

The book of
JAMES Devotions
you're doing it wrong READ | UNDERSTAND | APPLY

Monday: We All Stumble

PRAY: Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

READ: James 3:1-2

¹ **Not many of you should become teachers**, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be **judged more strictly**. ² **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**.

UNDERSTAND: *get a deeper understanding of the key words*

- **Not many of you should become teachers:** Teachers were very important in the early church. The early Christians were devoted to learning God's word on a daily basis (Acts 2:42). Therefore, teaching God's word is a high calling with much responsibility. Apparently James knew that there were some people who sought this role to gain status for the wrong reasons. Not everyone should fill this role.
- **Judged more strictly:** Teaching God's word is a serious task. It comes with a high level of accountability. A teacher can easily lead people astray if they are not carefully studying the word to ensure their teaching is correct. Therefore, teachers are judged more strictly by God and held to a higher standard.
- **We all stumble in many ways:** James is pointing out the fact we are nowhere near perfect people. Since he uses the words "we" and "all" he is also referring himself.
- **Never at fault in what they say:** James is not saying that we will actually be able to be perfect in everything we say. His point is that when we make an intentional effort to watch what we say, we may stumble less in other areas as well.
- **Able to keep their whole body in check:** Words have more power than we realize. Our words reflect our heart (Matthew 12:34; 15:18). James is teaching us that our words have a big effect on all the other areas of our lives.

APPLY: *What is this passage calling me to do?*

Why do you think people who teach the Bible are judged more strictly?

If we were perfect in controlling our words, how would that impact other areas of our lives? What would be different or better?

PRAY: Ask God to help you use your words wisely.

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Tuesday: Under Control

PRAY: Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

READ: James 3:3-4

³ When we put **bits into the mouths of horses** to make them obey us, we can **turn the whole animal**. ⁴ 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.

UNDERSTAND: *get a deeper understanding of the key words*

- **Bits into the mouths of horses:** Although a horse is a large animal that can overpower any human, it can be controlled with a small bit. Whichever way we turn the horse's mouth and head is the way to **turn the whole animal**. James is using this to illustrate how the tongue can turn our entire lives in a certain direction.
- **Take ships as an example:** No matter how large the ship and how strong the winds, a ship can be **steered by a very small rudder**. In both of these illustrations, James is making the point that the tongue is a small organ that can change the direction of our lives, whether that be a good direction or bad direction.
- **The pilot:** It's important to notice that in both of these examples, there is someone making a choice. With the horse, the owner or trainer is choosing the direction. With the ship, the pilot or captain is choosing the direction. The point here is that we always have a choice with what we say. We cannot blame being careless with words on our personality or anything like that. We have to choose to be wise. Sometimes that means we need to be quiet and listen.

APPLY: *What is this passage calling me to do?*

How do these illustrations apply to everyday life situations?

In what ways do our words set the direction of our lives?

PRAY: Ask God to reveal to you how your words have guided or misguided you.

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Wednesday: Small Spark, Big Fire

PRAY: Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

READ: James 3:5-6

⁵ 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. ⁶ **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.**

UNDERSTAND: *get a deeper understanding of the key words*

- **A small part of the body, but it makes great boasts:** Pride is the major cause of misusing our words. We we blame our personality or say, "that's just the way I am" we are being prideful about our sinfulness.
- **A great forest:** Something as small as a spark can cause an entire forest to burn. James' point here is to warn us of the devastating effects our words can have. The consequences are often much more severe than we realize. And if we are careless enough, sometimes the damage cannot be undone.
- **The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil:** The tongue has the power to give expression to evil and unrighteousness. James is making the point that it is the natural tendency of our sin nature to speak evil. Therefore, we must fight that temptation and speak life rather than death.
- **Corrupts the whole body:** The Greek word for corrupt is *spiloō*. It means to be defiled, foul, dirty, or polluted. James is saying that even if you have everything else going for you, your tongue can ruin it all.
- **Sets the whole course of one's life on fire:** Being careless with your words can ultimately ruin your life. In our culture you can even lose your job for an unwise Facebook post. Words can set your life on fire and fire can be very difficult to put out.
- **Set on fire by hell:** a reference to the fact that sinful speech has a very evil source.

APPLY: *What is this passage calling me to do?*

What are some small things you've said that have had big consequences?

Why is it so difficult to consider the consequences before we speak?

PRAY: Ask God to help you think about the consequences before you speak.

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Thursday: Deadly Poison

PRAY: Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

READ: James 3:7-8

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and **have been tamed by mankind**,⁸ but **no human being can tame the tongue**. It is a **restless evil, full of deadly poison**.

UNDERSTAND: *get a deeper understanding of the key words*

- **All kinds of animals...have been tamed by mankind:** It is ironic that we have the ability and control to tame all kinds of animals. We are even willing to put forth much effort to train an animal. But we struggle to practice self-control.
- **No human being can tame the tongue:** James is pointing out that no one can perfectly tame the tongue. But that does not give us an excuse to be careless with our words. Taming the tongue is a matter of humility and self-control. These are part of the Fruit of the Spirit that should always be growing in us (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **A restless evil:** The Greek word for restless is *akatastatos* which can also be translated to mean unstable and unpredictable. If we do not practice the discipline of self-control, our words will be careless and destructive. As believers we are called to speak words that build others up (Ephesians 4:29).
- **Full of deadly poison:** We usually don't think of our words as being deadly. But God's word tells us that our words have the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21).

APPLY: *What is this passage calling me to do?*

Do you have a difficult time taming your words? Why or why not?

How does this passage help you to realize the power of your words?

What changes do you need to make with how you speak?

PRAY: Ask God to give you the strength to practice self-control.

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Friday: This Should Not Be

PRAY: Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

READ: James 3:9-12

⁹ With the tongue we **praise our Lord** and Father, and with it we **curse human beings**, who have been **made in God's likeness**. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, **this should not be**. ¹¹ **Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?** ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

UNDERSTAND: *get a deeper understanding of the key words*

- **Praise our Lord...curse human beings:** The word for "praise" here is *eulogeō* meaning to bless or celebrate with praises. The Greek word for "curse" is *kataōmai* meaning to speak evil of someone or to speak in a way that brings evil on another person. James is teaching against hypocrisy which was a common theme in the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 23:1-39).
- **Made in God's likeness:** Since human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), to speak against people is to speak against God.
- **This should not be:** James is emphasizing the fact that praising God while cursing others should not happen at all in the life of believers. This is non-negotiable. There is no excuse for that kind of hypocrisy.
- **Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?:** James ends his teaching on taming the tongue by illustrating how impossible it is to praise God while cursing others. Salt water and fresh water don't flow from the same spring. Fig trees can't produce olives. Grapevines can't produce figs. Therefore, James is arguing that it is not possible to be a believer and be careless and harmful with your words.

APPLY: *What is this passage calling me to do?*

What are some ways that we curse or speak against others?

In what ways do you need to change the way you speak about others?

PRAY: Ask God to help you change the way you speak about others.

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Saturday: Prepare for Sunday

REVIEW: Take a few minutes to make a list of what you've learned this week.

PRAY: Ask God to use this time to help you get familiar with Sunday's scripture passage.

READ: James 3:13-18

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

THINK: *Go ahead and underline key words and phrases.*

Start thinking about what this passage is saying.

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- What do you think is the main idea?
- What parts are confusing or hard to understand?
- How might this passage help you to follow Jesus better?

PRAY: Ask God to prepare you for tomorrow's worship service.