One Small Step - Part 3

# Changing Your Words

# (James 3:1-6)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re so glad to have you with us today as we continue in part three of our four-part message series entitled “One Small Step”. We’ve been looking at little things that can make a big difference and last time we talked about our thoughts, why our thoughts matter so much. Today I would like to talk you about changing your words; just a small thing that will make a big difference in our lives.

Many years ago, Norman Vincent Peale said,

"Change your thoughts and you'll change your world” (Norman Vincent Peale).

There is definitely truth in that statement because the only person that you can change is yourself. We’re going to look at a text from James who presents a similar idea but he suggests that if we change our words, we will change ourselves. And so, to begin we need to understand that our words have incredible powerful. In fact, Solomon said this about our words in Proverbs chapter 18, in verse 21,

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21 NIV).

In other words, we can speak words that are positive or words that are negative. We can speak words that would give life or words that would take life. And so, if we want to take one small step in the right direction, we can make a little change in the words we speak, because they can make a big difference in our lives. If you remember, over the past few weeks I’ve made reference to this well-known quote, Frank Outlaw said,

“Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become character; watch your character, for it becomes your destiny” (Frank Outlaw).

Last time we talked about our thoughts and how important they are because we tend to move in the direction of our thoughts. Craig Groeschel said it this way, he said, “Your life will always move in the direction of your strongest thoughts.” And so, today we’re going to watch our words, because they are very powerful. In fact, Jesus tells us that speaking the wrong words is just as dangerous in a spiritual sense as eating or drinking something that is spoiled, rotten, or poisonous. In Matthew chapter 15, he called a crowd of people to himself saying, “Listen and understand” and then he said this in verse 11,

“What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean” (Matthew 15:11, NIV).

In other words, what we say can be just as dangerous as salmonella or E. coli. And so, the proper use of our words is just as important as sanitizing our dishes and washing our hands with warm water and soap. Now, the people he was talking to were devoutly religious men who were all concerned about the religious practice of eating kosher foods and washing dishes and hands before a meal. But the point that Jesus was trying to get across is that the words you speak can actually sabotage your life like few other things. And so, we have to realize the incredible power of our tongue, the words that we speak, and the ways that we communicate.

A study at the University of Arizona discovered that most people speak around 16,000 words in a day. Now, that’s not to mention the comments and text messages that come through your thumb, on your phone, or your fingers on a keypad. But if you were to add up all those words, all of those thousands of ways that you communicate in a day, it’s a rather sobering thought when Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 12,

“You must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak" (Matthew 12:36, NLT).

And so, Jesus is telling us that when we stand before God, our blessings in heaven, the rewards that we receive, will be impacted by the words that we speak. In other words, just think about all those words as he loads your Instagram account and starts scrolling through. You know, he might ask you, “Why did you say that?” or “How about this? Or maybe “let’s talk about this one on Snapchat,” because they’re all going to come up, including your Facebook, every idle word. Eugene Peterson wrote it this way in his Message Translation, Jesus said,

“Every one of these careless words is going to come back to haunt you. There will be a time of Reckoning. Words are powerful; take them seriously. Words can be your salvation. Words can also be your damnation” (Matthew 12:36-37, The Message).

Now I know that’s pretty intense, but I want you to feel the weight of your words because God gave you something very powerful and he wants you to use it for good and not for evil. You see, everything that comes out of your mouth should bring praise and glory to God and never damnation. And so, this morning we’re going to look at a text from James because he wrote specifically about this. Here is what James said about our words in chapter 3, verse two, he said,

“We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check” (James 3:2 NIV).

In other words, the Holy Spirit tells us through James, that to become the kind of person you want to become, to be in control of your life, you begin by taking control of your tongue and changing your words. He continues in verse three describing the power of the tongue:

“When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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 is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:3-6, NIV).

Now, in these verses James is emphasizing and pointing out the negative aspects of what our words can do, but just the opposite is true as well. And so, just as words can be used to destroy, they can also be used to build. Just as words can be used to hurt, they can also be used to heal. In fact, Solomon used a Hebrew poetic form of parallelism in Proverbs where he often contrasted the difference between words that would build up with words that would tear down. In Proverbs chapter 12, verse 18, he wrote,

“Reckless words pierce like a sword but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18 NIV).

More than likely, every single one of us have been pierced by reckless words, we’ve been wounded, but Solomon encourages us that it is the tongue of the wise that brings healing into our lives. And some of you are nodding because you know it’s that word in season, given at just the right time, that encourages you and gives you the hope to press on. Solomon also said it this way in Proverbs chapter 15, verse four,

“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4, NIV).

Again, I assure you that most of us at some point in our lives have been crushed by the words of a deceitful tongue. They may have been casual and meaningless, but they may also have been much more intentional and just plain spiteful, piercing like a sword, crushing the spirit. And so, what I want to do today is help you to audit your words considering the words that we speak to others, about others, but also to ourselves; three different ways that we should realize that our words are very powerful. Number one, we want to consider how our words can influence others.

## 1. Influences Others

I would imagine that each of us have our own stories of how we have been on the receiving end of hurtful words. It could be as meaningless as someone looking at you and asking, “Did you mean to do that to your hair?” Or maybe, “Why aren’t you married, as old as you are?” But again, it could be something much more intentional, “I never loved you, I can’t stand you, and I wish I’d never met you.” And it’s those words that pierce like a sword, crushing the spirit.

And maybe it was you, you know, you thought you were just messing around, you didn’t mean it, but you just tore someone down, possibly leaving scars that will last for a lifetime. And yet unfortunately that seems to be so much a part of our culture today. I mean, you turn on the Cartoon Network or even the Disney Channel and it doesn’t take long to see that we’re raising up a generation of children to take our sarcastic, disrespectful, and scornful culture to the next level. But it’s not just out there, it’s not just out in the world, because we ourselves can be so quick to tear someone down, to say something at someone else’s expense, when what we’re really saying, is that deep down inside we feel insignificant and insecure. This little voice inside is crying out, “What about me? Aren’t I important?”

And so, we need to understand how our words influence others, that they’re not a joke, you can’t take them back, you can’t erase them once they’ve been said, sent, posted, copied or whatever. And that’s why the apostle Paul said,

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29 NIV).

Now, let me just assure you, that if you’ll just apply this one verse to your life, your marriage, your parenting, your work relationships, and your friendships, then your time here was incredibly worthwhile. And here’s how you do this, the Bible says,

“Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19, NIV).

And so, before you speak, before that word rolls off your tongue, you ask yourself, “Is this word a gift”? In other words, we all know what it’s like to receive a gift, and so when you open your mouth to speak let other people feel like they have received a gift. Let your children, your spouse, your family and friends, feel like you just gave them a present. You see, the bottom line is that as followers of Christ every time we speak, we should be making an intentional choice to be a blessing. In fact, here’s what the apostle Paul encourages us to do in Colossians chapter 4, verse six, he said,

 “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6 NIV).

Let your words always be full of grace, because grace is never deserved, and so let your words overwhelm them with something that they don’t deserve. You let your words be a gift, maybe something they themselves are unwilling to give, but something they desperately need. And so, when you open your mouth you use your words to influence others, encouraging them toward good works, and try this, every time you think something good, just say it. You see, our words can greatly influence others, and so we want to be careful and purposeful to bless and encourage others. And then, number two, by changing your words you can build relationships.

## 2. Builds Relationships

You see, most of our relationships are built upon words. Of course, there are exceptions, but for the most part your relationships are made up of what you and another person say to one another. Now, just think for a moment, about any relationship that you have that is not working, is not healthy, and is not the way it should be. Maybe a relationship with one of your children, your spouse, your parents, or someone at work. But chances are, that the use of words played a serious part in that conflict. In other words, the way that we speak to one another has a lot to do with how well we get along together. Solomon said it this way in Proverbs chapter 16, verse 24,

“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24 NIV).

Notice that he didn’t say, “Pleasant thoughts” but he said “Pleasant words” and so, if we have a good thought, if we think something good, we need to speak it and set it free. You see, our words have the power to give life and blessing to others. It’s those words that will build others up, helping to shape who they become, and so any time you think something good you should say it. Because the other extreme is to tear somebody down. Our words have the power of life and death. In fact, James tells us in chapter 3, verse 9,

“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” (James 3:9-10, NIV).

And so, James says when you curse, insult, or speak harshly against someone, your words are like poison and this should not be. Those words destroy relationships and that’s why the apostle Paul said,

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs…” (Ephesians 4:29, NIV).

But just as relationships can be destroyed by saying the wrong words, they can be built up by saying the right words.

Jim Burns, in his book “The Youth Builder” talks about how important it is to build up others with affirmation. He said, "For every critical comment we receive, it takes nine affirming comments to even out the negative effect in our life. Most young people receive more critical comments a day than encouraging ones. You can have a very positive, life-transforming effect when you develop a ministry of affirmation."

Think for a moment about those close to you, your spouse, your children, your friends, or your parents. How many encouraging comments do you think they hear a day? Do you remember the last time you encouraged your spouse or your child? The Bible tells us in the book of Hebrews, chapter 3, verse 13,

“Encourage one another daily …” (Hebrews 3:13, NIV).

I’d like to encourage you to get in the habit of building up those around you because your words can literally alter the course of history for those that you speak to. It’s just a little thing, but it’s a really big deal also at the same time. Motivational speaker, Charles “Tremendous” Jones, challenges people to say something positive about everything all the time. And that's a big challenge, but worthy of your effort, because the apostle Peter tells us,

"Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Peter 3:10, NIV).

And so, you have the potential to do great good with your words. And not just to other people, but also to yourself. If you’d carefully consider the words that you are speaking, many of you are saying negative things to yourself, you are discouraging yourself, but number three, by changing your words you can encourage yourself.

## 3. Encourages Yourself

You see, many of us are our own worst critics. And it’s internal, it’s all in our minds, and we just kind of talk and talk, and often times we’re just speaking doubt, fear, and negativity. But if you do like we talked about last week, if you have that “to think” list, like the apostle Paul’s list in Philippians chapter 4, you can block out all the negativity. You can focus on those things that are true, excellent and praiseworthy, so that no matter what your circumstances are, no matter what your situation, by changing the way that you think, blocking out all the negative voices, you can face each day with a positive attitude, and it’s just one small step that will make a big difference in our lives.

So instead of allowing yourself to get discouraged listening to the voices saying, “You’ve really blown it this time, you’re such a failure, you never do anything right.” You can do what King David did when he was discouraged, he was in serious trouble, he was worried and the Bible says,

“David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God” (1 Samuel 30:6 NIV).

And I’ll tell you, I do this when I’m tired and discouraged and it really works. Sometimes you’ve just got to get away with the Lord to encourage yourself, to find where your true strength is, and break that cycle of discouragement. You see, when we’re weak then we’re strong, and that’s why the Bible says to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. And so, you’ve got to seek the Lord, letting his Word wash over you, speaking it over yourself, encouraging yourself with words of affirmation, because there’s great power in the Word of God.

You just get into the Word, you seek the will of God, and you muster up all the faith you’ve got, maybe just a mustard seed, and you speak words of encouragement to yourself. You speak words of life and not words of death. You speak words of healing and not cursing. The Bible tells us this in Ezekiel chapter 37, the Lord carried the prophet away by the Spirit to a valley filled with dry bones. And God said to him in verse four,

"Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again” (Ezekiel 37:4-5, NLT).

He didn’t say think about them or talk about them, he said speak to them. And so, if you’re believing that God is going to do something in that relationship, or you believe that he’s going to heal the person you’re praying for, or you believe he’s going to help you get out of that debt, if you want to see that mountain move, you’ve got to start believing it and speaking it over yourself and speaking it over that mountain.

If you want to make a big difference in the way you live, make a small change in the words you speak, encourage yourself because there is power in your words. If you’ll do that every time you speak, you’ll find yourself removing all the negativity and you’ll have a more positive outlook on life. You see, you just keep believing the word of God, speaking with the mind of Christ, and you just keep saying those things over and over and over again. And it’s your words inspired by the Word of God and anointed by the Holy Spirit that can make a big difference in the way you live. Because your words are powerful, they have the power of life and death, and so if you want to change the life you have to change the words you speak.

It’s just one small step, but changing your words influences others, builds relationships, and when you’re feeling discouraged and hopeless, you talk to yourself, and encourage yourself in the Lord. You tell yourself once again what God has done for you, what God has done through you, what God has planned for you in the years to come, and the key is to like David, get in God's presence, get into his Word, listen to what God is saying to you, remind yourself again and again of what God is saying to you.

When you let go of excuses and start taking steps of obedience, taking ownership of every idle word that you speak, every outcome you create, and taking responsibility for your words, you will experience power in your life as God intended it. And so, every time we think of something good, we should say it, because we’re going to bless others, we’re not going to let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but only that which is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Just one small step, to glorify God, improve our relationships, and make us more like Christ.

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January 20, 2018

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scriptures from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*