

STUDY 6

Getting a Grip on Gossip

NEHEMIAH 6:1-14; PROVERBS 12:13-23

The owner of a British newspaper notorious for its gossip once proudly declared, “There’s money in muck!” In America, too, various television programs and magazines specialize in digging up whatever juicy tidbits they can find about the rich and famous. Innocent information about families, homes, hobbies, or lifestyle isn’t enough. What the public wants is private, preferably titillating information—in other words, gossip.

Unfortunately, some Christians are not immune to craving gossip either, even though gossip shreds relationships and reputations, causes pain and anguish, and greatly harms the work of God in individual Christians and churches. Ancient times were no different from today, however, as we will see in this study of Nehemiah, a leader of Israel, who also dealt with malicious gossip.

1. In your opinion, when is talking about someone else “gossip” and when is it not?

READ NEHEMIAH 6:1-14.

2. Nehemiah was a godly leader who was involved personally in rebuilding the city wall of Jerusalem. Summarize in your own words the many ways Nehemiah’s enemies tried to discredit and demoralize him.

3. Why did Nehemiah’s enemies attack him (verses 2,9,13)?

4. List the ways Nehemiah responded to each assault on his character (verses 2-4,8-9,11-13; see also 4:8-9).

5. Why do you think Nehemiah was able to persevere and not be overcome by the lies and gossip spread about him?
6. What motivates people to gossip, slander, or misrepresent another person?

If you are comfortable doing so—and without giving names—share an example of a time when you were the object of gossip. How did it affect you? How did you handle it?

7. What helpful lessons do you learn from the way Nehemiah handled his difficult situation?

READ PROVERBS 12:13-23.

8. In what ways does verse 13—“An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk”—apply to a gossip?

9. List the phrases in this passage that describe the person who uses his or her tongue wisely.

Which of these descriptions would you like to be said of you? Why?

10. What further insights for getting a grip on gossip do you find in the following verses?

Matthew 5:44

Matthew 18:15

Philippians 2:3-4

In what ways can taking these steps help contain the damage gossip does to us and to others?

Life Changes

11. Gossip doesn't just take place at work or during get-togethers with friends. It can frequently come in the guise of a prayer request, cloaked with expressions of concern. Parents can gossip about others, not realizing that their children are absorbing every word. Family gatherings can degenerate into information-sharing sessions where a juicy tidbit gets passed on to many others. Where or with whom do you find it most difficult to resist joining in on gossip? Explain.

12. In light of gossip's great power to hurt innocent people, what can you do to be known by colleagues, fellow believers, friends, and family as a person whose tongue "brings healing" and not harm (Proverbs 12:18)?

Encouraging
Others