
FAITH IN ACTION

Part 3 - Faith and Speech

This is the third part of a 5-part series on the book of James. As we entered the New Year, we were challenged to think about how our hopes and aspirations for 2022 should be shaped by the priority of being a disciple of Jesus first and foremost.

The book of James has some great practical advice to help us navigate the pressure and stresses we face in putting our faith in action today. The big deal that James constantly talks about is that faith in action is evidenced in living a life where our beliefs and values in Jesus are lived out consistently in our lives.

In chapter three James draws our attention to the importance of words. Our words emanate from what's happening in our hearts and have great power, to either build someone up or to tear someone down. As followers of Jesus we have the responsibility to take control of our tongues with God's help to use our words constructively for God's purposes (Mark 7:20-23).

That's why James warns us that "everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). Our words should be the words of the wise, communicating the truth of God in love. Truth spoken in love that encourages and builds each other up (Ephesians 4:15).

Influencers – James 3:1-2

Why does James start with a warning to those who teach and their speech in particular? Because teachers are people of influence. James is emphasising in this opening statement that words are not a game. They are not to be taken lightly, they mean something and they actually influence people's direction – their future and maybe even their destiny.

When a teacher mishandles the Word of God in particular, that person is capable of wrecking somebody's direction and destiny. Likewise, when somebody handles the Word of God well, they are able to set a person on the path of life and affect their destination for good.

Who are your teachers? Have a think, right now, and ask yourself this question: who is teaching me?

Each of us need teachers in our lives who lead us towards truth as they “keep their whole body in check” (James 3:2), which ultimately is referring to the Church.

The Power of Words – James 3:3-8

The size of something does not necessarily denote its value or power. Three examples – the bit/the rudder/a spark – they are small but powerful. Each of these represent how a small object has the ability to control a larger object. But more than control, this is also about a destination.

Think of how powerful your words can be to set someone in the right direction, to put them on course to be their best and call out God’s best in their lives. We must be so careful in the words we choose because they are so powerful.

Uncontrolled Power

Fire, evil and poison – uncontrolled power that can cause all sorts of destruction. Words are powerful and can be an uncontrolled and destructive power.

A spiritual tongue is medicine that can heal and not hurt (Proverbs 12:18).

Although only very small, the tongue releases words that can do immeasurable good and immeasurable harm.

If no human being can tame the tongue, how can we have hope?

The good fruit of our faith comes from being transformed by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the Holy Spirit’s fruit in a life that is transformed by the Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). To have self-control of your tongue is to tame the tongue. Not in your own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consistent Speech – James 3:9-12

In these remaining verses, James talks about this inconsistency in how we use our words, to praise and to slander. To worship God and then talk badly about someone made in His image.

If every person we see, whether Christian or not, has been made in God's likeness, then whatever one did to other humans, it was as if one did it to God Himself.

This Scripture is reading us, scanning our very hearts. Searching for what is truly under the surface of our lives.

The flesh and the spirit are at war.

We need the Holy Spirit in our lives, daily and moment by moment reminding us of the mercy that we have received through Jesus' sacrifice, and the grace that we are to now live by, when we walk in step with the Spirit.

Maturity, Wisdom and Speech – James 3:17-18

That's why James leads us to again call on God for wisdom, knowing that it is God that supernaturally empowers us to bring about change, giving us new birth through the Word of Truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created (James 1:17-18).

Wisdom and maturity show themselves in speech. We are responsible for the destructive results of our talk. The wisdom of God that helps control our lives can also control our tongue. Accepting God's wisdom will alter speech. Words, when controlled and empowered by God's Spirit, will convey true humility and lead to peace.

This is the fruit of supernatural wisdom being worked out in our works and words. Your words can plant seeds that will reap a harvest of righteousness. That's true faith in action!

Speech In Action

How do we live this out tomorrow?

1. Worship God
2. Be Intentional
3. Know the Truth
4. Ask for Forgiveness
5. Call out Gifts of the Holy Spirit
6. Rebuking in Love
7. Think about God

Faith in Action is evidenced in living a life where our beliefs and values in Jesus are lived out consistently in our lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read James 3.
2. What stood out for you as you read James 3?
3. Do you have any teachers who you are actively submitting to? Do you know them? Do they know you?
4. James says that "...no human being can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). If this is true, what hope do we have in taming the tongue? How, if at all, is it made possible?
5. When have you spoken encouragingly about someone and noticed your words becoming medicine that can heal? (see Proverbs 12:18).
6. What aspects of your speech do you struggle to keep consistent?
7. What lies have been spoken over you? Ask for the truth.
8. What words have you spoken over others? Ask for forgiveness.