech."**

NOTE: Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

ITEM 4: Consider displaying **The Source of Speech Poster** as you study verses 9-10. Challenge students to consider the source of their words.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.



THE SETTING

James addressed two subjects in this chapter—the tongue and godly wisdom—and he actually devoted more space to our words. James likely intended for his readers to recall what he had written in the first chapter (1:26) about controlling the tongue. While some suggest this portion mainly addressed those who taught or who desired to teach, James likely addressed the church in general because of the power of our words.

FACT:

Embarrassment holds a purpose. It's the emotional equivalent to touching a hot stove—we learn not to make the same social mistakes again.²

It is estimated that people spend fifty-two minutes a day talking about someone who is not present. Of those conversations:

- Ten percent are positive or flattering
- Seventy-five percent are neutral
- Fifteen percent are negative.¹

Recently, a friend had a guy ask her out on a date over text. She screen-captured the conversation and sent it to her best friend with the caption, “Oh no! This is a nightmare! He doesn’t get it!”

Except she hadn’t sent it to her best friend. She’d accidentally responded to the guy who’d asked her out. She was embarrassed. He was humiliated. And their friendship was impacted in a big way because of the words she’d chosen. Gossip means specifically to reveal secrets or to spread scandalous information. It’s not wrong to talk about people, as long as we’re lifting them up to others. However, when we say things that are unflattering or that tear them down, we’re acting as gossips and our words have serious consequences.

Most of the time people do not hear what is being said about them. But what if they did? Our words matter.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

JAMES 3:1-5a

Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body. Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies. And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. **JAMES 3:1-5a**

In our last session, we saw that James taught that faith isn't just a matter of what we say, but what we do (James 2:14-26). We need to understand that James wasn't implying that our words are not important. They are. Very important! And James helps us to see just how important they are.

On average, people speak about 16,000 words in a day. That's a lot of words, and it can be easy to lose the importance of single words. But think about this—single words or phrases can be extremely important:

- Ask the father who just heard his daughter say “I do” on her wedding day.
- Ask the mother who anxiously waits for her child's first word.
- Ask the nervous patient waiting for the doctor to share if the test results are positive or negative.

Words matter. They can destroy. Or they can give hope. Our words have the power to instruct, inspire, encourage, and motivate. A teacher's words make a difference in her students' lives. In fact, the words she speaks are so important that the very act of teaching invites a stricter judgment. Teachers will give account for how they exercise that power to communicate.

Jesus also had a lot to say about the consequences teachers will suffer who lead their students astray (see Matt. 5:19; 18:6). However, it is not just teachers who will be held accountable for their words. The truth is that we will all be judged by our words. Jesus said, “I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak” (Matt. 12:36).

James used the examples of horses and ships to illustrate how they are controlled by very small devices. A bridle bit weighs a pound or so, yet a rider uses it to guide an 1,800-pound horse. A rudder is very small compared to the ship, yet the captain uses it to steer the entire vessel. In the same way, though “the tongue is a small part of the body” (James 3:5), it is very powerful in its effect—for good or bad. Harsh words or untrue words can destroy others just as a small spark can start a wildfire that destroys a large forest. We've surely all experienced the effects of harsh or careless words. Like James, Paul also challenged his readers to use their words carefully, avoiding the use of obscene and foolish talking or crude joking (Eph. 5:4). Words are very powerful. Let's make sure we use them in the right ways.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 30)

- 1** When has a sensitive situation forced you to choose your words carefully?
- 2** What are some of the consequences of an uncontrolled tongue?



IMPART

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

JAMES 3:9-10

With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way. **JAMES 3:9-10**

The tongue can be used for good or evil, and James pointed out just how inconsistent we can be with our words. At times, we use our tongues to bless God, but at other times, we speak unkindly or hurtfully to people created in His image.

This teaching can be discouraging, or even seem hopeless. After all, many people have felt the guilt of having hurt someone with their words and promised never to do it again. But before they know what's happened, the old bad habit pops up and harsh words come out. However, James's point is not that the situation is hopeless. Rather, because our tongues are tempted toward evil, we must continually be on guard, paying attention to every word we say.

Relying only on our own self-control is not the answer. The only way we can use our tongue consistently for God's good purposes is to submit to God's control in our lives. James gave a couple examples:

- **A good spring doesn't produce bitter water.**
- **A fig tree doesn't produce olives.**

Here's the point: the source determines the product.

If we lack self-control in the area of our words, then we'll naturally be inclined toward complaining, gossip, harsh criticism, or even sarcasm. And the source of these kinds of words is the flesh (the fallen nature that is opposed to following God). However, when we live by the Spirit, which means He will be the source of our words, the things we say will always serve to build others up and point people to Jesus.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul called the church to think continually about the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and praiseworthy. Considering our words are the expression of our thoughts, we must be careful to make sure our thoughts and words align with these values. At times, this might require us to slow down and think before speaking (which is a good idea). But dealing with a few seconds of awkward silence is far better than dealing with a mess created by destructive words.

Whether we need to get a handle on complaining, gossip, hurtful sarcasm, mistruths, or coarse joking, we need to choose to allow God to be the source of our words, prayerfully depending on Him to be at work in our lives. We are called to be wise, and wise people speak in ways that bless others, pointing them to the goodness of God.

We are called to be wise, and wise people speak in ways that bless others, pointing them to the goodness of God. #BSFLFaithLivedOut

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 31)

- 3** Why is inconsistency in the ways we use our words such a big deal?
- 4** What effect has technology (social media/texting) had on the way we use our words?
- 5** How do our words give others a glimpse into our souls?



IMPART

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

JAMES 3:13-18

Who among you is wise and understanding? By his good conduct he should show that his works are done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace. **JAMES 3:13-18**

In James 1:5-6, James promised that God gives wisdom to those who ask in faith. Now, James returned to this same idea to show how important wisdom really is. Of course, our words are to be guided by wisdom. However, just to say the right things is never enough—we must also live out the truths we speak. When our lives are guided by God's wisdom, right thoughts and desires provide the foundation for right words and actions. And one defining characteristic James listed is this: wisdom leads us to deal with others with gentleness.

James contrasted earthly “wisdom” with true heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom is expressed through living selfishly, which is in stark contrast to the ways Jesus lived. James further characterized earthly wisdom as:

- **Unspiritual:** It is self-centered wisdom and totally void of godly influence.
- **Demonic:** This escalates the idea a step further. Earthly wisdom is characterized by the desires and ways of the forces of darkness.

The types of wisdom that are opposed to God are characterized primarily by “selfish ambition and bitter envy.” It's not difficult to identify ways that people all around live selfishly and with little regard for others. And when others get ahead, they feel envious. Further, earthly wisdom denies the truth about Jesus and God's purposes in the world.

Heavenly wisdom is different. Instead of thinking first of self, it's set on blessing others. And because true wisdom believes the truth about Jesus, it moves people to live in the ways that Jesus lived. James said that heavenly wisdom is:

- **Pure:** Morally perfect, free from any defects
- **Peace-loving:** Whole, leads us to whole relationships with God and others
- **Gentle:** Gracious and patient with others
- **Compliant:** Reasonable and agreeable, not argumentative
- **Full of mercy and good fruits:** Displaying kindness and goodness
- **Unwavering:** Steady and faithful
- **Without pretense:** Genuine, honest, and sincere

If we live selfishly, then we're living according to the “demonic” wisdom of the world. This fails to honor Jesus and will ultimately lead to the unwise being cut off from God's blessings. However, when we pursue true wisdom, God will enable us to speak in ways that build others up and live in ways that reflect the goodness of Christ. Let's live by the wisdom from above in all we say and do.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 31)

6 Why is gentleness so important in our daily lives?

7 How does heavenly wisdom differ from earthly wisdom?

8 How can we evaluate whether or not our words reflect God's character?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.

Through Scripture, God spoke to His people, revealing Himself and the ways He'd have us live. The Holy Spirit inspired real-life people to write down God's very words. Though Scripture has been completed, the Holy Spirit still works in the hearts and minds of God's people to communicate His truths to others. Our words certainly don't have the same authority as Scripture. Still, they matter a lot!

>CHRIST

9 Memorize Philippians 4:8 so that you can recall it when you are tempted to gossip or make sarcastic remarks. Begin by writing it below:

GOD

JESUS

HOLY SPIRIT

BIBLE

SALVATION

CREATION

CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY

COMMUNITY
& WORLD



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // WHEN YOU RELY ON GOD, YOUR WORDS REFLECT HIS CHARACTER.

> COMMUNITY

The church is to be known by the unity that exists among its members. There are few things that damage unity more than gossip. Make it a point never to speak negatively about others in your church (or anyone for that matter). Instead, choose to speak well of others.

10 This week, share with three friends something specific you really appreciate about them.



> CULTURE

You might have heard the quote, “Preach the gospel at all times, and, if necessary, use words.” This is a nice sentiment—our lives are to be living pictures of the gospel. However, we must realize that words are necessary. Understand these things:

- > When Christians use words that tear down, we will turn people away from Jesus.
- > When we speak positively and display unity within the church, people are drawn to Jesus.

11 This week, choose to display unity to your non-believing friends. Choose to share the gospel, not only through your life, but through your words.