

# WISE WORDS

## Week 2 | James 3

### Day 1 - Words have power

**Read:** James 3:1-6

God's words are so powerful that they literally spoke the whole universe into motion. In Hebrews 11:3 it says, *"the universe was formed at God's command"*. While our human words can't create heavens and earth, they still hold great power. The ability to speak & communicate through the spoken or written word is a unique gift from the Lord. It's a part of being created in His image. Of course, as with all gifts, it can be used wisely or unwisely in our human hands.

On a very basic level, words are the way we communicate our intentions, emotions, stories, plans, ideas, information, and express our identities. Our words can unite or incite, heal or inflict, calm or trigger, create peace or war. This is why God warns us throughout the Bible to be cautious with the power that we have with our words & tongues. Jesus reminds us that our words are so powerful that they will actually account for (or against) us when we stand before Him. In Matthew 12:36-37 He says, *"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned"*. Our verses in James today compare the smallness of our tongues to our entire bodies. He makes the point that even though our tongue is small, it holds great power over us. He compares this to a ship with a rudder, a horse with a bit, or a tiny spark that can ignite an entire forest. Just like the tongue, these are small things that have the power to control something much larger than itself. This is why we need to exercise such great caution with the words that we speak. We can choose to use our tongues to glorify God as a witness to His love, grace and goodness inside of us; or we can use them as a spark to burn down those around us.

- Prayerfully ask yourself today: Where do I need greater self-control or better self-awareness around the words that I speak? Towards others or myself? Towards situations or circumstances?
- What would it look like to give the Spirit control over my tongue in this area of my life? Ask the Lord to help you to use your gift of being able to speak for His glory, and not your own this week.

### Deeper Dive

As we read through the book of James, it's important to understand the context during this time of the New Testament. James was written by Jesus's half-brother. James was leading the early church in Jerusalem at the time. This was a community of Jewish followers that had accepted Jesus as their savior. Of course, this community was heavily persecuted by the Jewish leaders. In addition to the persecution, there was also a famine in the region so they were struggling with severe poverty. James was eventually killed by the Jewish leaders because of his faith in Christ and leadership of the early church.

The book of James starts like a letter, however, it's doesn't address specific "church related" concerns like Paul's letters. Instead, it's an overall practical application of Jesus' teachings largely based on the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5-7) and the book of Proverbs. It's short, direct, and meant to challenge us all. It should serve as a reminder of how we should be living in accordance with God's Word & teachings.

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Colossians 4:6** ~Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
- **Luke 6:43-45** ~"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.
- **Matthew 12:34** ~how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.
- **Psalms 19:14** ~May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.
- **Galatians 5:22-23** ~But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

## Day 2 - Words reveal what's inside

**Read:** James 3: 7-12

Most of us have heard the toothpaste lesson as kids. When you squeeze toothpaste out of the tube, you can't put the toothpaste back in, right?! In this basic object lesson, the messy toothpaste represents the words we speak. This is meant to teach us two things: 1. Think before we speak, because our words aren't easily taken back., 2. The words we speak are an exact indication of what's truly inside of us. Whatever type of toothpaste is inside the tube is what comes out.

Jesus speaks about this in Luke 6:43-45 & Matthew 12:34. Our fruit (or words & actions) will reveal what's truly inside our hearts. James gives several examples in our scripture today when he says that fig trees can't bear olives, nor can a grapevine bear figs. With our words, we communicate our inner thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires. Ultimately, the words we speak serve as an indicator of the state of our hearts and our character.

Take a moment to think about some of your conversations this week. What do your words reveal about the condition of your heart? Have your words been judgmental, tinted with gossip, sarcastic, passive aggressive, frustrated, full of complaints, deceptive, or self-serving? OR have your words been filled with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23 - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, & faith)?

Of course, it's important to remember that we can't just "try harder" to use kinder words, or say a bunch of positive affirmations to change our hearts. We have to surrender to the work of the Spirit & allow our hearts to align with His. God wants to use our words as instrument for His glory, grace and wisdom. He wants our words to be perfectly seasoned with the salt that comes from obedience to Him (Col 4:6).

Prayerfully use this "cheat-sheet" to assess the words you speak this week. If you can't definitively say YES to all 3, then STOP. Take time to pray and wait for Godly wisdom. Consider if God is revealing something that needs to change in your heart first.

### BEFORE I speak:

1. Is it true?
2. Is it helpful, or necessary?
3. Does it reflect Christ?

YES (to all 3)

Speak truth with love & gentleness

NO (to any)

STOP + PRAY  
wait on God's wisdom

- In what situations, or around what company, do you need to ask yourself these questions the most? Where do you struggle with waiting on the Lord's guidance and wisdom before you speak? Why?
- Is there an area in your life where your words are revealing a deeper need for a heart change or a spiritual transformation? Spend some time in prayer over that area today. Ask God to meet you there.

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Proverbs 13:3** ~Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.
- **Proverbs 18:21** ~The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
- **Proverbs 12:18** ~The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- **1 Peter 3:10** ~For whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

## Day 3 - Discerning words - earthly wisdom

**Read:** James 3: 13-16

With so many sources of information bombarding us daily, we can easily find ourselves being deceived. If you've ever believed the false statement - "we only use 10% of our brains", then you've been a victim of the "Illusory Truth Effect". This effect happens when a statement is repeated over and over again, until your brain becomes familiar with hearing it. Psychological studies have shown that each time something is repeated, our brains become more confident that the statement is true regardless of the source or rational thinking. We see this effect used in certain ideologies, political propaganda, conspiracy theories, advertising, and on social media. It explains why mis-information can be so rapidly spread and believed as truth without question. Most of us are surrounded by an overwhelming amount of this so-called earthly wisdom each and every day. Therefore, even as followers of Christ, we can be deceived into accepting untruths or false ideologies.

Earthly wisdom focuses our hearts & identity on self. This manifests as self-ambition, envy, pride, control, or striving for success & recognition. It aligns our worth, values, and identity with our own selfish desires and measures it by our own personal performance. When we subscribe to this, we are placing ourselves on God's throne in our lives. We are attempting to attain the unattainable, and we will never have peace or fulfillment while striving to be our own god. How do we discern when our way of thinking, or our words, are coming from earthly wisdom instead of from God? Prayerfully ask which of these earthly beliefs you may be accepting as truth in your life.

Earthly Wisdom	False core belief:	Godly Wisdom:
Need to make others happy	My worth is in pleasing others	My identity is based on pleasing God first (Gal 1:10, Col 3:23)
Work hard, do more, hustle and grind culture	My value is based on my productivity & performance	I am already accepted and loved by Christ, my contentment only comes from Him (Eph 2:8-10, Matt 11:28-30)
Need to be in control of my life	Security comes from control	True peace comes from trusting God for my safety, security, and provision (Prov 3:5-6, Phill 4:6-7)
If someone hurts me, I get even	Retaliation is my protection	Wisdom pursues peace, healthy boundaries, accountability & forgiveness (James 3:17-18, Rom 12:17-21)
Need to be right, or the best	Winning & success prove my worth	Truth & love belong together (Eph 4:15, 1 Cor 13:1-2, Micah 6:8)
I don't need help, I've got this	Independence is strength	Humbly accept our need for God (Ecc 4:9-10, 2 Cor 12:9-10)
I deserve better than this	My rights & preferences come first	Jesus modeled humility and servanthood (Phil 2:3-8)

- Which of these false earthly beliefs do you struggle with the most? Are there more false beliefs that you could add to this list?
- Where and when are you listening to earthly wisdom in your life? How could you begin to move away from that source?

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Jeremiah 31:33** ~“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- **Colossians 3:16** ~Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.
- **Philippians 2:3** ~Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.
- **Proverbs 15:1** ~A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- **Hebrews 3:13** ~A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger
- **Proverbs 3:5-7** ~Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

## Day 4 - Words from heavenly wisdom

**Read:** James 3:17-18

Yesterday we learned how our brains retain and understand the information we've heard repeatedly & consistently over time. Whether bad or good, this information shapes our hearts and minds. This is why the Lord cautions us to guard our hearts and minds, and to be intentional about what sources of wisdom we allow in our lives. We want our brains to retain God's words, and not the false messages from the world around us. Of course, long before psychologists ever thought to study this idea, God knew how our brains worked. He uses this exact concept throughout scripture as He repeats Himself frequently in His words. He even suggests the idea of writing His words on our hearts & minds (Jeremiah 31:33).

Receiving, believing and implementing heavenly wisdom into our words and actions is different than just knowing it. This is the deep slow deep work that comes from consistently, repeatedly, and intentionally reading in His Word, and allowing His Spirit to transform our hearts and lives.

When we speak with heavenly wisdom, God can use our words as an instrument to bear His good fruit in our lives. In our scripture for today James lists exactly what that fruit should look like. He says heavenly wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive or humble, full of mercy, impartial, and sincere.

As we think about what Godly wisdom looks like in our daily lives, take a look at this simple chart. As you reflect on this, think about your recent conversations, social media feeds, texts with friends, the books you read, and even the podcasts or news you subscribe to.

Earthly Wisdom:	Godly Wisdom:
Promote yourself	Humble yourself
Protect yourself	Trust God
Pursue winning	Pursue peace
Self first	Others first
Do what feels right	Do what honors God
Value & Identity = performance	Value & Identity = Christ

- Where does the wisdom from those sources align? Is it mostly from God, or mostly from the world? How often are you listening to sources earthly wisdom verses Godly wisdom in your life?
- In the conversations that you've had this week, are your words reflecting an inner Godly wisdom or earthly wisdom? Where do you struggle the most with your words reflecting the character and wisdom of Christ?

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Proverbs 17:27** ~The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.
- **Ephesians 4:29** ~Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- **Ephesians 4:5** ~Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
- **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.
- **Proverbs 16:28** ~A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.
- **Proverbs 20:19** ~A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.
- **Titus 3:2** ~to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

## Day 5 - Wise words in practice

When we think about putting wise words into practice, we aren't talking about proper grammar, extensive vocabulary, or needing a master degree to decipher someone's commentary on a subject. As we have learned this week in James 3, words of Godly wisdom are truly about reflecting God's character in our lives. When we do this our actions & words will reveal good fruit in obedience to the Spirit. We cannot just try harder, or practice being wiser with our words in our own strength. We have to surrender our hearts and minds to Him in order to put these wise words into practice.

As you read over this list, allow the Spirit to speak and guide your words & actions today. Let God put His words of wisdom into practice!

1. **Pause** - Ask yourself, *"do I need to say this right now?"* True wisdom practices restraint and creates space & time for the Spirit to intervene between our emotions and our reaction. This brings peace, order, and a calm tone to otherwise chaotic situations.
2. **Listen** - Listen with humility, openness, and a desire to understand. Challenging moments are rarely improved with long explanations, unsolicited advice, wrong assumptions, or asking too many questions. Many times people need empathy before solutions, listening before trying to immediately relate, and affirmation before judgement or criticism. True wisdom takes the time to hear what the other person is actually saying before planning it's response.
3. **Truth + grace** - Before speaking ask yourself, *"Is it true?, Is it necessary?, Is it helpful?, Is it loving?"* Truth without grace wounds. Grace without truth enables brokenness & sin. True wisdom speaks with honesty, holds others accountable, and has healthy boundaries WITH the purpose of showing God's love and grace.
4. **Gossip is NEVER ok (even "just venting")** - Ask yourself, *"Would I say this if the person were standing beside me?, Why am I sharing this?, Is this my story to share?, Would I want someone sharing this about me?, Am I seeking a solution or sharing to spread information?, Am I sharing facts or assumptions & rumors?, Will this produce good fruit?"* Gossip produces the fruits of embarrassment, judgement, suspicion, division, and elevating oneself. True wisdom produces fruits of healing, reconciliation, protection, and genuine help.
5. **Own your mistakes** - True wisdom says *"I'm sorry., I was wrong., Can you forgive me?"*. Godly wisdom happens in a humble heart.

As you read over this list and put it into practice, which ones did you struggle with the most? Are there certain situations you struggled with wisdom more than others? Confess this to the Lord & ask Him to help you learn and grow to practice better wisdom in those areas today. 5