

Discussion Starter

How easy would you find it to take a (temporary) vow of silence? Which people or activities would it be most difficult to be around without breaking your vow? How long do you think you would last?

Worship Together

There are many names and titles used for the Lord Jesus in the Bible and each tells us something unique about who He is. Write the following verse references on separate pieces of paper before the meeting and then hand them out to people in the group. In an attitude of quiet reflection, ask each person to read their verse in turn, allowing a few moments between each for everyone to consider what that verse says about the person of Jesus. When everyone has read their verse leave a few minutes for prayers of praise and worship.

- Revelation 22:13 – Alpha and Omega
- John 6:35 – The Bread of Life
- John 10:14 – The Good Shepherd
- John 1:29 – The Lamb of God
- John 8:12 – The Light of the World
- Isaiah 9:6 – Wonderful Counsellor...
- John 1:1 – The Word
- John 11:25 – The Resurrection and the Life
- Revelation 17:14 – King of Kings

Bible Study

“Life and death are in the hand of the tongue. The hand kills only at close quarters; the tongue is called an arrow because it kills at a distance.”
1st Century Rabbinical Teaching

Read James 3:1-12 and discuss the following questions...

- Why does James single teachers out for a special mention in this passage? Are there particular dangers that face those of us who teach others? (You may want to think back to the last study as well as forward to this one.)
- The word translated “perfect” in verse 2 means something close to *perfectly mature* rather than *sinless*. To what extent do you think that somebody’s speech is an accurate indicator of their spiritual maturity?
- There are three vivid pictures used in this passage to describe the tongue and the damage it can do: the bit, the rudder and the spark. Are they just three ways of saying the same thing or do the three images each teach us something different about the power of the tongue? Is there any significance to the order that the author puts them in?
- Discuss together why James calls the tongue “a world of evil...” The word translated “hell” is *gehenna*, which was a valley outside Jerusalem where “unclean” waste, such as dead animals and dung, would be taken and burnt. For obvious reasons the name came to be used metaphorically for the place of punishment. Why does James link it to the tongue?
- James says in effect that nobody can really control their tongue. Do you agree with him? Is this view overly pessimistic?
- After all this discussion about the damage that our words can do, read Proverbs 12:18. What examples have you seen of the healing power of wise words?

Pray Together

Gossip, back-biting, slander, unkind humour, dishonesty, obscenity, verbal abuse: many of us live, work or socialise in environments where it is hard not to get drawn into wrong ways of speaking. In fact, this is an area where it can be exceptionally difficult to stand out without appearing prudish or judgemental. And yet we are called to stand out from the crowd and even to be a catalyst by which the crowd might be changed. Is anyone in the group in this kind of situation at the moment? Take some time to pray for them.

Meditations

A few brief thoughts to ponder on before your group discussion.

Read James 3:2

Do you agree with James's assessment that the tongue is the most difficult part of the body to keep under control? There are so many ways that our words can be a blessing to others, and so many ways in which they can be hurtful or damaging. Instead of speaking to God, ask Him to speak to you about the words you speak and take a few minutes to allow the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts and to challenge you if He wants to.

Read James 3:3-4

Have you ever had the experience that your tongue has steered you onto a path that you had no intention of taking? If so, how did you recover the situation? How can you go about trying to ensure that you control your tongue rather than the other way around?

Read James 3:9

Think for a while on what it means that men and women "have been made in God's likeness". James is clearly implying here that the full importance of this fact has been missed by his readers, or they would not be speaking about each other in the way that they were. Ask God to help you to see His own image and likeness in other people, even those that you find it the hardest to see any good in.

Read James 3:9

Look at the words of the quote at the top of the Bible Study section overleaf. Our words can be bringers of life, of bringers of death. So can the words of those around us. Are you aware of things that have been said to you or about you which have killed a little bit of you? Ask God to reveal His truth to you and make a commitment before Him that you will believe what He says over what anyone else has spoken. If necessary, ask Him for the grace to forgive that person.

If there are particularly painful memories associated with things that have been said to you, you might want to ask a trusted friend to pray through these things with you.

Read James 3:12 and Matthew 12:33-37

Reflect upon the words of Jesus and consider what further light they throw upon what James writes in this verse.

Read James 3:9-12

Meditate on these verses again for a few minutes. Think about those people who you don't like or don't agree with at work, in church or in any other context. Consider how you talk about them, or indeed to them. If necessary, bring your thoughts to God and ask for His help to be a source of fresh water and not salt water (literally *bitter water*).