

BIG IDEA

Wise people's words
show God's love.

BIBLE

James 3:13–4:3; Ephesians 4:29–5:2;
Matthew 12:34

ABOUT THIS WEEK

The right words from a coach can inspire us to finish the game strong and overcome any obstacle in our way. This week, we'll hear from James as he helped inspire his church to think differently about the words they say to each other. James wanted to make sure everyone knew the power of their words and how **wise people's words show God's love.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Drink Dilemma

- Welcome to the final week of our series, Good Call. We have been asking what it looks like to listen to and allow God to help us navigate our daily decisions with wisdom.
- With all the decisions I make in a day, I wish some decisions were easier to make. For example, when I go to the store for a Gatorade, there are so many options—I just can't decide! Sometimes, I just close my eyes and choose one. Maybe you are in a similar boat. I bet that means you have tried lots of different flavors. Let's put that knowledge to the test. Who thinks they can figure out a color of Gatorade just by drinking it?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you will need two bottles each of five different flavors of sports drinks. Call up one teen to do a blind taste test. Place five of the Gatorade in a box that conceals the flavor from the player but shows the flavor to the audience. To play, give the player the five remaining bottles of unopened drink. After the teenager has tasted all the flavors, have them match the bottle so they can see the same flavor in the concealed box. If you'd like to do this a few times, purchase more Gatorade, mix up the order, and invite a few other teenagers to attempt the challenge.*
- Why do athletes drink sports drinks? They help refuel their bodies, right? Sports drinks, like Gatorade, help replenish the water and electrolytes athletes lose when they sweat. But any sports drink consumed in large amounts can be unhealthy. Gatorade has a lot of salt and sugar, so drinking too much can become harmful.
- Our words are a lot like sports drinks. Our words can be helpful or harmful, depending on how and when we use them. What does it look like for wisdom to help us discern how to best communicate with the people around us in ways that are honoring and healthy in the long run?

IMAGE | Emoji Sports

- Sometimes, making a good call feels like you are just making the best guess based on the information you have available to you, like trying to guess sports terms from just emojis.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you will need buzzers [like these](#). Before your program, use the blank slide in your graphics folder to make some emoji sports names and put the slides into your presentation software.*

Call up two volunteers at a time and play head-to-head with some form of buzzer or item to grab in the middle. Display the emoji on the screen, and the first teen to buzz in gets a chance to guess the term. If they get it wrong, the other teenager can steal. Identify some emoji combinations that indicate different sports or sports terms that will work for your culture. Here are a few to get your imagination going.

- 🏀🏀 Double dribble
 - 🏹 Archery
 - ⚽ Football
 - 🏏 Cricket
 - 🏀🌬️ Airball
 - 🐎🏁 Horse Racing
 - 🏀🙏 Full court press
 - 🤲🏀 Handball
 - 🏀🏀 Basketball
- Our words are powerful whether texted on a screen or spoken out loud. They can help us have fun, inspire, tear us down, or cause hurt. Every person has the potential to wield so much power with their words. What would it look like for us to use them to help support others rather than harm them?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*

What's your favorite sports drink?

- ★ **What do you think keeps us from offering encouragement to others?**
- **What makes kind words so impactful? What makes unkind words so hurtful?**

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | James 3:13–4:3

- The book of James helps us see God can give us the wisdom to control the words that come out of our mouths and use them for good. It's a collection of teachings from Jesus' brother, who became a Jerusalem church leader during a difficult time. There was a famine, many in his church suffered from poverty, and they were persecuted because of their faith in Jesus. Despite these challenges, James remained a faithful, uplifting leader who let love and wisdom lead the way.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read James 3:13–4:3.*
- James points out that sometimes "bitter envy and selfish ambition" can take root in life. But through God's wisdom, that can be held back and prevented from coming out in our words. When we rely on God's wisdom, we can avoid fights and divisions that often spread because of what we say. And we can do this because we know where our words come from. Jesus said our words overflow from our hearts. So, if we have a word problem, we have a heart problem. So, what do we do?
- Jesus' brother wants us to see wisdom comes from God's presence in heaven. We need God's help to reshape our hearts first so our words will be transformed. When we ask God to bring healing to our hearts, God helps us eliminate selfishness that damages others and replaces it with kindness and humility.
- When we let God's wisdom and mercy shape our hearts, our words will follow. Because of God's grace in us, our words will become loving, considerate, gentle, fair, and sincere. God wants us to use our words to uplift and encourage people rather than injuring others with cutting words.

SCRIPTURE | Ephesians 4:29–5:2

- An Early Church leader named Paul was trying to get early Christians in the city of Ephesus to do precisely this. Ephesus was a big city that was a significant center of idol worship. And when Paul lived there for two years, people threw accusatory and biting words to diminish Paul's character and ministry.
- Paul had personally experienced what it was like to be torn down by words, so as he wrote from his imprisonment in Rome, he wanted to remind the church to communicate differently.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Ephesians 4:29–5:2.*
- The wisdom of God says our language needs to build others up, not tear them down. Paul wants us to know our language can grieve God. The words we use about others affect God! This is because words are powerful. They impact those around us, and as we've talked about today, our words point to the state of our hearts. Even if we've suffered pain, betrayal, or been cut down by other people's words as Paul did, we don't have to act and speak in the same hurtful ways.
- Paul reminds the church in Ephesus to speak in ways that will benefit others by building people up *according to their needs*. This means we need to take the time to be curious, ask questions, and understand what is going on beneath the surface of their lives. When we realize what other people are walking through, we can speak in ways that build them up.
- People—including us—often damage others with our words because we've been hurt. When this happens, we all tend to try to pull others down if we're feeling down. Misery loves company, right? If we can see the hurt someone is carrying, we may be able to share compassion and wisdom with them in ways we wouldn't if we jumped to conclusions about who they are and what they need.
- This doesn't excuse someone else's hurtful words. We shouldn't be treated poorly, and we shouldn't treat others poorly ... but when we see the internal pain or hurt someone may be carrying, it opens us up to empathize and share words that will lift them rather than perpetuate their pain.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **What do you think of the way James says that wisdom and humility are connected? How does this challenge the way you follow Jesus?**
 - **If you could think of one word to describe a wise person you know, what would it be? Thinking about the adjectives Paul uses in Ephesians, what are some common qualities the wise people in your life all have?**

OBJECT LESSON | Stay Hydrated

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you'll need a large water cooler [like this one](#). Before your program, paint a heart on the outside of the water cooler. In addition, bring index cards with good and bad words written on them (for example, praise, encouragement, compliments, kindness, slander, gossip, cussing, and any other ones that work for your context). Have the cards in stacks of good cards and bad cards. Put the appropriate card into the cooler, as the teaching indicates.*
- Here is a way to visualize what James and Paul are talking about.
 - Let's say this water jug represents our hearts. These cards represent things we allow into our hearts. Let's start with some of these cards—slander, gossip, swearing, bullying, hate, bitterness, jealousy, and envy. Imagine I let this all in my heart. If I have all that in my heart, what do you think will spill out of my heart through my words? Will kindness come out of the spout? Will encouragement flow out? Probably not.
 - Let's take all that out and put in some other things—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, encouragement, praise, and compliments ... if I have all that in my heart, what do you think will

spill out? All those uplifting, positive things!

- Think of your favorite athlete who showed up to a game with Diet Coke in their water bottle. That's a poor choice! It's filled with gunk, which will not help them get the output they need to win. But if they fill it up with stuff their body needs to compete, they are setting themselves up to compete in pretty remarkable ways.
- When we spew words that tear people down, we are like a jug of water that doesn't support those around us to be awesome like we know they can be. However, when we use our words to give encouragement, kindness, and praise, we help fill others up to take the field and accomplish incredible things.
- So, instead of filling ourselves up with frustration and jealousy, let's fill ourselves up with the healing love of God offered to us in the life of Jesus and let that be the thing that helps sustain the people around us because **wise people's words show God's love.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

VIDEO | Jay Hewitt: Ironman

- Today, we've talked about how **wise people's words show God's love.** But this is sometimes easier said than done, especially if we have been hurt. Here is the story of someone who allowed their setbacks to fuel them into showing God's love.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a video like [this one](#) about someone overcoming massive obstacles to accomplish a goal. We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- God gave Jay wisdom to navigate the most challenging time of his life in a way that was inspiring to others. He may have been tempted to project his anger onto other people. It may have been easy for him to be so discouraged by his diagnosis that he lashed out at others.
- Instead, he decided to allow God's hope to seep into his heart so he could share hope with others. Jay's story helps us see that when **wise people's words show God's love,** they see the ultimate prize is experiencing God's love and giving it away. This can be true for us, too. So, here are a few ideas of how you can love others right where they are this week.
 - **LISTEN TO OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES:** It's easy to jump to conclusions and assume things about people. Stay curious, ask questions, and show genuine interest in someone's story this week. People feel loved when they feel heard and understood.
 - **LIFT OTHERS UP:** Once you've learned more about someone's story, you can encourage and uplift them. Sometimes, this involves words—like writing a friend a card or sending them a text message letting them know you're praying for them. Other times, it may look like doing something nice for them, like buying their coffee, babysitting their siblings, or simply offering them a hug. Look for an opportunity to lift someone up this week.
 - **LEARN NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE:** When we are open to learning and embracing new ways to communicate, God will help us grow in wisdom and love. Pay attention to how you communicate with others this week. Ask them if there are ways you could grow and be better at showing them you love and care for them, and then put that into practice.
- We all experience and communicate love in different ways. Words are just part of that. Let's show God's love by being intentional with what we say and do.

DISCUSSION

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conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.

- **Why do you think we tend to tear others down with our words when we feel down ourselves?**
- ★ **When you notice envy or the temptation to tear others down come up, what is something you can do to try and change course and use your words to build up instead?**
- ★ **In a moment where you used your words to tear someone down, how did you feel immediately after? What about when you encouraged someone?**

REFLECTION | Mark My Words

- Sometimes, we may not know how well we use our words to encourage others. So, let's spend a few minutes and honestly evaluate how we talk to others.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this reflection, you will need [the handout](#) included in this week's series materials and something to write with. Put one handout underneath every chair, along with something to write with, and give some time to complete the assessment.
- We all have things we do well and room to grow, and the good news is God will help us become more compassionate, humble, patient, and honoring with our words. Use this as an opportunity to live out the idea that **wise people's words show God's love.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups.
 - **Read Matthew 12:34. How have you seen it be true that words reflect what's already in someone's heart? What are some things you can do to make sure what's going on in your heart is worth coming out in your words?**
 - **Today, what's one change you can make to be someone whose words show God's love?**

RESPONSE | Playbook: Practice God's Words

- Over the last few weeks, we have had time to memorize, reflect, and pray Scripture. This week, we want to allow you to live out what Scripture says.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Every week of this series, there's a handout about how teenagers can listen to and apply God's wisdom. Since this is the last week of the series, get some paper binder clips [like this](#) to give to the group so they can bind their playbooks together at home. For this response, print the handout [included in this week's series folder](#) and put one underneath each chair. Invite them to connect with God all week using this "play." This week, teenagers will put one thing into practice that they read in James 3:17,18 from the Message.
- Take this home and spend some time praying and asking God what it would look like for you to live out what Scripture says in James 3:17,18. And as you pray this week, ask God to help you be filled with God's love and wisdom so you can share it with others.
- As we wrap up this series, remember you aren't alone in decision-making. God will give you the wisdom to make good calls as you **practice what God has said, share what God has given you, follow God's guidance, and show God's love.**