

# Use Your Words 2 (Don't Gossip)

## Preview

It's probably safe to assume that at some point in our lives, we have seen the effects of gossip—the hurt, pain, and destruction it causes. Yet somehow, we still participate. It's hard to stop the gossip train sometimes because of how fast it travels, who carries it, and the information it carries. The bottom line, however, is simple: God hates when we use our words to bring destruction on other people.

## Praise

Read James 1:26 (NIV):

“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.”

## Parable

An old proverb relates the story of a person we'll call Demas, who repeated some gossip about a neighbor. Soon the rumor spread through the whole community. Demas learned later that the rumor was untrue and felt sorry, so he sought advice from an elder in the community who had a reputation for great wisdom. The elder told Demas, “Go home and take a feather pillow outside. Rip it open and scatter the feathers, and then return to me tomorrow.” Demas did as the elder had instructed. The next day he revisited the elder, who then told him, “Go and collect the feathers you scattered yesterday and bring them back to me.” Demas went home and searched for the feathers, but the wind had carried them all away. He returned to the elder and said, “I could find none of the feathers I scattered yesterday.” “You see,” said the elder, “it's easy to scatter the feathers, but impossible to get them back.” So it is with gossip; it doesn't take much to spread hurtful words, but once you do, you can never completely undo the damage.

## Present

The definition of gossip is casual or unconstrained

conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true. Whether the information you have is 100 percent true, 100 percent false, or somewhere in between, an honest evaluation should be done of the importance of sharing that information.

Socrates had a great “Triple-Filter Test” to evaluate gossip.

- Truth Test: Are you absolutely sure it's true?
- Goodness Test: Is what you're wanting to share good?
- Usefulness Test: Is what you're wanting to share useful?

Proverbs 16:28 says, “A gossip separates close friends” (NIV). Ever have a friend who talked about you behind your back? Even more frustrating, was it false information? Those types of conversations can throw a wrench into the works of continuing friendships. This is especially true because Proverbs 11:13 (NIV) says, “A gossip betrays a confidence.”

God made us to be social creatures. “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18, NIV). However, sin corrupts this desire for relationship. Instead of building healthy relationships, we may end up gossiping about someone else just so we can be accepted. In most cases, gossip is a basic betrayal of trust. Trust is very hard to come by for a lot of people. Trust is the foundational element for any significant relationship. Without trust, many of us would never share our inner selves with anyone.

Write down a couple of key points about our words from Proverbs 6 to share with the group.

We see some strong language in Proverbs 6, where it says God hates people who stir up conflict in the community. That's harsh. I don't think it's a stretch to say that gossip stirs up conflict.

In addition to God hating it, gossip made it into the “Top Ten”: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16).

Read Romans 1:28–32 to the group. This is perhaps one of the most straightforward biblical messages about this topic. It describes things that stir up God's wrath. Guess what's on the list? Gossipers and slanderers—in the same list as

murderers and haters of God! The big message is this: God despises the practice of causing pain to others by what we say.

## Practice

No matter how fast the gossip train is traveling, it must be stopped if we are to be like God.

### Prevent Gossip

1. Don't share information that's not yours to share. This is one of the easiest ways not to get caught up in gossip.
2. Ask God to make you aware of conversations that don't bring honor to Him.

### Ignore Gossip

1. Don't participate in conversations about others unless it is building them up.
2. Implement a personal mentality that the train stops with you. When someone shares something with you, you do not have to pass it on.
3. Even when someone gossips about you, you don't have the right to repay him or her with gossip. "Do not repay evil with evil" (1 Peter 3:9).

### Confront Gossip

Of all the methods of preventing gossip, this one could be one of the most challenging. However, when coupled with a truckload of love, it can be the most rewarding.

1. If you have an issue with someone, don't gossip about them; go directly to them. It takes a lot more courage to confront someone than it does to ignore that person or talk behind their back.
2. If someone tries to pass gossip to you, it's OK to tell them you're not interested in hearing it. Heads up: the conversation can spiral downward quickly, though, if it is said in an arrogant way. Say it with love and grace (Proverbs 12:18, NIV)!
3. Reward: stop the gossip train enough times, and people eventually will quit sharing gossip with you.

## Pray

Lord, thank You for the opportunity we have to live for You. We ask that You give us the strength, courage, and boldness not to gossip about people whom You died to save. We understand that we reflect You, so when we are seen as gossipers, it hurts the gospel that You have called

us to represent. Help us to be a source of honesty and truth so that we can continually encourage others, not tear them down. Let us always speak the truth in love and stop any gossip that enters our life. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

## Plus

Today's challenge:

Tell students to write on a piece of paper one item of gossip they heard during the last week. By writing it down, they can start to become more aware of these types of conversations in the future. Once they have it written down, have some fun with it. Have them fold it, hold it up in the air, and collectively say "Jesus, we give these conversations to You. Help us not to do it again." Encourage them to allow God's grace to get rid of these conversations in the future and be more intentional about eliminating them. (Collect the papers and discard them.)