

Note: The Rev. Caleb Kim will deliver the sermon below on Sunday, July 6, 2025, at 10:00 am at St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: How To Manage Your Mouth
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 5

Communication experts say that, on average, men speak about 20,000 words a day, while women speak about 30,000. Regardless of how many words we use, the Bible makes it clear that our words carry incredible weight. Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death." We've all experienced times when we said the wrong thing at the wrong time. I once heard a humorous story about a stock boy in a grocery store... It's funny—but also a reminder that our mouths can get us into trouble.

James, the writer of our primary text, talks more about the tongue than anybody else in the New Testament. In fact, every chapter of the book of James says something about how we use our words. In today's passage, he emphasizes the importance of taming the tongue. James writes in James 3:2: "We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check." The word translated "perfect" here doesn't mean sinless—it means "mature, complete or healthy." When we go to the doctor and say, "I'm not feeling well," one of the first things they often say is, "Stick out your tongue." Why? Because our tongue can reveal what is going on inside of us, not just physically but spiritually. James is telling us: You've got to learn to manage your mouth. You need to get your tongue under control.

Now some might say, "Why should I? They're just words. I was only joking." But Scripture is clear: "Words are significant." So this morning, I want us to explore three reasons why we must learn to manage our mouth, and then we'll look at three methods to help us gain control of our tongue.

Let's begin with the first reasons, and then move on to the solutions.

The first reason we must learn to manage our mouth is this: our tongue directs where we go. It has tremendous influence and control over our lives. One of the best ways to predict where we'll be in a month, a year, or even ten years from now is to examine what we talk about the most. What dominates our conversations? Because the truth is: we shape our words and then our words shape us. James writes in James 3:5, "the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts." Physically, the tongue may seem insignificant only about 60 to 70 grams in weight and 2 to 3 inches in length. But spiritually and emotionally, the words that come from it carry tremendous power.

James uses two vivid illustrations to help us understand this influence: the bit in a horse's mouth and the rudder on a ship. Let's think about horses first. A single horse can have up to a thousand pounds of strength. When we talk about engines, we even use the term "horsepower" to describe their force. Yet despite their great power, a horse can be guided by a small bit placed in its mouth. That tiny piece of metal gives a rider full control over the animal's direction.

Then James points us to ships. Large, powerful ships are at the mercy of many forces—winds, waves, and ocean currents. But even in the middle of those forces, the ship. However, when the pilot of the ocean ship uses its rudder properly he can steer the ship

is steered by a relatively small rudder, hidden below the waterline. When the pilot uses the rudder properly, he can guide the ship wherever it needs to go, even through dangerous waters.

In the same way, our tongue, though small, can steer the course of our lives. It can determine the direction of our relationships, careers, faith, and future. Now, some people might think: "Well, if the tongue is so powerful, maybe the safest thing is to say nothing at all—just stay silent!" But that doesn't work either. I'm reminded of a story of a man who joined a monastery. One of the rules was to take a vow of silence for three years. During that time, he was only allowed to say two words at the end of each year. At the end of the first year, he said, "Bed hard." At the end of the second year, he said, "Food cold." At the end of the third year, he came in and said, "I quit". The head monk replied, "That doesn't surprise me. All you've done since you got here is complain." It's not about being silent—it's about learning to speak wisely. Our tongue is like a control tower. If we don't like the direction our life is heading, maybe we need to take a closer look at the words we're speaking. Because if we want to change our life, we often have to start by changing the way we talk.

The second reason we must manage our mouth is this: our tongue can destroy what we have. James gives another powerful illustration in James 3: 5: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." Imagine a beautiful forest filled with tall trees, rich greenery, and wildlife. Now imagine a small spark—just one—igniting a fire. That tiny flame can turn into a blaze that wipes out miles and miles of land, homes, livestock, and entire communities. Every year, especially around this time, we hear tragic news of wildfires. Even with all our modern technology and firefighting methods, these fires still cause massive destruction—and they often start with something as simple and careless as a single match.

James is saying: our words are like that spark. Left unchecked, they can cause irreparable damage—not just to others, but to ourselves. Our words have incredible power. They can encourage or discourage, heal or hurt, build up or tear down.

Let me share two personal examples that I've never forgotten... Words—like fire—can either warm a home or burn it down. Words—like fire—can bring light or destroy everything in their path. James warns us: Be careful. Like a wildfire, our tongue can burn people. It can destroy marriages. It can ruin careers. It can tear apart churches. It can damage reputations, friendships, and futures. Sometimes a single careless word has long-lasting consequences. So while our tongue can direct where we go, it can also destroy what we have—if we don't learn to control it.

The third reason we must manage our mouth is this: our tongue displays who we are. It reveals our real character. It tells the truth about what's inside of us. James points out the inconsistency of our speech in James 3:9-10: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be." We've all experienced this. We come to church on Sunday and use our mouth for the highest purpose—praising God. We sing, we pray, we worship. Then sometimes before we've even left the parking lot or on the drive home, we're already arguing about something as trivial as where to eat lunch. One minute, we're already saying godly words; the next, we're speaking in frustration, criticism, or anger. The tongue is a strange

contradiction—so quick to change, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One moment we're adoring God, and the next we're tearing down someone made in His image.

Now, when James talks about cursing, he doesn't only mean profanity. He's talking about any kind of put-down word that devalues another person. Jesus addressed this directly in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:22, He warns, "Anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell." That's a strong warning. Why does Jesus take this so seriously? Because He knows that how we speak to others reflects how we view them—and ultimately, how we view God. When we use hurtful words to ignore, blame, or condemn someone, we're not just sinning against that person—we're sinning against their Creator. We're hurting someone who bears the image of God.

Friends, do you ever find yourself praising God one moment and tearing someone down the next? James says—we all do. But then he challenges us to get to the root of the problem. In verses 11-12, he asks: "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." James is making it clear: What comes out of mouth is determined by what is in the heart... We often try to excuse ourselves by saying, "I don't know why I said that. I didn't really mean it." But James—and Jesus—would challenge that. Jesus says in Matthew 12:34 "...How can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." In other words, the tongue is just the microphone. The real source is the heart... So, the tongue directs where we go. It can destroy what we have. But most of all, it displays what we are. It's a mirror of the heart.

So what's the cure? How do we manage our mouth and begin to tame the tongue?

Firstly, we need to get a new heart. As we've seen, the problem isn't ultimately with our lips—it's deeper than that. It's rooted in the heart. Our words are simply the overflow of what's inside. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel said it plainly in Ezekiel 18:31: "Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit..." You can clean up the outside, but if the inside is still poisoned, nothing will change. It's like painting the outside of a pump while the water inside is still toxic... We need a fresh start. We need a new heart.

How do we get that? The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" When we come to Jesus Christ, He doesn't clean up our language—He gives us a new nature. He wipes out everything from the past and offers a brand-new beginning... But for that to happen, we must first come to Him in repentance. We must confess the ways we've used our tongue to wound, to gossip, to lie, to curse, to divide. Let us pray like King David in Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." That's where it begins—with a changed heart. Only then can our words begin to reflect God's grace, truth, and love.

Secondly, we need to ask God for help every day. Why? Because we can't control our tongue on our own. Our lives are living proof of that. We may have tried—perhaps many times—to be more careful with our words, to stay calm under pressure, to hold back that harsh comment, or to stop gossiping. But we've also failed. Why? Because this is not just a matter of willpower—it's a matter of God's power. We need supernatural help. We need

God's strength, God's wisdom, and God's spirit to help us guard our lips. King David understood this. He prayed in Psalm 141:3: "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." That's a wonderful verse to memorize and pray each morning... We must ask God for help regularly—not just once, but daily. Because every day, we'll face moments where our words can either heal or hurt. And we need God's guidance in those moments.

But it doesn't stop there. As we ask God for help, we also need to fill our hearts and minds with His Word. You've probably heard the phrase, "Garbage in, garbage out." The truth is, what we put into will eventually come out through our mouths. What fills your heart will shape your words. Jesus said in Matthew 12:33-37: "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good... A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him." In other words, our words are the fruit—but the root is what is stored in our hearts. So if we want to speak like Christ, we have to think like Christ. And if we want to think like Christ, we must regularly meditate on God's Word. Paul says in Philippians 4:8 to think about whatever is "true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable." And then in verse 7, he adds: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And I would add—it will guard your mouth as well... A heart filled with God's truth produces words that bless others. So let's ask God every day to help us. Let's fill our hearts with His Word so that our mouths will reflect His grace.

Thirdly, we need to think before we speak. We must engage our minds before putting our mouths in gear. James gives us a simple but profound instruction in James 1:19 "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." There is a sacred order here: First, be quick to listen. Second—be slow to speak. Third—be slow to become angry. If we have a problem with anger, we often need to start by listening more and speaking less...

Let me give you something else to think about. According to communication experts, the average person speaks enough words each day to fill twenty single-spaced, typewritten pages. That means in a month, we could "publish" two full books of 300 pages—just with our spoken words. Over a lifetime of 100 years, that would be 2,400 books. Now, imagine your descendants reading those books. What would they learn about you? Would those books be filled with grace, encouragement, love, and wisdom? Or would they be full of complaints, criticism, and regret? And more importantly—God reads every word.

To conclude, let us review what've learned: our tongue directs where we go. Our tongues can destroy what we have. Our tongue displays who we are. And we've explored the only way to gain control: We need a new heart. We need to ask God for help every day. We need to think before we speak. James is clear: The only way to truly tame the tongues is to let Jesus Christ take control of our hearts. Because what's in our hearts will always come out through our mouths. We need to let Christ hold the reins—His hand on the rudder—guiding our words, our attitudes, and ultimately, our lives. So maybe today, some of us need to ask forgiveness. Maybe we need to apologize to someone close to us. Maybe we need to surrender an area of our life we've been trying to manage on our own. Every single one of us needs this message. This is a universal issue. No one is exempt.

**In this sermon I have used material and inspiration from Rev. Rick Warren's message series "Developing a Faith That Works," based on James 3:1-12.*