

A. The Tongue: _____ but _____ (1-6)

A _____ (1-2)

Three _____ (3-6)

A _____

A _____

A _____

B. The Tongue: _____ and _____ (7-8)

C. The Tongue: _____ but _____ (9-12)

One Tongue but Two Words: _____ and _____ (9-10)

Sources of _____ or _____? (11-12)

A _____

A _____

A _____

Homework

- **Read James 3:13-18.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 7: Sowing Seeds of Peace" (pp 69-78).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. How does James say people who are wise will demonstrate their wisdom?
 2. How would you describe *worldly* wisdom?
 3. How does James describe *godly* wisdom?
 4. Why does envy, jealousy, and selfishness cause confusion and disorder?
 5. What happens when people work for peace?
 6. What are some ways you are seeking to be a peacemaker in your world?
 7. How does a wise person resolve conflict?
 8. What do you think it means to sow seeds of peace?
 9. How have you seen words sown in peace produce "a harvest of righteousness" (verse 18)?
 10. Why do you think people are often unwilling to work for peace?
 11. How do James's words in this passage challenge you to deal with conflicts?
 12. What are some practical ways you can bring peace to a conflict you are facing?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How can you bring a greater sense of peace to your home, work, school, and church?

Introduction

1. How healthy is your tongue?
 - a. A few years ago during my annual check-up, my dentist began examining my tongue.
 - b. There is much that can be learned about the health of the body from the condition of the tongue.
 - c. The tongue is a two-ounce slab of muscle, mucous membrane, and nerves that enables us to chew, taste, swallow, and articulate words. It is an important organ.
 - d. Many diseases of the mouth and even of the whole body can be seen by examining the tongue.
2. Not only must we regularly examine the physical health of our tongues, but we must also examine the spiritual health of our tongues.
 - a. The tongue is small but powerful; necessary but dangerous; helpful but inconsistent.
 - b. We must control our tongues and use them to the glory of God.

3. Read James 3:1-12.**A. The Tongue: Small but Powerful (1-6)****1. A Warning (1-2)**

- a. Why should not many believers become “teachers” (Gk., *didaskalos*)?
 - 1) Teachers “will be judged more strictly” (1)
 - 2) “We all stumble in many ways” (2)
 - a) While we strive to be “perfect” (Gk., *teleios*), we all make mistakes especially with the use of our tongues.
 - b) Our words affect the “whole body” (Gk., *olon to soma*)
- b. In context with his original audience, James is concerned about the powerful, negative impact of the words of teachers on the community. Many teachers may have been irresponsible and unloving with their words.
- c. However, teaching is necessary.
 - 1) The office of teacher (Gk., *didaskalos*) developed within the New Testament community.
 - 2) See Acts 13:1, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11.
 - 3) It is an important and responsible office usually associated with the pastor.
 - 4) The words of the teacher have great impact on the body of the church.

2. Three Illustrations (3-6) – James gives three illustrations/images of the smallness yet the great power of our tongues. These were commonplace illustrations used elsewhere in the ancient world.**a. A Bit (3)**

- 1) A small bit in the mouth of a powerful horse can turn the mighty animal in any direction desired.
- 2) So also, how we use our little bitty tongue can turn our lives and the lives of others in either good or bad directions.
- 3) In James’s context of instructions to teachers, the teacher’s tongue, while small, has great power to direct or misdirect an entire community of faith.

b. A Rudder (4)

- 1) Like the bit, the rudder is a small thing that has great power in guiding a larger body, a ship.
- 2) A relatively small rudder at the back of a huge ship steers it either to safety or destruction.
 - a) The loss of a rudder or the failure to use it properly can lead to the ship sinking.
 - b) The proper use of a rudder can steer a ship safely through a violent storm.
- 3) It is the helmsman (i.e., teacher) who controls the rudder (i.e., the tongue). The teacher’s desires are expressed by his/her tongue as a means of directing the community of faith.
- 4) The helmsman of our tongues, our desires, is found in our hearts.
- 5) Jesus said, “. . . the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Mt 15:18-19).
- 6) Warren Wiersbe said, ““When Jesus Christ is the Lord of the heart, then He is Lord of the lips too” (Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 100).

c. **A Fire** (5-6)

- 1) In this third illustration, James points out the potential for great destruction that can come from improper use of the small tongue.
 - a) Note that James says, “The tongue **is** a fire” (6 – emphasis mine). He moves from a simile (like/as) in the first two illustrations (e.g., bit, rudder) to a metaphor. There is great potential in the tongue for either great damage or great good.
 - b) “a great forest (Gk, *hyle* = “dry brush”) is set on fire by a small spark” (5).
- 2) A few years ago, I read a story about three young men who built a small campfire in the Angeles National Forest to stay warm. Staying warm was good, but the fire got out of control and burned 1,700 acres including five homes, injured several people, and cost thousands of dollars to bring under control.
- 3) An out-of-control tongue can quickly do a lot of fiery damage.
 - a) God’s word supports the fact that the human tongue can be a two-ounce beast framing deceit (Ps 50:19), devising destruction (Ps 52:2), savoring harsh and hurtful words (Ps 52:4). It can be a sharp sword (Ps 57:4) that breaks bones (Pr 25:15), backbites (Pr 25:23), flatters vainly (Pr 28:23), and poisons the lives and reputations of others (Ro 3:13).
 - b) When used improperly, the tongue is “a world of evil (Gk., *adikia*) among the parts of the body” (6)
 - 1) Much evil is expressed via the tongue: boastful pride, destructive anger, cutting bitterness, flattering lust, complaints, lies, gossip, unhelpful criticism, crude language, flippant talk, condescending talk, too much talk.
 - 2) Evil speech often leads to evil actions. Jesus warned us about this when he said, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Mt 5:21-22).
 - 3) What is in our hearts and minds will soon be in our actions.
 - c) James says that the tongue is set on fire by “hell” (6).
 - 1) “hell” (Gk/Hb, *Gehenna*) was a valley outside Jerusalem used as a dump where a fire always smoldered.
 - 2) The filth of Jerusalem collected in *Gehenna*, the local dump. The filth of the world can collect on our tongues—if we allow it.
 - 3) If our tongues are controlled by the world/hell, they will destroy us and others.
 - 4) An improperly used tongue opposes God’s will and plan. It speaks from “hell” (Gk., *Gehenna*) and brings “the whole course of one’s life” (i.e., person and community) to a fiery, destructive end.
 - d) Wiersbe notes, “Fiery words can defile a home, a Sunday school class, a church. The only thing that can wash away that defilement is the blood of Jesus Christ” (Wiersbe, 102).
- 4) However, remember that the same human tongue can be used for great good in teaching, encouraging, building up, training, complimenting, and speaking positive words to and about others.
- 5) Wiersbe notes, “If the heart is filled with hatred, Satan will light the fire. But if the heart is filled with love, God will light the fire” (Wiersbe, 103).
- 6) The tongue is small but extremely powerful. It must be carefully controlled, if it is to be used positively, but control of the tongue is extremely difficult.

B. The Tongue: Wild and Deadly (7-8)

1. It is amazing to see how animals can be trained.
 - a. James notes that animals “have been tamed” (Gk. *damao*) by mankind” (7).
 - b. I once saw a video clip of a dog in China who sits with his paws on a bicycle until his master returns. He then jumps up on the back rack of the bike and rides behind his master.
 - c. His mention of “animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures” alludes to God’s command in Genesis 1 for man to “Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Ge 1:28).

2. Ironically, “no human being can tame the tongue” (8).
 - a. We can tame, domesticate, and train wild animals, but we are often unable to rule over and train our own wild tongues?
 - b. Our tongues are “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (8).
 - c. David cried, “Rescue me, LORD, from evildoers; protect me from the violent, who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips” (Ps 140:1-3).
 - d. Inability to control the tongue is a critical problem for teachers.
 - 1) We are not “perfect” (3:2) and make mistakes.
 - 2) Our words have power and we must be accountable to God for every one of them.
 - 3) We must always speak the truth in love.
3. How does your tongue need taming? How does it need to be controlled? It is wild about complaining, bragging, lying, gossiping, criticizing, talking crudely, talking flippantly, talking condescendingly, talking too much, talking abrasively, or in other evil ways?
4. In order to control our tongues and to use them to the glory of God, we need help from God.
 - a. David asked God for help, “Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps 141:3).
 - b. We must give our hearts/minds to God and allow him to control our thoughts and actions.

C. The Tongue: Life-giving but Inconsistent (9-12)

1. **One Tongue but Two Words: Blessing and Cursing** (9-10)
 - a. With our tongues we bless God and we curse other human beings made by God in his image.
 - b. We cannot be both God blessers and human cursers.
 - c. When we issue blessings and curses from our mouths, we are like the double-minded man undergoing trials who looks to God in faith one minute and then doubts the next minute (cf., Jm 1:8).
 - d. Our words are inconsistent because our hearts are inconsistent, unstable, sinful.
2. Our tongues are like the “Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” a novella by Robert Louis Stevenson in which the good-hearted Dr. Jekyll transforms into the murderous Mr. Hyde unless he takes a special potion he has made in his laboratory.
 - a. Sometimes our tongues are Dr. Jekyll: mending, building up, bringing life, glorifying God.
 - b. Sometimes our tongues are Mr. Hyde: breaking, tearing down, and killing. These uses deny God.
 - c. We need a special potion to remain Jekyll and avoid being Hyde. That potion is the Spirit of Christ.
 - d. Our access to the Spirit of Christ is unlimited and never runs out.
 - e. When we feel Mr. Hyde coming on, we must go to the Spirit and fill our hearts anew with Christ—with his love, his words, his thoughts, his actions.
 - f. That is the only way that our tongue can be controlled to the glory of God and bring life.
3. “From the fruit of their mouth a person’s stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied. The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Pr 18:20-21).
 - a. In blessing and cursing is the power of life and death.
 - b. John MacArthur notes, “Nowhere is the relationship between faith and works more evident than in a person’s speech. What you are will inevitably be disclosed by what you say. It might be said that a person’s speech is a reliable measure of his spiritual temperature, a monitor of the inner human condition” (John MacArthur, *James*, 56).
4. **Sources of Life or Death?** (11-12)
 - a. The nature of the human heart/tongue is like nothing else in nature.
 - 1) James asks three questions about the consistency of nature in vv. 11-12.
 - 2) All three questions expect an answer of “No!”
 - 3) Nature is consistent, but our hearts/tongues are not.
 - b. James paints three pictures of things that should be sources of life.
 - 1) A **Spring** – A spring should bring forth fresh water (i.e., blessing) and not salt-water (i.e., cursing).
 - 2) A **Fig Tree** – A fig tree should produce only figs (i.e., blessing) and not olives (i.e., cursing).
 - 3) A **Grapevine** – Likewise a grapevine should produce grapes (i.e., blessing) and not figs (i.e., cursing).

5. Teachers must use words to bring life and not to destroy those who are made in God's image.
 - a. Scot McKnight says, "A better way is the way of wisdom, and the proper goal of the teacher is neither control nor curse but wisdom" (Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 297).
 - b. We will take up the related topic of teachers and wisdom next week in James 3:13-18.
 - c. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps 19:4).
6. How healthy is your tongue today?
 - a. Do your words generally help or hurt?
 - b. Do your words reveal or hide who you really are?
 - c. Do your words dominate others or empower them?
 - d. Do your words spring from truth or what you think the other person wants to hear?
 - e. Are your words the same when the person is present as they are when they are absent?
 - f. Do your words reveal maturity and control or immaturity and sinfulness?
 - g. Do your words reveal or hide God?
 - h. Do your words honor or embarrass God?
7. Here are four uses of the tongue that honor God and bring life (Wiersbe, 106-7).
 - a. "Please" and "Thank you" – Treat others as people not slaves or things.
 - b. "I'm sorry" – These words break down barriers and build bridges.
 - c. "I love you" – Deeper than romance, these words carry tremendous power
 - d. "I'm praying for you" – We say these words not to boast but to encourage and to let other know that we care enough to intercede at the throne of grace
8. "Give God your tongue and your heart each day and ask Him to use you to be a blessing to others (Wiersbe, 107).