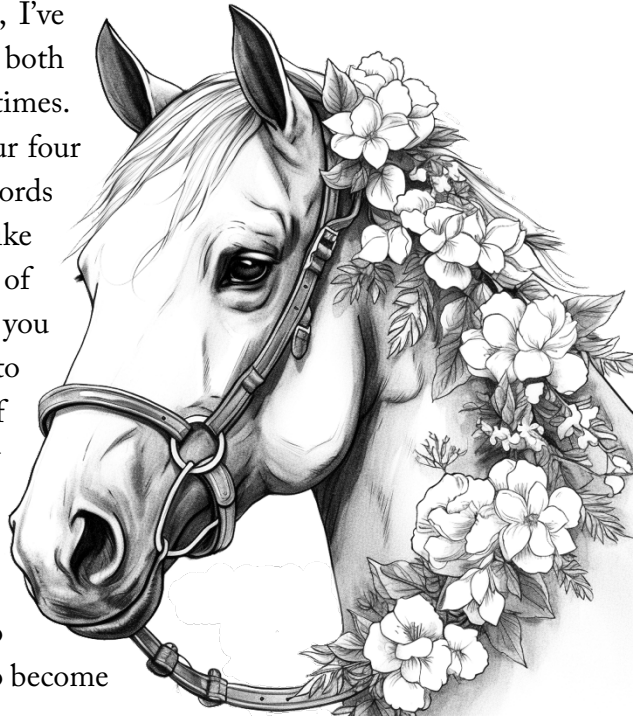


Chapter 3

• LIVING FAITHFULLY THROUGH WORDS •

READ: JAMES 3:1-12 | 2 KINGS 5:1-15 THE DANGERS OF AN UNBRIDLED TONGUE

As someone who loves to talk, I've come to learn that words can be both a blessing and a burden at times. Graham, the quietest one of our four kids, used to say, "Why waste words when you don't have to?" Unlike my son, I see words like a box of crayons—why settle for 8 when you have 96 beautiful colors to choose from? I'd use them all if I could, but when I open my Bible, I find a different approach: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19, NIV).



Listening gives us the opportunity to connect with others on a deeper level. It's about ensuring they feel respected and cherished. It's not just about hearing; it's about considering the words of another and also considering ours. We might not always agree, but patience and understanding will take us further than anger and spite ever could. Have you ever felt that urge to

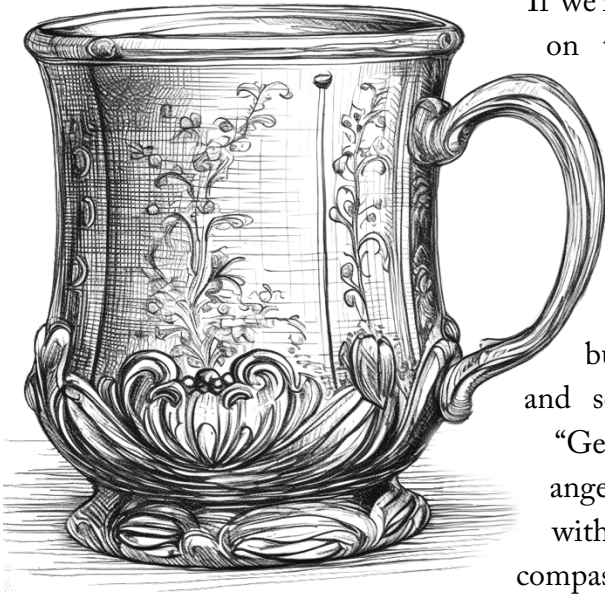
snap back with a quick retort when someone says something hurtful? I've definitely been there. But over time, I've learned the wisdom in pausing because I've seen firsthand the damage that a hasty word can cause. We all know that an unconstrained tongue resolves nothing; it's the gentle and quiet spirit that mends fences, softens hearts, and ministers grace. Pay close attention to this verse, because it's so relevant to the times we live in today. With so much division and everyone ready to jump on their soapbox, we need to take this to heart: Proverbs 10:19 reminds us, "Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues" (NIV). Before speaking or typing, let's ask ourselves: Does this glorify God? Does it point others to Christ? Does my response align with the fruit of the Spirit? If it doesn't, maybe it's better left unsaid.

We read the Bible, and for most of us, we know what we should and shouldn't be saying. We might even give silence a sincere shot, but then, out of nowhere, our tongue takes control, and we end up saying things we instantly regret. As I got to thinking about that today, I was reminded of the story from 2 Kings chapter 5. Naaman, a valiant soldier and commander of King Aram's army, had leprosy. After a young Israelite girl told Naaman that he could be healed, he sought healing from the prophet Elisha.

Further into the story, we see that when things didn't go the way that Naaman expected, he lost his temper instead of humbling himself before God. The Bible tells us, "Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, 'Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.' But Naaman went away angry and said, 'I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?' So he turned and went off in a rage" (2 Kings 5:10-12, NIV).

After listening to the wise counsel of his servants, Naaman made a choice to humble himself and turn back. Then, after dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times as the man of God had instructed, Naaman was healed. It's sad how pride and anger can take such a toll on our lives. Once those emotions form words and roll off of our tongues they can divide

friendships, destroy families, hinder our testimonies as a believers, and in Naaman's case, it almost cost him his healing. Matthew 15:18 reminds us, "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them" (NIV). This verse reminds us that taming the tongue begins within our hearts and works its way out. We need to put down our pride and control our anger before it rolls off of our tongue.



If we're kind on the outside but rotten on the inside, we're just like the Pharisees who followed the letter of the law yet neglected the more important things of God like mercy, kindness, and love. They were meticulous about cleaning the outside of their cups, but inside, they were full of greed and self-indulgence. Paul advises us, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving

each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32, NIV). If only we truly embraced this verse, we would see a transformation not just in our own lives, but also in the lives of those around us. Kind and compassionate words stem from a heart that has been purified by the love and grace of Christ. When we release bitterness and anger, we create space for the Holy Spirit to work within us and through us, affecting the way that we speak, and the way we treat others. As we close this chapter I'd like to leave you with this final word of encouragement:

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. - Colossians 4:5-6

❓ Can you recall a situation where holding your tongue led to a better outcome? How did this decision affect your situation?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 3:1-12

PERFECT:

In this context, "perfect" refers to spiritual and moral completeness or maturity. It doesn't imply flawlessness in the absolute sense but rather the ability to exercise complete self-control, especially over one's speech. A "perfect" person in this passage is someone who can control their tongue, which is seen as a sign of overall maturity and discipline.

STUMBLE:

To stumble means to make a mistake or fall into sin. In the passage, it refers to the various ways in which people can fail, particularly in their speech. The idea is that everyone stumbles or errs in many ways, but those who can control their words are less likely to stumble and are on the path toward spiritual maturity.

JUDGED:

To be judged is to be evaluated or assessed, often in a moral or spiritual sense. In this context, those who teach are cautioned that they will be judged more strictly, meaning they are held to a higher standard because of the influence and responsibility they carry in guiding others.

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READ: JAMES 3:13-18 | JOHN 13:1-30

EXAMINE YOUR HEART

I received a sweet gift from a friend one day. The girl who lives with us walked over to me with a green plastic bag, and said, “I’m cleaning your car, and I don’t want you to say ‘no.’ I know you’ve been stressed out lately, and so I want to do this for you.”

First off, let me tell you that my car was a mess. One look in the window and you would have quickly agreed. There were French fries on the floor in the back, flyers scattered throughout, and a few lost mittens thrown here and there. The dashboard hadn’t been wiped down in who knows how long, and to top it all off, it was loaded with dog hair.

In my defense, my son borrows my car a lot, winters are freezing up here, and this winter was exceptionally cold. Standing in snow, cleaning the car has been the last thing on my mind. Besides that, I’m a bit of a car slob sometimes.

As embarrassing as it is, some days you just have to accept a gift and say, “thank you.” So, I did, but not without a gift in exchange.

“Okay, but what can I do for you?” I asked. “Can I clean your room?”

She agreed. And so, for the next hour or so, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work blessing each other.

In chapter 2, James emphasized the relationship between faith and deeds, illustrating that actions go hand in hand with our faith. He takes it a step further in this chapter by examining the attitude of our hearts, pointing out that selfish ambition and envy are both earthly and unspiritual. The attitude of our heart is just as important as the actions themselves, if not more so. Both our words and our deeds should align with the “wisdom that comes from above,” which James describes this way: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17, NIV).

Proverbs 16:2 tells us, “All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.”

People do good work for all kinds of reasons. They volunteer at church, give to the poor, and help those in need. The question we need to ask ourselves is, what is the motive behind my actions?

Are they driven by selfish ambition and pride, a desire for recognition, or the love of money? Or are they motivated by a genuine love for God?

I’m embarrassed to say that there have been times when selfish ambition was driving my cart. We love God, but at the same time, many of us crave the validation that comes from being recognized. The real test of our faith comes in those quiet moments when no one but God sees the sacrifices we make. James isn’t discouraging us from doing good deeds; rather, he’s urging us to examine what’s in our hearts: are we willing to give when nobody knows? If so, will we give just as much? Are we willing to help without recognition? When we do good solely because we

love God, we reflect His love and grace.

Philippians 2 tells us to put on the mind of Christ, who took on the form of a servant and humbled Himself before God and man. In the same



chapter, Paul writes, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4, NIV)

I can clean my home, cook a meal, and take care of my family, but if I’m not doing it for the right reasons, then I’m merely doing a job. Sure, we can do our job and also be a servant at the same time, but we can also do a job and not be a servant at all.

We’ve read how our Savior washed the disciples’ feet on the night He was betrayed. We read how He went to the cross like a lamb to the slaughter, and how He gave up His life for ours. The key there is the disregard of one’s own interest. What’s most incredible about the events in John chapter 13 is the order in which they took place. Notice that Jesus washed their feet after the devil prompted Judas to betray Him. Jesus knew this full well when He got up from His meal. In fact, He mentioned it to the disciples right after He was done. He didn’t wash 11 men and skip the 12th. He put Himself aside to serve them all. Why? Because He loved His Father with all of His heart, soul, strength, and mind, and loved His neighbor as Himself.

It’s in those unseen acts of kindness, those moments of sacrifice, when we serve without any expectation of recognition or reward, that our faith shines brightest. True wisdom and humility are displayed when we act out of pure love for God, allowing our deeds to be a testament to His presence in our lives. Let’s strive to purify our hearts, setting aside selfish ambition and pride, so that we can serve others with genuine love and humility. When we do, we are truly walking in obedience to His greatest commandment: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Final Thought:

Our actions should stem from a genuine love for God and a desire to serve others selflessly. By examining our motives and setting aside selfish ambition and pride, we can allow God’s love and grace to shine through us. Let our deeds be a testament to His presence in our lives, demonstrating our faith through humble and sincere service.

⓪ How does Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet, including those who would betray or deny Him, challenge our approach to serving others?

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⓪ Think about a recent act of service or kindness you performed. What was your motive behind it, and how can you continue to grow in aligning your actions with the humility and selflessness exemplified by Jesus?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 3:13-18

EARTHLY WISDOM:

Earthly wisdom is rooted in worldly values, characterized by selfishness, pride, and a focus on personal gain. It is described as unspiritual and demonic, leading to disorder and evil practices. This wisdom is disconnected from God's truth and is concerned with temporary, material concerns rather than eternal, spiritual ones.

HEAVENLY WISDOM:

Heavenly wisdom is wisdom that comes from God and reflects His character and values. It is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. This wisdom leads to righteousness, peace, and a life that honors God. It is marked by humility and the desire to do good for others.

SELFISH AMBITION:

Selfish ambition refers to the pursuit of personal gain or success at the expense of others, often driven by a desire for power, recognition, or advantage. In the passage, selfish ambition is associated with envy and is contrasted with the humility that comes from true wisdom. It is seen as a destructive force that leads to disorder and evil practices.

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ANSWER KEY

Please note that the answers provided are intended to guide your understanding, but they may vary depending on personal perspectives. Many of these questions invite thoughtful reflection, and your responses might differ from the ones given here. My goal is to encourage you to consider the teachings and how they apply to your own life and faith journey.

This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 3

Colossians 4:5-6 encourages us to have conversations "full of grace, seasoned with salt." What does this look like in practice, especially when interacting with those who don't share our faith?

It's speaking with kindness, respect, and love, even when discussing difficult topics. It involves being considerate of the other person's perspective, avoiding harsh or judgmental language, and sharing truth in a way that is compassionate and thoughtful.

This approach can open doors for meaningful dialogue and allow the light of Christ to shine through our interactions.

Can you recall a situation where holding your tongue led to a better outcome? How did this decision affect your situation?

This answer will be different for everyone.

How does Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet, including those who would betray or deny Him, challenge our approach to serving others?

This answer will be different for everyone.

Think about a recent act of service or kindness you performed. What was your motive behind it, and how can you continue to grow in aligning your actions with the humility and selflessness exemplified by Jesus?

The first part of this answer will be different for everyone.

We can grow in aligning our actions with Jesus' humility and selflessness by regularly studying His life and teachings, praying for a heart that reflects His character, and seeking opportunities to serve others without seeking recognition. Practicing gratitude, putting others' needs before our own, and being willing to sacrifice for the sake of others are practical ways to embody Christ's humility in our daily lives.