



God Has an App for That!

Leaders Notes Week 5

“Curb Your Profanity”

James 3:1-12

1. Pay close attention to what follows in this chapter. James will soon talk about the power of speech and the destruction it can inflict in other's lives. The teacher wields this power and can use it to either build up the followers of Christ or to dismantle them. To assume this kind of authority means that you are accountable not only for yourself but also for your students. See Matt. 7:15-23 on what Jesus thinks about false teachers and their punishment and how to detect false teachers (you will recognize them by their “fruit”).

2. James writes in 3:2 that a perfect person is never at fault in what he or says. He also writes that we “stumble in many ways,” yet the cornerstone of our stumbling and fumbling lies in our speech. If we could control our speech, then our lives will be sure to follow. As Proverbs 13:3 says, “He who guards his lips guards his life...”

Consider also Luke 6:45, which says, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” The condition of a person's speech reveals the condition of his or her heart. So if our speech is pure and without offense, then we can be confident that our hearts are following suit.

3. v. 3: The bit in a horse's mouth. A small piece of metal that connects to the bridle and helps the rider communicate with the horse. The bit reacts to how the rider pulls the reins, applying pressure to the inside of the horse's mouth. A small piece of metal is all it takes to turn a massive animal.

v. 4: The rudder of a ship. When the captain of a ship turns the wheel in order to steer the craft, he is controlling the rudder, a small piece of metal at the tail end of the ship that affects its direction in the water. It is smaller than you might think, measuring anywhere from 1/60th to 1/70th of the

ship's length. For instance, the Titanic was about 900 feet long, or the length of three football fields. The rudder for the Titanic was about 15 feet long, or 5 yards.

v. 5-6: A fire caused by a small spark. In 1871, a cow on the outskirts of Chicago kicked over a lamp (as the story goes anyway). Three days later, about three and a half square miles of downtown Chicago was destroyed. Massive damage can come from just a small hazard.

v. 7-8: A restless and deadly evil. This is contrast to all sorts of wild and poisonous animals that have been tamed by man. Even though men have tamed and trained lions, tigers, bears, snakes and scorpions, the human tongue remains the most vicious and destructive beast in the world. Our speech can contain more spiritual poison than a viper or rattlesnake. Our words can cut down men and women faster than the claws of a jungle cat.

4. The common idea is that even though the tongue is small, it is powerful. Napoleon Bonaparte stood at 5' 6" – 5' 7" (a small man at that time), and yet he commanded an army of 600,000 men. The poison dart frog can be as small as half an inch, and yet it contains the deadliest poison known to man. It is the same with the tongue, for though it seems small and insignificant, it has the ability to cause serious damage. When we think of destructive force, we might tend to think of massive bombs or giant Godzilla-like monsters, but James teaches us to fear the power of the small tongue.

5. The main point: Do not underestimate the effect of your speech. Even if you may think that the impact of your words are small and insignificant, this is not so. The ripples of your words will span wide. Proverbs 12:18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Our words can be used either to heal or to hurt, and the effect of those words are much grander than we realize.

6. Go around and share. Remind them not to use specific names or places. Also, keep in mind that this is a not time to judge others, but merely an opportunity to see a spectrum of negative effects that our speech can have on others. One example might be: I knew a coworker who liked to use profanity at work. It quickly spread around the office until management was forced to take disciplinary action. Or: A young girl on a playground is bullied for being overweight. As a result, her self-image is impacted through the rest of her life.



7. All Christians are guilty of using the same mouth to both praise the Father and curse men. We would hope that there is a difference between the speech of Christians and of non-Christians, and yet this may not be the case. Ask the group to share from personal experience: (1) whether or not they are honestly more encouraged more from Christians than non-Christians, (2) if they hear swear words less from Christians than non-Christians, and (3) if a large factor in determining the strength of a person's faith and character can be observed from the way they talk.

“God's likeness” comes into play here. The reference is to Genesis 1:26 when God made mankind “in His image.” Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and represent the pinnacle of His creation, so whenever we curse or demean other people, *we are tearing down something that God created*. In a sense, we are also cursing God when we do this.

8. The interest of this question will arise if someone actually would disagree with Paul's command in v. 10. Explore that idea. Are there any instances in which it is acceptable for a Christian to curse another? (Answer: No, there's isn't.)

9. Your answers might be informed by some of the verses listed below:

-- Psalm 50:16, 19-21 – “But to the wicked, God says: ‘What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? ...You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son. These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.’”

-- Psalm 52:1-5a – “Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue! Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin...”

-- 2 Kings 19:22 – “Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!”

-- Psalm 12:3 – “May the Lord cut-off all flatterer lips and every boastful tongue...”



-- Jeremiah 9:3 – “They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me,” declares the Lord.

-- Jude 16-19 – “These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.’ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.”

-- Ephesians 4:29 – “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

-- Romans 12:14 – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

10. The two illustrations in 3:11-12 are used to support what James teaches in 3:10, that praise and cursing should not come from the same mouth. Salt water and fresh water cannot flow from the same spring. Fig trees cannot produce olives and grapevines cannot produce figs. These scenarios are impossible. Here’s another scenario that *should* be impossible: a worshipper of God cursing His creation.

Here’s the question that should keep our tongues in check: Will you produce fresh water or salt water? Will you produce healthy, constructive speech for others or harmful, destructive speech?

11. In Ephesians 4:29, the word “unwholesome” can also mean “destructive.” Read it this way: Let no *destructive* word come out of your mouths but only what is *constructive*. Explore what it means to be constructive with your speech. Explore also what it means to be “seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6). How can you fill your speech with grace?

12. Take this time to write down in your study guide the prayer requests of those who share. Be sure to share the praise reports on a weekly basis as the series progresses.



FURTHER STUDY |

There is a reoccurring theme throughout scripture for each one of these topical studies. Take this week as the Leader of your group to immerse yourself in the reading of the Word and see how these verses can help you download God's app to Curb your profanity.

- Psalm 5:9
- Psalm 10:7
- Psalm 34:13
- Proverbs 10:19
- Proverbs 12:17-19
- Proverbs 15:3-5
- Proverbs 18:21
- Jeremiah 9:2-4

