



## LIFE GROUP STUDIES AUTUMN 2024

### 5 FAITH ON OUR TONGUES

#### JAMES 3. 1-18

**A way in – but don't spend long on this, get on quickly to digging into what James says!**

James says, 'No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.' What is your reaction? Have you suffered from people misrepresenting you or criticising you behind your back? Do you sometimes find your tongue runs away with you? Have you ever desperately wished you could un-say what you just said? Does your tongue have an extension in the finger on your keypad?

#### **READ JAMES 3. 1- 12      TAMING THE TONGUE**

- **Verses 1-2** Why do you think James utters this special warning to those of us who teach or preach (or write study notes!)?

Here are two dangers James may foresee:

**1** Such people may be guilty of misinterpreting or perverting the teachings of the Bible. Cf Paul's words to his protégé Timothy: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.' (2 Tim 2. 15) One modern-day deviation is called the 'Prosperity Gospel'. See **\*\*NOTE** at end.

**2** It's all too possible to 'talk the talk' without 'walking the walk'. Cf James 2.17, 'Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.' So woe betide the teacher or preacher who doesn't examine themselves in the light of the Word they are expounding, and apply the teaching to themselves. (I'm challenging myself as I write this.)

- **Verses 3-6** Discuss the 3 vivid images James uses, to make his point about the damage caused by the tongue. Does the seriousness with which he treats this subject surprise you? Does what he says ring true in our world today, and in your own experience?
- **Verses 7-8** Do you think James may have in mind the early chapters of Genesis? Consider 1. 27-31, 3. 1-11. How have the higher mental functions, expressed through the unique human faculty of speech, been subverted?
- **Verses 9-12** These are very searching verses, and I'm sure each one of us will feel convicted by them. Again, like his brother Jesus, James uses vivid imagery. Indeed in verse 12 James is quoting him – see Matthew 7. 15-23.

Take some time for silent reflection and confession. You might like to use Psalm 141.3 as a prayer: NIV says, 'Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.' New Living Translation says, 'Take control of what I say, O LORD, and guard my lips.'

A good rule of thumb, best applied BEFORE we open our mouths, is:

'Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?' And the best checklist, to guard our tongues, is Galatians 5. 22-26.

## READ JAMES 3. 13-18      TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

- In verse 13 James seems to be moving from what we say to how we behave. But look at his list of unspiritual behaviours which lead to 'disorder and every evil practice', in verses 14-16; can you see how inseparable words and actions are, and where both originate? As Jesus himself said, 'A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.' Luke 6.45 New Living Translation
- If you looked Galatians 5. 22-26, you'll have noticed that after listing the fruits of the Spirit, Paul wrote, 'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.' Compare this with James's words in verses 14-16. What three adjectives does James use to describe such behaviours? Why do you think he uses the word 'Wisdom' in inverted commas?
- Have you been in situations dominated by these attitudes and behaviours? How apt are these descriptions for our world today?
- If, as I expect, you have experienced such situations, maybe even got dragged into them, then James provides the perfect antidote in verses 17-18. I commend this whole section as a sort of touchstone, to make us aware of how the devil bedevils situations and relationships, and to give us a template for our response. It does work!

**Praying it through** Share the ways this teaching has touched you and pray:

- for one another;
- for situations where you encounter worldly 'wisdom' and seek to live out verses 17-18;
- for Christians in positions of influence in local and national affairs;
- for those who seek to be peacemakers in our war-torn world today.

### **\*\*NOTE:      An (over-simplified) explanation of the 'Prosperity Gospel'**

The 'Prosperity Gospel' has become a significant influence in some Christian churches since the early 20th century, particularly in the USA, and notably in Pentecostal churches. It is also popular in third world countries. It is sometimes referred to as the "Health and Wealth Gospel", with the slogan "Name it and Claim it." Central to this teaching is the belief that salvation through Jesus Christ includes liberation from not only death and eternal damnation but also poverty, sickness, and other ills. Believers are taught that God wants them to be richly blessed in this life and that this blessing includes physical well-being and material riches. Illness and poverty are seen as curses that can be broken through faith in Jesus; sadly this can lead to the suggestion that people who do not experience the healing they have prayed for must be deficient in their faith. Because of frequently extreme pressure on worshippers to give sacrificially to their church, there have been some notable scandals involving pastors who have become excessively and ostentatiously wealthy, at the expense of their followers.

We only have to revisit passages we've studied in recent months - James 2.5, Luke 6.17-26, 2 Corinthians 6.3-10, to know that that teaching is not biblical. Yes, God can use the material wealth of committed Christians to bring much blessing; yes, we have seen many amazing answers to prayers for the healing of others. But we still grapple with the mystery of why some people aren't healed in the way we hoped; and Paul sets us an example by his attitude to wealth, in Philippians 4. 11-13.