

ARE YOU SERIOUS

“Let Me Tell You”

October 29, 2023

INTRO.: We welcome you this morning to our **ARE YOU SERIOUS** message series on forgiveness. Over the last several weeks we have talked about:

*How forgiveness is Inconceivable apart from God

*What forgiveness is and what it isn't

*Why should I forgive

*When should I forgive

*How does forgiveness work

If you missed any of the messages, you can find a link on the website as well as a copy of the notes. Last week we began a four-part message series on the **FRUITS OF UNFORGIVENESS**. Last week we looked at anger: I'm Mad. This morning we are looking at gossip: Let me Tell You. How many here remember these? (picture of a bug zapper) Brenda and I used to have one. You would turn it on at night, it would light up. The bugs would be attracted to the UV light at the center of the device and be electrocuted. According to some researchers they found that they don't work so well at killing the bugs that bite you, like mosquitos. Come to think of it, I don't see many of these around anymore. This reminds me of the second fruit of unforgiveness that we're going to look at: gossip. Why are we so attracted to gossip? It never produces the results we think it will. Just like the bug heading to the bug zapper thinking it will provide something good only having it lead to its death. Gossip causes an incredible amount of damage: affecting the one who shares the gossip, the one who listens to the gossip, and the person the gossip is about. This week we are looking at

THE WARNINGS IN SCRIPTURE

THE WHAT IT IS

THE WHAT IT IS NOT

THE WHY WE DO IT

Next week we will look at how we can stop it.

THE WARNINGS IN SCRIPTURE

What does the Bible have to say about gossip? We don't find many places where the word is mentioned but when it is, there is always damage. Gossip is NEVER brought forth in a positive light. So, let's take some time going through some of these verses. We find several references in the book of proverbs which is another reason I encourage people to take a month and read through the book and journal what you find. A chapter a day gets you through the entire book in a month. You will find things about how we should talk, moral purity, temptation, finances, work, anger, wisdom, what we should think about, lying, generosity, marriage, raising children, love, and gossip. And some say the Bible doesn't speak to the issues of the day.

I want to begin with one that is mentioned twice in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 18:8; 26:22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Jonathan Akin in his commentary on Proverbs says, "People love to gossip. It is virtually a universal human addiction. We just cannot get enough. Like a man strung out on heroin or crack cocaine, we just have to have more.

This is a tasty delicacy. When Solomon says that it "*goes down to a man's inmost parts,*" he is saying that it becomes firmly implanted in us and becomes a part of who we are. It leaves us with wanting more. Why do you think the tabloids and websites that speak of people's supposed transgressions attract so much attention?

Proverbs 11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

Have you ever had anyone say, "I shouldn't tell you this, but..." If you and I have been told something in confidence and we spread the information that is gossip. There are some places where things need to be told to someone else. When someone asks me, "If I tell you this will you promise not to tell anyone else?", I have to say that depends if it's illegal, dangerous to themselves or others.

Proverbs 14:15 A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.

We live in a day when we no longer believe the best about someone. We may have known them for years and their character has been above reproach, but we hear something bad and at times automatically believe the report. We are called to make sure the report is true by talking directly to the person. Am I willing to defend the person before just believing everything that is said about them?

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. I put these two together because the result is the same. Gossip ruins friendships. Often, it is because the person has done something to me, and I am not only unwilling to forgive them but want to lash out by spreading rumors about them.

Paul, in his letter to the believers in Corinth, is deeply concerned for them, and he wants to assure them that all he, and those with him, have done for them is to strengthen them. He communicates this one fear in coming to them:

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

In the list that contains gossip he mentions many other sins that cause great harm and division. We need to face it: GOSSIP IS SIN!!! GOSSIP IS DESTRUCTIVE!!

In the letter to the church at Rome we see gossip in another list. This is a passage where Paul tells us that, because of people's ongoing disobedience, and their unwillingness to recognize God as the only true God, the only One who is due their worship, God gave them over and let them pursue their sin.

Romans 1:28–32 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. **29** They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, **30** slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; **31** they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. **32** Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Our conclusion after looking at these Scriptures (and there are more) is that gossip is not only incredibly damaging, but also sin. We need to call it what it is! Since this is so damaging, we need to define it.

THE WHAT IT IS

One of my main concerns is that we don't realize we are gossiping when in fact we are. In preparation for these messages, I have read the book, *Resisting Gossip*, by Matthew Mitchell. He is a pastor who does an excellent job in writing about the definition, dangers, destruction of gossip. One of our men's groups has gone through this book and we have some copies available and we will get more if needed. Let's begin with his definition of gossip.

"bearing bad news behind someone's back out of a bad heart."

"bearing bad news:" gossip is a communication thing that requires words, spoken or written. We have this with in-person conversations but now we also have it through email, texting, and on-line communication. Let's face it: the more we talk, the more opportunity there is for sin.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

"behind someone's back:" I am purposely not talking to them directly, but instead talking about them when they are not present.

Matthew Mitchell provides these questions we should ask when talking about someone:

- Would I say this if they were here? (Really? Be honest now.)
- Would I receive this bad news about them in the same way if they were present?
- Am I hiding this conversation from someone?
- Would I want someone else to talk this way about me if I were out of the room?

"out of a bad heart:" My motives are not right and I am not right.

Matthew 12:33–34 “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. **34** You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Joseph Stowell, past president of Moody Bible Institute once said, “All talk is heart talk.”

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Three questions Matthew Mitchell encourages someone to ask:

*Why am I saying this?

*Why am I listening to this?

*Why am I attracted to this bad news?

I would like to look at some things that fit this definition: (both from Matthew Mitchell and myself)

*sharing a story that is not truthful

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

*sharing a story that may not be true or assuming a bad report is true

You tell it like its truth, but you really haven’t checked out the facts. What happened to “believing the best” about someone? This is so important for a successful marriage: believing that our spouse is good hearted in the midst of difficult things.

The serpent in Genesis 3 got Eve to question the reasons for the direction God had given them.

*sharing bad news that is true to the detriment of the person being talked about

We are attracted to bad reports because it makes us feel better about ourselves. We shouldn’t rejoice in another’s sin, but we should grieve.

Just because I know you got a speeding ticket doesn’t mean I need to tell others about it. Obviously, if someone is in danger or if it is illegal I need to tell someone who has authority/power to do something about it.

*sharing a story where I determine their motives

In this scenario I am actually playing God. I determine that I know why somebody did something. Jesus, in speaking to the Pharisees, reminds them that, no matter what they do, God knows their hearts. I get in trouble when I start to make the determination of people’s motives.

Luke 16:15 He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.

*sharing a story about someone when I haven’t first talked with them

Matthew 5:23–24 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

*sharing a story that was told to me in confidence

Proverbs 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

*sharing only “my side of the story” so that I look good without sharing everything that went on.

Maybe I have been wounded by that person and I want everyone to know about it. I can only see my hurt and I’m not willing to share all of what was told to me. This happens sometimes when another confronts me about my sin or delivers difficult news to me.

*sharing a story out of a critical spirit

What does God tell us to do? What does love look like according to the Bible?

1 Corinthians 13:4–8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **8** Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Sometimes things are shared as prayer requests that are actually just another form of gossip.

THE WHAT IT IS NOT

*When I go to the authorities about a dangerous situation

*When I need to seek counsel about conflicts and problems
(keep the circle small)

*When I am warning people

*When I go to the spiritual leaders to resolve a conflict, restore a fellow believer, after having approached the individual first myself (Matthew 18:15-17)

THE WHY WE DO IT

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV) “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

We are attracted to bad news about other people. It comes natural and to not gossip is supernatural. How many people here have been affected by gossip? Have you been gossiped about? If you haven't, I can almost guarantee that you will be. Just like the bugs were attracted to our bug zapper, so we are attracted to gossip.

Sometimes we do it so we can feel better about ourselves and our weaknesses and sins with which we struggle. Let me go back to one of the verses I began with this morning.

Proverbs 18:8; 26:22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts. “*choice morsels:*” when Brenda bakes cookies I love to take some off the rack right after they come out of the oven. They are still warm and delicious, although I may have to sneak them. Gossip is like that warm cookie that I just can't wait to eat.

Our attraction to gossip speaks of our sinful nature and the need to have God's strength and power to overcome it. It's also one of the reasons there is so much in the Bible about the tongue.

Let's read together what James 3:2-12 says about the tongue. This is truth and think about how you and I stand no chance to overcome gossip apart from God.

James 3:2–12 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

**if a man is never at fault in what he says he is perfect*

**tongue is a fire*

**you can tame animals but no one can tame the tongue*

**it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*

**we praise God and curse people*

If you and I think we have the power to control our tongue, we are deceiving ourselves!!

SO WHAT???

Unfortunately, gossip doesn't come with a warning sign. It's not like Thursday morning when I was heading up to the district meet early in the morning and as I approached the high school, I saw flashing lights giving a warning that there was an accident ahead. As I passed the scene I saw where two cars had collided, there was an ambulance, fire truck, police cars, all with flashing lights. There was damage and gossip is very damaging.

Gossip is Like Barnacles

In the Entre Leadership podcast, author Stephen Mansfield compares how barnacles slow down sea vessels to the affect gossip can have on an organization or church. Some of the facts discussed in the podcast:

- Barnacles can slow down ships by as much as 40% as reported by the US Navy.
- Barnacles can get inside engines and can be added weight on the hull.
- Barnacles can actually crack the hull of smaller vessels.
- Barnacles diminish the aerodynamics of the boat.
- The number of barnacles multiply rapidly due to the constant reproduction.
- The US Navy spends \$500 million a year to scrape barnacles off ships.

Source: Stephen Mansfield, "4 Steps to Kill Gossip," Entre Leadership podcast #303 (1-27-19)

*Where is my heart?

What Do 860 Million Words Say About You?

In a recent book, Levi Lusko writes that it takes cooperation of 72 different muscles to produce speech. On average 16,000 words come out of your mouth every day. That adds up to a whopping 860.3 million words in the average American lifetime. What do all the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sentences say about your life and the condition of your heart?

Source: Adapted from Levi Lusko, I Declare War (W Publishing Group, 2018), page 81

*Am I willing to examine my words before I speak to others?

*Have I put my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior who is my only hope in overcoming gossip?

*Am I willing to seek forgiveness for gossiping about another

Who is in the Driver's Seat of Your Life?

In his sermon, John Ortberg compares submission to Jesus to driving a car:

When it was time to take our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of the car, and then I got in the front seat to drive. She was so small even the baby seat was way too big. She looked so fragile to me that I drove home on the freeway going 35 miles per hour with the hazard lights flashing the whole time.

That first day, when your kid is in the car with you, is a scary day. Does anybody want to know what the next really scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16, and now you're handing over the keys. Now they're moving from the passenger seat, from the ride-along seat, into the driver's seat. That's a scary moment.

It is a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the speed. You're in the drive-along seat. But if we are to change seats, if you're going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control. Whoever is in this seat is the person in control.

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as he's in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where they require his services. Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help.... I want you in the car, but I'm not so sure I want you driving. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my life anymore. If he's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put him in control then it's no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now, it's his wallet. It's scary. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. No, it's his agenda. It's his life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip, flatter, cajole, deceive, rage, intimidate, manipulate, exaggerate. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to him. I'm fully engaged. In fact, I'm more alive than I've ever been before, but it's not my life anymore. It's *his* life.

Source: John Ortberg, "True Freedom," sermon on PreachingToday.com