

Harvest

Evangelical Free Church

SERIES: Life: Redefined • Lesson 6

For Adult Bible Fellowships and Small Groups Meeting Nov. 8-14, 2009

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"The Power of Words"

James 2:1-13

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

We live in an information age. You and I are surrounded by television, radio, the Internet, text messaging, twitter, Facebook, blogging, advertising supplements, newspapers, and magazines. Everywhere you turn you see another message. Words, slogans, and logos adorn the caps of professional golfers, the hood of NASCAR vehicles, and the home page of most websites. It's easy to believe that our generation is bombarded by more words and messages than at any other time in the history of the world.

This flood of words tends to make us numb. We filter some out because we can't process them all. And in the process we become experts at tuning out messages.

We tend to forget that during most of the world's history, things were different. Words and images did not line the streets from Nazareth to Jerusalem. Verbal messages were seldom addressed to crowds. They were usually personal, part of the conversations of a family, neighbors, or those who lived nearby. And ancient words may have had more power than they do today because people did not feel inundated with messages. They came from people you actually knew.

In chapter 3 James begins by addressing prospective teachers. He reminds them of the power of words and the need to use them with care—whether in a mentoring situation or anywhere else in life.

- Q: List some ways in which words demonstrate their power. I've started the list for you.
- They shape the outcome of sporting events, as with a "fair" or "foul" ball or an umpire's call for pass interference.
 - Hurtful words can change your whole attitude about someone else.
 - A kind and compassionate phone call can encourage you when you're sick or facing surgery.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Thinking about Speech

1. Is James 3:1 contradicting Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:11 that God gave some teachers to the church to build up the body of Christ?



James 3:1-12

¹ Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. ³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

2. The writer of Hebrews criticizes the believers to whom he writes because too few of them are teachers. They are still dependent on others. (See Hebrews 5:12.) Why do you think the instruction to them is not the same as the teaching of James 3:1?

3. James 3:1 gives a reason for cautioning people against jumping into the teaching role in the modern church. What does James imply that some people forget when they speak on behalf of God?

4. What was the error some of the religious teachers made in Jeremiah's day? (See Jeremiah 23:21.)

5. In Jeremiah 23:30 the prophet Jeremiah criticizes the prophets of the day because of something else they do. What is the practice he critiques?

6. James 3:1 is not a statement of prohibition. It is a statement of caution. Why does he caution people about striving to become teachers?

You may know people who have developed a remarkable level of self-mastery over parts of their lives. They may have their bodies fine tuned by exercise. They may demonstrate great self-discipline in terms of careful eating, setting goals, or living by a set of priorities. But James suggests there is a part of life that is even more difficult to manage.

7. In verse 2 James argues from the greater to the lesser. What part of your life is the most difficult to control, according to James?

8. In verses 3-4 James uses two distinct illustrations. What do they have in common?

9. In James 3:5 James illustrates his point by referring to a spark that triggers a wild fire which ignites a huge blaze. How is a spark *different* from a rudder or a bit in the mouth of a horse?

10. The spark in a car ignition is a good thing. The spark in a furnace on a cold day I is welcome. How is this metaphor in verse 3 different from these other kinds of sparks?

Power of Words

11. _____
James describes the impact of our speech, using the metaphor of the tongue. He's obviously not simply speaking about the organ in our mouth, but about the speech that comes from it. What is the tongue doing in verse five that is destructive?
- _____

13. _____
In verse 6 James ties the damage of the tongue to a previous action. What influenced the tongue in the first place? How does John 8:44 help you understand James picture here?
- _____

James 3:7 uses a very common language tool called *hyperbole*. It is not claiming that every species of animal on earth is worth taming or has been tamed. It makes a strong statement through exaggeration to stress the fact that mankind has domesticated *all kinds* of animals. We find hyperbole repeatedly in scripture. For example, in Matthew 3:5 the gospel writer states, "Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan." The point is that some people from all over were going to see John the Baptist. We do not interpret it as claiming that everyone in the areas mentioned went out. Today you might hear hyperbole if someone were to say, "The whole country was talking about the presidential election."

14. _____
What argument is James making when he compares the domestication of animals in verse 7 with the exercise of speech in verse 8?
- _____

15. _____
Verse 8 implies that the human tongue makes us act like another animal. What animal might he have in mind?
- _____

16. _____
James avoids branding the tongue as something that is so evil it is useless. In verse 9, what is the inconsistency he points to?
- _____

After describing the restless evil that comes with the tongue, that is, with our speech, James still insists in verse 10, "This should not be." At first it seems strange that James would go to such lengths to illustrate that the tongue is a dangerous, rebellious thing. Here he seems to contradict himself.

17. _____
In what sense are the positive and negative words that come from our speech something that "should not be"? To whom is he speaking?
- _____

18. _____
James uses two additional illustrations in verse 11-12 to describe an expectation for how Christians are to speak. What is the point of his comparison?



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

HARVST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

524 River Hills Dr. P.O. Box 291

Phone: 515-733-5360
Web: www.harvestefree.org
E-mail: office@harvestefree.org



19. James has told us "no man can tame the tongue." But here he expects us to produce the equivalent of good olives and figs, or fresh water. What is James assuming that he does not state explicitly?

20. What are some of the ways scripture guides you into using your tongue in a healthier way? How does God equip you to overcome the natural destructive force of your tongue?

21. How does a growing understanding of the teaching of Christ and the Bible help you in the way you speak?

Quotations are from THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.