

James: Putting Our Faith Into Action

Lesson 5 - You can tame the tiger, but you can't tame a tongue

Warm up -

1. Here's a tongue twister: "Twin- screw steel cruiser." How many times can you say it?
2. When we were kids, we used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Is that true? Think back and remember the worst thing someone ever said to you. How did it make you feel?
3. Why is it so hard to control what we say?

Lesson -

Although it happened many years ago, the memory is still all too clear in Antonia's mind. She was in junior high. Her best friend was going through a really hard time at home - her parents were fighting all the time, and her dad was about to lose his job because he had a hard time controlling his temper at work too. She'd confided in Antonia. A few days later, this friend had walked in on a little circle of people clustered around Antonia. Everyone stopped talking at once and stared at her. Antonia flushed with shame. She'd never forget the look of betrayal on her best friend's face.

Maybe you can relate. Some time or another, we've all put our foot in our mouth. We know how it feels to betray a confidence or trash a reputation or curse with the same tongue we use to praise God. Words are incredibly powerful tools that can encourage and affirm but so often discourage, insult, and degrade.

I wonder if God gave us the gift of time, in part, so that the mistakes we've made in the past can slowly disappear from our (and other people's) memory. Even if we don't completely forget, each new second is a fresh start; each new day a new opportunity to live as God wants us to live.

But time goes on and we still make loads of mistakes. Pretty frustrating, isn't it? James touches on all of this in the beginning of chapter 3. What act constantly reminds us of how far we are from

being perfect? It's our speaking - the words that come out of our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, says James, you'd have a perfect person in perfect control.

So what can we do? Try being silent! Think before you speak, and if what you are about to say is not uplifting, don't say it. Your mother was right!

Read James 3: 1 -12

1. As you read this, look for the things to which James compares the tongue.
2. Why does James warn us not to be in a rush to become teachers?
3. James calls the tongue "a restless evil, full of deadly poison." Why does he single out this small body part for such strong condemnation?
4. Is it possible for us to use our tongues only for blessing others?
5. What do the words we speak indicate about our hearts?
6. What steps will you take this week to try to control the words that come out of your mouth?
7. We've all said things we wish we could un-say -- things for which an apology is necessary. Think of someone you need to apologize to. Discuss with the group what you should include in a note of apology. Then write the note, and mail it.
8. Try going for a period of time without saying anything (short of being rude, of course). Next week, describe to the group what it was like.