

# Watch Your Mouth

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Moral Issues for Teens · theme **Guard Your Tongue**  
· built on **James 3, Matthew 12:34, Ephesians 4:29**

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Your students live inside words all day — group chats, hallways, gaming headsets, family dinners where someone says something that lands like a slap. Crude jokes get passed off as harmless. Gossip wears a polite mask ("don't tell anyone, but..."). God's name gets used as filler. Some of them have already heard that words at home can crush a person from the inside out. This session isn't a lecture on manners — it's an honest look at what the Bible says about the tongue, the heart underneath it, and the kind of speech that actually builds people up.

## **Before you teach anything, pray.**

Some students are the ones who tear down; some are the ones who get torn down. A few carry both wounds at once. Ask the Spirit for wisdom to speak truth without shaming, and for courage to name real habits without making light of them. You are handing them a standard they can live by — not performing a behavior lecture.

## **The heart of the lesson**

James calls the tongue a small fire that can set a whole forest ablaze (James 3:5–6). Jesus goes deeper: the mouth is only the faucet — what comes out shows what is stored in the heart (Matthew 12:34). "Bad language" is bigger than cuss words. Scripture puts gossip, crude joking, lying, cutting people down, and complaining in the same pile we're told to put off (Colossians 3:8; Ephesians 5:4).

*Your mouth is the faucet. Your heart is the tank. Clean the tank.*

A **critical spirit** uses "honesty" as a weapon — faultfinding, nit-picking, tearing someone down to feel elevated for a moment (1 Thessalonians 5:14–15; Romans 2:1). A **caring spirit** listens beneath the surface, speaks to build up, and treats every person as someone God created with worth (Ephesians 4:29; Luke 12:6–7). Hurt people often hurt people; the gospel offers a different path — mercy received becomes mercy given.

## Think twice, speak once.

### EPHESIANS 4:29

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for **building up**, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

### MATTHEW 12:34

"Out of the abundance of the **heart** the mouth speaks."

## How the session flows

- 1 Toothpaste hook.** Squeeze out — you can't put it back — then read the text. ~7 min
- 2 Faucet and tank.** Heart-to-mouth teaching; critical vs. caring. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** "Watch Your Mouth" two-team showdown. ~12–15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, filled in privately. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home reinforcement. ~15 min
- 6 Close with prayer.** Invitation to let God guard the mouth and clean the heart. ~8 min

You'll want a screen for the game, a tube of toothpaste for the hook (optional but memorable), printed reference cards and worksheets, pens, and a leader ready to handle students who disclose verbal hurt at home with care and appropriate follow-up.

## Leading it, part by part

### Toothpaste hook

Squeeze a line of toothpaste onto a plate or paper. Ask: can you put it back in the tube? Let them try — they can't. Land the point: words work the same way. A cruel text, a leaked secret, a joke at someone's expense — once it's out, you can't unsay it. Matthew 12:36 says we will give account for careless words. Then read Matthew 12:34 aloud slowly. Ask: if your mouth is the faucet, what has been sitting in your tank this week?

### Faucet and tank teaching

Walk through four layers. **Build up vs. tear down:** Ephesians 4:29 — does this word hand someone grace or take it away? **Bigger than cussing:** gossip, God's name as filler (Exodus 20:7), crude jokes "out of place" for God's people (Ephesians 5:4). **Critical vs. caring:** a critical spirit pushes others down to feel up; a caring spirit sees unmet needs beneath harsh words and answers with truth *and* love (1 Thess. 5:14–15; Philippians 4:8). **Hope:** Peter's mouth cursed by a fire — and later preached at Pentecost (Matthew 26:74; Acts 2). Tongues can be redeemed when hearts are surrendered.

Read James 3:5–6 and Proverbs 18:21. Death and life are in the power of the tongue — the same mouth can hand out either one today. Invite them to pray Psalm 141:3: "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth."

### Play the game

Split into two teams and run "Watch Your Mouth" on the screen. Twelve to fifteen minutes. Rounds move from sorting build-up vs. tear-down speech, to Scripture characters whose tongues told on them, to real scenarios (group chat, lies, angry comebacks). When it ends, bridge back: every round asked the same thing — what kind of speaker are you becoming?

### Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Promise plainly that nobody is collecting it. Five quiet minutes to circle, check boxes, and write. Some students are deciding what they will do the next time the group chat turns cruel. That moment deserves silence and soft worship if you have it.

### Worksheet

Use the teen worksheet in class or send it home. It reinforces Scripture lookups, honest self-check, and one practical "this week" step. Pair students if your group benefits from talking through

answers — but keep the card moment private; the worksheet is structured practice, not confession time.

### **Close with prayer**

Invite students to ask the Holy Spirit for help they cannot manufacture on their own (Luke 11:13). Pray for students who use words to hurt and students who have been crushed by words at home or online. Offer yourself as a safe adult afterward. Don't manufacture guilt — do make the standard clear: in Christ, our speech is meant to build up.

## **Take it further**

Use in small groups or a follow-up week:

- What does James 3:5–6 teach about how "small" careless words really are?
- How is gossip different from honest concern? (Proverbs 11:13; 18:8)
- What is the difference between a critical spirit and a caring spirit? (1 Thessalonians 5:14–15; Ephesians 4:29)
- Why does Jesus trace the mouth back to the heart? (Matthew 12:34–35)
- What does Proverbs 18:21 mean — "death and life are in the power of the tongue"?
- When is it wise to stay silent instead of "being honest"? (Proverbs 10:19; James 1:19)
- How did Peter's tongue change between Matthew 26 and Acts 2 — and what does that promise for us?
- If someone at home uses words that crush you, is that "just words"? (Proverbs 15:4; Luke 12:6–7)

## **A final word**

Teach the truth without contempt for students who struggle and without softening what God said. Your teens will face a specific moment — the group chat, the angry comeback, the joke that gets the laugh at someone else's expense. Give them Scripture, give them the game, give them the card, and trust the Spirit to make "think twice, speak once" sound like freedom, not a rule on a wall.