

This guide is an invitation to follow Jesus with greater purpose and hope. It will help you to explore the scriptures and challenge you to live out your faith. Each week we'd love for you to think about how you relate: **Up** (with God), **In** (with church) and **Out** (with neighbors).



Weekly Questions:

- How is God getting my attention? For help, think about these areas:
- How are you living up with God?
- How are you living in community with other followers of Jesus?
- How are you living out on mission with your neighbors?
- What are you going to do about it?

From Garden to Garden: Crisis 3- Words as Weapons

James 3

- **Words as Weapons.** While we often grew up with the lie that "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," Scripture tells a different story. James uses two vivid metaphors to describe the tongue's influence. The horse bit: Just as a small bit directs a massive animal, our words apply pressure that shapes the trajectory of our lives. And, the ship's rudder: though tiny compared to the ship, the rudder determines its direction. Our speech acts as a rudder, guiding us toward either life or destruction.
- **Words Create Worlds.** As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel noted, "Words create worlds". If we assume the worst or speak with harshness, we create a world defined by criticism and conflict . Conversely, if we allow the love of Jesus to shape our speech, we participate in creating a world of hope, patience, and goodness.
- **Reflection Questions:**
 - **The Power of Influence:** Who are the teachers, coaches, or leaders who shaped your life with their words? How did their speech either build you up or tear you down?
 - **The Source of Speech:** James asks if a spring can produce both fresh and salt water. Where in your life are you finding it difficult to reconcile your public "praise" (worship) with your private "cursing" (complaints, gossip, or harshness)?
 - **The "Restless Evil":** Why do you think James calls the tongue "restless evil"? What are the common environments or emotional states (e.g., stress, defensiveness, tiredness) that make your tongue most difficult to "tame"?
- **Creating Worlds:** If you audited your conversations from the last week, what kind of "world" did your words create for the people around you
- **Practice: Living in Peace**

This week how can you commit to practicing "Jesus-shaped" speech:

- **The Guarded Door:** Pray Psalm 141:3 daily: "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips". Before speaking in stressful situations, pause to consider if your words will "build up" or "destroy".
- **The Fruit Audit:** Identify one conversation or relationship where your words have been harsh or judgmental. Instead of doubling down, practice the "big-hearted love of Jesus" by offering an apology or speaking a word of encouragement to make things right.
- **Peacemaking Speech:** Intentionally use your words this week to "sow in peace". When you hear gossip, decline to participate, or steer the conversation toward something that reflects the "good fruit" of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness).

- **Words of Affirmation:** Identify one person who has been discouraged recently and intentionally use your words to remind them of their worth and your support for them.