

Gathering Question: In your group play the game gossip. Someone begin and whisper a message in the ear of the person sitting nearby. Then that person does the same and so on until the message gets back to the person who began the game.

Do Not Slander One Another

Do you know the difference between gossip and slander? What your group just did when they played gossip was a relatively benign exercise. The main point being that when many people tell one story, it eventually will become distorted and exaggerated. By the time such a story gets to you, it might be filled with half-truths or even absolute falsehood. That’s why gossip is so troublesome and that is why Christians should never allow themselves to get caught up in gossip.

Slander is a different sin altogether. When someone slanders someone else, they tell something about a person with the intent for evil. It may be that the slanderer will tell outright lies about someone else in order to put that person in the worse possible light. Or, it might be that the slanderer simply initiates some innuendo with the hope that the person he is slandering is seen in the worse possible light.

Plain spoken James confronts the problem of slander head on. “Do not slander one another,” he writes. I like the way that The NRSV translates it. “Do not speak evil against one another.” (James 4:11) This admonition is buried in a much larger admonition about conflicts and disputes that often arise among believers. James confronts us with the fact that our disputes often come as a result of our own evil desires that are at war within us.

What kinds of desires could cause a fellow believer intentionally to slander a fellow believer? Maybe it is pride or it could even be a poor self-image. Whatever the evil desire is, it results in evil talk. And that evil talk is intentional. James’ point is clear, Christians don’t act that way. In fact, Christians encourage and build each other up. Christians intentionally respond to fellow believers with talk that seeks the greatest good and reflects the purest hopes.

Buried within the passage in James is the only cure for slander. To purify hearts, minds, and talk, one must draw near to God with a humble heart, intentionally taking on his character and his desires.

Read: James 4:1-12; Ephesians 4:25-32

Discuss:

1. Read Ephesians 4. What is more natural for human beings, telling the truth, building up, and being kind, or telling lies, slandering, and being hateful? How is Paul’s prescription possible for believers?
2. What does James 4:1-10 have to do with James 4:11? Is there a connection between slander and all the other sins that James mentions? Explain your answer.