

**James: Careful Speech...What a Christian Says**  
**Numbers 6:24-27; Proverbs 9:6, 17:27-28, 18:20-21; Matthew 12:34, 36-37; Ephesians 4:29;**  
**James 3**

James is seen as wisdom literature just like Proverbs. In fact we're going to be in Proverbs and James 3 a lot today as we talk about the power of our words.

**Words are Important:**

How many of your parents used the saying, 'If you can't say something nice...Don't say anything at all?' at some point? It's from Thumper from the 1942 version of Bambi and has been nicknamed Thumpers Rule! Even though this isn't found in the Bible (as many have probably thought) Ephesians 4:29 is close. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*

So why are our words so important? Our words plant seeds in everyone we're around, and people tend to become like what we pour into them. If it's not helpful for building others up, just don't say it. James 3 is the most concentrated teaching in the Bible on why what we say matters so much.

Read James 3:1-6. James starts with teachers, but every one of us is teaching someone — our kids, our friends, our coworkers, so really he is talking to all of us here! In fact, in Matthew 12: 36-37 it says, *'But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.'*

Then James goes on to say a small bit controls a whole horse and a small rudder steers a massive ship. The tongue works the same way. It's a small member of our body, but it has powerful implications on how people feel about us.

James also says that one spark can set an entire forest on fire. Ask yourself: did your words this week build something up or burn something down? It is amazing how a small part of your body can control other people's lives.

**Tame the Tongue:**

Read James 3:7-10. Humanity has tamed wild animals — but no one has been able to tame the tongue by willpower alone. The same mouth that praises God on Sunday can tear down someone made in His image on Monday.

James does not mix his words. James just says it. Hey! Stop being a jerk with how you talk to people.

**Our Hearts:**

James says that the problem is not just our words — the problem runs deeper than that. Our words reveal our hearts.

Read James 3:11-12. The tongue is a thermometer, not a thermostat — it tells you what's in the heart, it doesn't set it. What is coming out of your heart is revealed through your words. We can see this in Matthew when Jesus is talking to the Pharisees.

Read Matthew 12:34. The way you talk to your family, about your friends, about others — all of it is an indicator of what's truly inside you. Why is it that we tend to hurt those who are closest to us? Why is it always the people we love that we are hurting? Probably because we guard our speech when we are at work, and out in public, and then we feel like we can be ourselves when we get home. The problem with that is that sometimes what is in our hearts isn't good, and we become jerks to our friends and family members.

You can't clean up your speech by working on your speech — the change has to come from the inside out.

### **Wisdom:**

Read James 3:13-18. God's wisdom changes what comes out of our mouths. Worldly wisdom produces bitterness, disorder, and division — you can hear it in how people talk.

Even if your heart isn't in the right place. You can still fool people! How? Read Proverbs 17:27-28. Even if you are a fool, people might think you are wise if you will just shut your yapper!

Godly wisdom produces peace and righteousness. The way people know that you are full of Godly wisdom is through your speech.

In Proverbs 1 and 8, wisdom is depicted as an honorable woman (Lady Wisdom) who calls out in public squares, city gates, and on high places to offer guidance and life. She offers treasures greater than gold, protects those who follow her, and was present with God at the creation of the world. She invites the naive and unlearned to abandon foolishness and dine at her banquet table.

There is an antagonist in this story too. Lady Folly is found in Proverbs 9. She is the loud, seductive, and ignorant opposite of Lady Wisdom. She sits at the door of her house, calling out to those passing by to take "stolen water" and "secret bread." While Lady Wisdom leads to life, the Bible warns that those who follow Lady Folly end up in the depths of the grave

Once again we are faced with two choices. (Does that sound like the two trees in Eden?) If you read through these verses in Proverbs 9, both women are inviting you to dine with them. One is preparing a feast of meat and wine for you to sit, dine, learn, and grow. The other is asking you to dine with her and drink stolen water and bread. Who does your heart want to follow?

I love this line from Proverbs 9:6 that says, "*Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.*" '

### **Personal Example:**

A few years ago I started trying something, and it has worked out beautifully for me. I have tried my best to not talk bad about people...I mean everyone. Now I will still speak the

truth about people, but I silenced the negative talk. When I hear people start up the gossip talk, I leave the room. It drives people crazy. I actually had someone tell me once, ‘I wish you would say something negative about this person because now I feel bad about what I am saying.’ What they were saying was true, but it didn’t change anything. It had no power to make an improvement on that person’s life. It meant nothing! It was just Trash Talk.

Why would I do that? What do I gain from this? Well on multiple occasions, people have noticed this about me, especially at work. All of a sudden, these people have started coming to me for wise counsel. Why would they come to me? Because they know that I am not going to trash talk about them as soon as they leave my office. They also can tell by my speech that I am not going to bring them, or another, down. This type of language is attractive to others because it’s so different from what you are used to hearing, especially on the news.

### **Planting Seeds:**

Building off of what we learned last week, they will know we are Christians by our love. How do they know we love them? Through the way we act and speak toward them. No one will believe your God exists if you are using hate speech!

Read Proverbs 18:20-21. When Christ lives at the core of who you are, He changes you from the inside out — and your words begin to change too. This is not about cleaning up your language. It is about letting God change your heart and the way that you see the world around you.

Every person you talk to this week will walk away carrying a seed you planted. How do you talk about yourself? How do you talk to others? How do you talk about others?

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with what is worth sharing — because whatever fills the heart is what comes out of the mouth.

### **Blessing:**

Today I want to close by saying a blessing over each of you. This is something that you can do at home with your family too! It does not matter if you are the parent or the child, you can bless others no matter how old you are!

I can still remember that when I was about 13 or 14 my brother decided that he was going to be moving to Colorado. The day that he was leaving, I remember asking them if they cared if we gathered up to pray for him. It was awkward at first, but I remember my parents saying, ‘This was your idea!’ And so I did. I said a blessing over my older brother to be safe and to be blessed while he was gone.

Kids, you are not too young to bless people. You are not too young to speak positive words to others. You are not too young to start speaking life into people instead of death. You are not too young to keep from gossiping. God did not give you a JR Holy Spirit to lead you. He gave you the Holy Spirit, and when the Holy Spirit leads you to speak life into someone, DO IT! It is worth it. You never know how those words can impact your life and the lives of those who you are speaking into!

Today I want to close with a blessing that was given to Israel from God. “*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace...*” (Numbers 6:24-27)

**Reflection Questions:**

- Why do you think words have such a strong impact on people’s lives and emotions?
- Jesus says, “*The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*” (Matthew 12:34) What do your everyday conversations reveal about what is filling your heart?
- Think about your words this past week. Did they mostly build people up or tear people down? What examples come to mind?
- What kind of seeds are you planting in your family, friendships, workplace, or school?
- What practical steps can you take this week to speak more life, encouragement, and wisdom into others?