

Slip of the Tongue | Wildfires or Waterfalls

Aaron Brockett | James 3:1-12

It's good to be with all of you this weekend. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors at all of our campuses. We are absolutely thrilled to have you with us.

One of the things I want to do right out of the gate is I just want to thank everyone who serves—they go above and beyond at all of our campuses to make this what it is.

I am reminded of this because this weekend we had CIY SuperStart here, which is a ministry to middle schoolers. We hosted nearly 2,500 middle schoolers here in this room at Northwest. So if you smell a little something in the air it might be the wonderful body odor of our middle schoolers. You might be able to smell it through the camera at our other campuses, alright?

Man, we had just a killer team of volunteers and it reminds me that I just don't say thank you enough. I'm talking like Kids' Ministry volunteers, Guest Services, those of you who stand out in the parking lot and point us to where we should park safely, those of you who serve behind the scenes, keep our facilities clean and safe—man, at all of our campuses can we just thank everybody who goes above and beyond? Thank you for serving.

I know how it goes, man. You volunteer for something and at first you're excited and after a few weeks you go, "Man, does anybody even notice?" And man, we do. I just want you to know that regardless of how you serve you are making more of a difference around here than what you may realize. So thank you so much.

I want to encourage you at each of our campuses this Thursday night, March the 8th, from 7:00 to 8:00... We're having a night of prayer and worship at all of our campuses. We're very, very excited about this. I want to encourage you to come this Thursday night to your campus where we'll just spend an hour together lifting up our voices, praying, and encouraging one another.

If you have a Bible or a Bible app would you please meet me in James, chapter 3? It's in the New Testament. James, chapter 3 is the passage that we're going to be walking through today.

I have a good friend who lives in Kentucky and he was telling me not long ago that he took his wife out on a date. So they were spending a very romantic evening at Lowe's because many of you know that the longer that you are married, the more kids you have and all of that, your dates and your errands sort of like run together.

So they were in Lowe's, they are in the check-out line getting ready to check-out when one of his three teen-aged daughters (you can be praying for him) called him on his cell phone, which immediately meant something was wrong because she never uses the phone to call—it's all texting, right?

So he answers the phone and he goes, “What’s wrong?” And she says, “Dad, the dumpster is on fire.”

Apparently he had rented a dumpster that weekend to do some cleaning out of the garage. It was sitting in the driveway and she said, “It’s on fire.” And he goes, “Well, is it outside the dumpster?” And she’s like, “No, it’s inside the dumpster.” So he thought, “Well, I think we’re okay.” He thought it was just a little brush fire or a few little flames.

He said, “We’re on our way home. Just keep an eye on it and if it gets outside the dumpster call the fire department.” So they get done, they’re in the car, they are on their way home when his teen-aged daughter texted him a picture of the dumpster in full flame—so, a little bigger than he thought.

He said they were still miles from home and they could see the smoke billowing in the distance. So they are racing to get home and he said that by the time they got home the fire had burned itself out—meaning everything in the dumpster was literally burned up so the fire had nothing else to burn.

So they’re just thinking that they dodged a bullet. He was just glad that everybody was safe. So after he checked that all out he began his investigation. His investigation really centered around this question: What started the fire? He wanted to know.

He began to interview each of his kids asking them what they knew and what they were doing and finally his very responsible 18-year-old daughter stepped forward and she confessed that it might have been her.

She explained the situation, that she had her boyfriend over (it always involves a boyfriend, alright?). So he was over that afternoon and they were—I know this is going to be shocking to some of you—they were shooting exploding targets with rifles. Did I mention that they are from Kentucky? That just explains it. Sounds like a good time to me.

Anyway, she said that one of the embers from the exploding target just might have fallen into the dumpster. They didn’t think anything of it. They didn’t see any smoke, but apparently it just kind of sat in there and smoldered until it burst into flames. By the time it did they were already gone. She didn’t do it on purpose. It wasn’t intentional but does it really matter? I mean it started with a small spark that ended up bursting into this enormous flame.

Unfortunately, we’re seeing more and more that this is oftentimes just to be expected. The wildfires that take place every year. The most recent ones were in Santa Barbara and these fires cause millions and millions of dollars in damage, they take the lives of hundreds if not thousands of people and when these fires are finally managed or maintained or when they are finally able to get them out the authorities will do the same thing that my friend did. They’ll begin an investigation where they want to trace where the fire started and how did it start.

And 90 percent of the time these fires are caused by human beings—they didn’t do it on purpose, it wasn’t arson, it just happened unintentionally but does it really matter? Maybe it was a campfire that

wasn't put out appropriately, maybe it was a cigarette butt that got flicked out of a window and a small spark causes a huge flame.

Now this image of a spark causing a flame is actually the word picture that our guy James is going to use here in James, chapter 3 to describe the power that our words can have.

We all know, metaphorically speaking, when it comes to our relationships that a fire can break out, metaphorically speaking, and it can actually burn a relationship to the ground.

Maybe you had a friendship at one time in your past that burned to the ground. You were really, really close to this other person. Maybe you were BFF. You rode a tandem bike together. You had matching outfits. I mean, you were going to be friends for life but maybe you realize that it's been several years and you haven't even talked to that other person.

As you stand there in the ashes of that relationship and you do an investigation of your own you find out that there were some words, some sparks—they didn't seem to be all that big of a deal at the time. You didn't say them intentionally. It wasn't on purpose, but it caused this fire that burned the relationship to the ground.

Maybe it was your marriage. Maybe there was a time in your life when you and your spouse loved each other, you were on the same page, you had plans and dreams and hopes for your future but maybe you got careless with your words and there were some sparks. You didn't necessarily mean for them to cause the kind of damage that they did, but by the time you recognized that there was a fire in the relationship it was maybe too late to get it put out.

Maybe it was your career, maybe it was your reputation, your influence that got burned to the ground. And as you stand there you ask the question, "What in the world happened here? I didn't intend for this to go this way."

Well James has some answers for us. James was the half brother of Jesus. He was also one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church and because of that, because of his connection to Jesus and because of his position in the early church, when James spoke, people listened. James' words carried a lot a weight.

So he writes one of the most practical books in the New Testament. In fact, if you're looking for just some really practical teaching, James is your book. And he writes this letter, not just for his church in Jerusalem, but it's also going to get passed around to the other churches in the area. In fact, James is one of the earliest letters that we have in the New Testament. And the tone must have been a real problem for people in these churches—aren't you glad that times have changed?

James devotes more time and attention to the issue of the tongue than Peter and Paul ever do. Peter and Paul wrote much of the New Testament as well but James really zeros in on this issue as we will see today.

As we read through this there are two things that become extremely clear. The first thing is that our tongues are a real problem as it relates—I think we all realize this—to our relationships. That’s what we’ve been talking about all series long. But James is even going to say: Hey man, our tongues—the way that we talk with each other within the church as Christ followers, this can actually hinder or block the very mission that Jesus has given us.

The mission of the church is to get as many people to Jesus as we possibly can. James is going to say: Man, if we don’t watch our speech within the church it will actually hinder that.

The second thing that becomes clear is that James is going to include himself in the battle. James is going to say: Hey, listen. In case you thought that I’ve mastered my tongue—I haven’t. I’m right there with you. He uses the word *we*. He says: Man, I’m at the front of the line. God has continued to work with me on this issue because I realize how easy it is for me to have a slip of the tongue.

It’s actually what he begins with right out of the gate in verses 1 and 2, chapter 3. Look at this with me. He says, “Dear brothers and sisters,” so notice the compassion in his words here. He said *dear* and he’s referring to them as brothers and sisters, because we’re a family. He’s going to say some hard things.

He says, “... not many of you should become teachers in the church, for,” there is the word *we*, “... for **we** who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, **we all make many mistakes.**”

Now keep this in mind because James is going to say some tough stuff here in a few verses. But he says right out of the gate: Hey, listen. We all make mistakes. We’re all human beings. We’re all going to mess up. And then he says: I’m at the front of the line here and as a teacher and a preacher God is going to judge me more strictly.

In other words, James realizes: My words carry a lot of weight with them and I’m leveraging my influence here to speak. So I realize this: God is going to hold me accountable for this.

And man, can I tell you that as a teacher and a preacher, when I read this this is humbling. Just to recognize that I’m going to be held to higher standard—not just for what I do but for what I say on a weekly basis.

Every now and then I’ll have somebody come up to me, sometimes it’s a younger person maybe thinking about going into ministry, maybe he feels like God is calling him to that. Or maybe it’s just somebody who is curious who says, “Hey, Aaron. What’s it like to stand up on a stage and just communicate to thousands of people every single week.”

And the way that they ask the question leads me to believe that they think that it’s like a real perk, like that it’s... Now, don’t get me wrong. It is a privilege. It’s a blessing. I don’t take it lightly. I’ve said this before. I believe that God has given me the ability and the opportunity to do this and he could take both away if he wanted to because he gave them both to me. So I hold this really loosely up here.

But whenever they ask that of me there are times when I want to go, “Hey, man. It’s not as glamorous as you think. Here’s what it is like, alright? It’s like spending 15 to 20 hours a week writing a research paper, and then getting to know it well enough so that you can stand up and orally deliver it to thousands of people (half of them are not even in the room so I can’t tell if they like it or not). And I know that what I’m going to say, somebody probably won’t like, agree with, or understand. And then I’ve got to do it again the next week. That’s what it’s like, alright? And I just realize that it’s a heavy, heavy responsibility.

Here’s the thing. Some of you are like... This is how you are reading verses 1 and 2, “Well, I’m glad I’m not going into ministry.” It’s like, “I wouldn’t want to do that. I don’t want to be judged more strictly.”

But I think that the same can be true for those of you—and I know that we have many in our church—who, if you’re a follower of Jesus and I know that many of you... We have many gifted communicators in our church and you do it for a living.

Maybe God has kind of put you into a position where when you speak it has ripple effects and it affects people. I think the same thing is applicable to you. Use that gift, steward it wisely. It’s easy for those of us who are good speakers to actually mask our character behind our ability to speak. Man, just don’t do that.

James goes on in verse 2. He says: Hey, man: “...if we could **control our tongues**, we would be perfect,” so he’s being facetious, alright? We won’t literally be perfect. But he says we, “...could also **control ourselves** in every other way.”

I love how James kind of talks about the tongue as if it’s like sort of a separate thing that has a mind of its own. I can’t control my tongue. He’s just going to do what he’s going to do, right? And what James is kind of leading us into here is that really the tongue sort of sets the standard, the tongue directs all of our relationships and the very direction of our lives.

And what he’s going to do in verses 3 through 6 is that he is actually going to teach using some metaphors, which I really appreciate. Actually, in the first century Jewish teachers, many times, when they were trying to communicate a point they would use metaphors in sets of three to really try to drive their point home. And this is exactly what James does.

He begins with the first metaphor in verse 3. He says, “We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a **small bit** in its mouth.” And those of you who have ever ridden a horse you know this to be true. You are on this big, powerful animal and you can control it, you can direct where it goes with just a small bit in its mouth. James is like: the tongue is like that for your life.

Maybe horseback riding isn’t your thing. Maybe you’d like to go on a cruise. Well, I’ve got a metaphor for that to, alright? In verse 4, he goes, “And a **small rudder** makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a **small thing** that makes grand speeches.”

Now here's metaphor 3: "But a **tiny spark** can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the **tongue is a flame of fire**. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your **entire body**. It can set your **whole life** on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself."

Wow. Those are strong words. And James, what he is doing is he is actually stretching the human language to its limits to try to help us to see that our words carry weight. Our words really matter. And when he says *whole life* he's not only talking about every facet of your life. I think he's also talking about the duration of your life. And if you're just thinking, "Well, just with age and experience then I'll finally get to this place where my tongue will be managed," he goes: No, no, no. If you're not intentional about this you can let decade after decade after decade—relationship after relationship after relationship burn to the ground. When are you going to learn your lesson? You've got to get control of your tongue.

Now, the first two metaphors have to do with the direction of our lives. That last metaphor has to do with the potential destruction that our tongue can cause. And so James says in verse 7, "People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, **but no one can tame the tongue**. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it **praises** our Lord and Father, and sometimes it **curses** those who have been made in the image of God.

"And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs?" And he answers his own question, "No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring."

When I was in college the pastor of my home church came over to our campus and did a dorm devo with us guys on our dorm floor. We used to do this several times a week. And I don't remember very many devos (or devotionals) that we would do together as a dorm, but I remember this one. And it was this passage that he actually read to us.

After he got done reading it he goes, "Hey, guys. I want you to imagine that there is a water fountain in a room and you're thirsty. And nine times out of 10 when you walk up to that water fountain, you're going to get a mouthful of cool, refreshing water but one time out of 10 it's going to produce salt water." He goes, "Let's just go worse than that. One time out of 10 it's just produces sewer water—just something really vile."

He goes, "Here's a question for you. How many experiences with that is it going to take for you to avoid that water fountain all together? Even though nine times out of 10 you get fresh water, if you just have one experience where you get a mouth full of bitter salt water, chances are that you're just going to avoid the water fountain all together."

And he goes, "And some of you—most of the time what you say is appropriate. Most of the time what you say is right. Most of the time what you say is kind and encouraging, but even if just one time you just haul off and tell somebody off and vile stuff comes out of your mouth," he goes, "people will begin to avoid you and those relationships—they just won't make it."

See James' teaching here applies to our relationships, but he turns a corner in verse 9, if you saw it. He says: Hey, guys. I'm speaking to those Christ followers within the church. He says: this is actually hindering and keeping people back from experiencing what Jesus has to offer to them.

I'm reminded of what Jesus said to the woman at the well when she was struggling. Jesus said to her: I want to give you water so that you'll never thirst again. And we live in a world that is thirsty. We live in a world that is thirsting for what? Thirsting for hope, thirsting for answers, thirsting for love—trying to find it wherever it can be found and always coming up short.

And Jesus said: I've got the water that will make people never thirst again. I want to give it to them. And here's the amazing thing about it. He said: I want to use you to do that. I want to use you to lead them to me. And so all it takes is maybe for somebody who is really thirsty and they say, "I've tried to find it everywhere else, but I can't find it. But there's something about that church. Maybe I'll go to that church. Maybe I'll check it out."

And what if they come? Maybe they muster up the courage to be here and then just one time—we didn't do it on purpose, we didn't do it intentionally but we gave them a mouth full of salt water. That's the picture James is painting.

And he says: Brothers and sisters, man this isn't right. They're actually rejecting Jesus because of the words that we have spoken to them. And I know people like that. I know people who have said, "Yeah, I tried church and it didn't work." Or, "I went and some religious people said some really, really hurtful, hateful, nasty things to me." And so they rejected Jesus because of it. And Jesus says: No, I want to give them fresh water and I want to use you to do it.

I'm really, really grateful for this church and what God is doing here. God is doing some amazing things in this church that we can't take credit for. And I don't fully even understand it. So much of the time my prayer is, "God, just help me not to mess this thing up. I don't want to get in the way of what you are doing here."

But I've begun to have people from around the country call me or email me or ask me, "Hey, what are you guys doing there? Why are you guys growing? Why are you guys so effective?" And I have to tell them as honestly as I can that I really don't know. God is doing what he is doing and I can't fully understand it."

But I've been thinking about this a lot since I've been getting these questions and I think that one of the answers as to why God is doing some uncommon things in our church is because this church, for the most part—for the most part, we still have some work to do—this is a church that watches its tongue.

From the leadership meetings that I'm in to the hallway conversations that I experience and see to what I see out in the community... Man, I get to work with some very talented men and women who are passionate and gifted and have differing opinions and yet we know how to talk to each other in a

way that is God honoring and that builds each other up. And I believe that God honors that. Now, that does not mean that we are perfect. That doesn't mean that we don't have a ways to grow in this area. We all do. But I think by-in-large this is a church that watches its tongue.

I've been in churches, some of you have as well, where gossip just swept through the church like a wildfire: divisive, nasty, hateful, bitter words swept through the church like wildfire and they just couldn't control it.

I think that there are a lot of churches that want to grow, I think there are a lot of churches that love Jesus just as much as we love Jesus, there are a lot of churches that have vision—they know what to do—but, man, if you don't control the tongue I don't think that God blesses that because God is like: why would I send you people if they are just going to get salt water? It's a warning for us. God can pull his hand of blessing back off of us if we don't control our tongue.

So keeping in line with James' teaching pattern here in chapter 3, what are some specific ways that our tongue can become like a wildfire? What are some ways that our speech can actually be like salt water? I want to get real, real specific. And some of you might call this meddling, but I just call this good application, alright? So you might pull out your cell phone and take a picture of some of these words. I want to name them, alright?

Here's one way that our words can become a wildfire. This is probably pretty self explanatory, but just harsh and mean-spirited words. You ever raise you voice at somebody, yell at them, scream at them, just tear them down and you don't expect any sort of response. You don't want one. You just want to give them a piece of your mind. That's harsh and mean spirited words. And there's just nothing salvageable about them. They will burn the relationship to ground faster than anything.

When I was in college I did an internship out on the west coast and I was staying with a family in the church. And I actually had a roommate: the family's nephew. He was there working a summer job. He was about six foot five, very intimidating guy. And he had a temper on him.

I remember the first time I experienced it was maybe two weeks into the internship, we were home by ourselves, and I was on the phone with Lindsay—we were dating at the time. And he came in. He was upset about something, maybe a dish or something that I left in the kitchen. He came up and basically just laid into me—nose to nose just tearing me up. And I remember just being shocked by it. I remember thinking... It was so bad I thought that I might need to move out. That's what I thought. He did that several more times that summer.

Here's the thing. About 15 minutes later, after he got done chewing me out, he would be totally fine—cool as a cucumber. Anybody know anybody like that? And I'd walk into the room, I'd be all defensive like, "Dude, are you going to swing at me?" I'd walk into the room and he'd be like, "Hey, Brockett. Do you want to go to In-and-Out and get a burger?"

“No, I don’t want to get a burger with you, dude. I would not eat a burger with you on a boat or with a goat. I would not eat a burger with you in a tree, I would not eat a double, double with you, you see.” I was just going all Dr. Seuss on him. He’d be like, “Whoa, tone it down there bad boy.”

What he was doing was he was throwing up all over me, probably had nothing to do with me it was probably something else and he felt better but I’m like covered in his salt water.

Here’s the thing. When we do that it’s because we want some sort of result or response. But see, flowers don’t grow through the thunder. Flowers grow through rain. And so, man, if you’re just trying to raise your voice because you want to get something done it will actually have the opposite effect that you intended.

Another set of words is just bitter and cynical words. These are words that we use when we sort of assume that everybody else’s motives are impure and selfish. We don’t understand what somebody else has said or done so we just sort of write them off like, “Everybody else in this world is just an idiot except for me.” That’s what we’re communicating through bitter and cynical words.

Another is sarcastic and condescending words. Sarcasm is when we use words at somebody else’s expense. And we might say that we are kidding or joking around but there is an element of truth in them and they are enough to wound someone. Here’s the thing about sarcasm, most people don’t want to rain on your parade or on your humor so they’ll kind of smile and laugh, but secretly on the inside they are wounded and you don’t know it.

Now, I’m just kind of curious. How many of you have the spiritual gift of sarcasm? You’re just very, very good at it. All of the time you are like, “Oh, that would be really good,” and you want to use it.

Especially as a younger man, before I had really grown up and matured (which is debatable if I really have by now)—as a younger man I was good at it so I would wield it all of the time. And I just thought I was having a good time and I was actually burning relationships to the ground and I didn’t even know it. There was this thing that I would say that is probably not even, well it isn’t worth the small, little laugh I might get if I used some sarcasm.

Another is passive aggressive words. These are words that we use or actually the lack of words that we use—sometimes it’s just the silent treatment like giving a cold shoulder. We’ve all done it before. Here’s what it sounds like, “Hey, man. I think something is wrong. Is everything okay? Are you okay?”

“Oh, yeah. Everything is fine.”

No it isn’t, right?

So you kind of give the impression that everything is fine and you actually really need them to kind of keep trying. You want them to feel bad about what they have said or have done. And, man, we have all done it. I’ve done this. What it is, it’s a form of manipulation and control that actually blocks further communication rather than going deeper into it.

Another is untrue words—otherwise known as lying. Here's the thing about lying. We all have been lied to and we don't like it. We have all lied before and we know that it's wrong, so why do we do it? And I think the reason why we lie is very, very simple: two reasons. We lie to promote ourselves and to protect ourselves.

So we [I] lie when I'm afraid that you're not going to notice the good things that I've done so I'm going to go ahead and promote myself and actually exaggerate the truth so that I come off looking better than I really am. Or maybe you get backed into a corner so you lied to protect yourself.

Proverbs, chapter 12, verse 19 says: "Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed."

Another set of words is just corrosive and toxic words. These are words and statements that we use that are just simply exaggerated and they're definitive and they put people into a box. This was actually true on my media feed when I just asked you what are some of the most hurtful things that people have said to you. Corrosive and toxic words were about 90 percent of it. Statements like: Man, you'll never amount to anything.

Statements like: You always do this. You just never did it right. Man, words always and never are just always exaggerations. We'll go back and edit that later. Why can't you be more like your brother or sister? You're a loser. I hate you. Man, those are just corrosive and toxic and they will stay with somebody for life.

Another is critical and complaining words. How many of you have an Eeyore or a Debbie Downer in your life? And you just can't share any kind of good news with them because they'll always spin it and turn it into a negative: something is always wrong. The weather is too cold, too hot, or too humid. The prices are too high. The waiter is too slow. The food is too spicy. The music is too loud. The traffic is too congested. The church is too small. The church is too big...

Several years ago the University of Denver conducted a study and they found that one of the greatest predictors of divorce is when 10 or more negative or critical comments take place per 100 conversations. In other words, with your spouse if out of every 100 conversations that you have 10 or more go negative then that's one of the predictors that your marriage might be headed for divorce.

The same principle is actually true in the work place. The business book called *The Carrot Principle*, reported a 10-year study involving over 200,000 employees and one of the key findings that they discovered is that 79 percent of employees who quit their job cited the reason being a culture of criticism and a lack of encouragement.

The last one that I will mention is gossip and rumors. Gossip and rumors are maybe the most pervasive, maybe the most destructive in the sense that they are easy to disguise. Sometimes it's difficult to detect when somebody is gossiping or spreading a rumor, especially now with social media just rampant.

You know, in 1970—some of you might remember this—the U.S. economy wasn't doing very well and there was actually a shortage of three things. There was a shortage of gasoline, a shortage of onions, and a shortage of electricity.

In 1973 somebody started a rumor that there was a shortage of something else. They started the rumor that the United States was on the brink of running out of toilet paper. Any of you remember this? I think Johnny Carson had something to do with this—he was a late night talk show host.

People freaked out. So they are running out and cleaning out the stores of toilet paper and a United States senator fueled that fear when he released this press statement that said: "The U.S. may face a serious shortage of toilet paper within a few months. A toilet paper shortage is no laughing matter. It is a problem that will potentially touch every American." No pun intended, alright. It was a rumor. It was all gossip. It wasn't true.

See gossip and rumors are so destructive because they are easy to disguise, especially within the church. It's easy to gossip and maybe you don't even know that you are doing it. Maybe it's a legitimate concern that you have. Maybe it's a conviction or a criticism. Oftentimes, unfortunately, here's how gossip starts in a church. It starts with a prayer request and instead of just stating the prayer request we have to add our commentary to the prayer request and that's where we venture into gossip.

Let me just provide this working definition of gossip: Gossip is saying something that may or may not be true—it could actually be true but it's still gossip. It's true about someone. And when they aren't physically present we assume the worst about their intentions and motives. In other words, there is a gap in information: Did you hear They made this decision and I don't understand it. Well, I heard...

And then you start to go into it. There is a gap of information there that you don't have and it's the least gracious explanation. So instead of going to the person, we just fill in the blanks with suspicion.

It's one thing to have gossip that is said about us. When we're gossiped about we're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa—that's wrong." It's easy to let slide, though, when it's about someone else.

Proverbs, chapter 16, verse 28 says: "A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip **separates** the best of friends." In other words, even the strongest relationship cannot withstand the destructive forces of gossip.

God feels so strongly about this that in Romans, chapter 1 Paul is actually listing out all of these horrible things that people can be guilty of. And he says: "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and **gossip**."

And you're going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Remember that song on *Sesame Street* 'One of These Things Doesn't Belong With the Others'?" You're like, "I don't think that gossip should be included in this paragraph. All of these other things like murder and hate, those are really serious. Gossip is just fun, right?" He's like: No. It's not fun.

God does not hate very many things but he hates gossip and he makes it very clear that he does. Why? Well because of what it does to relationships and to communities. It just shreds them. It tears them apart.

Here's the even further convicting thing. Gossip isn't just what you do with your mouth. You can also do it with your ears. When you listen to gossip, you're actually just as guilty of it as the person who is actually doing the gossiping.

Here's the thing. If somebody is gossiping to you they will gossip about you. And so you've got to ask yourself at some point, "Man, do I have the courage to actually step up and to say something here?"

I realize this. Many of you are non-confrontational, you hate confrontation. So when somebody gossips you think the best thing to do is to sit there quietly. You don't agree with them. You're just letting them vent. But actually, what it is is that you're potentially encouraging them to keep doing it. Maybe they interpret your silence as an endorsement.

So what are you supposed to do? What are you supposed to do when you're in your group and all of a sudden the conversation turns into gossip? Well you don't need to reprimand. You just need to redirect.

Here's how you redirect. I have a friend who does this really, really well. When somebody starts gossiping what she'll do is she will say one or two really encouraging things about the person being gossiped about and then she will say, "You know what? You ought to go directly to them and talk about the issue that you have."

You know what happens to the gossip when she says that? It just shuts down. And the Bible actually tells us that this will be the result. In Proverbs, chapter 26, verse 20 it says: "Fire goes out without wood, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops."

Here's the thing. There is so much power when God leads a person to say the right thing at the right time to somebody who is thirsty, to somebody who desperately needs to hear it.

Now I know for a fact—because I've heard from many of you—there are a lot of you across all of our campuses where God has led someone into your life to say something to you at just the right time and it was something that you desperately need to hear and maybe that other person doesn't fully realize how God used them in that moment. But it changed things for you. It gave you some hope. You turned the corner.

Here's the thing. I want to be that kind of person. I don't want to be the kind of person whose words were the spark that caused the wildfire and then just to go, "Well, I didn't mean it. It wasn't intentional. It wasn't on purpose." Well, at that point does it really matter? My words became a wildfire that burnt relationships to the ground. I want my words to be more like a waterfall—just fresh water building people up.

That doesn't mean that I'm going to shrink back from stating the truth. It doesn't mean that I'm not going to offer constructive criticism. It doesn't mean that I don't have convictions. It means that every word that comes off of my tongue—I want it to be glorifying to God. I want it to build others up.

So how can we get to this place where maybe we can stop before we speak? I like this acrostic right here. Maybe some of you have seen this. It's not original with me. This is the acrostic THINK. If your mom has ever said, "Hey, you need to think before you speak," this is it. So before you say something just run it through this grid:

T - Is it true?
H - Is it helpful?
I - Is it inspiring?
N - Is it necessary?
K - Is it kind?

That would be a pretty good discipline. Just kind of stop, give yourself 30 seconds, and run through those questions before you actually speak.

I love what David writes in Psalms, chapter 139, verse 17. He says, "How precious are your **thoughts about me**, O God. They cannot be numbered!"

That shows you the very heart of God and what he has—his intentions for you. When God thinks about you—his thoughts are precious about you. And if anybody had reason to actually be upset with us, I think it would be God. And God says: No. No. Actually I choose to think about you in the best possible way. I'm thinking precious thoughts about you: thoughts to reconcile with you; thoughts for your wellbeing; and a purpose for your life.

And if God can think precious thoughts about you and me then we can start there in our relationships so that our words are like fresh water to those we come into contact with.

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to you right now and I know that throughout this series it's just been working so many of us over because this applies to all of us because we use words every day that communicate with those that we come into contact with, relationships, they will either thrive or they will shrivel up and die depending upon our words and our conversations.

God, our effectiveness as a church to lead people to the living water in you that will never make them thirst again is all connected to our speech. So, God, we pray that you would help us to think, help us to really weigh our words so that what comes out of our mouth will actually, not only be glorifying to you, but they would actually build others up and lead them closer to you.

In these next few moments, God, as we reflect on the teaching; we ask you to now turn this to us that we would make the decision, “Hey, God, what is it that you want me to learn from this, to take away from this, what do you want me to do?” I pray that your Spirit would meet us in this place as we reflect upon this teaching and these following moments together.

We thank you for being a God who thinks precious thoughts about us. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.