



The Tongue: The True Test of a Transformed Life

[James 3:1-12](#)

Fifth in a 14-part series titled: *Wholly Transformed*

Pastor Matt Friend – February 3 & 6, 2022

.....

– OUTLINE –

Here's what the test is...

The true test of transformation is how you tame your tongue ([1:26](#)).

Here's how God wants you to respond to the test...

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry ([1:19](#)).

Here's why God wants you to respond positively to the test...

#1 – Because if you're quick to tell others what to do, you'll face stricter judgment on Judgment Day ([3:1-2](#)).

#2 – Because your words can help or hurt every other area of your life ([3:3-6](#)).

#3 – Because your words can help or hurt the people around you ([3:7-10](#)).

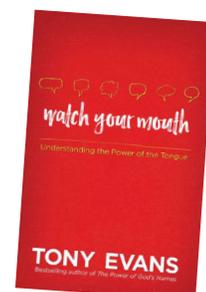
Here's the secret to making this change (where change takes place)...

Let Jesus change your heart ([3:11-12](#)).

Recommended Book

[Watch Your Mouth:
Understanding the Power of the Tongue](#)

By Tony Evans





The Tongue: The True Test of a Transformed Life

[*James 3:1-12*](#)

Fifth in a 14-part series titled: *Wholly Transformed*

Pastor Matt Friend – February 3 & 6, 2022

.....

– NOTES –

Introduction:

Today we continue our 14-week Wholly Transformed series, walking verse by verse through the New Testament book of James. We launched this series over a month ago. You can download all of its messages on our [app](#), on our [sermon podcast](#), or on the series page [here](#).

We live in a world of tests: Covid tests, driver's tests, college tests, spelling tests, physical fitness tests. Wouldn't it be helpful if a test existed to indicate how spiritual you are? If such a spiritual test existed, would you take it?

Actually, such a test does exist. God has given you a built-in test to help you discern your transformation and spiritual progress at all times. This built-in gauge can tell you and the people around you how spiritually and emotionally mature you are at all times.

Today's message is very simple. I'll tell you *what* the test is, *how* to respond to the test, *why* God wants you to respond to the test, and *where* true change takes place.

Here's what the test is...

The true test of transformation is how you tame your tongue
([James 1:26](#)).

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless (James 1:26 NIV).

Other ways to say the same thing:



- How you tame your tongue is a test of your transformation.
- The greatest test of spiritual maturity is how you tame your tongue.

The true test of transformation is how you tame your tongue.

James mentions our speech (i.e. the tongue) throughout his little book. Since the book of James is about growing spiritually—being wholly transformed—It's no wonder he mentions the tongue in all five chapters, in one form or another.

An unbridled tongue is an indication that a person is an immature believer. A tamed tongue is an indication of a mature believer.

The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered. Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues (Proverbs 17:27-28 NIV).

A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards (Proverbs 29:11 KJV).

Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them (Proverbs 29:20 NIV).

The true test of transformation is how you tame your tongue.

Here's how God wants you to respond to the test...

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19 NIV).

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19 NIV).

As a culture, would you not agree that we have flipped the order of those? Does it not seem that our culture is quick to speak, quick to become angry, and slow to listen... even our American Christian culture?



To answer before listening—that is folly and shame (Proverbs 18:13 NIV).

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity (Proverbs 21:23 NIV).

Respond positively to the test: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Here's why God wants you to respond positively to the test...

#1 – Because if you're quick to tell others what to do, you'll face stricter judgment on Judgment Day (3:1-2).

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1 NIV).

Before we talk about teachers, let's talk about all of us. James knew Jesus' words about the judgment to come for each one of us...

But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36-37 NIV).

Sociologists tell us that the typical person spends $\frac{1}{5}$ of his or her life talking. If all of our words were put into print, the result would be this:

- A single day's words would fill a 50-page book.
- In a year's time, the average person's words would fill 91 books of 200 pages each.

Why does James mention "teachers" here? The New Testament reveals that teachers were important in the early church, just as they are important in the church today. However, some were evidently seeking teacher status for the wrong reasons. James reminds them here that with greater responsibility comes greater expectations by



God. Teachers will be judged with greater strictness since they are accountable for more.

Think back to your grade school, middle school, or high school experiences. Think of the teachers you liked and who made a difference in your life. Now, think of the teachers you didn't like and/or who didn't make a difference in your life. Teachers have more influence than they may realize, both inside and outside the church.

Thankfully, James (as a teacher), reminds us that perfection isn't the standard. Even the best teachers mess up from time to time; however, maturity is the goal we are all striving for.

We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check (James 3:2 NIV).

This appears to be James' personal confession. Thankfully, he includes himself here. I wonder how many times as a young man James sinned against his older half-brother, Jesus. I wonder how many times he spoke to Jesus sinfully or wrongly complained about Him to Mary. After having seen Jesus die on the cross and then appear after His resurrection (at which point James became a believer), James likely reflected many times on his life growing up with Jesus.

No one has fully mastered the tongue in this life except Jesus. It's a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute, second-by-second decision. Nevertheless, it's important that we stay in the battle, striving for maturity and endeavoring to control our tongues. A tamed tongue is a hallmark of spiritual maturity.

Why be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry? Because if you're quick to tell others what to do, you'll face stricter judgment on Judgment Day.

#2 – Because your words can help or hurt every other area of your life (3:3-6).



When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal (James 3:3 NIV).

Again, James uses vivid illustrations from nature here. This is why many outdoor lovers love the book of James. He uses at least 30 references to nature, including waves of the sea, rain, animals, birds, reptiles, sea creatures. James would fit in well in West Virginia!

According to James, our words affect everything else in our lives. Your words affect your whole person for good or evil.

Have you ever ridden a horse? The obvious implication of verse 3 is that just as you keep control of the reins of a horse to retain control of the horse, you must keep control of your tongue to retain control of your life. The opposite is also true. If you lose control of your tongue, you will lose control of your life.

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 whenever the pilot wants to go (James 3:4 NIV).

Here James compares the tongue's control over a person with a rudder's control over a ship. This comparison stresses the smallness of the tongue in relation to its power. The slightest turn of a little ruder alters the course of the entire massive vessel, so the slightest use of the tongue can help or hurt every other area of your life.

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 (James 3:5 NIV).

10 fun facts about the human tongue:

- The average tongue from the back to the tip is 3 inches long.
- There are eight muscles that make up the human tongue.
- Your tongue has between 3,000 and 10,000 taste buds not visible to the human eye.



- The average lifespan of a taste bud is 2 weeks.
- There are 5 different types of taste buds: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and savory.
- Your tongue never stops working, even when you sleep.
- Your tongue is the most flexible muscle in your body.
- Your tongue requires moisture to taste.
- Your tongue shapes sounds into words.
- Your tongue print is as unique as your fingerprint.

It's phenomenal to think that something so small can have such an impact in our lives!

A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire (Proverbs 16:27 NIV).

As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife (Proverbs 26:21 NIV).

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:6 NIV).

There's an inexhaustible aspect of the tongue's ability to do evil.

When James says it impacts the "whole body," he's literally saying it can corrupt the "whole wheel of your life." Ancient wheels had wooden spokes. When the hub caught fire, the flame would spread through the spokes to the rim and destroy the entire wheel. James is telling us here that the tongue is the hub of a person. A flame in it can reach through the spiritual, moral, and physical spokes of our lives until it consumes us completely.

Why be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry? Because your words can help or hurt every other area of your life.

#3 – Because your words can help or hurt the people around you (3:7-10).



All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:7-8 NIV).

Isn't it amazing what we can train animals to do? James is using hyperbole here to emphasize that controlling the tongue is more difficult than taming the worst of the beasts.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be (James 3:9-10 NIV).

James is still using the image of a snake here, especially its forked tongue. When we rip a person apart (behind their back or to their face) and then come to church and sing, God says that's evil. Instead, he invites us to value the sanctity of human life, beginning with the people already in our lives.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21 NKJV).

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18 NKJV).

Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6 NIV).

Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13 NIV).

Why be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry? Because your words can help or hurt the people around you.

Here's the secret to making this change (where change takes place)...

Let Jesus change your heart (James 3:11-12).

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My



brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water (James 3:11-12 NIV).

The heart of the issue is a matter of the heart.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it (Proverbs 4:23 NIV).

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (Matthew 12:34 NIV).

You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them” (Matthew 15:6-11 NIV).

But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Matthew 15:18-19 NIV).

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them” (Mark 7:14-16 NIV).

Jesus went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23 NIV).

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from



thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (Luke 6:43-45 NIV).

Let Jesus change your heart!