

How to Live with a Controlled Tongue

Study Guide for Small Group Discussion and Personal Application
Lynn Haven UMC – October 18, 2020 – Pastor Craig Carter

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This fall we are exploring the Letter of James. James is full of practical advice and shows us “How to Live” as Christians. As a congregation we are following a reading plan through James and studying selected passages. Check out mylhumc.net/grow for more information.

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. - James 1:26 NLT

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 among all the parts of the body, 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! - James 3:2-10 NLT

1) A controlled tongue is the key to Christian living. (vv. 2-5a)

The words we speak determine the direction of our lives. Our words can have a dramatic effect on the lives of others and ourselves – whether they are hurtful words or words of encouragement. James offers the analogies of a bit in a horse's mouth or the rudder on a ship as examples of how one small thing can channel great power.

2) The tongue has incredible power to harm both ourselves and others. (vv. 5b-6)

James uses the analogy of the tongue as a spark that can ignite a forest fire. Think of how destructive forest fires have been in California this year – most of them were started by something small. In the same way, a careless word can prove incredibly destructive.

3) No one can control the tongue. (vv. 7-10)

Here James uses the analogy of a wild animal. We have great trouble controlling our tongues. James contends that trying harder does not always bring us success, we need God's help.

4) Only God can control the tongue.

We learn to live with a controlled tongue when we realize how powerful and harmful it can be, acknowledge how powerless we are to command it, and then invite the Lord to do for us what we cannot do ourselves. The Lord can bring about this change in our lives.

For Discussion:

⇒ In the last week or two, what kind of words have come out of your mouth? Do you use profanity? What other kinds of ungodly or unkind speech (in addition to actual swearing) sneak out of your mouth?

⇒ Describe a time when you said something that you later regretted. What were the consequences? How was the situation resolved? In the same way, consider an occasion when a well-placed word, spoken by you or someone else, proved beneficial. What was the result?

What will you do about it?

⇒ PRAY

⇒ REPENT of any sinful speech and confess it to God
- e.g. harsh words, untruthful statements, harmful gossip, vulgar language

⇒ ASK God to seize control of your tongue from this point on
- Give Him permission to convict you, restrain your speech, and even silence you, if necessary

⇒ How can you use your words for good this week?

Suggested Daily Prayer:

Lord, show me how to live with a controlled tongue today. Help me to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Amen.