

“Pssst”

Staring into the virtual full-length mirror of our soul, we're quick to describe our pluses and diminish our minuses, often in comparison to others. "I'd never do that" we hear our tiny, self-congratulating inner voice hum.

And the great majority of us would never murder, commit adultery or rob a store. But we'd happily talk

“*Is gossip all that bad?*”

about someone else who has. And there's the problem.

Too often, our talk becomes a means of cutting people down. We swap tidbits of others' lives in order to fill empty hours of our own. The stories of "big sins" we trade like childhood bubblegum cards move back and forth on the wings of another sin we rarely identify.

It's called gossip.

Read on. 

# When *what's up with who's who is trouble*

By George P. Wood

**H**ave you heard the latest about ... ?

Whenever you hear someone begin a conversation with those words, you know you're about to hear a juicy tidbit of gossip. In fact, the Bible portrays gossip as a meal. "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts" (Proverbs 18:8; 26:22, NIV).

If gossip is a meal, then the entertainment media are a chain of restaurants that serve it hot and fresh every day. Whether TV, radio or glossy magazines, the media dish up the latest news about what celebrities are doing and whom they're seen with.

Why do people like to dine on celebrity gossip? Why do people care about Britney Spears' most recent babysitting mistake or Orlando Bloom's current girlfriend or Paris Hilton's wildest party? There are two basic reasons.

First, celebrity gossip is a tasty meal. Celebrities lead interesting lives. They travel to exotic places, date interesting people, lead lives of apparent leisure, and spend money like it's going out of style. Who wouldn't want to do those things? Gossip is a way of living the high life vicariously.

Second, celebrity gossip is free. You might not be able to attend a celebrity wedding or Academy Awards party, but you can see the video on E! The Entertainment Channel. If you were unfaithful to your spouse or routinely abused alcohol and drugs, you would pay the high costs of divorce and rehabilitation. If you keep up on celebrity gossip, you get the highs of the partying lifestyle without the lows.

But as tasty and free as celebrity gossip is in the short term, in the

long term, it will give you indigestion.

You'll feel the indigestion in your wallet first. Celebrity gossip only appears free. In fact, it'll cost you. Magazines such as *People* and *Us* promise the inside story about celebrities, but only if you subscribe. Celebrities themselves use their fame to sell their self-named clothes, jewelry and perfumes. Hollywood publicists keep their clients' names in the news to make sure you know about their clients' latest movie or TV show. Celebrity gossip is a marketing scam. Let the buyer beware!

You'll notice the indigestion in your integrity next. Celebrity gossip is a way of taking secret delight in sin. Oh, sure, you personally wouldn't sleep around or get drunk, but you're fascinated when celebrities do. Why else do you watch TV entertainment news or read glossy magazines? But God blesses the "pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8), not people who take a second look at sin.

And you'll notice the indigestion in your relationship with God as well. James 4:4 states the matter in stark terms: "Friendship with the

# Shalt thou *not* gossip?

By Zenas Bicket

**A**ccording to Scripture, which sin is worse: murder or gossip? Most Christians would quickly answer, "Murder, of course. It's the subject of one of the Ten Commandments."

But gossip's in there too.

False witness against a neighbor is forbidden by the ninth commandment. Yet how glibly some professing believers pass on the latest gossip they have heard, ignoring the fact untrue gossip is indeed false witness.

How do we know when we are gossiping? Isn't it normal to share interesting tidbits of news about people we know? Yet, what may be normal for fallen human nature is not what God's Word requires of redeemed human nature.

Gossiping is sinful behavior. The word gossip is used seven times in the NIV in place of the KJV synonyms talebearer or whisperer. In the New Testament, Paul lists gossip along with murder and sexual immorality in describing rebellion against God (Romans 1:29). Gossip can thus be defined as a malicious, secretive act that wounds and tears down others.

Gossip need not be false to be evil. There is much truth that should not be passed on to others. One should always ask, "What is my purpose in sharing a negative report about someone?"

There are proper ways of dealing with misbehavior and sin in the lives of others. If a person has been wronged in some way, the Bible's instruction is "First go and be reconciled to your brother" (Matthew 5:24, NIV). Just repeating how one has been wronged, without seeking reconciliation, is

contrary to Scripture. "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down" (Proverbs 26:20).

What should a sincere believer do when he sees bad behavior that could jeopardize the spiritual health

**Paul lists gossip along with murder and sexual immorality in describing rebellion against God.**

of a church? It is at this point that verifying gossip or any misbehavior is very important. Some have created more problems by acting as spiritual policemen, supposedly keeping the rest of the congregation walking a straight and narrow path.

The wisest course of action would

Continued on page 18

"Pssst"



"Pssst"



## TECHNO > GOSSIPS

- 35%** Men who indulge in mobile gossip (talking on a cell phone or text messaging) almost every day.
- 21%** Men who admit to using their phones primarily for gossip.
- 26%** Women who indulge in mobile gossip almost every day.
- 70%** Individuals whose gossip sessions last no longer than five minutes.
- 55%** Male conversation that's about gossip.
- >** Gossip about family members and colleagues is highest among those over 55 years.
- 67%** Female conversation that's about gossip.
- >** Gossip with work colleagues and spouses/partners increases when a person turns 35.
- 27%** Women who admit to using their phones primarily for gossip.

tpe

# “Pssst” THE DARK SIDE OF BLOGS: More than sticks and stones

Using one's reputation online is perhaps too easy today. According to a Weblog, or blog, written by *The New York Times* reporter Adam Nagourney, the Internet giant “Google estimates a new blog is being created every second of every day.”

Some blogs receive thousands, if not millions, of readers. But even if only a local circle of family and friends sees a negative mention on the Internet, the damage or embarrassment can be extensive.

What's a person — or a company — to do? Rumors and gossip can be spread online faster than any old game of “telephone” could ever accomplish. Web sites such as [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) and [urbanlegends.about.com](http://urbanlegends.about.com) are regularly updated with news of the latest misinformation about consumer products and companies. Even the old rumors about a popular consumer products company or the other canard about religious programming being taken off the air are still bouncing around in e-mails and, probably, on minor Web sites somewhere.

It's widely acknowledged that the great thing about the Internet is that it allows just about anyone to become a publisher. At the same time, that's the bad thing about the online world: anyone can publish online, and there's little moderation of what's right and wrong.

One way of looking at it might be to compare a raw supermarket tabloid — the kind that engages in the most ridiculous of speculations — with an established newspaper or magazine. Anyone who reads the tabloid should realize that the level of truth is low at best. The reader of an established journal, on the other hand, can expect veracity.

Christian blogging superstar Dawn Eden, whose “Dawn Patrol” blog has garnered national attention and led to her first book, *The Thrill of the Chaste*, knows that those who don't like her ardent pro-life blogging will sometimes try to attack her.

“What I don't like is when people say things about me and make it seem they're privy to some secret information,” she says.

How can you know that what you're reading online is trustworthy?

“The only way to do it is the same way you do it with someone who is a friend,” Eden says. “Spend time with them, and if they seem truthful about things you know, they may be truthful about others. It's the same thing with the blogs.” **tpe**

MARK KELLNER is a staff writer for an independent trade newspaper.

*Shalt thou not gossip? cont.*

be to take the matter to a respected church leader. It is not wrong to share truthful reports with leaders responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you” (1 Corinthians 1:11). Were the members of Chloe's household gossips? No, because Paul, as founder of the church to which he was writing, had a right to such information. The purpose of the report to Paul was to strengthen the Corinthian church, not to tear it down.

The Book of Proverbs contains several wise observations about gossip. “A gossip goes about telling secrets, but one who is

trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence” (11:13, NRSV). “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (16:28, NIV). “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much” (20:19).

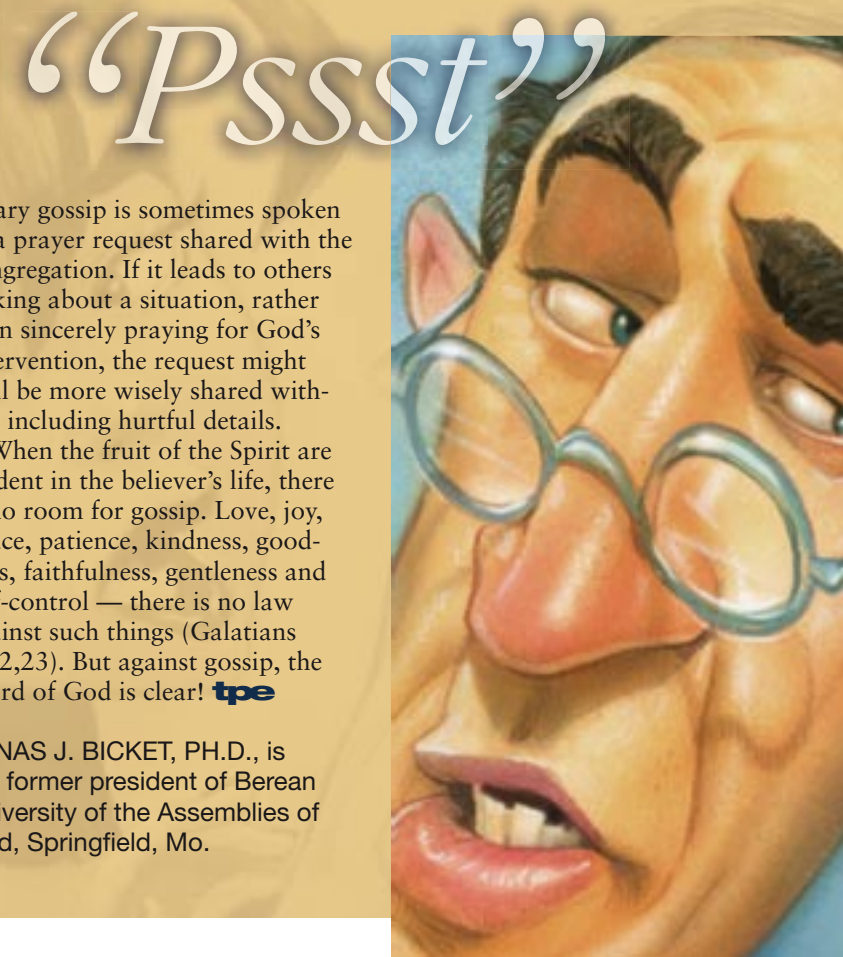
Gossip is not limited to one gender. Though Paul spoke of young widows who were gossips and busybodies (1 Timothy 5:11-13), men can be just as guilty of spreading reports that unnecessarily hurt the reputation of others. The subject matter of gossip may be the only difference between male and female gossip. We will all stand one day before our Lord and give account for every word we have carelessly spoken (Matthew 12:36).

Some have observed that unne-

cessary gossip is sometimes spoken as a prayer request shared with the congregation. If it leads to others talking about a situation, rather than sincerely praying for God's intervention, the request might well be more wisely shared without including hurtful details.

When the fruit of the Spirit are evident in the believer's life, there is no room for gossip. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control — there is no law against such things (Galatians 5:22,23). But against gossip, the Word of God is clear! **tpe**

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# Innocent "Pssst?" conversation? Take the test

By Wade B. Mumm

Most people never consider the ramifications of their gossip until it is too late. Why? At the time, one's gossip seems so inconsequential and insignificant. Yet, its bite is potent.

God, being free of the blinders we sport, understands the putridity of gossip and its negative effect on those around us. It is His desire we stand fully clear of gossip, and we are warned several times in Scripture to refrain from such. The Greek word *nirgan* is translated as "gossip" (NIV) and "tale-

bearer" or "whisperer" (KJV).

The word portrays a person who spreads thoughts true or false. Gossip creates malicious or damaging reports about someone else. Paul, writing to the Romans, describes individuals God has turned over to their evil lusts as "gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful" (Romans 1:29,30, NIV). Notice the company gossips keep. Clearly, God does not approve of gossiping.

Christian counselors have long understood that, in fact, gossipers

may be hurting themselves far more than they realize when it comes to developing and maintaining the relationships they cherish.

"A gossip unconsciously sabotages their relationships as they communicate to others that they are untrustworthy and malicious," said Dr. Helena Mariades of Restoration Counseling Ministries ([www.restorationcounseling.net](http://www.restorationcounseling.net)).

However, despite the warnings, for many Americans, gossip is the norm. Culturally, Americans see gossip as acceptable. Consider the entire industry that has been built upon the titillating magazines lining our supermarket checkouts and salaciously formatted television programming which all depend upon America's insatiable desire for gossip on favorite Hollywood stars.

When gossip is so common it becomes difficult to decipher what is and what is not gossip. Dr. Robert Herron, a theologian and professor, suggests the following "gossip" test:

Ask yourself these two questions:

- *Would I say this thing, in this way, if I knew the person I am talking about will hear it just like I said it?*
- *Would I want this thing said about me behind my back, even if it were true? (Note: Just because something is true does not mean it is helpful or right to repeat it.)*

If the answer to both of these questions is "yes," you can probably repeat it with a clear conscience, says Herron. But if the answer to either of these questions is "no," then your utterance of these words is morally questionable.

Bottom line, participating in gossip displeases God and negatively impacts gossipers and those around them. We would be wise to follow the guidance of 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." **tpe**

WADE B. MUMM is senior pastor of GreeneWay Church in Orlando, Fla., and associate professor of Communication at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla. He is also host of the television program *Influence Living* ([www.influenceliving.com](http://www.influenceliving.com)).

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## MODERN ABSALOMS AT THE GATE?

David sat on Israel's throne as a king who had many accomplishments. But he had a disgruntled son looking for power.

The account of how King David's son Absalom riled the populace and overthrew his vulnerable father is described in 2 Samuel 15. Absalom understood he could accomplish a coup merely by providing a listening ear to those who had a complaint or legal question for King David. Absalom rose early and stood by the side of the road leading to the city gate. He then sowed seeds of discontent, saying his father didn't really care.

"If only I were appointed judge in the land!" Absalom said in verse 4 (NIV). "Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice."

Today it's usually not relatives vying for power who sabotage church leadership. But there are plenty of naysaying laity in the foyer. If you want to be a thorn in the side of your pastor, here are some surefire methods:

- Tell him, and others in the congregation, his sermon ran too long.
- Leave the service early so you can get to the door before anyone else and complain about what you didn't like.
- Every week talk to others about families who have left the church.
- Talk about the good old days.
- Criticize the way the pastor's wife dresses or how the pastor's children misbehave.
- Grumble about the choice of music.
- Question the wisdom of the deacon board.
- Criticize the quality of Sunday School teachers.
- Spread rumors the pastor is unhappy with his wife or is looking for another pastorate.
- Suggest people stop tithing as a way to force the pastor to leave.
- Above all, don't get involved in any form of ministry. That way you can just lambaste others.

But before you do any of the aforementioned items prayerfully ask God what He would have you do. **tpe**

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

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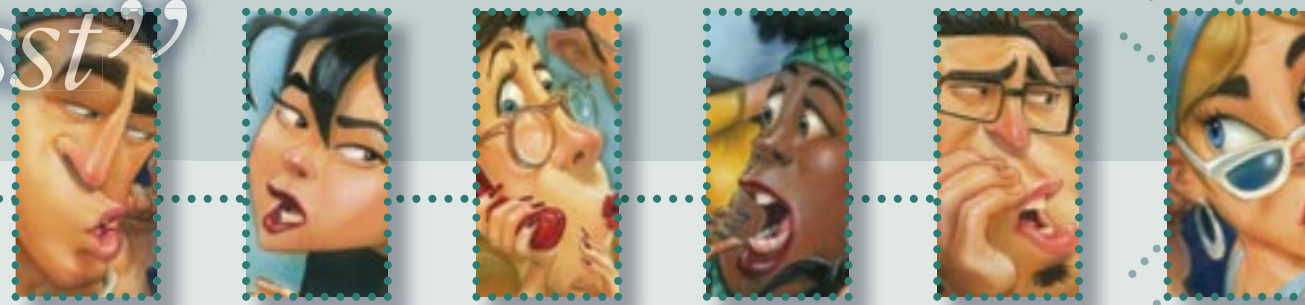
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# “Pssst” Break the chain

By Brenda Spina



## FIVE PATTERNS OF A GOSSIP

**1.** Gossip exists when a sense of belonging comes from revealing secrets concerning the personal struggles of others. People have an inborn need to know they belong to a group. If our only way to feel a part of a group is to share the negative about others, we are not safe or secure in our group membership. As believers, we need to anchor our sense of belonging in God's unfailing love for us.

**2.** Confidential information is revealed as a way of feeling significant. Gossip may result in the immediate reward of feeling special by having inside knowledge; however, the long-term results are mistrust, dissension and division. A desire for significance is normal, but significance rests in the

fact God created us uniquely. Lack of belief in how much we are loved creates the risk of vying for significance by dividing and conquering others.

**3.** Revealing confidential information is an indirect way of obtaining emotional release. We all let off steam at times. Venting may help reduce immediate stress. However reliving negative feelings through gossip rarely results in lasting comfort.

**4.** Confidential information is revealed as a way of trying to make friends. Revealing confidential information does not prove or assure friendship to anyone. Defamation of character is a form of dishonesty and selfishness, and breeds mistrust. An inability to maintain friendships may be marked by an inability to

keep confidential information.

**5.** Revealing confidential information lessens group morale. Instead of promoting teamwork, the atmosphere fills with uncertainty and suspicion. Members try to protect themselves rather than relying on the integrity of the group.

## BREAK IT

As with all behaviors, changing the habit of gossip takes practice and requires a plan. Here are steps out of the gossip loop.

**1.** Acknowledge the emotions experienced when someone is gossiping. This requires purposeful observation of the emotions within you. A statement such as "I feel uncomfortable talking about this"

provides emotional distance from what is happening. It takes courage but is focused on the truth. With this consciousness you will be able to pray and begin to act appropriately when gossip is present.

**2.** Dare to ask yourself the following questions: Would I talk to \_\_\_\_\_ directly about this? What is my source for that information? How do I know that it is accurate?

Any hesitancy in these answers means information isn't appropriate.

**3.** Keep the "heat" where it belongs. A reflective statement or question focuses on what may be feeding the behavior. "How do you feel about what you are saying?" "It sounds like you're upset and anxious about this." These questions allow for refocusing to include the Lord.

**4.** Find an accountability partner whom you trust to be praying for and with you. Gossip does not happen in isolation; neither does getting out of the loop. Your accountability person is not someone to whom you would tell the "scoop," but one with whom you can be honest about your motives and failures and someone you can trust to pray effectively.

**5.** Have a healthy limit in mind for what you will tolerate. A sentence spoken to others and to yourself may sound like this: "I will not talk about \_\_\_\_\_ unless he/she is present." Your inner commitment and outward behavior will match up more effectively with predetermined limits.

"Never return evil for evil or insult for insult ... but on the contrary blessing [praying for their welfare, happiness and protection]. ... For know that to this you have been called, that you may yourselves inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9, Amplified). **tpe**

Family therapist BRENDA SPINA, M.S., LMFT, LPC, is co-director of the Center for Family Healing in Appleton, Wis.

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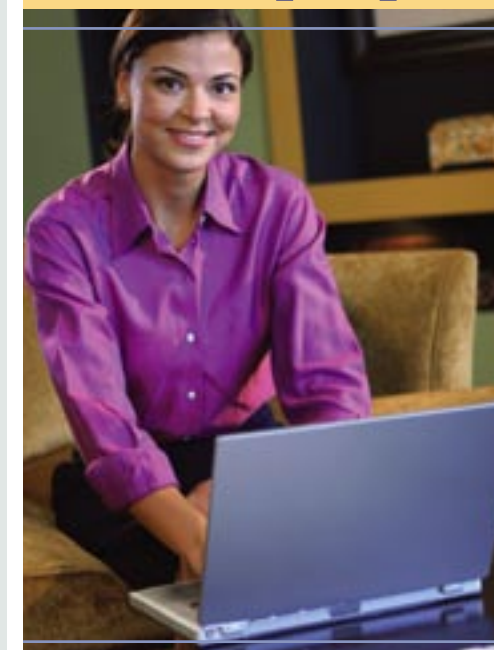
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