

Godly Living

Lesson 1—A Tamed Tongue

OVERVIEW

Bible Passages: James 3:1-12

Key Verse: James 3:6—“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.”

BEFORE CLASS

Preparation: *Your preparation will determine the direction your class will go.*

- Consider how you use your words. Have you participated in gossip or negative talk? Have you been an ear for the evil or chatty talk of others?
- Consider what it means that the tongue is a fire.
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Use the Contact 1-2-3 system to follow up on students who have recently missed church.
- Pray for each student by name.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Discussion

- *What do you think is the most destructive weapon ever made? (The tongue has caused more damage than all other weapons. There's not a person in this room, nor in this world, that at some time hasn't been hurt by it.)*
- *In what ways can a tongue hurt you? (It can gossip, lie, insult, complain, abuse, boast, etc.)*
- *What are some things that have been said to you or about you that personally hurt you? (Let your students share some stories.)*

SAY: Today we're going to look at the power of the tongue and how God wants you to use your tongue to help and not hurt.

BIBLE LESSON—part 1

Have students turn in their Bibles to James 3:1-12

While turning there, SAY:

The Book of James is the wisdom book of the New Testament. If you want advice on practical day-to-day living, James is the book for you.

Choose a volunteer to read—James 3:1-2

- *How do these verses make you feel about perhaps someday teaching or leading others? (Hesitant? Unsure? Teaching whether in a role like VBS or as a teacher, helper, or leader elsewhere in the church is a privilege that should only be given to those who are spiritually mature and in love with Christ. It's a privilege that comes with the responsibility of being a living example of everything the Bible teaches.)*
- *What did James say—If a person can control his tongue, he can control what? (His whole body.)*

SAY: Nothing seems to trip a believer more than a dangling tongue. Spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue.

- *Answer these questions to yourself:*
 - (1) Do you consider yourself to be a spiritually mature Christian? Why or why not? (By the way, going to church doesn't make one mature.)*
 - (2) Do you have a tamed tongue—In other words is your daily speech free from talking bad about other people and situations, from gossiping, from any form of deceit or malice or insult or abuse. Is your speech negative or is it seasoned with the grace of God so that your words bless those who hear you? Do your words help or hurt?*

SAY: Spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue. Unfortunately our churches are full of people who consider themselves to be spiritually mature, but when they talk, their speech reveals them to be spiritual babes who claim to be spiritually grown but have little godly control over what they say. One of the greatest things that holds churches and ministries back today are that these people are put into positions of leadership because they consider themselves to be mature when they are not. As a result they talk bad about people in the church, they gossip, insult, grumble, stir up strife and do all sorts of evil with their mouths, many times without even realizing the damage they are doing or the judgment they will receive.

Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:3-5

- *What are the three examples that James uses to describe the tongue? (Bits that turn grown horses, small rudders that guide large ships, and a small spark that can consume an entire forest.)*
- *What is the point behind these illustrations? (The tongue is small but powerful. Your body and life will follow your tongue.)*

KEY VERSE

Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:6

SAY: James makes the point that the tongue is not only powerful but perverse. It is small and influential but, worse by far, it can be satanic and infectious.

- *What are things that are said spread like a fire?* (There's an old saying, "Good news travels fast, but bad news travels faster.")
- *When someone tells you some bit of juicy information, what's the first thing you want to do with it?* (Spread it to others. Gossip and bad talk is a like a cancer that spreads quickly and damages everything it touches.)
- *How would you define gossip?* (Gossip originated from an Old English word *godsibb*, or *god*, meaning "God" plus *sib*, meaning "kinsman" or close "relation," from which we get the word *sibling*. *Godsibb* wasn't directly referencing God but something that God gives.² For example, *Godspeed* meant "prosperous journey," a *Godsend* was something "unexpected," not directly referring to God but something He gives. *Godsibb*, therefore, refers to a closeness, like family, that God gives among a group. In other words, gossip originally referred to a tight-knit group, something that is good, something that God gave—a closeness among friends. But over time, this word that originally referred to something good became something bad.
- *Why do you think the meaning of the word gossip (godsibb) changed?* (What did close-knit groups of friends become known for: For talking bad about others and using their tongues to harm and damage others, especially those who weren't a part of their group. This is also the reason that "gossip" can both refer to a person—i.e., "She's a gossip"—as well as an act. Thus, *godsibb*, which originally meant a closeness that God gives, evolved into the word *gossip* which is defined as "a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts about others; a rumor or report of an intimate nature."³
- *If you are a part of a close-knit group of friends, how can you protect against gossip?*

SAY: Here are some suggestions: If someone comes to you with juicy information, *did they see it themselves or did they hear about it from another?* If they are not an eye-witness, they are a false witness and it is gossip and evil if they pass along the information to you, and it is just as wrong and evil if you provide an ear for their sin.

- *So once they begin talking, this is what you do:* Say, "Wait a minute. Is this something you saw yourself or just heard about?" If they didn't see it themselves, tell them that you don't need to know it and they don't need to be passing it along to anyone else. A true friend who is godly and in a growing relationship with Christ will understand and receive your correction. If your friend is not godly or a growing believer, you may need to question how close a friendship you should have with him or her.

- *If they saw it themselves, your next question should be: “Why is this something that I need to know?”* In other words, what’s the motive or purpose behind what they are saying? It may be information regarding a situation you need to know; they might be needing advice; etc. But, if their motive is purely to talk bad about someone or to pass along chatty information, then you need to tell them, either gently or firmly, that you won’t be a part of it.
- *Be careful: Many gossips disguise their information by saying, “We need to be in prayer for...”* when their purpose is not prayer and the work of God but the passing of negative information.
- *How to identify a gossip:*
 - Most gossips begin by saying, “You won’t believe what I heard...” Or, “You’re not going to believe this,” etc.
 - Most gossips come to you excited, even about the most disturbing information. Why? Because they derive a perverse pleasure from sharing negative information.
 - Most gossips continually talk negative about people behind their backs, even little one liners such as, “I can’t believe she wore that dress,” etc. This is the same negative attitude that gives birth to their desire to gossip.
 - Most gossips are very insecure about themselves: That’s the reason they talk bad about others—to feel better about themselves. This is also the reason that many gossips will respond negatively to correction and will many times find other friends if you are not willing to listen to them. The advantage to this is, as a godly, growing, follower of Christ, it is best for you not to be close friends with a gossip.
 - Being best friends with a gossip will almost always hinder your walk with God. Their desire to talk bad about people will become a weight that holds you back and a hindrance instead of an encouragement to closely follow Christ.

A few other things to know about Gossip:

- *Gossip is never positive.* It is always negative information. It’s okay to pass along good information you hear about others.
- *Gossip is never profitable.* It always destroys and deeply affects both the talker and the listener.
- *Gossip is contagious.* Once you hear gossip, you will be tempted to share it with others.
- *Gossip is always sin.* In the end God will judge the motives of the heart.
- *Gossip reveals inward wickedness.* Jesus said that what comes out of your mouth shows what is in your heart.
- *Gossip brings consequences.* Sin always brings consequences both in your relationship with others and in your relationship with God.
- *God will judge gossip.* You will be held accountable for how you lived and what you did.

LESSON ACTIVITY

Illustration—Human Telephone

This is an activity that many groups have done before but it still makes a good point. Whisper to one of your students a phrase such as “I went to the circus and saw a yellow monkey riding a pink rhinoceros” or “I like peanut butter and banana sandwiches with pickles, potato salad, and milk.” Then have them whisper the phrase to the student next to them and on and on around the room. Have the last student say the phrase aloud and see how much it has changed. Do this activity more than once if you desire.

Discussion

- *How is this activity like gossip? (The more people information is passed through, the more it changes. The more the story is altered, the more damage it can do. So don't partake in gossip. For all you know you are hearing and passing lies along.)*
- *Has anyone ever gossiped about you? Did the story change as it circulated? How did it make you feel when you found out what others were saying?*

BIBLE LESSON—part 2

Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:7-8

SAY: The tongue is not only like an uncontrolled fire. It is also like an untamed beast, a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:9-12

- *What point is James making here? (That the tongue cannot be used inconsistently.)*

SAY: Overall, this is what I want you to remember today: The tongue is small and influential and it must be controlled. It can be satanic and infectious and it must be corralled; salty and inconsistent, the tongue must be cleansed.

- *Answer these questions to yourself: Are there people in your life, your family, or even here at church that you have talked bad about? Have your words hurt or offended someone? If so, what do you think God would have you do to regain a right relationship with them and Him?*

Consider the following situations:

Examples:

- *You've been talking bad about your parents to your friends. What should you do to correct the situation? (Pray and ask God to forgive you for not honoring your parents. Then go to your friends and apologize for having an untamed tongue. Ask them to help keep you accountable to use your tongue correctly.)*

- You've been an ear for someone else's negative talk. *What should you do to correct the situation?* (Pray and ask God to forgive you and to give you wisdom and the best way to tell the person the next time they come to you that you won't be a part of what they are doing. You won't be an ear for evil. Pray for the gossip that they will grow in the relationship with Christ and overcome the bad use of their tongue.)

- You've been talking bad about other people or situations. *What should you do to correct the matter?* Consider why you've been doing this. What's your motive? Is this a situation you saw yourself or did you just hear about it. If it's a situation that needs to be addressed, have you gone to the authority in charge who can deal with it. If not, then you're probably just partaking in chatty talk. A correct motive will always follow the correct means for correcting a situation.

- You have a parent who likes to gossip to you—i.e., they complain to you about people at work or their boss or just talk bad about people in general. *What should you do?* It's especially difficult if you have a parent that likes to gossip to you, but be honest with them about what the Bible says: i.e., "Do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14), "Rid yourself of...malice, slander, filthy language from your lips" (Col. 3:8), etc. Help your parents to understand that they shouldn't use their mouth in an unprofitable way. Offer to pray with them when they come to you wanting to unload about a difficult day, but be honest to say that you don't need to hear bad talk about others. Let them know that how this affects your own relationship with God. Be gentle but honest and pray that God will help them not to talk negatively.

- *Answer these questions to yourself: Are there other ways you've been using your mouth in a bad way—Have you been lying? Cussing? Cutting people down? What do you think God would have you do to regain a right relationship with both others and Him?*

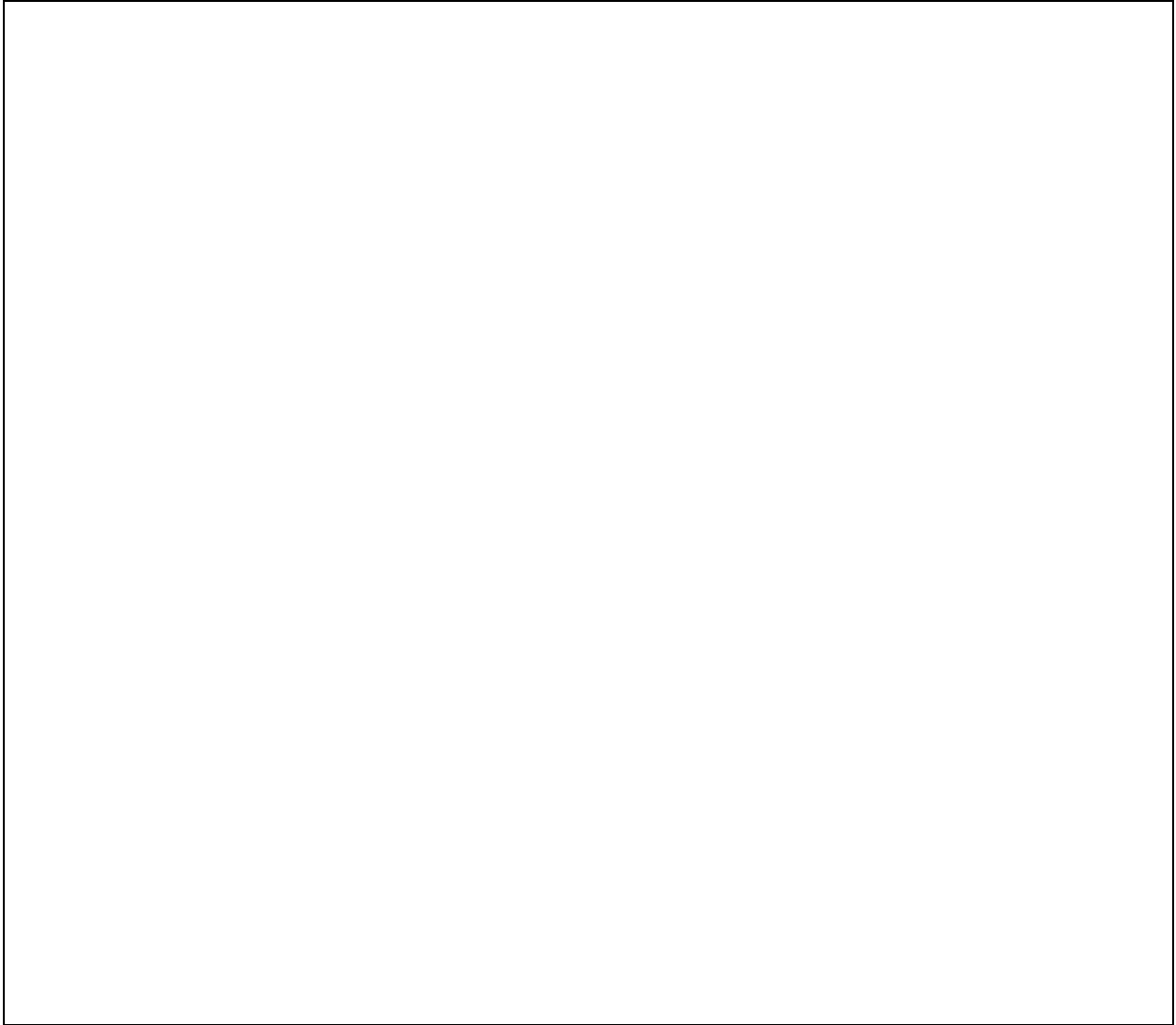
WRAP IT UP

Pray today specifically to commit your words to Christ. Pray that your words will build up and not tear down, that they will be a blessing to others. Pray that God will strengthen you to use your tongue to help and not hurt.

Prayer Time

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

Prayer Requests



¹Based in part on following lesson: *Lifetrack 5.3*, “That Was Then, This is Now” series, lesson one, “It’s Not About You.” (Nashville: Lifeway, 2005), 84-91.

²*Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), 540

³*Ibid.*