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Guard Your Tongue

James 3:1-12

“Gahp,” he says with great enthusiasm. “Gahp?” he asks. I spoon mashed bananas, yogurt and a mushy greenbean mixture into his tiny rosebud mouth. “Gahp” he says again in appreciation. All things gastronomic are gahp to Thomas. I marvel at the shape of his mouth, five teeth so far, gums hiding the rest, along with buds of the next set, tongue busy all day long with giggles and yowls and the beginnings of words, a throat with vocal chords that he has somehow learned to vibrate with just the right pressure to express himself, lungs and breath forcing out the sound—at his whim. He is a marvelous creation, this grandson of mine. God made him and gave him incredible skills with a complex mechanism aimed at speech. He (and we) can use that gift for God’s glory—or not.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Use your tongue to say something that you appreciate about the person sitting on your right and on your left. As long as the compliments are flowing, don’t leave God out of the conversation. When you have finished talking to each other, turn to prayer. Pray one-sentence prayers of praise to God.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Take personal inventory of how well you use your tongue. On the positive side, are you quick to encourage and to express appreciation? Are you thoughtful in what you say, so that oth-

ers gain from your insight? Have you developed a listening manner? On the negative side, do you withhold words that might encourage or inform? Do you speak so often, so fast and so loudly that others do not have opportunity to express themselves? Have you perfected the art of verbal barbs so that people are injured by your words? Ask God to further reveal your verbal strengths and weaknesses as you work with the Scripture passage below.

How we use our gift of speech is important to God. *Read James 3:1-12.*

1. Notice the different objects this text uses to illustrate the tongue. How do these objects help us to picture the impact of our words?

2. Why is the use of the tongue such a good test of our character (reread v. 2)?

3. The power of speech is a gift from God, but it can also become sin. What are some sins of the tongue?

4. What inconsistencies do verses 7-12 point out?

5. How do the fig tree, grapevine and salt spring illustrate the tongue—and the source of its words?

6. Verse 8 speaks of the tongue as containing “deadly poison.” When have you seen words become deadly poison?

7. Verse 9 says that blessing may come from the tongue. When have you been “blessed” by someone’s tongue?

8. Verse 1 begins, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers.” How might this passage help a person (who does presume to teach) to become a better teacher?

9. Verse 9 implies that our relationship with God ought to influence what we say to and about people. What reasons can you give for this connection?

10. Take a quick mental survey of your verbal strengths, skills and outright inclinations. What are some ways that you can glorify God with your tongue?

11. What do you consider to be your strengths and your weaknesses

in the use of your tongue?

In view of these strengths and weaknesses, what steps can you take to improve the use of your tongue in one of your current relationships?

Pray, thanking God for at least one person who has spoken (or written) words of value to you. Commit to God the use of your own tongue.

Now or Later

How do you feel about the way you use words? Uncertain? Embarrassed? Frightened? Confident? Creative? Fulfilled? Other? (Perhaps these feelings vary, depending on the circumstances.) Talk to God about your feelings. Thank him for the gift of language and ask his help in using that gift in a way that honors him.

What are the pressure points that cause you to lose control of your tongue? Picture the circumstances where this is likely to occur, then bring that setting to God in prayer, making confession as needed, and asking his help in those circumstances.

Study the Scripture passages below using them as a focus for self-examination and prayer.

The mouth of a righteous man utters wisdom,
and his tongue speaks what is just. (Psalm 37:30)

Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;
keep watch over the door of my lips. (Psalm 141:3)

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)