

- a. “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is literally true. Others’ words don’t have to produce pain in us – they can be very hard to hear – but what happens in our hearts as a result is *entirely up to us*.

It is true, however, that unrighteous words are evil. And though they may not “hurt” others (like a punch in the nose), our unrighteous words secure judgment for us before God – that’s serious!

The next time you say harsh, unkind or mean words, ask yourself the “5-Why’s.” These are questions designed to get to the heart-rider. They are progressive (meaning they get to the root):

Why wasn’t I *silent*?

Why did I say those *particular* words?

Why did I choose *that point* to make with them?

Why was that point *significant* to me to make?

Why does that significance *matter* to me?

- b. James argues that our tongue-system is supernatural. Its fruit is invisible; its effects are oftentimes invisible as well. Yet we try to control it using natural means.

Maybe you have learned communication techniques; praise God for that! What about heart-control techniques?

How would you rate your Depend-On-God-Daily lifestyle? Have you made repentance for sin, confession of sin, seeking of forgiveness and resting in the Gospel a daily habit?

To have quiet times are good, but to do so without these other elements could mean you view quiet times as “block-checkers” and not faith builders.

- c. Words and works are organic. In other words, they are connected. One will follow the other eventually – even though we may say, “Do what I say not what I do,” in the end, our words and actions match.

How is your “blessing of God” these days? In one of your quiet times, write a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God. Be creative and even use the Psalms as a guide.

How is your “cursing of those made in His image”? Consider three people that you can personally contact (i.e., not via text or email) and bless them with words of encouragement or praise.

- d. In 3:13, James tells us that wisdom produces a beautiful life. This life comes from a heart of humility, gentleness or meekness. This doesn’t describe too many of us! Maybe you think this describes you – let’s check: ask a significant other to rate your gentleness on a scale from 1 to 10.

- e. Sometimes we chalk up our harshness to “personality.” “I’m just not a gentle person” or “I just tell the truth – that’s all!” or “I wasn’t raised to be gentle.” The problems with these statements lie in the fact that we assume external factors drive our conduct (thoughts, words and deeds). The Bible paints a very different picture. For James to command us to be gentle or humble means that we *can* be and that we *should* be gentle.

Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21 and Colossians 3:2-4.

- f. James gives us some tests to determine whether we are living a beautiful life:

1. Do we often boast to make ourselves look better than others?
2. Are we regularly envious?
3. Are we regularly pursuing what’s good for ourselves or for others?
4. Is there general disorder in our “circles” (home, work, etc.)?

- g. One of the reasons we fail to be peacemakers in our circles is that we have no vision for it. In other words, we don’t see the point. Or, maybe we don’t see the possibility of peace and so believe it cannot be achieved.

Read through James’ heavenly fruit list in 3:17. Ask God in prayer to give you a personal vision for seeing these fruit harvested in your life and in the lives of those closest to you.