FREE THREE-SERMON SERIES

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

James 3:1–12 • Optional fourth message

A free companion to Taming the Tongue



SERIES OVERVIEW

Three messages. One deeper problem.

James 3:1–12 confronts the influence, destruction, and contradictions of sinful speech.

Each message moves beyond behavior to the heart, repentance, and the grace of Christ.



SERIES MAP

Where we are going

01 Small Tongue, Serious Consequences
02 When Words Become Wildfire
03 One Mouth, Two Messages
04 Optional: The Heart Behind the Words



SERMON 01

Small Tongue, Serious Consequences

James 3:1–5a



BIG IDEA | 01

Small Tongue, Serious Consequences

Words carry influence far beyond their size. James begins by calling those who teach to sober accountability and then reminds every believer that a little tongue can steer a whole life.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 1 OF 3 | 01

Our words come with responsibility

James starts with teachers, not because speech matters only in a pulpit, but because public teaching raises the stakes. Those who teach God’s Word must not treat that privilege lightly. Then he levels the field: we all stumble, including with our mouths.



BRING IT HOME

Ask the church to consider conversations in which others rely on their words: parents, supervisors, small-group leaders, teachers, and friends.

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 2 OF 3 | 01

Small instruments can change large directions

James points to a bit in a horse’s mouth and a rudder on a ship. The images are not chiefly about horsepower or ocean currents; they are about proportion. Something small is able to direct something large.



BRING IT HOME

A brief sentence can strengthen a weary believer or deflate a child. Words can direct an argument toward repentance or toward a week of silence.

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 3 OF 3 | 01

Influence calls for humility, not self-confidence

The tongue is small, yet makes great boasts. James places influence beside the temptation to pride. The same gift that can guide can also magnify self. The issue is not merely volume but what the heart wants to accomplish through speech.



BRING IT HOME

Before your next difficult conversation, ask: Am I trying to serve the person in front of me, or am I trying to win?

THE GOSPEL | 01

Our hope is Christ

James exposes more than a bad habit. We need mercy for careless and proud words. Christ is the sinless Savior who never manipulated, lied, or sinned with His speech, and He bore the guilt of sinners who have. In Him, forgiven people learn to speak differently through the Spirit. We pursue disciplined speech because grace has found us, not so grace will finally accept us.



REFLECTION | 01

Repent … Believe … Respond

01 Read James 3:1–5 aloud again. Where does the author place the weight of responsibility?

02 Name one arena where your words exercise more influence than you normally admit.

03 What did you want in the last conversation where your tone changed the room?



CLOSING PRAYER | 01

Pray, then obey

Lord, forgive the careless influence of our words. Guard those who teach, humble those who lead, and teach every one of us to speak as people who belong to Christ. Make our words more useful to others and more faithful to Your truth. Amen.



SERMON 02

When Words Become Wildfire

James 3:5b–8



BIG IDEA | 02

When Words Become Wildfire

Sinful words can spread destruction with frightening speed. James strips away our excuses and shows why our hope cannot rest in human self-control alone.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 1 OF 3 | 02

A little fire can consume a great deal

James describes the tongue as a fire, capable of staining life and setting relationships ablaze. He names an evil that is not limited to a few dramatic outbursts; speech can contaminate ordinary life when it serves sinful desires.

BRING IT HOME

Consider a sarcastic comment turned into a running joke, a rumor repeated as concern, or an accusation posted before facts were checked.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 2 OF 3 | 02

Sinful speech reveals a deeper corruption

James’s language is stark because the problem is spiritual, not cosmetic. Anger wants to punish. Pride wants the last word. Envy wants to reduce someone else. The tongue often gives the heart exactly what it asks for.



BRING IT HOME

Rather than stopping at “I should have kept quiet,” ask what desire or fear was ruling you in that moment.

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 3 OF 3 | 02

No human technique can become our savior

People tame wild creatures, yet James says no human being can tame the tongue. The point is the insufficiency of merely human mastery. This is not permission to surrender or to neglect obedience; it is a blow to self-sufficiency.

BRING IT HOME

Practice pausing, listening, and checking facts. Yet pray even more urgently for repentance and Spirit-produced fruit.



THE GOSPEL | 02

Our hope is Christ

James gives us nowhere to hide behind a polished vocabulary. But he does not leave repentant sinners without hope. Jesus was reviled and did not retaliate in sin. He died for guilty speakers and rose again. Those united to Him are not justified by a streak of polite conversations; they are justified by Christ, and the Holy Spirit begins to shape words that reflect Him.



REFLECTION | 02

Repent … Believe … Respond

01 Which kind of “spark” is easiest for you to excuse: sarcasm, gossip, contempt, exaggeration, or angry replies?

02 Who bears the cost when that pattern spreads?

03 Is your first impulse to manage consequences or to confess the sin that produced the words?



CLOSING PRAYER | 02

Pray, then obey

Father, we have used words You gave us to wound those You made. Expose the deeper sins that set our mouths on fire. Grant us honest confession, courage to make wrongs right, and a growing dependence on Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, amen.



SERMON 03

One Mouth, Two Messages

James 3:9–12



BIG IDEA | 03

One Mouth, Two Messages

A mouth that praises God yet degrades people made in His image reveals a contradiction that believers must not ignore.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 1 OF 3 | 03

Our speech can contradict our worship

James names a jarring practice: praising the Lord and cursing people who bear His likeness. He does not shrug at the inconsistency. His plain response is that it ought not be so.



BRING IT HOME

Ask listeners to consider their speech about a difficult neighbor, political opponent, family member, or irritating coworker. Are we treating their dignity as optional?

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 2 OF 3 | 03

Every person remains an image-bearer

The people most easily dismissed by our words are still made in the likeness of God. The image of God is the basis of their dignity, not a reward for their behavior. Truthful correction and human dignity belong together.



BRING IT HOME

The next time you strongly disagree, name the issue truthfully without using contempt as a shortcut.

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 3 OF 3 | 03

The fruit calls us to examine the source

James asks whether a spring produces two kinds of water and whether trees bear fruit contrary to their nature. The images do not teach that Christians never fail; they press us to ask whether the direction of our lives aligns with the God we.



BRING IT HOME

Move from “I need to filter my words” toward “Lord, expose what my heart loves, fears, and resents.”

THE GOSPEL | 03

Our hope is Christ

Our inconsistency condemns self-righteousness. None of us can say we have loved God and our neighbor perfectly. Christ fulfilled what we have not, gave Himself for sinners, and grants pardon through faith. The Spirit who renews the heart also bears fruit in increasingly truthful, gracious, and courageous speech. The goal is not a religious performance … it is life that belongs to the Redeemer.



REFLECTION | 03

Repent … Believe … Respond

01 Where is the sharpest mismatch between your Sunday worship and weekday conversations?

02 Whose dignity have you ignored with labels, jokes, or contempt?

03 Where does repentance require a direct apology rather than a vague promise to “do better”?



CLOSING PRAYER | 03

Pray, then obey

Lord, do not let our praise of You be disconnected from our treatment of those made in Your image. Expose our hypocrisy without leaving us in despair. Turn us to Christ, change our hearts, and teach us to speak with truth and grace. Amen.



OPTIONAL MESSAGE 04

The Heart Behind the Words

Luke 6:43–45; Ephesians 4:25–32



BIG IDEA | 04

The Heart Behind the Words

Our words reveal the heart, and lasting change grows from the grace of Christ, not the performance of better manners.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 1 OF 3 | 04

Our words bring the heart into the open

Jesus’s tree-and-fruit illustration means our mouths are not spiritually neutral. Words are evidence of what the heart treasures. This is deeper than personality, upbringing, or a stressful week.



BRING IT HOME

Think back over the last week’s speech. What do repeated patterns suggest you are trying to protect, prove, or possess?

EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 2 OF 3 | 04

Grace puts off the old patterns and puts on the new

Paul does not merely say “stop talking.” He calls believers to put away falsehood, address anger without sinful escalation, and choose words that build up according to need. Sanctification is purposeful, practical, and dependent on our union with Christ.

BRING IT HOME

Trade gossip for truthful conversation. Trade rehearsed insults for patient listening. Speak encouragement with the same specificity you once used for criticism.



EXPOSITORY MOVEMENT 3 OF 3 | 04

The gospel gives the why and the power

Paul locates Christian conduct in the work of God, calling believers away from bitterness and malice toward kindness and forgiveness. This is not a way to purchase acceptance; it is the family resemblance of those whom Christ has rescued.

BRING IT HOME

Make room for a real apology without an excuse, a conversation that restores truth, or a wise boundary where trust was broken.



THE GOSPEL | 04

Our hope is Christ

This is the good news beneath the whole series: the Savior who commands holiness is the Savior who secures our pardon. No one is saved by winning a speech audit. Christ’s obedience, death, and resurrection are our hope. Through faith in Him we are forgiven, and His Spirit begins making new fruit grow. When we fail, we do not run from Christ to shame or self-defense … we run to Christ for mercy and change.



REFLECTION | 04

Repent … Believe … Respond

01 What recurring pattern has this series exposed in you?

02 How have you justified that pattern rather than confessing it?

03 What has Christ accomplished for guilty sinners who cannot repair themselves?



CLOSING PRAYER | 04

Pray, then obey

Jesus, thank You that our hope is not perfect speech, but a perfect Savior. Forgive our sins, change what we love, and bear Your fruit in our words. Let our homes, workplaces, and churches hear more truth, humility, courage, and grace because You are at work in us. Amen.



CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

From sermon to study

Use the included fill-in-the-blank service notes handouts. For deeper study, continue with the Taming the Tongue 30-Day Devotional, Participant Workbook, and Small Group Leader’s Guide.



FINAL REMINDER

Grace before performance

We do not pursue holiness to earn grace … we pursue holiness because grace has already found us in Christ.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

