



**JAMES: Week 3**

**Author:** Carrie Busch  
**Project Supervisor:** Nick Diliberto & Becky Forkel  
**Artwork:** Kate Forkel  
**Editor:** Angela Ivey

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## **JAMES**

### **WEEK 3: Live Well, Live Wisely**

**Bottom Line:** It's the way you live—not the way you talk—that counts.

#### **WEEK 1-2 SUMMARY**

The book of James is filled with practical knowledge.

And over the past few weeks, we've covered several valuable tips for living a Godly life as a follower of Jesus.

James, assumed to be Jesus' half-brother, was speaking to Christians in his day, but these words apply to us now even though approximately 2,000 years have passed.

In James 1, we learned that trials and temptations are expected in the lives of believers.

We learned how to approach them and that we must live the Word, not just listen to it.

Then, in James 2, we learned that we are commanded to demonstrate our faith through love as Christians.

And when we don't, we are hypocrites who can lead others away from, instead of toward, Christ.

In other words, our behavior matters, and should be the fruit of the gift of salvation that we were so undeservedly given.

#### **LESSON**

##### **Read James 3:1-12.**

*1 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.*

*3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. 5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.*

*But a tiny spark can set a vast forest on fire. 6 And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.*

*7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. 10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! 11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? 12 Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.*

In today's world, it seems that everyone wants to make a statement.

Whether it's through a post on Instagram or a clever saying on a T-shirt, we've all made statements about our beliefs—whether spiritual, political, or relational—through some avenue or method.

And some of us have done so with great intention, while others have done so with little thought or care.

Either way, what we say matters whether to the world or the people surrounding us.

And God's Word is very clear about how much damage we can do with what we say.

This isn't the only excerpt from the Bible that addresses the "tongue," which refers to "our words."

A quick Google search led me to over 100 passages about this very topic.

The words we say can either build up or tear down, and this "power," as scripture calls it, is nothing to take lightly.

In verses 3 and 4, James uses two metaphors—one of a ship's rudder and a bit in the mouth of a horse.

Both metaphors demonstrate that the tongue, although small, holds great power to steer a vehicle.

So, what does this mean for you as a believer?

It means that your tongue will affect the direction of your life.

In the same way, *God's Word* directs our path.

When given a choice between choosing our path and choosing the path that God has for us, we'd all probably claim that we'd choose God's.

But do our words line up with that claim?

Think about how you speak to your friends, family, church family, acquaintances, and classmates.

Do you speak what is true and what is good?

Do you build up or tear down?

When we recognize the tongue for what God's Word says it is, we must also acknowledge that we have the responsibility to wield this weapon with wisdom.

**Discussion questions:**

1. Think of a time when you were insulted by someone.

Does this memory still have power over you?

Is it hard to forget harsh words?

2. Think of a time when someone's words motivated you to do good.

What was the result of these positive words?

3. Why is it critical that believers be cautious with their words?

**Read James 3:13-18.**

*13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. 15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. 16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.*

*17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*

In these verses, James once again discusses the importance of living out our faith and doing good works.

But let's be clear: these works do not save.

Instead, they are *evidence* that we have been saved, as we discussed last week.

Now, let's move on to the truths evident in this excerpt.

James contrasts humility and selfishness.

According to James, true wisdom results in humility.

This means that God wants us to have humble hearts, putting others ahead of ourselves.

The opposite of humility is pride, which leads us to put ourselves first, leading to “disorder and evil of every kind.”

Wow.

Those are strong words.

James explains that God's wisdom—wisdom that He grants to those who ask—produces gentleness, humility, peace, good deeds, sincerity, and love without favoritism.

We can't live this out without God because true wisdom comes from Him.

**Discussion questions:**

1. What has God taught you about humility?

What can Jesus' death on the cross teach us about humility?

2. How does selfish ambition stand in contrast to the Great Commission (to go and make disciples)?
3. How can humility lead to unity among believers?

How can selfishness lead to disunity?

**Read James 4:1-10.**

*1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. 3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*

*4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. 5 Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. 6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,*

*“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

*7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. 9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*

This last excerpt from James 4 is a wake-up call, a call for repentance.

Once again, James contrasts God's way and the world's way.

When we understand that God's way leads to peace and fulfillment, why would we want the way of the world?

It seems ridiculous.

Yet, in many cases, we find ourselves wanting what the rest of the world chases.

We desire things like wealth, status, popularity, attention, and success.

These things are not evil in themselves—instead, it's our motives that make them so.

In other words, it isn't wrong to have money; you can certainly use it to glorify God.

But when money becomes our heart's desire, it becomes an idol that divides our loyalty between the world and God.

The same goes for all the other things we chase.

In verses 7-10, James calls us to repent for these desires, these motives, and these behaviors.

Once again, he reminds us that we must humble ourselves before God, and He will lift us up.

Nothing that the world can offer can rival the honor that we receive when we live for Christ.

**Discussion questions:**

1. What are some of the worldly things that we pursue?

Why are they so tempting to us?

2. What does humility before God look like?

How does one humble himself or herself before the Lord?

3. Do you think it's more tempting to be "friends with the world" rather than "friends with God"?

Why or why not?