

# TENSION and TRIUMPH

## Sermon Study - 3.1.2026

### Leader's Corner

The Fire Behind Your Words

James 3:1-18

#### Summary:

James confronts us with a sobering truth: our words are not small. In a cultural moment where everyone has a voice and a platform, James reminds the church that speech carries spiritual weight. Words guide lives like bits guide horses, steer communities like rudders steer ships, and can destroy like sparks ignite forests. Speech is never neutral. It either reflects heaven's wisdom or it is fueled by something darker.

But James doesn't stop at behavior — he goes deeper to the heart. Our speech reveals our soul. The issue isn't simply what we say, but what is shaping us. Earthly wisdom produces jealousy, division, outrage, and disorder. Heavenly wisdom produces peace, gentleness, humility, mercy, and sincerity. The call of James is not to silence our voice but to surrender our hearts so our words become instruments of grace rather than destruction.

The vision for the church is clear: followers of Jesus are to be people whose presence lowers the temperature, whose words build rather than burn, and whose speech sounds like heaven rather than hell. Since no human can tame the tongue, transformation must come from the Spirit. This week's invitation is to let God shape our hearts so our words carry life.

**Main Passage:** James 3:1–18

**Main Idea:** Our words reveal our hearts, and only heavenly wisdom can shape speech that brings life.

**Main Practice:** Pause, Pray, and Speak Life

(Practicing Spirit-led speech that lowers the temperature and builds others up)

### Prayer and Praise

#### Worship Song Suggestions:

- "Lord I Need You" – Humility and dependence on the Spirit
- "Speak O Lord" – Formation through God's Word and truth
- "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" / "Prayer of St. Francis"

#### Liturgical Prayer:

Holy God,  
You spoke the world into being,  
and through Your Word all things hold together.  
Forgive us for the careless words we have spoken,  
the wounds we have caused,  
and the dignity we have denied to those made in Your image.  
Purify our hearts,  
that our words may be gentle, sincere, and full of mercy.  
Light our speech with the fire of Your Spirit,  
so that we may sow peace and reap righteousness.  
Make us people whose voices sound like Jesus,  
whose presence brings calm,  
and whose words carry life.  
Through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

## Group Discussion

1. What illustration or point from the sermon stood out most to you and why?
2. According to James 3, why does James warn about becoming teachers and using our voice carelessly?
3. James gives three images (bit, rudder, spark). What do these teach us about the power of small words?
4. Why do you think James connects speech problems to heart problems rather than just self-control?
5. Where do you most struggle with your words right now? (Home, work, online, friendships, church, etc.)
6. What does heavenly wisdom (James 3:17) sound like in real-life conversations?
7. What would actually change in your relationships if you became slower to speak and quicker to listen this week?
8. What is one situation this week where you want your words to sound more like heaven?

## Further Study

### Additional Scriptures:

- Matthew 12:36–37 — Words reveal our hearts
- Luke 6:45 — Speech flows from the heart
- Proverbs 18:21 — Life and death in the tongue
- Ephesians 4:29 — Speak only what builds up
- Colossians 4:6 — Speech seasoned with grace
- Acts 2:1–12 — Tongues of fire from heaven unite

### Theological Truths:

- Speech is a spiritual act, not merely a social one.
- Transformation of speech requires transformation of the heart.
- Peacemaking speech is evidence of heavenly wisdom.
- The Spirit empowers what self-discipline alone cannot tame.

### Quotes for Reflection:

“Words create worlds.”

“You can be right in argument and wrong in spirit.”

“The tongue reveals what the heart rehearses.”

“A Spirit-shaped heart produces Spirit-shaped speech.”

# Practice

Group Practice — “Pause, Pray, Speak” Exercise

## Step 1 – Reflect (2–3 min)

Ask everyone to silently think of:

- One conversation they regret
- One conversation they fear
- One conversation they need to have

## Step 2 – Pray Together

Pray this simple breath prayer: “Holy Spirit, shape my heart before I shape my words.”

## Step 3 – Practice Speaking Life

In pairs or as a group:

- Speak one encouraging sentence over someone in the room
- Practice phrasing a difficult conversation with gentleness and sincerity

Leaders remind group: Tone is part of obedience.

## Individual Practice for the Week:

The 3–Second Rule of Heavenly Wisdom

Before speaking, texting, or posting:

1. Pause – Is this reactive or reflective?
2. Pray – “Spirit, light this with heaven.”
3. Speak Life – Will this build, heal, or guide?

## Optional challenges:

- Delete one post or message before sending
- Offer one apology
- Speak one intentional encouragement each day