



Week Four: Meanness

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Loving God, help us to love those who are mean to us, forgive us for the times we have been mean to others. Thank you for the grace that you have shown us, when we failed to do or say the right thing. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen!

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Share where you have seen God at work in your life this week.
Share one good thing that you have done for someone else.
Ask yourself silently, “Did I do any harm this week?”

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WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

James 3:7-16

“For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can saltwater yield fresh. Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.”

REFLECTION:

Meanness: offensive, selfish, or unaccommodating; nasty; malicious

When mean words are spoken to us, maybe we should just get over it or toughen up. People shouldn't be sensitive, right? "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never break me." That is a bunch of baloney. Words can harm us. We live in a world of internet trolls who launch mean-spirited attacks on others in order to increase their number of followers. The dueling cable news networks, representing opposing sides of political issues, often spew mean-spirited attacks against people and groups that they deem a threat to their political ideology. Even churches have bitter disagreements over both the essentials and nonessentials of faith. If we are not careful, this can lead us down a dark path of demonizing those who don't hold our view. My friends, we are seeing the polarization of our society in our online platforms, in our government and in our churches. Speaking the truth in love, respecting our differences and working together with people of opposing camps for the common good seem to be forgotten ways. Our emotional memory, how we feel because of something done to us or how we feel when our expectations have not been met, seem to rule the day. When we allow our stored-up frustration, guilt, shame, fear, bitterness, negativity, and anger to fill our hearts, meanness can flow out of our hearts. Just because life has given us hell, doesn't we have earned the right to be mean to others.

WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

LONG WALKS & SHORT PIERS

WEEK FOUR

At the beginning of the third chapter of James, the writer starts by stating that teachers will be judged with greater strictness. Why? Teachers have the authority through their words to creatively shape and mold the lives of their students. Anyone who has authority over another person is in a unique position to use their words to creatively shape that person's life. Our words can also be destructive to the lives of others. In our text today, starting at verse seven, the writer of James takes us back to creation in the Book of Genesis. God spoke our world into existence. God gave humanity the responsibility to tame animals and the power to name the animals. Humans are distinct from the rest of creation because God gave us the gift of language. Therefore, language when used for a godly purpose, can create good things but when used improperly, it can destroy. James is urging the readers of this letter to use our gifts for godly purposes. Weaponized words can assassinate the character of a person. Godly words can inspire us to live with integrity. Hurtful words can emotionally wound us. Godly words can spiritually heal us. Slandorous words can lead to wrongful convictions. Godly words can lead to vindications. Flattering words can lead to an inflated ego. Godly words can lead to humility. Scornful words can lead to despair. Godly words can lead to hope. You see, words can build up or words can tear down. Words can be life-giving or death-dealing. Here are some practices that can help us on our journey:

Talk to God: *Prayer is our means of speaking to and hearing from God. Prayer is our communication system. We don't need to try to impress God with our extensive vocabulary. All we need to do is express our love for God, give thanks to God for what God has done, ask God for what we need, and lastly, trust God with the outcome. If you are having trouble lashing out at others with mean words, ask God to help you choose your words more carefully, and help you discern when to speak and how to speak to others*

Have Self-talk: *Sometimes, we must encourage ourselves. It would be nice if we had our own group of personal cheerleaders, but that is not the reality. When the storms of life are raging, when that person that gets on your nerves enters the room, when rush-hour traffic is at its worst, when your spouse is being disagreeable, your children have lost their minds... that is when you remind yourself of what is written in the Word of God. You are a child of God. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to redeem and save you. It's not personal sunshine pumping. It's not denying the reality or the facts. The facts may be that life is giving you hell, but the truth is that you have heaven in your heart. The truth is that God is a way maker.*

Talk to Others: *Share how God is active and at work in your life with others. Listen to others share their journey with God. Just as God said let there be light, we can speak words that bring the Light of hope in the darkest places of despair. Just as Jesus said, "forgive them father for, they know not what they do," we can speak words that pardon those who persecute us.*

Just as Ezekiel prophesied to a valley of dry bones, we can speak words of life that brings new life into dry places. We need to speak words of life - God is big enough.

Encounter the Head:

What is meanness?

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What was the most impactful thing that you learned from the scripture, sermon, podcast or discussion guide?

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What does it mean / look like for us to be guided by a pursuit of gentleness?

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Encounter the Heart:

Share a time when someone's kind words helped you through a difficult time.

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GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Share a time when your words helped someone going through a difficult time.

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Share a time when someone's words inspired you.

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Encounter the Hands:

Write down the names of people that you may have spoken to harshly. If you discern that your words were mean, make time to apologize to that person. Commit to putting the three practices (mentioned in the discussion guide) to use in your life.

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Encounter The Hands:

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

We encourage everyone to do a daily reflection. This can be done alone, as a couple, or with your family. This spiritual practice will help answer the questions you have and it will improve your ability to see where God is at work in your life, and in the lives of those around you. Please answer the following questions during your personal devotional time at the end of the day.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, “what made you happy today?”

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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