

# PRACTICE MAKES PERSONS

## “Talk is Expensive”

James 3:1-12 | March 3, 2019

**Sermon Summary:** We say, “Talk is cheap,” and sometimes it is. Platitudes like those spoken in James 2—“Go in peace; be warmed and filled”—is cheap. But most often talk is valuable and expensive. The value is illustrated and imparted by God: with words he brings about creation, revelation, and redemption. But the *expense* is brought by us when we speak destructive, degrading, alienating words. “The power of life and death is in the tongue,” Proverbs 18:21 says. And in our unredeemed selves it is usually the latter.

The text opens up with an injunction toward teachers. Not many should become teachers because they are subject to a stricter judgment. The church is a word-based community sent on a disciple-making mission. An army marches on its stomachs, and teachers need to make sure the army is well fed. A flock is prone to wander, and teachers need to guide it “through many dangers, toils, and snares” to safe pasture. A church is comprised of people called out of a fallen world who nevertheless are prone to revert to old patterns; and teachers need to transform the body by the renewing of its mind in the “pattern of sound doctrine” handed down to us. All this is a sobering word to teachers.

But “we all stumble in many ways,” especially with our tongues. Talk is expensive because the tongue is:

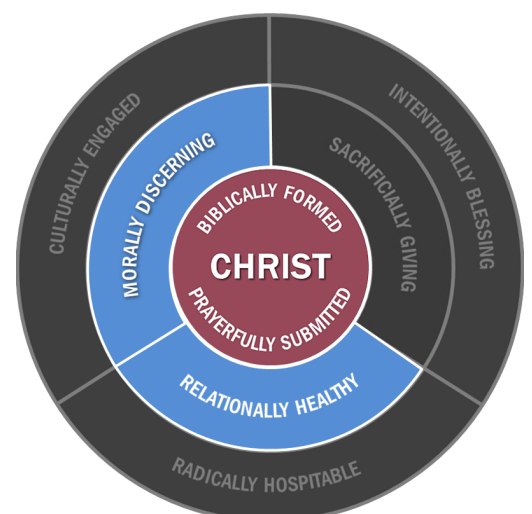
**1. Historically Untamable.** Small bits safely guide large horses; small rudders smartly guide large ships; but the small tongues cause a whole person to run wild. Virtually every other animal has been tamed, but no one has ever tamed the tongue.

**2. Highly Combustible.** A large forest is set on fire by a small spark, and many lives are burned by a few bad words. Dearly loved people who bear God’s image are ruined by hateful, degrading words. “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is rubbish! Broken bones can be set and easily mended. Broken spirits sometimes never heal.

**3. Horribly Suicidal.** Our words hurt more than others; they hurt us! They corrupt our character, set our lives ablaze, and are fueled by hell itself. It’s “suicidal” to talk the way we do, yet we cannot stop. At one moment we’re inspired by heaven, like when Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” And in the next moment we’re spewing hellish poison: “You shall not die. This will not happen!” And Jesus has to say, “Get behind me, Satan.” The Lord says elsewhere, “By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).

**4. Hopelessly Hypocritical.** The same mouth blesses and curses. The same mouth pours forth sweet words and brackish. The same mouth bears good fruit and bad. These are impossibilities in nature, but inevitabilities in *human* nature. No one can tame or purify the tongue—except God.

### Discipleship Focus:



This is our hope. We have more than natural resources to draw upon. We have **supernatural** resources. We have God, the gospel, and grace. What should we do as we're convicted of our verbal sins?

**1. Confess.** To confess literally means "to say the same thing." Agree with God about the seriousness of your sins. See what he sees in them, and say what he says about them. Then lay hold of redeeming grace: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

**2. Cry out for the Spirit.** Luke 11:11-13 reminds us that God will give his Spirit to all who ask. The Holy Spirit is the power in our lives; and the fruit of his empowering presence is self control (Gal. 5:22-23).

**3. Consecrate our mouths daily.** Romans 12:1 calls us, in view of God's mercy (who forgives, cleanses, and imparts his Spirit), to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. Each morning offer up specifically your tongue as an instrument of righteousness. Pray the Lord's Prayer over your mouth: "Lead it not into temptation, but deliver it from evil." Let it be a loyal subject of Christ's **kingdom**, under his **power**, for his **glory**, forever.

**4. Continue to praise.** Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Jesus let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." James says the same mouth praises God and curses people. True—but not at the same time! You can only do one at a time. Thus the more you lift up God, the less you tear down people. Praise is verbal training, reinforcing what is true, noble, right, and pure (cf: Phil. 4:8).

#### Discussion Guide

1. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." What is an example of how untrue that is in your life. Can you think of words spoken to you many years ago that still wound today? Would you be willing to share?
2. Teachers (and leaders) incur stricter judgment, especially for their words. How have you seen this play out in your past experience?
3. In Matthew 12:36-37 reminds us that we will give an account of all the careless words we speak. Why do you think Jesus gave this warning? How should Christians view it in light of his grace and forgiveness?
4. From the list below circle the top three verbal sins that you wrestle with. If you're willing, "Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

Profanity

Gossip

Slander

Negativity

Lying

Exaggerating

Criticism

Cynicism

Flattery

Pride/Boasting

Anger

Defensiveness

Back-biting

Fault-finding

Domination

Verbosity

Silence

\_\_\_\_\_ (other)

5. What improvements could you make to the verbal, relational culture of your family, small group, ministry team, or church as a whole? What issues do you see? What can you **start**, **stop**, and **continue** to make it better?
6. Of the four pieces of advice given at the top of this page for responding to James 3:1-12, which will you do? How can we encourage each other and offer accountability to follow through?