

GOSSIP

What does the Bible say about gossip?

Question: "What does the Bible say about gossip?"

Answer: The Hebrew word translated “gossip” in the Old Testament is defined as “one who reveals secrets, one who goes about as a talebearer or scandal-monger.” A gossip is a person who has privileged information about people and proceeds to reveal that information to those who have no business knowing it. Gossip is distinguished from sharing information in two ways:

1. *Intent.* Gossipers often have the goal of building themselves up by making others look bad and exalting themselves as some kind of repositories of knowledge.
2. *The type of information shared.* Gossipers speak of the faults and failings of others, or reveal potentially embarrassing or shameful details regarding the lives of others without their knowledge or approval. Even if they mean no harm, it is still gossip.

In the book of Romans, Paul reveals the sinful nature and lawlessness of mankind, stating how God poured out His wrath on those who rejected His laws. Because they had turned away from God's instruction and guidance, He gave them over to their sinful natures. The list of sins includes gossips and slanderers ([Romans 1:29b-32](#)). We see from this passage how serious the sin of gossip is and that it characterizes those who are under God's wrath.

Another group who were (and still are today) known for indulging in gossip is widows. Paul cautions widows against entertaining the habit of gossip and of being idle. These women are described as “gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to” ([1 Timothy 5:12-13](#)). Because women tend to spend a lot of

time in each other's homes and work closely with other women, they hear and observe situations which can become distorted, especially when repeated over and over. Paul states that widows get into the habit of going from home to home, looking for something to occupy their idleness. Idle hands are the devil's workshop, and God cautions against allowing idleness to enter our lives. "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man [or woman] who talks too much" ([Proverbs 20:19](#)).

Women are certainly not the only ones who have been found guilty of gossip. Anyone can engage in gossip simply by repeating something heard in confidence. The book of Proverbs has a long list of verses that cover the dangers of gossip and the potential hurt that results from it. "A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret" ([Proverbs 11:12-13](#)).

The Bible tells us that "a perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends" ([Proverbs 16:28](#)). Many a friendship has been ruined over a misunderstanding that started with gossip. Those who engage in this behavior do nothing but stir up trouble and cause anger, bitterness, and pain among friends. Sadly, some people thrive on this and look for opportunities to destroy others. And when such people are confronted, they deny the allegations and answer with excuses and rationalizations. Rather than admit wrongdoing, they blame someone else or attempt to minimize the seriousness of the sin. "A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts" ([Proverbs 18:7-8](#)).

Those who guard their tongues keep themselves from calamity ([Proverbs 21:23](#)). So we must guard our tongues and refrain from the sinful act of gossip. If we surrender our natural desires to the Lord, He will help us to remain righteous. May we all follow the Bible's teaching on gossip by keeping our mouths shut unless it is necessary and appropriate to speak.

GOSSIP

What does the Bible say about spreading rumors?

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](#)).

GOSSIP

Dealing with mean people—what does the Bible say?

Question: "Dealing with mean people—what does the Bible say?"

Answer: Unfortunately, we all have to deal with mean people at one time or another. [Romans 1:28–30](#) contains a long list of unrighteous behavior, which includes malice, gossip, slander, insolence, heartlessness and ruthlessness. These are all different facets of meanness, and it's inevitable that we encounter people driven by such behavior in this world. People are mean for a variety of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with the person who takes their abuse. Often, mean behavior is a reaction to a person's inner conflicts rather than a rational response to the people around him. However, being the subject of mean behavior is hurtful and demoralizing. What is the biblical response? What does the Bible say about how we should react to mean people?

Dealing with mean people—Empathy

The first proper response to mean people is empathy, especially when it is a first-time altercation or offense. A gentle attempt to understand and relate to the pain behind the meanness is much more effective than combativeness in dispelling a conflict. One of the most beautiful examples of empathy in the Bible is Jesus' response to those who crucified Him and cast lots for His clothing. This is a dramatic example, because what was being done to Jesus was way beyond meanness—it was torture and injustice. Even so, instead of focusing on His own pain, He thought of their spiritual condition. Instead of responding with justified anger, He asked God to forgive them for their ignorant actions ([Luke 23:34](#)). [Stephen](#), the church's first martyr, followed that example ([Acts 7:59–60](#)).

Dealing with mean people—Confrontation

We should be empathetic, and we should always respond with kindness. Being mean to a mean person only escalates the situation; we are called to be peaceful and “[turn the other cheek](#)” ([Matthew 5:38–42](#); [Romans 12:18](#)). But if the mean person is a Christian, the Bible recommends confrontation. We all sin, of course. As James said, “We all stumble in many ways” ([James 3:2](#)), but a pattern of meanness needs to be confronted, per the instructions in [Matthew 18:15–17](#). We are to confront our brothers and sisters when they sin against us in the spirit of restoration. If they refuse to listen, we should take a few other faithful Christians with us, again in the spirit of reminding the offending Christian that he is not behaving according to his profession of faith. If that does not work, the matter is taken before the local church. If he does not listen to the whole group, he should be treated as an unbeliever—no enmity or retaliation is called for, but the relationship has changed.

Dealing with mean people—Humility

Remember that sometimes you are the mean person. Do not be like the [unforgiving servant](#) in Jesus’ parable in [Matthew 18:21–35](#). A servant owed a huge debt to his master; it was an amount he could never pay back. The master completely wiped out the debt. The servant, however, went to another servant who owed him a small amount of money and demanded that he pay up—and when the debtor could not pay, he threw him in prison! The master heard about it and became angry. The master reinstated the unforgiving servant’s original debt and threw him in jail. We should always try to remember, when people are mean to us, that we owed God a huge debt. He forgave us, and we can forgive others.

