



"My Pastor Drives Me Crazy": Is It Gossip?

by Kris Swiatocho

Editor's note: Today's article is the fourth in a series about "fine line" areas of our lives. Areas where we struggle to discern truth from sin. Areas we prefer not to deal with so that we can continue living on the edge, where the "fine line" is.

Lord, here I am again ...in yet another church that doesn't seem to care that I am single. Sure, they take my tithes, ask me to help watch the zillion kids in childcare, but they mostly ignore me. I just hate it. I hate being forgotten. I hate that my pastor never addresses singleness from the pulpit. I am not even sure if he knows who I am, much less that I am single. And our deacons, are you sure they are even breathing? What about the committees of this church? It seems like you can't change a light bulb without a committee to decide when to change it. And another thing....

You know, this single sounds a lot like I use to sound when I was much younger. But it also sounds like a lot of people I know that are married, too. Bottom line, we all go to churches where there are things we do not like. Maybe it's the pastors last sermon, how they voted to elect an elder, how they spend the missions money, or how they involved you. But maybe it's more than just your church. Maybe you also have some complaints about your job. Maybe your boss drives you nuts. He or she keeps you overtime without any concern that you might have a life. Or maybe it's a neighbor who constantly plays loud music or never cuts the grass. Or maybe it's a friend who constantly dates the wrong girl/guy and never seems to get it.

So how do most people handle their complaints? They tell others. You know the old saying, if you love something like a restaurant or pair of shoes you might tell 2 or 3 (well unless you are on) but if you are unhappy, you tell an army. The problem with telling an army is what may be a simple complaint or a time of venting becomes gossip. And this gossip can not only spread, it can cause pain to others, even broken relationships. It can also cause damage to a person's reputation, church or workplace.

I know this because I have experienced first-hand the consequences of having a person vent to me over the years about this person's church. I was told about every person that was there, what they said in Sunday school, and how they reacted to various things. I was also told anything the pastor said or did, if it was wrong in the eyes of my friend. From time to time I would point out that these complaints sounded like gossip. I was corrected, and told that my friend was just "venting", that my friend needed to tell me this stuff to help deal with it. The only problem is I would visit this church in question from time to time. As a result of years of hearing only negatives, I began to draw opinions about the various people there. People that I used to like.

So what is the difference between gossip and venting? What is the fine line?



VENTING IS:

We all have times when we need to vent. We simply need to share about things that are frustrating us, be it church, school, or friends. Venting allows us to hear our own voice, hear the problem, and even work it out. Venting allows us to process the stress. People who vent may or may not be looking for a solution. Sometimes they know God has placed them in a specific situation: amongst those aggravating people at work, on a committee at church, next door that a particular neighbor. They know that God has placed them there and is using them to reach those people. When we hear someone vent, the frustration we hear is usually just a release of stress about the situation. Everyone listening knows there will be some kind of victory in the end. You can even set up your venting to say: I love my pastor but sometimes he frustrates me when he†...or I love my friend but when she does this it hurts me.

GOSSIP IS:

Gossip can sometimes appear as "sharing for prayer" or "venting" when in reality a part of your heart is hoping that what you are saying will make you look better and another person look worse. You say these things to not only feel better about who you are, but also to feel better about what you do. You are not really concerned with the outcome. You ask people to maybe not say anything but you know down inside, they might. Gossip is very self-focused.

Gossip is also something I find people do when they struggle with self-esteem, and with being a people pleaser. When you start to tell someone about your church, your pastor, your boss, or your friend - what type of things are you sharing and why? Are you sharing a character flaw? Are you sharing a sin? Are you sharing something they did wrong to you? What is your ultimate goal in talking about them behind their backs? And to whom are you talking about them? Are you really sharing because they need prayer?

The Fine Line Revealed:

In order to know where the fine line is the next time you want to share, make sure you:

a.) Vent to those who know you well and you consider to be strong, wise counsel. Those that you are willing to speak truth into your life. Those that are willing to let you know when what you are saying sounds more like gossip.

b.) Vent with the openness to allow the Holy Spirit to make changes in you and with those with whom you are frustrated. Allow the person you are speaking too to also offer direction. We all get frustrated. It's how you handle the frustration that makes the difference.



c.) Pray about anything that you think someone else needs to know about. Ask yourself, why?

OK, so my Sunday school teacher taught something wrong in the Bible. Do I tell everyone I know what they taught OR do I ask to set up an appointment and ask for clarity of what they said? Your friend is a huge flirt with all the boys. Do you tell everyone she is a flirt or again, confront her in love to share this? I realize not every aggravating situation or person is solved by just talking to the person. Some of us have situations we are in that we are not always able to do anything about. So when this happens:

1) Pray, allowing God to reveal what He is trying to do through it.

¡This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" ().

2) Become the solution instead of the problem. You don't like some of the ways things are being done at church? Ask to help to make changes (including to help start a singles ministry!). You don't like your neighbor's long grass? Mow it for them to help them out. You don't like your cubicle mate's voice, put on headphones. But seriously, seek a way to solve the problem where you build a bridge instead of destroying it.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" ().

3. Finally, sometimes, the things we think or see should be kept to ourselves. Remember the golden rule.

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" ().

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helps churches, pastors and single adult leaders evaluate, develop and support their single adult ministries through high-energy speaking engagements, results-oriented consulting and training and leadership development conferences and seminars. Click to request a FREE "How to Start a Single Adult Ministry" guide. †



is Kris' speaking ministry. If you've ever heard her speak, you know that Kris is the kind of speaker who keeps the crowd captivated, shares great information and motivates people to make a difference in the lives of those around them! She speaks to all church audiences on everything from "first impression" ministry to women's topics to singles and young adults. She can speak on a Sunday morning, at a woman's retreat or for a single adults conference. Bring Kris to your church today!

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