

6. TAMING THE TONGUE

REFLECTION

Begin your study by sharing thoughts on this question.

1. Why does a compliment give someone confidence?

BIBLE READING

Read James 3:1–12 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all make many mistakes. If people never said anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their entire selves, too. ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can control their whole bodies. ⁴Also a ship is very big, and it is pushed by strong winds. But a very small rudder controls that big ship, making it go wherever the pilot wants. ⁵It is the same with the tongue. It is a small part of the body, but it brags about great things.

A big forest fire can be started with only a little flame. ⁶And the tongue is like a fire. It is a whole world of evil among the parts of our bodies. The tongue spreads its evil through the whole body. The tongue is set on fire by hell, and it starts a fire that influences all of life. ⁷People can tame every kind of wild animal, bird, reptile, and fish, and they have tamed them, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue. It is wild and evil and full of deadly poison. ⁹We use our tongues to praise our Lord and Father, but then we

NKJV

¹My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. ³Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. ⁴Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. ⁵Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren,

curse people, whom God made like himself. these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a
¹⁰Praises and curses come from the same spring send forth fresh water and bitter
mouth! My brothers and sisters, this should from the same opening? ¹²Can a fig tree, my
not happen. ¹¹Do good and bad water flow brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear
from the same spring? ¹²My brothers and figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water
sisters, can a fig tree make olives, or can a and fresh.
grapevine make figs? No! And a well full of
salty water cannot give good water.

DISCOVERY

Explore the Bible reading by discussing these questions.

2. How does a person's tongue compare to a horse's bit and a ship's rudder?
3. In what ways is the tongue like fire?
4. Explain how the tongue can be used for both good and evil.
5. Why is the tongue so difficult to control?
6. List the examples from nature that James uses to teach the power of words.
7. What are some examples of an untamed tongue?
8. How can a person's tongue hinder his or her Christian service?
9. How can we submit our tongues to the control of God's Spirit? What is the result?

PRAYER

Father, change us from the inside out. Purify our hearts so that our speech will be pleasing to you. Keep us from using our words to manipulate and hurt others. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to use our tongues to sing your praises and to build others up in the faith.

JOURNALING

Take a few moments to record your personal insights from this lesson.

What can I do to let God control the words I say?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

10. In what ways can our words encourage others or hurt others?

11. What can you do to use only encouraging words?

12. How can you speak words of blessing today?

For more Bible passages on controlling the tongue, see Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 13:3; 21:23; Titus 3:2; James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10.