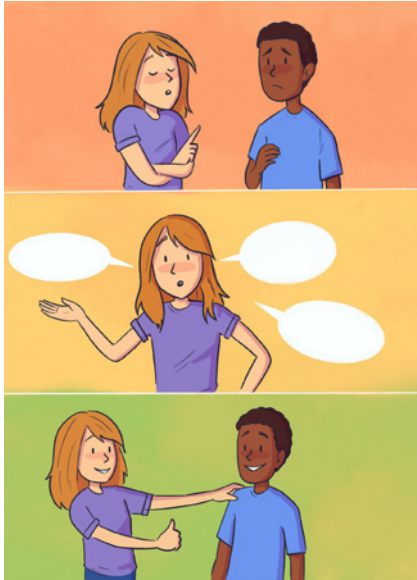


James 3:1-12

What comes out when you are squeezed?

James uses a succession of striking images to illustrate the power of the tongue, the impact of which can be used for both good or ill, going well beyond its small size. Nobody is perfect, but this state of affairs does not befit followers of Jesus.



Pray



Pope Francis offered the following teaching on different ways to fast (to give up something, so you can draw closer to God). Prayerfully consider what you could give up.

Fast from hurting words and say kind words; Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude; Fast from anger and be filled with patience; Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope; Fast from worries and have trust in God; Fast from complaining and contemplate simplicity; Fast from pressures and be prayerful; Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy; Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others; Fast from grudges and be reconciled; Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

Discuss

Powerful words: What are the three most impactful things you've said, or had said to you?

LISTEN



Listen to 'Build Up' by Fischy Music and reflect: How can you use our words to build someone up today? Is there someone who'd appreciate a phone call? Or could you make or write a card for someone?

Bible notes



James makes a powerful argument on the power and potential consequences of what we say. This passage addresses the importance of controlling our tongues. In a technological age, we might want to include the many instruments of communication we use that would have a similar impact. James cautions aspiring teachers that they have a greater responsibility to bear. Teachers influence and guide others. They may, however, point people in the wrong direction or misuse their power. Teaching should not be undertaken lightly but with self-awareness, humility, and integrity.

James seems resigned that controlling the tongue is a universal human struggle. Mastering the tongue is a sign of overall self-control. And just as a small rudder guides a massive ship, our words, though seemingly insignificant, have the power to direct the course of our lives and impact those around us.

The tongue is compared to a fire that, though small, can cause immense destruction (vv.5-6). James points out that our words can potentially create chaos and harm. Harmful speech can spread like wildfire, damaging relationships and reputations. The paradox is that humans have been able to tame many aspects of nature but struggle to control their own tongues. James emphasises the difficulty of consistently using speech in a positive and constructive manner. We may use our words to praise God and then turn around to speak negatively about fellow human beings who are created in God's image. Unsurprisingly, a freshwater spring cannot produce salt water, or vice versa (v.12). Therefore, despite being in difficult situations and pressed on every side, our hearts should manifest consistent, positive speech that aligns with God's Word.

First impressions

- How do you react under pressure?
- How can you control what you say so it doesn't cause hurt to others?
- What words can you use to bless others this week?



A sending out prayer

God, you change the wriggly caterpillar into the fluttering butterfly, the swimming tadpole into a leaping frog! Change us too, in the power of your Holy Spirit. Re-form us to be sharers of your good news in thought, word and action. Amen.



Read the short Letter of James in its entirety, and then make a list of the practical ways he challenges Christians to live. How could you apply them today?