

Transforming The Tongue (James 3:1-12 May 21, 2017)

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

Really? Is that really true?

Broken bones heal. The heart crushed by words often *never* heals.

For years I wondered which ... I did want to use a not nice name ... but in light of today's sermon I will simply say ... which 'not-wise person' ... ever truly thought this?

This is so patently wrong I wondered who could have come up with this – or popularised this?

So, I turned to Google.

To my dismay – the first recorded use was by Christians! – in the magazine – *The Christian Recorder* – in 1862.

It dismays me because the Bible says *exactly* the opposite.

Solomon wrote this in Proverbs 18:21:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

That is how powerful the tongue is – death and life are in its power.

Not only can words harm – they can kill.

It is a rare week in which we do not see headlines concerning a teenager who took their own life after bullying.

I am a little wary of statistics – but for what they are worth:

- 77% of teens admit to being bullied in some form.
- 42% have been bullied online.
- Those who are bullied are up to 9 times as likely to develop depression or commit suicide.
- Well over half of youth suicides were known to have been bullied.

Death and life are most certainly in the power of the tongue – your tongue.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your words can even kill me.

Spurgeon put it this way:

We can commit murder with the tongue as well as with the hand.

I won't ask for a show of hands – but I suspect the majority of us were teased and bullied when we were younger – maybe even when we were older – maybe even to this very day.

Quite likely you were tormented with words, taunts, jibes at school – in the workplace – online – and unfortunately for some of you – even in your own families.

Some bully, some coward, some wicked person – found something about you that hurt.

Something about your appearance – your manner – your characteristics – your interests – some bully found a word or words that wound – and they drove the knife in.

Originally, in this sermon – I included a list of words that may have once hurt some of those here this morning.

Those words were so powerful, with such ability to wound – the Elders at Holland Park suggested it was better to not say them – even in this context.

Let me simply say this – you know the words that have wounded you deeply.

Words in the playground:

Appearance slurs, racial slurs, intelligence slurs.

Words in the home:

Slurs about your worth, your character, your future.

Words in the office, online, in public:

The slur can be any manner of attack – as long as it hurts.

Words wound deeply.

Often those wounds never heal.

I guarantee I am not the only one here with schoolyard scars or online scars or family scars.

I guarantee many parents here have had spent many nights praying, comforting, guiding your children through the gauntlet of words that harm.

Christians should be **so** much better than the world in this area.

Unfortunately, too many of us are only marginally better if at all.

This morning we are going to look at a passage in James that deals with this crucial subject – the tongue.

No one here this morning will escape this passage unscathed. You only have to read this passage and you feel convicted to the core of your being.

Even if you are mute – unable to speak – this passage applies to you – because it refers to more than speech. It applies to Facebook, Twitter, Emails, Text Messages – any form of communication.

In fact these days – Facebook, SMS, Twitter are probably the places where the most hurt occurs.

The tongue is one of the most prolific subjects in the Bible.

Do a study of the passages in the Scriptures on the tongue and I guarantee no true Christian can even read them and not fall to their knees in repentance.

When I prepared this sermon, I cut and pasted all the verses on speech, the tongue, gossip, slander, lying, praising, encouraging, building up – and I had well over a hundred verses.

I thought very seriously about reading James 3:1-12 and then just reading all of these verses and then saying amen. I think it would have been very powerful.

Right or wrong – this morning you do get a sermon – but – as well – I cut all those passages down to the ones that **I** found truly impactful.

There were 40. I am going to send them to Ben to email with the sermon.

Please don't email me or Ben if I left out your favourite tongue verse – this is **my** top 40 – not yours.

I also, I cut that list down to my – **Top Ten To Tame The Tongue**. I can tell you – you very nearly got a top twenty – because it was so hard to narrow them down to ten.

I will also email them.

Don't just read them and ignore them. **Print them** and put them by your bed and read them, let them convict you.

I want you to especially note the Matthew 12 and Matthew 15 passages – let them soak in – memorise them.

Consider the end of the Matthew 12 passage:

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak ... for by your words you will be justified ... and by your words you will be condemned.

Wow! We give an account for **every** careless word.

And these words are powerful – they are so powerful they vindicate our salvation **and** they confirm our condemnation.

James knows this and his burden is that we transform this most powerful tool so that it is used to the glory of God.

Here is the point of our passage this morning.

To transform your tongue – transform your heart.

To transform your tongue – transform your heart.

If you have a problem with your tongue – you have a problem with your heart.

If you correct the problem with your heart – you *will* correct the problem with your tongue.

I truly pray that this morning you will come to grasp the power of the tongue to harm and to heal – to slaughter and to save – and you will heed the cry of James to strive to redeem your tongue to the glory of God.

I am very open that this is unashamedly a guilt trip sermon – but it is a necessary guilt trip.

To help us, I want to set this sermon in the book of James.

The point of this whole book is this:

Trials are a blessing from God to approve our faith and produce good fruit.

In chapter 1 verses 2-18, James talks about the effect trials and temptations have on us.

He tells us that when we encounter trials our response will lead us down one of two paths.

Either to sin and death **or** to fruit and life.

Then, from chapter 1 verse 19 to the end of the book – James gives us a picture of what true firstfruits will look like.

When trials have led us to maturity – our lives will look like this:

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 1:19-27 | The fruit of obedience |
| 2:1-13 | The fruit of impartiality |
| 2:14-26 | The fruit of works |
| 3:1-12 | The fruit of words |

3:13-4:3	The fruit of peacemaking
4:4-12	The fruit of humility
4:13-5:12	The fruit of submission
5:13-18	The fruit of prayer

This morning I want to look at the *fourth* fruit – **the fruit of words**.

James is writing to Christians struggling under intense trials.

So, what is the relationship between trials and words?

In chapter 1 verse 19 he tells us that our natural tendency when trials hit is **not** to listen to God but to respond in anger to God.

James tells us to be quick to listen to the Word of God, to be slow to speak rashly back to God and to be slow to respond in anger.

Here in chapter 3 – the focus on what we say expands. When times of stress come – it is not just God but also our brothers and sisters who must **not** bear the brunt of the potentially destructive power of the tongues the Lord gave us.

Our passage divides into three parts:

Your tongue has great power to harm and to heal 1-5

Your tongue cannot be tamed by the power of man 6-10a

Your tongue can be transformed by the power of God 10b-12

We begin this morning with the first point:

Your tongue has great power to harm and to heal 1-5

James 3:1:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

There are a couple of questions raised by this verse.

First, does this entire section – verses 1-12 – apply only to teachers of the Word?

Are you off the hook? Do these verses not apply to you?

No!

Notice who James addresses – brothers – Christians in general – *not* just teachers.

So, you are well and truly *on* the hook – this section applies to all Christians – to everyone here.

The second question is why single out teachers of the Word for this initial warning?

The answer seems to be because of the increased danger inherent in teaching the Word of God.

Let's step back for a moment and think about the tongue – speech – communication.

When you open the Bible – Genesis 1 begins with God speaking. It is through this act of divine speech that God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it – including the pinnacle of the created order – men and women.

God created men and women in His likeness and image.

Part of being created in the image of God is having the ability to speak – to communicate.

Speech is unique to man. No animal has the ability to communicate feelings, abstractions, complex thoughts. That is unique to us – to men and women.

God used this ability to communicate with Adam and Eve. They learned who He was, what He required and they could respond back in worship. We see this in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis.

Giraffes and dolphins and lizards did not receive these communications – just man.

Then, in chapter 2 we see Adam using speech to the glory of God – naming the animals and joining with Eve and worshipping God.

Again – no wolves and whales are seen praising God.

But in chapter 3 – we see speech used in a different way.

Satan appears and he speaks. And what he does is to question the words of God – *did God actually say?*

He deceived Eve. Adam followed her.

And the first thing Adam does after the fall is to use his tongue to say – I am afraid of you God and to blame Eve and God for his sin.

The tongue that was given to praise God and worship God is now used for deception and blame and disobedience.

Things only became worse. By Genesis 11 – men used this incredible gift of speech to co-operate and organize a rebellion against God at the Tower of Babel – forcing the Lord to intervene and confuse their speech.

But, God was not done with mankind. He continued to communicate. He spoke – through prophets and writing and ultimately in His Son.

He spoke the words of eternal life.

And those who hear – who receive life – they speak back – they praise the Creator and the Son.

My point is this – since the fall – the tongue can be used for **great good** – sharing the gospel, praising God and encouraging others:

Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

But, the *same* tongue can also be used for **great evil** – deception, cursing God and harming others:

Romans 3:13:

Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Our world is full of voices. Some good some evil.

Among those many voices – a number claim to speak for God. Some genuinely do.

Ephesians 4 tells us that God gave teachers to declare His truth to His people to build up His body.

This is the greatest possible use of the tongue – to praise God and proclaim His truth.

But, if you say you are a teacher – if you say you are speaking the truths of God – if you dare to stand before the people of God – to open the Word of God – and say – this is what God says to you – James wants you to know – **you better get it right.**

If you are going to handle this most sacred and precious gift – if you are going to tell men – this is the way to heaven – this is how God wants you to live – thus says the Lord – **you better get it right.**

We saw earlier that in Matthew 12 Jesus said we must **all** give an account for **every** careless word we speak because our words vindicate our salvation and they confirm our condemnation.

Here James says – if the words you are speaking are the truths of God – the bar of judgment – the standard of getting it right – rises.

It is one thing to have your conversation over morning tea judged.

But to have the Judge of the universe pay close attention to every word you say because you claim to speak in His name – knowing heaven and hell hang on those words – wow!

That should make you check every word you say in His name.

I don't know exactly what James means – in what way our accountability will be greater – all I know is your accountability will be greater.

So, no one should enter the pulpit, homegroup, Sunday School, the dinner table – unprepared in word – heart – or attitude.

To say God says – and He did not.

To say – God is like this – and He is not.

To say – God's salvation is this – and it is not.

Somewhere God will have an accounting – and you don't want to have messed this up.

And in the context, it is not just getting the truth right.

Verse 9 indicates that James is also referring to someone who speaks with the tongue of a Spurgeon – but then five minutes after the service ends, they destroy their credibility by speaking profanity or belittling a brother or sister.

Let me put it this way. If there is a man you know well. He is crude, vulgar, putting everyone down, critical, self-important, never serious. You haven't heard him speak of God or the Kingdom.

But, then he asks to preach and he steps behind the pulpit and he is a different man – serious, devout, disciplined, godly.

What are you going to think?

Hypocrite! Putting it on. He doesn't believe a word of what he is saying so why should I?

Brothers and sisters. Please do not get me wrong here.

This verse is not meant to turn eager hearts from teaching the Word – in pulpits, in women's meetings, in youth group, to your children.

No! To handle the truths that can save a man or woman's soul – the truths that can heal and encourage the weak – is perhaps the greatest privilege in this life. If God puts that in your heart – praise the Lord.

But, it *is* meant to give us pause to handle the Word of Truth accurately – to be Bereans, to be workmen who strive to speak the truth in love – to watch what we say – both in our teaching and in our lives.

Paul said this in 1 Timothy 4:16:

Keep a close watch on yourself **and** on the teaching.

I preach all the time. Verse 1 is so hard for a pastor to read – let alone preach on.

How have I done concerning this verse?

I think I have done alright on handing the Word accurately.

I know I could have done better in being a doer of the Word.

And there is no doubt at times my smart mouth has wiped away some credibility from my teaching.

But this reminder has caused me to strive harder to tame my tongue.

I know full well this is not an easy thing to do.

It is so incredibly easy to sin with our tongue.

The average person spends more than 1/5 of their entire life talking.

Some of you – are well below that – and some of you are well above that – I make no further comment.

But on average – 1/5 of your life you are talking.

We are beings created to communicate – but our problem is that since we use the tongue so much – it is hard to consistently use the tongue to the glory of God and not for profane purposes.

James knows this. Verse 2:

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

James moves from teachers to all of us.

There is no one who has not stumbled in many ways – including with their tongue.

If you could keep your tongue from sin – you would be perfect – sinless – which means you would be able to keep every part of your body from sin.

But no one is like that. We all sin – in many ways – including the tongue.

I trust no one here needs convincing of this.

Every one of us has said something and as the last word rolls out – we would give anything to take it back.

Taunts, profanity, crudeness, selfishness, hurtful words.

Often, I don't even know where some words come from. They just erupt out and it is like an out of body experience – you watch the words come out and you say – who said that? Me! I said that?

Oh no!

Too late!

James knows no one – not the godliest pastor – not a woman of excellence – has their tongue under check all the time – **but** – Christians – and especially teaching Christians – we better be using **every** spiritual resource to tame our tongue by the power of God.

How crucial is this? Verses 3-4:

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

If you do not tame your tongue – it will lead your whole life astray.

Your tongue is a barometer of your life.

If your lips are praising God – it comes from a life that loves God.

If your lips are vile and profane – it comes from a life that is opposed to God.

A small bit in the mouth of a powerful animal can turn it where you will.

A small rudder can direct a huge ship.

So also – the tongue is small but it has an outsize effect on your life.

Verse 5:

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

The Phillips translations nails the point: “The human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of!”

How big an effect? The end of verse 5:

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

This is one of the most vivid and accurate descriptions of cause and effect I know of.

Every Australian knows one spark can become a huge, out of control wildfire.

Every Christian knows one loose comment can become a huge, out of control wildfire.

I have been a pastor coming up on three decades. I could not tell you how many raging tongue-fires I have had to try and deal with – often unsuccessfully.

We have all been stunned to watch as one of our careless words becomes an engulfing fire.

Someone shares a prayer point – please pray for Janet – her marriage is failing.

Or some gossip – I think Bill might like Sue.

Or something nasty or untrue or cruel.

And in a day or two – I can tell you – I am getting phone calls, emails, messages – saying Pastor Craig **you** need to deal with this.

Really? I need to deal with this! You think I can somehow put the genie back in the bottle. You think my few drops of water can quench this wildfire?

The fire liter – the gossip – often says – who could have guessed this would happen?

I could have guessed!

Then they say – well I’m sorry.

Too late.

There is a Jewish fable that talks about a woman who gossiped about a neighbour.

Within a few days everyone in the community knew the gossip. It caused great pain and shame to the neighbour.

Later, the woman who had spread the story came to learn that her gossip was not true. She was mortified.

She asked a wise rabbi what she could do to repair the damage.

After giving this some thought, the rabbi said to her, “Go home, get one of your feather pillows, and bring it back to me.”

Surprised by the rabbi’s response, the woman followed his advice and went home to get a feather pillow and brought it to the rabbi.

Together they climbed to a nearby rooftop just as the wind came up.

“Now,” said the rabbi, “cut open the pillow and release feathers.”

Confused, the woman did what she was told to do.

The woman then asked, “Is that it? Am I now forgiven?”

The rabbi replied, “Not yet. First you must find every one of the feathers and put them back into the pillow.”

“But that’s impossible!” cried the woman, almost in tears.

“Yes,” said the rabbi. “And that is what happens when you gossip or spread a lie. The words fly about just like these feathers. Once you say them, you can never take them back.”

The power of words spreads like a wildfire.

And words have **great** power to harm.

Proverbs 12 – Rash words are like sword thrusts.

Here is the thing about sword thrusts – you pull the sword out and the wound remains.

Your rash word is blurted out – it pierces the soul of the one it is aimed at.

Even if you apologize – the wound remains.

The hasty word, the untruth, the sly suggestion, the harmful gossip, the innuendo, the impure word, the hasty comment, the hurtful jab.

These are the words that harm.

These are the words that cause anger, and hatred and murder and shame and divorce.

But, because James addressed teachers – the context is not just interpersonal. Remember that words are powerful on a larger stage as well.

Every movement of evil has been empowered by words.

Political words.

What turned ordinary Germans into those who would starve, gas and torture 8 million Jews to death?

Who can forget those images of a golden tongued devil who said – non-Aryans – Jews, Asians, Africans, Indians – anyone not like him – they were inferior – not true people.

Words from Hitler and Stalin and Mao.

Atheist words.

What makes a woman think that to harm a one month old baby is monstrous – but to kill a child before birth is fine?

It is words – words that say – it does not matter that what is in your womb has fingers, a heartbeat, brainwaves – it is just cells – not a child – and the most important right is the mother's right to happiness.

What makes men and women believe this life is all there is?

Words from Darwin and Sagan and Dawkins.

Religious Words.

What empowers the cults, the heresies, the false religions?

Ear-tickling, man-centered words straight from the pit of hell.

Words from Joseph Smith and Mohammed and Buddha.

Words have **great** power to harm.

But – James and the Bible are clear – words **also** have **great** power to heal.

So many passages speak of this.

Proverbs 12 – The tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15 – A soft answer turns away wrath ... A gentle tongue is a tree of life.

Proverbs 18 – Life is in the power of the tongue.

You can give a person hope and encouragement and love and meaning.

And of course, the greatest power to heal is the gospel.

God has chosen to use men and women and their words to take this message of healing to the nations.

To tell them of Jesus and heaven.

But what should be crystal clear is that many of the gifts with the greatest potential for good **also** have the greatest potential for evil.

I think of nuclear energy or the Internet.

The tongue is no different.

Your tongue has great power to harm and to heal.

That is why James' next point is so important.

Your tongue cannot be tamed by the power of man 6-10a

Verse 6:

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Here is what James is saying.

The fire of hell is the sin within us. It stains our whole body – it sets our whole body on a path of evil – and the proof of this is the tongue.

The evil, the unrighteousness, the filth within a man or woman is manifest by our tongues.

Calvin put it this way, “A slender portion of flesh contains the whole world of iniquity.”

I like that – I wish I had said that.

“A slender portion of flesh contains the whole world of iniquity.”

But Jesus says it even better in Matthew 15:11:

It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.

The reason bad stuff comes out of my mouth, the reason stuff comes out and I ask – where did that come from? – is because I have a vile, corrupted heart.

A vile heart leads to a vile tongue.

And the bad news – the terrible news is that in their own strength – **no one** can control their sinful heart so **no one** can control their sinful tongue.

Verses 7–8:

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but **no** human being can tame the tongue.

There are animals hard to tame – lions, elephants, whales, crocodiles – but we can tame them.

Yet no one can tame the tongue – because no one can tame sin.

Your tongue reflects your heart.

Our hearts are selfish, prideful, arrogant – untamable.

So, our sin manifests itself in our words.

Moreover, attack us where our sin resides – and our tongue responds.

If being a mum is your identity and someone questions something you do as a mum – just stand back – that tongue is about to go to work.

If your identity is as a gym junkie or your work or how much Calvin you know – and someone threatens your supremacy in these areas – the untamable tongue will appear.

You have all seen it.

Someone casually mentions how good their child is at maths and supermum's tongue just *has* to respond – great – so glad – I know just how you feel because **my** daughter won the entire state Athletics comp last year – just so you know.

Our sin can't let their joy, their pride go unchallenged.

I know full well – my tongue is untamed.

If you know me – You know I interrupt. I like to have the last word. I am always right.

If my kid's were here, their heads would be almost falling off nodding in agreement.

You may laugh – but you have your area of tongue sin.

For some of us, our untamable tongue shows itself by crudity, or cruelty, or half-truths, or gossip, or as we put others down, or we have to let others know ours is better – our kids, our cooking, our car, our housekeeping – we steal joy, we cause shame.

I don't know where your untamable tongue shows its true restless poison – but you do.

If somehow you don't – then ask your kids, ask your spouse, ask your friends – say I'm not sure I have a tongue problem – they will let you know ... Oh yes you do ... and you won't like it.

Verse 8:

[The tongue] is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

What a picture.

The tongue is restless – uncontrollable. It is writhing like a nest of snakes – it won't stay still.

The picture is if you try and contain it – it just wants to break loose.

We are communicative beings. Solitary confinement is torture.

Tell a child to be silent – they just have to talk.

Now combine that with the fact that – vile hearts mean vile words – poison – deadly poison – and the problem magnifies.

We can't control our tongue and what comes out is deadly.

Really bad combination folks. Really bad.

And it is not just enemies the tongue takes aim at.

All too often our words find their target in one we love.

Spouses, children, believers.

You know this. You have hurt your husband, your wife, your kids, your friends – with one piercing comment that stabbed worse than any dagger.

But not only that. Verses 9-10:

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

What is the result of a restless untameable tongue?

How many Sundays have you stood and sung songs to the glory of God – then the service ends and you yell at your kid, make a snide remark about someone, gossip a bit then say something crude – all before you walk out those doors?

We bless God and we curse man made in God's image – using the same instrument – the tongue.

But that just shouldn't happen.

It is like a surgeon taking a scalpel home and using it to gut fish then taking the same one back to the hospital and using it to perform surgery.

It is so wrong. But you do it because:

Your tongue cannot be tamed by the power of man.

But – praise God – James does not put his quill down here. He has one final point.

Your tongue can be transformed by the power of God 10b-12

James 3:10–12:

My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Your mouth does **not** have to be a drain, a dagger, a divider.

But if man can't tame it – who can?

James gives illustrations – a spring can't pour forth fresh and salt water. No – it pours forth what lies within – either fresh or salt.

A fig tree bears figs – not olives or grapes.

A pond has either fresh water or salt water not both.

James is alluding to something Jesus said in Matthew 15:11:

It is **not** what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.

If there is filth within – filth comes out.

If there is holiness within – holiness comes out.

Your mouth is a reflection of your heart.

So, put holiness in your heart.

To transform your tongue – transform your heart.

What does this mean practically?

First, if your mouth is just the same as it was before you became a Christian – then I'm sorry but you didn't become a Christian.

Salvation **has** to change your mouth. Your language, your sarcasm, your biting tone, your put downs – they have to have changed.

If they haven't – repent and get saved.

Second, call on the power of God and the resources of the people of God.

This is the big one.

Use the power and resources of God to transform your heart.

I have had Christians tell me – I can't help it – these things just slip out before I know it.

James says – these things ought **not** be so. This infers there **is** a power to deal with them.

By the power of God – you **can** tame your tongue.

Pray and ask God to set a guard over your mouth – to transform your tongue.

Develop the spiritual disciplines. The godlier you become – the godlier your tongue becomes.

Fill your heart with godly truths so that is what will come out. Philippians 4:8:

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Put these in your heart rather than the violence, profanity and innuendo of worldly entertainment.

Memorise Scripture. Meditate on Scripture.

Fill your heart with these things – so that is what comes out of your mouth.

Third, teach yourself to pause before you speak and then:

Think! Is It:

TTrue?

HHelpful?

IInspiring?

NNecessary?

KKind?

If it doesn't pass the THINK test – don't say it or send it!

There are times when we have to speak the truth – but only in love (Eph. 4:15).

But be sure before you speak.

There are plenty of times we want to say something negative. Don't.

Wait an hour. Wait a day. Then see if you still think it is necessary when you have calmed down.

If you are unsure write it down – and show it or say it to a spouse or friend – see if they believe it passes the THINK test. Even then you have to be sure you want to say it or send it or post it.

Perhaps ask – is it something I should just let love cover a multitude of sins? Learn to be a forgiver.

Learn to say – I've said worse – and just let it go.

Related to this – don't write quick emails or texts or posts – please! **Please don't!**

Don't send them to me – and even worse – don't send them to others – and don't post quickly – because then Ben and I have to sort out that mess too.

Here is something I try to do – very often. I get my frustrations out by writing down what I might want to say.

Note – I always do it in Word – never Mail – in case I accidentally hit send.

I write it all out. Then I reread it later – think how foolish or petty or unnecessary it sounds and delete it and just get on with life. That has served me very well.

We have all had the emails or the texts or seen the post and we think – buddy – you are going to regret hitting send or post.

(Take note President Trump).

Don't say it or send it or post it unless it truly passes the THINK test.

Fourthly, are there people in your home, your church, your work, online – you need to go to and say – forgive me?

People you know you have harmed with your tongue.

Now a little wisdom here. If people know you have said something inappropriate or cruel or wrong about them – yes – go and ask forgiveness.

But, what if you are convicted about your gossip – but the person doesn't even know anything has been said about them?

Maybe you need to go – maybe you don't.

I know of many instances in my church where people have had someone come and say – hey, I am sorry I have spread gossip and said bad things about you – please forgive me?

And the person is thinking – What? OK, so what have you said about me?

They weren't upset before – now they are crushed.

Then if they ask – so what did you say? – Often the gossiper says – look that doesn't matter – I have stopped – just forgive me.

And the mess is bigger than before the apology.

What should you do? – Should you tell the person – I said you were a flirt or legalistic or on the prowl for a husband? Sorry about that.

Look – sometimes it is better to just stop saying negative things – and start saying some positive things – and ask God for forgiveness – and move on – than to open a whole can of worms that might cause even more hurt.

You need to pray it through.

But far better you learn **not** to say it in the first place.

Finally, make sure you say **many** positive things – to God, to your family, to your brothers and sisters, to enemies, to strangers.

Are your lips constantly filled with praise – to the point that is the first thing that comes out?

Do you regularly thank God and praise God?

Do you tell someone in the church or your work why you appreciate them or just why they annoy you?

Do you tell your spouse and kids how incredible they are – or do you just tell them where they fail and need to improve and don't meet your standards?

Many you might have seen the article in the paper this week saying the most accurate predictor of how your children will turn out – successful or not – is how many words and in particular, how many words of praise you say to them – especially in their first 3 years.

If you have to say something negative – to curse – far better to say nothing. But even better – choose to bless. Choose to praise.

You can choose to bless – even someone who cursed you.

You can choose to build up – not tear down.

You can choose to calm – not to inflame.

You can choose to be a Barnabas – a son of encouragement – not one who's tongue is always, biting, sharp and hurtful.

You can choose to share the gospel – not the gossip.

Ephesians 4:29:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Yes – the tongue is a restless evil – but by the power of God – it **can** be tamed.

Ultimately – **To transform your tongue – transform your heart.**

Revelation 21 and 22 paints for us a picture of heaven and the inhabitants of heaven.

When God is done with us – our tongues will be redeemed.

We are told that all of those who lie and use the tongue for profane reasons will **not** be in the heavenly city – they will be in the lake of fire.

We are told that there will never be anything unclean or false in the city.

We are told that for all eternity – those in heaven will use their tongues to praise the Lamb and the Father.

At last – our tongues will be transformed and redeemed.

But, our task in this life is to become more of what we will finally be.

To fight the profane use of the tongue.

To strive to put away all: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

To strive to have our tongues regularly tell of His righteousness and praise Him all the day long – speaking the truth in love, building up, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Do this – and you know your heart is redeemed.

Do this – and you know you are His.

Do this – and you will find a unity that brings the deepest joy now and for eternity.