

# “It’s Hard to Lick Your Tongue” // James 3:1–18 // The Book of James #6y

## Announcement

### Prayer

- New desperation
- South Asia
- Hawaii
- College students

24 hours of prayer

## Introduction

James 3, if you have your Bibles.<sup>1</sup> As you turn there... I have a story that some of you are going to hate, and some of you are going to love.

A few years ago, the car I was driving at the time, a 2003 Honda Pilot, started to smell weird... It was an older car, and I thought maybe I had left one of the windows cracked while it was raining and the carpet had mildewed or something. So, I pulled it into the garage and turned a fan on the inside to dry it out, but that didn’t work, so I took out all the mats and shampooed them and scrubbed the floorboards, but that didn’t work either. It still smelled. Eventually, I figured out that the smell seemed to be coming through the vents, so I bought one of

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God’s Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Paige Benton Brown, study of James (Spring 2023)—notes no

those little deodorizers shaped like a pine tree and hung it right on one of the vents—but that didn’t work either. If anything, the smell was getting worse--so I bought one for each of the vents. The inside of my car looked and smelled like a Christmas tree, except a Christmas tree hiding a dead body or something. So, I figured I should clean the whole ventilation system--but I’m not a mechanic, and I have no idea how to take apart and put back together an air conditioner, so, I found the little air intake valve down near the floorboard and took a full bottle of Lysol disinfecting spray, turned the AC on full blast and sprayed the entire bottle into the air intake so that the disinfectant would cycle through the system--I thought that was particularly ingenious innovation, btw, and I’m still proud of it. But it still smelled. By this point, the smell had become almost unbearable--like, middle-school-cabin-at-student-camp-on-the-4th-night-of-camp unbearable.

So, begrudgingly, I took the Pilot to my mechanic, dropped it off, and braced for the \$400 bill (which is what I feel like it costs just to drive the car onto the lot of a mechanic. He called me less than an hour later and said, “It’s all ready for you, son,” and I said, “Well, that was fast. What was wrong with it?” He said, “I’ll explain it when you get here.” When I pulled up to his shop he had the weirdest grin on his face--and he held up this poor, dead, mangled rat by the tail. “There’s your smell,” he said. And suddenly I remembered this incident a couple weeks before when I’d started the car up and I had heard this grinding sound... but then it stopped--so, I figured whatever was wrong in there had just worked itself out.

My mechanic was laughing so hard he wouldn’t even let me pay him. “Naw, naw, fixing this was my pleasure, son,” he said. “You’ve done me a favor.” BTW, true story--that mechanic got saved and baptized

longer available online; Bryan Loritts, “Me and My Big Mouth,” sermon preached at Fellowship Memphis, 2013; Brad Hambrick, “[Taming the Tongue](#),” a Counseling Commentary on James, from BradHambrick.com; Tony Merida, Tim Keller, Tony Evans. And others as noted throughout.

at our church a few years later, and I like to think that poor rat played a part in his conversion story--that his little rat-life and freon-laced death had meaning.

**So, why do I share with you this terrible story?** Because today I want to talk about something small in the... shall we say... ventilation system of your life, so to speak, that has the capacity to make your whole life stink, no matter how many little proverbial air fresheners you hang on your vents.

James 3, vs 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. (That's what the tongue is like)

Or, 4 Look at the ships also: (here's a 2nd analogy) though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

**Vs. 5, 3rd analogy** (they always say that for public speakers, you should never use more than one analogy or illustration to make your point. James clearly hasn't heard that, so here's his 3rd analogy): How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 (In the same way) 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 (itself). 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind (There's your 4th analogy!), 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with (that same tongue, on the same day, sometimes in the same conversation) # we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? (5th analogy) 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? (6th analogy!) Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Now, class: what small thing are we talking about that causes all these problems and prompts all these analogies? That's right—the tongue.

That's why I've titled this message, **"It's Hard to Lick Your Tongue."** And yes, I came up with that myself.

(All jokes aside, I was really, really convicted writing this message... I struggle with this so much. So bear with me today).

In this passage James makes **3 points about our tongues**, our words, and then he points us toward a solution. So, here we go. Point...

### 1. The tongue has incredible power (3:2–5)

**He compares it, vs 3, to a bit** like you would use to control a horse; and in **vs 4, to a rudder that steers a ship**. Both very small in themselves, but both with incredible ability to control the large powerful bodies they are attached to.

- I love reading about WW2 history, particularly naval warfare (probably because my grandfather served on an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific in WW2), and one of my favorite sea battle stories is the story about the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck by the British Navy in 1941.

The Bismarck was the largest, most well-fortified battleship Germany had ever produced; it was so fast, so strongly-built that it was considered "unsinkable." It could outrun any other ship on

the water and was so steel-reinforced that it would withstand a considerable amount of torpedoes and bombs.

British aerial recon unexpectedly sighted the Bismarck on May 21, 1941 in the North Atlantic. A couple of British planes fired some torpedoes at it and they assumed they had missed because they saw no explosion, which meant the Bismarck would get away because it was way faster than all the British ships--but to everyone's surprise, as the Bismarck was sailing away, it suddenly turned back TOWARD the British ships, then it zig-zagged and started to go in circles. The torpedo had jammed the rudder and this incredible ship couldn't go straight, it could only go in circles. At that point the British navy just pummeled it with bombs and torpedoes. The mighty, unsinkable Bismarck, sent to the bottom of the Atlantic because of a jammed rudder.

- Your tongue is like that, James says. It's a relatively small part of your body, but it determines the whole course of your life.
  - People form their opinions of you based on your words. They determine your intelligence by your words.
  - You begin and end relationships with your words.
  - With your tongue you draw people close and push them away.
  - Think about how words have changed your life: I love you. I'm proud of you. We want you. You're not very good. We're going in a different direction. I want to break up.
- Your best relationships came about through words; your most estranged relationships became that way through words.

**In vs 5, James compares the tongue to a fire.** Massive, destructive fires in our world are started by the smallest of flames.

- **This terrible thing going on in Maui right** now started at 6:30 AM on August 8th with one severed power line. A single spark on some dry grass. You can watch videos of it—after the first few minutes, it was no bigger than 10 square feet, so small you could step right over it without getting hurt. Three hours later,

authorities said the “small brush fire” was 100% contained. No problem.

- And yet, later that same afternoon, we were all watching horrifying videos of people abandoning their cars swimming out into the Pacific Ocean to avoid the growing inferno. At this point, it is the worst natural disaster in the state's history, and we're only beginning to know the extent of it. Lives lost. Hundreds injured. Thousands of homes, destroyed. All of that *from one spark*.

**The tongue is like that**, James says. Think about the destruction that has come into the WORLD through words. It's been said that **125 people died for each word of Adolf Hitler's** manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. We know about the horror of the holocaust ... but we often don't think about how it all began with *words*, not with weapons. The death-to-word ratio in Mao's *Little Red Book* would be even higher.

**Think about the destruction that has come into YOUR life through words.** If I asked you to recount the most painful time of your life, chances are it would involve something that was said to you.

- For many of you struggling the effects of trauma--your trauma goes back, in part, to things said to you, or about you. Or those of you with low self-esteem, it was what your parents, or your friends, said about you.

Or **think about the pain your words have caused others.**

- Our Counseling Director, Dr. **Brad Hambrick** says: *“Complete this sentence, ‘If only I hadn't \_\_\_\_\_.’ For most of us, the next word in this sentence is ‘said.’”*
- If your marriage has fallen apart, chances are it was due, in large part, to words. What was said, what was not said, how it was said... Dr. Hambrick says, *“There is almost no such thing as a bad marriage where the couple speaks well to each other.”*
- **Some of you have lost jobs** because of careless words or injudicious emails. I worked with a guy one time who was

incredibly talented. So gifted. Got results, and almost always had a good attitude when you saw him. Pleasant and easy to get along with! But man, he'd get behind that keyboard and he'd turn into Terminator 2; leaving nothing but scorched earth. Incredibly talented guy whose career came crashing down because of his inability to control his words.

- (PAUSE) Or maybe you know the infamous story of **Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier**. You might know the story of their epic boxing battle and the bitter feud that surrounded it--but what you may not know about them is that they had previously been the best of friends. What ended the friendship was when Ali, in an effort to promote his first fight against Frazier, started calling Frazier an Uncle Tom and an ugly gorilla. The war of words got so bitter that not only did it end the friendship, it left deep reservoirs of hatred and bitterness, particularly in Frazier's soul. **Biographers say that Frazier went to his grave a bitter man, bragging that he was the one who gave Muhammad Ali his Parkinson's disease**, and even rejoicing over Ali's sickness. That hatred was provoked not by fists, but by words. Maybe you have some relationship like that.
- **Like a bit, like a rudder, like a fire**--the tongue contains the power of life and death.

## 2. The tongue is nearly impossible to tame (vv. 7–8)

- In vs 7 James says, **For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue.**
- **I love this analogy.** You can tame just about any animal. People got all kinds of strange pets. Recently my family and I were at a small horse farm and the owner said, "You gotta see my pig." And she mentioned this pig like 4 times, to the point it became apparent that she was really proud of her pig and it was going to cause relational damage with her if we didn't go see it... So, we

went and looked, and he was out there rooting around (**I even took this pic**). We walked over to the fence and it lifted up that ugly snout face of his... to see if we had any food, of course. After that he wasn't interested. **I told my wife: "That might be the ugliest animal I've ever seen. It just looks so dumb."** But that lady was so proud of her pig that I went home and did a little research--and sure enough, the internet agrees that pigs actually make great pets. According to this one article I read, pigs are the 4th most intelligent animal on the earth. *I know! I didn't believe it either, so I kept digging, and sure enough, pigs consistently rank in the 4 or 5.* Higher than dogs on every list I saw. BTW, cats don't even make the top 10 list, because cats are nothing but evil personified.

- This article said that we don't realize the pig's intelligence sometimes because they have an unrelenting quest for food, so they are always rootin' around;
- And they have a complex about being "top pig" that can cause undue aggression, even against the owner of the house;
- This article explained that once they pick a spot to do their business you might as well concede that that spot is theirs, b/c you'll never get it back;<sup>2</sup>
- But the most interesting line of the article was this one, and I quote: **"With consistent discipline AND the use of some mild electric-shock equipment, pigs can be trained to be darling pets."** I'm not even sure what to do with that.
- **The point is, sure enough: every kind of beast can be tamed...** but no human being--even with all our positive-thinking and self-help techniques--can tame the tongue. It's an unruly evil, James says, a "world of unrighteousness" (v. 6) empowered by the flames of hell itself. That thing in your mouth; it would be easier to tame a **spitting cobra** than it would be that tongue of yours. It

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<sup>2</sup> And when pigs are angry, they squeal. So, if the pig squeals, watch out.

is full of deadly poison (v. 8), and strikes at the most inopportune times.

- **Think about how often you've said something that now you so, so** wish you could take back.
  - **Again--remember Brad's observation:** "Complete this sentence,: If only I hadn't \_\_\_\_\_.' For most of us, the next word in this sentence is 'said.'"
  - **These forest fires that James talks about in vs 5** aren't usually caused by arson, but carelessness... Just like in Maui, no one intentionally started the blaze; it was a careless spark. A lot of the fires in your life are because something slipped out: a hateful comment. An outburst of anger. A degrading comment or the verbalization of an inappropriate lust.
  - **It's not arson, just carelessness**, because no one can tame the tongue.

*And that's because, #3...*

### 3. The tongue reveals the depravity of our heart (v. 12)

Your words are the **single best indicator** of the state of your heart.

**Back when we were studying through James 1**, I told you to imagine if you had a little monitor on the side of your head that displayed for everyone exactly, unfiltered, what you were thinking at any moment, how horrid that would be. Well, our words are the closest thing to having that monitor.

Your words are the clearest and best indicator of what's in your heart. Which is why Jesus said, "Every idle word will be brought into evidence at the judgment." (Matthew 12:36). And that's because "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34). What's down in there will inevitably come out.

I told you that when you say something you regret—an angry word, something harsh or condemning or judgmental, a degrading comment or the verbalization of a lust—and you're embarrassed by it, and you go back to apologize, you always go back and say, "I didn't really mean that. That's not really me" But I pointed out the irony of that in the moment you said, you meant it. You'd never meant anything more in your life! And if that "wasn't really you," who was it from? No, the truth is that you're frustrated at yourself for not filtering it, but just because you successfully filter it doesn't mean it's not still in your heart.

**We're frustrated with ourselves for not putting better filters on our mouths, when what we should do is lament what our words reveal about the depravity of our hearts.** We keep trying to fix ourselves through air fresheners. But there's a dead rat in the deep recesses of your heart--and that dead rat is your sinful nature, and it is smelling up your entire life, which is why so many of our words stink.

In vs 6, James says that tongue is set on fire by the flames of hell itself. That's not just a hyperbolic metaphor. It means that the powers of sin and corruption and hell itself--our depravity--is at work in our heart and manifest from our tongues.

**Hear this:** A tongue problem is ultimately a heart problem. And that's what James hints at in vs. 12... **12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives...** No matter how much a fig tree wants to produce olives--no matter how many books it reads on olive production; no matter how much willpower it exerts ("I will produce olives!"), it's never going to do it! **--Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.**

Your problem, James says, is that your heart is a saltwater pond of undrinkable water. And no amount of filtering or deodorizing will change that. You've got a dead rat in your central ventilation system, and no amount of those pine tree thingies or scrubbing your floorboards can change that. "The heart is deceitful above all things,"

the prophet Jeremiah said, “and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” The heart has a wound, Jeremiah goes on to say, that is incurable! Or as Jesus said in **Matthew 15:19**, “*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander,*” and all kinds of depravity.” Our culture says, “Follow your heart.” I’m telling you, that’s the last thing you want to follow. Your heart is a mess and the worst things that slip out of your mouth are just a fraction of the actual depravity down there. Think of it like this: Your words are **(PIC)** the tip of the **iceberg**—all those sinful, unkind words reveal a massive depravity of spirit underneath.

**Words indicate your heart.** Which is why Jesus said, “**Every idle word will be brought into judgment.**” (Matthew 12:36)

- **Y’all, isn’t that terrifying?** Things said in private. To yourself. To your spouse. Slanderous, unkind, uncharitable, mean-spirited, gossiping, hypocritical words. Even those said to your closest friend or your spouse or even your diary. Just because you’re talking to a close friend or a spouse or relative doesn’t mean you’re in a safe zone.
- Why? Because no matter who you say them to, words only indicate your heart. Out of the abundance of the heart your mouth speaks. Even if you keep the best filters and *never say* a wrong word, what’s foul in the heart is still there.

**And I know this makes you ask, “Wait, Pastor, are you saying that at the final judgment, I’m going to be judged and held accountable for my words? I thought Jesus had paid for and removed all of my sin?”**

- Yes, that is true. What Jesus says here about every word being brought into judgment doesn’t cancel out everything else the Bible teaches about salvation. If you have really received Christ’s forgiveness, there is no condemnation remaining for you.
- What Jesus means by every idle word will be brought into judgment, for you, as a believer, is this: first, even if your sins are ultimately forgiven, you will still have to answer for them. The Apostle Paul says that at the final judgment the works of

Christians will be brought forward to test whether they were good or bad, whether they reap rebuke or reward for eternity. For many of us, so many of our words will be revealed as shameful and worthless.

- And second, and this is probably James’ and Jesus’ more important point: for some of us, our words will reveal that we were not actually Christians. We learned to act like Christians on the outside—we learned to do all the Christian things; we got super involved in church, read our Bibles, acted morally, memorized verses... but what we said with our mouths in private indicated that our hearts had never really changed.

So, ask yourself: the way you speak about others: Does it exude, grace, and mercy, and love? Do your words sound like someone whose heart has been sweetened by the gospel? If not, James says, maybe your religion is a sham. You should at least consider that.

**You say, “Well, Pastor, I’m in trouble. My words indicate my heart is a mess. *How can I heal my heart? How can I change that salt water pond to a fresh mountain spring? How can I get the dead rat out?*”**

Great question. These might be the Bible’s most important questions! How do we change the depravity of our hearts?

I’ll answer that **with 2 biblical pictures; the metaphors that James uses for the tongue point back, I believe, to these stories**, let me give them to you—and then I’ll close with what I hope are some really practical applications.

**Picture I: Exodus 15:** Moses and the children of Israel are wandering through the desert, they are thirsty; their water supply has all but dried up, and they come upon an oasis! At last, here is water! So they plunge into the water and fill up their canteens and begin to drink, but immediately spit it out and vomit because the water was (as

Exodus 15 says) bitter. And in despair they cry out, “What are we gonna do?”

God tells Moses to have them cut down a tree and throw it in, and when they do that, it says, “the bitter waters became sweet.”

This was right after the deliverance through the Red Sea, and it’s a picture of the cross. The whole Exodus story, as you may know, is like a physical demonstration of the Christian life. It’s showing that God puts the cross into the bitter waters of our heart and they become sweet.

Why? Because at the cross, we hear words of forgiveness when what we deserved to hear were words of condemnation. The cross is about a God who speaks with love--unconditional love that we didn’t deserve, that never changes or fades away. And that love, when you really embrace it, changes YOU. God’s words of acceptance transform you from an insecure, suspicious, bitter person to a secure, happy, satisfied, compassionate one. And when your heart changes, your words change. When the fountain of our souls is made sweet, the water coming from the tap starts to be sweet, too.

**Picture II.** Isaiah 6: Here we have God calling Isaiah to ministry, and he reveals himself to Isaiah in the splendor of holiness. Isaiah sees the Lord on his throne, high and lifted up, and the angels around him singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy!” And what was Isaiah’s reaction? Do you remember? **5 And (Isaiah) said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips...”** Isn’t it amazing that when Isaiah stands in the presence of God, the first thing he realizes is dirty, the first thing he’s self-conscious about, is his lips? Think of God’s holiness like one of those black lights that exposes all the germs and filth on something... When we stand in God’s holiness, the first and dirtiest place we see our sin is around our mouths. Every idle word is going to be brought into judgment.

So, how is Isaiah healed? An angel takes a burning coal from the altar and touches Isaiah’s mouth with it. It’s so hot the angel himself can’t even touch it. You’d think a burning coal would injure him. But instead, it heals him.

The altar, of course, represents Jesus’ sacrifice for our sin. As we hear its declaration, **“Behold... your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for...”** we are healed.

Putting the cross into the bitter waters of our hearts--placing it on our lips heals us. That’s why, Paul says, when we come together we should SPEAK to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, because in doing so we are reminding each other of the good news of the gospel, which heals our hearts and cleanses our lips.

If you have a history, like most of us do, of hurting others with your words, **“Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do! Who with his love doth befriend thee!”** until that makes you a better friend to others; renew your heart and mind in the gospel, until it transforms your heart and your words become, like Jesus’ words, healing and life-giving.

**And, if you have been hurt by words,** if you have these deep, painful wounds that go back to what someone said to you, or about you, dwell on the louder word of Jesus in the gospel: “Well may the accuser roar of sins that I have done. I know them all and thousands more, Jehovah knoweth none.” HE has said to you: “You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased... though your sins were as scarlet, I have made them white as snow.”

- “Others have told you that you’re not good enough, pretty enough, smart enough.” But he has said, “Before you were knit together in your mother’s womb, I knew you, loved you, and laid out a plan for you.”
- “Others have told you that you’ve messed it all up.” He says, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation.” And, “I delight to

deliver those who trust in me.” You say, “Others have left me.” He says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

You’ve heard acceptance and healing and love from the most significant lips in the universe. That can heal your soul.

Now, before we close, let me apply that with a few really practical bits of counsel:

### A. Be slow to speak

- This is counsel straight from James himself, James 1:19: Be slow to speak. Knowing the power of the tongue, AND how closely connected our tongues are with the depravity of our hearts, we should be slow to speak--and very careful when we do.
- The book of Proverbs says it like this, **“In many words sin is not lacking.”** (Prov 10:19) Which means, if you have a disposition to talk a lot, you sin a lot. David Jeremiah says, **“People with a propensity to talk a lot... cannot go on forever talking about nothing; they inevitably go on to scandal and gossip rather than be silent.”**
- Know when to be silent! Martin Luther: **“I have learned this art: when I have nothing more to say, I stop speaking.”** (That would be great counsel for some of you. In fact, I wish Luther himself had heeded it toward the end of his life.)
- But it’s great counsel. Ask yourself before saying something about someone, *“Do I really need to share this about this person? Is there anything profitable that comes from me repeating this tale-- or am I simply delighting in sharing the faults or misfortunes of others?”* Think about it--because Jesus said you will be brought into judgment for that idle gossip spoken to your friend, or your spouse, or your daughter. I said this a couple of weeks ago, I’ll say

it again--you can gossip with your spouse or your children. Don’t think that’s some kind of neutral zone where the laws of sin do not apply. I’m glad you and your child are communicating, but don’t cultivate the sin of speaking harmful, unnecessary words or criticism about others in them.

- And **be careful before you speak a word of criticism** to your spouse or your child or your friend... because after your frustration or your anger subsides, the wound of your words will remain. Be slow to speak. Your child will likely remember for decades the harsh word you spoke to them in a moment of frustration and anger.
- **Before you vent your anger, just be slow. Before you vent your anger at someone in an email**, ask, “Wouldn’t it be better to let myself cool down before sending this email?” **My favorite feature of google mail is that little “Unsend” button that I have 7 seconds to press. Y’all, that has saved me so many relationships.**
  - (BOB illus?)
  - Abraham Lincoln famously had a drawer full of letters he regarded as the greatest letters he had ever penned, but never sent. When someone would make him mad, he would promptly sit down and write a letter giving them what for, but then he’d put it in a drawer and wait until his anger cooled, and then he’d re-read it and inevitably he’d change it or just not send it all. He said thank God I never sent most of these letters, because his presidency would have been so much different if he had.
- Be slow to speak, because once you say a word--of anger or criticism, you can’t get it back.
- ~~The story is told of a guy who lived in a village who had a proclivity to gossip and soon no one wanted anything to do with~~

him. He sensed how he had lost favor with the other villagers, and he wanted to mend his ways and make restitution and start over, so he went to the village elder and asked what he needed to do to repair his reputation. The elder said, "That's easy, take a bag full of chicken feathers and put one feather in each person's yard that you've gossiped to, representing your regret for those careless words, and come back tomorrow to see me." The man thought he got off easy. So he did it and came back the next day to the elder saying he'd done his penance. "Not quite," the elder said, "now go back to each of those yards and collect all the feathers, and then your reputation will be restored. The man said, "That's impossible, the wind has blown all those feathers away now." The elder said that's the same dilemma with your words: once they leave your mouth you can never get them back! **Be slow to speak.**

Now, having said that, I want to give you... **B. Be quick to say "I'm sorry"**

- Don't underestimate the power of those 2 words to heal. You've said something to a spouse, a friend, a child, maybe a parent--maybe it was years ago. Just saying, "I regret that, I'm sorry" will do more than you can possibly realize.
- I remember hearing the story through our men's ministry of a guy named Ken who, when he was a teenager, was discussing his future life plans with his father, and there was some conflict, his dad wanted him to take some academic course and he didn't want to and in a moment of anger, Ken said, 'Well, what do you know, Dad? You're just a dumb factory worker.' His dad had never been to college--he'd been a great dad, and always provided for his family, and those words just crushed his dad's spirit. Well, Ken went off to college and they never talked about it. Time heals all wounds, which is not really true--it usually just papers over them. Twenty years later, their relationship's okay,

but after hearing a message, Ken remembered this whole incident, so he called his dad up and said, "Dad, do you remember 20 years ago when I said you were only a dumb factory worker?" Ken said, "To my shock, my Dad began to cry." And Ken said, "I'm so sorry, dad, I'm so grateful for you and so proud of you. All the things that matter in life: you excel at all of them."

- Some of you just need to apologize to someone, even if it's been 20 years, 10 years, 5 years.
- **Wives, do you ever apologize to your husbands? Question:** Given how much James says we sin with our lips, shouldn't apologies in a marriage be FREQUENT? If you can't remember the last time you apologized to your spouse, maybe you are not in touch with the sin in your heart. **I mean, if what James is saying is true, that our tongues are untameable and are connected to our depravity,** wouldn't you expect a person who grasps that to find themselves apologizing A LOT?
- **Husbands, do you apologize to your wives?**
- Parents, do you apologize to your kids? Bosses--to your employees or employees to your bosses? Some of you college students who just arrived at college--maybe the last conversation you had with your parents before coming back to school was one of anger. Don't underestimate the healing power of simply saying "I'm sorry." Or to one of your siblings.
- And, one Pro Tip here: Don't go apologize to someone and in the process inform them of something really bad you've said about them that they didn't know about. **I say that because about once a year,** typically right after I preach on confession or forgiveness, someone will come to me and tell me about really mean things they've said about me that I never knew about. They'll say, "Pastor, I just want to apologize to you... I've said this and that about you around our dinner table" or "...we've been really critical of you in our small group. Sorry." And I always think, "I was kind of better off not even knowing you said it!" Listen, if you've said mean things about me and I don't know about them, I forgive you right now--categorical forgiveness--without needing to know

what you said. I bestow upon thee blanket forgiveness. If the person doesn't know you said the mean thing about them, just repent to God and anybody you said it to, but let it stop there.

- But, again, the point: Given how much James and Jesus say that we sin with our words, we'd expect that someone in the slightest awareness of the depravity of their heart will apologize often.<sup>3</sup>

OK, 2 more:

### C. Sow life-giving words

So much good stuff in vv 13–18, I wish we had time to plunge into it. But I am going to limit myself to vs. 18:

Let me read the last few verses of this chapter: **13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

Here's the first: **He's telling us to replace destructive words with life-giving ones.** See how James says, **vs 18**, we are to sow good words of peace? We should see our words as seeds that can create goodness and life in others.

**Let me make this real practical. I have a challenge for you this week.** Choose one person in your life, and every day this week until we meet again next week, speak blessing and encouragement and love into

their lives: Call out a strength. Parents, bless your children. Let that fountain be life-giving. That's my challenge. One person--the same person--every day this week. Every day, a text, a phone call, a quick convo, and email, a hand-written note. And watch the difference it makes in their lives. (Then maybe you'll find yourself doing this with others.)

Lastly, **D. Receive peace**

In order to be able to speak peace, you have to be at peace. **The reason some of you sin with your lips is because your hearts are at war.** What's in your hearts is not peace, but turmoil: insecurity, and fear, and anxiety. And maybe that's because of unkind words you've heard throughout your life. Other people have damaged you with their words, and that's why you now damage others with your words. **I mean, sadly, hurt people hurt people.**

The way to fix that is to replace the hurtful words you've heard from others with the healing words of Jesus. Replace the words of criticism and comparison and judgment and condemnation and fear and anxiety with his assurance of unconditional love and empowerment. Jesus says, "Right now. You're safe with me. I've never stopped loving you. Before you were even born, I had a plan for you. You're special, and I've always been there, every second, by your side, weaving it all for good. I got you!" If you're a believer, this is what he says to you in Psalm 139 and Romans 8 and other places. Embrace those words, and dwell on them, and take them into your heart, and your heart will be at peace, and your words will become a harvest of righteousness. You'll see righteousness springing up everywhere!

**And that's where we'll end.** Some of you have a problem with your words, and it's because of a problem in your heart.

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<sup>3</sup> Good counsel on apologies from Brad Hambrick [here](#)

**I want to open up this altar for two reasons:**

- **Maybe you have a problem in your heart that you need God to change.** You need to come down and say, “God, heal my heart.” Or **maybe you need to speak some words of peace** to someone, or say you’re sorry, and you need to ask God for strength in doing that. Come and ask God for that. You say, “Well, can’t I pray that from my seat?” Yes, of course, but coming down here is your public cry for God’s help, and it’s your commitment to have that conversation. See, if you stay there, later you might renege on it. Coming down says, “I’m going to have this conversation and I’m asking you, God, to help me with it.”
- **Or, here’s a second reason you might come:** Maybe you need deliverance from thoughts planted in you by unkind words. I’m not saying your mom or dad or friend was demon-possessed when they said that thing to you, but Satan is taking words you’ve heard for years and he’s used them to cut up your soul. You know who you are--you are filled with anxiety and suspicion and insecurity. Come down here and pray for deliverance. The blood of Jesus is powerful enough to heal you. The gospel speaks a louder word than your hateful Accuser speaks.

For any of those reasons, you come. We’ll have 3–4 people down front at each campus if you want someone to pray over you; we’d love to, or, if not, you can pray by yourself.

As our worship teams come, you come