

“Tame This”
James 3:2-12
Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion): Share about a time when someone said words that influenced you for good, or shaped the direction of your life in a positive way.

Transition: We’re coming back to the book of James today, in our series, Gospel on the Ground. In Chapter 3, James draws on the image of a fast-moving forest fire when he talks about one of the greatest challenges we face in living out our faith – taming our tongue (speech).

READ JAMES 3:2.

- In verse 2, James gives an overview on the tongue:
 - Pastor Josh said the Greek word for “perfect” is “teleios,” which means “complete in character” or “having integrity,” instead of “sinless perfection.” If so, how does that change the goal you set for yourself?
 - How does having self-control in your speech develop the ability to “keep [your] whole body in check?”

In this passage we see three hard realities about the tongue.

1. READ JAMES 3:3-6 for the first reality about the tongue: The tongue is disproportionately powerful for its size.

- James uses three illustrations or metaphors about the tongue. The first two are positive metaphors about steering.
 - The bit and the rudder are described as “very small” as compared to what they steer. What do the bit and rudder represent and why is this important?
 - The horse and ship are described as “so large.” What do they represent and why is this important to taming the tongue?
 - If you wanted to be a skilled rider or skilled sailor, how would you go about it? Do you see any analogy with taming the tongue? Discuss.
 - How often do you think about the fact that your words carry great potential for good?
 - Do you notice opportunities that God gives you, to speak words of encouragement, or compassion, or tactful redirection, into people’s lives?
- The second illustration, comparing the tongue with fire, is a negative one.
 - Have you had any experience with how much damage an actual fire can cause? What happened?
 - Have you ever said, posted, or tweeted anything that became like a wildfire? How did this affect you and others?
 - Re-read verse 6. Having these serious consequences in mind, how does this affect your view on the tongue? How do you react to this emotionally? Explain.
- If we’ve learned that the tongue is disproportionately powerful for its size, how can we be more skilled and cautious with our speech?

2. **READ JAMES 3:7-8** for the second reality about the tongue: **the tongue is disproportionately difficult to control.**
- How is taming the tongue compared to taming an animal? What point is the author making?
 - The tongue is described as “a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Arsenic is a substance that in the right quantities can either heal or kill. How does this affect your view of the tongue?
 - James’ point is to have a healthy respect for taming something so powerful as the tongue. It is a matter too difficult for mere willpower and effort. How do you feel about this point? Discuss.
3. **READ JAMES 3:9-12** for the third reality about the tongue: **the tongue is dishearteningly duplicitous.**
- How would you re-phrase James’ point here about the tongue, in your own words?
 - Why shouldn’t our tongues be “duplicitous” (double-minded)?
 - How disheartened are you about your inability to control your words?
 - What is the point of the illustrations of the spring and the plant?
 - As the spring below the ground determines the quality of water that bubbles up; as the type of plant determines the type of fruit yielded, our hearts determine what comes out of our mouths. How can a regular review of our heart’s attitudes enable us to control our tongue? Discuss.
 - Who is one trusted person with whom you can regularly review what’s in your heart that comes out in speech? Can you commit to this?
 - In James 1:21, James says, “Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” What is he talking about, “the word planted in you?”
 - How can you “water” that word planted in you (i.e., the gospel)?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

- Are any of the following traits typical of you? Do you regularly a) speak critical words? b) argue incessantly that you are right? c) think judgmentally of others? d) speak in a way that reflects bitterness or resentment? e) speak quickly to defend or prove yourself, f) speak quicker than you listen, g) engage in gossip, h) not forgive yourself for a mistake of the tongue or i) not forgive another for hurtful words that were spoken to you?
- What does “the word planted in you” say about this area of your life?
- Which of the following applications is an area of opportunity for you to bring about good with your words?
 - Parents, do you need to think about how you’re using the power of words with your kids?
 - In your work place, are your words gossiping or cutting, or are they used to build people up?
 - Students, do you realize that you have the opportunity every day at school to use words to encourage someone?
 - What about the things you say to your parents?
 - Has God given you influence in the life of a younger person?
- How can today’s Bible Study and discussion help you to seize this opportunity for good?

Prayer:

- As you pray, pay attention to how the Holy Spirit might give you words of encouragement for one another.
- Among our prayer requests, let us pray for each other [with God’s help] to develop the discipline to tame our tongues.