

Gossip and Grace | Lesson 9 | August 28, 2010
Sticks and Stones and . . . Words?

Sabbath Afternoon | Today's Reading

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 57, 58

“The tongue that delights in mischief, the babbling tongue that says, Report, and I will report it, is declared by the apostle James to be set on fire of hell. It scatters firebrands on every side. What cares the vendor of gossip that he defames the innocent? He will not stay his evil work, though he destroy hope and courage in those who are already sinking under their burdens. He cares only to indulge his scandal-loving propensity. Even professed Christians close their eyes to all that is pure, honest, noble, and lovely, and treasure up what ever is objectionable and disagreeable, and publish it to the world.”

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 94, 95

“You have yourselves thrown open the doors for Satan to come in. You have given him an honored place at your investigation, or inquisition meetings. But you have shown no respect for the excellencies of a character established by years of faithfulness. Jealous, revengeful tongues have colored acts and motives, to suit their own ideas. They have made black appear white, and white black. When remonstrated with for their statements, some have said, ‘It is true.’ Admitting that the fact stated is true, does that justify your course? No, no. If God should take all the accusations that might in truth be brought against you, and should braid them into a scourge to punish you, your wounds would be more and deeper than those which you have inflicted on Brother _____. Even facts may be so stated as to convey a false impression. You have no right to gather up every report against him and use them to ruin his reputation and destroy his usefulness. Should the Lord manifest toward you the same spirit which you have manifested toward your brother, you would be destroyed without mercy. Have you no compunctions of conscience? I fear not. The time has come for this satanic spell to lose its power.”

“It pains me to say that there are unruly tongues among church members. There are false tongues that feed on mischief. There are sly, whispering tongues. There is tattling, impertinent meddling, adroit quizzing. Among the lovers of gossip some are actuated by curiosity, others by jealousy, and many by hatred against those through whom God has spoken to reprove them. All these discordant elements are at work. Some conceal their real sentiments, while others are eager to publish all they know, or even suspect, of evil against

another.

“I saw that the very spirit of perjury, that would turn truth into falsehood, good into evil, and innocence into crime, is now active. Satan exults over the condition of God's professed people. While many are neglecting their own souls, they eagerly watch for an opportunity to criticize and condemn others. All have defects of character, and it is not hard to find something that jealousy can interpret to their injury. ‘Now,’ say these self-constituted judges, ‘we have *facts*. We will fasten upon them an accusation from which they can not clear themselves.’ They wait for a fitting opportunity and then produce their bundle of gossip and bring forth their tidbits.”

STICKS AND STONES AND . . . WORDS?

Screams erupted from the courtroom. There was a row of young girls, who sat on the front row, and every so often their voices would hit high pitches and their bodies would twist and shake. These outbursts were not limited to the courtroom. When the young women were at home and even at church, sometimes they would go into a fit, although they never dared to have an outburst during prayer or the sermon—just during the down times of the service.

Doctors could find no reasonable explanation for their condition, so they concluded it must be witchcraft. Somebody in the village was bewitching these girls. The townspeople believed only the girls knew who was doing this to them. As a result, those girls became celebrities. They instantly became the town's most talked about, honored, and feared citizens. At their word you could go to jail and even be hanged.

The first few people the girls accused were likely suspects, a slave from the Caribbean, a homeless woman, and a woman they heard their parents say entertained men late at night. The slave confessed to witchcraft, so they let her go. In Salem, Massachusetts, they believed that if you admitted to witchcraft, the devil no longer had power over you. The other two women, however, maintained their innocence, so they were hanged.

In this town, life was usually rather boring, but with all these witch trials going on, things picked up a little. The girls loved the attention, so they had more fits, and more people went to jail. At first the girls accused only the people their parents did not like or of whom they had heard rumors. Soon, in order to appear innocent themselves, others began accusing people of witchcraft. Witch fever had taken control of Salem. Though they had trials, if the girls said someone was guilty, the victim was hanged. The girls were caught in lies many times, but the town was run on gossip. Lies were much more interesting and binding than the truth.

Before the governor shut down the witch trials and the girls actually confessed to their lies, 100 persons were arrested and imprisoned on witchcraft charges, 20 had been executed, and 4 died in prison. People lost their property and their jobs. Husbands lost their wives, and wives lost their husbands. There were also many orphans in Salem village because children had lost both parents to execution.

Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can get someone killed. The

people of the Salem village in Massachusetts learned this lesson all too well.

1. What is so powerful about words?

2. Shouldn't it be OK just to say what you want to say? Explain your answer.

3. Does gossip have consequences?

4. Is it easy to gossip?

5. How can you keep from gossiping?

Sunday | Today's Reading

The Adventist Home, pp. 440, 441

“We think with horror of the cannibal who feasts on the still warm and trembling flesh of his victim; but are the results of even this practice more terrible than are the agony and ruin caused by misrepresenting motive, blackening reputation, dissecting character? Let the children, and the youth as well, learn what God says about these things: ‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue.’

“The spirit of gossip and talebearing is one of Satan's special agencies to sow discord and strife, to separate friends, and to undermine the faith of many in the truthfulness of our positions.”

HERE'S WHAT I THINK

David and Rachel had a big fight at lunch in the cafeteria right at your table. There were not many people around because lunch had just started. You, however, were there, and you heard everything. It was the biggest shock because everyone thought they would be together forever. Throughout the day, both seem to be near tears, but they are not talking—to each other or anyone else. You are the only one who really

knows what happened, so everyone rushes to you to find out the truth.

How do you decide what information, if any, to share? Whom would you share it with? What effect will your actions have on the situation?

Go to <http://guidemagazine.org/rtf> to post your answers. Your thoughts and feelings may seem clearer to you when you write them down, so we've provided space for you here as well. You may also wish to share them with your class later. Be up-front and honest. #####

Monday | Today's Reading

Find the hidden words within the grid of letters. The words may be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. These words can be correlated with the word *gossip*.

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C R N X T Q X S N X C C W Q B
H E A L H S V C O H Z V E L M
I L T T E A R A I P O Y A T P
T T T J A E I N T L E B Z U H
C T E B T T W D A A B K L A T
H A R T R A T A S E H G S S J
A T A U G R F L R C Z C R A C
T H M E U N D M E E A O M C P
C O V Z D B O O V T H N V W Z
R J R F L U W N N W A T D Z Q
A O S B T A Q G O I A L A A B
I J Z H G O G E C Q M L E L L
B W Y X Y A S R A E H J B G B
E L T T A T E L T T I T R J S
S J G O S S I P M O N G E R G
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blabbermouth
blather
chat
chatter

chinwag
chitchat
conversation
gossipmonger

hearsay
natter
rumor
scandal

scandalmonger
talk
tattler
tattletale

Tuesday | Today's Reading

In Heavenly Places, p. 289

"I wish we could have a pledge in our hearts that we would not utter any one word

against a brother or a sister. Remember that they also are tempted, it may be more strongly than you. . . . Those who are really the most erring are in greatest need of your help. Do not gossip about them and make remarks about their character, but go to them in the love of Jesus and the love of the truth and try to help them. . . .

“When you are troubled with doubts, and darkness compasses your own soul, the very best course you can pursue to get out of this darkness is to help someone else who is discouraged. As you try to lift others up, behold, you lift up yourself into close connection with God. As you show kindness to others you will help yourself, for the same will be reflected back upon you. The man who has the most of Christ in the soul will manifest the tenderest sympathy for the souls who need help. . . .

“You will always have erring ones among you, and here is where you can show a Christian character. Do not push them away from you, but if you have light seek to let it shine upon them, and in this way you can help them toward heaven. Every soul that has the spirit of Christ will work the works of Christ. And if any see one wandering away from Christ, he will feel as Christ did about the lost sheep. There were ninety and nine in the fold, but He went out after the one that had strayed away. This is the spirit we should manifest. As children of God we should walk in the light, and as we follow in the light we shall lighten the path for others. Let us cultivate gratitude to God and then we shall not get our eyes upon little difficulties. And although our brethren and sisters may err, shall we err? We have faults, as well as they, and we want compassion, as well as they; we should have compassion for one another.

‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord’ (Colossians 3:16). Here is the privilege of the Christian.”

SO WHAT?

Have you ever stepped on an open tube of toothpaste and had its contents squirt all over the floor? If you have, you know you have a sticky mess to clean up. This is a lot like squirting gossip all over the place. Just as you can't get the toothpaste back in the tube, you can't take words back. Many times the damage is irreversible.

Whether we own up to it or not, our words have power. Unfortunately, many times we use this power to hurt others. We have all been hurt by things people have said about us. We also know that it doesn't have to be a lie to be hurtful. In many cases, sharing the truth in the wrong situation can hurt just as much or more.

James talks about the daunting task of controlling our tongues. It takes both strength and courage. It takes strength to keep our mouth shut and courage to tell others to shut their mouths when they come bearing juicy gossip. Just think about it. If a classmate wanted to talk about someone, and you suggested you all not talk about that person behind her back, you are setting yourself apart as someone of integrity who can be trusted.

This, however, is not a task you can handle by yourself. You are going to have to get help, supernatural help from God. You are going to have to ask Him continually to guard your tongue and keep your mouth full of grace.

1. What does gossiping do to you?

2. How does gossiping affect our relationship with God?

3. Who would like us to gossip more? Why?

4. Does gossip make us popular?

Wednesday | Today's Reading

Using biblegateway.com, fill in the blanks.

1. "Set a guard, O Lord, over my _____, keep watch over the door of my _____" (Psalm 141:3, NKJV).

2. "Listening to _____ is like eating cheap _____; do you want _____ like that in your _____?" (Proverbs 26:22, *The Message*).

3. "You shall not circulate a _____ report. Do not put your hand with the _____ to be an unrighteous _____" (Exodus 23:1, NKJV).

4. "_____ can't keep _____, so never confide in _____" (Proverbs 20:19, *The Message*).

5. "An evil man sows _____; _____ separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28, TLB).

6. "Whoever loves _____ and desires to see many good _____, keep

your tongue from _____ and your lips from speaking _____”

(Psalm 24: 12, 13, NIV).

7. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are of _____, if there is any _____ and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8, NKJV).
8. “Though some tongues just love the taste of _____, Christians have better uses for language than that. Don’t talk _____ or _____. That kind of talk doesn’t fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect” (Ephesians 5:4, *The Message*).
9. “Don’t bad-mouth each other, friends. It’s God’s Word, His _____, His _____, that takes a beating in the kind of talk. You’re supposed to be honoring the _____, not writing _____ all over it” (James 4:11, *The Message*).

Thursday | Today’s Reading

Numbers 12 (*The Message*)

“Miriam and Aaron talked against Moses behind his back because of his Cushite wife (he had married a Cushite woman). They said, ‘Is it only through Moses that God speaks? Doesn’t he also speak through us?’

“God overheard their talk.

“Now the man Moses was a quietly humble man, more so than anyone living on Earth. GOD broke in suddenly on Moses and Aaron and Miriam saying, ‘Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting.’ The three went out. God descended in a Pillar of Cloud and stood at the entrance to the Tent. He

called Aaron and Miriam to him. When they stepped out, he said,

‘Listen carefully to what I’m telling you.

If there is a prophet of God among you,
I make myself known to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams.

But I don’t do it that way with my servant Moses;
he has the run of my entire house;
I speak to him intimately, in person,
in plain talk without riddles:
He ponders the very form of God.

So why did you show no reverence or respect
in speaking against my servant, against Moses?

“The anger of God blazed out against them. And then he left.

“When the cloud moved off from the Tent, oh! Miriam had turned leprous, her skin like snow. Aaron took one look at Miriam—a leper!

“He said to Moses, ‘Please, my master, please don’t come down so hard on us for this foolish and thoughtless sin. Please don’t make her like a stillborn baby coming out of its mother’s womb with half its body decomposed.’

“And Moses prayed to God:

‘Please, God, heal her,
please heal her.’

“God answered Moses, ‘If her father had spat in her face, wouldn’t she be ostracized for seven days? Quarantine her outside the camp for seven days. Then she can be readmitted to the camp.’ So Miriam was in quarantine outside the camp for seven days. The people didn’t march on until she was readmitted. Only then did the people march from Hazeroth and set up camp in the Wilderness of Paran.”

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

Why all this talk on gossip and words? Because some people are well into adulthood before they realize or understand the power that is caged behind their teeth. During this time of exploration and discovery of who you really are, you will find it will be a whole lot easier if you do not get caught up in locker room or lunch table talk that will hurt others and also backfire and hurt you, too.

Every school, church, and town has a person who is a big mouth. People do not feel comfortable around such people, because they do not want to be the next “talk of the town.” As agents in God’s kingdom, we should be people around whom others feel at ease. If they are in need of help, advice, or encouragement, they should know they can get a Christian perspective from us and not have to worry about everyone else knowing their troubles. Trust, grace, and love in these matters can be a great tool to recruit others to the kingdom!

1. When Miriam and Aaron were talking about Moses’ wife, did they feel

justified in what they were saying?

2. What was the real cause of all the trouble?

3. Usually when people gossip, what are the causes?

Friday | Today's Reading

Education, p. 236

“Closely allied to gossip is the covert insinuation, the sly innuendo, by which the unclean in heart seek to insinuate the evil they dare not openly express. Every approach to these practices the youth should be taught to shun as they would shun the leprosy.”

Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, November 30, 1886

“An earnest effort should be made in every church to put away evil-speaking and a censorious spirit. Severity and fault-finding must be rebuked as the work of Satan. Mutual love and confidence must be encouraged and strengthened in the members of the church. Let all close their ears to gossip and censure. Direct the tale-bearer to the teachings of God's word. Bid him carry his complaints directly to those whom he thinks in error. This united action would bring a flood of light into the church, and close the door to a flood of evil.”

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Think of a time someone said something to or about you that was really a downer—something that made you feel bad. Now, think of a time when someone said an upper to or about you—something that made you feel good. Write about these situations below, exploring (1) whether they were true or not, (2) how they made you feel, (3) how long they have stuck in your memory, and/or (4) any repercussions they may have had.
