

Studies in James

Lesson 12

How to Muzzle the Mouth

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past two weeks we've been focusing on one of the greatest battle the Christian faces today – the battle of trying to gain control out tongue.
 - A. If you were to go to almost ANY bookstore and walk into the SELF-HELP section, you would find books offering a wide range of techniques to control lust, greed, resentment, and laziness.
 1. But you're probably NOT going to find a SINGLE book that gives practical advice for controlling the strongest muscle in the body – The Tongue.
 - B. Fortunately, the BIBLE provides that practical advice in a number of passages. And perhaps one of the most helpful passages is a psalm of David – **Psalms 39**.
 1. This psalm offers some of the best and most practical insights we could ever hope to find when it comes to muzzling our mouth.
 2. And since we want to learn how to heal with our tongue, rather than allowing it to wound and crush others, we need to spend some time carefully examining some of the great truths taught here.

3. Therefore, as an introduction to our study in Psalm 39, let's consider this statement taken from a proverb of Solomon.
 - a. *"A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit."* (**Proverbs 15:4 - NASV**)
- II. Before we get into **Psalm 39**, perhaps it would be best for us to first understand something about the background of this psalm.
- A. From the outset, it appears that David was deeply troubled because:
 1. He **MAY** have said **MORE** than he should have, or perhaps said something he **SHOULDN'T** have said **AT ALL**.
 - B. We've **ALL** felt this way at times.
 1. In the heat of an argument, or in the midst of a confrontation:
 - a. We've said **MORE** than we should have.
 - (1). Perhaps we betrayed a trust – revealing something that was said to us in confidence.
 - b. We've also said things we shouldn't have said at all.
 - (1). Maybe we were unaware of a sensitive area in another persons life.
 - (a). Perhaps we offered advice, but it was taken in the wrong way.

(b). Or maybe we said something that deeply hurt someone, and we never realized they took what we said the way they did.

(2). Or maybe we didn't stop ourselves before we became angry and lost control of our speech.

(a). Perhaps we cursed, or retaliated by making some baseless accusation.

c. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever done any of these things?

C. This is apparently what happened to David.

1. In fact, notice the ending of the Psalm.

a. **Psalm 39:12-13** – *"Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more."*

b. This psalm ends showing that David is in GREAT distress, asking God to take away his sorrow.

c. He has become deeply depressed over something he said.

D. Now, as we begin looking at this psalm, I want you to notice something very unique about it's arrangement.

1. This psalm is actually a LIST of the various methods David tried using to control his tongue.
 - a. In all, there are FOUR METHODS listed here.
 - b. And what is some IMPORTANT here is that the methods David used begin with failure.
 - c. But, as he progresses, David finally achieved success in controlling his tongue – and you might be surprised how he did it.
2. So, let's look at the FOUR METHODS David used in an attempt to control his tongue.

BODY:

- I. The FIRST METHOD David employed can be summed up with the words, "I can do this MYSELF!"
 - A. David writes:
 1. *I said, "I will guard MY ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain MY mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me." I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue: (Psalm 39:1-3)*
 2. This is usually the FIRST way we try to solve the problem of our tongue.

- a. We become DETERMINED to watch what we say.
 - b. OR we become determined to say NOTHING AT ALL.
3. In essence, we try to suppress our NATURAL tendency to say things we SHOULDN'T say, or SPEAK when we SHOULD remain silent.
- a. How many times have YOU psyched yourself up with that kind of resolve before going into a confrontational situation?
 - b. You told yourself over and over, you're NOT going to say the wrong thing, OR you promised yourself that you were DETERMINED to keep your mouth SHUT!
 - c. THEN, when you found yourself in the midst of the situation, you BLEW IT!!
4. The problem with this approach is that it simply DOESN'T WORK.
- a. We're not strong enough, ON OUR OWN, to control our tongue.
 - (1). Remember what James said? **James 3:7-8** – *For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue.*
 - (2). We may be able to tame SOME wild beasts, BUT NOT THE TONGUE!
 - (a). "NO MAN can tame the tongue" says James!

5. In fact, David goes on to describe what happened when he tried to exercise self-restraint.
 - a. **Psalm 39:2-3** – ... *my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned...*
 - b. While David was trying to refrain from speaking, he said:
 - (1). His sorrow grew worse.
 - (2). His heart BURNED within him.
 - (a). Deep within, he was boiling.
 - c. Finally, the pressure built up TOO much. He couldn't hold back any longer.
 - (1). And, he says, *"Then I spoke with my tongue."*
6. Can you relate to this?
 - a. Can you remember times when you PROMISED yourself you wouldn't say something you'd LATER be sorry for.
 - b. Then during the "heat of battle," your emotions began to stir.
 - (1). Your sorrow INTENSIFIED, and your HEART began to burn within you.
 - c. Suddenly, you unleashed all that stored-up feeling – and you "spoke with YOUR tongue."
7. That's usually what happens when we try to control our tongue all on our own.
 - a. No matter how HARD we try, we FAIL.

- B. That brings us to the SECOND APPROACH David used, which can best be summed up with a question to God, "Why can't I do this myself?"
1. **Psalm 39:4-6** – *"LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them."*
 2. On the heels of failure and confusion, David expresses his thoughts using a familiar Hebrew idiom:
 - a. *"Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure [extent] of my days, that I may know how frail [transient] I am."*
(vs. 4)
 - b. He's asking God to give him INSIGHT.
 - (1). He wanted to see HIMSELF as GOD sees him, because he wants to know WHY he can't control his tongue all by himself.
 3. In the verses following, we have a list of things that God helped him to see: (vs. 5-6)

- a. His life was BRIEF – *"Indeed, you have made my days as handbreadths" (v 5a)*
- (1). A handbreadth is a form of SHORT measurement, and is used here to show that David's lifespan was brief – like the lifespan of us ALL.
- b. He was WEAK – *"And my age is nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but a vapor." (v 5b)*
- (1). David knew there was nothing in HIMSELF that could LENGTHEN his days.
- (2). We DESPERATELY need to be convinced of this.
- (a). Our strength does NOT lie in ourselves, but in GOD.
- (b). It's only when we FINALLY come face-to-face with our weakness that GOD can be strong.
- (c). **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** – *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of*

Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- (d). Paul understood that when we stop trying to rely on our OWN strength, and FACE our own weaknesses, the strength of GOD can then do it's work in our lives.
 - (e). And so David, like the apostle Paul, realized he wasn't able to handle this problem of the tongue on his own.
- c. David also learned he was PROUD – *"Surely every man walks about like a shadow [a phantom - literally "an image"], surely they busy themselves in vain [NASV - "they make an uproar for nothing"]*. **(v 6a)**
- (1). The idea here is that every person is concerned with maintaining their IMAGE.
 - (2). We become pre-occupied with things that will enhance OUR image or self-esteem.
- 3. So there was how GOD saw David: Transient, weak, but filled with arrogant pride.
 - 4. Few of us are really willing to see these truths about themselves.

- a. OUR problem is that we are simply too filled with self-confidence about our own abilities and capabilities.
 - b. We've been brainwashed into believing the lie that the answer lies in "SELF-HELP."
 - (1). Have you ever noticed how many "SELF-HELP" books people buy?
 - c. We've learned do-it-yourself rules, and have erroneously applied them to the Christian life.
 - (1). And IT DOESN'T WORK!
 - d. WHY?
 - (1). Because God designed the Christian life to be one of **DEPENDENCE, not INDEPENDENCE!**
5. And so, David finally came to the realization that he couldn't handle this problem alone.

C. And that brings us to the **THIRD APPROACH** which can best be summarized with the words, "I don't WANT to do this all by myself!"

- 1. David now moves closer to being convinced of the need for God's help.
 - a. **Psalm 39:7-8** – *"And now Lord, what do I wait for [another way of saying, "what am I waiting for"]? My hope is in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the*

reproach of the foolish [or, "don't make me the object of embarrassment"]."

2. David had tried and failed.
 - a. He had TRIED to control his tongue, but BLEW it.
 - b. Now, he was KEENLY aware of the unwise use of his tongue.
 - (1). He was EMBARRASED.
3. There are several important things in these verses:
 - a. First, David asks, "*What am I waiting for?*" (**v 7a**)
 - (1). There is no attempt to CONCEAL his mistake.
 - (a). He KNEW he had spoken when he shouldn't have, and as a result, he SINNED with his tongue.
 - (2). Therefore, he knew he needed to get forgiveness of this sin IMMEDIATELY.
 - (3). FURTHERMORE, he knew he needed to turn to God for the SOLUTION IMMEDIATELY!
 - b. Second, David ASKED for forgiveness. (**v 8a**)
 - (1). To do THIS, he had to FIRST recognize he did wrong.
 - (a). Sometimes we convince ourselves that we were JUSTIFIED in speaking the way we did.
 - (b). The reason we do that is simply because it's often easier to JUSTIFY our actions than to ADMIT they were wrong.

(2). There is none of that here.

c. Third, David asks to be delivered from the CONSEQUENCES of his mistake. **(v 8b)**

(1). Have you ever prayed that prayer -- to NOT ONLY be delivered from your TRANSGRESSION, but to ALSO be delivered from the CONSEQUENCE of your transgression?

(a). Sure – We all have.

(2). That's what David did.

(a). He had sinned with his tongue.

(b). And now, as a result, he was looking like a fool.

(3). We need to understand that if God has POWER enough to forgive you of a SIN, he ALSO has POWER enough to deliver you from the CONSEQUENCES of that sin.

(a). Ask Him for that!

D. And all this brings us to the FOURTH APPROACH which can be summed up with the words, "I need YOU, Lord, to do this for me."

1. David had started out trying to control his tongue by HIMSELF – with a kind of "self-help technique" – but he ends up letting the LORD do it for him.

a. **Psalm 39:9** – *"I was mute ["I didn't say something I shouldn't"],*

I did not open my mouth, because it was YOU WHO DID IT!"

- b. What David couldn't do for HIMSELF – the LORD could do.
 - (1). David finally HUMBLLED himself, and turned the matter over to the Lord – as a result, the Lord was able to bring about the desired results.
- 2. Let's stop here and try to make some PERSONAL application from all this:
 - a. What terrible thing are you trying to deal with in your life all by yourself – using your own strength?
 - (1). Some kind of burden or fear?
 - (2). An uncertainty about God's will for the future?
 - (3). A failing romance, marriage or home life?
 - (4). Some deep, dark sin that keeps constantly rearing its ugly head?
 - b. Do you find yourself facing some situation that's BEYOND your ability to control?
 - c. If so, then David's words are perfect.
 - (1). God can handle it!
 - (a). Turn the matter over to him.
 - (b). Get your hands off the steering wheel, and let Him drive.
 - (2). There is NOTHING He can't handle. Three key passages should convince us of this fact.

- (a). **Jeremiah 32:17, 27** – "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You! "... Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"
- (b). **Luke 1:34** – When Mary was told she was going to give birth to a son, *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"* The answer came in **verse 37** – *"For with God nothing will be impossible."*
- (c). **Luke 18:27** – Jesus assured His disciples, *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."*

- 3. David achieved victory (success) in controlling his tongue when he turned the matter over the Lord.
- E. And that finally brings us to David's CONCLUDING PRAYER in verses 10 through 13.
 - 1. God had FORGIVEN David's SINS, and DELIVERED David from the CONSEQUENCES of that sin. NOW David asks to be RELEASED from his GUILT.
 - a. David says, *"Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand."* (**v 10**)

- (1). David felt the STINGING REBUKE and PUNISHMENT from the hand of God.
- (2). As a RESULT, David had become deeply depressed over his own sins.
 - (a). In fact, David goes on to say, all joy has gone from him.
- b. *"When with rebukes You correct a man for iniquity, You make his beauty ["his radiant smile"] melt away like a mouth; surely every man is a vapor." (v 11)*
 - (1). David no longer had that RADIANT SMILE – that characteristic BRIGHT SMILE for which he was apparently known.
 - (2). The GUILT of his sin has wiped it all away.
 - (3). It has been CONSUMED like a mouth in a flame.
- c. And so, David cries to the Lord, *"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were." (v 12)*
 - (1). Again, David experienced DEEP, AGONIZING GUILT.
 - (a). He WEEPS as he remembers the sin he committed with his tongue (his speech).
- d. Finally, David pleads, *"Remove your gaze from me [Don't look at me with that LOOK – a look that may have been either an*

expression of DISPLEASURE, or perhaps even of SORROW and HURT], *that I may regain my strength, before I go away and am no more.*" (v 13)

2. You get a sense of David LITERALLY POURING OUT HIS HEART to God – BEGGING for God to not only forgive him, but to remove the TERRIBLE SHAME and GUILT David felt over having disappointed God.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Have you ever found yourself in a situation like the one David describes in Psalm 39?
 - A. Have you tried to battle some WEAKNESS or SIN in your life all on your OWN and FAILED?
 1. Did you finally decide to turn the whole situation over to God and ask Him to not only forgive you of the SIN, but also of the CONSEQUENCES of that sin?
 2. And, did you ALSO plead with God to take away the terrible SHAME and GUILT you felt for having committed that sin?
 3. If you have, then YOU know the kind of a response we receive when we TAKE this approach.

a. **Isaiah 40:31** - *"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."*

(1). The term "wait" means "to twist or stretch."

(a). It carries the idea of twisting or wrapping a threads around a massive steel cable so that the thread cannot possibly break.

(2). Isaiah is saying we need to take our weakness (whatever it may be), and WRAP IT AROUND the MASSIVE STEEL CABLE of GOD'S strength.

(3). In essence, we are exchanging our WEAKNESS for His STRENGTH!

(a). That's the ONLY WAY we'll conquer ANY unconquerable situation!

b. That's EXACTLY what David did – He "waited" on the Lord, and so did YOU.

(1). YOU exchanged YOUR weakness for GOD'S strength.

B. Do you remember the result of exchanging your weakness for God's strength?

1. Do you remember what happened when you confessed that sin and asked God to not only be forgiven of the sin but also of the consequences of that sin?

2. And do you remember when you also prayed for God to remove the shame and guilt you were feeling?
- C. David remembered – He wrote a psalm about the whole experience.
1. **Psalm 40:1-5** – *I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth – Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*
 - a. God FORGAVE HIS SIN.
 - b. God DELIVERED HIM FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS SIN.
 - c. God RELEASED HIM FROM HIS GUILT.
 - (1). And now, David was now "singing a new song."
 - (2). Joy had been restored.
- D. If you find yourself tangled up in some terrible sin – whether it's a sin of the TONGUE (something you said), or whether it's a sin of the HEART (something you can't seem to get out of your mind), or even a sin of the

FLESH (something you've done) – the SOLUTION is to simply bring that sin to the LORD and let HIM FORGIVE you and FREE you from the GUILT of that sin, and perhaps in His grace and mercy, He will also free you from the CONSEQUENCES of that sin.

1. When you do, you will also be "singing a new song."
 2. God will restore COMPLETE JOY by lifting YOU from the PIT, and setting YOUR FEET on the SOLID ROCK of His GRACE and MERCY.
- E. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ, or if you're a child of God and need to turn back to the Lord, we want to encourage you to come to the Lord now.