

Words

James 3 v 1-12 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

1. Can you summarise the last study we did in James?

'Faith without deeds is dead' (James 2 v 26). Our lives should reflect our faith.

Explain that James is now moving on to think about how our words reflect our hearts.

2. Read James 3 v 1-12. What do you think the overall message is?

3. Read James 1 v 26. What did James already tell us about those who cannot keep a tight rein on their tongues?

'Not controlling our speech is a sign that we're not actually following God', (Alberry 2015, p52). As with our behaviour, our speech reveals our hearts.

4. Read James 3 v 1-2. Why do you think that teachers (of Scripture) will be judged more strictly?

Because of the responsibility they have to teach faithfully, without deceit or distortion (2 Cor 4 v 2). It matters very much that God's word is taught faithfully as the hearers' understanding of God, of their sinfulness and how they can be saved is influenced heavily by the teaching they receive. To teach is a privilege and a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

NB 'judged more strictly' – this is probably talking about the judgement of the work of a believer, as in 1 Cor 3 v 12-15, not the final judgement, since the outcome of the final judgement is already known for the believer i.e. forgiven and having eternal life with Christ.

5. Read 2 Corinthians 4 v 2. How should the word of God be taught? What do you think this means in practice?

Without any 'secret or shameful' ways (manipulation, threats etc), and without deceit or distortion (adding bits, taking bits away, twisting the Word to make it more palatable etc), and setting forth the truth plainly.

6. Read 2 Corinthians 4 v 5. What message should we be sharing / hearing?

The message is about Christ, not about the speaker. So if we hear a preacher whose message is primarily about how wonderful they are, or their ministry is, or teaching anything that is against what the Bible says, then we need to consider whether they are a reliable teacher of Scripture. We should measure all teaching by God's word.

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How do you know which church is a good church, or who is a good person to help you grow in your faith?

By measuring their words with the Bible. If a church or an individual teaches something that isn't in the Bible or contradicts the Bible then they are teaching self (2 Cor 4 v 5). Encourage your group to think about what they hear in Bible study and chapel services, not to blindly accept everything because of the reputation of the speaker, and to feel able to question the speaker / teacher gently when appropriate.

Explain that we need to remember that there are some things in the Bible that are salvation issues (i.e. the gospel) and others which are secondary issues about which Christians legitimately disagree, (e.g. freewill & predestination).

Questions 7-9 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*7. **SDL** Read James 3 v 2. How do we keep our tongue in check?

We learn to keep a tight rein on our tongues as we mature, but it can also take some hard work on our part. We need to pray for help.

The word 'perfect' is the same word as in 1 v 4, translated 'mature and complete'. 3 v 2 is not talking about unattainable perfection, rather Christian maturity in how we use words.

*8. **SDL** Read James 3 v 3-5. What is James' point as he writes about horse-bits, rudders and sparks?

That a very small thing can have a very great effect. The tongue is a very small muscle, but it can do a lot more damage than a bigger muscle. Ask your group if anyone has any sharable examples of significant damage done by someone's words.

*9. **SDL** Read James 3 v 6. Why do you think James says that the tongue corrupts the whole body?

What we say can get our whole body into trouble and can lead us into actions that are wrong. E.g. one small lie leads to another, one unguarded word can destroy a relationship or a career.

*10. **SHOUT-OUT** What kinds of talk can we use our tongues for?

List their suggestions on the flip-chart. Don't forget to include some good things!

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'Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.' Is this true? Why?

*11. Read James 3 v 7-8. Why can't we tame our own tongue?

Ultimately, because we are sinners. When we try to do it, e.g. to stop swearing, criticizing, gossiping, we have to work hard and we need to pray for help because we can't do it in our own strength. As we seek to follow Jesus faithfully our words as well as our actions start to change and become more like his.

*12. Read James 3 v 11-12. On a purely physical level, what is James' point?

That the taste of the water defines its source and the fruit defines the tree.

*13. Now read James 3 v 9-10. What is James saying and how does this link into verses 11-12?

Using our tongue to praise God and also to curse people is inconsistent and shows that sin is still there. As with the spring and the tree where the water and the fruit identify the source, our words reveal our hearts. Our language should be consistently honouring to God, whether we are in church, Bible study, on the wing, on the street, out with the boys, at home with mum, etc. Honourable language is not to be reserved for inside a church building or in the presence of Christians or your mum – that is just respecting the place or the people, it's not obedience to God.

14. Read Ephesians 4 v 29. We should use our tongues to praise God. What kind of talk should we engage in with other people?

Talk that is helpful to build others up, not to put them down, hurt them, crush them, slander them, etc.

*15. Look up the following passages – what do they say?

Proverbs 29 v 11 *'A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.'*

Ephesians 4 v 26-27 *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold.'*

James 1 v 20 *'...man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.'*

*16. What effect does anger have on your use of words?

*When we are angry we say the first thing that comes to our mouth with no filtering. Our emotions override everything else and it doesn't matter who gets hurt. **Spend some time** with the group thinking about anger being one of the root causes of using the wrong words (not just swearing, but insults, threats, hurting the other person verbally etc). Think about where this is most likely to happen (on the wing, in work, at home etc) and with whom and try to think of some strategies for change regarding the root problem of anger.*

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We also use words in our minds – fantasy, thoughts of revenge, self-pity etc. And on our screens – what we post on FaceBook and Twitter, what we say in emails and texts.

How does this challenge you?

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What was the biggest challenge to you from today's study?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

Words

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4. Read James 3 v 1-2. Why do you think that teachers (of Scripture) will be judged more strictly?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 4 v 2. How should the word of God be taught? What do you think this means in practice?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 4 v 5. What message should we be sharing / hearing?

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Ephesians 4 v 26-27

James 1 v 20

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