

Speak Life

- A recent study looked at the actual amount of words that people speak.
- Historically, and I have used this statistic, that women speak many more words than men. This is actually one of those stats that is simply not true. The average in this study that actually recorded people found almost no difference between men and women (ironically, in this particular study, the least chatty and most chatty were both men)
- The issue is not so much who speaks more, but how much we speak. The average is around 16K words per day.
- This doesn't mean much, so let's put it in context.
- In a book, a typical page has 250-300 words on it. This means in one day the average person speaks enough to fill a 50-60 page book. Each week we say enough to fill a 400 page book.
- I am currently reading a 1000 page novel. The average person speaks enough to fill 16-17 of these books every year!
- That is a lot of words. Some of you speak less and so it might only be a few of these type books and some of you probably could fill 30 of them (that's me).
- *"Talk is cheap because the supply always exceeds the demand. One of the lessons of history is that nothing is often a good thing to do and always a clever thing to say."* (Will Durant)
- If we were to read those extensive books based on your words, how would that book read?
- Would it be filled with life . . . or death?

- You can vividly recall that time when a friend mocked you in a room full of your friends. When your mother or father criticized you and made you feel worthless. When a boss or coworker questioned your abilities. When a spouse went off on you to tell you how you are "always" that way.
- We also have those times when we were complimented in a room full of people. When someone looked at us and told us they were proud of us. When we heard that we were unconditionally loved. That we were respected because of our actions or character.
- The problem for many people is that the wounds are held more closely. For some reason the negative lasts and is easier to believe than the good. These words sit deep in our souls like a poison that Jesus has to draw out and heal.
- Here's the good news today! We can be a people that speak life. We are supposed to be and get to be people that leave every situation a bit better than we found it. We get to be the ones who have a place in other people's lives because of the positive we said.
- **SPEAK LIFE.**

- We are studying the book of James (actually a letter) and today we begin a whole new section of this letter that focuses on wisdom and speech.
- James, the half-brother of Jesus, was writing to Jesus-followers about their life and conduct. The entire theme of his letter is that AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS. Our actions reflect what we really believe about who God is and what he is like.
- What we are focusing on today is that our relationship with Jesus should result in us being those who **SPEAK LIFE.**
- He begins this section (our chapter 3) by saying:

3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

- We will circle back to this, because it is a lead-in to his wider point on speaking life.
- He quickly jumps to addressing not only teachers, but everyone.

2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

- At first, v2 seems negative, but it is a positive statement. Essentially, James is saying that even though we are not perfect, if we can learn to control our tongue, we can control any and every part of life.
- To drive his point home, he gives two examples, two word pictures.

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

- Horses are large animals. I am not a huge fan of horses up close. From far away they are beautiful, powerful and fun to watch. But they can bite you, kick you, sit on you and they are a lot bigger than I am. They are used for work, for pulling, for riding and even were used in battle for much of history.
- Yet all that muscle and power can be harnessed by a piece of metal about 3 inches across.
- James' illustration is interesting because if you control the horse's mouth, you control the entire animal.
- He drives his point home with another analogy.

4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

- The ship is huge but it is controlled by one of the smallest parts of the ship. And if that rudder is not working, you end up with an out of control ship.

5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

- The point James is making is that the tongue can be a powerful influence for good. Or put another way:

I. We have immense positive potential in our speech.

- Our speech is disproportionately influential.
- The possibility for powerful positive influence far outstrips the size of the instrument.
- The tongue might be small, but can make great positive contributions (boasts does not mean boasting in a negative way. It is a neutral meaning.)
- The Scriptures are filled with examples:
- "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life" (Proverbs 10:11)
- "A gentle answer turns away wrath." (Proverbs 15:1)
- "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (Proverbs 15:22)
- "Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise." (Proverbs 15:31)
- "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24)
- "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs." (Ephesians 4:29)
- "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit." (Colossians 3:16)
- We have no idea the impact our positive speech will have on the people we encounter through our day. So **SPEAK LIFE**. Because here is the flip side.

II. We have immense negative potential in our speech.

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

- It takes so little to start something huge.
- The Camp Fire in California last year that killed 85 people, burned 150,000 acres and destroyed 18000 buildings started with vegetation being spared by some transmission lines. Other wildfires started with as little as a careless cigarette.
- It takes so little to start something huge.
- One careless statement can ruin careers and destroy lives.

6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

- When our speech is not godly, it continually corrupts/defiles the one speaking wrongly. It damages others and there is eternal damage / punishment.
- That's because what we say, our speech, influences the rest of our life.
- *"Spread gossip, and people will not trust you. Speak with sarcasm and insults, and people will not follow you. Yet what is especially on James's mind is not the reaction of others to your speech but the spreading of sin from your speech to the rest of your life. Be hateful with your tongue, and you will be hateful with other aspects of your behavior. If you do not discipline and purify your speech, you will not discipline or purify the rest of your life."* (James, George Stulac)
- The word restless (lit. uncontrollable) means it is hard to keep in check.
- Scripture is filled with examples:
- "A harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)
- "The mouth of the fool gushes folly." (Proverbs 15:2)
- "A perverse tongue crushes the spirit." (Proverbs 15:4)
- If we stopped here, the obvious takeaway is that we have to do better. Speak better. Stop the negative and harmful talk. **SPEAK LIFE.**
- But James says that no one can tame the tongue. We cannot fully solve this on our own. We must look outside humanity for help in taming the tongue. We can never solve this problem by willpower alone.

III. Our mouths are connected directly to our hearts.

- Here is the crux of the matter. The center of it. What comes out of our mouth is a direct reflection of what is in our hearts.
- James might have been remembering what Jesus said.
Matthew 12:33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 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.
- If all we do it try and control our tongues, then we are fighting a losing battle.
- Yes, we need to **SPEAK LIFE.** We need to learn to do this well. We must practice. We must learn to control and think about what we say.
- But there is something deeper.
9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.
- We are surrounded by image-bearers of God. How we speak should reflect an accurate view of God.

*10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.
11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters,
can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh
water.*

- A spring of fresh water only needs a little contaminant to make it undrinkable and unable to give life.
- Do you **SPEAK LIFE** regularly?
- Our mouths and what we say, if we pay attention, is one of the best diagnostic tools of our hearts that we have.
- We say we love God. We claim to follow Jesus. Then we gossip around the water cooler at work. We use sarcasm as our humor of choice. We curse out the driver in front of us.
- When need to get in the habit of listening to ourselves speak and ask, “Why did I feel it necessary to respond the way I did? What is going on in here?”

- James began the whole section by encouraging people to not aspire to being leaders and teachers too quickly. That’s because in that position, the potential to do even more harm with your words is heightened.
- As a result, those in charge will be judged to a higher standard.
- So let me ask you this morning:
- What kind of water flows from the springs of your heart?
- Are you a negative person? One who is complaining and who sees the bad side of every situation? Or do you find yourself regularly giving thanks?
- Are you angry? Are your words and tone such that lash out? Or do you listen and respond with gentleness.
- Is your humor filled with sarcasm or sexual innuendo? Or is your first thought pure and for the good of others?

- This is not meant to guilt us into speaking like better Christ-followers.
- It is meant to expose our hearts and to remind us that as followers of Jesus, we get to **SPEAK LIFE**. We get to change the course of the lives of others. We get to be Jesus’s change agents in our families, workplace and churches.
- When Jesus was on earth, he always spoke the truth in love. He never shied away from difficult conversations (and neither should we), but his heart for the people around him left his conversations seasoned with grace. No one walked away from Jesus feeling belittled.
- And when he died, he said, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”
- So here is the take-home action:
- Text or phone or have a conversation every day this week to speak life into another person.
- **SPEAK LIFE.**
- Let’s make this a marker that says that we as people are those who speak life.