

## On The Tip of My Tongue

The Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi has a new exhibit: Naiya, a lesser anteater- and if you're waiting for me to tell you why such a beast belongs in a facility for sea creatures, don't because I don't know. *Tamandua tetradactyla* inhabits tropical rain forests, savannahs, and thorn scrub. It prefers to hang out near rivers and streams but not, as far as I have discovered, oceans. What interests me, however, is not the beast's territory, but its tongue.

A lesser anteater grows to an average length of two feet not counting the tail. Its tongue measures around eighteen inches. It uses this pencil-thick appendage to slurp up prey in the form of ants and termites. The tongue attaches to muscles in the animal's chest.

A killer tongue rooted in its heart and occupying two-thirds of its being: is this an anteater or an evangelical?

Scripture has long warned of the deadly weapon that grows from our innermost being and dominates our outward lives. James calls the tongue the steering wheel of the soul, a lightning strike that sparks spiritual forest fires (James 3.4-5). Like a lighter with flames at one end and fuel at the other, the tongue, James says, dips its wick in Hell and thus never runs short of resources for spreading disaster (James 3.6). Proverbs 12.18 says the tongue stabs like a prison shank. Proverbs 26.28 moves to the metaphor of a sledgehammer.

Whatever simile we select, Scripture clearly warns that we come equipped with a compact soul which rests in our mouths and reveals our true selves. Win the battle of oral hygiene, says James, and count yourself conqueror of the spiritual World Series (James 3.2). I know a pastor who carries around a tongue depressor. He always keeps it tucked into his shirt pocket to remind him that in most cases, suppression beats expression. The lesser anteater can teach the larger lesson of silence as a spiritual discipline which lets us lick one of life's biggest battles.

Mum's The Word,  
Doug