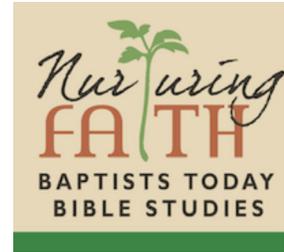


# Adult Teaching Resources

September 13, 2015



## Serious Church

True Faith — James 2:1-26

**Pure Speech — James 3:1-12**

Highborn Wisdom — James 3:13-4:10

Fervent Prayer — James 5:13-20

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## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Make copies of the handout, “Some Sayings About Speech,” for the Transformational Exercise.

### Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

[If you have a child/children] What was your child’s first word?

The nicest thing someone has said to me in the last 24 hours was ...

### Information

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There is great excitement when a child begins to speak! The child seems to sense this, too, as adults give encouraging prompts and cheers. So, from very early on, we learn the power of speech. So, we keep on speaking. The book of James has a lot to say about what we say.

[Have class members read James 1:19; 1:26; 5:9 and 5:12.]

The way we talk and the content of our talk is important. Although those verses were scattered throughout James’ letter, the idea permeates this book. According to Biblical scholar Todd Still, “In fact, some forty-six of the letter’s one hundred and eight verses — an arresting forty-three percent of them!—touch upon ‘speech matters’ in one fashion or another. Put otherwise, two out of every five verses in James have something to do with speaking.” [Todd D. Still. “Taming the Tongue.” Center for Christian Ethics of Baylor University. p. 30 Source: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/174969.pdf>]

James particularly focuses on the subject in chapter 3.

[Have a class member read James 3:1.]

So, would someone like to have my seat? What do you think James means? (teachers talk, and must be particularly careful what they say; teachers must have correct doctrine; we put teachers on a pedestal and expect more of them; teachers can have influence and God will judge how we influenced others, etc.)

[Have a class member read James 3:2-5.]

## Information *continued*

James uses three illustrations. What is his point in comparing the tongue to a horse bit, a boat rudder and a campfire?

Does anyone have a story of how a small word or conversation blew up to be so much bigger than it began? [Personal example would be best here. One national example as this lesson is being written is Donald Trump speaking off the cuff about Senator John McCain's military service as a POW. "He's not a hero. He's a hero because he got caught. I like people who don't get caught." His casual condemnation is currently getting Trump a lot of bad press.]

We all have experienced the joy of an appreciative word as well as the sting of insults. Words begin somewhere — and it is not the tongue itself. Where do those words come from?

Jesus said that the words we use come from the heart. "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." (Matthew 12:34b-35 NIV)

Lindy West writes articles online. She is a feminist. When she writes articles about women and men from a feminist perspective, she is attacked online by anonymous critics. In the online world, they are called "trolls." Trolls are people who look for ways to attack and upset online writers. For online writers, a best practice is to ignore trolls and to block their emails. She says, "In the summer of 2013, in certain circles of the internet, comedians and feminists were at war over rape jokes. Being both a comedy writer and a committed feminist killjoy, I weighed in with an article in which I said that I think a lot of male comedians are careless with the subject of rape." She got many insulting comments about women, about rape and about her weight, including things like, "No one would want to rape that fat disgusting mess." Online writers get many hateful emails. West was getting 30 or so a day about this article. Then she got a tweet from her father. That is, someone who had stolen her father's identity. Her father had recently died. A troll had set up a fake account using her father's name to explicitly attack Lindy. Her "father" wrote tweets about how he was embarrassed by his idiot daughter. It was the most painful troll attack she'd ever experienced. She wrote about it on a blog. The troll read her article and was ashamed at how much he had caused her personal pain. He wrote her again with an apology. In repentance, he made a donation to a charity in her father's memory. Through a radio program, *This American Life*, Lindy found a way to track down this troll. Then she called him to find out why he would take such effort to speak so hatefully. He confessed that he hated Lindy for being comfortable with her weight when he hated himself for being 75 pounds overweight. His attack was rooted in the evil he had within himself about himself. By the end of the conversation, Lindy says, "I didn't mean to forgive him, but I did." [Source: Article: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/02/what-happened-confronted-cruellest-troll-lindy-west> ; And here it is on *This American Life*: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/545/if-you-dont-have-anything-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps>]

Do you have stories of how our self-image informs our speech?

On the other hand, sometimes the good that is within people cannot help but come out. When my mother was severely ill and not in her "right mind," she consistently said very nice

## Information *continued*

things to medical personnel who came to stick her for blood or give her shots or make her move in uncomfortable ways. She would look at them and say, “You’re so sweet” or “You are a kind person.” She was not in her right mind, but she was in her “right heart.”

Do you have stories of how our hearts inform our speech?

Sometimes, we say mean things “innocently.” We did not intend to insult the person. We did not know that a certain combination of words would set off fireworks within them. However, sometimes the evil in us comes out intentionally. We had a thought. We had a choice to push the delete button, the pause button or the play button and we pushed play. We may expect James to say that we must train the tongue — and our will — not to push play when it will cause harm. But, that’s not what he does.

[Have a class member read James 3:6-8.]

How is it that we can train animals but cannot train our own tongues?

Do you agree with James’ pessimism that the tongue cannot be tamed?

“If you are very angry, count to yourself to ten before you say anything,” is a lesson a parent may teach a child. Does this help? Or is it advice that only deals with the surface?

[Have a class member read James 3:9-12.]

James talks about animals. Now he talks about springs and fig trees. All elements of nature. It is un-natural to speak in an evil way. James seems to be saying that “good” speech naturally comes from a good heart. So, if there is “bad” speech, it is coming from a bad heart.

“Thus, for James, speech ethics is not simply a facet of do-goodery propped up by syrupy sentimentality like that expressed by Thumper in the movie ‘Bambi.’ (Recall, ‘If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothin’ at all.’) Far more than a peripheral, external accouterment meant to adorn ethical life, James sees speech to be a decidedly moral matter that is integral to the good life. Indeed, he regards unbridled, duplicitous speech as sinful and unnatural.” [Ibid. p. 33.]

We might consider ourselves to be basically good people. Why does bad speech still come from our hearts?

Physical presence can have dramatic influence for good or for evil. Our speech can also have dramatic influence for good or for evil. Hear this quote and respond to it:

“A fist can reach only three feet, but the tongue is an intercontinental ballistic missile. Conversely, the helping hand holding a cup of cold water can only extend three feet, but the tongue in this [high tech age] can preach the good news of God in Christ around the world.” [Foy Valentine. *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter*. Layman’s Bible Book Commentary. v. 23. Nashville: Broadman Press. 1981. p. 83.]

## Transformational Exercise

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Although James says the tongue cannot be trained, he is apparently speaking hyperbolically. He is over-speaking to make a point of the ease we have in saying things that can have dramatic impact. However, even in this epistle James give us hints about training the tongue. And, there are several other Biblical passages that teach us that as we strengthen our soul and train our will, our tongue will follow suit.

[Distribute handout.]

Take a look at these Scripture verses. Read through them several times in silence. Does one of them stand out for you? If so, jot a prayer to God based on that verse. Is God calling you to say a specific thing to a person based on this verse? If so, jot down a commitment to act on that prompting. Who will you speak to? When?

[After a few minutes for silent reflection and writing, close in a prayer something like this:  
*When there was nothing, O God, you spoke and a good creation came into being. God, your words are words of life. May we be more like you in this week, using our voice for creative, positive, nurturing speech. Amen. ]*

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Building muscles** — We live in a very health-conscious society. Millions of people work out in health spas or exercise at home. Workout videos target specific muscle groups, while various types of equipment promote strength in particular areas. Muscle builders work on their “pecs,” their “abs,” and their “lats,” but there is one muscle I have never seen an exercise for. No one needs help in building up the tongue, for it is inherently the strongest muscle in the body.

**Faith and works** — Keep in mind that the early church was still developing, had few firm traditions, and no scriptures beyond the Old Testament. Different factions or points of view developed as local teachers or congregations sought to work out their faith. Some people, influenced by the dualistic Greek belief that the body and soul were separate, appear to have believed that actions of the body had no effect on the soul. Others may have taken Paul’s emphasis on faith over works to an extreme, arguing that works of charity or personal piety were not important. James argued for a balanced approach in which faith and works went hand in hand: What one did was proof of what one truly believed.

**Fiery tongues** — James was not the first to associate the tongue with fire. The metaphor was known in Greek literature, and was common in Hebrew writings. See, for example, Ps. 120:2-4: “Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.” What shall be given to you? And what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!

Likewise, the book of Proverbs warns: “Scoundrels concoct evil, and their speech is like a scorching fire” (16:9); and “As charcoal is to hot embers and wood to a fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife” (26:21).

**Hell** — The word translated as “hell” is “Gehenna,” a Greek translation of the Hebrew *ge hinnom*, which means “The Valley of Hinnom.” The Hinnom Valley was a deep ravine along the south side of Jerusalem, accessed by the “Dung Gate” and used in ancient times as a garbage dump. Smoldering fires, maggot-ridden scraps, and a persistent stench led to its association with a place of punishment for the dead, a belief that had begun to emerge in postexilic Judaism. Earlier, the valley had been associated with the worship of the pagan gods Baal and Molech, including the practice of child sacrifice (Jer. 7:31, 19:5-6, 32:35).

As the belief in Satan as a supernatural adversary of God emerged in Judaism, the valley came to be thought of as the haunt of demons -- including one known as Azazel (described in the pseudepigraphal Apocalypse of Abraham 14:6-8).

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**A restless evil** — The word translated as “restless” in James’s description of the tongue as a “restless evil” is *akatastatos*. The word describes something that cannot be tamed or controlled and is therefore neither stable nor useful.

James used the same word in 1:8 to describe double-minded people who are so uncertain about their faith that they are unstable or inconsistent.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### What twisted teachings might concern us today?

What sort of twisted teachings might we be likely to hear in church — or in “Christian media” — today? One of the most insidious has to be the “prosperity gospel,” which claims that God wants all believers to be healthy and wealthy rather than helping people to deal realistically with the struggles that come to all of us. Too often, prosperity preachers are in it for themselves, fattening their coffers by soliciting money from the poor in return for “prayer cloths” or other paltry items, promising financial returns for those who invest in their enterprise.

Others may focus heavily on an attempt to interpret apocalyptic literature as future prophecy in a fruitless effort to combine teachings from Daniel and Revelation in complex scenarios designed to predict when Christ will return. Through the years a variety of leaders have persuaded believers to sell or give away all their goods while awaiting Christ’s return, only to be disappointed. Others have profited from fright-inducing end-times book sales to build investment portfolios to cushion their own future.

Some teachers put so much emphasis on biblical “inerrancy” that they lead people to believe that a single error would render the Bible useless. As people who have bought into such teachings grow older and begin to recognize the varying points of view and internal contradictions clearly present in the Bible, they are unprepared to deal with a more complex understanding of faith, and may be prone to give up on it altogether. Sadly, many churches have faced division when pastors or others have used strict interpretations of a few passages in the Bible as a club to eliminate women from church leadership or to promote hurtful social agendas.

In the nineteenth century many Baptist churches in America were split by the popularity of hardcore Calvinist teachings. These teachings denied the role of free will and opposed missionary efforts in the belief that God has predestined those who will be saved, leaving humans no choice in the matter. In some cases the resultant “missionary” and “primitive” Baptist churches continue to stand in the same communities.

Have you had personal experience with troublesome teachings that caused harm to believers or division within the church? Can the tongue also be used in redemptive ways to bring hope in the wake of division?

## Some Sayings About Speech

Read through these several times in silence.

Does one of them stand out for you? If so, jot a prayer to God based on that verse.

Is God calling you to say a specific thing to a person based on this verse? If so, jot down a commitment to act on that prompting. Who will you speak to? When?

“There is a time to be silent and a time to speak.” Ecclesiastes 3:7

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” James 1:19

“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.” Proverbs 10:20-21

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Matthew 7:1-2

“I said, ‘I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.’” Psalm 39:1

“Do not let your mouth lead you into sin.” Ecclesiastes 5:6

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” I John 4:20

“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Proverbs 16:24

A prayer based on a verse:

A commitment based on a verse:

