

MARK & FRIENDS PROGRAM RESOURCES

Words That Build or Burn

Taming the Tongue, Weighing Influence, and Speaking with
the Love of Christ

Pastor Mark Johnson

Friday, July 31, 2026

Program Summary

In this Mark & Friends conversation from James 3, Pastor Mark Johnson and the studio group examine the enormous influence of our words. A small tongue can guide a life like a rudder guides a ship, or ignite destruction like a spark starts a fire. The discussion also asks us to consider whose voices we allow to shape us, how to receive difficult correction with maturity, and how Christians can use speech to bring healing, truth, encouragement, and the love of Jesus into the lives of others.

Key Takeaways

- Words are never small in their effect. They can direct a life, strengthen a soul, wound deeply, or set an entire situation on fire.
- Every person is being influenced by voices - family, friends, media, leaders, and culture - so believers must weigh those voices against Scripture.
- The Holy Spirit leads believers into truth, confirming and illuminating God's Word rather than contradicting it.
- Rehoboam and Korah show how destructive consequences can follow when we listen to proud, rebellious, or unwise counsel.
- Painful criticism may still contain truth. Spiritual maturity separates the truth of a message from the poor timing, tone, or motive of the messenger.
- Before correcting someone, consider whether that person knows you love them, whether the timing is right, and whether your words are gentle and necessary.
- James warns that praise and cursing should not come from the same mouth. Our speech toward people made in God's likeness must reflect our worship of God.
- Some words are simply off limits in close relationships because love refuses to use intimate knowledge as a weapon.
- Believers are called to seek divine appointments where a timely word, patient listening, or simple affirmation can carry the healing hope of Jesus.

Scripture References

- James 3:1-12
- Proverbs 10:19
- John 16:13
- 1 Kings 12:6-16
- Numbers 16:1-35
- Ephesians 4:29
- Proverbs 15:1
- Colossians 4:6
- Psalm 141:3

Quote of the Day

“Who am I allowing to speak into my life? They may be setting my life on fire, or they may be building me.”

Broadcast Notes

The program opens with Vicki Lutchman reading James 3:1-6 and Pastor Mark Johnson asking listeners to identify the people who have influenced their lives. Members of the studio group remember mothers, pastors, mentors, and Scripture teachers whose words shaped them for good. Pastor Mark then turns the question around: who would say that we have influenced their life, and was that influence Christlike? The discussion explores causation - the voices and choices that have helped form the people we are today. Biblical examples such as Rehoboam and Korah demonstrate the danger of listening to proud or deceptive counsel. The group also challenges the familiar saying that words can never hurt, acknowledging that speech can cause lasting pain. At the same time, even poorly delivered criticism may contain truth that God wants us to consider. The passage's central conviction arrives in James 3:9-10: the same tongue should not praise God and curse people made in His likeness. The program closes by urging listeners to ask the Lord for opportunities to speak encouragement, listen well, and represent Jesus with both words and attitude.

Practical Applications

- Pray Psalm 141:3 each morning: ask the Lord to guard your mouth and watch over the door of your lips.
- Write down the five voices that most influence your thinking. Ask whether each one consistently moves you toward biblical truth, wisdom, humility, and Christlike love.
- Before speaking a difficult word, ask: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is this the right time? Does this person know I love them? Can I say it gently?
- When criticism hurts, take it to one or two spiritually mature people who will be honest rather than merely reassuring.
- Refuse to use a loved one's vulnerabilities as ammunition during conflict. Declare those words permanently off limits.
- Replace one habitual complaint, sarcastic remark, or negative comment with a sincere word of gratitude or encouragement.
- Listen for understanding before offering advice. Sometimes the most Christlike use of the tongue is patient silence.
- Measure teachers, broadcasters, influencers, and even pastors by Scripture. Keep what is biblical and dismiss what is not.
- Ask God to arrange one divine appointment this week in which your words can bring hope, dignity, or the good news of Jesus.

Today's Challenge

For the next seven days, pause before speaking whenever you feel irritated, defensive, or eager to correct someone. Pray, 'Holy Spirit, guide my words.' Then choose one of three responses: speak truth gently, offer encouragement, or remain silent. At the end of each day, thank God for one conversation in which He helped your tongue build rather than burn.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the gift and power of words. Forgive us for the times we have spoken carelessly, repeated what should have remained private, wounded people made in Your likeness, or praised You with the same mouth we used to tear someone down. Guard our lips and renew our hearts. Give us wisdom to recognize the voices that are shaping us, humility to receive truthful correction, and discernment to reject counsel that does not agree with Your Word. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that our speech is gracious, honest, timely, and full of the love of Jesus. Use our words today to encourage the weary, guide the uncertain, heal the wounded, and point people toward Christ. Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson

Pastor and Bible Teacher

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield, Illinois, and regularly joins Mark Burns and the Mark & Friends studio audience for practical, verse-by-verse conversations from the book of James. His teaching combines careful attention to Scripture, pastoral experience, honest personal reflection, and a strong desire to help believers live out their faith in everyday relationships.

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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.

For in many things we offend all. If any men offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horse's mouth, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body.

Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. That is from James 3, verses 1-6.

And that was the beloved Vicki Lutchman, married to Bernie. Everyone knows Bernie. And actually the mother of the beloved Ani Lutchman, who is our staff member here at the WLUJ studios in Springfield.

So it's a family edition here. So we appreciate all the Lutchmans, and the Mankys, and the many influences they have in the Christian community here. But that was the reading of James 3, verses 1-6.

Last week we had an exciting discussion on faith and deeds. And we covered a few verses, but most of it dealt with deeds and works, and the importance of following Jesus, and not doing deeds to be showy or to earn our way into heaven. We do the deeds in an outflow of our love for God.

And what Jesus has done for us is we've accepted Him as Lord and Savior. It's having faith in what Jesus did, not in our abilities or what we can do to earn our way into heaven. So today it's about taming the tongue.

This is a hard one for me, because I do like to talk. And there's that proverb, when words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. Well, it's hard to hold the tongue when you like to talk, but it's an important concept that I think we'll all learn through today.

You know, Mark, as we look at this passage today, I want to ask the question to everybody that's listening. And the question I would ask you is, who's had great influence in your life? We know, we kind of talked about this in the room here a day before we began the show. There are people who are good influences.

There are people who have been bad influences in our life. But I want to give the people in this room a chance to give a shout-out to anybody who's been a good influence in their life, made a good impact in your life. Anybody want to share somebody who's impacted you in a great way? I would say that somebody that really was a positive impact in my life was my mother.

She was the one who really turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. And she was the one that kept confessing about the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and all of those things that I remember. And I remember, too, though, when I was young, when I was 16 years old, working a summer job, how I thought to myself, you know, when she was praying on the phone to one of her friends, I thought, well, I guess that's what women do.

But I didn't realize it's not about women. It's about everybody. It's men, women, it's for all of us.

And then I started realizing all the things that she taught, that she was right about so much of that. And then I had a friend, a very good friend, my best friend, who when he heard my mother talking of things, then he started bringing up things that he turned from. He turned from witchcraft and Satanism to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's a great influence. That's a great influence. Anybody else? Pastor John Crabtree, through his creation of the Junior Bible Quiz program, his big role in that was very influential for me for memorizing Scripture, for memorizing the teachings of the Bible at a very young age.

Good. Anybody else come by a big influence in their life? Well, naturally, we should all say our parents, but sometimes that's not always the case. For me, I would like to say it was my pastor, Mark Johnson, sitting here.

Like I said in a previous taping, that he knows my family pretty well. And he was always there, and he had much patience with me. So for that, I am very—actually, I had much patience with a couple of my boys, too.

And for that, I am very thankful. Thank you, Pastor Mark. Love your boy.

Your son, Caleb, he's special to me. He's a great young man doing great things right now. And that's very kind of you to say.

I think of great influences in my life. I think of some really great godly men who've been back to my life over the years. But I also think, you think about the bad—and all of us have probably not only had good influence.

We've had people come into our life that were negative influences. And I remember when I was just a young teenager, there was this young guy, a few years older than me, kind of came into my life. And I was just a young, naive kid.

I didn't know much. And this guy and I were talking, and my dad walked up to me. And he looked at me, and he said, You are never to be with him again.

Do you understand that? And he said it in such a way, if you knew my dad, he could be in charge, that I knew there was no arguing. There was no fussing. I was not to be with this guy again.

It was going to be trouble if I was. I didn't understand that call until about 10 years later, when I realized more about this man and what this man's agenda was in life. Bad influences can come into our life, too.

Now, how do they come into our life? Generally, good and bad influences come into our life with words, with how they talk to us. A mom who talks to us. A friend who talks to us.

Think about this. Who would say about you that you have been a great influence in their life? Who would look and say that person? And would it be a good influence? Or would it be a bad influence? I've had to go back to people that I felt like I was a bad influence in their life and apologize and say, I was foolish. I did not represent Christ well.

I did not make wisest choices when I was young. I was dumb. I was immature.

I thought I was smarter than I was. I was arrogant. I was whatever.

I was not a good influence. I was a bad influence. You think about somebody like a Dave Ramsey.

I've met Dave one time. I don't know if anybody else in the room has ever met David or not. I met him one time.

But a lot of us have been really influenced in our finances by Dave Ramsey. He's helped us see things and do things by his words. So here's something to think about for everybody.

We don't think about this a lot. Causation. What has caused my circumstances? Good or bad? If I'm rich or poor? If I'm happy or unhappy? If I'm miserable or I'm at peace? What has led me from being a child that was pretty innocent, pretty filled with joy, maybe as growing up, unless something really unseemly was happening in your life as a child, to the person you are today? What's caused that? See, if I don't look at the cause of that legitimately and learn how to put an end to it, I'll never get out of it.

I'll be ensnared in it. I'll be trapped in it. So somebody's words.

Somebody's saying something to me. I remember once there was a time we did a series of messages. And at the end of these messages, we were talking about love, and we talked about how within the messages, we were just talking about I love you, God loves you.

And with that series of messages, we stopped doing that. And a person came up to me in the entryway after one of the services and said, Why did you stop saying you love me? And I said, Well, that was part of that sermon series. And the person looked at me and said, The only place I go where anybody tells me they love me is here.

It's the only place I go. We can be a people who bring healing by beginning to do the right things, but we also have to recognize, Why am I the way I am today? And then I have to look at my actions, because prudence is a part of the kingdom of God. Prudence is the ability to see where my actions are taking me.

And some of my actions are who am I allowing to speak into my life? Who am I allowing to have influence in my life? They may be setting my life on fire, or they may be building me. What are they doing? And so becoming aware of that. So you know who your influence is like.

We know who our influences are like, but who do we act like? I knew a fellow once. He talked to me about his mom and dad and how they acted, and he hated the way they acted. And yet he acted the exact same way.

I've been around people who hated that their dad was an alcoholic, and yet they become an alcoholic. And you're like, Why did you ever begin to do that influence in life? I have to look at causation. I have to look at what's leading me places, who's influencing me, what's driving me, and how am I being led.

And then as a Christian, how am I being an influence in other people's lives? Mark, one thing I thought of, and I just wrote it down, as I wrote down who speaks into my life, would you say the Holy Spirit? Because I think many times when I pray and open up the Bible, I ask God, Reveal truth to me, Holy Spirit, help me understand or ascertain truth from these words. So is that somebody that you're thinking of? Well, Mark, we talked about this before. There's a whole genre, if you will, of Christianity that says, that if anybody says, God speaks to me, they make fun of him, make light of him.

They say, Oh, so you're now hearing from God. No, the voice of God is closed. It's only in the Bible.

You can't hear God any other way than the Bible. And yet the Bible says that Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit was going to come to lead us into all truth, to reveal to us. Well, how's he going to do that unless he speaks to us? I don't hear an audible voice when I hear God.

I hear a confirmation of his word, a revelation of his word. I want you to think with me about two influences. We think of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam, the son of David, and under him the kingdom is divided. Why is it divided? He had two voices speaking into his life. The older, wiser voices saying to him, Hey, the people are concerned.

If you'll tell them I'm going to take care of you, I'm going to be a lighter on you. They'll love you forever, and they'll be loyal to you forever. Then he had these young guys talking to him saying, No, tell them you're tougher than your dad.

You're stronger. You're going to hold them more accountable than your dad did. He took the wrong advice.

He followed the wrong influence. You think about Korah when he decides that Moses has too much power. He says, You've gone too far.

The whole community is holy. Churches get divided over junk like this. People get in fights in churches, and they divide, and people leave, and all kinds of ugliness happens because somebody begins to be a voice of influence that shouldn't be a voice of influence.

Here's what I'll ask you to think about for just a second because this is an important thing. Do you think Korah was seen by the people as a successful guy or as a failure before he came under judgment? Do you think Korah was likable or unlikable before he came under judgment? Do you think Korah believed he was in rebellion, or do you think Korah had even convinced himself that he was doing the right thing? Do you think Korah was a fun guy to be with or a harsh guy to be with? He may have been more fun to hang around with than Moses was. What do you think was happening? We can become the self-deceived person can also deceive us, and because of it, judgment came on the camp.

Thousands of people ended up dying because the wrong influence with the use of what? Words. So I've got to be careful about my words. I've got to be careful about what words I allow into my life.

I've got to be careful to see is this of the Spirit of God or isn't it, and I've got to be somebody who walks wisely in those things. I have a problem, so correct me if I'm wrong. It's a little childhood nursery rhyme.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. I found that words can have a big impact on me. Like a little rudder on a ship, it can control the whole ship.

I just have a problem. If words are kind, I welcome them, but if the words are unkind, I kind of frown, and sometimes people may give me advice, good advice, in an unkind way, in my opinion, and then that still annoys me. What is wrong with me, guys? You're a person of the flesh, just like the rest of us in this room.

So there you go. This is the sin nature rising right to the top of us. But Stan, you're absolutely right.

That nursery rhyme is nonsensical. It's a silly little saying that is words can be very, very painful, and yet sometimes inside of painful words are truth. It takes maturity to work through the spirit of what somebody says something to us about and to see if there's truth in it, to see if maybe there's some accuracy in what they're saying.

Now, sometimes a person just being mean, and I've got to be able to say, I'm not going to pay attention. I'm going to set that aside. That's that person's problem, not my problem.

Now, I'll tell you how I do that. If somebody, you know, I'm a pastor. If somebody in the church accuses me or attacks me, says something negative about me, could this be true or not true, even if they just say something that's harmful to me, I will go to our board of elders.

I'm a part of the elder board, and I will say to them, brothers, this was said to me this week. Now, I used to go to my mom and dad, but they're in heaven now. I remember doing this with my mom and dad once.

I was told this today, and I thought my mom and dad, because that's how I balance that stuff out, is I would go to somebody like that who could speak honestly to me, and most of the time my parents would say, just ignore that. That person's got a problem. Just ignore it.

Ignore it. But I remember one particular time going to my mom and dad and saying, this person said this to me, and my dad looked at me and said, yeah, you ought to listen to that. I was like floored, you know.

I needed to hear it, and that impacted my life. Even though the person didn't say it at the right time, they didn't say it at the right place, they didn't say it with the right attitude, what they were saying was true, and I needed to hear that word. But I needed to separate myself from the time, the place, and the attitude and look at it just on its merit.

And on its merit, my mom and dad looked at me and said, yep, you ought to consider that. And it changed my actions. That changed what I did.

The influence became positive at that point in time. So I think for all of us, we have those times when we need to hear the words of others, and we need to weigh it on its merit. It's better if it comes softly.

It's better, it seems to me, if we can hear it, if it comes from somebody that we know loves us and cares about us. And that should give us some insight. Who should I talk to? Does that person know I love them? Do they know I care about them? Do they know am I coming at the right time and the right place to talk to them about this? Am I gentle with them in what I'm seeing? If I don't have those places, then I may not be the right person to talk to them.

I may just be the right person to pray for them. And so all of that comes down to how we as Christians conduct ourselves and how we allow influences to impact our life. We have a whole culture today of talking heads, people on TV, just like us on the radio, talking.

What do we want? We want to influence you. We want to influence you. And you've got to weigh out our words and say, do these words match up with the Bible? Do they match up with what Scripture says? And I would tell you, if my words don't match up with what Scripture says, just dismiss them, say, Pastor, I had a bad day today, and move on.

So if you talk the talk, you better walk the walk kind of thing? Well, I've had people who weren't walking the walk who still said the truth. We've all seen preachers, pastors, who gifted delivery, not walking wisely, but gifted to deliver things. That makes it really hard to hear.

That makes it really hard to hear. Here's a verse that'll be hard for all of us to hear, but I love it because it goes right to my heart, and I think it'll go to all of our hearts because it's something we probably all struggle with, but this concept in verse 9 and 10, maybe jumping a little bit ahead, but with the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.

My brothers, this should not be. You're right, I don't like hearing that. Just think about that.

With our tongue, we praise God. Our very lips, we sing God praises and say wonderful things about Him, but we curse men, men and women, boys and girls. We curse others who have been made in His likeness, and I love this.

Out of the same mouth comes praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. It's just a perfect verse for us.

I have two grandsons. They're pretty young. They're close, and they really love each other, but they know what to say to hurt the other one.

They know each other so well. When they really get after each other, they go right there. One of the things I've been trying to teach these two boys is inside a family, you know those things.

I've talked about this on this show before. I could go in to my wife today, and in 15 minutes, I could have her in tears, and I know she could come in to me, and in 10 or 15 minutes, have me really upset. You know what that means? Those words are off limits.

I can't say those things. It's against the rules to say those things. I've got to weigh the intent of the person out that's talking to me and say, what is the intent of this? Now, but as we said, sometimes people with wrong intentions may be saying right things, but how do I deal with this person? What do I see the intent of their? So if I'm going to even speak correctively to somebody that I know, I'm asking permission.

Can I share something with you? Listen, I want you to pray about this. I want you to respect me enough to think about it. I'm not asking you to defend it.

I'm not asking you to argue with me about it. I'm not going to argue with you about it. I'm going to lay it on the table, and I'm walking away.

I'm saying this because I love you. Amen. Stop talking to your wife that way.

See you. Talk to you later. I've heard that one definition of a gentleman is someone who does not cause injury unintentionally.

Well, listening friend, there's many concepts in this chapter three of the book of James. I highly recommend you reading it and reading it again and a third and

fourth time. It's filled with lots of great healthy conviction and insights into the importance of what we say and how we say it or the expressions we make.

Sometimes our nonverbals communicate more things than the actual words we're saying. So ask the Lord to lead you into those divine appointments today where you can bring a word of encouragement or affirmation or have that opportunity to represent Jesus in a positive way by what you say. Maybe it's encouraging them.

Maybe it's just listening to them and talking to them and getting to know them through their words. And so words are very important. And we pray you would call on the Lord with your words in a personal way, just like Lord, help me today, Holy Spirit, guide me through this scripture or this reading or ask God to create those divine appointments where you can bring that healing hope, that good news message of Jesus.

Well, if you missed a portion of today's broadcast or want to hear it again or pass it on to a friend, we have a lot of resources at our website, greatnewsradio.org and wluj.org. Click on the Mark & Friends tab and there's a host of different things that you can now learn and pass on to friends. So I hope you'll take that opportunity and be in the book of James this week and be in church this Sunday. Pastors have been praying up their message all week long.

They want to speak to you and be God's vehicle, his voicepiece on what he'd like to say and share to you. And I think you'll find a good body of believers that'll bless you through Sunday's message. Well, thanks for listening.

Thanks for being a part of our Radio Listening family. This is Mark Burns and Pastor Mark Johnson with the Ministry of Great News Media. God bless you and have a great day and night.

Yay! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!

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