

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: November 11, 2018
Lesson Title: "With Control"
Lesson Passage: James 3:1-12

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Apparently, loose talk was a real problem among the readers of James' letters, for he has already referred to it earlier in James 1:19,26. And now he addresses the subject more fully. In the lesson passage, he speaks first of the power of the tongue (vv. 1-5) and then goes on to describe the destructive effect of loose talk (vv. 5-8). And, in James 3:9-12, he deals specifically with the matter of inconsistent speech by contrasting words of blessing with words of cursing. The essential thought in this passage is that what you say reveals who you are.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Identify sins that involve the use of the tongue.
- (2) Explain why sins of the tongue should be taken seriously.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin by quoting the familiar saying, "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." Then comment: This saying was originated by the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who actually said, "What you are stands over you the while and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary." Add this: There is truth in this time-honored saying, but there might be a basic fallacy in it. It implies that what we say is different from what we are; but, in our lesson passage, James contends that what we say is inseparably bound up with who we are. St. Francis de Sales, a 17th-century bishop of Geneva, had it right when he said, "Our words are a faithful index of the state of our souls." James would heartily agree with this.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Use the following outline as you discuss the lesson passage:

- I. THE SIN THAT'S HARD TO TAME (James 3:2)
- II. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE (James 3:3-8)
- III. THE DOUBLE-DEALING TONGUE (James 3:9-12)

2. To introduce the first point, "THE SIN THAT'S HARD TO TAME." *Read Jas. 3:2 from the King James Version; then comment*: (1) The word "offend" in the KJV means, literally, "stumble" or "slip." So, "we offend all" could read, "we all stumble." And "If any man offend not in word" might read, "whoever avoids slips of speech." (2) Of all the sins we might stumble into, none are more treacherous, none more easily

committed, than sins of the tongue. In fact, persons who are able to bridle the tongue should be able to control themselves in every respect. FOR DISCUSSION: Do you think sins of the tongue, such as angry outbursts and quarreling, are as serious as sins like sexual immorality and drunkenness? After class members have had a chance to respond, call attention to Galatians 5:19-21, where Paul lists "outbursts of anger, disputes and dissensions" right alongside of "immorality, drunkenness and carousing." Then make this point: We tend to be more tolerant of sins of the tongue than other sins. Gossips who spread slander are often more easily forgiven than the victims of their gossip.

3. Comment on the next point, THE POWER OF THE TONGUE (3:3-8): We tend to play down the significance of words, as though words make little difference. (EXAMPLE: "Words, words, words, nothing but words.") But James thought differently. **Call attention to his arguments in Jas. 3:3-5:** (1) He uses three word-pictures to make the point that the tongue can have an impact far out of proportion to its size: First, a small bit in a horse's mouth can control the whole body of the animal. Second, a small rudder can determine the course of a huge ship. Third, a tiny fire (such as a burning match) can burn thousands of acres of timber. Similarly, a wagging tongue can inflame masses of people, and, like a raging forest fire, the destruction unleashed by the tongue can get completely out of control. (2) **Three devastating indictments of sins of the tongue are presented in James 3:6-8:** First, the tongue is a "world of iniquity." (The Greek text reads literally "the world of iniquity." This means that the tongue is a microcosm of the whole world of unrighteousness. Second, it "sets on fire the course of nature." That is to say, the orderly course of human affairs in home, church, community and business relations can be set on fire by the tongue. Third, it is "set on fire of hell." We need not wonder what inspires malicious gossip and "trash talk". Here James tells us where it comes from.

4. Note the third point, THE DOUBLE-DEALING TONGUE (James 3:9-12): The wagging tongue is two-faced. The person who "blesses God" out of one side of his mouth and curses men made in the likeness of God out of the other side is a hypocrite. ILLUSTRATION: A woman whose rose garden had been invaded by a small boy who lived next door complained to the boy's mother, saying, "I don't have anything against you, understand, it's just little brat..." "You don't understand," the boy's mother broke in, "that little brat is me." (The point is, you can't flatter God while maligning His children.)

CLOSING THE LESSON

Conclude with this formula (written by Beth Day in 1885) for testing the words you are about to utter: "Make it pass, before you speak three gates of gold, these narrow gates: First, 'is it true?' Then, 'Is it needful?' In your mind give truthful answer. And the next is last and narrowest, 'Is it kind?' And if to reach your lips at last it passes through these gateways three, then you may tell the tale, nor fear what the result of speech may be."

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