

GLENKIRK CHURCH



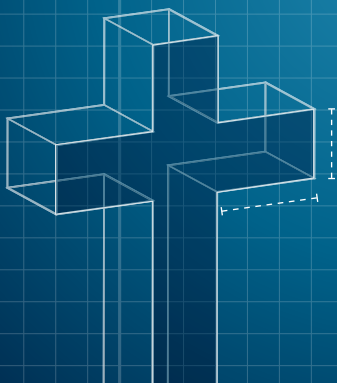
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

OCTOBER 4 - 8, 2021

FAITH WORK

the book of
James



MONDAY

James 3:1

It is not an exaggeration to say that a great teacher can change a student's life. There is an endless number of great teacher stories that attest to the benefits of a strong relationship between an educator and pupil. Teaching is a great responsibility and paradoxically will enrich your growth as you lead others in their growth. The role of teacher is essential in the church.

Teaching is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift ... is teaching, then teach"* (Romans 12:6-7). In this context, teaching refers to the God-given ability to explain God's Word; the teacher has the supernatural ability to clearly instruct and communicate knowledge, specifically the doctrines of the faith and truths of the Bible (1 Corinthians 12:27-29). James reminds us that being among the teachers in God's church is more than a matter of having natural or even spiritual gifts; there is an additional dimension of appropriate character and right living. Hence the warning that teaching is a serious responsibility. God will judge teachers on the last day with special strictness on account of their influence over others.

Some teach and lead in the church because God has called them to do so. For thousands of years God has asked and equipped teachers to participate in the work of helping others know God and live as people of faith. These teachers have come in many shapes and forms, from many backgrounds, and with many levels of ability.

But each has somehow heard a call to teach and has responded. God's call can come in many ways:

- Through the voice of a friend
- Through prayerful discernment
- From the challenge of a sermon
- By identifying your spiritual gifts
- Upon seeing a need and responding
- Through the strong movement of the Holy Spirit
- Even by the seeming accident as you “fall” into teaching

God does not call us and then leave us alone (Matthew 28:18-19). Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say now when we need them (Luke 12:12).

QUESTIONS

How have you been influenced positively or negatively by a teacher—whether in church or in a secular setting? What feelings did that person bring into your life with his or her words?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRY

Pray for Living Stones Ministry's growing children's book series, which addresses gender and sexuality from a biblical perspective. Pray for the young hearts being reached through these books and for all children who need to be assured of their God-given identity. Pray that God will help LSM get these books into schools, libraries, and churches.

TUESDAY

James 3:2-5a

As we move into chapter 3, James moves from preaching to application. He has made it clear that authentic faith *works*. If God has changed your heart through a new birth, the saving faith that He granted to you will show itself in a life of good deeds. But He moves from the generality of good deeds to the specific words that you speak. Authentic faith yields to Christ's lordship over your tongue.

James declares that "we all" stumble in many ways—how perceptive and important to see he included himself—but he makes clear that the person who can discipline his tongue gives evidence that he can control his whole body. He proves he is a mature (perfect) person.

In selecting the bit and a rudder as examples (James 3-4), James identifies two objects that are small of themselves, yet exercise great power, just like the tongue. A small bit enables the rider to exert control of a powerful horse, and a small rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue must overcome contrary forces. We have an old sin nature that wants to control us and make us sin. There are circumstances around us that make us say things we ought not to say. Sin on the inside and pressures on the outside are seeking to get control of the tongue.

James's point of comparison is not so much the matter of control (the tongue does not really control the body), but of the inordinate

influence of such a small part (3:5a): *“So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.”* James is saying, “Don’t underestimate the power of the tongue, because if you do, you won’t be able to tame it.”

Have you ever heard this familiar children’s taunt: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”? The entirety of God’s Word teaches to the contrary! I spent many years as a kid and adult acting like the cruel words of others did not hurt me when they deeply harmed me. The book of Proverbs has much to say about the tongue’s power either for good or for evil; i.e., *“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”* (Proverbs 12:18).

James wants us to recognize that we will be held accountable for how we use our tongues (conversations, texts, emails, letters). He wants us to recognize the inordinate power of the tongue, either for good or for evil, so that we use it carefully.

QUESTIONS

As your word (tongue) is powerful for good, how are you using it? And conversely, as your tongue is powerful to do evil, what are you doing to control it?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRY

Pray for Living Stones Ministry’s support group leaders as they minister to many families through both in-person and online meetings. Pray also that those who attend these groups will be encouraged and strengthened by others who are walking the same journey. Pray that each person will feel comfortable enough to share his/her concerns and heartaches.

WEDNESDAY

James 3:5b-8

James is a savvy pastor comparing the damage that a tongue can do to a raging fire—the tongue’s wickedness has its source in hell itself. The uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. Many Christians are repelled by sins like child molestation, murder, or homosexuality as being spiritually depraved. Yet we tolerate gossip, slander, deceit, sarcastic put-downs, half-truths, and other sins of the tongue as if they are no big deal. James says that all such sins have their origin in the pit of hell. They defile the one committing them, separating him/her from God. They destroy others. As a believer in Christ, you must confront these sins in yourself.

A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire (3:5b). Fire spreads, and the more fuel you give it, the farther and faster it burns and destroys. James suggests that the whole person’s life can be corrupted by the uncontrolled tongue. Time does not correct the sins of the tongue. How often have you wished to “take back” something you said to someone or about someone? With the advent of the internet, our words can go viral, spreading with an unpredictable ferociousness to damage or destroy reputations, marriages, families, ministries, and more.

James also compares the uncontrolled tongue to a dangerous animal. It is restless and cannot be ruled, and it seeks its prey to kill and consume. While in Africa years ago, I was able to do a safari seeing former “zoo” animals in their habitats. One scene I will always remember was of a lion pride casually consuming an okapi for breakfast. We have seen many dangerous animals tamed, but James says there is one that cannot be tamed: the human tongue. He adds, “*It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*” (3:8b). Being restless means there is never a time when the tongue sleeps. You must always be on guard against it.

James does not say that the tongue is untamable. He says that *no one* can tame it. It is humanly untamable. Only God can tame the tongue. When the Holy Spirit controls your heart daily, over time the fruit of the Spirit will appear. These include love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), which all relate to the control of the tongue. To tame the tongue, we must walk daily in the Spirit, “*taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

QUESTIONS

When have the words of a fellow brother or sister in Christ impacted (set fire to) you positively or negatively? What changes would you make to what you say and what you don't say when you reflect on these words from James?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRY

Pray for the Living Stones Ministries staff and board of directors. We want to be open and sensitive to God's leading in every aspect of this ministry. Pray that God will protect us and our families as we continue to proclaim His message of healing to hurting families and help them move forward in hope.

THURSDAY

James 3:10

“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.” (James 3:10)

“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles” (Proverbs 21:23). The book of Proverbs has much to say about wisdom and our mouths. The principle taught in this verse is one of the most empirically obvious in God’s creation, but most of us will still need remedial courses to learn the lesson. How many times do we roll our eyes and think, “How could I have said something so idiotic” (mean, cruel, stupid, insensitive, politically incorrect)?

We can keep our souls from trouble—the trouble that comes from the nagging guilt after saying the wrong things—only if we actively guard our mouths. Here are some suggestions that can change the words you choose:

- Every morning, ask God for wisdom about your words.
- Before any significant conversation, take a minute to define your goals. Also, identify any topics or issues to avoid or treat with diplomacy.
- Watch out for any temptation to use sarcasm to get a laugh.
- In conversations, be aware that words can kill or cure. If you feel emotions rising, take a deep breath and don’t let your words fly!
- Ask a fellow believer to hold you accountable for your words (speaking the truth in love).

“I have never had to apologize for something I did not say.”
(Ike Reighard)

James wants us to connect our genuine faith with the words we speak—not just at church but in every circumstance. Genuine faith yields to Christ’s lordship over your tongue. David prayed, “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). The ongoing battle to tame the tongue is real; to become spiritually mature, we must wage war daily on this front.

QUESTIONS

In what specific situations does your mouth get you into trouble?
What steps will you take to guard your mouth?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRY

Pray for the hurting family members who will read our new book, *Moving Forward in Hope: A Devotional for Families of LGBTQ+ Loved Ones*. Ask God to fill these readers with His love, encouragement, and peace as they read the stories of others who are walking their journey and learning to trust God in it.

FRIDAY

James 3:9-12; Psalm 19:14

James, no doubt, observed many inconsistencies that Christians were expressing as he led them. He wanted his brothers and sisters to recognize these inconsistencies at their source, the heart. He speaks about fountains and fruit. Where there is inconsistency, he declares, *“This is not right!”* (3:10b). His point is the same as that of Jesus: *“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”* (Matthew 12:34). Jesus also said, *“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man”* (Matthew 15:18). We may try to hide what we really think about a person or a situation, but sooner or later, our words will reflect our beliefs. For most of us, aligning our hearts and our words is difficult, and it requires necessary reflection, prayer and discipleship—like a Small Group dedicated to studying James.

For those who are serious about following Christ, alignment doesn't stop with our hearts and our mouths. We need to align both with the character and purposes of God so that what we say and what we believe reflect God's heart at work in us.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength, and my Redeemer.”
(Psalm 19:14)

What is “acceptable” in God’s sight? God delights in our acts of kindness and goodness. What we do to meet the needs of the poor and needy—the homeless, widows, single moms, lonely adults, foster children, etc.—are acceptable actions. Our words and actions of forgiveness of the those who have hurt us and our refraining from speaking poisonous words are acceptable actions. God loves when we are honest about our faults and when we have broken hearts because He knows He has our attention. Then He can reveal the secret of His love to us, and our hearts are filled with God’s love.

Our words serve as a barometer, reflecting the content of our hearts and indicating the desire for change. The more we value God’s grace, His wisdom, and His strength, the more we’ll long for every part of us—especially our words and hearts—to be in alignment with Him.

QUESTIONS

What did your mouth reflect about your heart in the past twenty-four hours? What are some things you can do to align your words with your heart, with God’s character, and with God’s purposes?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRY

Pray for all those caught in the LGBTQ+ lifestyle and for children and teens who are confused about their God-given identity. Pray that they will come to know Him as their Savior and King, for He is the only one who can meet their deepest needs and heal their deepest wounds.

Sources

- Ike Reighard's quote can be found in *One Year Daily Insights with Zig Ziglar and Dr. Ike Reighard* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2009), February 15 entry.

