

## High Maintenance Relationships: “The Gossiper”

Proverbs 26:17-28

June 26, 2011

### **Introduction:**

As we continue to look at high maintenance relationships, we look this morning at the issue of dealing with the person who gossips. The individual who gossips is the person who wants to tell us about someone’s else’s personal matters and secrets and for the most part there is no good intention or purpose for sharing what they share. What do we do with the person who is breaking someone else’s trust and confidentiality by confiding in us? What does God and the Bible have to say about gossiping?

### **Read Proverbs 26:17-28**

Knowing and gossiping about the personal matters of others has become acceptable behavior and a major preoccupation in our society.

We have internet-bloggers who dispense opinions that are not always factual.

We have the media exposing us to the personal trials of stars like Charlie Sheen for weeks on end until some national or international crisis finally bumped him out of the news spotlight.

We have 24 hour political news channels that have their biases about what they report.

**Illustration:** The other night Marlene I were watching a special on PBS about the response to the earthquake victims in Haiti. Doctors and nurses who served there told stories about Haitian people who lived in a nearby town unaffected by the earthquake. They said those people of that neighboring town brought food and

assisted with the care for the earthquake victims. People from that town waited outside the hospitals for opportunities to help. The men and women came into the clinic to hold and comfort children. I never heard those types of stories about people in Haiti. All I have heard in the news seemed to paint the Haitian people as victims depending on nothing but outside help.

Our culture has gotten sloppy about checking the facts before speaking opinions. So as Christians from time to time we need to be reminded about the issue of gossiping and other forms of corrupt communication.

- The third chapter of the book of James teaches us of the many ways we get into trouble because we do not control our tongues in what we say.
- The first book of Timothy, chapter 5 has the Apostle Paul warning the Christians about **“going from house to house being gossips and busybodies spreading falsehoods.”** **Information whether false or factual that gets misused can do great harm.**

**Illustration:** Wasn't it just about 2 years ago that a teenage girl in the mid-west committed suicide because of the false information being spread about her by her classmates online? A story like her's is extreme and we could quickly say that we would never be involved in anything like that but scripture tells us we don't have to be involved in anything that sensational to be a part of gossiping which displeases the Lord.

### **Why the Bible condemns gossiping: Proverbs 22:1**

Let's look at first why the Bible condemns gossiping. Why is the talk, whether fact or fiction about someone else when they are not in our presence to dispute, explain or defend themselves so clearly discouraged by scripture? Proverbs 22:1 tells us that **“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than gold or silver.”** The Bible condemns gossip because

gossip “injures a good name.” Gossip is a form of stealing from someone’s life and reputation.

**Gossip is stealing someone’s privacy.** Gossip may be very accurate information about a couple having marital problems, people facing financial problems, health issues, or any other concern. But that is just it, it is their hurt, their problems and up to them to be in the control of telling. Often when someone will ask me for prayer support when they are going through a tough time I ask, can this be shared or is this prayer concern to be kept confidential. The issue, the problem belongs to them and gossiping steals that control and responsibility away from them about disclosing things that are happening in their life.

**Gossip is a form of theft of someone’s reputation.** Lies are spread about what someone did or didn’t do. Gossip spreads interpretations about what some one might be thinking, going to do, or feeling without the person there to defend themselves. I think we agree we often hear people say they strive to live by the Ten Commandments. Ask them if they have ever broken the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment of “you shall not steal.” Most would probably say oh no I would never steal from anyone. But if we speak about others without them present to defend, explain or verify what we are saying about them then we have robbed them of their credibility and good reputation. We have broken the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment.

**Illustration:** When I pastored at Walton Christian, we went through a period of church conflict. I was taken off the Christmas card list of some of the members. There began to be gossip about me including the fact that there was a big milk weed growing outside in the crack of the steps near my office. The rumor was that I didn’t want that one single solitary milkweed cut down by the lawn service. I could have cared less about that weed. But that was the rumor a group of people passed around and the rumor

finally surfaced in a council meeting. When it was said, I had to laugh when I heard that one. I am for saving various animals and plants in danger of extinction; but I have never made a contribution to the save the milk weed foundation.

Gossiping really hits home with God because people used gossip against Jesus. Religious people who knew better were gossiping about him. The gossipers said things like, Jesus was in cahoots with devil. They said the only way Jesus could cast out demons was by the power of the devil. They accused him of breaking the Law of Moses by working on the Sabbath when he healed people. People used gossip to wrongfully discredit his reputation and control him. When we gossip we are practicing the very thing used to mock and discredit Jesus. I have to believe that gossiping is a big deal to the Lord.

### **How God views the one who gossips: Proverbs 26:17-22**

The one who gossips is not just passing along information. When we talk about someone during their absence we are not always being helpful. There are at least three ways that I can see from scripture how God views and describes the one who gossips. In just Proverbs 26 there are three descriptions about the one who gossips.

Proverbs 26:17 describes the one who gossips is a meddler and unwise at that. Verse 17 says that the one who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears. Do we get the mental picture here? Who would grab a stray dog by the ear? Do it and your likely to get bit. The Bible says the one who gossips is just as foolish and going to eventually get bit.

Proverbs 26:18-19 states **“Like a maniac who shoots deadly firebrands and arrows, so is the one who deceives a neighbor and says I am joking.”**

Sometimes the one who reveals the confidential private matters of

others, hides behind the excuse of gossips as they are only concerned. Problem is they are telling everyone how concerned they are.

Sometimes the one who is critical of another person when that person is absent will say they are only trying to be helpful, but do they go to the very one they are talking about and offer help? If not, it's practicing deception. The one who throws words around carelessly about others and says they are only joking, they didn't mean anything by it are using idle words that cannot be trusted.

Proverbs 26:22 states the one who gossips is a tempter, verse 22 states, **“the words of a whisper are like delicious morsels...”** When we take part in gossip, especially being the one doing the talking we are tempting another person to do wrong.

God is not pleased in the one who begins a conversation with words like, “keep this to yourself but did you hear....

“You have to keep this a secret but I'll tell you....

### **Biblical guidance for responding to gossip**

Within the scripture I believe there is guidance of how to respond to the person and relationship where gossip is offered.

1) One step is not to listen. Don't offer an ear or be an audience for the gossip. **Proverbs 26:20 states “for lack of wood the fire goes out.”** A gossip cannot spread gossip if there is no one willing to allow them to whisper in their ear. Our Christ-like character needs to cause us to step out of the way of participating in gossip. If someone asks, “can you keep a secret,” say “no I cannot.” Tell them your spiritual gift is honesty and you'll let others know where you got your information, and do your best just to change the subject of the conversation. Don't give the wood of your attention to keep the fires of gossip burning.

2.) Gossip to the Lord first. Psalm 62:5-6, 8 is about channeling our concern to the Lord. **Verse 8 says pour out your heart before him.** If we are finding ourselves tempted to pass along information about someone to other people, tell it to God first. Pray for that person and their situation. Pray for how you can help them. We'll find if God gives us a burden to support that person, the temptation to gossip about them will be removed.

3.) Challenge the conversation of the person who is about to gossip to you. Matthew 18:15 says if we see our brother committing a wrong we are to go to them. Challenge that person to take their interest about what someone else is going through and go to that person to see if they can help. Not only that, remind the person although they might not mean to gossip, they are telling you things you do not need to be hearing.

### **Conclusion**

What makes some people prone to gossip?

Do we gossip because we are concerned? Possibly.

Do we gossip because we think others would find what we are about to say interesting, probably.

Do some people gossip because it gives them a sense of power and control over information and people? It could be.

One thing is for certain, gossip breaks trust. If people cannot trust they cannot really share about their deepest hurts, fears, demons, struggles, hopes and dreams. Gossip is the weak link in the chain of relationships. If people feel others will talk behind their back they will never draw close.