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Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

PRAYER: Father, we do again thank you for the incredible gift of your Son, we thank you for the most precious gift there ever was, the one that you were willing to give. Lord, we just celebrate that this month, and we just thank you for it. We thank you also for the gift of your word, Lord, we cannot understand your Son without understanding your word, and so I thank you for that gift as well, and I pray for your Holy Spirit who accompanies your word. I pray that you would give us the presence of your Spirit as we again look into James, into this, again, challenging book. I pray that you would by your Holy Spirit's power give us the ability to not just to see it, not just hear it, but to again make it a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, James is returning once again to the issue of the tongue in our reading this morning. This is James 3, verses 1-12. It says: *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*

We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. 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. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 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. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

It's a long passage about the tongue, but the first person that James is aiming at in this passage is me. He says: Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know

that we who teach will be judged more strictly. You know, this made me think. It was about 33 years ago, I was sitting in a Sunday school class not 500 yards from where I'm standing right now, actually right down that way, and I was listening to the adult Sunday school teacher go over the story of the unjust steward. And as most of you know, the story involves a steward who realizes that he's going to be fired, and so realizing that, he approaches many of his soon to be former clients and has them favorably re-adjust their bills. Well, the Sunday school teacher that morning interjected at this point that he was sure that the steward had his own private bank account from which he had made up the difference to his boss, because after all, the boss had commended him. And I remember back then very politely suggesting that I thought when it came to explaining the Bible, you're not allowed to make stuff up to make things sound either better or worse, and I thought like the steward having a separate bank account kind of sounded like something that was made up. To his credit, the Sunday school teacher acknowledged that he had a real problem with the passage. A few months later, he had to go out of town and he actually asked me if I would substitute teach his class. Well, it was that substitute Sunday school class that started me on the path where I find myself now today standing here in front of you, and I can't tell you how many times I've thought about this passage in James and wondered how in the world I wound up being a teacher of the

scriptures, particularly since I made a commitment to God right at the very beginning when I was first saved that I would do anything he asked me to do as long as it didn't involve public speaking. And I say that to point out from personal experience that anybody that God wants to use, he will equip for that use. You see, I certainly don't believe that I sought out the gift of teaching, but God gave me this task just as he has given every single one of us in this body a unique gift designed for this body's edification. But it also doesn't mean that I'm not aware that this is a very sacred responsibility with a considerable downside. It says: *We who teach will be judged more strictly.* And it's not just James who points this out. Jesus himself said in Matthew 5:18: *"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

So Jesus warned about the careless use of the tongue, not just in teaching but even in simple conversation. In Matthew 12, he says: *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be*

justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Well, James this morning seems to take this warning and put it under a microscope, and over and over again James repeatedly warns us that the most difficult to control part of everyone's body is the tongue. So difficult that James could say that those mythical people who have completely mastered the tongue, well, they've mastered their entire body. He says: *We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.* Well, no one except the Lord Jesus Christ could make a claim like that. James is just acknowledging the enormity of the problem of controlling the tongue, and this is not the first time he's brought this subject up. We've seen before, James 1:19, he says: *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;* and in James 1:26, he says: *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*

Basically we're going to see this third time out talking about the tongue, James is devoting almost an entire chapter to the devastation produced by the tongue. And the three things that he discusses here is, number one, the seriousness of the sin of the tongue, the scope of that sin, and the solution to the sin of the

tongue. The seriousness, the scope, and the solution.

And first off he talks about the seriousness of the sin of the tongue. He says: *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. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.* He's saying figuratively and literally, the tongue is not given the respect it deserves for the damage that it can do. The tongue is a small part of our bodies and yet James takes great pains to point out that small parts of other things have great effects on them. I mean, a small bridle can control a horse, a small rudder can control a ship, and that's literally true. Figuratively speaking, we view the sin of the tongue as small and as inconsequential as the organ that produces it, and that's a mistake, because this sin is so pervasive and so much a part of our culture, we think the sins of the tongue are little as well. We have a hard time taking them seriously.

You see, we have a great pantheon of sins in the evangelical church, and often times we are not remotely on the same page that God is. At the very top of our list, I would suggest, is sexual

sins followed close behind those are sins of addiction, followed by anything involving a public scandal. A porn-addicted adulterer going to jail for tax evasion would be about the very top of our list for what we consider a grossly sinful life-style, and many would consider that the very bottom of the barrel. But God might have a very different bottom, judging by his word. And this is not to minimize the grievous nature of those sins, but a person who has that kind of public sin is not likely to gloss over the fact that he's got huge problems.

You know, the late Chuck Colson, he was one of the most powerful men in the world before the Watergate scandal sent him to jail, and he'd be the very first one to tell you, it was the best thing that ever happened to him. I mean, that scandal stripped him of the pretense that his life was going fine, and it forced him to see his sin for what it was and to cry out to God for help. That's why Jesus says in Mark 2:17: *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

You see, the sins of the tongue, on the other hand, are like many forms of spiritual cancer. You never realize how serious they are until immense damage has been done both to you and to the victim of your tongue. 1 Timothy 5:24 says this. It says: *Some men's sins*

are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. You see, a porn-addicted adulterer going to jail for tax evasion would expect his sins are preceding him, and God can use that exposure to convince the sick one that he's truly sick. But a person who is just as seriously ensnared in sins of the tongue, he can very often find that his or her judgment will follow too late to make a difference. Very often they escape any scrutiny at all because the sins of the tongue are sins that our culture winks at.

So how do I know that God takes it that seriously? Well, consider God's main complaint about us. It's in Romans 1. There God reads out this lengthy indictment of mankind for the sins that follow from the one great sin that man is guilty of, and that is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. This is what God says in his indictment. In Romans 1:18, he says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.*

Well God then goes on to describe this downward spiral that mankind is in where his conduct grows continually more and more debased as God progressively abandons him and the culture that refuses to hear him. Three times it says God gives them up, and each time man becomes more and more debased, until eventually he reaches the

bottom. And Romans 1:28 describes that bottom. It says this: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strive, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

We look at this terrible, terrible list, and God has 21 different expressions of a debased mind in that list, a mind that's been abandoned by God, and almost half of those sins listed there involve sins of the tongue. God says *they are full of envy, strive, deceit, maliciousness*, all sins of the tongue. He says *they are gossips, slanderers, insolent, haughty, boastful*; again, sins of the tongue.

You see, James' culture had only the spoken word for communicating the tongue. We have print, we have audio, we have video venues including 3D to express the evil of the tongue. We can now in effect destroy someone with our tongue on Facebook. That's now within our power. And these are sins that our culture winks at.

Different cultures have different sins which are typified by that culture. Ours has entire industries devoted, devoted to the sins of the tongue, and whether it be Hollywood or TV entertainment or magazines or gossip sites on the Internet, our culture winks at sins of the tongue, and the church which often mirrors of culture has failed to point out how serious those sins are.

Listen to what James says. He says: *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and it is itself set on fire by hell. 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 here is telling us what God views or how God views the sins of the tongue, and part of the reason why we don't take these sins seriously is because we don't fully grasp the scope of the sins of the tongue. And the reason why we don't grasp the scope of the sins of the tongue is because they are ubiquitous, they are virtually everywhere, and because they are everywhere, they are, in effect, nowhere. If TMZ and People or Us or Glamour or National

Enquirer are foreign to you, then you are actually quite blessed, but you probably don't use the checkout lines at the grocery store. If you watch TV for entertainment, you are going to see the sins of the tongue showcased and spotlighted as hip, as funny or as enlightened. And the net effect of that constant bombardment is that we continue to see things from the world's perspective instead of from God's, and subsequently when we hear what God's perspective on the sins of the tongue is, we find it jarring, we find it foreign, perhaps oppressive.

And he says: *The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* We think, I mean, isn't this a little excessive? But God's not the one who is left wounded and bleeding by the sins of the tongue. It is us. And that's not to say that God wasn't wounded by the sins of the tongue. Envy and strive and deceit and maliciousness is what drove the Pharisees in the relentless quest to have Jesus arrested, tried and executed. Gossip and slander and insolence, haughtiness and boasting is also what also drove the crowds to collectively use their tongues to shout, "Crucify him!" and to say with their tongues: "May His blood be on us and on our children."

But, you see, the difference between God and us is that God was

never a helpless victim of the sins of the tongue. Jesus walked right into what he knew was going to be his execution because he was not only the sacrifice, he was the sacrificer. He was not only the high priest but he was also the Lamb of God sacrificed by the high priest. Jesus willingly went to the cross to offer up his perfect life for our sins so that by faith, we could have his perfection. And that's not what a victim does. Victims don't walk into a death sentence they know is awaiting them, but that's what Jesus did. And even before he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus said in Mark 10:33: *"See, we are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."* That's not what victims say. Jesus' tongue spoke only the truth. He was crucified by those whose tongue spoke only the opposite. But God's hatred for the sins of the tongue is not because his son was a victim, it's because we are. God's hatred for the sins of the tongue stems from his love of those who are victims of the tongue, and that is us.

Just take a second or two and think back on some of the most painful memories you have ever had either recently or dating all the way back to your childhood. My guess is that the vast majority

of any painful memories you have can trace themselves back in some way to a sin of the tongue. Such is the scope of the sins of the tongue. It's breadth covers our whole lives from childbirth to death; its depth is so hidden that God has to constantly expose it to us. You see, we look on the outside, we look at the finished product, and that is, the words of the tongue themselves, and we invent myths to excuse them. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names, well, they'll never hurt me." Who are we kidding?

God sees our words far differently. He sees them as the end product of a process that starts not in our tongues, not in our brains, but actually in our hearts, and we don't see that because we've been led by our culture to diminish the seriousness of the sins of the tongue. We are so surrounded by these sins that are presented as hip or funny or at the very least, harmless, that we embrace the culture's view of the tongue rather than God's.

And secondly, as a result, we also diminish the scope of the evil of the tongue. We are so desensitized that only flat out lies or blasphemous profanity or over the top cursing will cause us to react. But those are like electrified fences that only react when something outrageous tries to breach them. Breaches like that give us a false sense of security that we're not the ones that are committing those sins. It's Lady Gaga, Madonna or Bill Maher who

says something that make us feel righteously indignant that our faith is being attacked, but actually it's an unkind word, a joke at someone else's expense or a cleverly disguised bit of gossip that is far more effective at destroying relationships and whole communities than some unbeliever's profane rant. And again, it's Jesus who said, *"But I tell you that everyone will give an account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."* And so we've seen thus far that the problem of the sin of the tongue is more serious than our culture wants us to believe, that the scope of this sin is also far greater than we would imagine.

So what is the solution? What is the solution to the sins of the tongue? Well, the last time we looked at the tongue, we looked at James' treatment of it, we talked about two different approaches that people have. One is the outside-in approach; the other is the inside-out approach. God's approach is always inside-out and the world's is always outside-in. And at it's worst, outside-in was illustrated by the Pharisees whom Jesus called out as whitewashed tombs. In Matthew 23, he said: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to*

others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

You see, the outside-in approach says if you want religion to be worthwhile, you better learn how to bridle your tongue. And to a certain very limited extent you can do that, but here's why it will ultimately fail. You see, the outside-in approach identifies the tongue itself as the problem. And it seeks to find ways to address curbing the tongue from the outside. You know, a local government may attempt to impose fines for cursing as one local town actually tried to do, the local church may attempt to impose some kind of social stigma on that behavior, and in the end you can get your desired results if all you desire is a lessening of the amount of coarse language and gossip. But that's not what James is after here. James is speaking to brothers in Christ who have already received Christ as Lord and Savior. God's Holy Spirit has already indwelt them, and he is in the process of sanctifying him or her from the inside out, and James knows that the problem with the tongue can never be addressed from the outside. Because it is in its essence an internal problem. And again, Jesus made that quite clear in Matthew 15. He said this: And he called the people to him and said to them, *"Hear and understand: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."* Then the disciples came and said to him, *"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard*

this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides, and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

What Jesus is saying here is that the heart of man is filled with evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness and slander. Now, the outside-in approach says well, find a reward or sanction that will somehow curb the output not of the heart but of the expression of the heart which is the tongue. That's just not going to work. That's like trying to fix a toothache by putting an aspirin on your tooth. The only way you're ever going to fix the toothache is to get to the internal source of it, and that's the decay and the rot that is inside the tooth. Same is true when it comes to the root and decay inside the human heart. Jesus tells us that our hearts are filled with rot and that the solution is not a new set of rules or sanctions designed to limit the output of the heart; the solution is a new heart.

Again, Ezekiel 36: *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* This is the inside-out approach. Now, the inside-out approach says if you are one of God's own, then inside you right now is the Spirit of the living God. Romans 8:9 says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

You see, it is God's Spirit and not your flesh who is actively about the process of bridling your tongue, not from the outside but from the inside, and not because you have to but because you now want to, because God's Holy Spirit is now actively transforming you into the very image of his Son and not just at the tongue but first and foremost in the heart. And that's why James says in James 1:26: *If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* James is saying, he's saying that such a person gives no evidence that the Spirit is in him helping him bridle his tongue. He's self-deceived. His religion is worthless. What James -- all he's saying is if it walks like a duck and it swims

like a duck and it quacks like a duck, it's a duck. And James applies the very same logic to unbelievers who cannot bridle their tongue, because apart from God's grace, you cannot. Again: *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 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.*

Well, if no natural resource can tame the tongue, then what hope is there for us? Well, our hope is in a supernatural resource. And the supernatural resource living inside every believer is God's Holy Spirit. He indwells us at the moment of salvation and he begins the process of turning us into the very image of his Son. We call that process sanctification, and sanctification is a progressive endeavor. It takes us from where we were to where we are, to where God wants us to be. And for every one of us, that journey is unique, that journey is different because all of us have different starting points.

So there's no formula to determine how many slip-ups of the tongue constitute evidence that your heart is not right, but here is something concrete that you should consider. When we sin with our

tongues and we are believers, we have the Holy Spirit of God within us convicting us. That is a supernatural source of all of our wisdom, but it is a wisdom that must be put into practice. Jesus taught his disciples that the key to gaining spiritual wisdom and the solution to taming the tongue was actually putting into practice God's wisdom. In Matthew 13:10, he says this: *The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secret of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken away from them."*

You might say God is using very ancient language to use what we say today when we say, "use it or lose it." One commentator referred to this principle as a person just dabbling learning with an instrument, who puts it down and leaves it for a long period of time, and he finds after a while that the little skill that he had picked up has been taken away. But on the other hand, he also finds that the more he sticks with it, the more he actually practices with it, the more capable he becomes of growing deeper in his ability to play it. And James has been telling us that the toughest instrument by far to master is the instrument known as the tongue. Again: *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.

Now, the reason why James tells us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to get angry is because when it comes to our tongues, we need to develop the ability to listen to the Spirit, to put his wisdom into practice as he is convicting us. That requires a skillful ability to listen. And listening is the solution. You know, I've told this story many times but it bears repeating because it illustrates well why we don't hear the Holy Spirit. The story is about a guy who saves up all of his money, finally he's able to buy himself his favorite car, he gets himself a used Mercedes, and he loves the car and he loves driving it around, but one day the oil light comes on. So he takes it to a mechanic. The mechanic fixes it, only to have the light come on two weeks later, and he finds another mechanic who fixes it with the exact same results, again, after a few weeks the light comes on. Finally, he finds a mechanic who fixes his oil light so that it doesn't come on after a few weeks, and after a full year, he's back at that mechanic because this time his engine has seized up. And while he's there, he asked him how he's able to keep the oil light from coming on in the first place while all the other mechanics had failed. And the mechanic said, "Well, it's actually very simple. I just unscrewed the bulb." When it comes to sensing the danger of

the tongue, our culture has perfected the art of unscrewing the bulb. You see, the oil light is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and it pains us to see that, it pains us to hear it. We can choose to pay attention to a red light telling us something is not right or we can simply choose to unscrew the bulb. When it comes to God's Holy Spirit convicting us about the use of our tongue, we have ourselves and we have our culture helping us unscrew the bulb. And it takes practice to screw it back in and to keep it screwed in.

Let me put this as simply as I can and let me use myself as an example. When it comes to my tongue, see, I believe God's Holy Spirit convicts me moment by moment, conversation by conversation, word by word. And I believe he convicts all of us this way. But I believe it's very easy to get far, far away from that, because outside of any planned word you might give like I'm doing now, all of our conversations are moment by moment events. And when I sin with my tongue, it is because at the precise moment of the Holy Spirit's conviction, I've chosen to unscrew the bulb. I've chosen not to hear. Hebrews 4:12 says: *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* I can tell you from personal experience that I have literally heard God's Holy Spirit convicting

me through his word about the very thoughts and attitudes of my heart while I was speaking, and I confess to you there are times when I know, I know I've unscrewed the bulb, when I plowed right through the Holy Spirit's conviction and said things I know I shouldn't have, and I can sense in my spirit at that very moment God's Holy Spirit saying, "Don't say that." I suspect you've sensed that as well.

And furthermore, I think the ability to hear the Holy Spirit as he is convicting me is an acquired skill. It's an acquired skill that each of us can enhance or diminish by whether or not we choose to listen. Jesus said: *"Whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken away from them."* That's one of the reasons why James says: *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.* And so the question is quick to listen to whom? There's a huge difference between hearing the word of God active and alive, judging the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart and having it bound up in a Bible sitting in your book shelf.

James finishes up this section on the tongue with a practical discussion of the hypocrisy that our tongues often produce. This is what he says. He says: *With the tongue we praise our Lord and*

Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My dear brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. To be a hypocrite is really, it means simply to have two faces, one for a person's face and one for their back. They're two different personas occupying the very same person. Hence that person can praise God with one face and he can curse his brother with the other. James says: My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

Can I tell you a simple rule that I try, not always with success, but I try to live by. That is this. I try never to say something behind someone's back that I cannot imagine my saying in front of their face. I mean, I actually consciously try to choose my words as if I'm always speaking to someone's face even or especially even if I'm not, and if you can't say it in front of their face, just don't say it at all. I mean, in the long run it saves you and them an awful lot of pain if you learn to just limit yourself to only one face. You don't need two.

And finally on a positive note, I think we all need to practice the art of good gossip. This one is easy. This one is fun, and this

one blesses everyone. It's really simple. When you hear something positive or lovely or edifying about somebody else, just call them up and pass the good gossip on. Don't just keep it to yourself. Share it with the one to whom it would really be a blessing. You know, a couple weeks ago I was at a meeting, and in that meeting, somebody singled out a person that I knew that I didn't even know that they knew and they singled him out for doing an exceptional job on a project that they were involved in. As soon as I got home, I called that person up, I said, "Hey, I was at a meeting, I heard someone talking about you." And you know what their response is? Their immediate response is, "Okay. What did they say?" You know, that kind of -- I said, "I heard so-and-so say that you did a terrific job on this and that, and he wouldn't hesitate to recommend you to anybody because he was so pleased with your work." And as I'm speaking, I can almost see the grin coming on his face. To do that cost me nothing. Doesn't cost anybody anything. And it edifies not only the person I called but it also edifies the person who had been speaking well of him. Everybody wins. You see, good gossip like that is a good way to push back against a culture that wants us to bite and devour each other. And in fact, it's thoroughly biblical. Romans 14:19 says: *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

Listen, James here is pointing out a terrifying portrait of the tongue. And he says *no human being can tame the tongue*, and he is correct. But God can. God can if we are willing to hear him. He can if we are willing to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, as he convicts us even as we are speaking, if we are willing to screw the light bulb back in. The question is: Are you willing? Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word, I thank you for the warning that James sets out for us, especially as we live in a culture that laughs at sins of the tongue. We live in a culture that doesn't take any effort at all to examine the damage that that does. I pray that you would give us the ability, Lord, to screw the bulb back in when it comes to listening to your Holy Spirit, understand that your Spirit wants to judge the heart and the attitude of the heart moment by moment, word by word, conversation by conversation, and give us the ability to be sensitive to and willing to hear what your Holy Spirit is saying, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.