



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-2018 Midweek/Sermon Starter

Unit 3: Dare To Be Different
Sermon Series Title: Holding Up Our Holiness
Sermon 4: Sticks and Stones
Bible Passage: James 1:19-21

Introduction

There is a popular adage that has been recited in American culture for centuries, "sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you." Although this motto empowers many in the face of verbal abuse, it presents some errors. The truth is: malevolent words can hurt. In fact, words are everlasting, and words possess the potential to permanently poison, pain, and plague people forever. You see, physical wounds take time to heal, but in most cases, they can be overcome; however, words are recited for brief moments, but echo in the corridors of people's minds for lifetimes.

Unfortunately, many people (both Christian and non-Christian alike) have a propensity to use words as weapons of mass destruction without realizing the long-term adverse effects.

Background/Context

James wrote to "the 12 tribes dispersed abroad" (Jas. 1:1) with an appeal for them to monitor their Christian conduct. James wrote, "everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger" (v. 19). James admonished the believers to practice holiness in speech. For James, holy speaking was a major part of holy living. In this lesson, we will explore the ways in which we all can practice holiness in our speech.

**A. We Must Practice Self-Control
(Jas. 1:19)**

James addressed this letter to early Jewish Christians that resided in gentile communities outside of Palestine. James referred to them as the 12 tribes dispersed abroad. These were the 12 tribes of Israel who were scattered across gentile nations. James wrote to a people who were called to live above the culture. They were saved, they were set apart, and they were called to a high standard of living.

In an attempt to cement this effort, James offered a word about self-control. James instructed all disciples to "be quick to listen and slow to speak" (v. 19). Here, James reminded believers about their responsibility to uphold holiness in their conversations. They could not react unconstructively in the same way as their contemporaries; they were called to be holy—they

were called to speak holy. Therefore, their conversations had to match Christian conduct. You see, self-control is vital for the advancement of every Christian development.

Now, achieving the obligation set by James is not an easy mission because it requires a substantial amount of self-discipline and selflessness. Moreover, properly responding to issues instead of reacting poorly is not a skill that comes over night. This is why James' command, "'BE' quick to listen and slow to anger" is offered in the present imperative tense, which denotes continuity and habituality. All believers are therefore instructed to make self-control in speech a life-long commitment. When we choose to make this task our daily mission, The Holy Spirit will empower us to master self-control every day.

Application Point

In what ways and with whom do you find it most difficult to practice self-control in speech? Mastering self-control in speech is a difficult task—especially when dealing with problematic people, but it can be conquered one day at time. This week, practice self-control with the people that disturb you.

B. We Must Produce God's Righteousness (Jas. 1:20)

In the second movement of our text, James submitted a reason for the necessity of self-control among believers. James wrote plainly, "for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness" (v. 20). James was clear that our goal as believers is to produce God's righteousness, and failing to practice self-control inhibits us from achieving that objective.

In James, God strategically scattered the newly converted disciples among non-believers so that they could accomplish God's righteousness among the unbelievers. In a real sense, they were called to transform the culture instead of conforming to the culture. As holy people, believers should strive to produce God's righteousness especially among non-believers.

Contrary to popular opinion, the production of God's righteousness extends beyond ecclesiastical attendance and performance; God's righteousness is manifested through our interactions with humanity. Jesus reminded us in I John 4:20 that our love for God is validated by our love towards people. We therefore, must make sure that all our conversations accomplish God's righteousness.

Have you ever said something that you wish you could recant or restate? I am sure we all have. Unfortunately, words are permanent; once spoken, words can never be removed from the records of time. William Barclay warns, *"let people before they speak, remember that once words are spoken it is gone from their control"*. Hence, we should examine our words before we speak, and we should evaluate them to ensure that our words "accomplish God's righteousness." May we all live by this rule of thumb: process before proclamation.

Application Point

How well does your speech mirror the love of Jesus? Remember, we have been mandated to build people with love. Studies show that we speak some 7,000 words every day. We must

choose our words wisely understanding that our words can either build people or break people. This week, choose to build.

C. We Have Been Planted with God's Word (Jas. 1:21)

James concluded this petition with a plea for believers to rid themselves of the malevolent ways of the present culture. James wrote, "ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil" (v. 21). The believers were holy, so they could not conduct themselves with the moral filth and evil of the world. This included morally filthy words and evil intentions that drive those words.

James recommended a resource to aid in the quest to remove moral filth—to aid in the pursuit of mastering self-control and accomplishing God's righteousness. James wrote, "humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (v. 21). James reminded the believers that they were planted with the Word of God, and that they should adhere to its teachings. For James, the Word of God is the ultimate resource that strips away ungodliness and guides us towards righteousness.

You see, the Word of God is not just a book full of prosperity promises; the Word of God is the source that provokes change in our lives. The Hebrew writer reminds us, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When obeyed, the Word of God empowers believers to practice self-control in speech and to ultimately produce God's righteousness. All believers must commit themselves to submitting to God's word if they wish to prosper.

Application Point

How often do you consult The Bible before you address an issue with someone? Remember, God's word helps us control our scattered emotions while teaching us how to conduct godly conversations with irrational people. This week, make a commitment to always consult God's word before you react out of emotions.