

Today's Suggested Schedule—January 2024, Week 4

Today's Bible Story: Say What You Need to Say (Use Words Wisely) • *Ephesians 4:29*

Today's Key Question: Why do your words matter?

Today's Bottom Line: Use your words wisely.

Monthly Memory Verse: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. Luke 16:10 (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Responsibility—Showing you can be trusted with what is expected of you.

Basic Truth: I need to make the wise choice.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Pray for those who might visit your group for the first time. Thank God for the meaningful conversations you've had all month and for the ones you will continue to have as you talk about using words wisely. Pray that your students will be willing to be real about the words they use and that they would understand the impact that they can have, both positive and negative, with their words. Pray that God will give you the right words to say so that you can be an encouragement for your kids today.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

Hang Time

Welcome/Opener

Worship

Bible Story (Communicator Script)

Key Question

Prayer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

Prayer Activity: Make it Personal with Prayer

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)

Devotionals for Kids

Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make.

We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

In Psalm 24:1, David wrote, “The earth belongs to the Lord. And so does everything in it.” God is the author of creation, and God has entrusted us to care for and cultivate the world we see around us. We do that by taking responsibility. From work we need to accomplish, to people we meet, to the words we use, life is filled with moments where we can decide to reflect God’s character, take responsibility, and use what we have wisely. When we follow through and do what needs to be done, we can point others to Jesus, the One who took the ultimate responsibility for us and made it possible for us to be with God forever.

Following Jesus involves living a life that aligns with His teachings and example. When we look at Ephesians 4:29, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating a Christ-like character in our speech.

- **Love and Compassion:** Jesus demonstrated love and compassion in His interactions. Following His example means expressing our thoughts and opinions with genuine care for others, avoiding hurtful or negative speech.
- **Building Up Others:** Jesus sought to build up and encourage people. Following Him involves using our words to inspire, encourage, and support those around us, rather than tearing them down.
- **Wisdom and Discernment:** Jesus spoke with wisdom and discernment. Following in His footsteps means exercising discernment in our speech, choosing words that are not only truthful but also appropriate for the situation and beneficial for the listener.
- **Reflecting Christ's Character:** Following Jesus is about reflecting His character in all aspects of our lives, including our speech. Ephesians 4:29 calls us to speak in a way that shows others that we actually spend time with Jesus and are becoming more like Him.

Verses to look up and discuss about your speech: Proverbs 18:21, James 3:5-6, Proverbs 21:23, Proverbs 15:1, James 1:19

*1. Take a Snapshot

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need: No supplies: Discuss the food items below.

What You Do:

- Ask kids if they like chocolate and what their favorite kind of chocolate is.
- Ask:
 - Is there anything wrong with chocolate?
 - Is chocolate dangerous or harmful?
- Say: “Thankfully chocolate, if we eat it in moderation, isn’t necessarily harmful to us. Did you know that chocolate, when eaten in large quantities, can be super harmful to dogs and cats?”
- Say: “There are many different kinds of food that may not necessarily be bad for us to eat but would be terrible for specific pets.”
- *Optional: Other examples*
 - **Avocados:** Avocados can be extremely toxic for birds, rabbits, and even horses.
 - **Coke:** The caffeine found in soft drinks and many other beverages can be harmful—especially for smaller dogs and cats.
 - **Almonds:** Almonds are harmful for hamsters.
 - **Bread:** Bread will give rabbits major stomach problems and can also be harmful for some fish.
 - **Cheese:** Turtles do not have what it takes to digest any kind of dairy, so it would make them very sick if they were to eat cheese or other dairy products.
- Say: “These foods we discussed are a lot like our words. They can be used for both bad and good. They can be harmful or helpful, depending on how they’re used.”
- Invite the kids to share about a time where they were able to use their words for good.
- **[Make It Personal] (Share a kid-appropriate time when your words hurt someone else. Explain what happened and how you used words to make things right with that person.)**

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need: Lightweight blocks, tape, “Story Tower” Activity Page, “Story Tower Order” Activity Page, construction paper or cardstock

What You Do:

- Spread the pieces of the “Story Tower” Activity Page on the floor where everyone can see them.
- Place the blocks and roll of tape next to the pieces from the “Story Tower” Activity Page.
- Ask kids to try to remember which part of the story on the pieces came first in the story they heard during Large Group. (Allow the kids to work together.)
- Choose a kid to pick up the story piece that is first.
- Use the “Story Tower Order” Activity Page to check their response. Guide kids to try again if they’ve selected a different card.
- Use the tape to attach the story piece to the front side of a block.
- Instruct the kid to place the block on the floor to start a tower.
- Ask the kids to find the piece of the story that came next.
- Use the “Story Tower Order” Activity Page to check their response. Guide kids to try again if they’ve selected a different card.
- Choose a kid to attach the next piece of the story to another block.
- Direct the kid to place that block on top of the first one.
- Continue until all the pieces of the story have been mentioned and every block is placed in order to make a tall and sturdy tower.
- Ask your group to raise their hands if anyone plays baseball or softball.
- Choose a kid who raised their hand and give them a piece of construction paper or cardstock.
- Ask the kid to crumple up the piece of paper into a tight ball, throw the paper ball at the tower, and try to knock it down.
 - If the kid doesn’t knock down the tower on the first try, invite them to do it again until they’re successful.
- Say: “Our words can be like these blocks. We can use them to build others up and make them feel seen, loved, and valued. But our words can also be like the paper ball. They can tear others down and make them feel small and unloved. Our words have such power, and we should do everything we can to use them for the good of others.”
- Give the paper ball to another kid in your group.
- Ask the kid to open up the paper again and try to flatten it and smooth out the wrinkles.
- Say: “There’s no way to completely remove the wrinkles from the piece of paper once it has already been crumpled up. In the same way, we can never truly take back hurtful words that we say. Even though we can apologize for what we’ve said, we cannot undo what we’ve said. Words leave a lasting impact, much like the creases left in the paper. That’s why we should always be careful when we’re choosing the words we say. When we follow Jesus, God sends the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can ask for help any time we’re tempted to use harmful words.”

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share and collaborate with others while growing their understanding

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask:

- Why do your words matter?
- Why is it so hard to undo the damage caused by harmful words?
- Who can help us with our words?
- When have you used words that helped someone?
- How do the words you use reflect your relationship with God?
- How can the words you use point others to Jesus?
- How can your words point people away from Jesus?

4. Verses to Take with You

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: White board, dry-erase marker, index cards, pens, tape, Bible

What You Do:

- Ask kids if anyone is able to recite Luke 16:10a from memory.
- Invite kids to say the verse if they know it.
- Write the words to the verse on the white board:
 - NlrV: *Suppose you can be trusted with something very little. Then you can also be trusted with something very large. —Luke 16:10a*
 - NIV: *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. —Luke 16:10a*
- Be sure to spread out the words as you write so there is room to cover them with index cards.
- Give every kid an index card and a pen.
- Ask the kids to think of words that are positive or kind that they might use to build someone else up. Like:
 - beautiful
 - thoughtful
 - love
 - thanks
 - talented
- Instruct the kids to write the word they thought of on their index card.
- Depending on how many kids are in the group, you may need to ask some kids to write more than one word.
 - You will need 20 cards for the NlrV, 14 for the NIV.
 - Write a few words of your own if more cards are needed.
- Once all the index cards have been created, invite the group to read Luke 16:10a out loud.
- Choose a kid to pick a word from the verse and ask them to use the tape to stick their index card on the white board so it covers up one word of the verse.
- Invite the group to read the verse again, using the word on the index card in place of the word it is covering.
- Repeat until everyone has had a chance to tape their cards on the board and all words of the verse have been covered up.
- Each round, instruct the group to say the verse, substituting words for the ones written on the index cards.
- Eventually, on the final round, the group will be reading only a series of words of affirmation.
- Again, ask kids if anyone remembers Luke 16:10a.
- Allow the kids to take turns saying it from memory.
- Give a kid a Bible.
- Ask them to look up Ephesians 4:29 and read it out loud.
- Ask:
 - What are some ways you can keep from saying things that tear others down?
 - What are some ways you can practice using words that build others up?
- Say: "We will become people who others trust when they can depend on us to use words that build others up, rather than tear others down."

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember?
- How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission?

What You Need:

Pet Project Prayers: 4" Activity Page, pens (or pencils)

- Give each kid a copy of the "Pet Project Prayers: 4" Activity Page and a pen (or pencil).
- Encourage kids to decorate their pages however they would like. (They can draw pictures of their favorite animal or a pet they have at home.)
- After each kid has had a chance to decorate their page, instruct them to use the spaces provided to list prayers they may have.
- Instruct the kids to write prayers that are focused on asking God to help them with their words. (These should be brief reminders that will help guide them when they pray at home.)
- Encourage the kids to think of specific ways they need to work on using their words.
- Examples of prayers might include:
 - Use kinder words with my brother.
 - Stop gossiping about people.
 - Text a compliment to a friend.
- Encourage kids to take their page home and place it somewhere they will see it.
- Challenge them to set aside time in the week ahead to pray each day.
- Say: "Praying doesn't have to be complicated or take a long time. Just taking a little time talking to God each day is a great way to spend time with God and also to stay focused on using our words for good."
- Close your group time in prayer, making sure to say something edifying or encouraging about each kid.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible story applies to real life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

Story Exploration – No supplies

***1. Take a Snapshot**

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need:

- NO supplies

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need:

- Lightweight blocks made of cardboard or Styrofoam—12 blocks for each Small Group
 - These will need to be light enough so that they can be knocked down by a paper ball.
 - These could either be made of thin cardboard or paper, foam, or Styrofoam.
 - Ex: Styrofoam blocks, learning blocks, or gift boxes
- Tape—one roll for each Small Group
- Print “Story Tower” Activity Page on paper and cut apart—one set for each Small Group
- Print “Story Tower Order” Activity Page on paper—one for each Small Group
- Thick construction paper or cardstock—one to three pieces for each Small Group

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share and collaborate with others while growing their understanding

What You Need:

- No supplies needed

4. Verses to Take with You

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need:

- White board—one for each Small Group
- Dry-erase marker—one for each Small Group
- Index cards—20 for each Small Group
- Pens—one for each kid
- Tape—one roll for each Small Group
- Bible—one for each Small Group

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Need:

- Print “Pet Project Prayers: 4” Activity Page on cardstock—one for each kid
- Pens (or pencils)—one for each kid

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Print on cardstock or email this week’s devotionals and Parent Cue cards.
- Tell parents about our additional family resources: **Parent Cue app**