

## Aim of lesson

To help the young people to realise how their language affects God, other people and themselves.

## Bible background

Matthew 12:36-37

## Preparation required

This is largely a discussion lesson so read through the notes and the relevant passages and decide for yourself which points are clear, which debatable and what problems or questions you might get from your particular group.

## Suggested outline of lesson

For each section, get the young people to discuss the questions on the worksheet using the references to guide them. If you want to share the references out it will probably be better to do it within each section rather than getting one group to talk about gossip, one about lies and one about swearing. This way you will get the best input into each section. Encourage the young people to write their own answers after listening to others' points of view.

The sort of points that should be made are:

### Gossip.

Gossip is idle talk and your group should decide whether it is possible to have 'good' gossip and 'bad' gossip or whether to call 'good' gossip conversation. In the end they should realise that it can be uplifting to ask after people who are not there, take an interest in each others' welfare, tell of your own successes and problems but there is a fine line between this and talking in a damaging way especially about people who are not there to defend themselves. Bring out the fact that James includes 'gossip' amongst 'all kinds of wickedness'. He uses strong language to describe the damage that can be done by a misplaced word.

Help the young people to think about:

- how stories can get exaggerated or embroidered
- how we often find it easier to say something nasty about someone than something good
- how we may have felt crushed in the past when things have been said about us
- how, just because something is 'true' we don't have to say it
- how hearing something about someone affects your opinion of them and you can never really forget it

The rules they devise should include something like:

- Only say things that will do good.
- Always bear in mind that people who hear things may not be as fussy about what they pass on as you are.
- James 3:10 says we can use our tongues to say good things and we should make a point of doing this.

### Lies.

The Bible is unequivocal about lying but it is probably the thing we most often justify. It seems to be against the spirit of Jesus to hurt someone by insisting on telling the truth. Are there ways we can avoid it? Help the young people to see that the reason for the lie is the most important aspect. It must always be wrong to tell a lie to help ourselves, protect ourselves or hurt someone else. Being deceitful without actually telling a lie is just as bad.

### Swearing.

There are two distinct meanings of swearing these days although obviously they both had the same origin.

- Legal oaths. The students will have seen court room scenes on television and know about taking an oath. They may not know that by law, people are allowed to 'affirm' that they will tell the truth because of what the Bible says.
- Unwholesome language. Swear words have developed from the sort of oath mentioned above therefore originally used God's name. Others are biological in origin. It is difficult to say why some words are worse than others but deep down we know what gives us and others offence and that should be our guide. Telling dirty jokes also comes in this area of discussion. Context and the way in which words are said also make a difference to whether they are offensive or not. For this section it seems to be clear that the rule is, 'Don't do it'.

## **Relevance to our lives**

If we are trying to be like Jesus - loving and thoughtful, our conversation should always be influenced by our care for those who hear.

## **Prayer**

Colossians 4:2-6. The young people could write their own prayer using this passage as a guide for what to ask for.

## **Other suggestions for activities**

- The young people might make a list of their friends or acquaintances and beside each a good quality or achievement. They could then either tell each other or make up their minds to tell someone else about each during the coming week.
- Matthew 15:11 tells us how what we say shows what we are like inside. The students could discuss how our language can be a form of preaching - showing others what we are really like - and also show us what sort of people we really are.