

The Triple Test

Jane Phinney

One of the greatest lies ever penned is the old adage, "*Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.*" Even as a kid, something about that saying just never set well with me. It didn't take long, especially after getting married, to figure out that, "*Sticks and stones may break my bones but words hurt the worst of all*". (my paraphrase)

In James, chapter 3, the tongue as "a fire" is thoroughly discussed. Because it is written specifically to believers and chapter 4 discusses relational issues, we can conclude that the people had some serious conflicts as a result of gossip. After comparing the tongue to a ship's rudder and a small fire that sets the forest aflame, Jesus' half-brother zeroes in with a strong admonition: "*...no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?*" I don't know about you but I'm feeling a tad bit uncomfortable right now. I have not only experienced being the brunt of gossip but, on occasion, I have participated in it myself. I believe an "untamed tongue" is the number one method Christians employ to shoot their wounded. I also believe it is the primary way we ruin our testimony to the world at large.

I remember a time when we were in leadership at a particular church. I was friends with another gal whose husband was also in a position of huge spiritual responsibility. I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the fact that, when she and I shared, we seemed to talk about church members under the guise of sharing concerns or prayer requests. Whenever I walked away from our interchange, I felt sick to my stomach because of the conviction that it was flat out *wrong*. I am not, by nature, a confrontational person. But I felt so crummy that I knew God wanted me to address the issue. So, when He opened a door, I took a deep breath and walked through it. I remember saying something like, "*God laid it on my heart that we talk too much about other people in the church. I think it's wrong and I don't want to do it anymore.*" I don't recall, exactly, what her response was but I do know that my actions redirected the course of our conversations thereafter. In my heart, I knew it was one way that I could be a unifying force in our Body. And having a clear conscience before God gave me a new sense of freedom, both with Him and with the people we served.

I once read a personal challenge at the conclusion of a devotional entitled "Watch Your Words" in an issue of Our Daily Bread. God has used it to put a check in my spirit when I'm tempted to speak impulsively, in anger, or when I want to retaliate. My family can verify that I'm by no means perfect in my responses but, I am learning not to be such a serious over-reactor as I grow older, and hopefully, wiser. ☺ **The challenge is: Does what you say pass the triple test?** I'm asking you to please consider how you show love for people with your words, particularly your immediate family members, other Christians, and then other people you know, in general. The first test is, *is it true?* This should be a no-brainer for Christians but sadly enough, too often assumptions get passed along as facts. Just remember, if you tell the truth, you don't have to remember what you said. The second test is, *is it kind?* Many times we take liberties in our speech under the guise of humor. This can do a world of hurt to someone's soul. It is never our prerogative to make jokes about, or point out, another person's weaknesses or vulnerabilities at their expense. One sarcastic remark can change the course of a

person's life. And lastly, even if what we're about to say passes the first and second tests, much of what we say wouldn't pass the third test, *is it necessary?* This is usually the point where we ignore the Holy Spirit's promptings to shut our mouths, to quit while we're ahead, and to die to our perceived rights to be heard or get even. Many hearts have been broken by a harsh delivery of the message.

February is a good time to begin anew with words...truthful, kind, timely, (and maybe forgiving) expressions of love & appreciation for the people God has brought into your life. It doesn't cost a thing and it could change a heart, and a life, forever! "*We love, because He first loved us.*" (1 John 4:19)

In His *Love*,
Jane Phinney

"Create (in me) a holy dissatisfaction for the things that offend You, Lord."

~ Dr. Fred Chay~

Recommended reading: *Grace-Based Parenting* (Set Your Family Free)
by Dr. Tim Kimmel