



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

Words, words, words, words. They have the power to bless and the power to destroy. In this very convicting section of James' letter to Christians, he delivered a penetrating reminder of the power of the tongue—both for good and for evil. Anyone desiring to live out his or her faith with a *hands-on Christianity* must take heed to this pointed lesson on the importance of what we say.



## Getting Started: What's That You Said?

When searching the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have a Bible dictionary and a concordance handy, as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. For this study of James, we recommend you get a copy of *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*. You'll find a description of that and other resources on the last page of this study.

NOTE: From time to time throughout this study, you'll notice bolded page numbers in parentheses next to a question or comment. These page numbers correspond to the section in *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter* where that particular point is discussed.

Read through all of James chapter 3. Read it slowly, as if you're reading it for the very first time.

## Quotable

*An unchecked and unguarded tongue can assassinate someone's character. It can destroy a life. It can ruin a church.*

—Charles R. Swindoll





### *Helpful Hint*

Remember: *Observation* is a critical beginning technique you will want to use to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Paying particular attention to James 3:1–12, make some initial observations about what you see—for instance, *are there any repeated words? Did James use any connecting words that offer clues into what he was emphasizing?* Take some time to make notes on a separate sheet of paper about what you discover.



### **Your Turn in the Scriptures**

Take a few moments to read through the material on James 3:1–12 in your commentary or in that section of your study Bible. Also, look up this passage in either a Bible dictionary or a Bible background commentary.

To get the juices flowing, write down as many Bible passages that you can think of which deal with speech or the proper use of words. You may want to start with the Old Testament book of Proverbs. In fact, if you have a Bible concordance, look up the word *speech* or *tongue* and see how many entries you can find in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Look up several examples and make some notes below about what you discover.

Notes about *speech* and the *tongue* from the Scriptures:

Summarize in one sentence the overall biblical teaching on the power of words, based on your initial search of the Scriptures.



Now take a few minutes to respond to the following questions using the study resources you have available.

In James 3:1–2, we read find a strong warning for anyone desiring to be a teacher in the church (pages 66–67).

What is the command James issued to these believers (verse 1)?

What is the explanation James offered for the command (verse 2)?

Did James say that it is *wrong* to desire to become a teacher in the church?

Let's take a few minutes to examine a correlating passage: 1 Timothy 1:1–7. It might be helpful to read 1 Timothy 1 in its entirety, but pay close attention to verses 1–7 and Paul's specific instructions to Timothy in regard to his teaching ministry at Ephesus.

How does this passage relate to what James was concerned about in James 3?

How does this passage differ from James 3?

Describe briefly how you might use this passage in a Bible study or small group to shed light on James' serious warning about becoming a teacher in James 3:1–2.



In the searching the Scriptures process, after you've done a good amount of study of a passage, you are ready for the process referred to as *exposition*. If you recall from the *Searching the Scriptures* study series, exposition is drawing principles and application *from* the biblical text, verse by verse, and presenting those principles in ways that will be helpful to those with whom you are communicating.

Take some time to read carefully through James 3:3–12. James organized his instruction in three sections. Each section concerning the tongue could become a Bible study, sermon outline, or main points in a brief devotional prepared for a group. Take a close look at the following expositional outline. Fill in some observations next to each set of verses about what seems significant to you.

The Tongue . . . *Small but Powerful* (James 3:3–5)

- Illustration: a horse with bit and bridle . . . (verse 3)
- Illustration: a ship with a small rudder . . . (verse 4)
- Illustration: a fire with a small spark . . . (verse 5)

What would you say is the overarching principle regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?

Principle:

The Tongue . . . *Necessary but Dangerous* (James 3:6–8)

- Fire . . . a danger that has its roots in Satan's realm (verse 6)
- Beasts . . . and their relationship to humans (verse 7)
- Poison . . . the grim perspective of an uncontrolled tongue (verse 8)

What would you say is the overarching principle regarding the tongue, based on these three illustrations?

Principle:



The Tongue . . . *Helpful but Inconsistent* (James 3:9–12) James explained that the human tongue, in offering both blessings and curses, is wholly inconsistent with nature.

- An illustration from humanity: *With our words, we can either bless others or harm them with a curse.* (verses 9–10)
- An illustration from nature: *Both bitter water and sweet water cannot flow from the same fountain.* (verses 11–12)

How did James use an example from nature to make his point about the inconsistency of our words?

Imagine you're teaching this passage to a small group of college students preparing to leave on a week-long mission trip to Haiti. Write down three specific applications they can apply as they interact with each other during the trip, based on the preceding exposition.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, only You truly know the intentions and motivations of my heart. I'm sorry for the words that I have spoken recently that have been dishonoring to You and harmful to others. Place a guard over my mouth, Father, so that by Your Holy Spirit, only gracious words that build others up flow from my mouth. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, I pray, amen.*



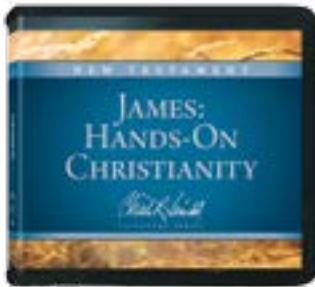
**JAMES**  
**Hands-On Christianity**  
**Bridling the Beast in Your Body**  
*James 3:1–12*

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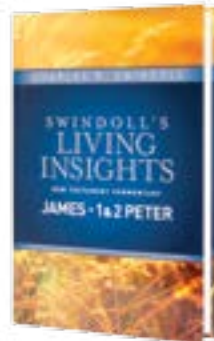
STUDY



Tools for Digging Deeper



**James: Hands-On  
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For the 2016 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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