

JAMES: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

Week 3:
A Blazing Fire

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

Our words have consequences. The words we choose to use will either advance God's kingdom here on earth or bring destruction. In this lesson, your college-age participants will discover how James teaches that as followers of Christ, we are no longer given the option of praising God while bringing destruction with our tongue. As we evaluate the power of our words, we can look for ways to use those words for God's glory.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: Our words have the ability to bring destruction or advance the kingdom of God.
2. WHY: Too often, we use our words as if they don't have eternal consequences—but we don't have to live that way.
3. HOW: In this lesson, participants will evaluate the impact of their words and look for ways they can use their words to advance God's kingdom here on earth.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

James 3:1-12

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

James 1:26-27

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with participants, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your lesson.

Read James 3:1-12.

We continue our study in James by looking at his teaching on the power of words. Many of us can remember things that were said to us years ago that were either extremely



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hurtful or incredibly uplifting. James teaches us that the smallest words can have an enormous impact, like a rudder that turns a ship or a spark that causes a fire. As we've seen in our study of James, Jesus is very interested in every detail of our lives—including the words that come out of our mouth.

We live in a day and age where more words are communicated than ever before. Between email, phone calls, text messages, face-to-face conversations, and social media, we throw out thousands of words each day, often with little regard for the impact they might have.

The goal of this lesson is more than just encouraging people to stop cussing or telling dirty jokes. James is teaching us to become followers of Christ who use every tool we can to advance God's kingdom here on earth, including our words. Encourage your college-age participants to see their words as tools to bring pieces of heaven here to earth. Whether they are praising God, encouraging their friends, or addressing the evil they see around them in the world, they can use their words in ways that bring glory to God.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to participants prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Every word you use today has an impact; are you using your words wisely? Join us tonight as we continue our study in James.
- What are you choosing to talk about today? Are you focusing people's attention toward God's kingdom? Let's talk about it at group tonight.



Continuing the Conversation

We've provided you with some thoughts below that you can post on your blog or a social networking site following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage you and your college-age participants to continue the conversation after the lesson ends. Feel free to edit and customize the content to fit your ministry needs.

Every word you say has significance. Your words can either bring value to God's kingdom or bring destruction to someone else's life. Spend time reading through James 3 this week, and consider the words you use on a daily basis. Have you used your words to bring God's kingdom to the world and to the people around you? Are your words meaningless or full of destruction? This week, closely examine the conversations you have with your peers, the words you post online, and the jokes you tell your friends. Consider using your words as a tool to become more like Christ and to show Christ to others around you.



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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

As you begin, welcome your participants and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then ASK:

- Give me a recent example of a time your words brought you closer to another person—or how your words created distance with another person.
- When was the last time someone said something to you that brought you closer to Jesus? took you further away from Jesus?
- If you examine all the words you used in the past seven days, what percentage do you think added value to God's kingdom? encouraged other people? hurt or caused damage to others? were meaningless?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Our words have incredible weight. Some of the most impactful moments in our lives were a direct result of someone else's words to us. Our words can leave permanent scars of damage. We've all been hurt by words and we've all hurt others with our words. Fortunately, our words also can encourage others and can bring God's kingdom here on earth.*

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other small group leaders, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.



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TEACHING GUIDE

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help participants capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Your words have great impact, and (2) A disciplined tongue can bring discipline to other areas of your life.



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Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.



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Read James 3:1-12 together as a group. Consider having one or more of the participants read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We can choose to use our words with greater intention for God's kingdom. James has a lot of powerful things to teach us when it comes to the words we use, so let's dive in and see what he has to say.*

1. Your words have great impact

ASK:

- *In this passage, James compares the tongue to bits that guide horses, rudders that direct ships, and sparks that start fires. Which word picture do you find most effective, and why? What other word picture might describe the impact our words can have?*
- *What are some examples in our day-to-day speech of how words can be like a spark that starts a fire?*
- *How have you seen words be used for evil? How have you seen words be used for the advancing of God's kingdom?*
- *What do you think James means in verse 6 when he says this: The tongue is set apart among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell?*
- *Think back to some of the most impactful things ever said to you. What was said that caused deep hurt? What was said that caused great joy?*
- *Look at verse 9. Have you found yourself in a situation where you were praising God or speaking of the things of God, only to immediately find yourself talking about things of destruction? Explain.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Our words have great influence. If we could see the long-term impact our words have, we would likely be much slower to speak. Jesus wants our relationship with him to affect every area of our lives, but sometimes we overlook how he can change the words we speak, the way we speak them, and the way we are impacted by the words of others.*

2. A disciplined tongue can bring discipline to other areas of your life

ASK:

- *On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10 being high, how disciplined of a person are you?*



- *Are you more disciplined or less disciplined with your words than you are with other areas of your life? Why?*
- *How might a disciplined tongue create discipline in other areas of your life?*
- *Are there areas of your life that you feel you have little control over? How have words played a role in that?*
- *Think back to the last rough situation you experienced. How did your words or the words of others affect the situation?*
- *Is it possible to become more like Christ by the words you use? If so, explain and give practical answers. If not, why not?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We don't always draw a correlation between the words we use and the circumstances we are going through in life. It's likely, however, that some of the joy and fulfillment you have experienced have been the result of words and communication. And some of the hurt or difficulties you have experienced were likely a result of words that other people used. As followers of Christ, if we can learn to control our tongue, we will learn how to exercise discipline in other areas of our lives.*

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

ASK:

- *We have countless ways to communicate throughout the day, including phone calls, social media, text messages, face-to-face conversations, and emails. How can we turn this abundance and diversity of methods into a tool to bring God's kingdom here to earth?*
- *Read James 1:26-27. What's your reaction to these words? How are our words a reflection of the depth, genuineness, and health of our faith?*
- *The lack of ability to control our tongue can make our faith worthless, as James says. How can we use our tongue to bring worth to God's kingdom individually? How about collectively?*
- *Every word that Jesus used was for the advancement of God's kingdom. He did not speak without intention. How can Jesus' standard inspire and direct you in how you intentionally use your words to further God's kingdom here on earth?*



APPLICATION

Ask participants to form groups of two or three for these questions.

ASK:

- *One of the most powerful ways to control our tongue is through accountability. Think of someone you know who is around you enough to call you out when you are not using words to advance God's kingdom. In other words, who can help hold you accountable?*
- *Talk about a specific situation where you know you need to use your words differently because you are bringing destruction. Maybe it's the things you say online or the jokes you tell your friends or the music you listen to and sing along with all day.*
- *How can you be more specific this week in the way you use your words—or the way you allow other people's words to affect you?*
- *In what area of your life do you need to be more intentional about using words to advance God's kingdom?*



SUMMARY

End your lesson here. Provide participants with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles individuals are facing, and (4) the big picture of your ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



SCRIPTURE TO PROCESS

Encourage and/or challenge participants to engage with the passage below. We encourage you to return to these passages throughout the series to illustrate their point of connection to God's story.



So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell (James 3:5-6).

