

Honor
Slander and Gossip
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TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Exodus 20:16 (NLT)

16 *“You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.*

Proverbs 18:8 (NLT)

8 *Rumors are dainty morsels
that sink deep into one’s heart.*

Luke 6:45 (NLT)

45 *A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.*

Matthew 16:1-12 (NLT)

Matthew 23:1-36 (NLT)

Ephesians 4:31–32 (NLT)

31 *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

1 Peter 2:21–23 (NLT)

21 *For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.*

22 *He never sinned,
nor ever deceived anyone.*

23 *He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.*

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What's the most surprising or funny rumor you ever heard about yourself or someone else? How did you react when you found out the truth?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- What does it mean to “not testify falsely against your neighbor” in the context of slander and gossip?
- What strategies did the sermon suggest for overcoming the temptation to gossip or slander? How can you apply these strategies in your own life?
- According to Jeff, what are the key differences between slander and gossip? Why are both considered harmful and sinful?
- **Proverbs 18:8** says, “The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.” Why do you think gossip is so enticing, and what does this verse reveal about its impact on us?
- **Read Luke 6:45**. Do you agree with this passage? Why or why not?
- Discuss the examples of Jesus in **Matthew 16** and **Matthew 23**. How did Jesus’s actions differ from slander and gossip, despite Him speaking negatively about the Pharisees?
- Do we have this same capacity to rightfully assess and criticize the behavior and intention of others and then to share that information publicly or privately?
- How should we respond if we are victims of gossip or slander, according to **Ephesians 4:31-32** and **1 Peter 2:21-23**?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Be intentional and mindful this week to guard against gossip or slander in your interactions with others.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Lord, help us to guard our tongues and speak only what is true, kind, and helpful. Give us the strength to resist the temptation to gossip or slander, and fill our hearts with love and compassion for others. May our words bring glory to You and build up those around us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Question: "What does the Bible say about spreading rumors?"

Answer: A rumor is an unconfirmed, widely spread story or statement. Rumors may or may not contain elements of truth, but their veracity is anyone's guess—rumors carry no factual certainty. Rumors are also known as gossip, and the Bible has a lot to say about that.

Scripture warns against spreading rumors and those who engage in gossip. Proverbs 20:19 says, "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much." Words are powerful. They can build up or destroy (Proverbs 18:21). James 3:2–12 instructs us to control our words, stating in verse 5: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." Spreading "harmless" rumors, then, can cause great destruction. God desires that we use our words to praise Him (Psalm 34:1), to speak wisdom (Proverbs 10:13), and to encourage and edify each other (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 4:29).

The Bible often includes gossip in lists of specific evils (e.g., 2 Corinthians 12:20; Romans 1:29). Spreading rumors is so repulsive in the Lord's sight that He made a prohibition against it in the Law He gave to the Israelites (Leviticus 19:16). First Timothy 5:13 sternly warns against using idle time to spread slander. And Proverbs 17:4 implies that those who eagerly listen to gossip have low character.

So why do we enjoy the rumor mill? Proverbs 26:22 gives one reason: "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts." There is a delicious thrill in hearing scandalous information about someone we know or wish we knew. Jealousy is often the root of spreading rumors. When we learn "the real reason" someone did something, we can alter our opinion of him or her and make ourselves feel better by comparison. We rarely hear rumors that exalt someone's reputation. We don't hear rumors that someone's son worked hard to make the honor roll again, a friend's spouse is kind and devoted, or that the Joneses saved for ten years to take that luxury cruise. That kind of information is not a "choice morsel." Instead, we perk up when we hear that someone's son cheated his way onto the honor roll, that a friend's spouse only pretends to be kind and devoted because he is having an affair, or that the Joneses blew their retirement to take that luxury cruise. Those kinds of tidbits let us compare ourselves favorably with the ones gossiped about, and we feel more satisfied with our own lives.

In Christian circles, spreading rumors has an ally in the guise of the "prayer chain." Prayer chains are ways that local churches inform other members of prayer needs within that body. They can be useful if the information shared is general knowledge and those informed will truly pray. However, many times prayer chains become excuses for speculation and rumor as the story grows with each telling. A prayer chain can become a real-life example of the party game "Telephone," with the last person on the prayer chain receiving information that bears little resemblance to the original request. When this happens, it is nothing more than spreading rumors and can be destructive to individuals and churches.

Proverbs 26:20 gives us the antidote for spreading rumors: "Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down." We cannot stop all rumors, but we can refuse to participate in them. We can break the "telephone" chain and refuse to pass it on. When we hear slanderous news, we should go to the source and check it out. If we are not part of the solution, and the person we are telling is not part of the solution, then the news is not ours to propagate. Our sinful natures enjoy possessing a juicy morsel of information that would gain us attention in the telling. But when we are willing to recognize the selfishness of that desire, we can repent of it and dedicate our mouths to the glory of God (Psalm 19:14).