

worry about the damage we are causing those we tell or those we tell on. "There are six things that the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

### JUST LISTENING

Many of us like to believe that "just listening" to gossip is not really as bad as spreading it. This is not so. God says, "An evildoer listens to wicked lips and a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue." (Proverbs 17:4) In I Samuel 24:9, David exhorts Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men saying, 'Behold, David



seeks to harm you?" Well, why do we listen? Why are we so ready to believe the worst? The Bible says, "Love hopes all things." (I Cor. 13:7) Why don't we gently but firmly say, "I'm sorry, but you're telling me something I really don't think I should be listening to. You need to take this to the Lord, and those involved . . . not me." A few exhortations like that will stop most gossips in their tracks. At least it will stop them from coming to you with their treachery, and maybe give them something else to think about besides other people's business. The Bible warns us not to associate with gossips. "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip." (Proverbs 20:19)



### "A MARK OF MATURITY"

*"And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgement." (Matt. 12:36)*

With every word we speak we are making a choice. We are either choosing to bless God or grieve Him by rebelling against His Word. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." (Eph. 4:29) Again, sometimes we do not take seriously enough God's command for us to have control over our tongue. This is one of the true marks of a mature man or woman of God. James says, "If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." (James 1:26) We all know that the heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9), and so it may seem easy to rationalize our behavior . . . but look how high the price is. I get convicted just writing this! I certainly don't want my walk with the Lord to become worthless because I'm not mature enough to control the words that come out of my own mouth.

### ONE FINAL THOUGHT

Gossip and slander are Satan's tools. He knows that if he can get us to divide and fight each other, we'll be far too busy to unite and fight him! We need to stop and think before we speak, and purpose in our hearts to never receive or repeat gossip again. We can do it by the grace of God and a determination to make the right choices. You pray about it. There may be people you need to repent to and bitternesses that need to be confessed and healed. Go to God first and get your heart right. He will give you the power to do the rest. "Let us rejoice and be glad, and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7) It may seem like a monumental task . . . but God is calling a holy bride and we need to do everything we possibly can to "make ourselves ready"!

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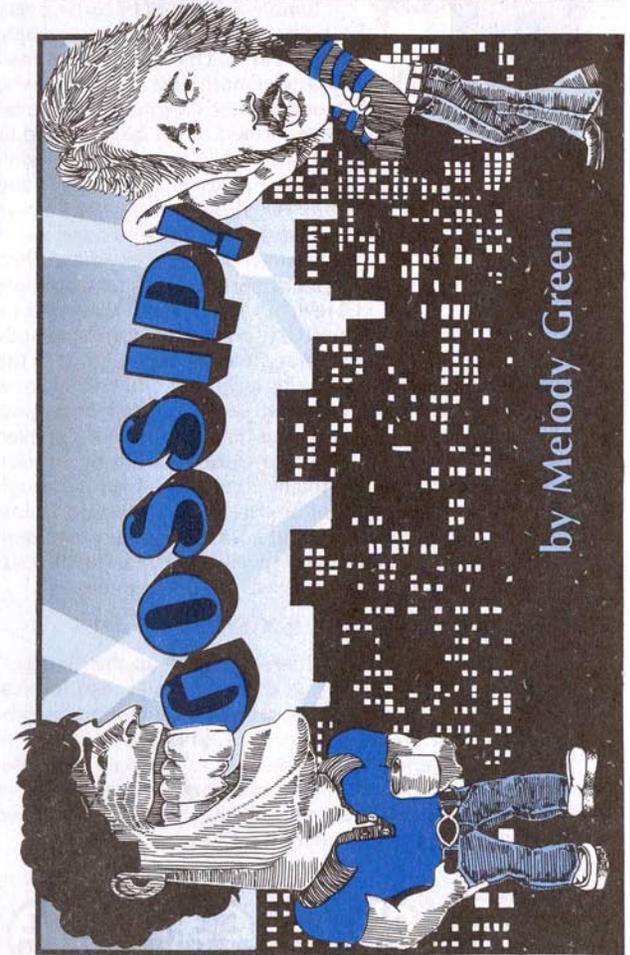
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**I** think the main reason that God is letting me share a little bit with you about the problem of gossip is because I'm no stranger to it. I have not only listened to gossip . . . I've also spread it and been the victim of it . . . and let me say it's all equally as painful to the Lord. When I told people things I shouldn't have, I usually justified it by saying, "We really need to pray for so and so, they're having this terrible problem . . ." But we usually didn't pray, we just "talked it through." Then, of course, it was great fun to listen to the latest tale about someone or some ministry. I again justified it by thinking, "Well, it's important to keep up with what's happening. Besides, I need to know how to pray . . ." which again, I hardly ever did. (In fact, if I had spent as much time on my knees talking to God as I did on my couch talking to friends, I would really be quite the woman of God by now.)



by Melody Green



My awareness of the problem started early in our ministry when we first began our community. I realized that with so many close relationships forming, we had become a real breeding ground for gossip to grow and spread . . . infecting all who participated. I became very concerned about it, looked up a lot of Scriptures, and gave a few very convicting Bible studies for the girls. But God didn't really open my eyes until I found myself and our ministry on the receiving end of some rumors and exaggerations that wounded me deeply. I was so stumbled! I started becoming very bitter, and wondered how people could say such things. But I think I was even more hurt over those who

listened and just accepted the information as confirmed fact. I begged God to please make them stop! Well, it didn't take long for Jesus to take action, and boy, did He show me sin—but guess whose it was? Mine! He reminded me of all the times I had received and then spread rumors, not only about people I knew, but about many I'd never even met. Jesus showed me how I had planted poison in the body of Christ and done real damage to many reputations. At the time I didn't think I was hurting anyone . . . but now I knew differently. Jesus allowed me to see how it felt, and it was just awful. He also showed me that He was more grieved than anyone when His people were so unloving to each other. To say that I have totally conquered this sin through this experience would not be true. I am still tested almost daily, and sometimes I fail; but I can honestly say that there is a day-and-night difference in my life, and that I know Jesus is faithful to complete the work He started in me.

#### WHAT IS GOSSIP?

When we become Christians, we give up the "biggies" like lying, stealing, drinking, cheating, drugs, and fornication. We start spending time with our new-found friends, talking about the Lord, our lives, and what's going on around us in general. Harmless stuff . . . or so we think. But let's take a closer look. Many times these conversations are full of judgements, rumors, and hearsay . . . all tucked neatly away behind a concerned Christian smile.

Did you know the Bible talks a lot about gossip? It's not just a "little sin" as some of us like to rationalize. It says, "*The Lord hates a froward (or perverted) mouth*" (Proverbs 8:13) . . . and He commands us, "*You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people.*" (Lev. 19:16) God also says, "*They go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention*" (1 Tim. 5:13), and in Psalm 101:5 He says, "*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy.*" God also has the notion that those who gossip do not acknowledge Him and are given over to a depraved mind. He lists gossips together with those who are untrustworthy, unloving, unrighteous, full of envy, strife and deceit, murderers and haters of God. Then He says those who practice such things know they are worthy of death, but it doesn't stop them from participating or encouraging others to do the same. (Rom. 1:28-32) These are pretty heavy Scriptures, and I cringe to think of their implications.

By the way, something doesn't have to be a lie to make it gossip. Many of us think, "Well, it's true . . . so I can tell anyone I want to." Not so! Telling the truth for the wrong motive can be even more destructive than telling a lie. In fact, here's a definition of gossip that's quite revealing: **Sharing anything about someone, when the act of sharing it is not part of the solution to that person's problem.**

#### MATTHEW 18

*"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed."* (Matt. 18:15) I think the reason God put this in the Bible is because He knows how weak we are, and He knew we needed some real solid guidelines.

If we are offended or see someone in sin, we are to go to that person and **no one else!** Let me give you a few examples: If someone is in sin, what good does it do to go and tell someone else? What can **they** do about it? If we start running around talking about this "awful thing" we see in someone's life, and asking others if "they see it too," then we are causing them to form judgements and ultimately to be stumbled. Instead, let's restore that brother or sister to fellowship with God. You may be showing them a real blind spot that the Lord wants desperately to deal with. If he does not listen, then there are further steps to take. Be prepared for this, although it usually doesn't get to that point. Believe me, I have done my greatest growing when someone has come to me in genuine love and concern over an inconsistency they see in my life. I am thankful that they love me enough to confront me with it and give me a chance to change. "*Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted.*" (Gal. 6:1)

#### "TAKING UP AN OFFENSE"

Sharing our hurts and bitternesses, and listening to others share theirs, is another area where we need to be very careful. If someone is rude to your best friend, and your friend shares their hurt with you, then you're probably going to "take up the offense." This means you

get hurt too, maybe even angry at the person who caused your friend pain. Later, they might make up and all may be forgiven and forgotten. But there's only one problem . . . **you're still bitter!** And the next time you see the person who hurt your friend, you realize that you haven't forgiven him. Unless you go right away and clear things up, you may carry around a subtle bitterness that comes to remembrance every time you see him or hear his name. Why? Because God did not give you the same amount of grace to forgive as He gave your friend. You were not the one offended. God gives grace to the humble and the afflicted (James 4:6), and you were neither. You just "happened" to become involved in something you shouldn't have been told about in the first place. The strife that one small incident can cause can be far-reaching and long-lasting, depending on how many people hear about it. So you see, it is totally irresponsible to involve others in your hurts and judgements. As far as I can see, we have no right to go to anyone except God and the offender, unless we are really at a loss as to what we should do. And then we need to go for counseling, not to our "most favorite person to talk to."

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COUNSELING AND GOSSIP

Much gossip and slander goes on under the guise of "getting counseling." There is nothing wrong with counseling if you are indeed talking to a **counselor**. A counselor is someone who is mature in the Lord, exhorts you to godliness and reconciliation, points out **your** sin in the situation, will not repeat the matter or be stumbled by it, and is seeking God's will first and foremost—not yours. (A person like this is usually in a leadership position in a church or fellowship.) I'm afraid this leaves out 95 percent of the people we usually run to with the latest problem. If we really need counseling, we should get it. But most of the time when we share with someone, we are not really seeking a solution. We just want a sympathetic ear to agree with our point of view.

It seems we don't care how much division we bring, as long as we get people on "our side." We are too selfish to

