

**HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH**  
**Developing a Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15**  
**James 3:1-12**  
**Rick Warren**

James 3:1-12

*"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." (vs. 2)*

**I. WHY MUST I WATCH WHAT I SAY?**

3 Reasons

**1. MY TONGUE DIRECTS \_\_\_\_\_ . (vs. 3-4)**

*"When we put bits in the mouths of horses ... we can turn the whole animal." (vs. 3)*

*"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." (vs. 4)*

**2. MY TONGUE CAN DESTROY \_\_\_\_\_ . (vs. 5-8)**

*"Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire ..." (vs. 5)*

*"... it sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (vs. 6b)*

Prov. 21:23 (GN) *"If you want to stay out of trouble be careful what you say!"*

*"All kinds of animals ... have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." (vs. 7-8)*

**3. MY TONGUE DISPLAYS \_\_\_\_\_ . (vs. 9-12)**

It's inconsistent: vs. 9

*"Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be." (vs. 10)*

*"Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ... can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?"*

THE PROBLEM: \_\_\_\_\_

*"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* Matt. 12:34  
Also Matt. 15:18-19

## II. WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

*"Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit!"* Ezekiel 18:31

2 Cor. 5:17

2. \_\_\_\_\_

*"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."* Psalm 141:3 Also Palms 19;14

3. \_\_\_\_\_

*"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."*  
James 1:19

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Today we're going to look at what James has to say about "How to Manage Your Mouth". We love to talk. There are talk shows everywhere. Everybody seems to have something to say. The average American has 30 conversations a day and you'll spend 1/5 of your life talking. In one year your conversations will fill 66 books of 800 pages a book. If you're a man you speak an average of 20,000 words a day. If you're a woman you speak 30,000 words a day. (Like the guy who was asked, "Do you resent that your wife has the last word?" He replied, "No, I'm just glad when she finally gets to it!" Or the wife who broke her jaw. When they took an X-ray it turned out to be a motion picture.)

Some of us are born with a silver foot in our mouths. We have this natural ability to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Nothing is opened more wrongly at the wrong time than our mouths. (Like the stock boy at the grocery store. Lady asked him, "Can I buy half a head of lettuce?" He walked back to the manager to ask, not realizing she was walking right behind him. He said, "You're not going to believe this, there's an old bag out there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce." He turned around and saw her standing there and said, "And this fine lady would like to buy the other half.")

Our mouths get us into a lot of trouble. James talks more about the tongue than anybody else in the New Testament. Every chapter in the book of James says something about managing your mouth. *"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."* James says, if you can control your mouth, you're perfect. He's not talking about sinless. The word "perfection" in Greek literally means "mature, healthy". When you go to the doctor and say, "I'm not feeling well," the first thing he says is, "Stick out your tongue." Your tongue reveals what's going on inside of you, not just physically but spiritually. James says that you've got to learn to manage your mouth. You've got to learn to tame your tongue. You've got to get your tongue under control. I was tempted to title this sermon "Don't Let Your Tongue Lick You."

### **WHY MUST I WATCH WHAT I SAY?**

"Why must I do that? It's only words; I'm just kidding." "Words are significant", says James. Three reasons we have to learn to manage our mouth. Then he gives us six illustrations, two for each of the points. He was a great communicator because he knows how to illustrate.

#### **1. MY TONGUE DIRECTS WHERE I GO**

It has tremendous influence and control over my life. Where are you headed in life? Where are you going to be ten years from now? Look at your conversation. What do you like to talk about? What do you talk about the most? We shape our words and then our words shape us. James says, "The tongue is small, it's tiny". And because it's tiny we think it's insignificant. But it has tremendous power. v. 3 Consider a bit in a horse's mouth. You've got a huge stallion, 2,000-3,000 pounds, and a 95 pound jockey on his back. The jockey can control the tremendous mighty horse by a little piece of metal stuck strategically over his tongue. Likewise your tongue controls the direction of your life wherever you want to go, and a little bit of a word or a phrase can influence the total direction of your life.

## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH

### Developing A Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15

Then he says, "Consider a ship". The Queen Mary has 3 acres of recreational space. The anchor is equal to the weight of ten cars. Yet a relatively small rudder directs the huge oceanliner out in the middle of the waves and winds and seas. A little rudder keeps it on course. Our tongue is like that. Our tongue is like a rudder that steers us. Ships: "... *they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.*" My tongue directs where I go. Circle "steered". Your tongue is the steering wheel of your life. It is the guidance system. If you don't like the way you're headed right now, change the way you talk.

Many people think, if the tongue has such influence maybe it's best to say nothing. Not talk at all, be silent. (A guy joined the Trappist monastery. For three years he was given a probation period where he was not to speak at all, but at the end of each year he could say two words. The first year at the end he said, "Bed hard." At end of the second year he said, "Food cold." At the end of the third year he's about had it. He comes in and says, "I quit". The head priest says, "That doesn't surprise me. All you've done is complain since you got here.") James says that my tongue directs where I go, so I've got to learn to control it.

## 2. MY TONGUE CAN DESTROY WHAT I HAVE

v. 5 James gives another illustration. Imagine a beautiful forest -- tall beautiful trees everywhere. Now imagine it in one minute up in smoke, completely destroyed instantly with a little tiny match. It only takes a spark to get a fire going. In 1983 in Australia, one fire overnight destroyed 600 miles of land, villages, livestock. All from a single match. James says that your tongue can destroy like that. You can lose it all. A careless camper can destroy an entire national forest overnight. A careless word can destroy a life overnight. Thousands of lives. Gossip is like fire. It spreads quickly and it wrecks havoc. I wonder how many people because of a careless word have destroyed their marriage, or their career, or their reputation, or the reputation of another, or their church, or a friendship. The tongue not only has the power to direct where you go but also to destroy what you have if you don't learn to control it. It's like a fire.

Have you ever met a verbal arsonist? Their words are always inflammatory. Senator Joseph McCarthy was a verbal arsonist. He spoke and he destroyed lives everywhere he went. James says that words, like a fire, can burn people. Why do you think they call it "Dean Martin's Celebrity Roast"? Because you can burn people with what you say. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It does hurt. Fire and words under control can give tremendous warmth and light, but fire and words out of control can be devastating. It can destroy miles and miles of homes and lands and peoples.

Proverbs 18:20 (Good News) *"You have to live with the consequences of everything you say."*

vs. 6 *"... it sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."* Circle "whole course". He's saying here that words can create a chain reaction. You can say something that you didn't mean to have any harm, but it can have devastating effects that are beyond your control. Just a few inflammatory statements set off a chain of events that we now look back on and call World War II.

## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH

### Developing A Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15

On a more personal level, you come home from work and you're tired and grumpy and cranky. The husband walks in and yells at the wife. The wife yells at the oldest kid. The oldest kid yells at the baby sister. The baby sister goes out and kicks the dog. The dog goes and bites the cat. The cat comes in and scratches the baby. The baby bites the head off the Barbie doll. Wouldn't it be a whole lot simpler if the husband just bit off the head of the Barbie doll himself? Chain reaction, the course of hell.

"*Set on fire by hell*" itself. A couple comes in for marriage counseling. "I said this and then she said that, then I said this..." Then what happened? "All hell broke loose". Our words can cause "all hell to break loose." James says you've got to learn to manage your mouth, not only because it can direct where you go but it can destroy what you have. You can lose your family, your kids, your career simply by what you say. It's like a fire.

Proverbs 21:23 *"If you want to stay out of trouble be careful what you say!"*

James uses another illustration. He talks about a zoo. *"All kinds of animals ... have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue.* [It's humanly impossible. Only God can do it.] *It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."* (vs.7-8) Of all the animals we've tamed, no man can tame the tongue, humanly speaking. He says it's restless. That means it's always liable to break out at any moment. When Lion Country Safari was open there was a big sign as you dove in -- "Do not get out of your car. Do not roll down the window." Why? Those animals that look so tame and peaceful could rip your head off in a second. Restless, always liable to break out. You never know what your mouth is going to say.

It's like poison. The word in Greek is literally "snake venom". Just a few drops can kill. You can assassinate somebody with your words. Assassinate their character. The tongue is a deadly weapon.

### 3. MY TONGUE DISPLAYS WHO I AM

It reveals my real character. It tells what's really inside of me. First James points out how inconsistent we are in our speech. v. 9 *"The tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with the same tongue we curse men who've been made in God's likeness. From the same mouth come praise and cursings. My brothers, this should not be."* We say these things out of the same mouth. We come to church on Sunday. The highest use of your mouth is to use it praising God. We sing praises to the Lord. Then we walk out, get into the car and on the way home we argue about where we're going to eat lunch. Isn't it amazing how quickly your attitude can change? In one minute you're saying, "Praise the Lord", the next you're saying, "Shut up!" The tongue is a strange contradiction. It's so inconsistent. It's amazing how quickly it can change, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One minute we're praising God and the next we're cursing other people. Cursing here doesn't necessarily mean profanity. It means any kind of put down, label. ["You good for nothing... You'll never amount to nothing ... You're just like ..."] Any kind of put down is a curse. He says, "Why curse men? They're made in God's image."

This bothers me immensely. I think how is it possible that we can be loving to people we love -- our kids, wives, husbands -- and the next moment be harsh, cold, mean to them? How is it possible? How is it possible in one minute to be talking to my kids in gentle, loving tones and the next minute I'm being

## **HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH**

### **Developing A Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15**

mean to them? I hurt them. I am saying things that damage their self- esteem. How is that? I grieve over that a lot. I find myself asking forgiveness a lot in my family, especially to my kids. Do you struggle with an inconsistent tongue? James says we all have it. We speak lovingly in one breath and then lash out in the next. What gives? What's the problem? Why do we do that? Why can we genuinely mean something in love and kindness one minute and then genuinely mean something in hate the next minute?

James gives the answer in v. 11-12. He says consider the source. *"Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."* The point is, whatever is in the well comes out in the water. Whatever is in the tree, comes out in the fruit. What is the likelihood of an apple tree producing cherries? Zip! My problem is not really my tongue. My problem is my heart. What's inside is what comes out. My mouth eventually betrays what is really on the inside of me. I can fool you and pretend but eventually my tongue is going to catch me. It's going to let you know what's really inside.

Have you heard this excuse? Someone says something really mean or hurtful and they say, "I don't know what got into me. It's not like me to say that. I don't know why I said that. It's totally out of character. I didn't really mean it." James would say, "Yes, it is. It's just like you. You meant it. Quit kidding yourself. What's inside is going to come out. You don't have a spring that one minute gives salt water and the next gives fresh water. That's inconsistent. It's a natural law: what comes out of the well is what is inside of it."

Jesus said in Matthew 12:34 *"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* Jesus explained the Freudian slip years before Freud even existed. He said what's inside of you is what's going to come out. My tongue just displays what I am. It directs where I go. It can destroy what I have. But most of all, it simply displays what I am. It reveals my character.

If you've got a problem with your tongue, it's much more serious than you think. You have a heart problem. A person with a harsh tongue has an angry heart. A person with a negative tongue has a fearful heart. A person with an overactive tongue has an unsettled heart. A person with a boasting tongue has an insecure heart. A person with a filthy tongue has an impure heart. A person who is critical all the time has a bitter heart.

On the other hand, a person who is always encouraging has a happy heart. A person who speaks gently has a loving heart. A person who speaks truthfully has an honest heart.

## **II. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?**

### **1. Get a new heart**

You've got to get a new heart, that's the problem. Ezekiel 18:31 *"Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit!"* Painting the outside of the pump doesn't make any difference if there is poison in the well. I can change the outside, I can turn over a new leaf,

## **HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH**

### **Developing A Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15**

but what I really need is a new life. What I need is a fresh start. I need to let go of all the past and be born again and start over. I need to get a new heart.

How do I get a new heart? 2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new person. The old has passed away. Behold all things have become new."* New life, new heart, new spirit. When you come to Jesus Christ, He wipes out everything you've done in the past. He says You're starting over. It's like being born again. You need a new heart.

We need to pray like David prayed in Psalm 51 *"Create in me a clean heart, O God"* because what's in my heart is going to come out in my mouth.

#### **2. Ask God for help every day.**

You need supernatural power to control your tongue. You can't do it on your own. Your life is a living proof of that. We cannot control it on our own. We need supernatural power so we ask God to help us. Psalm 141:3 *"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."* Great verse to memorize and quote every morning. "God, put a muzzle on my mouth. Guard my lips. Don't let me be critical today. Don't let me be judgmental. Don't let me say things off the cuff that I then regret." You need to ask God for help daily because you need His power in your life.

Sidlow Baxter: "The proof that God's Spirit is in your life is not that you speak in an unknown tongue but you control the tongue you do know." You watch your words, and God gives you the power to not slander, not lie, not exaggerate.

Getting into God's word is a part of asking God for help. As you ask Him for help you need to read His word. Computer statement: Garbage in, garbage out. What goes into your mind, goes into your heart, and what goes into your heart, comes out of your mouth. Fill your mind with the word of God -- with positive things, whatsoever things that are true, etc. -- think on these things.

#### **3. Think before you speak**

Engage your mind before you put your mouth in gear. James 1:19 *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."* There's a designation here. They go in order. First be quick to listen and then slow to speak. If you're quick to listen you will be slow to speak. If you're slow to speak, then you will be slow to become angry. If you have a problem with anger you need to work on being quick to listen and slow to speak. The result will be you'll be slow to anger.

What does your tongue say about you? What does it reveal about you? If we were to play back a tape of every conversation you've had in this past week, what would we learn about you? God hears it all. Our tongues display who we are. What direction is your tongue leading you? Some people say, "I'm just sick all the time" or "I can never do anything", "Things are just getting tougher and tougher" -- what direction are they headed? Our tongues control the direction of our lives like a rudder, a bit.

## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOUTH

### Developing A Faith That Works - Part 8 of 15

A bit and a rudder must be under the hand of a strong arm. James is saying that the only way to get control of your tongue is let Jesus Christ have control of your heart. What's in your heart is going to come out in your mouth. You let Christ's hand be on your bit, your rudder and let Him direct your life.

Maybe you need to ask forgiveness. Maybe you need to go to your kids to say, "I'm sorry. I'm inconsistent the way I talk to you. Sometimes I'm loving, sometimes I'm harsh. That shows I'm like everybody else. I'm human." We all stumble in many ways -- all of us. Maybe you need to apologize to your wife or your husband. "I'm not as loving to you in my speech as I ought to be. I tend to be apathetic, cold, indifferent. I talk to you harshly. I boss everybody around. I'm inconsistent and inconsiderate." Ezekiel says, *"Get rid of all your offenses you've committed and get a new heart and a new spirit."*

Prayer:

Every one of us today needed this message. It's a universal problem. Some people never do learn to control their tongue. Tombstone: "Here lies Arabella Young, who on the 24th of May began to hold her tongue." I hope you don't have to wait that long. Would you pray this prayer in your heart right now? "God, I need a heart transplant. I need a new heart and a new spirit. Come into my life. Maybe for the first time or as a recommitment you say, "Take control of my life." What direction is your tongue leading you? Where are you headed in life? Where will you be ten years from now? What do you talk about the most? That tells me where you're headed. My tongue can destroy what I have. I could lose it all in a minute by a few careless words, just like a cigarette dropped can destroy an entire park. Maybe some of you need to say, "God, I've been a verbal arsonist. I say things that hurt. That hurt my husband, my wife, my kids. I say things at work that are unkind. I'm harshest with those I love." The Bible says that displays what is inside. That's where the change needs to take place. "God would You give me help every day? Would You put a guard on my mouth? Would You help me to think before I speak? Lord, forgive me for the things I've said that were out of place. Help me with a new start this morning. I can't do it on my own; I need Your help. Help me to read Your Bible and fill my mind with good things." If you have an overactive tongue, say "God would You put peace in my heart so I don't have to talk so much? I've been negative. Help me not to be fearful. I tend to brag a lot. Help me to not feel insecure. God, melt the hard heart. Give me a caring, loving heart. Jesus Christ, take control of the rudder of my life and guide me in the direction that You wish."

If you prayed that prayer, God heard you. Father, we all need this message. I pray that we all learn to manage our mouth. Help us, we can't do it on our own. But by Your spirit in our lives we can have victory. Lord, we realize that our tongue can damage but it also can delight. What a great potential we have. Help us to use our mouths, our tongues to bless people. God, help me to use my tongue to bless my wife, to bless my children, to bless the people I work with. God, there is tremendous potential in it. Help my tongue to give light and warmth rather than destruction. In Jesus' name. Amen.