

Adult Lesson Eleven

Living and Speaking the Truth

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16, NRSV).

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:16
- James 3:3-12
- Philippians 4:8
- Colossians 4:6

WHAT YOU NEED

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pencils and pens

PURPOSE

To Know: As Christians, we are witnesses to the truth in Christ Jesus. Our lives and words tell the story of God's creation and redemption. When we fail to speak truthfully to one another, we are failing to live up to our purpose as a child and ambassador of God. We are to proclaim truth in a world of lies and deceit.

To Value: Do you value the truth more than affirmation? Is it more important to be truthful than accepted? Does your life and words mirror the truth of God? Questions like these help us to gauge our ability to follow this commandment.

To Apply: Read the book of James this week. Ask the Lord to help you be more conscious of your words. Strive to be a faithful and blameless witness of our loving and truthful savior this week.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Connected to the third commandment. The ninth commandment is closely tied to the third commandment which is concerned with using the name of God properly. The commandment here, however, adds the social dimension to the third commandment's application in the community. In the same manner that we speak the truth about God, we must speak the truth about our neighbor. The two go hand-in-hand. As we stated in the lesson on the third commandment, the importance of speech for ancient Israel cannot be overemphasized. Words carried power to create and destroy life. Just as God called the world into existence with the spoken word, so humanity possessed the power to speak worlds into existence in the lives of people.

Courtroom setting. One area this commandment seems concerned with is in respect to administering justice in the community where everything was based on people's testimony. There was no DNA testing or crime lab's that could bring empirical evidence against someone. People's lives were dependent on others in the community telling the truth. When the truth was not upheld and when someone could not be taken for his or her word, people became more isolated and were unable to work together as a community.



The law of the spring. James 3:1-12 uses four metaphors to illustrate the same point: the tongue, though small in size, contains an immense power for destruction or creation. The last metaphor James uses, fresh and salt water flowing from the same spring, provides a strong image for this eighth commandment. In talking about our speech within community, we need to ask ourselves what produces our speech and what was its created purpose. These two questions move us beyond the words themselves to the motivation behind them. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. When the Apostle Paul summoned his congregation in Philippi to focus on whatever was true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, he understood the law of the spring. It is the thought patterns and the meditations of the heart that produce the spoken word. Words reflect the inner-life of a person. This is why the eighth and third commandment are connected. Our relationship with God shapes our relationships with people. When we are not living in right relationship with God, we will not be able to live in right relationship with those with whom we share life. Our spoken words provide one of the clearest and most accurate assessments of our relationships.

The book of James is interested in that it is directed to struggling Christians and devotes more attention to the spoken word than any other book in the New Testament. For James, the two are inseparable. When "fresh water" is flowing from one's mouth it speaks of a clean spring out of sight. When a person's words are used carefully to build others up and witness to the life and death of Christ Jesus, it reflects an inner quality that is in right relationship to Christ.

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Open the class session with a role-play for two teens. Courtney approaches Melissa with gossip about what Megan did on Saturday night. Courtney tells Melissa what she heard about Megan. Melissa is a good friend with both Megan and Courtney. She doesn't want a rumor to spread about her friend, Megan, but she also doesn't want Courtney to get upset. The first time the students do the role-play, Melissa tries to keep Courtney from getting upset, no matter how unfair it might be to Megan. Discuss what you observed in the role-play.

Allow the teen playing the part of Melissa to huddle with two friends. The friends in the huddle are to help Melissa decide how she will try to stop the rumor, even if it makes Courtney angry. Do the role-play a second time with Melissa trying to squash the rumor. Discuss what you observed in the role-play.

Upon completing the role-play, ask the students if they encounter problems with rumors at school. Ask **Why do people talk about each other in such hurtful ways? What are the results? How should you respond if you encounter this type of situation?**

DIG IT

Read Exodus 20:16. Ask **What are some ways people bear false witness against other people? What are some of the reasons people lie to one another?** (Seek acceptance, shame of the truth, self-interest, etc.)

Explore how the failure to live out this commandment has affected our society. Ask **What are the ramifications of a people who fail to tell the truth to one another?** (Isolation, fear, competition, etc.) **What are some recent examples of people failing to follow this commandment?** (Politicians, church leaders caught embezzling money, etc.)

What would our society look like if people followed this commandment? (Trust would replace fear and skepticism; contracts would not be needed as much because we wouldn't be as concerned to protect ourselves from each other.)

Say **The Ten Commandments not only show us how to live, but they also reveal God to us. On these two tablets of stone we see the nature and heart of God.** Ask **What does the ninth commandment tell us about God? What do the Ten Commandments tell us about God's intention for the community of faith?** We witness the vision God has for his people and the community through which he will reveal himself. It is a community that protects each other and looks out for each other's needs. It is a community that speaks the truth to one another concerning God and other people. It is a community that understands the source of life and to what end it should be aimed. It is a community that recognizes the uniqueness and value of human life and defends those that may be exploited or overlooked.

Read James 3:3-12. Think about the role-play with Courtney and Melissa. Say **What if Courtney's words were true and Melissa knew they were true?** Ask **Is it okay to "speak the truth" about another regardless of how harmful it is to the one you are speaking about? Is it ever okay to speak damaging words about another?** Remind the students that this commandment is not a license to speak harmful words about other people even if they are true.

Read Philippians 4:8. Say **The apostle Paul reminded his congregations to focus on the good, pure, noble, and upright.** Ask **What is the relationship between this admonition of the apostle Paul and James' discussion on the power of the tongue?** It's not just a matter of what you say. It's also a matter of what you think about and how you view people. When a person focuses on another's strengths rather than weaknesses, he or she will be much more prone to speak positive and uplifting words. The difference between these two is like night and day. When you look at people for who they can be rather than for what they lack, the mistakes they've made and so forth, you will naturally speak "graceful" words when talking to them and about them.

Ask **Have you ever known anyone who was good about building up others?** Ask for personal examples. Say **Jesus is the perfect example of this teaching. He always viewed people for who they could be and never for what they had done in the past. This is why sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes were attracted to him rather than be scared of his criticism.**

TAKE OUT

Form groups of three or four. Ask the students to think of ways that they can speak words of encouragement to others throughout the week. Are there persons who are often degraded by others? Are there persons who have been damaged by the spoken words of others? With one of these persons in mind, create a spoken message that might encourage him or her. Have the groups report to the class.

Encourage the students to read the book of James this week, looking for instructions on how to speak in a manner pleasing to God.

Close this session with a prayer. Immediately after the prayer, say **"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone"** (Colossians 4:6).