A fig tree that produces olives or a grape vine that produces figs? Impossible! So is a bad word that produces something good.

Speaking with care

James cautions us to be careful of how we speak and what we say. We must learn, says James, to control our communication with others.

James 2:12 It's one of the criteria by which we will be judged. "So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty".

Christ is not only our Saviour, but he is also our Lawgiver and Judge. It is true that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). However, that does not give us the liberty to do and say whatever we please. We must "so speak and so act" as our Master commands and left us an example.

Different kinds of wrong speaking

In his letter, James alludes to many kinds of wrong speaking...

1 ~ Twisted truth

James 1:13 "Let no one say, 'I am tempted by God'". This is an example of a twisted truth. God allows us to be tempted, and strengthens us in our temptations, so he is certainly involved in our temptations -- not divorced from them. God bears definite responsibilities in our temptations (see 1Co 10:13). However to say that God is tempting us, or that he is causing us to be tempted, is twisting the truth. The twisted truth, and its first cousin the half-truth, are among the most popular forms of lying.

2 ~ Angry words

James 1:19-20 "Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God". When our anger is like God's anger, a righteous anger, then it will achieve the righteousness of God. Angry words, however, are often unjustified, ill considered, and therefore do a lot of harm. This verse does not say, "Do not be angry". It says, rather, "Be slow to anger". Consider your reasons, your motives, and your words, before you express your wrath.

3 ~ Idle and careless words

James 1:26 "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue this man's religion is worthless". It is not just in moments of anger that we must control the tongue, but at all times. A joke, a piece of news, whatever -- if it cannot be uttered to good purpose, it should not be uttered at all (cf Eph 4:29 and Jas 1:21).

4 ~ Flattery

James 2:3 "If you pay special attention to the one who is wearing fine clothes and say, 'You sit here in a good place' have you not evil motives?". Paying or accepting a well-deserved compliment, or expression of respect, is good. However, beware of flattering speech and the wrong motives behind it.

5 ~ Insults

James 2:3,6 "If you say to the poor man, 'You stand up over there or sit down by my footstool', you have dishonoured the man". It is easy to put people down, but it isn't right.

6 ~ Insincerity

James 2:15-16 "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed, and be filled' --and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Talk, they say, is cheap. We, however, should always say what we mean, and mean what we say.

7~ Bitterness

James 3:9-10 "Out of the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a fountain give fresh and bitter water from one opening?". To express regret, disappointment, disapproval, and such like, is not to be "bitter". Can you clarify what is? It has to do with grudges, blaming, not letting go and leaving vengeance to God. It has to do with focusing on past evil instead of good whether in past, present, or future.

8 ~ Quarreling

James 4:1-2 "What is the source of quarrel and conflicts among you? you are envious so you fight and quarrel". We will have disagreements from time to time, and these may become quite serious. However, we should not have fights and quarrels. The difference is simple...