

“Faith and **Words**”
 James 3:1-12
 May 11, 2008
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 (Tongue, the; Words)

Romans 12:1 speaks of offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

That language about “sacrifice” conjures up images of laying our bodies on an altar as an indication of our willingness to yield ourselves to God.

The story is probably apocryphal, but after one convicting sermon on the subject of gossip, a person, long known for causing trouble came up to Evangelist Dwight Moody saying that she wished to lay her tongue on the altar.

Moody supposedly replied, “We don’t have an altar long enough.” (Commonly told but never sourced)

The tongue – a mucus-laden muscle weighing only about 2 ½ ounces – but oh, how much we use it!

One man wrote that “we speak about 18 to 25 thousand words a day.”

We speak the equivalent of “a 54-page book every day. And in a year, we would probably produce about 66, 800-page books... You will, if you're a normal person, spend one fifth of your life talking.”

John MacArthur sermon on James 3 at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/59-17.htm>

Whether we speak of the mouth or the tongue, we not only talk a lot, but we also talk a lot about how we talk a lot.

- We put signs on our desks: “Be sure brain is in gear before engaging mouth.”
- We criticize another by saying, “When he opens his mouth all he does is switch feet.”
- We even chastise ourselves with, “Well slap my mouth!”

Everyone of us has probably, at one time or another, wished we could take back some words we have spoken in haste.

Well, just as a medical doctor might look at our tongues as an indicator of our health, so James asks us look at our tongues as an indicator of our spiritual health. John MacArthur sermon on James 3 at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/59-17.htm>

If last week's text on works (what we do) as an evidence of true saving faith was hard, this week's text on the words we speak, is harder still.

James 3:1-12 "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. ³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

It might be tempting for us to think of this text as simply a moralism – an attempt by James to get us to be more careful about how we speak.

The effect would be that some of us would feel a measure of guilt about how careless we have been with our words and then would pledge to ourselves to do better.

One man wrote, “The Christian way of life is not simply to see ourselves as we are, to see our faults and concentrate on overcoming them, to set our teeth and doggedly cultivate our characters and so save our souls. That method is not successful; it does not make good Christians, but at best, (it makes) self-righteous Pharisees.” (Donald Baillie quoted in Adamson, *James*, 458)

No, this text is not a moralism merely about self-improvement, it is much more serious than that.

I want to take you to the conclusion of this passage given to us in verses 11-12, “Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”

What is James’ point?

What comes out of the mouth is the gauge of true saving faith – an indication of whether one is truly a Christian.

That is consistent with how James got us into this whole discussion. Look back to 1:26 where he first mentions this subject.

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

Last week we saw, from James 2:14, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”

All through that text James answered those questions with these words, 2:26 “...Faith without deeds is dead.”

Likewise here in chapter 3 we see strong language speaking of the reality or unreality of our Christianity.

So in this text, James is not just encouraging us to clean up our talk, he’s saying that **our everyday speech** reveals the genuineness of our faith.

I think this text is as serious as whether we are truly Christians or not.

Now, to help us think through this text, I want to suggest an outline:

- 1-2a The transition from 1:26
- 2b-5a The tongue is powerful.
- 5b-6 The tongue is capable of great evil
- 7-8 The tongue itself is uncontrollable.
- 9-10 The tongue is duplicitous.
- 11-12 The tongue reveals who we truly are.

You see six point and you think, “Oh no! This will take forever.”
I assure you it won’t be quite as painful as it might appear.

In chapter two, James has been talking about faith and works.
At the beginning of chapter three he starts out talking about teachers.

It seems that he is switching subjects.
I don’t think so.

If you will allow me to imagine what James is thinking, I suggest he knows that just as he has been comparing faith and **works** so he is next going to compare faith and **words**.

In the transition, he thinks about **those who use words more than most** – teachers of religion.

Whether he has in mind the Jewish rabbis or the Christian teachers in the church, he makes the point that people should be careful what they aspire to.

So James writes, 3:1-2a “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways.”

Teachers of the Word of God hold a sacred and fearful duty to say what God has said, no more and no less.

That was true for the prophets of old where we hear Micaiah say in 1 Kings 22:14 “As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me.”

It was also true for teachers in the church.

Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who

does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

But teachers should note that those who use words more than others are in a place of greater vulnerability and will be judged more strictly.

This judgment doesn't necessarily mean eternal damnation for James includes himself (“we”) as he speaks of the stricter judgment.

Matthew 12:47-48 “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

If you agree to be a teacher, you live under greater scrutiny and your words become even weightier.

How you live and talk matters even more.

This isn't to discourage some from teaching, but it does make it a serious matter – because words matter.

Now, quickly moving along to the main points James wishes to make, he says in 2a “(because) we all stumble in many ways.”

Though it is left out of the NIV translation, the word “because” is in the Greek and connects it more clearly to what James has just said.

We who speak a lot know that we do in fact stumble.

Earlier in his letter, James makes it clear that “stumble” for him means “sins.”

He wrote, James 2:10 “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet **stumbles** at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

Maybe James is thinking of even our inadvertent sins.

But with that James get to his first point: The tongue is powerful.

James 3:2b “If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”

So powerful is the tongue that **if you can control it**, you can control everything about yourself, thereby demonstrating that you are in fact spiritually mature.

James then draws two analogies to illustrate how powerful the tongue is to control the way we live.

James 3:3-4 “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

The first analogy illustrates that if you control the mouth you control the whole animal.

It’s interesting to me that the word the NIV translates “animal” is more literally “body,” the same word James used in verse 2.

If you control the mouth, you control the whole body.

If you’ve ever ridden a horse you know the power of a bit.

That metal bar is placed between the front teeth and molars of the horse on the fleshy and tender gums of the mouth.

It doesn’t need to be painful to the horse to work, but if you need to encourage the horse to obey, you have the perfect way to do it.

James says you can turn the whole animal.

I remember when my brother and I were boys we sometimes tended the bulls on our farm.

My father would put a ring in the bull’s nose when it was very young.

If nothing pulled on the ring, there was no discomfort.

But it was amazing when the animal grew to 2000 pounds and dangerous, a 12-year-old boy could hook a six-foot pole to that nose ring and lead that huge animal wherever I wanted it to go.

With the next analogy James especially emphasizes the issue of size.
 3:5 “Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.”

Several years ago my family and I were in Newport News, Virginia and saw the newly built aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Regan.

That ship is three-football-fields-long and it has 4.5 acres of flight deck.

The weight of the rudders on that ship compare to the size of the ship in about the same proportion as the tongue compares to the human body.

That huge ship is controlled by those relatively small rudders.

And so James concludes with his point:

3:5 “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

The “boasting” here is not necessarily negative.

His point is that **a small thing can control a large thing**.

The tongue may be small by comparison to the rest of the body, but it is very significant in the way the whole life goes.

But James isn’t interested just in making the point that the tongue is small but mighty.

He goes on to say the tongue is capable of great evil.

James 3:5b “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

Here James’ words turn quite negative.

Not only can a bit turn a whole horse and a small rudder a great ship, but another small thing (a spark) can cause great destruction.

Many of us grew up hearing Smokey Bear’s warnings.

Many of us have seen what the fires southwest of the city did a few years ago

I remember driving through Yellowstone a year after the fires that destroyed so much.

With that image in mind, James says so it with the tongue:

James 3:6 “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.

“Fire” here, in the first part of the verse, is same Greek word translated “spark” in v5.

The human tongue is a spark that sets off a whole destructive fire.

How destructive is it?

James begins by speaking of what our words do to us.

It corrupts the whole person – it stains everything.

We shape our words and then our words begin to shape us.

We like to think that **we say what we believe**, but more likely, **we believe what we say**.

We speak ill of someone and we become negative toward them.

That brings us to the next phrase: **The tongue “sets the whole course of his life on fire.”**

Our words begin to shape our actions.

I have found true that what we say we tend to believe.

Our words have great power not only in others, but also in us.

I sometimes caution family members not to entertain certain thoughts and especially not to articulate those thoughts because when we speak the words, we have an ownership of them unlike merely thinking them.

To us, the words become truer when we speak them.

And believing them, we act accordingly.

Someone wrote, “Spread gossip, and people will not trust you. Speak with sarcasm and insults, and people will not follow you. Yet

what is especially on James's mind is not the reaction of others to your speech but the spreading of sin from your speech to the rest of your life. Be hateful with your tongue, and you will be hateful with other aspects of your behavior. If you do not discipline and purify your speech, you will not discipline or purify the rest of your life." (Stulac in Blomberg 207)

And when James says **the tongue "is itself set on fire by hell,"** he may mean either that hell itself is the ultimate source of such evil (John 8:44) or that hell is the ultimate destination of such conduct.

Either way it is very serious.

"The boneless tongue, so small and weak,
Can crush and kill," declares the Greek.
"The tongue destroys a greater horde,"
The Turk asserts, "than does the sword."
The Persian proverb wisely saith,
"A lengthy tongue – an early death."
Or sometimes takes this form instead,
"Don't let your tongue cut off your head."
"The tongue can speak a word whose speed,"
Say the Chinese, "outstrips the steed."
The Arab sages said in part,
"The tongue's great storehouse is the heart."
From Hebrew was the maxim sprung,
"Thy feet should slip, but ne'er the tongue."
The sacred writer crowns the whole,
"Who keeps the tongue doth keep his soul." (cited in Baker/Ellsworth, 43 from James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, 475)

In verses 7-8, James moves on to say more: The tongue is uncontrollable.

James 3:7-8 "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

My uncle, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, trained his Doberman Pincer dogs to stand perfectly upright and still even when he placed fresh meat on the bridge of their noses.

They would stand for many minutes not touching that meat until he spoke a command. Then with merely a flick of their noses they would toss the meat up and catch it with their teeth and gulp it down.

We can tame many living things.

But verse 8 says no one can tame the tongue.

James is not sewing hopelessness when it writes this.

He is making a statement that is generally true.

He is emphasizing how powerful, deadly and difficult to control the tongue is.

As Christians we know that by God's help some, or even great, control is possible.

But we will have to learn that idea from other places in the NT.

James then gives us **two more reasons why the tongue is so hard to control**: James 3:8 "It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

The word "restless" was translated "unstable" in James 1:8 "he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

It is also legitimate to translate the word as "uncontrollable."

The tongue is not able to control itself; it is unpredictable and can lash out at any moment.

It is restless, constantly looking for ways to express evil.

It has a propensity for saying the harmful, hurtful thing.

Not only is it a restless evil, but James also describes it as "full of deadly poison." (See Psalm 140:3, et al).

And what does the poison look like or, more accurately, sound like?

Many years ago, Morgan Blake, a sportswriter for the Atlanta Journal, wrote, "I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the Howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me. No purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard

for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive and my name is gossip."

(Upper Room, "Daily Reflections," October, 2000)

Even if we don't gossip, we might be guilty of innuendo.

Innuendo is a negative insinuation without having to actually say it.

The captain of the ship writes in his log, "mate drunk today."

So the next day the sailor writes in his official log, "Captain sober today." (Hughes, *James*, 140)

And if we don't use gossip or innuendo, we might try flattery.

Gossip is saying behind someone's back what you'd never say to his face, flattery is saying to someone's face what you would never say behind his back. (In John Blanchard, *Truth for Life*, 108)

Maybe more common is criticism.

Jean Paul Satre wrote, "Words are loaded pistols."

Lord Randolph Churchill was Winston Churchill's father.

On the occasion of Winston's graduation from the military academy, Sandhurst, where Winston failed to score high enough to make the top ranks, his father wrote:

"Do not think I am to take the trouble of writing to you long letters after every failure you commit and undergo... I no longer attach the slightest weight to anything you say about your own acquirements and exploits... If you cannot prevent yourself from leading the idle useless unprofitable life you have had during your schooldays & later months, you will become a mere social wastrel one of the hundreds of the public school failures, and you will degenerate into a shabby unhappy and futile existence. If that is so, you have to bear all the blame for such misfortunes yourself." He ended the letter with "Your mother sends her love." (in Nystrom NIVAC *James*, 200)

The tongue – how destructive and how hard to control.

Then in verses 10-11 James says it is even worse than that - The tongue is duplicitous –it speaks out of both sides of the mouth.

James 3:9-10 “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

This person tries to call himself a Christian while at the same time speaking ill of people God created.

He or she praises God with the same tongue they criticize, flatter, curse or gossip about others.

Ringling in our ears are those words we have spoken about others or to others in the car as we drive to church to recite the Apostles’ Creed and sing praise to God.

With that James quickly moves to his conclusion: The tongue reveals who we truly are.

James 3:11-12 “Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

What answers are implied? No! No!

Jesus said in Matthew 7:17-20 “Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

James and Jesus are saying the same thing: **What comes out of the mouth is the gauge of true spirituality!**

This takes us back to where we started:

James 1:26 “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

And to 2:26 “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

We may take seriously such sins as adultery, murder, idolatry, dishonoring of parents, and stealing.

But how many of us understand James in putting our speech in the same category of seriousness?

When the Apostle Paul describes the condition of sinful condemned people he writes of their **words**,

Romans 3:13-14 ““Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.”¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

And when Isaiah describes his sinful condition before a holy God, he exclaims, Isaiah 6:5 “I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

A man wrote, “We rarely stand alongside Paul (or Isaiah) in finding in our **speech** the **primary** evidence of our fallen state (Alex Motyer, *The Message of James*, 119)

So what do we do with this passage?

Are we just supposed to feel guilty for the bad things we’ve said to others and try to do better?

I think James’ has two audiences in mind.

First of all are those who believe all the right things and even do good to others **but their tongues betray the true nature of their souls.**

They are not Christians.

Just as we saw in chapter 2, “their kind” of faith is bogus.

If it hasn’t begun to change their tongues, it is not real faith.

I say to you, listen to the Spirit of God.

If he is revealing to you that you have a form of godliness but it is bearing no fruit in your speech,

James would say with Jesus and Paul, repent and trust Jesus that he can begin to change you from the inside out.

I think the other audience James has in mind are those believers who are trusting solely in Jesus for salvation but realize that they have been lax in attending to this important fruit of saving faith – God-honoring speech. (Ephesians 4:29)

The Bible teaches both Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

But where genuine saving faith exists, there fruit will grow. Those who trust in Christ alone, now have the God-given ability to obey and thus the responsibility to obey.

Again I say, we are not saved by good works **or good words** but those who are truly saved respond with good works and good words.

James already said this in 1:25 “The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

Someone well wrote, “All of us sin. The difference between the Christian and the unconverted is not that the Christian does not sin (for we do as Paul and James confess), but that we are not content to sin. We know that by faith in God’s grace we may hope to resist sin; and when we do fall, we know that if we genuinely repent we may repair the sin by God’s grace through Christ.” (Adamson, *James*, 458)

The same man wrote, “James’ theology is simply, ‘You know what Christ would have you do; do it and leave the rest to him. You know his promise.’

So what do I do?

- I ask God to forgive me.
- I pray, seriously asking God to enable me to guard and use my tongue only in ways that please him.
- And I discipline myself in this matter – making my speech as much a part of my conscious effort as remaining moral in my conduct, generous in my charity or orthodox in my beliefs.

What will you do?

Other notes:

In James 3:8 he writes “no one can tame the tongue.” The Greek is a little more involved than that. It is literally, “no one (of or among) people” can tame the tongue. Augustine thought James said it this way to point out that no **human** can train the tongue, but that God in his grace can. Even Moo and others who cite Augustine admit this interpretation is a bit dubious. (In Moo, 161)

Proverbs re. the Tongue

10:8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

10:11 “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

10:19 “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

10:21 “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.

11:9 “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape.

12:18 “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

12:25 “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.

13:3 “He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

16:27-28 “A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.²⁸ A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends

17:28 “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

My (Jerry’s) father’s variation on that theme was “Keep your mouth shut and others won’t know how ignorant you truly are.”

18:7 “A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul

18:21 “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

26:20 “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.”

29:20 “Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Jesus said in Matthew 15:11, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

Warren Wiersbe says he heard of a professing Christian who got angry on the job and let loose with a string of curse words.

Embarrassed, he turned to his partner and said, “I don’t know why I said that, it really isn’t me.” His partner replied, “It had to be you, or it couldn’t have come out of you.” *(Wiersbe, Be Mature, 99)*

The Effects of Gossip

A woman convicted of her sin of gossip asked her minister what to do. He said she should take a bag of feathers and go through the neighborhood putting one feather on the doorstep of each person she has maligned through the years. She returned saying she had obeyed but felt no better. He then said it was because she was only half done. She was to now return to each house and retrieve the feather. She returned shortly saying she could not find one of the feathers. The minister said that is precisely the nature of gossip, once you have scattered the words, they are impossible to retrieve. I hope the minister also told her about forgiveness but his point was that words destroy.

The relationship of justification by faith and our responsibility for our words:

“Now I want to talk about this for just a moment so you understand clearly some theological distinctions. True believers...mark this, here's the word...true believers will have a sanctified tongue. Did you get that? True believers, true Christians, totally transformed people, those who have been made new in Christ, will have a sanctified tongue. Let me add something to it. True believers must have a sanctified tongue. Did you get that? True

believers will have a sanctified tongue. True believers must have a sanctified tongue.

You say, "Well, wait a minute. If we will have, then why do you tell us we must have?" Because one is a sovereign reality in the new birth and the other is a human responsibility that's really ours to fulfill. And that's the amazing tension and paradox of our Christian experience. If we're truly new in Christ, we will have a pure speech. And if we're truly new in Christ, we will take the responsibility to be sure we have a pure speech. That is a constant biblical paradox. If you understand that, and we hit that a lot of times in our Bible study, but if you understand that, you really are on the way to understanding a mystery.

You can't fully understand it but let me give it to you this way. We are saved by sovereign grace, right? Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, yet we must believe. We are kept by the security of God in His sovereign decree, yet we must persevere. We live by sovereign power, not I but Christ living in me, yet we must obey. And as James would put it, because we are new creatures, we will endure trials and we must endure them. We will receive the Word and obey it and we must receive the Word and obey it. We will be gracious to the needy without partiality, and we must be gracious to the needy without partiality. We will produce good works and we must produce good works.

In other words, you'll never really be able to resolve the fact that what God says will be true of you, must be true of you. Just because God said it doesn't mean we can lie down flat on our back and hope it happens. And that's really the mystery of the apparent paradoxes of the Christian experience. Where there is genuine living faith and true regeneration and transformation, these things will be the result and they must be the result. God will produce them in us but He produces them in us through our commitment to them. You understand that? That's the best we can get at it." John MacArthur at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/59-18.htm>

The Power of Words

<http://powertochange.com/changed/ccolvin/>

by Claire Colvin.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words . . . can wound forever.

Pictures of me as a little kid are really cute — curly blond hair, a quick smile and eyes always looking for the next adventure. I had the confidence that comes from knowing you are truly loved. If we painted pictures at school, I painted three. I was the product of an almost perfect childhood, but I didn't stay that way.

Around grade six I became the kid everyone picked on. Maybe I didn't wear the right clothes, maybe kids are just mean sometimes, for whatever reason it started and it kept going. By high school there was a group of four or five guys who told me I was stupid and ugly every single day.

I believed them.

It is amazing what you accept as truth when you hear it enough times. As my confidence faltered and my self esteem withered away I stopped talking in class, in groups, or in the hallways. I dreaded lunch hour, never stepped foot inside the cafeteria and the thought of class presentations literally made me sick. I stopped smiling. They tell me I went a whole year and never smiled once.

Convinced I was worthless I would stress over every test and paper even though my grades were consistently excellent. My whole life revolved around being as invisible as possible. I thought that I couldn't get hurt if everyone forgot I was there. I had so little respect for myself and I was so afraid that I considered suicide. I got as far as choosing a method but decided that I couldn't go through with it. Suicide is something you can't take back. I was still thinking clearly enough to be able to consider what it would have done to my family. I don't think that suicide is always a conscious choice, but for me I had not yet arrived at a place where it was beyond my control. I know that's not always the case and I am grateful that I got a second chance.

Things did not improve so halfway through grade eleven I transferred to a different high school in a desperate attempt to get away. It worked, but it did not solve my problems. **The insults stopped but I still had to face myself, running wasn't going to fix that.** That summer I attended a conference with the youth group from my church and found answers in the last place I would have expected.

At the conference I came to realize that God loves me very, very much. I matter to God, what an incredible truth! Suddenly I had value, I had something to build on and the healing began. The world is a scary place when you stop liking yourself. Now I had hope. I had learned about God as a child, but just trying to survive had consumed me and I had long since forgotten about Him. God had not forgotten about me.

During my second year of university, I came across the verse in the Bible that is one of my favorites,

"I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:9&10)

Words are powerful things and God's words of love are the most powerful of all. I smile a lot now — I guess I'm still making up for that one silent year — and while I doubt I'll ever be a public speaker, I no longer walk around with my eyes on the floor. I am still learning, but my Mom tells me that I remind her of this little girl she used to know with curly blond hair, a quick smile and a glint of adventure in her eyes.

Though much is taken, much abides;
 And though we are not now that strength
 Which in old days moved earth and heaven
 That which we are, we are:
 One equal temper of heroic hearts
 Made weak by time and fate but strong in will:
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
 ~Tennyson, from "Ulysses"

Take a look at your life. How would you describe it? Contented? Rushed? Exciting? Stressful? Moving forward? Holding back? For many of us it's all of the above at times. There are things we dream of doing one day, there are things we wish we could forget. In the Bible, it says that Jesus came to make all things new. **What would your life look like if you could start over with a clean slate?**

Living with hope

If you are looking for peace, there is a way to balance your life. No one can be perfect, or have a perfect life. But every one of us has the opportunity to experience perfect grace through a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer. Praying is simply talking to God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. Here's a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life to you and ask you to come in as my Savior and Lord. Take control of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? You can pray it right now, and Jesus Christ will come into your life, just as He promised. **Is this the life for you?**

If you invited Christ into your life, thank God often that He is in your life, that He will never leave you and that you have eternal life. As you learn more about your relationship with God, and how much He loves you, you'll experience life to the *fullest*.

~ [Claire Colvin](#) is the editor of *Women Today*. She has a BA in English from Trinity Western University, a cat named after a Tolkien hero and dreams of living in Tuscany, even if it's just for the summer.