

**James 3:1-12**  
**THE WORLD'S SMALLEST**  
**BUT LARGEST TROUBLEMAKER**

James has explained to us two characteristics of the mature Christian: he is patient in trouble (James 1) and he practices the truth (James 2). In this section, he shared the third characteristic of the mature believer he has power over his tongue.

A pastor friend told me about a member of his church who was a notorious gossip. She would “hang on the phone” most of the day, sharing tidbits with any and all who would listen.

She came to the pastor one day and said, “Pastor, the Lord has convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me and others into trouble.”

My friend knew she was not sincere because she had gone through that routine before. Guardedly he asked, “Well, what do you plan to do?”

“I want to put my tongue on the altar,” she replied with pious fervor. Calmly my friend replied, “There isn’t an altar big enough,” and he left her to think it over.

The Christians that James wrote to were apparently having serious problems with their tongues. James had warned them to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). The believer who does not bridle his tongue is not truly religious (James 1:26). We must speak and act as though we were already facing Christ in judgment (James 2:12). When you read passages like James 4:1, 11–12, you get the impression that this assembly must have had some interesting meetings!

The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead the lost to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he can tell lies that could ruin a man’s reputation or break a person’s heart. The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks, and yet we take this ability for granted.

In order to impress on us the importance of controlled speech, and the great consequences of our words, James gave us six pictures of the tongue: the bit, the rudder, fire, a poisonous animal, a fountain, and a fig tree. You can put these six pictures into three meaningful classifications that reveal the three powers of the tongue.

**Power to Direct: The Bit and Rudder (3:1–4)**

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### Power to Destroy: the Fire and Animal (3:5–8)

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### Power to Delight: The Fountain and Tree (3:9–12)

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“Twelve Words That Can Transform Your Life:” If you use these words *and sincerely mean what you say from your heart*, you will find that God will use you to be a blessing and encouragement to others. There are only twelve of them, but they work:

- **“Please” and “Thank you.”** When you use these three words, you are treating others like people and not things. You are showing appreciation.
- **“I’m sorry.”** These two words have a way of breaking down walls and building bridges.
- **“I love you.”** Too many people read “romance” into these words, but they go much deeper than that. As Christians, we should love the brethren and even love our enemies. “I love you” is a statement that can carry tremendous power.
- **“I’m praying for you.”** And be sure that you are. When you talk to God about people, then you can talk to people about God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Outline adapted from: Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Mature Growing up in Christ*; 2nd ed. United States: David C. Cook; 2010.