

STEP FOUR: GOSSIP



Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends. Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished. (Prov. 16:28, 17:5 NLT)

The practice of gossip is extremely destructive to our growth in living with God in recovery. Not only does gossip breed discouragement among the people being talked about, but it also keeps us from examining our own life as we should. Instead of taking inventory of ourselves, we focus our attention on the lives of others.

However, our attention should be fully given to removing the character defects from our own lives before we gossip about flaws we see in others. If we don't, our gossiping lifestyle could cause us to shrink away from our own recovery while also discouraging others by what we say.

Gossip is something we say behind a person's back that we would not say if they were present in the conversation. We all say we dislike gossip, yet so often when we are offered an opportunity to hear or speak it, many of us find it impossible to resist. From God's perspective, even listening to gossip is as bad as speaking it. **Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. Do not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is threatened. I am the Lord. Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip; liars pay close attention to slander.** (Leviticus 19:16, Proverbs 17:4 NLT)

The God who loves us and wants a good life for us hates gossip. **I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors. I will not endure conceit and pride.** (Psalm 101:5 NLT) It would be wise to consider how God might respond to us if we continue to engage in gossip. We would be even wiser if we would persistently seek to live in a way that pleases God in everything we think and say. **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:31-32 NLT)

Gossip shows up in our lives in many forms. Here are some categories of gossip and what the Bible has to say about them. In which of the following areas are we tempted to gossip?

1. Slander spreads rumors or lies about a person in order to damage them. The written form of this is called libel. The Bible mentions slander many times. **Hiding hatred makes you a liar; slandering others makes you a fool. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.** (Proverbs 10:18, 2 Timothy 3:3-4 NLT)

2. Rumors abound. We hear something and even though it's not confirmed we pass it along and gossip spreads. Harm is done to the person and often to ourselves. **Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything.** (Proverbs 13:3 MSG)

3. Speaking with innuendo and planting seeds of doubt which question a person's character or actions is another destructive form of gossip that the Bible warns us against. **It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.** (James 3:5-6 MSG)

4. It is so easy to complain when gossiping about things that are not perfect or aren't going our way. This “behind the scenes complaining” can cause great harm. **Complain if you must, but don't lash out. Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart do the talking. Build your case before God and wait for his verdict.** (Psalm 4:4-5 MSG)

5. Bad-mouthing, back-stabbing, back-biting. These words seek to describe the harmful practice of speaking negative and harmful words about someone who isn't there to defend themselves. The Bible says: **Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?** (James 4:11-12 NLT)

How can we be a person who stops gossip rather than one who contributes to its spread? We first need to agree with God that the time to deal with gossip is NOW. **But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.** (Colossians 3:8 NLT)

We need to decide that we won't participate in a conversation about another person when the words that are being said would be painful for that person to hear if they were present. **The words of the godly encourage many, but fools**

are destroyed by their lack of common sense. (Proverbs 10:21 NLT) If the conversation around us moves towards gossip we can change the subject and talk about something else -- anything else that is positive.

It's unlikely that we will get through too many days without hearing some gossip. However, we can end gossip by simply not passing on any of the words and rumors we have heard. **Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.** (Proverbs 26:20 NIV)

We can make a point to counter negative things said about a person by expressing positive things about them. We can encourage a gossipier to speak to the person they are gossiping about if it would help the situation. Sometimes if we simply suggest, "I don't feel comfortable talking about this person this way", may help the gossipier to consider what they are saying. However, if a person persists in gossiping, then we are commanded by God to step away from them. He tells us plainly that it is not good for us to keep company with them. **Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.** (Psalm 1:1, Proverbs 22:10 NIV)

We need to ask ourselves: "When do I find myself engaging in gossip? How many of my words could pass the 3-question test for wise speech? 1) Is it true? 2) Is it kind? 3) Is it

necessary?" It's helpful to remember that those who gossip to us will definitely gossip about us. Let's make every effort to stop gossip today.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. How has the practice of gossip been destructive to my own growth in recovery with God?
2. How does noticing and speaking about the faults of others keep me from examining my own life as I should?
3. Which forms of gossip am I most tempted to use? Slander; rumours; planting seeds of doubt; complaints; bad-mouthing, backstabbing?
4. What's my motive when I participate in hearing or speaking gossip?
5. Why is gossip a spiritual issue that impacts my relationship with God?
6. Have I used the "3-question test" for wise speech? What impact does it have on what I say or don't say?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask Your forgiveness for the times I have found fault with others and gossiped about them. Help me to recognize my error in judging others. Only You, Lord are the all-wise, righteous, and merciful judge. I am grateful that You showed me compassion and mercy when my own character defects were revealed. Help me to be patient and merciful towards others when I see character defects in them. I praise You Lord that You are gracious and

compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
Change my heart, Lord and help me be to be like
You. AMEN