# James, Lesson #4 The Pressure of Words

## Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking [www.MyBibleStudyLessons.com](http://www.MyBibleStudyLessons.com)

You might check out this helpful book in preparation for this week’s study: 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House. Pegues, D. S.

## James 3

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name and what is the biggest fire you have ever seen?

### DIG

1. What does it mean that teachers will be judged more strictly?

Your life forms the ceiling above which you cannot influence people to grow.

This is not to say that they cannot grow beyond you. They most certainly can. But you don’t have any influence over that. If they grow beyond you, they are not growing because of you, they are growing in spite of you.

“A student should be satisfied to become like his teacher” (Matthew 10:25; NCV). Usually, they are satisfied. Very seldom does the students’ maturity eclipse that of his teachers.

That is why James warned, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). Judged more strictly because to some degree we are judged by the lives of the people we create. That is what Paul meant when he said, “You yourselves are all the endorsement we need. Your very lives are a letter that anyone can read by just looking at you” (2 Cor. 3:2; MSG). — Josh Hunt. (2005). 10 Marks of Incredible Small Group Leaders.

1. Why would anyone want to be a teacher?

There is a reason God warned that not many of us should presume to be teachers. (James 3:1) It is hard work. I love it. But it is hard work. But, with skill, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do our work effectively. I challenge you to engage in a life long pursuit of learning how to teach more effectively. I want to be a better teacher by this time next year. I hope you want to improve your teaching as well.

This book is not about teaching; it is about love. It is about loving your students enough to skillfully give to them the truth that will set them free. Nothing else will set them free. Only teachers who love the truth and love their groups and love the work will help people to be set free. I love teaching. I want you to love it too. — Josh Hunt. (1995). Disciplemaking Teachers.

1. Have any of you ever thought about teaching? What attracted you to the idea? What held you back?

The future of the church is about the multiplication of groups. The key to multiplying groups is finding more leaders. You might cast a vision about how you love to teach. You might speak into someone’s life and say to them, “I think you would be a great teacher.” Don’t forget about kids. Most churches need more kid teachers.

1. Verse 3. What do cowboys understand better than the rest of us?

The horse is an incredibly powerful animal. Take 550 pounds (as much as a puffing Olympic heavyweight lifter can hoist overhead), set it on a horse’s back, and it will barely snort as it stands breathing easily under the burden. The same horse, unburdened, can sprint a quarter-mile in about twenty-five seconds. A horse is half a ton of raw power! Yet, place a bridle and bit in its mouth and a 100-pound woman on its back who knows what she is doing and the animal can literally be made to dance. — Hughes, R. K. (2001). Disciplines of a godly man (10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed., p. 136). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. What do sailors understand better than the rest of us?

James observed the same phenomenon in ancient ships, as ships small and large were steered by an amazingly small rudder. Today it is still the same, whether it be an acrobatic ski boat or the USS Enterprise. He who controls the rudder controls the ship.

So it is with the mighty tongue, that “movable muscular structure attached to the floor of the mouth” (Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary). “[T]he tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts,” says James (v. 5). Or as Phillips has helpfully paraphrased it, “the human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of.” Though it weighs only two ounces, it can legitimately boast of its disproportionate power to determine human destiny. The lives of Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill bear eloquent testimony to the dark and bright sides of the tongue’s power. The Führer on one side of the Channel harangued a vast multitude with his hypnotic cadences. On the other side, the Prime Minister’s brilliant, measured utterances pulled a faltering nation together for its “finest hour.” — Hughes, R. K. (2001). Disciplines of a godly man (10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed., pp. 136–137). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. What can a fire teach us about Christian living?

James’ principal concern is with the destructive power of the tongue, and this produces a most provocative statement: “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (vv. 5, 6).

The tongue has awesome potential for harm, as the forest fire analogy suggests. At 9:00 one Sunday evening, October 8, 1871, poor Mrs. O’Leary’s cow kicked over the lantern as she was being milked, starting the great Chicago Fire. That disaster blackened three and one half miles of the city, destroying over 17,000 buildings before it was checked by gunpowder explosions on the south line of the fire. The fire lasted two days and cost over 250 lives.

But ironically that was not the greatest inferno in the Midwest that year. Historians tell us that on the same day that dry autumn a spark ignited a raging fire in the North Woods of Wisconsin, a blaze which burned for an entire month, taking more lives than the Chicago Fire. A veritable firestorm destroyed billions of yards of precious timber — all from one spark!

The tongue has that scope of inflammatory power in human relationships, and James is saying that those who misuse the tongue are guilty of spiritual arson. A mere spark from an ill-spoken word can produce a firestorm that annihilates everyone it touches. Furthermore, because the tongue is a “world of evil,” it contains and conveys all the world system’s wickedness. It is party to every evil there is and actively intrudes its evil into our lives. — Hughes, R. K. (2001). Disciplines of a godly man (10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed., p. 137). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. What metaphor do you think James might have used if he were living today?

A steering wheel is one idea. The keyboard and mouse can manipulate a powerful computer.

1. Verse 8. If not man can tame the tongue, why bother trying?

While James states that no one (in their own power) can “tame the tongue,” thankfully, God provides all you need to discipline this unruly critter (2 Peter 1:3-8)! As you cooperate with Him, here are some practical tips to help you tame that unruly tongue.

* Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal when your tongue does not glorify Christ, and for grace to speak life-giving words (Ephesians 4:29).
* Ask for input from family members and friends. This can be humiliating but it allows those who know us best to uncover “blind spots.” Please be prepared with a receptive heart! (Proverbs 27:5-6)
* Post Scriptures which apply to the tongue and begin memorizing them.
* Ask a friend to hold you accountable. Share specific areas of need and pray together for victory and grace.
* Practice the principle of crying out for HELP! When tempted: Stop. Close your mouth. Take a deep breath and cry out for God’s grace to overcome the temptation!
* Use less words. Practice the spiritual discipline of “quiet.”
* Learn to HALT!

This list is far from complete. I would love for you to add a few tips of your own below! And we’d love to hear from some of you who are memorizing James 3:7-11 or 1-12. How is it going? (You can join us at any time. Click here for Revive Our Hearts’ Monthly Memory Plan.) <http://www.truewoman.com/?id=1614>

1. Verse 6. What damage can be caused by words?

What is the effect of the tongue’s cosmic wickedness? “It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire” (v. 6). “[C]ourse of life” is literally “the wheel of our genesis,” “genesis” referring to our human life or existence. What an apt description of human experience! About nine-tenths of the flames we experience in our lives come from the tongue.

Having grabbed our imaginations with his graphic language, James adds the final touch: “and is itself set on fire by hell.” Here the language means continually set on fire. James used the same word for Hell that his brother Jesus used — “Gehenna” — derived from the perpetually burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem, a place of fire and filth where, as Jesus said, “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).

Can anyone miss the point? The uncontrolled tongue has a direct pipeline to Hell! Fueled by Hell, it burns our lives with its filthy fires. But it is also, as Calvin says, an “… instrument for catching, encouraging, and increasing the fires of hell.” — Hughes, R. K. (2001). Disciplines of a godly man (10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed., pp. 137–138). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. Let’s talk about some of the ways the tongue can do damage. Lying is one. What is the difference between and half-truth and a lie?

Joan Smith took the day off on Monday. She returned to work on Tuesday and explained to her boss that she had been absent because her elderly mother had been hospitalized. The truth of the matter is that Joan had only spent two hours at the hospital and six hours shopping! Joan’s objective was to have her boss believe that she had spent the entire day at her mother’s bedside. She told a half-truth.

I was once the queen of half-truths and had convinced myself I was still walking in integrity. One of my favorite half-truths was blaming lost keys for my being late to an appointment. I seemed to always misplace my keys; however, I could usually locate them within a few minutes in one of several places I knew to look. The real reason for my tardiness was usually poor time management. When I would offer my excuse, I rationalized that the portion of my statement that I verbalized was true; I had indeed searched for the keys. But I ignored the fact that the undisclosed information, like the extra minutes I spent in the bed or my decision to complete an insignificant task, would have caused the hearer to draw a different conclusion about me. My husband finally impressed upon me the painful reality that any intent to deceive is a lie—period.

I find it interesting that the word “integrity” derives from “integer,” which is a mathematical term. An integer is a whole number as opposed to a fraction. When we walk in integrity, we tell the whole truth and not just a fraction or part of it. Someone was well aware of the many ways there are to lie when he suggested that court oaths charge a person to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. Another form of lying is exaggeration. What damage can come from exaggeration? Can you think of a real live example?

Do you often embellish a story in order to get more attention from your listener? Exaggerating may seem harmless, but it is another form of lying. The danger in exaggerating is that those who are familiar with a person’s propensity to stretch the truth will discount everything he says. This is also the paradox of exaggerating; a person stretches the truth to make something sound more believable, but then he loses his credibility because he exaggerates. I know several truth-stretchers. Their favorite words include absolute terms like “everybody,” “nobody,” and “always.” Their friends jokingly warn, “Now, you know you should only believe about half of anything she says.” What a terrible indictment. Is this how you would like to be viewed?

When you relate a story or an incident, know that it is okay to tell it with enthusiasm; just avoid the exaggerations. Stick to the facts at face value and resist the urge to be the center of attention by engaging in this form of lying.

God has sealed the destiny of every liar: “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (REVELATION 21:8 NKJV). Death means separation. The first death is the separation of the spirit from the body; the second death is eternal separation of the spirit from God. Eternal separation from my Father is too high a price to pay for any form of deceitfulness. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. What about flattery? What damage have you seen caused by flattery? Again, a real example is always good.

“How does it feel to be the most beautiful woman in the room?” According to an Internet poll of the best pickup lines, men voted this question as the most effective for flattering a woman.

Flattery is a lie covered in a bed of flowery words. Most people who engage in this dishonest communication do so to gain favor. The desired favor is not always something material or tangible; it can be an intangible benefit, such as acceptance. The flatterer may have low self-worth and believe others will like him if he compliments them.

Engaging in flattery is clear evidence of one’s lack of faith in God’s ability to give him favor with other people. Favor is a fringe benefit of being in right standing with our Creator.

For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield (PSALM 5:12).

There are many instances in the Bible of God giving His children favor with man—with no effort on their part. Consider that God gave Esther favor and the king chose her to be the queen of Persia (ESTHER 2). He gave Daniel favor with one of the king’s officers, who allowed him and his three friends to select their own diet rather than eat the nonkosher food of their captors (DANIEL 1). God gave Joseph favor in Egypt, and he went from being a captive to commander of all the country’s resources (GENESIS 39-41). These children of the Most High never had to resort to any form of self-effort in order to ingratiate themselves for gain or survival.

Can you think of a time that you flattered someone by giving him an insincere compliment? How did you feel afterward? Unless you have grown comfortable with such insincere behavior and have become insensitive to the Holy Spirit, flattering someone will most likely cause you to feel you have violated your personal integrity. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. What about the opposite? How can belittling others cause harm? Again, anyone have real live story?

Do people feel better about themselves after spending time with you? Or are your expectations so high that you focus on their shortcomings rather than their assets? If someone speaks well of a person you envy, do you follow up with a disparaging remark? Are you so insecure that you can only feel good about yourself by denigrating others? “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 NASB).

When we had a room expanded at our home, I was fascinated by the use of the hammer. It was used in the demolition as well as the construction process. Words are like that. They can tear down or they can build. How do you use your words mostly? Is it your normal behavior to build?

During your tongue fast, conquer belittling by acting as if you are a cheerleader and a coach to your family members, employees, coworkers, and others in your sphere of interaction. Cheerleaders tell you that you can do it; coaches tell you how to reach the goal. They all have the same goal: They want you to win!

Now, I know from experience that if you tend to be one of those hard-driving, goal-oriented people, coaching may be a challenge initially. Perhaps you are from the school of thought that believes an employee’s paycheck is encouragement enough—especially if he is more than adequately compensated. Beware! Thou art stuck in the stone ages and in dire need of a mindset change. If you want to maximize productivity, then learn how to build up your employees. I have found that it is not my natural inclination to want to coach poor performers; I just want them out. In with the new superstars! What I have learned is that a little positive affirmation, some hand-holding, and lots of communication will often yield the productivity and the loyalty that may not accompany the cocky superstar.

Make it a habit to affirm your family members and friends. Tell your wife she is the only woman for you, express your appreciation for your husband’s sense of responsibility, applaud your teenager for avoiding drugs and alcohol, thank a friend for keeping your secrets! Resist the temptation to constantly “fix” something about them. Accept them as they are and remember that you only have them for a season. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. When have you seen rudeness cause damage?

What has made us so rude? Is it the overbooked schedules, longer commuting times, demanding bosses, spoiled children, and the stress of daily living? Perhaps our lack of patience can be attributed to the modern conveniences that allow us to do almost everything in mere seconds. Showing patience is a rare occurrence. Ill-mannered, discourteous communication has become standard practice—even among God’s children. I was in a meeting recently where a man was attempting to make his point. He droned on in his normally slow and deliberate manner. A woman, frustrated with his pace, anxious about her next meeting, and lacking the grace to hold her thought until he finished, interrupted him. She finished his statement and completely changed the subject. The other members of the group looked uncomfortably at each other, but no one said anything—not even the man. Incidentally, it was a meeting of executives at a Christian organization.

Being rude to others is very denigrating to them and can spoil their entire day. Whatever happened to the Golden Rule? “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (LUKE 6:31). Do unto others? Why, we do not even have time to think about others! We are totally absorbed with our own agendas. Many of us can be counted among cell phone users who parade around public places talking at the top of their voices as if no one else is present. Just tonight at church, during a very critical moment, a woman sitting near the front of the sanctuary received a call on her cell phone, which rang loudly and several times before she answered it. My husband was appalled that she not only had the phone on in church but that she actually took the call. Cell phone users seem to be totally oblivious to their annoying and offensive social misconduct. And, even though some speak quietly, I have noticed people dining with others while spending an inordinate amount of time talking on the phone. It is no wonder that many relationships are so shallow these days. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. Another way the tongue can do damage is by complaining. How do complainers make you feel?

A legitimate complaint can only be resolved if you direct it to the one who can change your situation. Only a few people who are dissatisfied, annoyed, or upset by an experience actually take steps to officially complain about it. They prefer to waste time soliciting others to commiserate with them. What an exercise in futility. Not only could their input to the right person improve things for them but for others as well. For example, on several occasions I find myself in a store where the line is growing longer by the minute. Rather than joining the other customers who are whining about the situation, I seek out (sometimes yell for) the store manager and ask him to open another register. Most of the time this works.

The psalmist in the opening Scripture of this chapter did not bore, frustrate, or waste the time of others with his complaints. He declares, “I pour out my complaint before Him,” the one who could bring change.

Notwithstanding, even God tires of constant complaints.

Someone once said, “To swear is wicked because it is taking God’s name in vain. To murmur is likewise wicked, for it takes God’s promises in vain.” During your tongue fast, become aware of how often you complain about nonessential matters such as a rainy day, traffic jams, boring television programs, lazy coworkers, and so on. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. Have you ever seen words divide a church or a family?

Divide and conquer is one of Satan’s most effective strategies for hindering the effectiveness of any effort undertaken by two or more people. He knows the power, synergy, and blessings that result when we work in harmony; therefore, he makes every effort to bring division.

Sometimes it is hard to believe there are people who deliberately engage in bringing dissension. I had a cousin who had experienced much domestic turmoil during her childhood. Years later at our family gatherings, she was not satisfied until she had picked a fight or maneuvered somebody into an argument with another person. Being a “peace-breaker” seemed to make her happier than enjoying family camaraderie. Dissension and division were so ingrained in her that she embraced them as normal. She professed a relationship with God, but her behavior overshadowed her claim.

The sixth chapter of Proverbs lists seven things that the Lord detests; among them is “a man who stirs up dissension among brothers” (VERSE 19). In Ephesians 4:3, Paul urges believers to keep the “unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Obviously, he knew that keeping peace required tremendous effort. We cannot afford to be ignorant of Satan’s tactics to keep us at odds. He will cause us to become offended over a harmless statement, to read more meaning into a comment than the speaker intended, to ascribe impure motives to someone’s behavior, or to believe a lie. Oh, that we would practice being more discerning! The Holy Spirit will surely reveal the truth of a situation. He is our peace, and when we embrace Him, He directs us into peaceful resolutions of our issues. In fact, our conflicts can become stepping-stones to stronger relationships when we make a commitment to understand each other and to refrain from divisiveness. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. When can saying nothing cause damage?

I heard a story about a husband and wife who were feuding and giving each other the silent treatment. One night he realized he needed her to wake him up at an early hour to catch a flight. Not wanting to humble himself and be the first to break the silence, he left her a note to wake him at 5 A.M. The next morning he awakened to find out that he had overslept by a couple of hours and had missed his flight. As he leaped out of bed to go and angrily confront her, he noticed a piece of paper on his nightstand. The note read, “It is 5 A.M. Wake up!”

Not all silence is golden. I have devoted the previous chapters to encourage you to abstain from various negative uses of the tongue. By now you may have concluded you will never be able to say more than a few words for the rest of your life if you are to tame the little unruly member that sets the course of your destiny. If you have decided a vow of silence is your only hope, read on.

Talking is absolutely essential to maintaining effective relationships. As a child, your parents or teachers may have drilled into you the proverb that “silence is golden.” The truth is that this is a half-quoted proverb. The complete saying is, “Speech is silver, silence is golden.” While keeping one’s mouth shut is a great virtue, effective communication is to a relationship what oxygen is to the body. To say “speech is silver” implies that speaking has significant value. Silver was once a primary medium of exchange, just as currency is today. It was used to trade one value for another. When we talk, it should be an exchange of valuable information. — Pegues, D. S. (2005). 30 days to taming your tongue: what you say (and don’t say) will improve your relationships. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1. What benefits come to those who learn to tame their tongue?

A family with teens decided that as part of their Sabbath commitments they would not criticize each other on Sundays.

As the months went on, they realized more and more of their children’s friends were coming over on Sundays just to hang around. No one in the family had talked about their commitment to withhold criticism, but somehow other teens knew this home was a good place to be. —Tilden Edwards, Sabbath Time (Upper Room Books, 1992) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (pp. 501–502). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. Let’s be practical. How can we tame our tongues? We will never do it perfectly. How can we take some positive steps in the right direction?

I don’t think any of us would deny that we have problems with our tongues. Some of us struggle more than others, but each of us needs to find a way to tame that beast. Let me give you five steps to consider in this process: First, RETHINK YOUR FREEDOM OF SPEECH. We live in a country where we insist on our freedom of speech. You can’t tell me what to say or what not to say! I have my rights! I have the right to speak my mind! Sound familiar? It’s our constitutional right. It’s our God given right. Or is it? Do we have the right to speak at the expense of others? Do we have the right to speak even when our words may hurt the person who we are speaking to or about? Do we really have the right? The world says we do but as a follower of Jesus Christ I would beg to differ. If anyone had rights it was Jesus Christ but the scripture says that when he was persecuted when he was brought to stand trial rather than standing up for his rights and saying he had done nothing wrong, rather than calling ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free he “kept silent!” He surrendered his freedom of speech for you and me!

Paul says in Romans 12:2 that we are not to conform to the patterns of this world. The world says you have the right to speak your mind, but the Apostle Paul says that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Before you speak your mind consider this: has your mind been transformed? If it’s been changed to reflect God’s love for people then the things that come out of your mouth will be different. Rethink your “freedom of speech.”

The second guideline to taming this beast is to LEAD WITH YOUR EARS AND FOLLOW WITH YOUR TONGUE. James 1:19 says “be quick to listen and slow to speak.” How many of you have a problem with that? I know I do. I have a tendency to react to quickly. When I’m arguing with my wife I don’t always listen as well as I should and instead spout off without really hearing what she’s said. Do you ever find yourself in the same predicament? Oh what a difference it would make if we would all stop and spend more time listening and less time talking.

The third practical step I’d encourage you to take is to BITE YOUR TONGUE MORE OFTEN. When I worked in radio there was a button on the soundboard that allowed us to block out something that came across the air. For instance, if there was a caller on the air who were to use inappropriate language there was just enough delay time between the time I heard that person speak and the time that it was broadcast that I could hit that button and it would mute the language. I often wish we had delay buttons built into us. You know? When you get upset and you say something you shouldn’t you have a few seconds to mute it before the person to whom you’re speaking hears it! But it doesn’t work that way. Most of the time our problem isn’t that we don’t say enough but that we say too much. James 1:26 says that if you think you’re religious but you don’t bridle your tongue your religion is worthless. It’s not ok to always speak your mind. Sometimes it’s better to bite your tongue. <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/taming-the-beast--practical-guidelines-for-controlling-your-tongue-keith-manry-sermon-on-discipleship-62098.asp?page=0>

1. What do you want to recall from today’s conversation?
2. How can we support one another in prayer this week?