

**Icebreaker:** Who is the best encourager you know? What about their words set them apart?

**From last week:** Abraham and Rahab both practiced their faith by showing hospitality in their lives (Genesis 18 and Joshua 2). Practice hospitality as evidence of your faith (e.g. show hospitality to someone at work, at home, or at church in worship or in the hallways). Were you able to show hospitality this past week?

**Read this week's scripture and discuss:**

1. Why do you think James sets apart teachers in this passage?
2. James compares the tongue's power to a bit in a horse's mouth, a rudder on a ship, and a spark which starts a fire. Which image do you find most accurate or compelling? What do these images say about the tongue and our words?
3. Please read Matthew 12:34-37. How does these words from Jesus connect with what James says and how does it make you feel?
4. James can be abrupt in the language he uses. Jesus was tough on the Pharisees and money changers in the gospels. Were they "tame" with their tongues? When is it acceptable to use strong language?
5. In your everyday conversation, how well do you do with verse 9? Is it a challenge for us to praise God and not "curse" others?
6. According to James in verses 15-18, what is "heavenly wisdom" and what is "earthly wisdom"?
7. From the list in James 3:17-18, what qualities do you need to develop? Is there one or two you are already developing?

This sermon series is called "Working Out Our Faith." Each week, we will recommend a practice to work out your faith.

**Working out your faith:** James says that with the same mouth we can praise God and curse His creation. Who is someone that you don't easily see the image of God in and are tempted to curse? Pray each day this week for that person (or persons) instead of thinking about cursing them.

**Prayer:** As your group closes in prayer, please remember the following requests from our church family.

- > Prayers of comfort for the Pike family in the death of Jim's father.
- > Prayers of healing for Phil McCauley.

**Requests from ZPC's May Prayer Calendar:**

- > Pray for volunteers who usher, serve donuts, and serve as greeters at ZPC.
- > Pray for the McDowells and their basketball ministry in the Philippines.

The words we speak to each other matter. Just read James chapter 3. Or read Jesus' words in Matthew 12:34-37. As we study this passage together, may we be reminded of the power of our words to hurt or to heal. Truly, our words can instruments in God's hands.

**[Question 1]** Teaching was a highly respected profession in Jewish culture. The words of a rabbi had great impact on his students' spiritual lives. Teachers today still use words and ideas to impact their students – anyone who teaches the Bible and spiritual things are held accountable by God.

**[Question 2]** James uses a lot of images in this short chapter. Discuss which one makes the biggest impact on your thinking. An untamed tongue can do damage with lies, gossip, slander, putting others down, cursing, or disrespecting others or God. The tongue and our words can set fire to things.

**[Question 3]** Reading Jesus' words after reading James' words seems to give them more power. Jesus is harsh to the Pharisees – but truthful in saying "by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." This blunt talk from Jesus is sobering and grabs our attention as his followers to use our words for good.

**[Question 4]** As Jerry discussed last week, those in other cultures and other times were often more harsh with the way they spoke than we are in suburban America. Strong language used by Jesus is acceptable because he is God. We can carefully use strong language when the situation calls for it. Some examples might be to speak out against moral ills, such as oppression, extreme poverty or racism. Pray and take a breath if you are contemplating using strong language.

**[Question 5]** It is a challenge to praise God and to "curse" others. It can be easy to praise God because of his love for us and his perfection. Humans aren't perfect and often make mistakes. As James says, humans are made in God's likeness. We are called clearly not to "curse" each other. Challenge your group members to use words of encouragement and kindness, not curses.

**[Question 6]** Earthly wisdom comes from selfish ambition and envy. It is about me. Heavenly wisdom includes peace, submission, mercy and sincerity. It is about God and others, not me.

**[Question 7]** Read the list again in verses 17-18. Use this as an opportunity to call out the good in each other as group members say how they may be working on peace, submission, mercy, purity, good fruit, and impartiality.