

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt EV Free  
June 3, 2001

### **Nibbling On Oreos Proverbs 26:20-22**

1994 Tabloid magazine headline "Killer Bug Ate My Face" The reporting was quite sensational, but they were based on seven real cases of invasive Strep A bacteria in Gloucestershire, England. Strep A is not the same as a strep throat, when it takes hold in a victim's body, killer microbes eat away at the flesh at an incredible rate of several inches per hour. Toxic shock can set in shutting down organs and causing death. In the first three days while the bacteria is rapidly multiplying producing toxins, the lymph nodes swell, high fever and terrible pain at the site of infection. Penicillin can still stop it, but by the 4th day, the damage is too much and death can follow within hours. It's a very unforgiving disease.

Is there any counterpart to the strep A bacteria in the body of Christ? Yes. Nothing can so quickly eat the flesh of the church as the sins of the tongue; gossip, slander. It all starts with taming the tongue and that is a tough one. Chuck Swindoll believes that the number one problem in the church today is not drinking, it's not drugs, it's not infidelity, TV, Movies bad church programming or even differing worship styles. Those can all be quite devastating to a church body, but Number one problem is the tongue that is out of control, out of God's control. James talks about how difficult it is to tame that tongue of ours. "If anyone does not stumble in what he says he is a perfect man able to bridle the whole body as well. No one can tame the tongue, it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison." Any people here this morning with perfect tongues? Not the guy standing up here. It's tough isn't it. How can we stop from stirring up strife with our tongues. How can we starve gossip that comes in our ears and sneaks past our lips? We cannot afford to have gossip and slander eat away at the face of our church body.

This morning we are going to look at what the book of Proverbs has to say about gossip. **What is gossip?** Gossip is talking bad about someone who isn't present when the motive is self-centered rather than

the motive of building up the other person in love. No matter whether or not the information is true. No matter whether you would have the gall to say those things in front of them or not. Gossip is pretty easy to spot, almost blatant between teenagers. "Did you here that Jimmy and Suzy got in a big fight last Friday night?" Did you hear why Jane hasn't been at school this past week? But, the older more "mature" we get, the more socially savvy and clever our gossip becomes. We are much more subtle when we offer up our choice bits of juicy gossip. When we talk behind someones back, we may drop hints that so and so's parenting skills are in need of help. We may openly mention a purchase someone has made and then with a casual but deadly lift of the eyebrow, shake of the head, toss of the hair...we can easily communicate our disapproval and criticism. We in the church have an even more insidious method of gossip as we wrap our critical barbs of disapproval in the glaze of religion. What is it? The prayer request. I have heard public request for prayer that were more a gossip shot, than a real request for Almighty God to intervene. Stripped away from all the pious sounding rhetoric it lies their quivering as bare naked gossip.

So if gossip is so harmful and damaging why don't we just knock it off. Cut it out and stop it? Why not? Because **its so attractive**. Look with me at Proverbs 26:22 "The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body." Dainty morsels, succulent candies, oreo cookies. Yes, there they are sitting on that counter just crying out for you to nibble on. Just one little nibble. It's so good, you of course can't just have one nibble. For that first nibble calls out for a second nibble and a third nibble. Once you've started its pretty tough to stop eating just one Oreo cookie. (Eat Cookie) Gossip is just like Oreo cookies, they are so delicious on our ears, we are seemingly powerless to resist. They are fun to eat but after you've finish the bag, they can ruin a persons health. Gossip is attractive to us and just like its hard to turn down a delicious dessert, its hard to refuse to listen to and dish out the dirt on someone else. Have you noticed when you have taken and nibbled on just one Oreo cookie, that it develops a taste for more. You can't just eat one out of the bag. That's why dieters must never open the bag, never let the bag into their house because its so tempting. If we are ever going to get control over our tongues we are

going to have to find ways to keep gossip out of our homes, lives, conversations.

We know why Oreos are so tasty. But why is gossip so tasty to us? **What is so attractive about gossip?** Gossip is attractive to us because we get to know special secret stuff that no one else, or few people know about. Information is power. We have a communication advantage if we know things others do not know. We can leverage that information to make us look better as we make others look bad, or even if we never use the information against someone else we can somehow feel better about ourselves knowing how bad off someone else is. I think that is what's so attractive about watching the messed up lives of the soap operas. After watching their messed up lives yours starts to look pretty good. Its attractive to us to be "in the know" group. We feel special because someone has shared a secret with us that is potentially damaging. Gossip is attractive to us because when we share it we prove that we are in the know group and socially well-connected. So we drop broad hints and innuendoes about a person or situation. We raise an eyebrow, wink an eye just to let everyone know that we are in the know. Yet, once we get nibbling on those oreos of gossip its hard to stop eating. When we develop a taste for hearing and telling bad things about others, it becomes so tasty to us we gulp it right down into our memories. We swallow it right down into the innermost parts of our body, retained and remembered. Wouldn't it be great if we could begin to develop a voracious appetite to hear good things and say good things about others?

So **What is the difference between gossip and information,** conversation. Between offering advice to a friend and gossip When does loving concern cross the line into gossip land? Loving concern is God centered which is other centered. Gossip is self-centered. Godly concern is really looking out for the best interests of the other individual. Gossip is only concerned about them looking bad so that you can look just a little bit better. Godly concern shares information on a need to know only basis. Sharing with only those who can help or the situation affects. Gossip doesn't care at all whether the other person can do anything to help or correct the situation or bring justice to light. Gossip is just willing to enflame the problem by spreading out, anxious to prove they are in

the know and have information power at their fingertips ready to destroy people, friendships, relationships at a nibble of an oreo.

Proverbs 11:13 "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter." We want the best of both worlds we want to be known as one who can keep a secret, that way people will be more free to confide in us all the juicy stuff. But we also want to be able to use that information to our advantage when we can. So the problem comes when we hear something that is truly dangerous or potentially harmful to someone. We heard it as gossip, told to us in confidence...but we know we need to get this person some help, but we aren't in a position to do anything about it. So we then hint to the pastor, the boss, the supervisor..we tell someone the problem. But then when they want to act on what we know. When they invite us to go together to talk with that person to resolve the problem or conflict. We back away because we are "not supposed to know". And when the person we told actually has the guts to do what needs to be done. We get all angry at them because they violated our confidence. All because we got caught in our own gossip and didn't have the guts to do what really needed to be done in the first place.

I let people know that if they come to me with a private matter and it only affects them, I will keep it private. There is a Pastoral confidence privilege. But there are things that people tell me that must be dealt with, and I will encourage them to do so and involve those who need to know and are affected. Unless its a public matter that circle of people who need to know, who can assist the problem with loving concern needs to stay in an tight circle.

What about advice? We may want to know how to respond to another individual, or situation? I think it is wise to one maybe two close friends whom you know to be trustworthy and can keep it to themselves. But be careful as to the details you share. Pray and ask God. Is my concern really for this other individual? Do I really need advice on how to respond? Is this the person who will give me godly advice that I need, Am I really acting in love, am I really ready to do something about it? ..or am I just nibbling on Oreos have I just tossed out more gossip into the slough of life.

Ask yourself, is this really a "prayer request" I'm sharing? Christians can disguise gossip pretty well dressed up in a prayer request. If you really want people to pray about it and it is a sensitive situation. You don't have to share all those details. They don't need names and detailed ugly words, nasty attitudes to pray. Christians we have been given a great translator, that is the Holy Spirit who stands before the throne of heaven and intercedes for us. All we have to do is groan and moan and the Holy Spirit can translate exactly what we need to ask before God Almighty's throne of grace. We may not even know how to pray, but the Holy Spirit knows our heart, knows the needs of our friends. We don't need to know all the details to pray in power. Isn't it encouraging that God knows all that and He can take care of the details we don't need to know.

So..What's so dangerous about gossip? What is the big deal? Look at Proverbs 16:28 "A slanderer, or gossip, separates intimate friends..a perverse man spreads strife." Haven't you seen how a gossip takes a truth, half truth or even a lie and spread it all around starting fights between best friends, between brothers and sisters, between relatives, girl friends boyfriends. Gossip can do great damage to relationships. Especially in the church when people would rather wind up the rumor mill then actually confront their brother or sister in Biblical love, actually seeking to resolve the problem. Instead they want to enflame it to feed their own anger and hurt. Remember gossip is self-centered, loving concern is God and other centered.

Proverbs 17:4 "An evil doer listen to wicked lips, a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue." What are you listening to? What we listen to, what we are attracted to, is what we will become more and more like. A liar pays attention to what? destructive tongue. He listens with careful instruction to the wicked speech, the gossip of the unrighteous. We will be attracted most to those people we are like ourselves or those we want to be like. Gossips, liars, cheats...they are most comfortable around other people who cheat and lie and gossip. We will feed on whatever enhances our character. If we want to be a gossip we will hang around gossips and we will become more entrenched in our gossip, The choice is yours. Nibble on oreos and you simply can't stop at eating just one. Proverbs 20:19 "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals

secrets...therefore do not associate with a gossip. Don't confide in blabbermouths. Don't hang out with gossips. Its too dangerous. It will rub off on you.

Remember our first verse 16:22? Gossip is like oreos cookies, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body. They go down where they are retained and remembered. Gossip is dangerous because it affects us and sticks inside us. Someone may say "Well, I listen to gossip, but I don't pass it on."...so I'm not a gossip. I'm not hurting anybody else. But you are hurting yourself because you can't get those other persons words of hate, of criticism, of jealousy, of bitterness, of anger out of you. They affect you because they will taint the way you treat that other individual. They affect your attitudes and actions toward others and damage the other person. By listening to gossip you have become an accomplice to the crime of oreo nibbling. Listening adds fuel to the fire. Gossip needs one thing to live and that's an ear to listen. If you take away that ear, gossip will die. Proverbs 26:20 "For lack of wood, the fire goes out.." Don't lend them either of your ears to listen. Don't be tempted to nibble on oreos, because it tough to stop at eating just one and its going to affect you way down deep in ways you may not imagine.

When my boys were younger, they would like to look out our sliding glass door. Boys of course do not look with their eyes, they look with their hands. Grimy, muddy hands tend to smear the glass and make it difficult to see out. Sure you can take a shirt sleeve and wipe off most of the mud, but it still leaves an unfocused smear. You may not pass gossip on, you may not believe most of what is said. You may consider the source and discount the comments about that other person, but it still will leave a smear on your window, the way you look at that person again. Don't listen to gossip and nibble on oreos, no matter how tempting they may taste.

**So what can we do about it. how can we be healing people with our words rather hurting other people with the things we say?** Well, the first step is to recognize gossip for what it is. That's what we have spent the last 20 minutes talking about gossip. Call it for what it is. Chase it out from under the covers. Expose it in the bright light of God's truth and it tends to wither pretty quickly. Once we begin to catch ourselves gossiping we can then be in a position to cut it off. Look back

at verse 26:20 gives us a real simple solution to stopping gossip. Where there is no wood, the fire dies out. Where there is no whisperer contention quiets down. I find it quite fascinating that the ones who accuse people most of gossip are those who traffic in it. Those who don't listen, don't know the gossip and don't add any fuel to the gossip flames. Cut the gossip, seal up the Oreo bag and the fire, the contention, the strife will die down. Ask a friends to keep you accountable. Give them permission to call you on it when you start to share something that might be close to gossip.

Someone may wonder. Well what do you do if someone comes to you and says I've noticed Susan seems to be struggling, do you know if she is alright? How do you respond? You could say, "I don't know" But if you really did know it would be a lie and that's not right because you really do know. She confided in you about her struggles. You could say, "Well, she is struggling but I not supposed to say anything about it. Well, that's about as good at saying, "go launch a major investigation. I'm in the know but you go find out somewhere else." I think in certain situations the most loving thing is to be purposefully vague. You are not required to answer every question asked, or even give hints that you know the answer. The most loving thing in concern for your friend Susan might be to reply. "I think she is struggling too, I bet she would appreciate our prayers...lets pray for her right now." Preplan your response so that you are ready for an answer of loving concern when someone sticks a big bag of juicy oreo gossip in front of your nose.

What can we do next week to reduce our gossip and exposure to gossip? Ask three questions to expose gossip. 1) Are my words being said **in loving concern** for the other individual? or is there some potential hurt to the people being discussed. Even if I might say these same words in their presence....are they helpful and loving words? 2) Does this **person really need to know** in order to prevent harm or help build up someone in love? If that other person is in no position to help other than pray, then you don't need to share all those juicy details. Sensitive information is on a need to know basis. 3) What is **my real reason for passing this information** along? Self-centered to make me look good, or God centered wanting to help the other person look good? What's the

motive that is driving your mouth? Is it the gospel...spreading the good news, or is it the gossip, spreading the bad news.

We cannot underestimate the power of our words. Solomon was right when he said, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue. We must be careful what we say, they may be a matter of life and death. I want to encourage all of us to make a difference this next week and reduce our gossip, our spreading the bad news, by filling up our conversations with spreading the good news. I want us for an entire day tomorrow to pray this simply prayer each time before we speak. Pray this prayer each time before we allow any words to come out of our mouth. Pray this prayer. "Lord, may my words bless and encourage those who hear them" (REPEAT) I want to make sure we have it down. Lord may my words bless and encourage those who hear them. What a difference my relationships, my life would be if I could do that for a day. Then try it for a week, a month. After praying that prayer, if God confirms you to go ahead and speak then allow your words to come on out passed your lips into the public arena and be a blessing to all who hear. But if the Holy Spirit convicts you that they would not be a helpful blessing, then keep silent. Pray this prayer for a day, maybe you will then want to do it for a week, a month....maybe a lifetime. What an encouraging person we would become. People would flock to spend time with you, because there is nothing more attractive then an encouraging person who speaks with words of blessing....far more attractive and tasty then even Oreo cookies.