



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, September 11-17 (B) – James 3:1-12

Focus: Taming our Tongue

word of life

“From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.” (James 3:10 NRSV)

Read James 4:1-12

The Letter of James is all about action—doing the word and living the faith. This includes controlling the tongue. This theme was introduced in chapter one, “If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.” (James 1:26 NRSV)

Controlling the tongue is a major concern of the author and the main emphasis of this passage. The tongue is small, but impacts the whole of the human body as well as other people. Words can be used for positive means, but words also can make a negative impact. A variety of metaphors is used to illustrate the power of the tongue—to build up or to tear down.

1. *Do you agree with this emphasis on Christians controlling their words? Explain.*
2. *Give examples when Christians use their words for positive or negative.*

The example of a forest fire started by a small flame is a vivid illustration of the power of something small with a capacity to grow to something large, sometimes to out-of control proportions. “And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:6 NRSV) This controversial verse contains an intriguing phrase, *the cycle of nature*. Sometimes this phrase is translated *world of unrighteousness* or *cycle of becoming*.

3. *What do you think “cycle of nature” means in this context?*
4. *How might our words stain the whole body?*
5. *How might our words ignite a chain reaction?*

The author of James warns those who desire to teach. In fact, not many *should* become teachers, primarily because they cannot control their tongue. Those who teach are held to a more severe standard. There is acknowledgement that all people make mistakes and speak in ways less than perfect.

Fortunately, the tongue can be controlled. The author of James offers vivid examples. Consider how a bridle controls a wild horse, despite the small size of the bit. Or, think how a small rudder on a ship steers a large ship through calm seas and strong winds. The pilot simply guides the rudder. In the same way, our mouth and the words which come from our tongue can *and should* be controlled.

6. *What situations make it challenging for people to control their tongues?*

Once a pattern and priority of using words for good is established, hopefully it becomes part of our personal DNA. It is like a fresh spring which consistently holds fresh water, not salty; or a fig tree which bears figs, not figs and olives. “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.” (James 3:10 NRSV) Like many patterns of behavior, it is a habit and a choice—one that reflects the value system of a Christian.

7. *Which metaphor in this passage speaks to you?*
8. *Summarize this passage in your own words.*

word among us

“Ouch!” His words stung to the core.

It is not that his words were untrue or inaccurate. Probably, the naked truth of his words added an extra punch. But, there seemed to be an emerging pattern as late. He uttered more words which stung and fewer words of encouragement.

To be honest, he was never an exuberant cheerleader. Never. Over the years as he aged, it seemed like he had lost his internal filtering system. He seemed to say whatever he thought – no matter how much it hurt the listener.

1. *Give examples of words which hurt.*
2. *As people age, do you believe people can mellow and become softer with their words? Explain your answer.*

In times past, it was a common practice to wash out a child’s mouth with soap in order to tame the tongue. You don’t hear adults doing that today.

3. *When you were a child, how were you taught to “tame your tongue”?*
4. *How does a person today learn to “tame their tongue”?*
5. *What advice can you give” on taming the tongue”?*

This passage from the Letter of James makes a statement as well as poses a problem. “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.” (James 3:10 NRSV)

6. *Can you relate to this concern about taming the tongue? Explain.*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people.

What could be more practical than a lesson about our words? Taming our tongue is fundamental to communication and relationship-building. We all need ways to filter our thoughts before they are spoken. Extroverts may struggle with this passage more than true introverts who tend to ponder all things before speaking.

When we are baptized we are claimed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God in Jesus Christ claims all of us—including our tongue. We are to use our gifts and abilities to build up the body of Christ.

Unlike an out-of-control forest fire, our words can give warmth, consolation, and hope. Like a spring overflowing with fresh, clear water, we can give refreshment through our words.

7. *What can you do on a daily basis to assure your words are blessing?*
8. *How do you hope your words spoken today and this week impact people?*

Prayer

Creator of all, you spoke the word and creation came to be. Use our words to be a blessing. Amen

last word

Watch and listen. Discover if your tongue needs taming.

Daily Faith Practices

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