

# Controlling the Tongue

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## **Scripture Reading: James 3:1-12, Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 12, Matthew 12:36-37**

The idea of “controlling the tongue” is not just religious-speak to me. It is not just a heading in my Bible or a topic that generates good, honest conversation at a Bible study. It is one of the most sincere prayers of my heart and one of the darkest manifestations of my sin.

Especially since becoming a mother, I’ve realized my words have the power to give life and hope or to steal them away. I’ll never forget the look in my young daughter’s eyes the first time I tossed sharp, careless words at her like a grenade and saw her wince at the explosion. I surrendered my tongue and its words to the Lord that day, and I’ve surrendered them countless times since.

In chapter 3, James describes the tongue as the epitome of hypocrisy. “With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God’s likeness” (James 3:9). And here’s the kicker: We are all guilty of this—every one of us, in every phase of life.

James does not give us a tidy “how-to” at the end of this passage, no foolproof answer for ending this struggle which takes place in each of us. Instead, he provides one analogy after the other, illustrating the way our words can bring life and direction, or death and destruction.

*“So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest” (v. 5).*

Our words have more power than we usually care to acknowledge. If we knew—really knew—the weight our words carry in each person who receives them, how would that change what we say? Would the flames of hypocrisy overcome us if we could see the fires we spark?

This forthright passage from James should bring us to our knees. **Our struggle to control our tongues and rein in our thoughts should cause us to plead to the Father for wisdom in how to honor Him and build up others with our words.** This is just what James encourages us to do in the first chapter of his letter:

*"Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).*

Praise God that He hears us!

Just as grace pours into the darkest parts of our hearts, igniting the hope of the gospel, so does His grace pour over the fires we start with our words. The hope of Jesus and the forgiveness of the Father extend to this place, too. As a woman who's flung more sparks than I care to admit, I am so incredibly thankful.