

"Global Cooling"

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Theme: Join the movement to make our planet a more peaceful place.

Text: Proverbs 26:20

Here's a thought: Someone has warned, "Who gossips to you will gossip about you."

Watch a video clip on "Alberta wildfires: All of Fort McMurray evacuated" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzPXUpk3mqQ.

On May 1st, 2016, a wildfire began in a remote area 15 kilometres southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta. On May 3rd, it swept through the community, prompting the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history, with almost 90,000 people forced from the area. The wildfire destroyed approximately 2,400 homes and buildings. Another 2,000 residents in three communities were displaced after their homes were declared unsafe for reoccupation due to contamination.

At its height, the fire spanned more than 500,000 hectares, an area bigger than Prince Edward Island. One analyst from the Bank of Montreal estimated insurance losses could exceed 9 billion dollars, making the wildfire the most expensive disaster in Canadian history. An official cause of the fire has not been determined to date, but officials think it was caused by a human (from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Fort_McMurray_Wildfire and www.theglobeandmail.com/news/alberta/the-fort-mcmurray-disaster-read-the-latest-weekend/article29930041).

It is incredible how quickly a small spark can turn into an uncontrollable wildfire!

King Solomon must have observed some interpersonal wildfires before he wrote Proverbs 26:20: Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. NIV

Proverbs 26:20: For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no

whisperer, contention quiets down. NASB

When faced with a relational fire you can:

Fuel it

or

Starve it

When faced with a relational fire you can:

Fuel it



The Hebrew word translated “wood” here can literally be translated as “sticks” (plural). This word picture leads me to believe that gossip is not just like a big fat log but can be more like little sticks. It doesn’t typically impress and turn a lot of heads in how it looks or sounds, but gossip can be like a compilation of little bits of information that come together and exert their power in numbers. The news being spread might not be earth-shattering, but small, seemingly insignificant sound bites that combine in harming someone’s reputation.

If you add fuel to the fire, you do something to make a bad situation even worse. Wood is to fire what gossip is to a quarrel. Newspaper makes for a good fire starter when you are lighting your fireplace or a campfire. Just think of all that information contained on the paper that can get it going. You simply light it with a match or a lighter and you are away. However, the fire will soon go out if you don’t add some wood chips or branches. The fire won’t last long unless you place some logs on top.

A small member of the human anatomy can do significant harm, as described in James 3:5-6:

5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. NIV

One tongue wagging out of control can create a spark. Two wagging tongues can multiply the damage, and so on and so on. Before you know it, a whole forest is being consumed by flames.

Ancient Jewish sages said, "Gossip kills three: the teller, the listener, and the subject." The damage spreads like wildfire, with chronic tale-bearers ultimately becoming negative, someone others mistrust. The gossip victim's reputation is sullied, often unfairly. And the Talmud [commentary on Jewish history and law] says that the listener is most damaged of all, because he alone had the power to turn away or change the subject, helping to stop the defamation of a third party. Remember, they don't call gossip "dirt" for nothing (www.beliefnet.com/faiths/judaism/2008/09/10-tips-for-kinder-speech.aspx?p=2#gJV4JPfqZktOrCQW.99). I could go around this room with a bucket scooping out dirt to whoever takes it. You would have the choice to receive or reject my offer.

Bridgid A. Boyle (www.haruth.com/mw/gossip.html) wrote, "Given our human nature, once started, stopping gossip is about like trying to unring a bell."

Boyle tells the story about a man in a little Jewish village, who went to his rabbi for help with a problem.

"Rabbi," he said, "I have a problem: I just can't stop myself from gossiping."

The rabbi thought for a moment, and then gave him some sheets of paper from his drawer. "Take these," he said, "tear them into small pieces this evening, go around the village and put a handful of pieces on the door step of each person you have gossiped about. Then come back and see me."

The man did as the rabbi told him. When he came back he asked the rabbi what he should do next. "Go around the village again tonight, gather up all the pieces and glue them back together again."

"But that is impossible," said the man. "The wind has blown them all away."

"Yes," replied the rabbi. "Now you know why gossip is so deadly."

There is a reason we have a garbage bin rather than a burning barrel at our acreage. We live in the country and I have had some traumatic experiences. I could have burned down our barn when I was a kid while my cousin and I were playing with matches amongst hay bales (what were we thinking?) and I came close to burning down a house or two while burning garbage on a dry, windy day.

If someone has something juicy to say about someone you need to redeem the conversation by quickly discerning where this is headed. Does the teller of the tale want truth, reconciliation and restoration or do they want you to join him or her in thinking less about someone?

Someone has warned, "Who gossips to you will gossip about you."

If you receive an e-mail from Alberta Health Services telling you not to eat canned/tinned pork because of swine flu - ignore it. It's just spam.

Gossip is as contagious as the mumps or swine flu, so you want to avoid those who carry it.

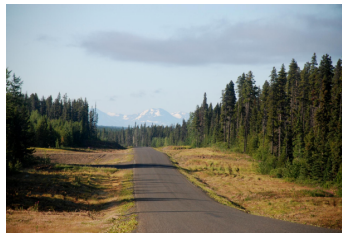
Do you know a "whisperer"? Are *you* a "whisperer"?

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or

Starve it



This principle of starving a fire is seen in forests with firebreaks or fireguards, strips of land that have been cleared, plowed, or planted with fire-resistant vegetation to prevent a fire from spreading (www.thefreedictionary.com/firebreak). When there are sparks or open flames in a conversation, your split-second decisions can reduce or increase the destruction.

When we learn of someone's sin we can cover it or expose it. Ham faced this choice in Genesis 9:20-27:

20 Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. 21 When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." 26 He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. 27 May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave." NIV

When a sin affects others, it may need to be exposed and subjected to proper discipline within the church or by the justice system. Generally, however, sin should be dealt with as discreetly as possible. Ham could have covered up his father and let him sleep off his drunkenness. Instead, he exposed his father's nakedness and sin to his brothers, dishonouring Noah and bringing shame upon him. When they learned of the situation, Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness, preserving their father's dignity.

The Lord commands in Exodus 23:1, "Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness." NIV

Does gossip just apply to spreading lies? Can it include spreading truths?

Daniel was the victim of gossip in Daniel 6:13-16:

13 Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." 14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. 15 Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed." 16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" NIV

What these jealous political opponents of Daniel told the king about him was true, but they set him up and used their new laws to trap him. God rescued Daniel, but this incident shows us that "whisperers" can try to use the truth to separate and destroy people.

You can starve out a fire by not adding fuel. I have been through a church split where I was the pastor and I was the object of many people's gossip. I thought I was loved and appreciated until crusaders started going door to door gathering stories from people who were unhappy with what I had said and done. Momentum grew as stories were collected and signatures were gathered. My fate was sealed when a vote was called and I failed to receive enough votes to stay.

Stop playing the "He said she said" game and let the fire die down. "Mama, dear, I was a peacemaker today," said a little girl as she snuggled up to her mother in the evening.

"How was that?" asked the mother, "I heard something, and I didn't tell it," was the reply (from www.moreillustrations.com/Illustrations/peacemakers.html).

Whitney Hopley summarizes "5 Ways to Stop Gossip in Its Tracks" (www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/5-ways-to-stop-gossip-in-its-tracks.html):

1. Change the subject. Distract people from gossiping by bringing up another subject in the conversation.
2. Say something positive about the person who's the target of gossip.
3. Confront gossip politely yet firmly. Stand up to people who are gossiping by saying that you don't want to know about the story they're trying to tell you. Don't hesitate to directly call the gossip what it is, but do so with grace. For example, you could say something like: "That sounds like gossip to me, so I don't really want to hear any more. Let's just drop it."
4. Point out missing information. Ask questions that point out holes in a gossipy story, such as specific times and places of events that supposedly happened. Challenge gossiping people to tell you how they personally verified the information they're spreading about others. Help them see that just because they heard a story doesn't mean it's true – and even if it is, they can't possibly have an accurate perspective on the situation unless they experienced every detail of it personally.
5. Turn gossip into prayers. Whenever you hear gossip, pray for the people whom the gossip targets. Talk with God – but not other people! – about the negative stories you've heard through gossip, asking God to intervene in each situation to help each person involved, if in fact there's actually any truth to the stories.

Whenever you successfully stop gossip, you prevent further damage to relationships and help usher God's peace into them.

This prayer could be a good one for us:

Dear Heavenly Father,

So far, today, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped or lost my temper. I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, or self-centered. I'm really happy about that so far, but in a few minutes, I'm going to be getting out of bed and then I'm going to need a lot of help. Thank you! Amen

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