

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 10 Sept 2018)

Read - James 1:19 - 27

"...Do any of you think you are religious? If you cannot control your tongue, your religion is worthless and you deceive yourself." vs 26

I have to confess with honesty, that the verses in Scripture about 'Taming the Tongue' cause me to get a knot in my stomach - it's a guilty conscience! I am anxious, because I am sure that I have caused terrible hurt to people by saying unguarded words. I have prided myself on my honesty, but sometimes this means that I have said unkind, judgemental words which is in direct conflict with the Spirit of Christ which dwells in me.

When my children were little, we watched the movie, 'Bambi' in which the little rabbit, Thumper, says this famous line: "If you can't say sumthin' nice, don't say nothin' at all". Scripture agrees with Thumper.

Mahatma Ghandi is reported to have said something along the lines of: "All the world would be Christian, if it wasn't for the Christians." We let our Master down by the destructive words we speak. We are being hypocritical if we proclaim to be Christians and yet prove, by our lack of control over our tongues, that our "religion is worthless".

God takes OUR words seriously. We can choose to use words bring hope and healing, or pain and judgement. The opinion of our Lord and Creator is of far more importance than impressing our social circle when we agree with their critical views or add our "bit of spice" to gossip or complaints.

Prayer: Lord, please forgive me for my lack of control over my tongue. I know that I have spoken words of criticism, complaint and unkindness. I have become angry and have said things which I know have hurt and wounded others. Lord, in Your mercy, hear my prayer.

DAY 2

Read - James 3:1 - 6

"And the tongue is like a fire..." vs 6

In June, last year, we South Africans watched in horror as we saw the shocking devastation which run-away fires had caused in the Knysna area. Rich and poor alike suffered through the horror and loss caused by the unrelenting flames.

James (3:5) says: "Just think how large a forest can be set on fire by a tiny flame." Once the flame is lit and burns, there is no going back.

In the news at the moment, is the story of a nasty, blatantly racial comment which was made by a young adult man on a Twitter video whilst overseas. The damage from this comment has spread like the wild fire James warned us of. The man has tried to apologise, but nothing, no words he can say, can remove the vileness and the destructive impact of the words he spoke. The impact of those words is far reaching and have hurt and damaged many lives - emotionally and physically.

Unfortunately, unkind, untrue and destructive words, once spoken, can only be forgiven, not forgotten. The Lord warns us in Proverbs 13:3 : "He (or she) who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin."

We need to allow God to convict us of the danger of an untamed tongue. Our prayer each day should be that God will help us to "guard our lips".

Prayer: Almighty God, I pray that you will help me to realise the impact of the words I speak. Please take control over my lips and my tongue that my conversations will be ones which please You and bring blessing to all I connect with.

DAY 3

Read - James 3:7 - 12

"But no one has been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and full of deadly poison. We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people". vs 8 and 9

We live in a very aggressive society. It is not just in South Africa, it is a world-wide problem. It seems as if it has become acceptable to react aggressively with hand motions and words when we feel slighted or wronged. Our roads are a prime example of the impatience and unnecessary anger which seems very close to the surface of many people in our land.

People use words to 'lash out' at others - they are used as weapons. Harsh words are sometimes chosen when we are in a fit of temper to 'put people in their place' - to degrade and humiliate. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." It is not our job to put people 'in their place'. The Lord commands us to react in a loving manner. Proverbs warns in 10:11 "A good person's words are a fountain of life, but a wicked person's words hide a violent nature."

Gossip is also a destructive use of the tongue. We need to be very careful about what we share about other people. Sometimes our gossip is disguised as concern, or requests for prayer for another person. Even listening to gossip is not okay for a Christian.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in a world where aggressive responses are becoming common, help me to react with gentleness and compassion. Help me, too, to be careful not to gossip or listen to gossip about others. Keep my heart kind and pure, I pray.

DAY 4

Read - Matthew 5:33 - 37; James 5: 12

“Just say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ - anything else you say comes from the evil one”. vs 37

The World’s leaders are setting a shocking example of untruthfulness! Every day we are exposed to the lies, deceit and duplicity of politicians. However, dishonesty is not reserved for the governments, it is rife wherever you turn.

Even children struggle to admit when they have done something wrong, they are always looking for someone else to blame. Adults are not much better and promises are broken all the time.

We are warned by Jesus and James not to exaggerate or lie. A person who has a reputation for deviating from the absolute truth, often cannot get people to believe them. The Ryrie Study Bible says: “Christians should not become like that. Always be honest so that others will believe your simple yes or no. By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as trustworthy.” Otherwise, Jesus says, we will be speaking words which come from the ‘evil one’.

Besides truthfulness, our conversation should also be clean. In our work environments we are exposed to very coarse, foul language. We hear it all the time, and then, suddenly, we find ourselves thinking and even saying these swear words. Christians should always be noteworthy by the purity of their speech. It should not be peppered with words which are not supposed to be said!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, it is so easy to be influenced by those around us. Give us the courage to speak honestly - to admit to any wrongdoing and not to hide from the truth. Help our conversations to be pure and clean.*

DAY 5

Read - Matthew 12:33 - 37

“Your words will be used to judge you - to declare you either innocent or guilty”. vs 37

We have realised this week that our words matter. Jesus and James have both told us that we need to make changes in the way we speak. The problem is that no matter how hard we try, words slip out and damage is done.

Jesus says that we cannot transform our tongue until we have a transformed heart. He said in Matthew 15:18 : “What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man (or woman).” The problem is within us.

We need to pray the prayer that King David prayed (Psalm 51:10) “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

In Romans 12:2 we are challenged by these words: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Only surrendering to the power and infilling of the Holy Spirit can do this.

It is only as the Spirit of Jesus is given the space to change the way we think, that there will be any change in the way we speak. Philippians 4: 9 “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.”

Prayer: *“Change my heart, Oh God, Make it ever true, Change my heart, Oh God, May I be like You.*

DAY 6

Read - Ephesians 4:29 - 32

“Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”. vs 29

One of Zig Ziglar’s popular sayings is: “He climbs highest who helps another up”.

The Bible challenges us to use our words to help people and to build others up. Our words can be life-giving and can have a wonderfully positive effect. I am sure that every one of us has had at least one experience of kind words of affirmation which were spoken to us at just the right time and we found that we were greatly comforted or encouraged by them.

As Christians, it is our duty to look for the good in people and situations, to find it and to highlight it. A positive mental attitude and positive thinking are both powerful and, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, our words could literally change the lives of people around us. Mother Teresa is quoted as saying: “Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

Instead of being pre-occupied by our own self-interest, we need to focus on the interests of others. We do not know their pain and their struggles. As we look outside of ourselves for ways to make those around us happy, by the way we speak to them and encourage them, we will find our lives are happier.

Prayer: *“Make me a channel of Your peace; Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love; Where there is injury, Your pardon, Lord; And where there’s doubt, true faith in You.”*