

# EXTREME FAITH

WISDOM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

## Discussion Five:

### *Our Words Reveal Our Wisdom (3:1-18)*

Words are powerful. We all remember negative words spoken about us. We also remember the words we wish we could take back! Words propel the destinies of nations as diplomats fail or succeed to prevent war. Words seal covenants, such as marriage, when the man and woman say, “I do” or “I will” and pledge their love. Word spoken and written start businesses and ministries, carry political campaigns, and hopefully encourage our family and friends. In today’s 24/7 social media, words often come in the form of explosive reactions, personal insults, and memes repeated as facts.

James teaches us that of all the disciplines in our lives, taming our tongues is among the most difficult. His readers were normal people...and that means their words were contradictory, including blessing and condemning, encouraging and insulting others. Our passage helps us pay attention to our words and find in God’s true wisdom the actions and words that lead to peace and justice.

#### Opening conversation:

Share about what kinds of humor you enjoy. What is the difference between healthy laughter about the human condition and unholy communication?

## Reading #1: James 3:1-6

#### Key ideas:

We have a warning for those who teach: your words matter, and you have a greater accountability before God because your words shape the beliefs and behavior of others. James also uses a bit of hyperbole to illustrate the power of the tongue: a bit for a horse, a rudder for a ship, and a spark setting a forest ablaze.

- Parallel scriptures: Proverbs 15:1-2, 23, 28, 31, 33; 16:13, 21
- Question: What experiences do you have of someone’s words either increasing or decreasing conflict? When have words stoked the flames of anger and when have they calmed the seas of contention?

#### An exercise:

Take a moment and speak a word of encouragement to a member of the group. If this feels awkward, then speak this blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6).

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## Reading #2: James 3:7-12

### Key idea:

James reinforces the potential evils of our speech and exposes the contradiction of the same mouth blessing and cursing. What he is really saying is that our words expose what is in our hearts.

- Parallel scriptures: Mark 7:5-8, 14-23; Ephesians 4:25-5:2
- Question: why is gossip so appealing, even to otherwise really good people?

### Insights:

If someone starts sharing something negative about someone else, ask them a question, "Have you shared this with them?" If they have not, the conversation should probably end. Also, it is right to distinguish criticism of ideas from judgmentalism toward a person. Critical thinking is not the same thing as a critical spirit!

## Reading #3: James 3:13-18

### Key idea:

God's wisdom brings beautiful fruit in comparison with human wisdom that is influenced by evil forces. Notice the contrast:

- Wisdom from "below" = bitter envy, selfish ambition, boasting...revealing an earthly, unspiritual, and demonic origin.
- Wisdom from above: a good life, with deeds done in humility and the seven-fold fruit: pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.
- Parallel scriptures: Galatians 5:13-26; Colossians 3:5-14
- Interesting fact: The seven facets of wisdom all begin with the same letter in the Greek language here – James really wanted his friends to remember the fruit of true wisdom.
- Question: How can we begin cultivating this wisdom? (Hints: memorizing the Word, sharing insights with believers, and learning to pause before we speak...)

### Insight:

"Even a fool appears wise when he is silent."

Good communication begins with a purified heart. Take time this week and examine how you feel and think about some people and where there is conflict, begin to bless them.