LEADER, EDUCATOR & PARENT COMPANION GUIDE

Episode 1: Bullying & Cyberbullying

Dual-Story Focus: "Harsh Words in the Hall" and "Toxic Texts"

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ANCHOR SCRIPTURE - EPHESIANS 4:29 (NIV)

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Key Principle: Words carry creative power. They either tear down or construct.

Classic Format for a Modern Generation

Heaven County blends the warm, character-driven storytelling of classic ensemble shows like Fat Albert with the authentic dilemmas high schoolers face today. Each episode is structured as two interconnected eleven-minute stories addressing one shared moral challenge from different angles, bookended by a trusted adult mentor who breaks the fourth wall to talk directly with the audience.

PART 1: HARSH WORDS IN THE HALL

Focus: Face-to-face hallway confrontation, verbal teasing, peer bystander pressure, and physical locker-room intimidation.

Core Question:
How do hallway jokes cross into deep wounds?

PART 2: TOXIC TEXTS & GROUP CHATS

Focus: Digital rumors, screenshot forwarding, private group chats turned cruel, and the permanence of online humiliation.

Core Question:
Why is it easier to be mean behind a screen?

Session Learning Objectives for Youth & Small Groups

- [X] **Recognize The Escalation Point:**
  Help students identify how casual sarcasm or forwarded screenshots quietly escalate into real emotional destruction.
- [X] **Dismantle The Bystander Effect:**
  Equip teens with practical language Jordan uses to step between peers and de-escalate tension without violence.
- [X] **Reframe Communication as Building:**
  Challenge students to evaluate every text, comment, and hallway remark through the lens of Ephesians 4:29.

Small Group & Classroom Discussion Guide

Designed for 45-to-60 minute youth group gatherings, Sunday school, or student leadership circles.

WARM-UP ICEBREAKERS (10 MINUTES)

1. Have you ever sent a text or joke in a group chat that was taken completely the wrong way? What happened?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how different are people at your school face-to-face versus in their comments or DMs?
3. Why do you think it feels so much harder to stand up for someone in the hallway than it does to just walk past?

Part 1: Harsh Words in the Hall (Discussion Questions)

Question 1: In the hallway scene, Dante tries to use humor to ease the tension, but it almost makes things worse. Why do we often use sarcasm or jokes as a defense mechanism when we feel threatened?

Question 2: Jordan steps into the circle when others are just watching. What is the difference between being a passive spectator and an active peacemaker? What risks did Jordan take by speaking up?

Question 3: Trey feels pressure to laugh along with the locker-room banter to protect his status on the basketball team. Have you ever felt forced to compromise your values just to maintain your standing in a group?

Part 2: Toxic Texts & The Digital Arena (Discussion Questions)

Question 4: When a hurtful screenshot gets forwarded into a secondary chat, everyone claims 'I didn't start it, I just shared it.' Why does digital communication trick us into thinking we carry less guilt?

Question 5: Maya struggles with wanting to delete her social accounts after reading cruel comments about her art. How does online peer approval distort our God-given identity (Psalm 139:14)?

Question 6: Pastor Marv calls a 'time-out' and asks the audience: 'Can you take back a bullet once it's fired?' How does that metaphor apply to words typed in anger or impulsiveness at 11:00 PM?

PASTOR MARV'S HUDDLE: SCRIPTURE APPLICATION

In Ephesians 4:29, the Greek word for 'unwholesome' is 'sapros' -- meaning rotten, spoiled, or corrupt fruit. Pastor Marv points out that corrupt talk isn't just profanity; it's gossip, mocking, exclusion, and cynical tearing down of another human being. But the verse doesn't stop with 'don't say bad things.' It commands positive construction: speak only what builds up according to the need of the moment.

Group Takeaway Exercise:

Before speaking or hitting 'send', run your words through the 3-Question Filter: (1) Is it true? (2) Is it necessary? (3) Does it build this person up in Christ?

Character Case Studies: Real Choices Under Pressure

Use these profiles to assign small groups or discuss how different personalities react to the same episode dilemma.

Jordan Bennett [The Steady Encourager | Ephesians 4:29]

Dilemma: Stepping into the Gap

Jordan is the central anchor of the crew. When hallway confrontation breaks out, Jordan risks his own comfort to intervene. He demonstrates that real leadership isn't about physical dominance; it is about moral courage and de-escalating anger with deliberate, measured encouragement.

Reflection: What would it look like for you to be a 'Jordan' in your group chat or school locker room this week?

Maya Gonzalez [The Creative Dreamer | Psalm 139:14]

Dilemma: Identity Under Digital Critique

Maya shares her community mural concepts online, only to receive mocking anonymous comments. Her emotional spiral shows how quickly cyberbullying attacks our self-worth. Maya learns through Pastor Marv that her value is rooted in being fearfully and wonderfully made, not in social validation.

Reflection: How can you protect your self-worth when peers criticize your talents, appearance, or background?

Dante Price [The Quick-Witted Comic | James 5:16]

Dilemma: When Humor Becomes a Weapon

Dante uses humor as both a defense shield and social currency. But when his hallway quip accidentally fuels the bully's mockery, Dante is forced to confront how jokes can wound. He learns that real maturity means owning up to hurtful words and offering an authentic, unmasked apology.

Reflection: Have you ever crossed the line from playful teasing into hurtful mocking? How can you make it right?

Trey Johnson [The Driven Athlete | 1 Corinthians 10:13]

Dilemma: The Pressure to Stay Silent

As the star basketball guard, Trey worries that speaking out against locker-room gossip will make him an outcast on the team. Trey's story highlights moral courage -- discovering that integrity lasts far longer than high school athletic hype.

Reflection: Where in your life are you currently tempted to remain silent while someone else is being torn down?

Teaching Tip: Ask two students to role-play Dante and Jordan's conversation from Scene 3.

Notice how Jordan holds Dante accountable without shaming or humiliating him in front of others.

Parent & Family Discussion Toolkit

Practical car-ride and dinner-table conversation starters for parents watching with teens.

THREE NATURAL CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR HOME

Prompt 1 (Car Ride):

"In the show, Jordan and Dante dealt with drama blowing up in a group chat. Does that kind of thing happen in your friend groups, or is it usually one-on-one?"

Why it works: Asks about their peers rather than interrogating their personal phone habits, allowing them to open up safely.

Prompt 2 (Dinner Table):

"Pastor Marv said mean words can act like bullets you can't take back. Have you ever seen someone say something online that ruined a real-life friendship?"

Why it works: Invites them to share observations and evaluate consequences without feeling judged.

Prompt 3 (Before Bed):

"If one of your friends was getting quietly ganged up on in a chat, what would be the safest way to show support without making yourself a target?"

Why it works: Focuses on problem-solving, courage, and practical action plans together.

THE 24-HOUR "WORDS THAT BUILD" CHALLENGE

Challenge your students or teens to complete these 5 concrete action steps over the next 24 hours:

- [ ] **1. The Private Encouragement Text:**
  Send an unexpected, genuine message to someone who has seemed stressed, quiet, or overlooked lately. Thank them for something specific.
- [ ] **2. The Group Chat Pause:**
  Before sending any comment, meme, or reply in a group chat today, pause for 5 seconds and ask: 'Does this build someone up, or is it at someone else's expense?'
- [ ] **3. The Hallway Defender:**
  If you overhear gossip or mocking between classes, refuse to laugh or nod along. Change the subject, or speak one positive truth about the absent person.
- [ ] **4. The Apology Bridge:**
  If you know you spoke harsh words to a sibling, parent, or teammate earlier this week, reach out and say: 'I was wrong to say that. Will you forgive me?'
- [ ] **5. Memorize Ephesians 4:29:**
  Write the verse on an index card or save it as your phone wallpaper: 'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.'

Leader's Closing Benediction & Prayer

\"Heavenly Father, You spoke the world into existence, and You gave our words the power to bring life or death. Guard our mouths in the hallways, guard our fingers on our keyboards, and give us Jordan's courage to stand in the gap when others are torn down. May Heaven County be more than a town on a screen -- may it be a reminder that in Christ, every day is a place of new beginnings. In Jesus' name, Amen.\"

HEAVEN COUNTY APPAREL & EPISODE 2 PACKS

Official Gildan 18500 Heavy Blend Collection: heavencounty.com | Direct Store: heavencounty.com/products-list

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