

THE BIBLE VIEW

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Theme: Gossip

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“Beware of the Drowning Man!”

Bill Brinkworth

It is said that it is very dangerous when trying to swim out and save a drowning person. Too often, the rescuer is drowned by the flailing, panicking drowner.

The natural reaction of the one going down, for possibly the last time, is to keep their head above water. In an effort to survive, he can grab hold of the rescuer, and in trying to get another breath of air, drown the person who is trying to help him.

A disgruntled, unhappy person is often much like the drowning man. For whatever reason, they are dissatisfied, they share their unrest and discontentment with others. In most situations, they mean no harm. They are unloading their burden and anguish on others hoping the person can say something or change something to stop their dissatisfaction. However, their complaining, or “venting,” does much the same as the drowning man. He can take the listener down with him.

The one listening may not know what is to follow in the conversation or genuinely may want to be a consoling ear to the one doing the complaining. Before the “rescuer” knows what has happened, he is a casualty of gossiping lips. Those words may do more than “sink ships,” as they said during World War II when referring to those that said more than they should have.

Making oneself a listening post for complaining, gossip, or dissatisfaction can result in one having the same thoughts as the one floundering. The complaints and opinionated talk can spread like an infectious disease. Soon the grumbler's frustrations are shared feelings of their audiences. Here are some common scenarios that trap too many:

- “Well, maybe that person at work is lazy and making us do his work like the other person said.”
- “Hmm, Sonya said that the person in the back of class is responsible for all the things missing in our class. Maybe he is a thief.”
- “Oh, oh. She thinks her husband is cheating on her; perhaps mine is doing the same thing.”
- “Things are not the same in church as they were. So-and-so says it's because of what Deacon Jones is doing. Our problems in church are all his fault.”
- “My friend says So-and-so looks like he's hiding something, and he is right; he does look suspicious. I don't think I will trust him, either.”

On and on the opinions and observations of others can go into listening ears, doing damage by intentional or unintentional words. Most often, we want to help, and that is why we listen. However, words often turn into improper or unjustified judgments or actions by the listeners.

Here are several guidelines one can keep in mind when lending a listening ear:

- What the other person is saying is only his side of the story. If the listener wants to know the truth, he should hear the other person's side of the situation. Suggesting to immediately get the other person's view of what is being said often silences what is being said, as the talebearer may know what he is saying is more emotional than factual.

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." Proverbs 18:13

"Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" John 7:51

"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Deut. 19:15

"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." I Timothy 5:19

"It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true." John 8:17

- Why are they telling me? Can I change the situation for them? Are they just gossiping, backbiting, complaining, or do they want the problem they are speaking of handled their way? Can what they are saying result in anything positive?

If it is discerned what is being said is for the wrong reasons, change the conversation or walk away from it. Why would anyone want to take part in another's sin?

"They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak." Psalm 12:2

"Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." Psalm 34:13

"Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue." Psalm 120:2

- Is what is being said edifying? Can it be destructive to my ears? Will it reinforce the problem to them as they share their concerns and make both of us miserable? Is what is said going to help or change anything, or is it gossip?

"They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah." Psalm 140:3

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." Proverbs 17:9

- If a suitable solution is given to solve the speaker's dilemma, will he follow the advice, or will he keep grumbling to anyone who listens?

"Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." Proverbs 23:9

"Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." Proverbs 9:8

- Why am I listening to them? Am I doing it to be a help, or do I want to hear some dirt about someone else?

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Ephesians 4:29

- Does voicing their grievances bring confusion and division to others? If it brings adverse side effects to others, then their "beefs" are probably not of God.

"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." I Corinthians 14:33

It is natural for most of us to want to listen to the concerns of those we are in contact. It is also quite normal to want to help them with our suggestions. We must always be aware of what our ears are listening. Often, a person does not know the damage their words can do to themselves and their listeners. They may not even know they are “drowning” in their trials and tribulations, but a drowning man can take others down with himself. Beware of drowning people.

Although some quoted scriptures were in a different context, they were used to show a biblically taught principle.

“Oh, be careful little lips what you say, for the Father up above is looking down in love ...” — *Words from a child’s Sunday school song*

Three Things to Remember

Gospel Banner

Remember, three things come not back
The arrow sent upon its track.
It will not swerve; it will not stay
Its speed; it flies to wound and slay.

The spoken word so soon forgot
By thee, but it has perished not.
In other hearts, ‘tis living still.
And doing work for good or ill.

And the lost opportunity,
That cometh back no more to thee;
In vain thou weepest, in vain dost yearn;
These three will nevermore return.

“You cannot stop people’s tongues, and therefore the best thing to do is to stop your ears and never mind what is spoken.” — *Spurgeon*

The Spreader

Author Unknown

On a well-equipped farm, you will find at least one machine that looks like a low-slung wagon. It is called a “spreader.” It is used to disperse seed and fertilizer.

Unfortunately, in every town, big or small, you will find men and women that might be placed in the category of the “spreader.” They run about from place to place spreading gossip, which is the dirtiest kind of dirt. Gossip helps no one and harms everyone. It is about the meanest manifestation of dirty work that a human can do and not be exiled.

“Chances are, if one speaks ill to you about others, when you are not around, he will speak ill of you.” — *Barbara Brinkworth*

Slander

C. H. Spurgeon

“Show that man out!” we would say of a drunkard. Yet it is very questionable if his unmannerly behavior will do us as much mischief as the talebearer’s insinuating story.

“Call for a policeman!” we say if we see a thief at his business. Ought we feel no indignation when we hear gossip at work?

“Mad dog! Mad dog!” is a terrible clamor, but there are few curs whose bite is as dangerous as a busybody’s tongue.

“Fire! Fire!” is an alarming note, but the talebearer’s tongue is far more hot and destructive.