

Taming The Tongue

James 3:1-12

MEMORY VERSE

JAMES 3:5

“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Either one small (travel size) tube of toothpaste for each child, or use one large tube of toothpaste and you demonstrate the activity instead of the children participating; paper plates and plastic knives.

Several ping pong balls, a table, and masking tape.

Card stock paper, markers, scissors and a copy of the “Megaphone Mania” curriculum template for each child (copied onto card stock or thick paper).

ATTENTION GETTER!

“You Can’t Take It Back”

For this activity you will need either one small (travel size) tube of toothpaste for each child, or use one large tube of toothpaste, paper plates, and plastic knives.

If you use the large tube of toothpaste, you will be demonstrating the activity instead of the children participating.

If you go with the idea of all the children participating, give each child a small (travel size) toothpaste.

At the same time instruct the children to squeeze out all of the contents of their toothpaste onto the paper plate. Next instruct the children to use their plastic knife to get all of the toothpaste back into the tube.

Obviously the children will not be able to get all of their toothpaste back into the tube. Have the children throw away their paper plates and plastic knives. Gather the children and explain that we will be learning about our words today. Just like the tube of toothpaste we find that once the words get out of our mouth it is very difficult to get them back. That is why we need to be careful about what we say.

As an option you can do the same thing with one tube of toothpaste and just demonstrate it yourself. **God wants us to watch what we say.**

LESSON TIME!

Today we are going to learn about controlling our tongues. The words that we use can be used to build people up or to tear them down. We have to be careful about what we say to others. God is concerned with what we say because He wants us to use our words to encourage and love one another. In our lesson this week we are studying James chapter 3. We will learn more about this little part of our bodies called the tongue and that **God wants us to watch what we say.**

JAMES 3:1-5a

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

Have you ever felt like maybe you would want to be a teacher? Teachers especially have to be careful with what they say. James is sharing that everyone should not become teachers because teachers will receive the stricter judgment. In other words, God is going to look closer at the lives of those who teach God's Word. It is important for us who would stand up before others and teach God's Word that we are living it out in our own lives.

God holds the job of teaching in high regard. It is an important position. A lot of people think teachers "know it all." If a person is a teacher of children, very often that child will believe everything that teacher says. Have you ever heard a child have a conversation with his mom when he has said, "That's not what my teachers says"? Teachers of the Word of God then have a big responsibility to study the Word of God so they do not misrepresent our Lord. James is telling us here that being a teacher is a serious job! It is very much a blessing to be a teacher, but at the same time it is a great responsibility.

Next James reminds us that we all stumble in many ways. In other words, we all make mistakes, but if we could control our tongues then that would be a true sign of being a mature believer (perfect here means mature or complete). To be a mature Christian means to have the fruit of self-control coming out of our lives. Controlling our tongues is a very hard thing, but when we truly have our tongues, and what we say under the control of the Holy Spirit then we are growing in Jesus. If we could control our tongues then we can also control other parts of our lives.

To give us an idea of how powerful our tongues are, James gives an example of a bit in a horse's mouth. A bit is a small piece of metal that is placed in a horse's mouth. When the horse's owner wants to move in a certain direction or stop or go then all they need to do is pull or turn the bit in the horse's mouth. That small piece of metal will turn the entire body of that strong horse. In the same way our little tiny tongues can control our entire lives.

We have to be careful with what comes out of our mouths. What we say matters. Who has heard the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me"? It's just not true. Words can and do hurt.

Another picture we are given is that of a large ship. Has anyone ever seen the little rudder at the tail end of a huge ship? A small thing like a rudder can help get a huge ship through a storm. A small thing like our tongue can change the course of our lives if we do not use it correctly, if we do not steer it the right way. Just like the captain of a ship, we need to stay at the helm all during the storm so we can bring the ship to safety. Proverbs 6:16, 17 say there are seven things God hates. A lying tongue is one of them. Let that not be us as we grow up in the ways of the Lord. **God wants us to watch what we say.**

Windstorms and Ping-Pong Balls

For this game you will need several ping-pong balls, a table, and masking tape. Tape a strip of making tape down the center of the table to make two sides (rectangle tables work best). Divide your class into two teams and have them each gather at the two ends of the table.

Set one ping-pong ball at the center of the table and explain to the children that they cannot touch the ping-pong ball or cross the line. They should have their hands behind their backs. Then with only wind power (blowing with their mouths) they are to try to get the ball to go onto their opponent's side and off the table. Each time a team does that they will get one point.

You may add additional ping-pong balls to make it more challenging. Continue play until the children tire of the game. Add up the points and declare a winner. You can tie in the lesson by asking the children what is inside of a ping-pong ball (nothing). In the same way our words can sometimes be empty or without purpose. **God wants us to watch what we say.**

JAMES 3:5b-8

See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

James is very strongly telling us how dangerous our tongues can be to our lives and to the lives around us. Has anyone ever seen a forest fire burning on the news or in person? In California, we have a lot of forest fires every summer. They can burn up thousands of acres of forests and kill thousands of animals and even burn down whole neighborhoods or small towns overnight! They start with one small spark. Our tongues can be a blessing or if they are out of control they can be a curse. (See Proverbs 10:8, 11, 13, 14, 18-21, 31, 32; 12:18)

Can anyone remember a disciple of Jesus' that said some words that he regretted the rest of his life? The night Jesus was arrested and all of his disciples were afraid and ran for their lives? That is right, it was Peter. (See Matthew 26:31-35; John 18:15-27; Mark 14:66-72) But do not forget too, how that later Jesus restored Peter's faith and forgave him (John 21) and it was Peter that gave the first great sermon of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). He used his tongue to bless many others.

One important thing to keep in mind: like a fire, the tongue can burn through a church, through a town, a community or a nation and most certainly it wrecks families all the time. Improper use of the tongue is mentioned more times in the Bible than drinking alcohol, so it must be very important.

A famous lion tamer was seen getting into a cage with four or five lion cubs, playing with them and talking with them. The boys who were watching him asked, "Why do you wrestle with them like that?" He said, "You can't train an old lion. I raise my lions from cubs and when they are fierce, grown up lions I take them into the cage with me. But I know them and they know me."

We have probably all seen animal shows with elephants, tigers, bears, seals, walruses, birds, whales and dolphins where they have been trained to do a human's bidding. But the Lord says we cannot tame the tongue the same way! How sad. A famous saying is "It takes two years for a human to learn to talk, and it takes at least fifty years for him to learn to keep quiet." It is hard to tame the tongue, but it can be done through God's Holy Spirit. **God wants us to watch what we say.**

JAMES 3:9-12

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

Paul said in Romans 10:9 that if we confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts we shall be saved. Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Our heart and our tongue work together every day. What is in our hearts is going to come out of our mouths sometime. Do you see why He gives us a new heart when we get saved? (Ezekiel 36:26, 27) Why He changes us from the inside out? (2 Corinthians 3:1-3; Rom. 12:1-2) Why He gives us His word to put in our hearts? (Psalm 119:11)

Remember how special it is that we have the gift of speech. We are not like mockingbirds that can only copy sounds he has heard. Man can communicate with God almighty. Some people who are in the world are miserable, but maybe they do not want to be a Christian because they had a bad experience with someone in their life at some time. Words can hurt for a long time when we aren't careful...

God does not want us to praise His name on Sundays and then go to school and call people names on Monday through Friday. It is not right! James tells us that is like a fig tree bearing olives or a spring that has fresh water and then has salt water coming out of it. If this is a habit of our lives, God reminds us to test our faith. See what is really in our hearts. Do we really have the Spirit of Jesus in there? Are we really learning to fear the Lord and His commandments? Is His Word living inside of us to help our tongues only bless and not curse? Let's watch what we say so we will grow up to bless God and others. **God wants us to watch what we say.**

Megaphone Mania

For this craft you will need card stock paper, markers, scissors and a copy of the "Megaphone Mania" curriculum template for each child (copied onto the card stock or thick paper). Have the children cut out their megaphone. Next, allow the children to write the memory verse and their names on the megaphone. They can also spend more time decorating it with stickers or other craft items. Then have the children roll them end-to-end and tape or staple the ends together.

They have a megaphone to talk to their neighbors. Remind the children and encourage them that we should be careful about what we say and only say things to others that will encourage them and build them up, not tear them down. You can also remind the children that phones are not just for talking, but also for listening.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to use their tongues only to glorify the Lord Jesus. That their words will be a blessing to others. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

Template - Megaphone Mania

