

Lesson 10 • Words That Give Life

Guiding question: How can our speech reflect the life and character of Christ?

Central understanding: Our words affect people and reveal the heart. Scripture calls us to truthful, gracious speech, reverence for God's name, and repentance when our words have wounded others.

Prepare and gather

Prepare worksheet and Scripture-reader copies, pens, and a place to record observations. Read the guide in advance. Invite participation without requiring personal disclosures.

Class readings: James 3:1–12; Proverbs 15:1–4; Exodus 20:7; Matthew 12:33–37.

50-minute flow: Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes; Scripture and teaching, 25 minutes; discussion, 10 minutes; weekly response, 5 minutes; closing prayer, 5 minutes.

Learning aims

- Explain James's images for the tongue's influence.
- Connect truthful speech with reverence for God.
- Practice a response that joins honesty, kindness, and accountability.

Opening conversation

Ask: "What is one encouraging sentence you have remembered for years?" Invite volunteers without asking anyone to repeat painful words or identify people who hurt them.

Teach and explore

Small words can have large consequences

Read: James 3:1–12.

James begins with the responsibility of teachers, then uses bits, rudders, and fire to describe the tongue. Small things can direct large bodies or spread destruction. The same mouth can bless God and curse people made after His likeness, a contradiction James refuses to excuse.

His statement that no human being can tame the tongue exposes our need for God's help and persistent attention. It does not release us from responsibility. Teachers and learners alike must consider the influence of repeated remarks, rumors, public claims, and private conversation.

Ask: Which image best helps you recognize the influence of speech?

Gentleness and truth belong together

Read: Proverbs 15:1–4; Ephesians 4:25–29.

A soft answer can turn away wrath, while grievous words stir up anger. Proverbs commends wise knowledge and a wholesome tongue. Ephesians calls believers to put away lying and speak truth as members of one another.

Gentleness concerns how truth is spoken, not whether truth matters. Before speaking, consider whether the claim is accurate, whether it needs to be said, and what response could build up the hearer. Difficult truth may still need a clear boundary or a firm correction.

Ask: How could a truthful correction become easier to hear without losing its meaning?

Lesson 10 • Teaching and response

Honor the name we speak

Read: Exodus 20:7; Matthew 12:33–37.

The commandment forbids taking the Lord's name in vain. It calls for reverence, including refusing false or empty uses of His name. We should not attach God's authority to our own guesses, promises, or interests as though that settled every question.

Jesus connects words with the heart and speaks of accountability for speech. Examining vocabulary alone is insufficient if pride, contempt, or deceit continues to govern us. Ask what our words disclose about whom we trust and how we regard the people God has made.

Ask: What is the danger in claiming that God endorses a statement we have not examined?

Repair requires changed speech

Read: Ephesians 4:30–32.

Paul directs the community away from bitterness, wrath, clamor, and evil speaking, toward kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness in Christ. These directions apply to patterns of relationship as well as isolated words.

When we have spoken falsely or cruelly, a useful response names the wrong plainly, corrects the false statement with those who heard it, and changes the practice that caused it. Forgiveness does not require someone to pretend the harm never happened. Repair should respect the other person's boundaries.

Ask: What would make an apology responsible and specific?

Discussion guide

1. Why does James begin by addressing teachers? — Possible response: Their words carry responsibility and influence; the warning invites care in teaching.
2. What distinguishes a gentle answer from a dishonest answer? — Possible response: A gentle answer can remain accurate and clear while avoiding needless insult or aggression.
3. How can God's name be used carelessly? — Possible response: Through false promises, empty claims, or presenting our wishes as unquestionable divine authority.
4. What follows an apology for a false statement? — Possible response: Correct the misinformation where possible and change the habit that produced it.

This week's response: Give pairs a fictional example: a volunteer arrives late and another says, "You never care about anyone." Rewrite the response to state the facts, ask what happened, and address the need. Then privately choose one speech habit to practice this week: checking a claim, listening first, giving thanks, or correcting an error.

Closing prayer: Lord, search our hearts and guide our words. Help us speak truth with love, honor Your name, and use our voices to strengthen others. Give us humility to correct what we have said wrongly and grace to begin again. Amen.

Continue the journey: Lesson Eleven connects our identity in Christ with reconciliation, gifts, and practical service.

Lesson 10 • Scripture reader

King James Version (KJV) • Complete assigned passages

Word help: Masters in James 3 means teachers; offend means stumble or do wrong; vain means empty, false, or without proper purpose; edifying means building up; clamor means angry shouting.

Class readings

James 3:1-12 • KJV

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Proverbs 15:1-4 • KJV

1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

2 The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

4 A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.

Exodus 20:7 • KJV

7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Matthew 12:33-37 • KJV

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Supporting reading

Ephesians 4:25–32 • KJV

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Before Lesson Eleven

1 Peter 2:4–10 • KJV

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

2 Corinthians 5:17–21 • KJV

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.