



THE POWER OF WORDS

JAMES 3:1-12

GOAL

- ▶ To teach children that words have the power to build or destroy. We must tame our tongues if we are to live out the mission for which God created us.
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WORDS TO KNOW

- ▶ **Corrupt:** to change from good to bad; to rot or spoil.
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MEMORY VERSES

- ▶ **James 3:8:** But no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Proverbs 15:28: The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ **Read James 3:1-12:** The Apostle James writes to warn believers that speaking the truth of God is not as simple as opening our mouths, letting the words flow, and watching people convert after hearing our message. Because we are telling other people how to live their lives, ours will be put under scrutiny as we will be held to a higher standard. Our words must match our actions, which is a difficult thing to accomplish. The tongue, while small, may be the most dangerous part of our bodies. It can spew evil or spread praise. Words have power, and we must learn to tame our tongues.



SUGGESTIONS

The Apostle James discussed the power of the tongue and the words that it speaks.

- **Words can bring destruction:** James compared the tongue to a forest fire, untamed beasts, and poison.
- **Words can bring life:** James begins this passage by discussing the best way we can use our ability to speak: sharing the word of God and teaching that Jesus is the path to salvation.
- **Words should honor God:** We should choose our words carefully and use them to honor God.

PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY

Ages 5-7 **Hold Your Tongue** | **Supplies:** brown paper lunch bags, long strips of red paper, markers, crayons, other decorating supplies, glue or tape

Give each student a paper bag and a long strip of red paper. With the bag folded flat, instruct the students to draw eyes on what is the bottom of the bag when unfolded and open. Instruct the students to fold the piece of red paper accordion-style so that it ends up a small square. Tape or glue one end of the red paper under the flap created by the bottom of the folded paper bag. Students put their hands in their paper bag to make it work like a puppet. When they open the mouth, the long tongue unfurls and they have to fold it back up into their puppets' mouths. Let students decorate their puppets.

Ages 5-10 **Catapult** | **Supplies:** tissue paper in a dark color, small pebbles, box, tape

On one side of the tissue paper, draw a large smiley face. Tape the tissue paper over the opening of the box, with the smiley face facing into the box and away from the students. Give each student a pebble and tell them to try to get the pebbles into the box. They will have to get the pebbles to punch through the tissue paper. Once everyone has had a chance to throw a pebble, remove the tissue paper from the box and show them the holes in the smiley face. Have everyone try to tape the paper together and make the picture whole again. Show them the result of their work and how it the picture doesn't look the same as it did before it was hit with pebbles. The same is true of words. Saying we are sorry doesn't undo the damage words create. We must be careful with our words.



Ages 8-10 **Tear It Apart** | **Supplies:** Markers, paper, tape

Draw a creature on a large piece of paper, or several pieces of paper taped or glued together. This drawing does not have to be good; in fact, the worse it is the better for this activity. Show your drawing to the class, and ask them to criticize the drawing and the way it looks. As students answer, tear off a piece of the creature and give it to the student who said something bad/critical about it. Continue until there is nothing left of the drawing. Then have the students put the drawing back together using tape. Ask them if it looks the same after they reassembled it. Words can leave scars. If we throw them around without thinking, we could be hurting someone without even really meaning it. Our words can cause serious damage, so we need to be careful with what we say to others and to ourselves.



James 3:8: The tongue has the potential to cause great damage and destruction if a person is not careful about the words he or she chooses to speak.

Proverbs 15:28: We must think before we speak to ensure that our words will help rather than harm.



Ages 5-7 **Balance Beam** | **Supplies:** Blue painter's tape

Put a long, straight line of blue painter's tape on the floor. Have each student try to walk quickly down the whole length of the tape without stepping off of it. Count how many times students step off of the line. Then have the students walk the line again, this time slowly. Taking their time, planning their steps, and recovering their balance helps them to stay on the line more than when they walked down it quickly. This is the same with our words. Slowing down and considering our words before speaking helps us to walk the path God has set for us without stepping off and losing our way.

MEMORY
VERSE
MEANING

POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY



Ages 5-10 Tongue Twisters

Give each student a tongue twister to memorize and repeat. After giving the students a chance to memorize and practice, have them try to say their tongue twister as fast as they can. You should do one too, so students know that it is OK to laugh at the mistakes. Once everyone has tried to say it quickly, have them read them slowly. This exercise helps them to see that slowing down can help us to control our tongues.

Ages 8-10 **Stuck on You** | **Supplies:** *Blue painter's tape, black paper, white paper, large piece of paper, marker*

Using a thick black marker, create an outline of a person on the large piece of paper. Cover the outline with blue painter's tape with the sticky side facing out. Do this for as many teams the class will be divided into. Crumple up the pieces of black and white paper, and give them to each team, making sure that there are the same number of black and white balls of paper. On "Go!," have each team throw the balls of paper at the person trying to get them to stick. When time is up, explain to the class that the white balls are nice words and the black balls are mean, hurtful words. Have the students pick up any of the paper balls that did not stick to their outline and remove the white balls from the outline, but leave the black ones up. On "Go!," students should throw the balls of paper at the outline again. Point out to the students that there is less room for the white balls to stick to because the black balls are blocking the way.



TAKE
HOME



James says that the tongue is like a wild animal, forest fire, and poison; however, he also says that the tongue can be controlled like a horse wearing a bit and bridle or like a ship steered by a rudder. When working to control our tongues, it is important to remember:

- **Words can bring destruction:** A simple word spoken in anger can cause serious damage to a person or a situation.
- **Words can bring life:** By sharing what we know about Jesus, we can help someone find their salvation through Christ.
- **Words should honor God:** We were created to worship and honor God, so our words should reflect that purpose. We should choose our words carefully and use them to honor God.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: For what reason did the Apostle James say we should not be eager to be teachers of God's word?

A1: The Apostle Paul said we shouldn't be eager to be teachers of God's word because we will be held to higher standards.

Q1b: Have you ever said something you immediately wished you could take back?

Teacher Notes: Let students answer. Most of us will answer yes, even without thinking of a specific instance. Whether we wish we could take back saying something we said to be intentionally mean or something that was just inconsiderate and unintentionally hurtful, most of us have said something that we wish we hadn't.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: How can you control the direction in which a horse goes?

A2: You can control the direction in which a horse goes by putting a bit and bridle in its mouth.

Q2b: Has anyone ever tapped you on one shoulder while standing by the other to get you to look the wrong direction?

Teacher Notes: It's a harmless joke. People do this because we expect the person trying to get our attention to be standing by the shoulder that was tapped. It's basic, typical behavior that can be exploited for a bit of a laugh. A simple piece of metal placed in a horse's mouth doesn't seem like enough to control a horse's direction, but horses move in the direction their head is facing. Knowing this helps people who work with horses. Understanding our own typical behavior and responses can help us to prepare ourselves for situations in which we may be tempted to react negatively. This is how we learn to tame our tongues.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: Besides the wind, what controls the direction of a ship?

A3: A small rudder steered by a single person can control the direction of a ship.

Q3b: Why is it important to be able to steer a boat?

Teacher Notes: Unless we're up for going anywhere the wind blows and the waves drive, we have to be able to steer or we will never get where we are supposed to go. If we let our words take us in a direction we did not intend, it will take us a long time to get back on track to accomplishing the mission God created us for.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: What can set a whole forest on fire?

A4: A tiny spark can set a whole forest on fire.

Q4b: What was the last mean thing anyone has said to you? What was the last nice thing anyone has said to you?

Teacher Notes: Let the students think. They do not have to tell the class their answers to these questions; this can be a conversation without students providing particular responses. There have been many studies that suggest that people remember negative comments and experiences more than positive. It may even be the case that some of us had a hard time remembering something nice someone has said to us but were able to think of a mean thing said. These mean things stick with us and make us think differently about ourselves. Like a tiny spark starting a wildfire, a single mean word starts to chip away at our self-esteem and confidence. We can take our negative experiences and their effects to help us as a reminder to choose our words carefully and kindly.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What is the one thing that humans have not been able to tame?

A5: Humans have not been able to tame their own tongues.

Q5b: Are pets, such as dogs and cats, always nice?

Teacher Notes: No, even tame dogs and house cats scratch and bite. Any animal we tame and train to perform in a certain way is still an animal. They will revert to their instincts when provoked or put into a certain situation. If we pull a dog's tail, it might growl, bark, or even bite at us. The same is true of people. We need to work very hard to understand the situations that trigger us to use unkind language. Maybe we get upset when we get into trouble for something, or when someone asks us to do our chores. When we learn the types of situations that make us angry and lash out, we know to guard our language. We may never be able to completely tame our tongues, but by practicing restraint, and thinking before we speak, we can make sure to reduce the number of people we hurt with our words.

SLIDE 6



Q6a: In the situation described, the tongue is used to do what in a single day?

A6: The tongue is used to praise God and curse someone made in God's image in the same day.

Q6b: Have you ever said something mean about a person you love?

Teacher Notes: Students do not have to answer out loud. This is a hard one to admit, but we have all done it. Whether we say it to the person's face or to someone else, we are using our words to hurt. It is for situations like this that we should all remember the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 7



Q7a: What can an apple tree not do?

A7: An apple tree cannot bear oranges.

Q7b: If you try something and fail, should you just give up?

Teacher Notes: No! Failure means we tried, and in so doing, we learned one way that doesn't work. We are going to find ourselves in situations in which we say things we regret. We should learn from these instances to help us keep our words kind and helpful rather than mean and hurtful. The more we try, the more successful we will become. We should never stop trying to be better people. The good news is that with God's help, we truly have the power to see our lives changed!



QUESTION & ANSWER

MEMORY VERSES

▶ **James 3:8:** But no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Proverbs 15:28: The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

BIG IDEA

▶ Our words have power, and we should use them to honor God.

CLOSING PRAYER

▶ Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus and the example He gave us of how we should live and use our words to help others and honor You. Help us to think before we speak and to choose our words carefully so that we can honor You. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



God created each of us for specific reasons, but one of the most important ones is to tell others about Jesus Christ and how to receive salvation through belief in Him. The Apostle James warned that we shouldn't be eager to be teachers of God's word because we will be held to a higher standard. We all fail in many areas, especially with our words. But it is possible to learn to control our words, so that they reflect our beliefs and God's mission for our lives.

SLIDE 2



As an example, James tells us that horses don't start out their lives as gentle, trained animals; they are wild creatures with huge, powerful bodies. But with some training and something as small as a bit and bridle in their mouths, we can control the direction in which these massive animals go. By controlling our words, we can control the power and direction of our lives as well.

SLIDE 3



James continues describing how Sailing Ships are amazing! They can cross huge bodies of water and carry enormous loads of supplies. Though these vessels are driven by fierce winds, they can be directed by a tiny rudder steered by a single person at the helm. We can accomplish great things and persevere in stormy times if we can control the words we speak.

SLIDE 4



The tongue we use to speak is small, but in many ways, it is the most dangerous part of our bodies. James tells us that just as a tiny spark can set a whole forest on fire, a single evil word the tongue spits out can start a destructive fire that can do unimaginable damage. However, just as our words can corrupt our lives and stir up all kinds of evil, they can also do incredible good.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 5



Next, James has us consider animals. From reptiles to birds, creatures of the sea to beasts of the jungle, humans have tamed and trained every kind of animal on earth. The only thing humans have been unable to tame are their own tongues to keep them from speaking evil. It has deadly potential to spew out poison-filled words, wounding all who hear them.

SLIDE 6



Consider this: On Sunday, we go to church where we use our tongues to speak and sing praises to God, and then a few hours later, we speak words that curse another person who was made in God's image. One minute, our tongues are doing what they were created to, and the next they are acting out of evil. This should never be!

SLIDE 7



Good and evil cannot come from the same place. Can an apple tree bear oranges or a saltwater pond produce fresh water? No, so a Christian should not use evil words. Our words should honor God and reflect a godly life. The Bible tells us that Jesus was the Word of God who became flesh. Jesus is our example to follow, and our lives should speak and live out the good words of God.