

Question: We have a lot of gossip going around at my workplace; some of it is very hurtful of others.

Is there anything I can do to counteract this? What would Jesus do?

In light of what the Bible says, I don't believe Jesus would endorse any use of gossip. According to the Proverbs, the tongue has the power for life or death (Proverbs 18:21). Also, the book of James warned of the dangers of the tongue: "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:5-6). Several times the New Testament condemns gossipers and identifies gossip as a form of wickedness along with greed, depravity, envy and murder (Romans 1:29; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13; 3 John 1:10).

A few years back I saw an Internet article on MSN that suggested listening to gossip is a helpful way to be informed of how things are done at the workplace. I cringed at the thought. In reality, gossip appeals to an unsavory human curiosity. "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts," said the wise man (Proverbs 18:8). By understanding this seductive power of secretive gossip, we place ourselves in a better position to deal with it. Don't feel like you might miss something important if you are not informed of the latest gossip. Helpful truth that needs to be repeated is not the subject of secretive gossip.

To deal with this problem, begin by kindly, but firmly, making it clear that you do not approve of gossip and do not want to be part of the rumor mill. According to the wise man, "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down" (Proverbs 26:20). If everyone refused to listen to rumors, gossip would soon cease.

In addition, inform the gossipers that you are only interested in hearing information that is true and helpful to others. When someone begins to share gossip with you, ask him if the source of his information is known and if he knows that the information is accurate. Even if a person relaying the information should declare it to be true, you should attempt to check it out in a way that does not maintain the rumor mill before

doing anything further. Depending on the nature of the gossip, you may be able to take action to help someone with a problem instead of engaging in gossip about them; but be careful of telling someone that he is the object of hurtful gossip. Usually, the best action is to correct any misinformation that can be corrected, discourage the continuance of the rumor and drop the matter. Sometimes just being seen with a person under attack can quell a rumor. The more influence you have, the greater responsibility you have to be an influence for good.

Tragically, lives and reputations have been ruined by gossip. Murders and suicides have been caused by rumors. Repeating gossip is like releasing feathers in a windstorm; you can never get it all back. Jesus has given us advice through the following statement from the apostle Paul: “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” (Ephesians 4:29). Truth is helpful for building others up, but gossip is not.

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