



Faith In Real Life – James 3:1-12 Faith In Speech

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Page 1)

TRADITIONAL MODEL:

Have you ever said something, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that “burned” another person?

Why do you think James felt it necessary to include the position of “teacher” with this section on language?

Are you actively aware of your worldview and how it affects your interactions with others? How good are you at controlling your speech (or Facebook comments)? How can you improve?

Do you believe that viewing people with this “Image of God” lens will actually affect the way that you approach your relationships?

Is there more freedom or more limitation in viewing people this way?

Why might God be more concerned with how we view people than the specific words we choose to say? Do you believe this to be true?

What are some ways that you can practice having this restored understanding of others? How might we hold each other accountable?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Page 2)

CONTEMPLATIVE MODEL:

What are you learning about God and yourself from this message?

How has your experience shaped the way that you view the world?

Why is it important for us to be aware of the lenses that we view the world through?

What does it mean to look at others as bearing the image of God?

How is this lived out practically?

What are you most looking forward to about viewing others as the *Imagio Dei* (Image of God)?



Leader Guide

Faith In Real Life - James 3:1-12 Faith In Speech

Honest, realistic and practical words about faith in a real life world from the Epistle of James.

MANUSCRIPT

Good morning, Sunridge!

My name is Danny Sugimoto, and I have the privilege of serving as your Middle School Pastor.

This morning, as you've just heard from Nora, we'll be in James 3.

As we begin this morning, I'd like to start off with a little exercise. It's a simple look at how certain words conjure up images of things in our minds. So, I'll say a word, and all you have to do is think about that word. Like if I say "cat," some of you will have an image of a cat in your mind. Maybe it's one that you have owned or currently own. For me, I think of this cat that my family used to own named Lola. She was charcoal grey with yellow eyes. That's what I think of when I hear "cat." Hopefully, you'll have an image in mind when you hear these words.

Again, there's no need to share your thoughts or anything. This won't require any bit of public speaking. It's strictly mental.

All of us introverts in the room are silently cheering.

Okay, is everybody ready?

Dog.

Yoda.

Church.

Pizza.

Queen.

Librarian.

Car.

See? That wasn't so bad. Some of you might have even wanted the rest of this time to be just random word associations. This morning, we're looking at words and the power of the tongue. If you remember from what was read earlier, James doesn't have a super positive view of the tongue. He thinks that the things that we say are often dangerous. He compares them to venom.

But when it comes to words, these combinations of letters actually don't have any meaning at all.



Words are absent of meaning until someone supplies that meaning, and, typically, we see societies and cultures supply meanings to words. Which is why certain phrases can change in meaning over time. It happens most often with slang and idioms. If I approached you and asked you to “Spill the beans,” I make an assumption about your culture and your identity, right? I assumed that when I say “spill the beans” that you come from a similar culture as me, and can reference this saying back to how it is commonly used in movies, songs, and other forms of media.

But if you don’t have that backdrop to work from, you might respond by saying, “Danny, I don’t have any beans, but if you give me some, I will gladly pour them out for you.”

And at that point, we’re operating on two very different levels of understanding.

But our words and our language has so much to do with how we have been raised and the experiences that we have had as individuals. When I say “Church” some of you might think of a building with a point on it. Or maybe you think of pews or a cross. When I say queen, some of you might think of the monarch in Britain or the band led by Freddie Mercury.

When I say car, some of you think Prius while others think NASCAR.

But our understanding of these words and how we respond to them has been shaped by our saturation in culture and in the world. When we hear certain words, we have a response or an image that is triggered and recalled within our minds. And that image is based the information that we have absorbed through the news, through media like film, music, art, and literature, through our relationships and our experiences with others, and in so many other ways. It’s directly connected to our perspective and the lens with which we view the world.

And this paradigm — this perspective — not only shapes the way we understand words, but also affects the way that we respond to those categories.

When you hear the word “millennial,” some of you might think of attributes about millennials that you have heard and absorbed. Maybe it’s an idea that all millennials are lazy or that millennials feel like they deserve and are entitled to things.

And those thoughts will directly influence the way that you interact with me — a millennial.

And if stepped on stage and said, “Hi, I’m Danny, and I’m a millennial” it might have drastically changed the way that you respond to me.

Most of us have an understanding of certain categories of people or of different people groups and the attributes *about* people who would fit within those groupings. And that’s just human nature. It’s a part of human psychology to group people together. Which is why when I say “liberal” or “conservative” you probably have an image of a specific person in mind or at least qualities that you have come to believe about “those” people

or what about “pastor”

or “sinner”

or “friend”

or “thug”

or “celebrity”

or “immigrant”



Our words trigger our minds to think about images, behaviors, characteristics, and maybe even skill colors that have become engrained in our minds from the information that we're given. And so based on our experiences, based on our sources of news and information, we might have drastically different understandings of these different words and of the people that fit in those categories. And when our understandings of words and ideas are rooted in this deep, complex covering of our history and our experiences, then we might have responses to things that we can't explain. Which is the beauty of attending counseling or therapy. So that you can gain insight from a third party and uncover the foundation to the way that you process things and how those seedlings have developed into your character and actions.

And here, in his letter, James finds that same idea to be true. He writes that the way speak is completely dependent upon how we view the world around us. It's completely dependent upon how we see things. It's relies fully upon the things that our interpretation of the world has been saturated in.

It's all about the lens that we see through.

James opens up chapter 3 by making sure that all of his readers understand the power of the tongue, and he does this by providing analogies and metaphors to the power of the things that we say. He likens our tongues to a horse bridle and rudder In verses 3-4, James writes *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. (James 3:3-4)*

James is reminding us our words have power. They guide the paths that we take. But he cautions us to be careful. Our words can be dangerous things.

in verses 5 and 6, James likens our tongues to fire, setting blazes and staining our bodies.

In verse 7, James writes *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:7-8)*

Our tongues are full of poison. And they can't be controlled.

And I imagine that most of you have experienced pain from something that someone has said to you. And I imagine that pretty much all of us have at one time said something that burned someone else.

A spouse. A parent. A sibling. A friend. A boyfriend or girlfriend. A co-worker. A mentor. We can never fully control our tongues, and because of that, we end up hurting people.

But for James, our ability to lessen the sting of words — to lessen the amount of fires that we start — that ability is dependent upon the images that we associate with people. It's dependent upon what we have saturated our worldview in.

Are we basing our understandings of people on what we hear about them in the news? Or how we experience them on the Internet? Or how we categorize the types of people that drive aggressively and cut us off?

Or are we looking to what God says about people?

To what he says about his creations?

For me, the cornerstone of this section of Scripture lay in what is written in verses 9.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. (James 3:9)



With our mouths, we're able to show up to church on Sundays and recite prayers and sing these song lyrics about how powerful our God is and how much we love him for the gifts that he has given us. For just about an hour, we can truly focus on the greatness of our God and the vastness of his kingdom.

But then we leave from this building and are fully comfortable with how we speak about people that have differing political ideologies.

Or we're fully comfortable with the way that we might cross the street or bring our children closer to us when certain types of people are near us.

We're comfortable with our ability to get into arguments on Facebook and to be able to say some of the worst things about people through a comment thread.

And there are some of you right now, considering your own actions and attempting to justify your behavior rather than be confronted with the reality of the situation.

Because most of us have saturated ourselves not in what God has done and what God has said, but we have saturated our worldview with this idea of "us vs. them." The idea that somehow we are different or better or superior.

But James' argument for language reminds us that there is no validity to us vs them ideology. It reminds us that each and every single person on this planet was made in the image of God. There's no grouping of "Those made in God's image" and "those who weren't" or "Those God spent more time on" and "those he didn't"

James reminds us that back in Genesis 1:26, God actively chose to create man in His own image. And that now our friends, our families, our neighbors, our enemies, our criminals, our politicians — all of us carry that watermark. That the source of our being is rooted in God's face.

For James, the mouth is absolutely connected to how we see and view the world around us. Our speech is directly connected to our sight. It's connected to the associations that we make when we think about people. It isn't just about carefully choosing our words. It isn't just about what we say *and* how we say it. It isn't about how quickly we can type out a comment to make another person seem foolish or uninformed.

It's about how we, at a fundamental level view other people.

About the things that we bring to the table when we look into the eyes of others.

Because Faith in real life means restored vision.

So are you willing to start to view other people as being made in the image of God?

Are you willing to no longer define others by worldly categories, but as "Created like God — just like me"

Because that is the fundamental question that James is asking of his audience. That is the faith that James is requesting of his readers.

Will you submit yourself to unlearning?

Will you submit yourself to deconstructing the layers and layers of information — the years of accumulation of data that the world has told you about others — and will you start to actively view people as *Imagio Dei* — God's image.



Because when you start to view people as having been made in the image of God, suddenly, your anger at their driving doesn't matter anymore.

My irritability at having to wait 5 more minutes at Starbucks isn't relevant and I don't actually need to say "thanks" in that low sarcastic tone.

When you're angry at your spouse or kids, you can look at them and see God's image — His perfectly loved creation.

And if I do slip up, then I realize that I've just spit venom towards an image of my loving Creator.

Then I realize, much like James wrote, that my river still has some salt in it.

And so we repent and pray for God to continue to help us unlearn our behavior and relearn to see with His lens.

Because faith in real life restores our speech through our sight.

We'll never be able to fully control our words and speech.

We'll never be able to fully extinguish the flames of our tongue.

But we can relearn to view people as being made in God's likeness.

As bearing his seal of approval of owning his watermark.

Just like we do.

Let's pray.

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is the "good news" that Jesus entered into our broken world to rescue us from sin. The good news is that through Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross, sinners are pardoned, the undeserving are given grace, and the broken are restored. There is no sin too heinous for God's forgiveness. There is no person so good in-and-of-themselves that they do not require forgiveness. Salvation is a free gift of God to anyone who genuinely acknowledges their brokenness and confesses saving faith in the Son of God. It doesn't take strong faith, just genuine faith in order to be saved. An example prayer you could pray:

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge I'm broken and a sinner. I believe that Christ died on the cross for sin, and through his resurrection overcame sin and death. I believe in you. I thank you for saving me.

The good news does not end with a confession of faith. New faith can grow into deep faith if cultivated. Let someone at Sunridge know about your new-found faith, and inquire about our new believer's resource: God Time: Your First 31 Days. Follow Christ wholeheartedly by professing your faith publicly through baptism, learning the Bible by attending church regularly and pursuing the unique calling of Jesus in your life!