

Teaching James 3 to Children

Games, activities and craft ideas on the power of our words | Used with children aged 9 to 13

James 3 gives children some of the clearest pictures in the Bible: a rudder that turns a huge ship, a spark that sets a forest alight, and a spring that can only give what is already inside it. Each idea below connects to a passage in James 3 and ends with a teaching point, so you can use them on their own or build a full lesson around them.

Games

1. The Rudder Challenge

Bible connection: James 3:4–5 — “Although they are so large... they are steered by a very small rudder.”

Materials: a paper plate or cardboard “ship”, a small paper rudder, masking tape, and several obstacles on the floor.

How to play: Divide the children into teams. One child is the “ship” and another is the “rudder”. The ship moves through an obstacle course. The rudder can give only short instructions: “left”, “right”, “stop”, “forward”. Then swap the roles.

Afterwards, ask:

- How could such a small rudder control something so large?
- What controls the direction of our conversations?
- Can a few words change the direction of someone’s entire day?
- Have you ever said something small that created a much bigger problem?

Teaching point: A small rudder changes the direction of a huge ship. In the same way, small words change the direction of a friendship, a family, a classroom, or even a person’s view of themselves.

2. Spark or Water?

Bible connection: James 3:5–6 and 17–18.

Create two areas in the room:

- **Spark** — words that create conflict, anger, jealousy, embarrassment or hurt.
- **Water** — words that bring peace, encouragement, mercy, truth and reconciliation.

Read out different situations. The children move to the side they think matches the response. For example:

- “Your friend makes a mistake during a game. You say, ‘You’re so stupid!’” — **Spark**
- “Your friend loses the game. You say, ‘It’s okay. Everyone makes mistakes.’” — **Water**
- “Someone tells you a secret, and you share it with others.” — **Spark**
- “Two friends are arguing. You help them listen to each other.” — **Water**

Make some situations harder, so the children have to think rather than pick the obvious answer.

Challenge: Ask them to turn one “spark sentence” into a “peace sentence”. For example:

- “You’re annoying!” becomes “I need some space right now.”
- “That’s a stupid idea!” becomes “I see it differently. Can I explain why?”

Teaching point: Our words can be sparks that spread fire, or water that brings peace.

3. Same Mouth Challenge

Bible connection: James 3:9–12 — “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.”

Give each team a set of cards with different statements. Some encourage, some insult, some gossip, some are truthful but hurtful, and some are wise responses. The team sorts them into three piles: **Life**, **Hurt** and **Wise response**.

Examples:

- “You’re really good at explaining things.”
- “Did you hear what she did yesterday?”
- “Nobody likes you.”
- “I disagree, but I want to hear your side.”
- “Don’t tell anyone, but...”
- “You made a mistake, but you can try again.”
- “I’m only telling the truth!” — this one should spark discussion.

Then ask: “Can the same mouth praise God on Sunday and destroy someone’s reputation on Monday?” James says the problem is not simply what comes out of our mouth, but what is happening in our heart.

Teaching point: Our speech is often a window into our heart.

Activities

1. The Word Ripple

Give each child a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a small circle in the centre and label it **one sentence**. Around it, they draw larger circles, like ripples in water.

Give them this scenario: “A teenager tells another child: ‘You’re not good enough to be on our team.’”

Ask them to write in the circles what could happen next:

one sentence, then one emotion, then one reaction, then one relationship, then one larger consequence

Then do the opposite: “You’re not giving up. Keep trying. You can improve.” Follow the ripple again.

Discussion: “Why does James compare the tongue to a fire?” Help them see that words rarely stop where they are spoken. They travel.

2. Rewrite the Sentence

This works particularly well with 10 to 14-year-olds, because it teaches a practical communication skill. Write several statements on cards:

- “You’re always annoying.”
- “That’s your fault.”
- “Whatever. I don’t care.”
- “You’re so embarrassing.”
- “Everyone thinks you’re weird.”
- “I hate you.”

The children rewrite each sentence without lying, but in a way that reflects the wisdom of James 3:17 — pure, peace-loving, considerate, full of mercy, sincere. For example:

- “You’re always annoying.” becomes “I’m getting frustrated right now. Can we talk about it later?”
- “That’s your fault.” becomes “I think what happened could have been handled differently. Can we work out what happened?”

Then ask: “Does controlling your tongue mean never telling someone the truth?” This draws an important distinction. Taming the tongue does not mean avoiding truth. It means speaking truth with wisdom, mercy and love.

3. My Tongue Has a Direction

Give each child a small piece of paper shaped like an arrow. At the top, they write: “Where are my words taking people?”

Ask them to finish three sentences privately:

- My words sometimes bring...
- One kind of speech I need to stop is...
- One kind of speech I want God to grow in me is...

Then they turn the arrow towards one of two words: **conflict** or **peace**.

Read James 3:17–18 together. Finally, ask them to write one word from verse 17 they especially want to develop: pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial or sincere.

This makes the lesson personal, without asking children to reveal something embarrassing in front of others.

Craft Ideas

1. The Rudder Bookmark

Make a bookmark shaped like a ship’s rudder.

On the front: “My tongue may be small, but it can change my direction.” — James 3:4–5

On the back, four questions to ask before speaking:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?
- Will it bring peace?

At the bottom: “Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” — James 3:18

The children can decorate the rudder with arrows showing different directions: anger to peace, gossip to silence, insult to encouragement, revenge to forgiveness. Best of all, they can keep it inside their Bible.

2. Fresh Water or Salt Water? Bottle Craft

Bible connection: James 3:11–12.

Give each child a clear plastic cup or small bottle and two strips of paper. One strip says **fresh water**. The other says **salt water**.

Ask: “What comes out of your mouth most often when you’re angry?” Then explain James’ picture — a spring produces according to what is inside it.

The children make a small hanging decoration or bottle label that reads: “What comes out of my mouth reveals what is happening in my heart.” — James 3:11

Underneath, they add a prayer: “God, make my heart a source of words that bring life.”

For a visual demonstration, use two clear glasses, one with fresh water and one with salt water. Ask: “Can one spring naturally produce both?” Then connect it to verses 9–12.

Tying the Lesson Together

Build the whole lesson around four pictures from James 3:

- **Bit** — my words can control my direction.
- **Rudder** — my words can influence where my life goes.
- **Spark** — my words can start something much bigger.
- **Spring** — my words reveal what is happening inside my heart.

Then finish with James 3:17–18. God’s wisdom changes not only what we say, but the kind of people we are becoming.

Leave the children with one final question:

“If someone could listen to everything you said this week, what would your words tell them about what is happening in your heart?”

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