

Necessary Sins Week 3 – Gossip

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton

Ps Jason Sander 19-3-23

(Inspired by a Sermon Series from Life.Church; some parts of the sermon are also taken from this resource)

Psalm 139:23,24 pray together.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you,

and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

(Intro) e.g. Have you ever been gossiped about?

In our culture today, gossip just seems like a necessary part of getting through the workday; it seems necessary when you catch up for a coffee with a friend, or when have you a beer or softy at the end of the day with your friends.

You could even say it is a necessary part of conversations with our friends.

- "Hey, I'm not really supposed to tell anybody this, but you're not going to believe what I heard."
- "Hey, you've got to promise not to tell anybody this, but I'm about to tell you something you're going to really want to hear."
- Sometimes we are even more blatant – "[chuckle] I've got some goss for you".

- I'm not sure if I should tell you, but, "Did you hear that so and so did this..."

Have you been involved in this type of conversation?

Pastor Rick Warren described gossip by suggesting, **"When we're talking about a situation with somebody who's neither part of the problem nor part of the solution, then we are probably gossiping."**

In the book of Proverbs, in the Bible, gossiping is referred to as, giving false witness against another person and stirring conflict in the family/community (Proverbs 6:19).

It is one of those things that God detests. If you recall, the word detest means to make someone feel nauseous. Just as we discovered with lying, God can't stand gossiping.

So why is God so strong on this?

- My parents visiting someone in hospital – the bed next over... the person started to talk about the pastor, and how he was changing this and that – which in all honesty I can say, was only part of the truth, we were trying to fulfil a child safety plan and ensure tables were stored safely...

This made my mum angry, the mother hen, protective angry, but she was able to hold it in and bite her tongue, I'm glad she did!

Here's the thing, what this story highlights for me, is how protective we are of our children if someone is gossiping, or speaking badly of our children, we fire up, ...people can gossip about me, but my children...

And when we speak of someone in a bad light, spread rumours, speaking unlovingly, we are talking about one of God's children! That's why God finds gossip offensive.

Here's the thing is, we can know gossip is unhelpful and can be really hurtful, but there is something attractive about the sin of gossip. Proverbs 18:8 (NIV) picks up on this:

**The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;
they go down to the inmost parts.**

The writer of Proverbs and the wisdom community of Israel knew how enjoyable it is to participate in the destructive sin of gossip.

So we know God hates gossiping, we know for humans it can be enjoyable and delectable, so why do we gossip? What drives people to gossip? What drives me, what drives you to gossip?

Random people were asked by a pastor, why do you gossip? This is how some people responded:

- "Well, honestly, if I'm sharing gossip, it makes me feel kind of important. I've got the power in the situation and all of a sudden, I feel elevated."
- Others said, "When I'm hearing gossip, it makes me feel better about myself. I mean, there's something great when someone else looks bad and it makes me feel good about myself."
- One guy said, "Honestly, I think I've got such a boring and dull life, hearing something juicy on someone else, it's like entertaining to me."

I'm going to rest on that for a moment. Because I know when I saw this it took time to let it sink in...

These responses reveal the darkness that can capture and hold the human heart. It highlights the human potential to find pleasure in another person's misery, misfortune, or mistake. Or that we feel so powerless or unsatisfied in our own lives; that we choose to find hope, meaning, and identity in someone else's life, in their story, their failures.

When these sentences came to me... it struck me... Holy Spirit what are you trying to tell me and others...

There is no good reason for us to participate in gossip.

Let's have a look at God's word and what he says about overcoming the sin of gossip.

Ephesians 4:25, 29

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. (29) 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.

Paul challenges us to ask: Is my conversation helpful or hurtful?

King Solomon the wisest man to have ever lived said this:

Proverbs 16:27, 28

**A scoundrel plots evil,
and on their lips it is like a scorching fire.**

Words are powerful and can burn people, and destroy lives.

Solomon goes on to say:

**A perverse person stirs up conflict,
and a gossip separates close friends.**

Is my conversation helpful or hurtful?

This is a powerful phrase you can use when you are meeting with friends when you feel the urge to discuss another person's life, situation, or experiences...

As a pastor, I cannot afford to be a gossip. God has called me with the privilege to carry the intimate details of some people's lives, to shepherd them, pray for and with them, and I cannot be a gossip. But I need to be honest with you, I'm not perfect; now I have never broken the seal of confession, or blurted out the sins of every person who ever shared them with me...

But this is what God convicted me of, and this came about through preparing for this sermon, by reading, what others have written/spoken.

It's called the compliment sandwich.

Let me give you an example...

Someone in the church will ask me, so what do you think about the new pastor in the next town?

- He is a really nice guy; he has a great sense of humour...
- But he isn't strong on his understanding of Luther's theology of the cross...

- But I really love the way he communicates with technology.

Compliment, gossip, compliment

Compliment sandwich

Mark, have you heard about the new restaurant in town?

- I really love the décor and how the tables are set up.
- But I heard that the owner can be a real pain to his staff.
- However, I really enjoyed the pavlova.

Here's the thing – it may seem harmless – but is it helpful or hurtful?

Is it my business, my place to offer a judgement...

Here's the thing, it may be true the pastor struggles with some theology, or the restaurant owner is not a nice person, but because it's true doesn't mean it's fair game.

Remember Ephesians 4:29. The posts aren't marked between true and untrue, but helpful and hurtful.

Everything you say must be true, but everything that's true does not need to be said.

We want our words to build others up, not tear them down.

The next question to ask is this: Am I making private matters public? Am I making something that should have been kept in confidence public?

In proverbs 11:12 and 13, Solomon again says,

It is foolish to belittle one's neighbour;

a sensible person keeps quiet.

A gossip goes around telling secrets,

but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence

Am I making private matters public?

Small groups and prayer groups are places of trust, honesty, and confidentiality. When trust is broken, it destroys, rips apart, and cuts deep.

A young married couple were on the road to healing their marriage, there was unfaithfulness, but they were working with a counsellor to rebuild trust. It was a long and tumultuous journey. There was deep sorrow and repentance from the husband, and the wife was coming around to forgive him and heal the relationship.

As part of the journey, it felt like the right time to invite their small group into their story, to help them heal, to support them. They were a close group and deeply connected and faithful to each other and had a mutual covenant of confidentiality. The small group embraced the couple and helped them.

One lady in the group felt it was important to tell another person outside the group that this young couple needed prayer... that their marriage needed prayer...

This person went on to Facebook and asked all her friends to pray for the couple... Another person in the church came up and asked the wife if everything was ok...

The wife, felt humiliated, she couldn't bear to go out in public, she spun out of control, and asserted, we can never recover from this, and the couple ended up getting divorced.

Now that is an extreme illustration, and it highlights the damage we can cause when private matters are made public...

Social media is a dangerous place for gossip. So many of our young people are hurt, humiliated, bullied, and degraded by words that destroy and tear down. Social media allows us to hide behind our comments, and offer limited, maybe if no accountability for our words.

Some people are happy to share a link, news, or images, that are factually incorrect... it's so easy, just to push a couple of buttons, and whoosh it's off for hundreds of our friends to see... and share... and yet would take the time to pick up the phone and call some of these people to share the same news story...

When it comes to gossip, we must protect others, but we also need to protect ourselves too. I know it's important for me to know that people see me as trustworthy, and who can keep confidence. I'm sure most of you would feel the same way.

Proverbs 25:9,10

When arguing with your neighbour,

**don't betray another person's secret.
Others may accuse you of gossip,
and you will never regain your good reputation.**

We must protect others, but we also need to protect our reputation.

Is my conversation helpful or hurtful? Am I making private matters public?

Here's the final question we need to ask ourselves.
Am I permitting others to gossip? This is where it gets even more challenging...

Proverbs 17:4

"Wrongdoers, eagerly listen to gossip; liar's pay close attention to slander"

In other words, not only is it wrong to speak the gossip, but it's also wrong to listen to the gossip. Why? Because what you permit, you promote.

If you listen to it, you are participating in it. If you are listening to it, you are actually facilitating it.

So if somebody says, "Hey, I've got to tell you this" and "Oh, you're not going to believe this" or "Have you heard,"
Here's the challenge, when we hear this introductory phrase, we can draw a line in the sand and say, "No, I'm sorry. We're not going there. I'm not going to allow you to do that."

Because if we permit it, we're promoting it. And besides, from a very practical standpoint --

If they gossip to you, They will gossip about you.

We can be people who stop the gossip and promote healthy wholesome talk. We can be courageous and in love, help gossipers stop the behaviour...

For example, you could say something like:

You know, if so and so, heard us talking about them, I don't think they would appreciate it, and we want to be good friends to them as they would be good friends to us, so why don't we talk about something else?

Or

It sounds like this is something important, I feel you should be speaking directly to them instead of me, I know I would appreciate that.

You may even be in the position to say to the person, you know what, I feel that this conversation is not helpful and I don't think this is what God wants from us.

So, does all of this mean that we can never talk about someone unless they are there?

You can talk positively about them all day long, lift them up and brag about them.

You can talk about them in a way that is helpful. But these times should be very rare.

If you are talking about another person who is not there, it is always in a constructive light, and something I would say if they were standing next to me.

Secondly, everybody in the conversation is committed to helping that person. They are not there to trash the person.

In your small group, you learn that someone has an addiction, or walking away from God... You would say, we love this person too much, we've got to help them to rehab. Let's work out a plan to move forward. We are going to sit down in the presence of Jesus and lovingly try to help them...

Or some of the blokes may band together and agree to help their brother, lift him up, and stand alongside him; because we love him, and he is important, he is a beloved child of God.

Friends, our words matter. Our words can bring life but can also cause destruction.

Let us keep one another accountable in love to be a community that is building one another up; to say things that are helpful and never hurtful. To believe the best about a person and never assume the worst. To be part of the solution in building others up and never part of the problem, tearing them down.

May our words be full of love, helpful and kind, encouraging and full of blessings. Because our words are powerful.

Prayer: