

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Nate Hilgenkamp
Series: 7 Deadly Sins of Suburbia
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Gossip

Well, I like to read. Reading is one of my favorite hobbies, because I believe that reading makes me better. Because I believe that leaders are readers. Leaders are readers, because if you're going to lead people, you need to continue to learn things. One of the best ways that I learn things is through reading. Whenever I read something that I find interesting or important, my commitment to you is anytime I preach, I'm going to share with you whatever I'm reading. This week I learned some things from different pieces of articles that I was learning from, that I just wanted to make sure that I shared with y'all. One of the things that I learned, I picked this OK! magazine up at H-E-B this week (Nate picks up an OK! magazine and opens it), and I just wanted to make sure y'all heard this because this feels really important to America. (Reading from magazine) "Longtime couple Justin Timberlake and Jessica Biel put their Hollywood Hills family home on the market for 35 million. Then, in early January, it was revealed that they'd also quietly unloaded their lower Manhattan penthouse for 29 million." But get this: "According to an insider, the recent real estate frenzy has friends worried that the duo are heading for a split." (Nate looks meaningfully up from the magazine.) It gets worse. (Nate picks up another magazine.) Star magazine. Again, you can get this at H-E-B. It's available to you. Star magazine—this is even more sad because it's Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively. Everyone loves them! I know! I know, but listen to this. This is why I needed to share this with you. This is what it says, "Ryan loves making movies, but Blake felt he enjoyed being away on location too much and it's something they would fight about. So, the source says, Blake gave Ryan a necessary nudge, and at this point they're fighting for their marriage." It's going to be interesting to see how that plays out.

Who buys that stuff? Have you ever checked out at H-E-B, or any grocery store, and you see all those magazines? Every time I see them, I wonder, "Who in the world buys these things? How are they still in business? I do not understand who would buy that to read that gossip." I mean, these magazines, (Nate picks one up) they're just like trash magazines in order to make money. I don't understand why anyone would buy this, and specifically, me. I'm a pastor. I'm way more mature than that to engage in such gossip. So, anyway, I just wanted to get that off my chest this morning.

Here's another story. Recently, I was in a group text message. Flex, I know. Don't treat me differently, but I was in a group text message. We were talking, and one of my buddies in the group text message, let's say his name was Kyle, and he was talking about some things, politically, that I kind of disagreed with. He does this often. I know he and I are not necessarily

on the same page. There's another guy in the group message. His name's Jamie, and we're more aligned. So, one of these days Kyle is going off on one of his political rants about something that I just don't agree with, so I did what everyone does. I took a screenshot of what he was saying, and I typed it into a message to my friend, Jamie. I said, "Jamie, bro, you've gotta check out what Kyle is saying. He has absolutely no idea what he's talking about," and then I hit 'send'. As soon as I hit 'send,' I realized I sent it to Kyle! It's just one of those things you can't undo. It's out there, and I'm not bringing it back in! There's nothing I could say, no smooth words I could say that would make it sound any better than what I did. It was clear what I did. I was speaking behind his back. I was gossiping. Here's what we need to know. (Nate picks up one of the gossip magazines) We do this more than what we think we do. We think this is some trash magazine, that we are so much better, we are more mature than this. Even me, as a pastor, I engage in it more than what I realized. This week, as I was writing this message on gossip, I've been overwhelmed by how much I've heard gossip when I've been listening for it. Even here at Harris Creek, it is all over the place. We are infected with gossip. When you are looking for it, you'll see it all over the place.

So, this morning we want to talk about it as we're continuing on in our sermon series called "The 7 Deadly Sins of Suburbia." We want to talk about gossip. We're going to talk about:

- Why we gossip
- What happens when we gossip
- How we can stop gossip

Just so we can all get on the same page this morning, here's a simple definition of gossip. Here's what I'm talking about when I'm talking about gossip. *Gossip is sharing unhelpful and/or unnecessary information about someone who isn't present.* Gossip is sharing unhelpful and/or unnecessary information about someone who isn't present. We're sharing what doesn't need to be shared.

But, for many of us, we just don't think it's that big of a deal. We understand gossip. We know we gossip; it's something that we do in our life. We do it in conversation, and we just carry around gossip like it's some sort of pet sin. I mean, gossip isn't like greed. Gossip isn't like I'm hating God, or anything. Gossip's not that big of a deal, but, if you've ever read Romans Chapter 1, you don't need to turn there, I'm not necessarily going to be preaching from it this morning. But in Romans Chapter 1, if you know anything about that chapter, what Paul is doing is he's writing to the church in Rome. He starts by saying there are people who have turned their backs on God. Although they knew God, they didn't glorify Him as God. So, God gave them over to their sinful desires to do whatever they wanted to do. And this is what Paul says these people look like who do not know Jesus. He says this, Romans 1:29-30: **"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, [...]."** You see, gossip is in the same list as murder and God-hating. That's jarring to me. Gossip doesn't seem like it's on the same playing field, but here, Paul puts it in the same list. It's just as dishonoring to God, and this is what people who don't know Jesus do. They gossip. This is a big deal to God.

This morning, what we're going to do is we're going to change things up just a little bit. Because typically, here at Harris Creek, our commitment to you, every single week, is we want to teach the Bible as effectively as we possibly can. Typically, what that's going to look like is we're going to pick out a passage in Scripture, and we're going to preach from that passage. We're going to sit in that passage, rather than cherry-picking verses because we don't want to preach on whatever we feel like preaching about. We want the Word of God to speak for itself. This morning is going to feel a little bit different from what we normally do, because I was talking with J.P. this week trying to figure out how to best preach gossip. We decided that the book of Proverbs is the best way to preach on it. All throughout Proverbs, it speaks directly to gossipers. And what makes preaching Proverbs a little bit more difficult, is that it's a book of collective wise sayings, so it will bounce around a little bit. One verse will be about your words, the next will be about comparison, the next will be about envy, the next will be about greed, and the very next will be about gossip. It's just kind of going all over the place, bouncing around. So, this morning we will bounce around, not to pick and choose what we want to preach on, but because we think it's the most effective way to preach Proverbs. So, we're going to pick and choose a few of the verses there that talk about gossip specifically. We're going to look at what Proverbs says about gossip. It's going to tell us:

- Why we gossip
- What happens when we gossip
- How we can stop gossip

Let's start with why we gossip. Why do we gossip? It says this in Proverbs 18, Verse 8; this is why we gossip. **“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.”** The words of the gossip are like choice morsels. (Nate picks up a bag of Brookstone chocolate candy) In other words, the words of the gossip are like these things. Have you ever had these things before? They're unbelievable! They're dark chocolate covered pomegranate. Except, it's not real pomegranate, it's just pomegranate flavor, so there's no nutritional value to it. But these things are fantastic! They're like choice morsels. I enjoy eating them. I like them. They're tasty. This is what Solomon compares gossip to, which is the first thing we need to realize about gossip. Point number 1:

1. Gossip is Enjoyable

Gossip is enjoyable. We enjoy listening to gossip. In fact, we enjoy listening to gossip so much that, get this, just last year, TMZ made 126 million dollars. What do they do? All they do is gossip. They turn gossip into a business model, and they made 126 million dollars last year. And it's because whenever anyone gossips, we enjoy listening to it. Whenever someone's like, “Hey, did you hear what she said? Did you hear what he did? Hey, did you hear why they broke up?” I'm like, “No, but tell me!” (Nate stuffs a handful of candy into his mouth, then talks with his mouth full of candy) “I wanna know! Like, spill the tea! Come on! This tastes good! This is interesting to me! Will you tell me?” (Nate looks down at the bag of chocolate, then looks at the camera to speak to his wife) Adalee, I know I'm ruining your Valentine's Day gift, but I got you this. (Holding out the bag) This is your gift for Valentine's Day. You can have whatever's left

over tomorrow. (Nate closes the bag of chocolate) We enjoy gossip like we enjoy these. In fact, it's even scientifically proven. It is! This week, as I was reading another magazine, Social Neuroscience. I read that as soon as I get done with my OK! Magazine. This is what it says, "Scientists looked at brain imaging of people as they heard gossip. The study found that the caudate nucleus, which is the reward center in your brain, was specifically activated in response to negative gossip. Subjects seemed to be amused or entertained by scandals. The caudate nucleus, listen to this, also lights up in response to things like romantic encounters or eating chocolate. That's science! Let me show you Scripture. Proverbs 18:8, one more time: **"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they do down to the inmost parts."** Isn't that interesting? It's almost like the Bible knows what it's talking about! Science backs it up.

Here's a couple of reasons why I think we enjoy gossip. First, I think gossip makes us feel we're better than the person next to us. It makes us feel like we're better people. In fact, this goes hand-in-hand with the message from last week. If you missed it, lots of people are saying it was the best message of this entire sermon series. (Nate preached last week) So, check it out. Speaking of that, it was on comparison. We talked about comparison. Whenever you struggle with comparison, it turns your life into a competition. Whenever your life is a competition, what actually ends up happening is you actually enjoy when other people fail. This is why we enjoy gossip. We enjoy hearing that they sin. We enjoy hearing that they broke up. We enjoy hearing that they're struggling financially because it's a reminder that we're doing better than they are. Recently, I was convicted by this because I was listening to a podcast. I'm sure a lot of you have either heard of it or listened to it. It was called "The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill." If you didn't listen to it or haven't heard of it, it's a simple premise. It followed the rise and fall of a church in Seattle; specifically, the pastor there. There's certainly a lot of things we can learn from that podcast, but I realized that the things I enjoyed the most about the podcast were the moments when I went, "Wait! He makes WHAT? He said WHAT? They did WHAT?" I enjoyed the podcast because it made me feel like I'm a better pastor than that guy. It made me feel that I'm at a better church than what they had. I enjoyed it because it was gossip. So, first, I think we enjoy gossip because it makes us feel like we're better than other people.

Secondly, I think we enjoy gossip; it tastes good to us, because it makes us feel like we're important. It makes us feel like we're important. Because when anyone shares gossip with you, you actually begin to bond with them. You begin to think, "They must think really highly of me. I must be a really reliable person in their life. I must be trustworthy. I must be important to them." That's not what gossip is communicating. This is really important to understand about gossip. Whenever someone is gossiping to you about someone else, they're not telling you that you're important. They're telling you that to them, people are entertainment. Because whenever someone gossips to you about someone else, you need to understand this. What they're telling you is, "I have no problem talking about someone behind their back, so, if you stick around me long enough, eventually it's gonna be you." Because, whenever you hear gossip from someone else, they're not telling you you're important. They're telling you that people are expendable. They're entertainment.

Thirdly, I think that we enjoy gossip because gossip is really, really easy. Gossip is easy conversation. It can flow in our conversation really, really easily, because it is so much easier to talk about the problems in someone else's marriage than it is to talk about the struggles in my own. It's so much easier to talk about the sins of someone else than it is to be open and honest and authentic about my own sins and my own mistakes. Think about this. How much harder is it to ask someone; how much more awkward is it to ask someone, "Hey, what have you been learning about God recently?" or "How can I be praying for you?" It's so much harder to ask that than it is to say, "Man, tell me about your crazy boss! What else has he been up to?" or "Tell me about your weird mother-in-law? What has she been doing recently?" Gossip is so much easier because it keeps us from having to be intentional with our conversations. But, even though gossip is easier, it doesn't mean that gossip is better. Scripture says that gossip is just like these things. (Nate picks up the bag of chocolate candy) The more we eat it, the more it will do stuff to our insides. Scripture says that whenever we hear gossip, it says in Proverbs 18:8, it goes down to our inmost parts. So, just like these things, whenever I eat these things, it goes down to my gut and it doesn't do anything good. I read the nutritional fact. There's essentially no nutritional facts on there. There's nothing nutritional about these things. It's only bad, so whenever I eat it, it just messes me up. It doesn't do anything good inside of me, because there's this frustrating fact about food. The better it tastes, the worse it is for you. And the worse it tastes, the better it is for you, which is why nobody has ever had to convince me to eat strawberry cheesecake. I'll do it because it tastes good! On the other side of things, you have to convince me to eat a salad. The only time I've ever eaten a salad is because I've disciplined myself to do so. It doesn't taste good, but it's good for me. It's frustrating that the better food tastes, typically, the worse it is for you. A similar thing can be said of gossip. The more interesting it is, the tastier it is, the more you want to hear it, the worse it is for you, because it does something to you.

Let's look at what it does. It says this in Proverbs. We've talked about why we gossip. Let's look at what gossip does to us. Proverbs 16, Verse 28, "**A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.**" A perverse person stirs up conflict, this is what gossip does, and a gossip separates close friends. Think about this. Have you left a situation where you were hearing gossip from someone else about someone else? Have you ever felt closer to the person being gossiped about? Never, ever, ever, ever has that happened! You never move closer to the person that's being gossiped about because, point number 2, the second thing we can learn about gossip is that gossip is divisive.

2. Gossip is Divisive

It separates close friends. Whenever you hear bad news, or negative news, about a person or an organization, you automatically pull back from them. Here's an example. Admittedly, this is somewhat of a ridiculous example, but I think it's going to be helpful. Some of you might remember this. I think it was about 10 years ago, but there were rumors going around that someone at Wendy's had put a human finger in someone's chili. Does anyone else remember this? It was, like, national news. There were rumors swirling that someone put a human finger in someone's chili bowl at Wendy's, and it wasn't true. Someone just made it up because they

wanted to sue Wendy's and make a bunch of money. It wasn't true. I knew it wasn't true. But it didn't matter how much I love their Frostys®, I didn't go to Wendy's for months and months after that. Because every time I thought of Wendy's I just thought of a human finger in my food. This is what gossip does. It separates you from people or from organizations that you hear gossip about. But it does things that are far more consequential than me just avoiding Wendy's.

If you're a parent of a middle schooler, you know this, because middle schoolers, not you guys. (pointing to students in the audience) I'm not talking about you, but some middle schoolers can be downright mean and cruel to each other. If you walked down the hall of Midway Middle School this week, you'd hear lots and lots and lots and lots of gossip. People just talking about other people. It has real life consequences. I bet you could tell me stories like this, but I could tell you hundreds of stories like this. I know someone who had to leave their middle school, went to a different school, because their sexuality was gossiped about. I know people who have developed eating disorders in middle school because their appearance and weight were gossiped about. I know people who developed depression and anxiety because in middle school they were gossiped about. You see, gossip has real life consequences. It divides people. Again, parents of middle schoolers, you know this. Your kid might come home from school and you might ask them, "Hey, how's your friend, Anna, doing?" And they'll say, "Oh, I'm not friends with her anymore. She's not friends with me anymore." It's because there's so much gossip in middle school that division comes alongside with it. This is what gossip does. It divides close friends. But it doesn't just stay over here (indicating one side of the room). It's not just these guys that do it. It's not just middle schoolers that do it.

I work with college students. That's primarily my job here. I get to work with a lot of college students. The vast majority of college students have roommate drama. The vast majority of their roommate drama is about gossip. I can't tell you how many times I've heard things like this, "Man, I'm just not close with my roommate anymore because she's just in her room all the time. She never comes out and hangs with us anymore. She's isolated herself from us, and we're just not close to her anymore and I can't wait to not live with her next year." I just have to say, "Hey, have you told her that?" They'll say, "No. Why would I?" "Because you're gossiping. Your gossip has created division." Or I'll be talking to a guy, and he'll say, "Man, I'm not close with my roommate anymore. We're not really friends because he's dating this girl, and he spends all of his time with this girl. This girl isn't even good for him. I mean, it's just a bad situation. You wouldn't believe it." And I say, "Hey, have you told him that?" And they're, like, "No." I just say, "Man, you're gossiping, and your gossip has clearly created division." This is what gossip does. But it doesn't just stay in college.

Think about your business or your organization. One of the worst things for a business is the meeting after the meeting. What happens is, the boss calls everyone together for a meeting, and says, hypothetically, "Hey, we're going to have to raise prices by 10%. Okay, ready, break!" Then the meeting ends and what happens is there's a meeting after the meeting between the people who aren't in charge. They get together to talk, or they hit up their group message, and they say things like, "Man, we're only raising prices so he can get more money." Or, "She's only

raising prices because she's got no idea what she's doing and we're going under." That's so harmful to any business, any organization, any team, because gossip creates division. That right there is why Satan loves gossip! Satan loves gossip because Satan loves division! This is what he's out to accomplish. In fact, in the Bible, do you know who the first person to talk behind someone's back was? Who was the first person to gossip about someone else when they weren't there? Satan. Genesis 3, he's talking to Eve, and this is what he says, Verses 4 and 5, **“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**” You see, he's placing thoughts in Eve's brain about God when God isn't present. And what happened? Division between God and humankind for the rest of human history. I've heard it said before that gossip is the devil's telephone. Gossip is the devil's telephone, because whenever you're gossiping, you're just spreading his message. Because he deeply desires for us to be divided. And that right there is why God hates gossip.

This is why it's a really, really big deal, because God hates division. God deeply desires unity. In fact, you might not know this, but Jesus prayed for you. Right before He's about to die, he's about to be crucified, spit on, mocked, beaten, whipped, He prayed for you! Right before He's about to die, this is His prayer for Harris Creek. This is what He said, John Chapter 17, He's praying for us. He says, **“My prayer is not for them alone.”** Not just for the disciples. He says, **“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,”** That's us. He says, **“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity.”** Then He says this, **“Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:20-23**

But here's a funny thing I've noticed about Waco. Waco *loves* church gossip. I don't know if you've realized that. I don't know if it's just because I'm on a church staff, but I think Waco loves church gossip. In fact, a few years ago when we didn't have a pastor, I felt like everyone wanted to talk to me. Everyone was hoping that I had a juicy story. Everyone wanted to hear what I heard, what I knew. Waco loves church gossip, and it's this weird thing that in Waco it feels like for some people, they get excited about when another church is struggling. Because when another church is struggling, there's a story there; and we want to hear the story because we want to hear the church gossip. How much different is that from Jesus's prayer that we would be unified? In Waco, we're not just on a bunch of different church teams. Every single Christian in this city is on the same team, with the same mission of lifting up the name and fame of Jesus. So, whenever you negatively gossip about another church, whenever you speak negatively about another pastor in this city, you are actively standing in the way of our mission. Because whenever you gossip, you are creating division, which stands in the way of the mission. Here's the mission. This is what Jesus says. It's a big claim. In this prayer, He says that **“the world will know me when the world sees a unified church.”** The church cannot be unified when it's filled with gossip, because gossip is divisive.

So, how can we cut it out? How can we get rid of gossip? Let's check out another Proverb. It says this, Proverbs 26, Verse 20. **“Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.”** Without wood a fire goes out. You see, every single time you hear gossip, you've got a choice. Are you going to add fuel to the fire or not? While gossip can spread fast, it can also be stopped fast, which is what we need to know about gossip.

3. *Gossip Can Be Put Out*

Gossip can be put out. The example here is one of a fire. The only way a fire can continue to stay aflame is if fuel is added to the fire. If one log is aflame, it can stay aflame for a little bit and then it's going to die out. But a fire can last for as long as it wants to, as long as more wood is being added to the fire. If you don't add wood, the fire can't continue to grow. The example here is one of a wildfire, so I decided to contact a close personal friend. I just thought he might have a great message for us. It's my friend, Smokey. (A picture of Smokey the Bear is shown on the screen with a message) He says this, **“Only you can prevent GOSSIP”**. I think that's what this passage is saying. It's saying, it's just like a wildfire. Every single one of us has a part to play in stomping out gossip. Because every single person here in this room, there's a thousand people in this room, every single person here represents a different piece of fuel to the fire. And the gossip can stay aflame as many people add fuel to the fire. But, if we're willing to stop it before it grows, then it will be put out. I bet there's people here today who don't struggle saying gossip. I believe that and I'm encouraged by that. I bet you don't struggle with speaking gossip. But, even in gossip, the listener plays a role. The listener plays a role in putting out gossip, because anything you permit, you are allowing. This is true of your family, of your business, of your organization, of your life group. Anything you permit, you are allowing. Here at Harris Creek, we don't want to permit gossip. We want to be a place that talks *to* people, not *about* people.

Here on staff, we take it really, really seriously. We don't want the flames of gossip to spread across our staff, so we do something that when I first heard it, I thought it was crazy! It's intense. I bet you might think it is, too, if you've ever heard of this before. On staff, we have something called the 24-Hour Rule. The 24-Hour Rule goes like this. Let's say we leave a meeting, and someone on staff comes up to me and says, “Did you hear that guy in that meeting? He was just talking, talking, talking the whole time. I mean, he just couldn't close his mouth. He was just talking the whole time.” Here's what the 24-Hour Rule looks like. I say, “Hey, have you told that person that before?” And if they say, “No,” I say, “Hey, I'm going to give you 24 hours to go and tell them. I'm going to check up on you 24 hours from now, and if you haven't told them, what I'm gonna have to do, since now I'm involved in this, I'm gonna have to either call them or walk to their office, and say, “Hey, I was talking to this other guy on staff and he said you were talking a lot in that meeting. I think you guys need to talk about it.” When I first heard that, it was really, really intimidating. When I first heard it, it felt a little over the top. But I'll tell you this. I've worked on staff before we had the 24-Hour Rule, and I've worked on staff since we've had the 24-Hour Rule. Which period of time do you think was healthier? It's not even a comparison. Since we've implemented the 24-Hour Rule, man, the 24-Hour Rule is like a fire extinguisher, putting out any sparks of gossip that pop up because no one wants to make that Walk of Shame

to someone's office to admit that you were gossiping about them. Think how much more healthy your life group would be if you had that. Or your family, or your organization, or your team, or your business. How much healthier would you be if you had the 24-Hour Rule? So, that's one way a listener can help put out gossip.

Here's another way. You can learn to turn the gossip. Learn to turn the gossip. Here's what that looks like. Let's say, after this message, hypothetically, that you come up to me in front of the stage, and you say, "Nate, did you see what Drew was wearing today? Like, what was he thinking when he put that on? Doesn't he have lights in his house? Does he have a mirror in his house? What was he thinking when he put those clothes on?" Here's what it looks like to learn to turn the gossip. I say, "Man, I'm so glad you brought Drew up. He's one of my favorite people to work with. He's just so kind. Like, I just love Drew's heart for other people." Here's what will happen. They'll try one more time to add another log to the fire. They'll try one more time. They'll say, "Yeah, I know, but do you see Drew's shoes? Did you see them?" And I say, "Yes, man, Drew, I just love the way Drew leads us every single Sunday to the throne of Jesus. I love the worship songs that he picks out, like, it's just fantastic!" You learn to turn the gossip. And when you do that, and implement the 24-Hour Rule, I'm telling you, you will not have gossip in your life. That's something you can do as a listener of gossip.

Here's something you can do if you're someone who frequently gossips. If you know this is your problem frequently in your life. You're talking about other people behind their back. There's a few things that you can do. One of the first things you can do is this: There are some phrases that we commonly use that rarely, if ever, the words following these phrases, honor God. Almost never. I don't want to say never, because I don't want to exaggerate, but think almost never do the words following these phrases honor God. Phrases like:

- Don't tell them I told you, but ...
- This doesn't leave this room ...
- Hey, just between you and I ...

Rarely, if ever, do the words following these phrases honor God.

- Don't tell them I told you, but ...
- This doesn't leave this room ...
- Hey, just between you and I ...

If you want to stop gossiping, stop using those phrases.

Another thing you can do, if you are someone who struggles with gossip, I've got a really simple challenge. But it's a really, really hard challenge. For the next seven days, the next week, don't talk about anyone who isn't present. You're going to be shocked at how hard that is. You'll be shocked at how often we just talk about other people, like it's no big deal, in our conversations. Try it for the next seven days. Don't talk about other people who aren't present. It's going to make your conversations so much harder, but I guarantee that it will make them better! It'll be harder, but it'll be better. But maybe you're thinking, "Nate, what if I just need to vent about somebody? What if I just need to get something off my chest about my boss, about my spouse, about my friend, about this person in my life group? What if I just need to vent?" The good news

about venting, is you can actually gossip as much as you want, as long as you call it venting. Then you can just sin, sin, sin, sin, as long as you're "venting". THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKS! Venting is gossip, just by a different name! But if you're thinking, "Nate, does this mean we can't ever talk about other people behind their back?" No, I think that would be an overstatement. That probably wouldn't be helpful. I think you absolutely can, truly, talk about people behind their back. I would just run it through Ephesians 4:29. It says this, "**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**" If it's helpful and beneficial, absolutely say it. But if it's not helpful, if it's not beneficial, it probably doesn't honor God. You're just adding fuel to the fire.

But if that doesn't help you enough, go by this rule. Try to live your life by the Rule of Siri. The Rule of Siri goes like this: Whenever I'm afraid that what I'm saying might be recorded on my phone and sent to that person, don't say it. I've heard this happen before. J.P has a great story of this, of something that you're talking about someone, your phone picks up that name, and it sends the conversation to that person. Try to live your life by the Rule of Siri. If you're ever afraid that your phone is going to pick up on what you say about someone else, then simply don't say it because you're gossiping. And you're just adding fuel to the fire of gossip.

So, in summary today, the three things we can learn about gossip are these:

1. *Gossip is Enjoyable*
2. *Gossip is Divisive*
3. *Gossip Can Be Put Out*

To close, I just want to show you a picture of my daughter. This is Jacie. (A baby girl sitting on a couch with a big grin on her face appears on the screen) She's ten months old. She just kept talking about Valentine's Day, how excited she was, so we put that on (Jacie is wearing an outfit with hearts and the word LOVE on it) on Thursday before I took her to PDO (Parent's Day Out). Man, I LOVE her! I love her so much! These ten months with her have been ten of the most impactful months of my life. I would do absolutely anything for her. She's our first, so I don't know what it's like to parent a son, but I just know that as a dad, I have this connection to her. She's my daughter. I'd do anything for her. She's got my whole heart, and she doesn't even know it yet. I would do anything for her, and she doesn't deserve it. I love my daughter. You see, I really like you guys. I do. But I *love* her. Let's just say, hypothetically, a couple of years from now, she's growing up, and I run into y'all in the lobby and I overhear you guys talking negatively about the way she looks. Let's just say I overheard some of her friends talking negatively about who she is and her character. That would crush me. I would be so deeply hurt by that, because that's my daughter! I love her! And if I heard you talking about her in that way, I'd be angry with you, because who are you to talk about her that way? I love her! That's my daughter!

How often this week did your Heavenly Father, who hears everything, He didn't miss a word—how often this week did you break His heart by the way you talked about His kids? How often

this week did He overhear you talking about that weird guy at your work? How often was His response, “That’s my son, whom I love, whom I created. How dare you talk about him that way!” How often this week did He hear you talk about that family member, who’s just a little “off”. How often was His response, “That’s my daughter, whom I love, whom I love so much that I sent my Son to die for her. And yet, you’re making fun of her quirks and her flaws. Is this the game we’re going to play? Because if this is the game we’re going to play, I can list off all your flaws, all your failures, all your sins, but I’ve chosen not to because you’re my son and you’re my daughter, and I’ve forgiven you for those things. Who are you to talk about her that way? Or maybe you just didn’t think I was listening.”

Here’s what you need to know about your Heavenly Father. He doesn’t miss a word. He hears everything you say. These following verses are scary; they mess me up, which is why I need to share them. This is what Jesus says, from the mouth of our Savior. Matthew 12, **“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36, 37.** Praise God, we’re not saved by our words. We’re saved by grace, through faith, not by our works or by our words, that no one can boast. But I don’t know exactly what this is going to look like, but Scripture says, Jesus says, we’ll have to give an account for every empty word that we’ve spoken. Because our words matter. Because our words display the state of our hearts. Scripture says that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. So, this week, if gossip has been on your tongue, it’s likely because the gospel hasn’t been on your heart. Because as gospel people, people who know and love Jesus, we don’t gossip about people. We are people who have been forgiven of much, so we forgive much. We don’t make light of other people’s mistakes because we know that we’ve made mistakes. We don’t laugh about them falling into sin because we know we’ve fallen into sin. And yet, in spite of that, we know that God in Heaven, our Father in Heaven, saw our sin, and you know what He didn’t do? He didn’t turn to the Holy Spirit and go, “Man, did you see that? Did you hear what they did? Did you see what they did?” He didn’t turn to the Holy Spirit to talk about it. He turned to his Son, and He sent his Son to die for us, so that all of our faults, failures, and sins might be forgiven and that we might be brought into a brand-new family. Here’s what you need to know about your Heavenly Father. He’s not playing games, and He’s not messing around because He loves His kids and He wants to protect His kids. My hope and my desperate prayer is that, at least for here at Harris Creek, our Heavenly Father wouldn’t have to protect His kids from His kids. But instead, we’d be a people who love dearly, who speak tenderly, and who simply believe the best about each other. My hope is that, at least here, at least Harris Creek, we’d be filled with people who throw around grace instead of throwing around stones. Because we’re family, and we’re all in this together. Let me pray that we talk like it.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the way in which you talk about us. There are so many times in Scripture where you talk about me better than I deserve. You talk about us better than we deserve, because we’ve forsaken you, we’ve failed you, we’ve sinned, we’ve fallen short. And yet, you call us your son. You call us your daughter. You say we’re dearly loved. God, thank you for the way you talk about us. I pray that would change the way we talk about others, that we

wouldn't make light of their sin or laugh at their failures or their flaws. But instead, we'd believe the best and we'd uplift other people, because that's what you've done to us. So, Father I pray that gossip would not be present in this place. Because my prayer is that, just as you prayed 2,000 years ago, right before you were about to die, my prayer is that this place would be unified. God, we know that we cannot achieve unity when there is gossip, because gossip is divisive and it keeps us from our mission. So, Father I pray that we would be unified around uplifting you, talking about you, not talking about others. God, I pray for anyone here who's been struggling with gossip, and they feel that they're cut deep right now. I pray that they'd hear the gospel. That you see them as they are and you accept them as they are. Above everything else, I pray that every single person in this room would know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that their God is alive, that their God is with us, that their God is for us. Because you are. It's in the powerful name of Jesus that we pray. Amen