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# 6 On Preventing Forest Fires

***James 3:1-12***

**O**ne of the most distressing crises is a fire out of control. The pain of seeing the resulting destruction can be almost unbearable. Personal belongings going up in smoke. The beauty of nature destroyed. Even loss of life itself. In this passage James compares the destructive power of the tongue to that of a forest fire.

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**1.** How do you respond to the adage, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”?

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**2.** Read James 3:1-12. James suggests that not many people should become teachers (v. 1). What examples come to your mind of religious teachers whose lives people judged more strictly than others?

Why were they judged more harshly?

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**3.** Why do you think people often give advice they don't follow themselves?

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**4.** James compares the tongue to a bit and a rudder (vv. 3-4). Why do you think the tongue has such control over our lives?

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**5.** James also compares the tongue to a fire and to a world of evil (vv. 5-6). What is the point of these two comparisons?

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**6.** Verses 7-8 emphasize what a challenge it is to control the tongue. What makes this so difficult?

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**7.** In what ways can the tongue poison people and relationships?

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**8.** In verses 9-12 James uses a series of analogies from nature (springs, trees, vines). How do they highlight the inconsistencies of the tongue?

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**9.** James has focused primarily on the destructive power of the tongue. In what ways can the tongue also bring refreshment and healing?

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**10.** What can you do to give God more praise? Be specific.

How can you give more praise to those you come in contact with each day?

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**11.** Ask God to make your tongue a source of life rather than a source of destruction.