
THE TONGUE IS A FIRE

Fire can be one of nature's most destructive forces.

On Sunday, October 8, 1871, a fire broke out in Chicago, Illinois. The fire started in or around a small shed. No one really knows it started, but it spread quickly due to several factors:

- The heavy use of wood for construction at that time
- A drought that had occurred prior to the fire
- Strong winds from the southwest that carried burning rubble to the heart of the city
- Poor reaction by city officials and citizens

The fire burned for two days, but even when it was over, the smoldering remains were still too hot for a survey of the damage to be completed for days. Eventually, it was determined that the fire had destroyed:

- An area 4 miles long by 3/4 of a mile wide, or more than 2,000 acres
- More than 73 miles of roads and 120 miles of sidewalks
- 17,500 buildings
- \$222 million in property—about 1/3 of the city's value
- Of 300,000 inhabitants, 90,000 were left homeless
- 200-300 people were killed

In the Book of James, James compares the human tongue to a raging fire:

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

(James 3.5-10)

James compares the tongue to fire because just like fire, if our tongues are out of control, they can cause a great deal of damage. Gossiping, talking behind people's backs, saying hurtful things, putting people down—all of these are ways in which our tongues can be like a dangerous fire.

When we're careless with our words, we can destroy a friendship. When we speak what is not true about someone, we can destroy reputations and lives. Even if we apologize later, the effects can spread like an out of control fire.

A lot of times when we talk about problems, especially with teens, we focus on the "big" issues: drinking, drugs, sex, etc. Those need to be talked about, but the harm we do with what we say is a much more common problem. Listen to James 3.9-10 again: *"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be."*

Your tongue can be as dangerous and destructive as a fire. Use it carefully. Our speech can be a problem or it can be pleasing to God. What's it going to be for you?

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