

# Steps Toward Maturity - Part 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] We find ourselves in James chapter 3, in part 3, and I do want to make sure each of you have an outline.

It's in your program, so if you did not get a program, raise your hand and the ushers will be happy to get one to you. So anyone need one here? Okay, Shirley needs one here in the front.

Anyone else need a program because there's an outline? Okay, James over here on the side, in the middle there as well. The lights are in my eyes there, but we'll get one of those to you.

And so I would love to have you follow along. Now you'll note on the back of the outline is another outline of the whole chapter. And so we've been looking at each chapter.

James is the book of doing. We were in Galatians, and if you want to say that, Galatians is the book of being. Who are you?

[ 1 : 12 ] You've got to know who you are before you can do anything. And Johnny, right over there on the far side, James needs one. And so, you know, knowing who you are in Christ, now we move forward in what Christ wants us to do.

And we do get a balance here. You know, faith alone, and that's it. It is faith alone, but faith without works is dead. And so the works give fruit to what the plant is.

And so that's what James is really focusing on here. And because it was the book of action, I came up with a body part. Just in my mind helps when I can see pictures and things to look at each of the chapters.

Chapter one, and I pointed out a key verse in each chapter. Now, the key verse of chapter one really is the key verse for the whole book. But James 1, 22, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.

And that's the sad thing about that. You can become comfortable in that deception. You can think, oh, I've heard the word of God.

[ 2 : 24 ] Or, oh, I've attended church. Or, oh, I've done this or I've done that. But you can't just hear the word. You have to do what the word says.

And the body part for that would be the ear to listen. Chapter two, the key verse is 26. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

That's a key verse there. And the body part is the whole body. And then here we are in chapter three. The key verse of chapter three is verse 17. But the wisdom and that word, you know, the word for today.

I still remember, I don't know if it was on TV, on the radio, but the Lutheran Hour or somebody would put out the word for today. The word for today is wisdom.

So just mark that down somewhere, Charles. The word, we're going to be hitting on wisdom for today. You take one word with you today, it's going to be the word wisdom.

[ 3 : 27 ] And you can wrestle, or as we say here in, see, when I went to California, I had to change a few of my words. In California, they say wrestle. In Oklahoma, or at least some of us say rastle.

The word that you should be wrestling with this week is going to be the word wisdom. James 3.17, the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

And so guess what the, well, the word for today is wisdom, but the body part. The body part, the tongue.

Where it says, likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body. Chapter 4, in chapter 4, verse 7, key verse, submit yourselves then to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

And I shouldn't have given it the emphasis on the resist the devil. The emphasis is, submit yourselves then to God. When you do submit yourselves to God, then, through the power of God,

the Holy Spirit, you can resist the devil, and he'll flee.

[ 4 : 47 ] And so the body part to me was the hand, that you wash your hands. You're part of the cleansing ritual, that you go before the Lord, and if you're drawing near to the Lord, submitting to him, obviously you're asking him to forgive you of your pride and your selfishness and what you're normally doing instead of submitting.

And then chapter 5, key verse, would be verse 16. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. And so with the focus on prayer, the body part would be the knee, kneeling in prayer. And that's the action part, the doing part that James focuses on.

So today we are in chapter 3, this whole idea of steps toward maturity. Let me read here. I'll be reading out of the New International Version. If you have another translation, I think you'll be able to follow.

So James 3, I'll read 18 verses. It's not a long chapter. It's not a long book. I would encourage you to read a chapter each day.

[ 6 : 01 ] I try to read through the whole book each day, but I don't make it every day. But anyway, it's just amazing, the repetition and praying and thinking and hearing, and then things just start popping out.

So James 3, verse 1. Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he's a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. We're moving toward that tongue.

And we're moving toward wisdom. Verse 3. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

Most of the time, we can do that. A little bit. Horses come in different sizes, but some of them are quite large, quite strong.

[ 7 : 04 ] And that little bit can control most of the time that horse. Or you take a ship 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.

Now, back in their day, you know, they had their ships weren't quite as big as they are today.

Actually, today, there are some very big rudders. But when you've got a big rudder, you've got a really big ship.

And so, still in comparison, it's a very small part of that giant ship. And that's what's going to turn that ship.

Verse 5. Yeah, we've had the big strong horse and the bit in its mouth. We've had the ship and the little rudder. And then we come to us.

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

[ 8 : 18 ] Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. Now, I'm not sure if you pay attention to things in California.

We, Mary and I, kind of pay attention to that because we used to live there. And many times we'll see, yeah, we know right where that is. We've been there. And the fires. Clarence is talking about going back to Sacramento or at least flying into Sacramento, going back to California for another visit.

The fires are raging in California. Now, you need to understand this. If there's a great, great drought, guess what happens? There's a bad fire danger because it's so dry.

But it hadn't been dry in California. They've had floods, historic rains. But you know what? There's still going to be a fire danger because that means the brush has grown up so fast and so much.

And there's going to be. So either way, you can't win for losing. But those massive fires out there, they, amazingly, they can usually pinpoint where the fire started and what started the fire.

[ 9 : 30 ] You see these massive fires. Do they start with a massive flame? Usually it's just a very small flame.

Unfortunately, many times it's just a little single match that then can conflagrate into that massive forest fire.

And so the same with our tongue. Little comparatively. I don't know. Sometimes I notice other parts of my body getting bigger.

I'm not sure that my tongue ever gets bigger. It's usually pretty small. And yet, it can get me in big trouble. The power in the tongue.

Other people's tongues can affect my life. Jerry was talking about, you know, losing his dad and, you know, offering condolences and comfort to me.

[10:36] And he said, you know, sometimes he can just, you know, close his eyes and lay his head back. And his dad's right there with him.

You know, probably hearing his voice or just picturing that. And, you know, thankful for, you know, many positive things. But, you know, every now and then when we hear other people, you know, just a little word sometimes can set us off.

Sometimes we call it pushing our buttons. Well, they usually don't use their fingers to push our buttons. It's usually the tongue that is pushing our buttons.

Just by what somebody says, there's great power in that tongue. Verse 6. 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. Verse 7.

[11:41] All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man. But no man can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father.

Dan led us a moment ago here. We were singing of the love of Jesus and the grace of God. And yet when we walk out those doors, what will our tongues be saying?

Verse 10. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and obviously my sisters. This should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?

[12:48] Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. Who is wise and understanding? Oh, we made a transition there.

That word wise has popped up. We've been talking about the tongue. Talking about the danger of the tongue. The power of the tongue. How do you control that tongue?

And now we're talking about the wise one. Let him show it by his good life. By deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Okay, we need to read Proverbs. We read Proverbs and we find very practical things.

You know, many things we have not thought about. Okay, that's a good way. You know, I do step one. I do step two. And I do step three. And that's probably going to keep me out of trouble. And you can call that wisdom.

[13:51] But there's something more to wisdom. Verse 14. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, there's a connection from the tongue to the heart.

Wisdom has been introduced here in this idea of the tongue and the heart. Do not boast about it or deny the truth.

Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is, first of all, pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. And as I read and read and read this passage, it seems to me that you could even just flip those two words.

[15:24] Peace and righteousness. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. Really, you could say righteous people who sow in righteousness, raise a harvest of peace.

Well, two keys here. Wisdom in the heart. Controlling this tongue. And the tongue is the rudder of our heart.

But really, the body part I should have listed is the one inside.

Actually, the rudder is your heart. Because your heart is controlling your tongue. Your tongue is controlling your body. And so I want to look at a couple of things here.

We've got to identify the source of the problem. And it's a barometer. Now, I never had much of an appreciation for barometers.

[16:32] I think in our house at one time, I know I've seen them in other houses. It was kind of popular there for a while. Maybe some kind of nice wooden feature. And there'd be a couple of dials

on there.

And I don't know. One of them was a thermometer maybe. I'm not sure what. But one of them was a barometer. And I couldn't tell you if it goes up or down what that means.

But I grew up understanding that a barometer was... Predictor might not necessarily be the right word I'm looking for.

But was an instrument. It was an indicator of what was going on around you.

I have a barometer. It's in my car. It's on my steering wheel. And I'll catch myself now and then using my barometer.

[ 17 : 38 ] Because that is giving me an indication something's going on here. Now, obviously, it's because somebody pulled out in front of me or somebody's going too slow or somebody's got a right turn on red and they're not right turning.

But I have figured out over the years that if I'm honking that horn, yes, something's happening out there.

But something's happening in here. And that's always an opportunity for me to say, why am I honking my horn?

Sure, I want to go faster. Why do I want to go faster? Why am I in a hurry? Why am I impatient? What is going on in here? And so, yes, the tongue is powerful.

And the Bible says the tongue's a rudder and I'm not going to go against the Bible. But there's, okay, here's what it is. The tongue is the rudder.

[ 18 : 42 ] What's turning the rudder on the boat? The pilot. The heart is the pilot. And so, of course, then it goes on.

Who is really the pilot of the pilot? Is it me? Is it you? Are you the pilot of your heart?

Or is it God? And so we've got to identify the source of the problem. And the problem is our heart. That's where the issue is.

Number two, what's the answer? We've got to identify the answer to the problem. What does it say in this chapter that is really the answer? It's wisdom.

Wisdom is the answer. What is wisdom? And maybe you're ahead of me right here.

[ 19 : 44 ] Because the real question is, who is wisdom? Well, let me read a couple of passages about wisdom and see if you can identify that.

1 Corinthians 2, verses 6 through 12. Paul writing here. He says, We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature.

But not the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom.

A wisdom that is hidden and that God is destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it.

For if they had, they would not have crucified. It says the Lord of glory. But could we not put in there?

[ 20 : 47 ] If they had understood wisdom, they would not have crucified wisdom.

However, as it is, continuing in verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 2. I think we're talking about Jesus here.

But continuing, The mystery is clearly identified in Colossians chapter 1.

I think it's referenced in several passages. I've given you one. I'll give you some more. But Colossians 1 clearly tells us, verses 25 through 27.

Again, Paul writing, I become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

[ 22 : 29 ] The mystery. The mystery. That has been kept hidden for ages. Now, in the passage we just read in 1 Corinthians 2, it talked about this wisdom that was hidden from the rule.

They didn't get it. Of course, that reminds me of the passage talking about the stumbling block.

They didn't get it. They're tripping over the stumbling block. Who's the stumbling block?

Jesus. Jesus. And so, Colossians 1, 26. The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you.

The hope of glory. Jesus is the mystery. The wisdom that can pilot the heart, that will direct the rudder, that will control your life.

[ 23 : 41 ] Jesus Christ is the answer. In John 1, Jesus is presented as the word.

You see this personification. Jesus is the door. Jesus is the good shepherd. Throughout the Bible, you see these different similes to what he is like.

Jesus is wisdom. And here we see that wisdom is another image of his character. Turn with me to Proverbs chapter 8.

Proverbs also defines wisdom. Gives us some very practical things. You know, be quick to hear and slow to speak.

That's pretty wise. You know, if maybe you've had a parent or an uncle or somebody told you, you know, if you listen twice as much as you speak, you're probably going to go do pretty well.

[ 24 : 52 ] That's a pretty good gauge. Or maybe, you know, three times or four times. Yeah, some very practical things that are wise. And those are good. And we embrace those.

But ultimately, it is the wisdom, the transformative wisdom, Jesus Christ, that changes us, that makes us wise from the inside out.

Let me begin by just reading verses 22 through 30. This is in Proverbs. This whole chapter is talking about wisdom.

But just listen to verse 22 through 31st and see if this rings a bell. The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works.

Before his deeds of old, I was appointed from eternity. From the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth.

[ 25 : 55 ] When there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled in place. Before the hills, I was given birth. Before he made the earth or its fields or anything of the dust of the world.

I was there when he set the heavens in place. When he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep. When he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep.

When he gave the sea its boundaries so that waters could not overlap his command. And when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side.

I was filled with delight day after day. Rejoicing always in his presence. Doesn't that sound like Jesus? That's wisdom speaking in chapter 8.

Let me go back and begin in verse 1. Now when we get to verse 22, I'll skip that part. But Proverbs 8 verses 1 through 31.

[ 26 : 57 ] Does not wisdom call out? Does not wisdom understanding raise her voice?

On the heights along the way where the paths meet, she takes her stand. Besides the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud.

Now it said she. How can it be she and it's referring to Jesus? Well, number one, God is beyond gender.

God has revealed himself as father. Jesus revealed himself as son. Those are significant and we need to identify with that.

But God is beyond us. That's what he's given us to relate to him with. Another is just this personification.

[ 27 : 56 ] When we honor different things. When we talk about the church. We talk about the church in a feminine way. When you're honoring Christ in a boat or naming a boat.

They normally give boats female names. And so, you know, I would not make too much out of the feminine use there.

Verse 4. To you, O men, I call out. I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence. You who are foolish, gain understanding.

Listen. For I have worthy things to say. I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true. For my lips detest wickedness.

All the words in my mouth are just. None of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning, all of them are right. They are all faultless to those who have knowledge.

[ 28 : 54 ] Choose my instruction instead of silver. Knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is more precious than rubies.

And nothing you desire can compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence. I possess knowledge and discretion.

To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance. Evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine. I have understanding and power.

By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just. By me princes govern and all nobles who rule the earth. I love those who love me. And those who seek me find me.

With me are riches and honor. Enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold. What I yield surpasses choice silver.

[ 29 : 53 ] I walk in the way of righteousness. Along the paths of justice. Bestowing wealth on those who love me. And making their treasures full. And then we read 22 through 30.

Let me pick up in 31. Rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. Now then my sons. Listen to me.

Blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise. Do not ignore it.

Blessed is the man who listens to me.

Watching daily at my doors. Waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me. Finds life. And receives favor from the Lord.

Now let me tell you. You can find wisdom. And not find life. You can practice a moral code.

[ 30 : 54 ] And not find life. There is wisdom. But Jesus is ultimately wisdom. And when we find Jesus.

We find life. And receive favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me. Harms himself. All who hate me.

Love death. Jesus is the solution. And then number three. The thing that James drives home and everything.

We can't just hear this. You can't just sit there and say. That was interesting. You can't just sit there and say. I've never thought of it that way before. You can't sit there and say.

You know what? I'm going to work. I'm going to double down this week. And I'm going to be more cautious with what I say. I'm not going to honk my horn as much.

[ 31 : 54 ] Those are nice things. But that is not what James is talking about here. James is saying. You need to embrace wisdom. That is the only hope.

For your rudder to. Direct your life. In the right way. Verse. Point three. Identify the step you're going to take.

And that step is. To embrace. Embrace. Jesus Christ. As the wisdom to control your heart. Your tongue. And your life.

We go back to chapter one. James. Verses three. Verses five through eight. You know. He just introduced it here. In chapter one.

He knew he would be circling back to it. And really hitting it hard. In chapter three. In. Chapter one. Verse five.

[ 32 : 55 ] He said. If any. Of you. Lacks. Wisdom. He should ask God. Who gives.

Generously. To all. Without finding fault. And it will be given to him. But when he asked. He must believe.

Not doubt. Because he who doubts. Is like a wave of the sea. Blown. And tossed by the wind. That man. That woman.

That young person. That child. Should not think. He'll receive anything. From the Lord. That one.

That's doubting. God. He is a double minded man.

Unstable. In all he does. James. Is the book. Of doing. But you can only do.

[ 33 : 55 ] What you are. Galatians. We talked about identity. Here. We talk about the tongue. And the rudder. The heart.

And it's wisdom. It's Jesus Christ. He. He. Can give hope. He. Can give strength. He. Can give comfort.

He. Can give. Protection. Obviously. Things. Still happen. But. It's under the. Hand of God.

And the grace of God. And the providence of God. God. Even. Taking. Something. That was evil.

And. Turning it into good. God.

Is the pilot. There are calm seas. And there are stormy.

[ 34 : 53 ] Seas. There are deep waters. And there are shallow waters. There are rocks in the waters. God.

Will. Pilot. You through. If you take. Your hand.

Off of that rudder. Thank you.