

The Life of Faith

Advance in Faith – Level 1 – Unit 5
February 4th to March 18th

Week 4
Faith's Expression (Part 1)



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To identify the ways in which faith finds expression in our daily lives and encourage believers toward intentional expressions of faith in both word and deed.*

1. Faith and Words

James 3:1-12

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can’t draw fresh water from a salty spring”.

When James refers to “the tongue” in this passage of scripture he is employing a particular figure of speech called *metonymy*, which is when a thing or a concept is not referred to by its name but rather the name of something associated with it (e.g. “the white house issued a statement today” actually means the Federal Government of the United States issued the statement).

“The tongue” is a reference to our God-given capacity for speech, which of course requires more than the tongue itself.

In this passage James highlights 2 things:

1. The **Power** of the tongue / ability to speak
2. The **Purpose** of the tongue / ability to speak

1. The POWER of the tongue / ability to speak

In vs. 3-5 James says that the tongue is small but powerful. Your God-given capacity for speech may seem insignificant to you but it is a powerful force that can shape and reshape your world. Like a tiny spark in a forest it can do much damage and like a tiny rudder it can change the course of your life.

You have no doubt heard it said that, *“sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me”*. Of course it’s a lie! Words can do an incredible amount of damage. They are exceptionally powerful and we need to be careful what we say to others because once something has been said you can never take it back again.

Proverbs 26:18-19

“Like a mad man who throws firebrands, arrows and death is the man who deceives his neighbour and then says, ‘I was only joking!’”

In light of this awesome power, there needs to be control. Power without control is extremely dangerous (A Ferrari is extremely powerful, but you wouldn't put a 10-year-old behind the wheel because he wouldn't have sufficient control). Much of the trouble we have in the world today is that unlimited power is getting into the hands of those who cannot exercise control.

In the same way that you can control the bit in the horse's mouth and in the same way you can control the rudder on a ship you can control your tongue.

The tongue may be small and powerful, but it is also controllable.

Chapter 3 vs. 8 says *“no man can tame the tongue”* but that does not mean we are helpless victims of our own ability to speak. Man on his own cannot tame the tongue but by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your heart the manifest fruit of self-control can enable you to rule your mouth.

So, words are extremely powerful and they can shape the world around you so choose them carefully!

The second thing James highlights is:

2. The PURPOSE of the tongue / ability to speak

Vs. 9-12 is key to understanding what James is saying.

In **vs. 11** he asks the rhetorical question, *“Does a spring produce fresh water or salt water?”* the answer obviously being fresh water.

In **vs. 12** he asks another rhetorical question, *“Can a fig tree produce olives or a grapevine bear figs?”* Again the answer is obviously no.

Everything created by God is created with PURPOSE. That purpose gives the created thing its essential nature or character. Vines produce grapes, Fig trees produce figs, Olive trees produce olives and springs produce fresh water

When something created by God is used for anything, but it's purpose it becomes susceptible to carnal and / or demonic influence.

In **vs. 6** James says that the tongue has the potential to be *“set on fire by hell”* – in other words to be subject to unholy, ungodly, demonic influence if used for the wrong purpose.

So, what is the purpose of the tongue?

The purpose of the tongue is not to criticise, complain, belittle or berate others. It is not to lie, to curse men or to curse God.

The purpose of the tongue is to:

1. Bless God

To praise, worship, thank, exalt and extol the name of the Lord.

- Hebrews 13:15

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer up the sacrifices of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

2. Bless Men

To encourage, exhort, commend and admonish others.

- Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

- Ephesians 4:25

“Therefore putting away lying let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour for we are members of one another.”

- Ephesians 4:29

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

- Colossians 3:8

“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”

3. Confess biblical truth in faith

- 2 Corinthians 4:13-14

“So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you. But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, “I believed in God, so I spoke.” We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you”.

Faith finds its expression in both word and deed but confession plays a particularly important part in establishing faith. Aligning the words you speak with the words God speaks is essential to strengthening your conviction about the goodness, greatness and rightness of God.

NB: Faith doesn't deny the facts. The scriptures say that God calls those things which are not as though they are. (Rom. 4:17). That does not mean however that God *does not* call those things which are as though they are not. In other words, faith doesn't deny reality. Faith acknowledges the realities of life but also acknowledges God's sovereignty over those realities.

Conclusion:

In summary: faith finds its expression in and through our confession i.e. the words we speak. Words are powerful containers of life and death, blessing and cursing and should be filled with both truths from God and faith in God.

Group Discussion:

1. How have words that were spoken by others to you affected you in life, both positively and/or negatively? Can you remember a moment(s) when what someone said deeply affected you? Share your experiences with the group.
2. What impact do the words that Jesus spoke have on the development of our faith?
3. What kind of words do you think would be carriers of “life” and what kind of words would be carriers of “death”?
4. How can you intentionally take control over your words to ensure that they are faith-filled and that they serve the purpose for which God intended them?

Memory verse:

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, admonishing and teaching one another in Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord”.