

**James 1:19-27****Introduction**

When I was younger one of the things we used to chant in the playground was "Sticks and stone may break my bones but words will never hurt me". That was usually in response to someone saying something unkind or name – calling. I expect you hear it today. It can make us feel better to say it but it isn't actually true. You can recover from a broken leg or arm. But if someone tells lies about you and other people believe them it may be much harder. You may find that people don't trust you and that people aren't so keen to be your friends.

Words can be harmful in two ways: When they are wrong or misleading or when they are hurtful and leave us feeling upset or sad.

A long time ago when I was a student nurse there was an underground train crash at Moorgate station in London. A team of first aiders made their way down the track to the injured people and sent messages back to the leaders over ground who were coordinating the rescue. Of course radios don't work well underground and this was before mobile phones so the messages came by word of mouth, passed from one person to another until it reached the command post. The first aiders asked for some more Entonox, which is an anesthetic gas that is very good at dealing with pain. When the message got back to the command post what happened was they sent an empty box. That is why today, in emergency response to disasters, people carry notepads and pens to make sure the right message gets through.

In our game we saw how easy it is to scramble a message and get things wrong. Sometimes that is just funny but it can be serious. In the accident it meant people had to wait a long time for pain relief. If we mishear or misunderstand and pass something on it can not only be hurtful it can be damaging. It might stop someone being chosen for a job or a sports team, it might mean people don't trust them, it might mean in a family that the wrong action is taken. How many people here, have been punished for something they didn't do? Words are

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important and words are powerful. We need to be very careful how we use them.

That is especially true if we are mocking someone or saying nasty things about someone. We don't have to do it very often before they begin to believe that they are 'fat', or 'stupid' or 'lazy' or 'worthless'. Words leave a mark in our minds and affect the way we think about ourselves they can be very damaging.

James tells his readers to be careful. He says" <sup>19</sup> *So, my dear brothers and sisters, get this straight. Every person should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.* <sup>20</sup> *Human anger, you see, doesn't produce God's justice!"* Words have a power of their own. We need to listen carefully and not to be quick to speak. Sometimes we are so busy thinking about what we want to say in a response that we don't listen carefully to what someone is saying to us. That leads to misunderstanding and people getting angry. James encourages us to be patient with each other. Which is something we learn in families; parents have to learn to be patient with their children. Children have to learn to be patient with their parents and with their brothers and sisters. When we are being patient and listening to each other life is much better.

James goes on to say : <sup>26</sup> *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."* We can fool ourselves into thinking that we are 'Good Christians', but our worship and Christian life is measured not just by what we say but also by what we do.

When we were teenagers my mother, brother and sister and I moved into a council house at the end of a terrace. The bottom end of our garden was fenced off and we noticed our neighbour working in it and growing vegetables there. We said to our mother – "That can't be right. That's our garden". My mother's response was to say, "I'm sure it's ok. I expect he must be renting it from the council".

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The couple who lived next door were very 'religious'. They attended church twice every Sunday, they went to midweek meetings and were always making it clear that as Christians they were better than the rest of us. The wife had one of the most poisonous tongues I have come across. She never had a good thing to say about anyone and could be very unpleasant. And when we eventually bought our house from the council we found that actually the whole garden belonged to our house but because our neighbor had been occupying it for so long it now belonged to him.

I had just come to faith and as a young Christian wanted to tell my family what a lovely thing it was to believe and trust in Jesus. But all they could see was that our neighbours who made such a thing about being Christians had stolen our property and were very unpleasant to us and to everyone else.

Our faith in God has to be demonstrated by the things we do, in what we say and in our attitudes to others. James wants the people he is speaking to to live in a way that is true and honest and allows people to come to know God. It is when we put Jesus at the centre of our lives that we begin to be transformed by God's word and begin to show Jesus's love and grace in the way we live.