

The Power of the Tongue

Learning Not Just How to Speak, but How to Talk Like Jesus

Pastor Mark Johnson

Friday, August 7, 2026

Program Summary

In this Friday edition of Mark & Friends, Pastor Mark Johnson continues the study of James 3 and its sobering teaching about the tongue. Words can guide, encourage, correct, wound, ignite conflict, or bring life. Pastor Mark challenges believers to move beyond merely learning how to speak and instead learn how to talk: when to speak, when to remain quiet, what attitude to use, and how to make sure our words reflect a heart being shaped by Jesus. The discussion also applies James's warning to social media, texting, email, correction, counsel, and the way believers respond when other people's words hurt.

Key Takeaways

- James 3 compares the tongue to a bit, a rudder, and a fire: something small can exert enormous influence.
- Learning to speak is not the same as learning how to talk. Mature communication includes timing, tone, restraint, motive, and concern for the hearer.
- Words reveal the condition of the heart; guarding the tongue therefore begins with allowing God to examine the heart.
- Proverbs 18:21 reminds us that death and life are in the power of the tongue, and our words can either discourage or strengthen others.
- Jesus warns in Matthew 12 that our words matter before God, giving believers a serious reason to practice restraint and wisdom.
- The biblical principles governing speech apply equally to Facebook posts, texts, emails, and every other form of communication.
- Correction is not automatically an attack. Wise people receive counsel, pray over it, and discern whether God is using it to redirect them.
- We need to distinguish cheerleaders from counselors: encouragement is valuable, but trusted counselors must be allowed to tell us difficult truth.
- Before giving counsel, we should understand whether the other person has invited us into that role and is prepared to receive it.

- Encouraging words can bring life: noticing faithfulness, hard work, service, worship, or perseverance can strengthen someone for years to come.

Scripture References

- James 3:2-12
- Proverbs 18:21
- Matthew 12:36-37
- 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- 1 Samuel 17:28-37
- 2 Samuel 16:5-14
- Psalm 119:165
- Proverbs 15:1
- Proverbs 12:18
- Ephesians 4:29

Quote of the Day

"Have you simply learned how to speak, or have you put rules to your life that have taught you how to talk?"

Broadcast Notes

Pastor Mark begins with the delightful example of his two-year-old granddaughter learning to speak in sentences. Her parents, however, are teaching something deeper: how to talk appropriately. He compares uncontrolled speech to a broken water pipe that floods everything around it. From there, the group examines the destructive and life-giving power of words through James 3, Proverbs 18, and Matthew 12. David's life provides a biblical case study in enduring harmful words, false accusations, family misunderstanding, and public criticism. The conversation then moves naturally into modern communication, emphasizing that a social-media post is effectively speaking into a crowded room. Pastor Mark distinguishes correction from attack and urges believers to receive wise counsel rather than surrounding themselves only with cheerleaders. He closes by asking how 'flammable' we are when attacked and by reminding listeners that Spirit-led words of encouragement can bring genuine life to another person.

♥ Practical Applications

- Before speaking in a tense moment, ask whether your words are necessary, true, loving, timely, and likely to help.
- Practice reflective listening by repeating back what you think another person meant before reacting to it.
- Review your recent texts, emails, or social-media posts as though you had spoken them aloud in a crowded room.
- Identify one trusted counselor who has permission to tell you difficult truth, and commit to prayerfully considering that counsel.
- Distinguish correction from attack. Do not reject wise counsel merely because it is uncomfortable.
- Ask God to show you what your speech reveals about the condition of your heart.
- When another person's words ignite anger, remember Psalm 119:165 and ask God to make you less spiritually flammable.
- Before offering unsolicited advice, consider whether you actually have a counseling relationship with that person.
- Give one specific, sincere word of encouragement today to someone whose faithfulness, work, service, or perseverance you have noticed.
- Pray over your words before teaching, singing, posting, counseling, correcting, or entering an important conversation.

Today's Challenge

For the next twenty-four hours, practice a deliberate 'tongue audit.' Before significant conversations, texts, emails, or posts, pause and ask: Will these words bring life or unnecessary fire? At the end of the day, review one moment you handled well and one you would change. Ask Jesus to shape both your heart and your speech, then intentionally speak one life-giving word to someone who needs encouragement.

Closing Prayer

Father, You have given our words tremendous power. Forgive us for the times we have spoken carelessly, reacted defensively, gossiped, wounded others, or used our voices without seeking Your wisdom. Search our hearts and teach us not merely how to speak, but how to talk in a way that honors Jesus. Give us humility to receive correction, discernment to recognize wise counsel, restraint when silence is best, and courage when truth must be spoken in love. Guard our conversations, texts, emails, and social-media posts. Make our words instruments of grace, encouragement, truth, and life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson

Pastor of Calvary Church, Springfield

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield and regularly joins the Mark & Friends studio audience for verse-by-verse Bible discussion. His teaching combines careful attention to Scripture with practical illustrations drawn from family, ministry, counseling, and everyday life. In this continuation of the study through James, Pastor Mark challenges believers to recognize the spiritual weight of their words and to let Jesus shape not only what they say, but how and why they say it.

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Mark & Friends Welcome Song

*We're glad you're here, we're glad you're here,
Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.
It's so good to see you, we hope that it's clear,
Everyone loves you, we're glad you're here.*

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship sweeter.

Knowing you're here. It's so good to see you. We hope that it's clear.

Everyone loves you. We're glad you're here. Reading from James 3, 2-6 For we all make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature and set on fire by hell.

That was James 3, 2-6. And that was Christi reading. And before her, Liz was praying up the program and shared a special psalm with us all.

We appreciate that. We're all prayed up, and I trust a blessing awaits you. Oh, magnify the Lord with me.

Let us exalt his name together. It's finally Friday, August 7, 2026. We're continuing our study through the book of James.

And last week we ended on talking about taming the tongue. Well, there's so much more to that concept, to that truth, to that practice, to being able to model Christ to a hurting world because of what we say and how we say it. Even the expressions we use, the nonverbal communication, often can convey more than the words you actually use.

But we're going to continue looking at taming the tongue. And joining us, as always, is Pastor Mark Johnson of Calvary Church here in Springfield. We appreciate him.

And recently I talked to you about his special devotional sharing at the Ministerial Alliance of Springfield and vicinity. Appreciate how he pours into pastors and ministry leaders, his passion for God's Word and his desire for all to come to know Jesus. So, Pastor Mark, we're going to continue talking about taming the tongue.

As Christi has already read, this book of James is loaded with the importance of watching the words we use. Mark, we commonly know 1 Corinthians 13 as what? The love chapter. And it's really worth digging into thinking about what the words in that chapter say about the nature of our heart and how we should see the world.

In the same sense, James chapter 3 is known as the chapter of the tongue. And the tongue points it out in James chapter 3. It's a very powerful instrument and we all use it, most all of us do, one way or the other. I have a two-year-old granddaughter right now.

She's a beautiful little girl. And we say she's learning to talk. And it's kind of amazing to be around her because she will, all of a sudden she's speaking in sentences.

You know, it used to be it would be a word and now she's talking in sentences. And it's just delightful to hear her talk. Now, what I would challenge us to think about is this.

Sometimes people learn to speak, but they never learn how to talk. She is a little girl. She is two years old.

And I'm grateful as I watch her that we're not just celebrating that she's learning to speak, but that her parents are teaching her how to talk. They will say to her, that's not appropriate. They will say to her, if you're going to talk that way, we're going to take you in the other room and have a talk.

You know, they will say to her because they're trying to teach her not just how to speak, but how to talk. And so that's one of the challenges I would put to everybody listening today. Have you simply learned how to speak? Or have you put rules to your life that have taught you how to talk? When to talk? When not to talk? How to talk? What to say? What attitude to say it in? How much weight of pain come in your words? And how much strength of encouragement comes in your words? That reminds me a lot of the concept, the difference between hearing and really listening.

You know, the importance of that same kind of concept. Yep. One of the ways that we listen is we repeat back to the person.

So I would tell you, if you think you hear something, did you mean this? And sometimes you'll be kind of offensive. Did you mean this? And they'll go, oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. I didn't mean that.

I didn't mean it that way. So, yeah, learning to listen is a key thing. Learning how to talk and to make sure people understand.

Some people are like a broken pipe. I had a broken pipe in my basement once. My son had taken a hose outside and took off chasing the dogs with it and ran out a hose and pulled the pipe right out of the wall.

I'm at church and I get a phone call from one of my daughters and she says, the basement is flooding right now. And I had to rush home and turn the valve off that shut the water off in the house because the water was just flooding out of that broken pipe. There was no control on it.

Some people are like that with their words. They're like a broken pipe. And it just spews out all over the place, causing damage many times.

So it really behooves us to take a look at have we learned just how to speak or have we learned how to talk? I think that's what this passage is talking to us about. And I was thinking of that other proverb or the saying about what comes out of our mouth is reflective of what's really in your heart, too. So it's not even just what you say.

It's kind of what's being said that's coming out of your heart. Yeah, we start by judging our heart. James 3.6a says this, The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

It can do real damage. Somebody's going to read Proverbs 18.21 for us. Who's got that? Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Okay, so sitting in this room with all my friends here today, we've probably all felt the power of the tongue, the power of a word that encourages us to write things, the power of a word that discourages us and moves us away from writing things. So we need to judge ourselves. Matthew 12.36 and 37.

Does somebody have that verse? Reading from Matthew 12, verses 36 through 37. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words, you will be acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned.

Well, there's a startling passage, Matthew 12.36 and 37. That gets right after us, doesn't it? Listen, you're going to be judged, not by some of your words, by every word. By it, you're going to be acquitted, and by it, you're going to be condemned.

That should put a big caution sign up in front of us to be careful what we say and what we do. If we really believe the Word of God, we will spend time not only learning how to speak, but learning how to talk. Let's back up and look at one of our favorite characters.

We look at King David. So we can be fascinated by some of the things that he did. But David, not a perfect man, but he didn't always have it easy either.

When God rejected Saul and sent Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint the next king, they didn't even think enough of him to bring him up to be considered. He was out with the sheep, out in the pasture someplace. Samuel becomes confused because he doesn't see who the king is going to be, and finally calls for him, and he comes up and anoints him the next king.

Now, do his brothers buy it? Nope. They don't buy those words. They think he's confused in some way.

In fact, not even the father because he wasn't even drawn in because didn't Samuel have to say, like, is there another son you have somewhere? Oh, yeah. Well, yeah. Actually, yes, exactly what happened.

Now, later, David would take food to his brothers and hear Goliath, and David started talking like a king. And his brothers told him what? Shut up. You're going to get yourself in trouble.

When servants start talking like kings, sometimes they're very misunderstood. His brothers rebuked him and told him he needed to know who he was. His brothers didn't see him as a king.

They saw him as a conceited, wicked boy. So I think God loves the loyal. I think that's one of the reasons God loved David so much, is he was loyal to Saul.

But Saul didn't see it that way. And you know what? Part of it was, if you read through the Psalms, there were people speaking to Saul, saying things to Saul that weren't true. Even later, as David becomes king, his troubles, and he writes about his troubles throughout the Psalms, there's always these detractors.

There's always these people that would lead them away from being loyal to Saul. So in the Psalms, we see kind of how we approach words when we're attacked and we believe we have the promises of God. When he was sick, some said, good, he's going down now.

When there was famine in the land, what did they say? It's David's fault. When enemies attacked, what did they say? They're going to get him now. This will be it.

This will be the end of David. When Absalom betrayed him, he fled from Jerusalem. And what happens to him? He runs into a man, Shimei, on the road who curses him and attacks him.

When things are going good, they made up lies about him, and they plotted against him. In fact, the most used weapon against him in the Psalms that he pleads about is deliverance from people's tongues. And I bet that's probably the case for most of us.

We get attacked by people and by their tongues. Now, how do we deal with that? How do we approach that? And question, would this also apply to social media, the Internet, texting posts? Because it seems like with the technology, we do maybe some less talking and a lot more posting, texting, social media, e-mails. I've asked people many times, would you walk into a crowded room of your friends and say what you just said on Facebook? And they'll go, oh, I'm just going to stumble around with them.

But that's exactly what we're doing. We're speaking to a crowd of not just of our friends, but of acquaintances and others and their friends sometimes. And we're making this proclamation.

So, yes, any place where we communicate something, any place where we communicate, we've got to look and say, is this godly? Does it meet the rules of the kingdom? I'm giving this voice to be an encourager. I'm giving this voice to be a blessing. Now, there's a balance here, because sometimes the word of encouragement may be a word that's hard to hear.

And that's where we come back, Mark, to what you said. Do we hear rightly? Do I see the motive and the attribute? So a person says to some young couple that have known each other for about three weeks, about a minute and a half, and they announce, we're getting married. And somebody goes, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

You guys have only known each other for two weeks. Slow down. Take your time.

Get to know his family. Get to know her family. Get to know each other.

And they go, why are you raining on my parade? Why are you trying to squash out love? Why are you attacking me? Well, they're not attacking them. They're trying to give them wisdom. Sometimes wisdom feels harsh to the person who just wants to do what they want to do.

Now, that is a condition of the heart. When a wise man receives correction, it doesn't mean he accepts every correction. He receives it.

He brings it in. He mulls it over. He may even go to others to talk to them about it to see if it's really wisdom and if he's just caught up in the excitement of the moment or the emotions of the moment.

Also, I was thinking, if he is wise, he's most likely going to take it to the Lord, see what the Lord says. So I thought about this, Pastor Mark, because it's not only what we say to people, but hopefully when we get older we learn from our mistakes and we realize it's not only what we say, it's how we say it and who we say it to. Because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

It's good to think about how is this going to affect this person if I say this. And Mark, why I brought up the social media and the posts and the texting, because people say, well, I haven't broken any of the Ten Commandments. I've been pretty good.

I should get into heaven. But there's verse six, the tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire.

And it itself is set on fire by hell. And I'm just thinking it's really James' way to say none of us are going to measure up. All of us fail, falter.

If it's just measuring us according to our speech, there's nobody that can say, oh, I haven't ever gossiped or said something wrong or communicated poorly. Yeah, I would back up here just a little bit, Mark, and remind us that counsel is very important in our life. Going to God sincerely, openly, and praying for his will to be done, not our will to be done.

Praying for understanding. So you come to me with a corrective word or a directive word, and do I weigh out? Hey, Mark's my friend. He wouldn't just be picking on me.

Maybe I better pray about this. And I take that word to the Lord, and I begin to pray about it. And I'm open to the Lord speaking to me.

Now, I would tell anyone, though, just the idea of me saying I'm a lone ranger, and I can just go pray and get the answer. No, God's answer is that there's wisdom in good counsel, that we protect ourselves with good counsel. Now, I have to know who are my cheerleaders and who are my counselors.

We have a basketball team at the school, and I always make fun of them sometimes, the cheerleaders, because they'll be saying, you know, they'll be doing the cheer. We're the Saints, and we can't be beat. And I'm looking up at the score, and we're down 20.

And I'm going, well, it looks like we're getting beat. It looks like we're going to lose tonight. You know, your cheerleaders will cheer for you all the time.

That's what they do. All the time. Yeah, that's their job.

That's what they do. You know, I can fumble over a message at church, and the people who really love me and are my cheerleaders will come and say, Pastor, that was great today. And I'm sitting there going, no, it wasn't.

It wasn't great. I'm embarrassed that I said it. You know, I'm embarrassed I said it the way I said it.

But your counselors help you. I don't go to my doctor to go to a cheerleader. I don't go to my car mechanic to say, oh, you'll be fine.

Just keep driving it that way. You know, you're not doing this and this, and we need to fix this, or you're going to be stranded out on the road. I don't want him to be a cheerleader.

I want him to tell me the truth. I want him to fix what the problem is. So I've got to know the difference between my cheerleaders.

Most moms and dads fall on the cheerleader side. Now, they may speak some correction, but they love us so much they're going to do a lot of cheering. And so I've got to be careful.

Now, some dads and some moms can be harsh. I understand that. But there should be people in my life that can say anything to me, and I will take it seriously because they're my counselors.

They're my co-laborers, and I'll go pray about it. I need to know, on the flip side of that, I need to know who I am in the person's life I'm talking to. I cannot be a counselor to somebody who doesn't see me as a counselor.

They will not allow it. They'll resent it. They'll be mad at me.

They'll say, what business is this of yours? They'll push me away from them. That happens even to pastors. You get pushed back.

They don't want your counsel. Here's how they say it. They walk up, and they don't even know they're saying it.

We're moving. We're getting married. We're doing this.

And they don't come up and say, Pastor, I'm thinking about getting a new job and moving to this city. Will you pray with me about that? They don't come up and say, Pastor, we've been dating for a while, and we're thinking about getting married. Would you walk through some counseling with us and help us come to a good decision? They don't use us as a pastor.

Now, some do that. They come up and say, Hey, I got this teenage kid. What do I do next? What's going on? And they're looking for counsel.

They're looking for a pastor to speak into their life or a friend to speak into their life. So I've got to know who I am. Now, let me give you a couple of questions.

One is, how flammable are you? Psalms 119, 165 says, Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them. So when I'm being attacked, when somebody says something negative to you, how flammable are you? Can their flaming tongue put you on fire? The closer that person is to us, the more intense the flame. I've got to be careful with really negative people in my life.

So listen, there's a difference between correction and attacking, right? There's a difference between those things. Some people just want everyone to agree with them. It's just that simple.

So everything's seen as an attack. Now, we watch and guard our mouth. Have I learned to really talk or have I learned to speak? What's going on in life? In thinking about the power that is in our tongue, the verse that we read in Proverbs 18, 21, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Not just the tongue, but the power that it wields. And I always thought it was me only. The person that I was talking about or to was I could offer them life and death, which I think it does mean that.

But it also means life and death in me. That's showing the condition of my heart. So the power is great.

Liz, as a pastor, I'm in church all the time and I hear many singers. And there's a lot of good singers. There's a difference between the singer who sings and the worship leader who has a sense of the moving of the Holy Spirit.

And when they sing, they can flow with that spirit and draw others into that place. So over the years, there's been many times when I've talked to singers and said, You have a good voice. Are you praying through this song before you come up? Are you thinking about what it means? Are you thinking about what it could mean to others? Are you asking the Spirit of God to lead you? There are other times I've said to the singers, When you sing, I sense that the Spirit's leading you while you're singing.

Keep that up. Keep listening to that. Keep following that.

There's a big difference between that. So I would say when we see, yes, there's power in the tongue for evil for good. Sometimes looking at somebody and seeing, hey, you're a good worker, especially the young kids.

You're a good worker. Keep it up. Keep going.

God will take you places if you'll work. You're a good student. Congratulations.

Keep studying. Keep working hard. That encouraging word leads and blesses people.

And so when you sense that in you, when you look at somebody and they sing and they bless you on a Sunday morning or they do something that you see as an honorable thing, they've taken care of their mom. Now their mom has passed away, but they took care of her for the last five years. That's an honorable thing that you've done.

And telling them that, words can bring life. Oh, so much more could be said about taming the tongue in chapter three of James. I hope you'll read it this weekend.

Read through it today. Share it with a friend. There's so much to take in as we want to model Christ to a hurting world.

And I wrote down the two words. That's the difference between like a performance and like a worship leader that's given a God honoring presentation. Listening friend, I hope you've been blessed by today's broadcast.

If you know somebody that might benefit from hearing it and the other resources we have at our website, send them to greatnewsradio.org or wluj.org. They can listen to the program and look up the resources and the verses and the things that were shared along with the transcript of today's conversation. Thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family.

This is Mark Burns and Pastor Mark Johnson in a room of friends with the Ministry of Great News Media. God bless you and have a great day, night, and weekend.