

What They Don't Know Won't Hurt Them: Loving Our Neighbors When They Aren't Around.

Rise & Shine, May 26th

Matthew 12:35

The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. (For context, read 12:33-37.)

Questions:

- What guiding principles do you have about what news about others is appropriate for you to pass along?
- How has social media changed the way people gossip or share information? In what ways have you seen it misused?
- In what ways have you yourself misused social media to pass on hurtful or incorrect information? And would you have done that had you been speaking to someone else in person?
- Where do you experience gossip? What benefits do you receive from participation?
- What is the real size of neutral small talk compared to positive small talk compared to malicious small talk?
- How would you explain the difference between gossip and malicious gossip to a teenager? What would you say to advocate for the former but not the latter?
- How do you decide whether or not you should share information about others with someone else?
- Have you ever regretted sharing something about others, and if so, why?

In the News

We All Gossip, and Most of It Is OK, Study Says

There's a difference between gossip and malicious gossip.

That's a conclusion that can be drawn from a study from the University of California, Riverside, just published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

The major finding of the research is that most people gossip about 52 minutes a day and that most of that chitchat is nonjudgmental.

That finding may be surprising since the very term "gossip" is often defined as a negative or even vicious activity. One online dictionary defines the word as "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true," and another dictionary explains the word as "revealing personal or sensational facts about others."

The new study, however, not only found that most gossip is neutral and not intended to harm others, but also that it is a way of staying connected with significant people in our lives. Telling a friend that your church is receiving a new minister or that your sister got a promotion are everyday matters and the sharing of the information is part of the bonding process within your circle of friends and acquaintances.

The study was done by examining the conversations of 467 people who wore portable recorders that picked up bits of their conversations for two to five days. Those snippets were then analyzed for overall gossipiness.

Other findings from the study include:

- Women gossip more than men, but only on neutral, information-focused topics.
- Extroverts are more likely than introverts to gossip.
- Younger people sling more negative gossip than older adults.
- People with less education and wealth don't gossip more than wealthier, more educated people.
- People are less likely to gossip about celebrities and more likely to gossip about people they know personally.
- Some gossip -- about 15 percent -- *is* mean-spirited or judgmental.

Other research has found that even judgmental gossip can serve a valuable purpose, such as giving us information we can use to protect ourselves. But, even in the cases when gossip does take a negative turn, researchers agree that the conversation can still have a positive effect.

"I think gossiping can be a smart thing to do," says Elena Martinescu, a postdoctoral researcher at King's College London who has studied gossip in the workplace. "It allows people to keep track of what's going on and form social alliances with other people," Martinescu says.

Rather than divide a group, gossip can actually bring people together and even lead to further cooperation. "When you gossip, you can keep track of who is contributing to the group and who's being selfish," Martinescu explains. "And by sharing this information, you can exclude those group members who are social loafers."

Another study, cited in the *Frontiers in Psychology* link below, also shows that overhearing or learning about negative gossip about ourselves can lead us to improve our performance or change our practices. For example, being gossiped about for always being late for appointments can motivate us to work to be on time.

Here are some Bible verses and a question outline to guide our discussion:

James 1:26

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

James 4:11

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

Prayer for the Good Use of Leisure (BCP p.825)

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.