JAMES 3:1-12 (NRSV)

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

2 For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle.

3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

4 Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!

6 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.

7 For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species,

8 but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?

JAMES 3:1-12 (KJV)

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things! How great a fire is set ablaze by a small fire!

6 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 course of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 For every kind of beast, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

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

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

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

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive
KEY TERMS

- **Judgment** – Conclusion of right from wrong.
- **Iniquity** – Opposite of justice, divine disapproval.
- **Evil** – Inner or outer malice flowing from a morally-rotten character.
- **Bridle** – a line, rope, or device that is used to restrain.
- **Stain** – Defile, pollute.
- **Bless** – Speech or actions which confer benefit.
- **Exploits** – Deeds, achievements, activities.
- **Tame** – Restrain.
- **Curse** – To utter or invoke evil against something or someone.
- **Brackish** – Bitter, pungent.
- **Restless** – Unstable, unsettled.

INTRODUCTION

Certified behavioral consultant Deborah Pegues released a book entitled, *30 Days to Taming Your Tongue: What You SAY (and DON’T SAY) Will Improve Your Relationships*. In it, Pegues identifies thirty negative uses of the tongue, and the detrimental effects they have on us and our relationships. She challenges her readers to embark on a 30-day journey of verbal abstinence, which she calls a tongue fast. Acknowledging that no one can truly tame the tongue, Pegues offers practical ways one can be a better steward over one of the smallest but most harmful parts of our body, the tongue.

**Tell the Bible Story**

The author of James begins by encouraging us to rejoice in the face of trials, for it is in our trials that we are made whole. He goes on to instruct us to not...
only hear the Word but to do as it says. It is in our actions that we not only bless others, but we ourselves will be blessed. In chapter 2, we are commanded to show our faith through our actions, for it is our action that justifies our faith. In chapter 3, James continues the commands, this time focusing on the tongue. The tongue is a small part of the body that is very impactful. It has the power to heal, bring life, and offer peace. But, it also has the power to destroy.

**SANKOFA**

During the times of enslavement, it was important for those brought from Africa to bridle their tongue. Taming the tongue was literally a matter of life and death. Saying the wrong thing at the wrong time could result in more work, lashes across the back, or worse, death. Slaves learned very quickly the power of their words and used them in ways to get messages to one another. Lyrics in many songs had significant meaning. Code words were established to allow for communication in plain sight of the master or overseer. And, the politeness of “yes, ma’am” and “no, sir,” quiet tones, and mellow voices, kept them from ever suspecting a thing. Slaves used their tongues to set themselves free, and they taught their children to do the same.

**CASE STUDY**

Technology is one of the greatest gifts given to humans. It allows us to complete tasks at a faster rate and communicate with people from around the world. Technology grants us exposure to other cultures and allows us to share ours. Technology offers a space for us to gather and store information, and also share our latest insights, wisdom, and ideas. Technology is not always used for good. In more recent years, technology has been a means for people to say hurtful and degrading things about other people. It is a mask for some who hide behind a screen in order to spew vitriol about certain places and cultures. Without accountability and any disciplinary action, people can say whatever they want, whether true or not, and the results are
often damaging. Like the tongue, when used properly, technology can bring forth many blessings and help improve our lives and those around us. But, one wrong word can do just the opposite.

What are some of the damaging effects of technology?

**LIFE APPLICATION**

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but whoever said words don’t hurt”... lied!

Words do things that sticks and stones cannot do. Words leave an everlasting pain that is difficult to get rid of. And, in light of technology, words do not fade away. They are introduced into the World Wide Web where any number of people can like, copy, share, retweet, or repost as many times as they want, and to whomever they choose.

Using Deborah Pegues’ list of the 30 destructive ways we use the tongue, identify the top 5 you need to work on most.

**30 NEGATIVE USES OF THE TONGUE**

- The Lying Tongue
- The Meddling Tongue
- The Self-Absorbed Tongue
- The Flattering Tongue
- The Betraying Tongue
- The Cursing Tongue
- The Manipulating Tongue
- The Belittling Tongue
- The Complaining Tongue
- The Hasty Tongue
- The Cynical Tongue
- The Retaliating Tongue
- The Divisive Tongue
- The Know-It-All Tongue
- The Accusing Tongue
- The Argumentative Tongue
- The Harsh Tongue
- The Discouraging Tongue
- The Boasting Tongue
- The Tactless Tongue
- The Doubting Tongue
- The Self-Deprecating Tongue
- The Intimidating Tongue
- The Loquacious Tongue
Lesson 12

The Slandering Tongue

QUESTIONS:

1. Given what James says about the tongue, is it ever okay to offend people with our words? Why or why not?

2. Given what James says about the destructive power of the tongues (thus, of words), why would a parent teach a child, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”?

3. Describe ways (other than singing and praising) that the tongue can be used to glorify God.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Complete the Daily Tongue Evaluation Checklist. This will help you identify the areas where your tongue needs work. There is no perfect evaluation, and the exercise may take more than thirty days. Persistence and consistency is the key.

Daily Prayer: Lord, forgive me for the ways in which I used my tongue to tear others down. As I go throughout this day, help me to bring my tongue into submission. I need more of your power to help with my (identify area, e.g. lying, meddling, etc.) tongue. Grant me the strength and courage to do better tomorrow. In Jesus’ name. AMEN.


HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 17 – August 23

Monday  Proverbs 5:7-14 (Unwise Not to Listen to Teachers)
Tuesday  Isaiah 50:4-11 (Testimony of a Wise Teacher)
Wednesday  Colossians 3:1-11 (Slander and Abusive Language Not Allowed)
Thursday  Psalm 119:169-176 (Use Tongue to Speak God’s Praise)
Friday  Acts 2:1-12 (Believers Anointed with Fire and Tongues)
Saturday  1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (Tongues and Teachers Are God’s Gifts)
Sunday  James 3:1-12 (Speech Is for Healing and Refreshment)