

3 Godly Principles to Help Guide and Guard Your Words

A few weeks ago, I was snuggled in a comfy chair with my granddaughter Selah. We were watching a Christmas movie. During one of the commercials, I asked, "What's God teaching you these days, Selah?"

She thought for a few minutes and then she said, "He's teaching me to listen better."

I said, "Oh baby, me too!"

Then Selah said, "I know Mimi, it's like you have all these thoughts and words in your head and you just have to blurt them out, right?" profound wisdom from a 7-year-old.

I don't know about you, but I am convicted often by the prayer of the psalmist: "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, "The tongue is a small part of the body yet carries great power!" He goes on to write, "the tongue is not able to be tamed. It's fickle, unrestrained evil that spews out words full of toxic poison!" (James 3:5, 8, TPT). Wow! That's pretty strong language from James, right? Our tongues may be small but can do a lot of damage. With our tongues, we can build others up and offer encouragement, but with the same tongue, we can tear others down and criticize or destroy another's reputation. Sobering thoughts.

As I've been thinking about all this and mulling these thoughts over in my mind, I want my tongue to be an instrument of praise. I want my words to bring glory and honor to God. In order for that to happen, my words to others and about others must echo God's feelings. After all, it's not God who is called "the accuser" but Satan! (Rev. 12:10). The bottom line is that I need some guiding principles for my tongue. You do

as well. As I study James 3, I find three principles to help us govern our tongues:

Don't imagine yourself to be "the expert." James begins this powerful chapter on the tongue with a warning: "Don't be so eager to become a teacher in the church since you know that we who teach are held to a higher standard of judgment" (James 3:1). James' warning is clear. Don't be quick to assume you're the expert because those who teach others are held to a higher standard. In other words, if you're in a place of leadership or are a teacher in the church, the standard to which God will hold your words is higher than the standard He has for others. Wow! Sobering, huh?

The Holy Spirit is to be our rudder. James uses the example of a ship being driven by massive and fierce winds (James 3:4). It is the rudder that keeps the ship on course. In our lives, we are tossed about by stress, pressure and the critical words of others. The only way to keep the ship of our lives on course is to lean into the power of the Holy Spirit. When the temptation comes to speak unkindly or criticize another, stop and ask the Holy Spirit if He is in your words. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove, which implies gentleness. At times, you will have to address an issue with firmness or even with lots of passion, but I can't imagine the Holy Spirit directing you to completely blast a person or tear them down, can you? Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your mind and your mouth with His thoughts.

Renew your mind every day. We never speak a word that has not formulated in our minds first. If you spend time dwelling on something, it will eventually come out of your mouth. So the key is to guard your thought life. James reminds us, "So wherever jealousy and selfishness are uncovered, you will also find many troubles and every kind of meanness" (James 3:16). Instead, we are to keep our thoughts fixated on the wisdom of God. His Word. His thoughts. His heart for others. His longings. And His love. All these are to flood our minds. The

only way to do this is to spend time meditating on His Word and character traits every day. In this way, you will be planting seeds of “wisdom’s fruit” in your mind every day (James 3:18). Ask the Holy Spirit to bring your thoughts into perfect union with His. Catch rogue thoughts before they take root. In the words of Paul, “Tak[e] every thought captive” (2 Cor. 10:5b, NASB). Here’s the thing: In our day, where people are shouting their opinions on social media and freely tearing others down who don’t think like them, the people of God need to use their mouths to advertise the gentle wisdom of God.

Why don’t you take a minute and pray this prayer with me?

“Lord Jesus, so often I fail You in the area of my mouth. I say things I regret later; I offer judgment where it’s not mine to judge; and I think thoughts I’d rather not think. Cleanse me, Holy Spirit. Bring my thoughts and words into perfect union with yours. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight. May I use my tongue to glorify You and advertise Your love to the world around me.” {eoa}

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