

- **\*READ James 3:1-13\*** 860,300,00. That's a pretty big number, right? Any idea what it might represent? If you guesses the estimated number of words spoken in ones lifetime, then you would be correct. According to Alexander Atkins' research published in a wordpress article, the average person living an average lifespan will speak approximately this many words in his or her life. This number already seems huge, but consider these other illustrations of just how many words this is. To speak this many words, a person would have to read through the 20-volume Oxford English Dictionary not once...not twice...but fourteen and a half times. Further, you'd have to read the Encyclopedia Britannica...nineteen and a half times. Since were Christians...just think about reading aloud through the King James Bible...one thousand one hundred and ten times! I don't know about you, but it is mind boggling to think that we will speak around that many words in our lifetimes! <https://atkinsbookshelf.wordpress.com/tag/how-many-words-does-the-average-person-speak-in-their-lifetime/>
  - Now, considering those numbers...might I suggest that if we are going to speak that many words, then it would probably do us well to make sure that those words spoken are good and beneficial words. Some might say that maybe we can be given a little leeway with our words since we speak so many of them throughout our lives, but I would argue that if we are going to do something this much then we ought to make sure that we are good at it! I truly believe that is what wisdom expects of us. In fact, God's Word specifically tells us that we should be mindful of the words we speak because everyone of them will be brought into judgement. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:36,37**, *"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*
  - I don't know about you...but this tells me that I need to be sure that I am using all 860,300,000 words in a wise manner. Therefore, let us continue forward in our theme of seeking wisdom from above by taking time this morning to consider wisely using our words. I think we would all say that we should use our words wisely, but maybe we fail at doing so sometimes because we don't fully understand the gravity of using our words wisely. Therefore, we are going to consider 4 points from our text here in **James 3:1-13** that we must understand if we are going to be truly committed to using wisdom when it comes to how we use our words in this life.
- I. Understand the power of our words. (James 3:1-6)**
- A. Remember that James is a book that focuses greatly on practically living out our faith as Christians, and with the previous chapter focusing on living out our faith it would make sense for James to then focus on a major part of our lives and that being how we speak and use our words. James beings chapter 3 with the admonition that each person ought to carefully consider whether or not they are willing to take on the huge responsibility of being a teacher. **(James 3:1)** Why is this such an important thing to consider? Firstly, he says that those who teach will be held to a stricter judgment. **(3:1)** Why is this the case? It must be the case because our words (and who uses their words more than teachers?) hold great power. For those who teach God's Word to others, these words are supposed to be leading people to be closer to God. That's a pretty big deal.
  - B. James goes on to illustrate how our words or our tongues, while they might be small, hold such great power. James uses a horse bit, a ship's rudder, and a small flame to show that even something as comparatively small as our tongue holds great power and can do either great good or great harm. None of these illustrations used by James speaks to me more than the mention of a small flame. I'm sure many of us still have it fresh in our minds the horrific forest fire that ripped through the Smokies last year. Reportedly, that fire was started by some teens who were playing with matches. Something as small as a match led to the deaths of fourteen individuals in those mountains. Surely we understand that even something small can have great power.

- C. We have all heard it said and have probably said so ourselves, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” While the sentiment of this saying is nice, I’m sure we are all well aware of the pain that can be felt by the sting of a hurtful word. In fact, we sing, just as we did a few minutes ago, *“angry words oh let them never from the tongue unbridled slip...brightest links of life are broken by a single angry word.”* Far too often our words cause severe damage to the hearts of others, and that is because our words hold great power within them. This should alone should scare us...but maybe even more scary than the power of our words is our next point that we need to understand if we are going to be fully committed to wisely using our words...

## II. Understand that words can’t be taken back. (James 3:5-6)

- A. It isn’t just that they hold great power and can do great damage...but it is the fact that once words are said...they have been said and they can’t just be erased as if they never happened. That doesn’t mean that we can’t be sorry for them, but it does mean that there is no magic move that can make it as though our words haven’t been spoken.
- B. Go back with me to those teens who’s immaturity in playing with matches in the woods led to the loss of fourteen people’s lives. Once they lit those matches and left them to burn in the woods... there was not going back. Once that fire started burning, all the fire fighters could hope to do was slow it down until they could fully put it out, but that didn’t do anything to save the forest that had already been ravaged by the fire. This imagery is exactly what we see in **3:6**, and our words have the exact same kind of power that can’t be stopped once we speak them.
- C. Once those words pass through our lips or once we hit send, tweet, or post...those words are out there. Sure we might be able to erase what we have posted on social media, but as we have seen numerous times from people who’s lives are in the spotlight...someone has already grabbed that screenshot and those words cannot truly be taken back. Those words are out there, and the damage that can be done by them will be present and in full effect. So if these things are so then what does wisdom teach us that we must do? What must we understand about what our responsibilities are if we want to wisely use our words?

## III. Understand the need to think before speaking. (James 3:7-13)

- A. Really what we’re saying here is that we must learn to control ourselves and thus control our tongues and the words that are said with them. That sounds pretty simple, easy, and straightforward, right? Well...not exactly. Notice what James says beginning in **3:7**. James points out the difficulty of controls our tongues. As humans, we have shown the ability to tame even the most dangerous of animals, but we really struggle with taming our tongues and making sure that they are only used for good.
- B. That’s not to say that any single person only uses their words for evil. In fact, I would say that even the most wicked person has the ability and probably will use his or her words at some point to the good of someone else. So we’re not saying that we always use our words poorly, but that might be the greatest danger of all. James goes on to say that our struggle is more with using our words for good sometimes, but other times we use it for evil. Sometimes we use our words to bless and others times we use our words to curse. **(3:9,10)** This is our predicament often, so what can we do to change that?
- C. I believe James goes on to show us how that can be changed. He mentions that it is illogical for a fresh water fountain to send forth both fresh and bitter water. Likewise, a fig tree doesn’t produce olives, and olive trees don’t produce figs. The sea being salty doesn’t produce fresh water What James is saying is that what is produced depends on the source, and our words are a product of the source of who we are...and what determines who and what we are is our heart. Therefore, whether we use our words wisely or not depends on if we have dedicated ourselves to wisdom and keeping our hearts pure.

- D. James goes on to say as much in **3:13** when he says that our wisdom and understanding is seen in our deeds and our behavior. Part of that is our words. So if our words are good and pure, then that is a result of us being pure of heart and practicing self control when we might want to say something as a result of being made upset to some extent. Even in those situations, if we have prepared ourselves well because we understand the power of our words and the fact that we can't take them back...then we will think carefully before speaking and our gentleness of wisdom will be seen and made evident. But there is still one more thing that we need to consider and understand when it comes to wisely using our words. We don't just do it for the practical value, but we do these things because of high expectations put upon us by our Creator.

#### IV. Understand that God expects for us to use our words well. (James 3:10)

- A. Notice, what is said at the end of **3:10**, *"My brethren, these things ought not to be this way."* James is referencing that from our mouths we utter both words of blessing and cursing, and that isn't what is expected of us. Now, are these expectations placed upon us by James? Surely James would agree with what he has written, but he isn't writing or speaking by his own authority, but he is writing and teaching based upon the will of our God. Our God expects for us to use the blessing of communication well and to His glory. He is glorified not when we use our words to hurt others, but He is glorified when we use our words as a blessing to others.
- B. God Himself recognizes that His words are powerful and that they can do much good. (*"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* **Hebrews 4:12**) God uses His Word for the benefit of mankind so that when they are judged, they will have been prepared to know exactly what was expected of them. Likewise, God expects for us to use our words to His glory and the benefit of others.
- C. When we sing together as we have done this morning, we are speaking, teaching, admonishing, and encouraging one another to grow love and good works. (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:24,25**) But it isn't only at this time that we do such a thing, but God expects for every word that we speak to be a blessing and a benefit to those we are speaking to or who might hear our words. *"Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."* (**Colossians 4:5,6**)
- D. As is seen in these verses, this isn't only concerning our brethren, but this truly matters when it comes to those who are outside of God's kingdom. My mind is certainly taken to Jesus's words during His great sermon on the mount when He speaks about our influence and how we can be salt and light to those around us to the extent that they too begin to seek to glorify our God who is in heaven. (**Matthew 5:13-16**) Through our efforts to be pure in heart and to be a people who practice self control, we can use our words wisely and in such a way that others are blessed by what we say, and it can be to the extent that they might even seek to give their lives to the Lord and live for Him. In understanding God's expectations for us, we can truly be resolved to dedicate ourselves to making sure that we are wisely using our words to God's glory.

860,300,000...that's still a big number, and hopefully it has become an even bigger number in our minds because we more fully recognize and understand that each of those words is an opportunity to either bless God and others...or to curse God and others. May we be the type of people whose words are only found to be blessings so that God may be praised and others may be uplifted. May we lean upon the wisdom of God so that we might use each of those words in a way that honors Him. **\*PRAYER\***