



## Watch It!

### What Is the Most Memorable Saying of Your Parents?

A poor farmer moved to a new town and attended a church for the first time. It was not a great experience. Many of the members criticized his appearance and avoided him because of how poorly dressed he was. After attending a second time, the pastor at the end of the service approached the farmer and reprimanded him. "In this town we dress up nicely for church." The humble farmer apologized but softly replied that he didn't have any better clothes. "What should I do?" "Pray to God" the pastor responded. "He will tell you what to do." The next week the farmer was wearing a different set of clothes, but they were just as shabby as the week before. The pastor, when he got a good look at the farmer, stopped his sermon, stared down at the poor farmer, and called out to him, "Didn't I tell you to ask God what to wear when you come to this church?" "Yes, you did Pastor!" "And did you do that?" "Yes sir, I did." "Well, what did God tell you to wear?" "To be honest, Pastor, He didn't know. "He said he'd never before been to this church."

God warns us to be careful about what we say to others and how we say it. It is no small matter to God how we speak to and about those the Lord has put in our lives. James has a strong admonition for us. **Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbor?** (James 4: 11-12 NIV) The wording of James is interesting. The term translated slander is actually used twice although the second time it is rendered, "speaks against". The Greek expression means, "to blab out, speak against". It describes criticism that is given thoughtlessly, either directly to the person or to someone else about the individual. Literally, it is, "Do not speak against one another." It is a command and probably it is best put this way, "Don't ever speak against one another!"

James makes it clear we are all in this together. He uses the term "adelphos" or "brother" three times although the NIV doesn't give it that emphasis the third time it is used. What is translated as just "him" is actually "his brother" and this is important to notice. James is insisting we are family, but not family that is dysfunctional and disconnected but family as it should be if God is at the center of it. When a family falls apart spiritually and sociologically, it becomes, a self-absorbed collection of individuals. With a family at its best, each part looking out for the greatest interests of the others and full of love for one another, the words used are for encouragement and support. Paul insists this is the track you should take in all your relationships. **Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.** (1 Thessalonians 5: 11 NIV) You might confess that this is easier said than done and sadly, that is the case.

Given what you have seen, is it surprising that before He faced the cross, countless numbers of Jesus' fellow countrymen slandered Him and used their conversations to find fault with Christ? His critics didn't try to hide their disdain for Jesus. They openly expressed their critical take on His ministry. **The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."** (Matthew 11: 19 NIV) Even His kind deeds were mocked as the efforts of evil spirits. **But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."** (Matthew 9: 34 NIV) God certainly has His critics. The people of Israel, from the time Moses announced to them that the Lord was

going to bring them out of slavery and into a new land of freedom, complained incessantly about God. **They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the Lord.** (Psalm 106:25 NIV) When God promised to provide them food during their travels, the Israelites griped that it wasn't possible. **They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert?"** (Psalm 78: 19 NIV)

There is a fascinating account in the Bible of how easily trust and friendship can be damaged by the use of the tongue. One of the great friends of David, before he became king of Israel was the son of the king, Jonathon. When Jonathon's dad, King Saul went on a manhunt to have David killed, Jonathon supported, encouraged and protected David as much as he could. While David was in hiding from King Saul, Jonathon as well as his father Saul died in battle fighting the hated Philistines. Tragically young Mephibosheth, Jonathon's son, was crippled for life when his nurse carried him off to go into hiding because of the threat of advancing Philistine forces. **(Jonathon son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathon came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.)** (2 Samuel 4: 4 NIV) Years later, after David was established as king of Israel, he decided he wanted to do something kind for his great friend Jonathon's children, if he had any who survived. A former servant of Saul was discovered, Ziba, who told David about Mephibosheth. It didn't exactly go as Ziba hoped when Mephibosheth was brought to David. Ziba had become prosperous since Saul died and enjoyed his freedom. David kindly restored to Mephibosheth all the property his grandfather had owned which I would assume, would have been good news to Ziba but David's next move would have been if not infuriating, at least distressing. David told Ziba, **You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for.** (2 Samuel 9: 10 NIV)

Ziba accepted his new place in life, but he could not have been happy. While Mephibosheth was able to leisurely enjoy daily feasts at the table of King David as that is what David did for Mephibosheth and his family, Ziba and his large family had to work like slaves once more. Several years later, David's son Absalom led a rebellion against his father and David and his household and allies had to flee from Jerusalem to save themselves. Ziba, the servant to Mephibosheth came out to support David and the people fleeing with him. He brought two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and some wine. Perhaps just as Ziba hoped David quizzed Ziba about the whereabouts of Ziba's master, Mephibosheth. **The king then asked, "Where is your master's grandson?" Ziba said to him, "He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.'" Then the king said to Ziba, "All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours."** (2 Samuel 16: 3-4 NIV) That must have thrilled Ziba. Just a little degrading comment about Mephibosheth and he not only gained his freedom but became rich too. Later though, when David returned to Jerusalem, his armies having defeated Absalom, Mephibosheth was there to welcome the King back. David though confronted him about not joining him in flight. Mephibosheth tried to defend himself to King David. **He said, "My lord the king, since I your servant am lame, I said, 'I will have my donkey saddled and will ride on it, so I can go with the king.' But Ziba my servant betrayed me. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. My lord the king is like an angel of God; so do whatever pleases you.** (2 Samuel 19: 26-28 NIV)

There are plenty of reasons why you might talk badly about others. Perhaps they have angered you or hurt you. It might be to make yourself look better or enhance your reputation with friends. Many times it is out of mental sluggishness, not bothering to think about the effect your words might have on others. Consider these three points when you are tempted to say something that will make another person look bad or degrade that one's reputation. 1. Every Christian has Christ in him or her and thus when you criticize that one, you also are putting down Jesus who is hard at work developing a perfected soul. 2. Every person is created in God's image and so you run the risk of criticizing or putting down those God lovingly created and died to save. 3. As James puts it so succinctly, **But you — who are you to judge your neighbor?** (James 4: 12b NIV) Be careful what you say about others. It may be God Himself you are turning on when you do so.