

Introduction: Go around the group and introduce yourselves. What are your holiday plans?

Read James 3 – What are your first impressions? What questions come to mind as you read this chapter?

(Reminder: What are the problems that James is dealing with in this letter? (1:1-4; 2:14; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1)

Diving Deeper:

1. Why is the person who speaks much going to stumble? How do they avoid stumbling?
2. James starts the chapter with three illustrations: three small things that have the power to direct larger things. Why is James putting so much emphasis on the tongue at this point in his letter?
3. Read James 3:9-12 again. Why is it inconsistent to honor God with our words, but then turn around and curse other people with what we say?
4. How do our words reveal the progress of our spiritual maturity?

(Note: To bless God is the sublimest function of the human tongue; three times a day the devout Jew recited 'the Eighteen Benedictions,' with their ending 'Blessed art Thou, O God.' It was the pious practice among the Jews, both in speaking and in writing, to add 'Blessed [be] He' after each utterance of the name of God. No doubt, the readers of this epistle still continued this practice whenever God was mentioned.)

5. James contrasts “wisdom from above” and earthly wisdom. What words does he use to accomplish this?

Taking it home: One of the themes that James brings to the forefront is Christian maturity. James continually encourages us that maturity is how you respond to the circumstances in your life. When it comes to the words you say – where are you at? Do you find yourself using destructive language? Do you find yourself using life giving and gracious words?

Bonus: What other questions do you have?

Words to know:

"**Gentleness**" (*prauteti*) in 3:13, occurs in non-biblical literature to describe a horse that someone had broken and had trained to submit to a bridle. It pictures strength under control, specifically the Holy Spirit's control. The evidence of this attitude is a deliberate placing of oneself under divine authority. The only way to control the tongue is to place one's mind deliberately under the authority of God and to let Him control it (have His way with it; cf. Matt. 11:27; 2 Cor. 10:1)

"**Bitter envy**" (v. 14). The Greek word for 'bitter,' *pikros*, is the same word James uses to describe the bitter water which comes from the spring (3:11). The word denotes a sharp, pungent characteristic. Envy is *zelos*, which can also be translated as jealousy or zeal.

"**Self-seeking**" (v. 14). This word in Greek is *eritheia*, which is better translated as 'strife.' The most graphic translation of the word would be 'faction' or those involved in 'party split.' This is the expression of mankind's sinful nature which is preoccupied with the indulgence of wanting our own way—doing our own thing. It creates the 'we-they' syndrome with which we are all so familiar. It is selfish ambition at its worst.

"**Jealousy**" and "**ambition**" are manifestations of arrogance (Gr. *katakauchaomai*, boasting), and they result in promoting self—rather than "the truth" the teacher is responsible to communicate. Lying (Gr. *pseudomai*) "against the truth" means teaching untrue things, things that oppose the truth. Those who boast of wisdom are not following God, because humility does not mark their lives.

The only One who can control our tongues is God, who alone can give us the "from above" wisdom. The marks of the wisdom He provides are humility, graciousness, and peace.