

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If You Talk Too Much?

Matthew 15:10–20; James 3:1–12



LET'S BEGIN HERE

That's quite a personal question! *Me? Talk too much?* If you're not certain whether this topic applies, carefully reflect on these questions:

- Have you thought, *I shouldn't say this . . .* and then you go right ahead and spill it?
- Have you promised to keep information confidential only to leak it later?
- Do you sometimes fill the air with many words but say very little?
- Have you spoken against others behind their backs and then said something completely different when you are standing alongside them?
- Have you spewed criticism one moment and then, later, oozed insincere compliments?

See yourself? If so, take heart. We all have talked too much . . . or said something hurtful . . . or let our words run wild when we should have leashed them. Taming our tongue is a discipline that everyone must master, and there's no better teacher than our Lord Jesus. He revealed the *heart* of our tongue problem.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

According to Luke 6:43–45, what did Jesus say is the source from which our words flow?

Quotable

You have been given the power to control your speech. He is called the Holy Spirit. You can't tame your own tongue, but the Spirit of God can.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Our tongue is neither friend nor foe. It's merely a delivery device, like a bucket that draws water from a well. According to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 15:17–20, what sins can poison the well?

Our words both *reveal* and *relay* our true nature, whether good or bad. They are the buckets that draw sweet or bitter water from the well, the channels into which our pure or polluted spring flows and which convey to the world the truth about us. Consequently, those who control their words must control far more than just the muscle that forms the words in their mouths; *they must have mastery over the deepest parts of who they are.*

Such mastery is no small accomplishment! It follows, then, that those who influence others with their words should be held to a higher standard of spiritual maturity, as the apostle James explained in James 3:1–12—a section on controlling the tongue we'll study next using the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study.



***Searching the Scriptures* Study Tool**

When searching the Scriptures, gather resources that will guide your study, including a concordance and a Bible dictionary. A reliable commentary on James is *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*, which is available at the Insight for Living Ministries online store: insight.org.

Helpful Hint

Remember: *observation* is a critical starting point. Read James 3:1–12, and make some initial observations about what you see. For instance, are there any repeated words? Did James use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing? Make notes on a separate sheet of paper about what you discover.



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Warning to Teachers

We all depend on teachers to tell us the truth, be responsible guides, and live what they teach—three essential characteristics of qualified teachers. If any group of people must master their tongues, as well as their lives, it is this group, which includes pastors, counselors, mentors, and anyone who uses words to influence. What warning did James give in James 3:1?

What explanation did James offer in verse 2?

Examine a correlating passage: 1 Timothy 1:1–7. It might be helpful to read 1 Timothy 1 in its entirety to get the context for Paul's instructions to young pastor Timothy. How does this passage relate to what James was concerned about in James 3:1–2?

James and Paul understood that words have the power to build up or tear down—a power that James vividly described in James 3:3–12.

Since we're on the subject of teachers, let's examine this passage from the point of view of a teacher preparing an expository Bible lesson. Exposition is drawing principles and application from the biblical text, verse by verse, and presenting those principles in ways that will be helpful to an audience.



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Read again James 3:3–12, noting how James organized his instruction into three sections. Each section concerning the tongue could become a Bible study, sermon outline, or main point in a brief devotional prepared for a group. Take a close look at the expositional outline below. Fill in some explanatory interpretations next to each set of verses about what seems significant to you.

The Tongue . . . Small but Powerful (James 3:3–5)

Illustration	Interpretation
A horse with bit and bridle (3:3)	
A ship with a rudder (3:4)	
A fire with a spark (3:5)	

What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?



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The Tongue . . . Necessary but Dangerous (James 3:6–8)

Illustration	Interpretation
Fire . . . a danger that has its roots in Satan's intent to destroy (3:6)	
Beasts . . . contrasted with the untamable tongue (3:7–8a)	
Poison . . . the grim perspective of an uncontrolled tongue (3:8b)	

What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?

The Tongue . . . Helpful but Inconsistent (James 3:9–12)

The human tongue can offer blessings one moment and curses the next! What does James say about the fickle nature of the tongue (3:9–10)?

What is his point in contrasting our words' inconsistency with nature's consistency (3:11–12)?



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What would you say is the overarching **principle** regarding the tongue, based on these verses?

Application

Good exposition always includes relevant application. Wrap up your lesson plan by imagining a group that you'd like to teach. Write down three specific applications the group members can put into practice as they interact with each, based on the exposition above.

1.

2.

3.

Bring It Home

Pick one of the principles from above, and write it in such a way that is most effective to you. Use “I” statements as you state your desire to put the truth into practice, and give an action plan for what you intend to do.



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Chuck's applications can offer further guidance.

- *You'll never regret restraining your tongue.* You'll always be grateful you controlled your words rather than letting them run wild. Once loosed, unrestrained words can wreak terrible damage.
- *Apologize for the times you failed to restrain your tongue.* Can you call to mind people whom your words have hurt? Admit the wrong, seek forgiveness, and make it right.

**A FINAL PRAYER**

As you would write in a journal, conclude this study by writing your own prayer to the Lord, reflecting on your need for the Spirit's power to control your tongue and transform your heart.

Father,

Amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Tools for Digging Deeper



What If . . . ?
by Charles R. Swindoll and
Insight for Living Ministries
Classic CD series



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How the Bible
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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