



Week Four

March 4 - 10

Following Christ Together Through the Prayer Action Plan

STICKS. STONES. TOOTHPASTE. MOUTHWASH.

Perhaps like me, you remember saying ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.’ In a moment of harsh words or ridicule I’d try to put on a brave face and act fearless. As people hurt us with harsh words, we might naturally attempt to cover the pain. But the words still hurt, in ways that exceed even broken bones, and our hearts may not heal correctly. A broken bone can be reset and heal within weeks. But hurtful words can take years, and must be reset with forgiveness. Read and meditate on what James 3:1-12 says about the tongue. Unlike anything else, the tongue is the hardest to control and affects all our relationships. Like a fire, it can severely burn and destroy relationships, or it can be a light that warms and encourages another’s heart.

As a church, we are one body in Christ. Gossip and a critical spirit have no place here. In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about growth within the Body of Christ, not individual growth. When we gossip and have a critical spirit against each other we do harm to the body.

“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth”. (Proverbs 10:20 ESV) The condition of our hearts affects our words. If our hearts are filled with peace, our speech will be peaceful. If there is unkindness in our hearts, there will be unkindness in our words. Our words display the condition of our hearts. Jesus says “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34b ESV) In the morning when we brush our teeth, what comes out of the tube of toothpaste is what is in the tube. When life squeezes you, what comes out? What comes out of you is what is in you. Spending time with Christ daily in His Word and in prayer helps us grow as His disciples and equips us to respond with kindness,

goodness, and the full fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23) when the harshness of life comes.

Let the harshness of life help grow you by asking God to illuminate your heart through it (remember the last words of James 4:2; also Luke 11:5-13). Read Ephesians 4:29-32 and consider the attitudes of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (shouting), slander, and malice (thoughts of spitefulness). What situations enter into your mind that need to be replaced and renewed with the kindness you have received from Christ? Read Ephesians 4:20-24.

APPLY THE WORD

When these negative situations and attitudes appear, examine your heart and evaluate what may be behind your desire to gossip, have jealousy, or seize revenge. To aid in breaking these sinful patterns, keep a card close at hand and evaluate your conversations and feelings throughout the day. Write down on the card what is motivating you to respond negatively and sinfully, and then consider some of these ideas to support you in your difficult situations:

- Avoid situations where gossip normally occurs,
- Ask friends to keep you accountable,
- Write Scripture on cards to read or memorize that can help redirect your mind on how gossip can cause deep hurt to others and yourself.

PRAY

Lord, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14 CSB). Help me to only speak what is right and true (see Proverbs 8:6-8) in love, and not harshly (see Ephesians 4:15 ,29). Help me to be quick to listen, and slow to speak (see James 1:19; Proverbs 10:19, 15:28, 17:28, 18:13, 29:20, 13:3). Help me, replace gossip with love and encouragement (in view of Ephesians 4:29, Psalm 141:3-4, Proverbs 17:9, 16:24, Colossians 4:6). Lord, help me to love others with Your abundant grace as You love me (to grow in living out Matthew 22:36-39)."