

## I. Introduction

- A. I am going to show you a picture of a contraption, and see if you know what it is. Now, don't guess. Either you know or you don't know. It looks like it's a part of an overhead projector, but it's not.
- B. Here it is.
- C. A long black arm and some attached mirrors and some glass.
- D. Don't guess. I'll give you a hint. It was invented by Ben Franklin, and you can still buy one today for the low, low price of \$59.99.
- E. Do you know how old Ben used this thing? When he was upstairs, lounging in his quarters, he wanted to snoop on people down on the street. So he made this gizmo. He attached to his window sill, and it acted a little bit like a periscope. Ben Franklin could snoop on without anybody noticing, and he didn't even have to get out of his seat.
- F. Do you know what this thing is called?
- G. It's called the Franklin BUSYBODY.
- H. I have a Word from the Lord for you today—actually, I have three words from the Lord for you today.
- I. This one, in context, is mainly for the guys:
  - 1. *"We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies." 2 Thessalonians 3:11, NIV.*
- J. And this one, in context, is mainly for the ladies:
  - 1. *"Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to." 1 Timothy 5:13, NIV.*
- K. And this one is for everyone:
  - 1. *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters." 1 Peter 4:15, NKJV.*
- L. Welcome to our fourth installment in a series called Bite Me! Tame your tongue; heal your heart. We are talking about a category of sins that is so tolerated in Christian cultures that we hardly know it's happening. Sins of the tongue.
- M. God cares about what comes out of your mouth—every word. I told you how, when I was a little boy in Sunday school, one of my teachers taught that my words never disappeared. They floated up into outer space, and kept going, and if we had a space ship fast enough, we could catch up to my words, and hear them all over again.
- N. That really put the fear of God into me. So did this Bible verse:
  - 1. *"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment." Matthew 12:36, NKJV.*
- O. Jesus doesn't fool around, does he?
- P. And of all the idle words that Christ's followers can speak, few are as mess up as the words of a busybody. I doubt that anybody actually owns a Franklin Busybody today. But we don't really need them, do we. We have the National Enquirer, and People Magazine, and we have Jon minus Kate plus Eight—and we have all kinds of ways to pry into other people's lives.

## II. The Corrector of Public Morals

- A. If you have a full-sized Bible, do me a favor, and turn to the back pages of your Bible. Most Bibles, not all, have something that's not exactly an index, but it looks like one. It's a list of Bible words, and list of Bible verses that have that word.
- B. So if you want to study love, or power, or busybodies, you look up that word in your concordance, and you'll find a list of Bible verses that contain that word. Along with the list of verses, you'll also find the exact phrase from each verse that contains the word.
- C. What do you call this part of your Bible?
- D. A Concordance. Let me tell you the story of the man who invented the English concordance. His name was Alexander Cruden, and he was born in 1699 in Scotland. He died just before the United States became a nation.
- E. When you realize that Cruden did what he did without a computer, it's pretty amazing. Cruden was a scholar in biblical studies, and he loved languages. He was a savant in Latin and Greek and theology.
- F. Cruden's Concordance was the first concordance in the world to include the relevant snippet of each verse.
- G. In 1737, Cruden presented his first concordance to Queen Caroline, the wife of King George II. That was 1737, and Cruden's concordance has never gone out of print since then.
- H. But in his own day, Alexander Cruden was not famous for his concordance. He was famous because he pestered the Parliament to give him a special appointment.
- I. Cruden longed to be officially appointed by his government as Correct of Public Morals. He began calling himself Alexander the Corrector. And he went around, prying into other people's business and if they didn't live up to his standards, Alexander the Corrector wrote out tickets, and fined people.
- J. He even pestered King George to knight him, so he could become Sir Alexander, Corrector of Public Morals.

K. Too bad Alexander didn't use his own concordance to look up busybodies. He might have had a change of heart.

### III. My Church Board

- A. I began my ministry as a youth pastor in Chicago. My church was really conservative—most of you have heard my story. They frowned on movies, drinking, dancing—all the rules that churches of a generation ago believed in.
- B. I got in trouble in my church, because of some busybodies. And I'm not making this up, but they called a special meeting of the church board—remember, I'm a young man, 22 or 23 years old, and these guys are mostly 60 and up and they call me in and put me on trial.
- C. Wanna know what for? Well, they found out that I went dancing. I took a special date to a dance, and my church board found out, and held a special meeting to figure out what to do with Bill the Dancer.
- D. And I have to point out, that our church had no official rules, or policies against dancing. It's the unwritten rules that really get a guy into trouble. So there I was, in my first full time church ministry, and I was in trouble.
- E. No kidding.
- F. But you want to know what makes this story even worse? Guess what kind of dancing it was—Square Dancing. Oh yeah, a whole lot of lust down at the local square dance. A whole lot of do-si-do-ing right straight into fornication.
- G. So here we had a bunch of busybodies prying into my own private life, and making me sweat over my job and the ministry I loved, because I took a date square dancing.
- H. But that's not the worst part of it.
- I. The worst part of it was exactly WHO I went square dancing with, because it was her birthday, and I knew she'd enjoy it, and I wanted her to feel special.
- J. I went square dancing with my mom.
- K. And you'd have to have a really sick mind to even being to imagine evil in that scenario.
  1. *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters." 1 Peter 4:15, NKJV.*
- L. I think someone on that church board realized how ridiculous the whole thing was, and they never did anything about it.
- M. Do you understand why I hate legalism?

### IV. What is a Busybody?

- A. What is a busybody?
- B. A busybody is someone who loves to talk about other people's problems.
- C. The New Testament has two different words for a busybody.
- D. The first word takes the word for "circle" and tacks it in front of the word for "effort." Effort going in circles (periergazomai). A busybody burns all kinds of fuel accomplishing NOTHING good. When you're a busybody, you're just going in circles.
- E. The second word is also really colorful. It's a triple compound word in Greek. You take the word that means a supervisor (episkopos), and tack on the word that means pertaining to others, or alien (allotropos). It means to meddle in other people's lives as if you were their boss.
- F. I asked God to give me a really vivid, memorable way for you to picture the sin of being a busybody.
- G. And this is what came to my mind immediately. In my previous church, we had this really nice secretary, and her husband drove a truck and delivered stuff. His name was Stu. One day, Stu slammed the truck door on his hand. He chopped off his thumb and one finger.
- H. They rushed Stu to the hospital, along with his severed thumb and finger.
- I. And you know what the doctors did? They sewed Stu's thumb and finger back on, and sent him home after a couple of days.
- J. But they also did something else. I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it with my own eyes.
- K. Stu stopped by the church office, and showed me his hand. It had a thin bandage on it. And he showed me that before the doctors wrapped up his hand, they stuck something on his wounds and wrapped these somethings into his wounds, so they wouldn't get out.
- L. Wanna know what the doctors wrapped into Stu's severed fingers?
- M. Maggots—Stu showed me. You could see them crawling under his bandage. He had something like 8 maggots. I'm talking civilized, USA, suburban hospital, modern medicine. Doctors stuck maggots inside Stu's wound.
- N. And they explained that maggots don't eat healthy flesh. They only eat putrid stuff. They only eat decay.
- O. I asked God to give me an illustration for a busybody, and he gave me maggots.
- P. When you're a busybody, you chew on bad stuff. You dig out people's failures, and talk about them behind their back. You put a negative spin on someone else's choices:
  1. How could they afford that car? That house? That college?
  2. Oh, they're probably having marital problems.
  3. Those two have to be sleeping together, even though they're not married! Gasp!

- Q. When you are being a busybody, God loves you, even though you are a spiritual maggot. When you are a busybody, God loves you, even though other people's rotten stuff is your personal pleasure.
- R. When you are a busybody,
1. You are nosy.
  2. You pry into other people's stories.
  3. You act like there's no bad stuff going on your life.
  4. And you take pleasure in other people's garbage.
- S. Very nice.
- T. What's going on? What force is inside us that makes us into busybodies?
- V. Harmless Meddling
- A. I think there are a lot of different reasons for being a busybody.
- B. One reason is simply that we love drama. That's why reality shows are such a hit. Drama. It's hard not to talk about other people's drama. It's interesting. I don't want to spoil anybody's fun, so I'll say that the drama-motive CAN be pretty harmless.
- C. Another harmless reason is because we really want to help. Pretty much every teenager thinks that your mom and dad meddle into your life. In your opinion, they are busybodies and you're probably right, except for the fact that they are paying for the right to be busybodies, and when they're done paying for your life and room and board and insurance, then they can't meddle any more. Until then, it's godly meddling. I had a dad on Facebook tell me yesterday, that he asked his son's third grade teacher to stick his son in the front row, right by the teacher's desk. Thank God for meddlesome parents.
- D. Also, sometimes, it's your job to meddle. If you're a boss, or a supervisor, contractor or a business owner you need to evaluate your employees, and see if the job is getting done. It doesn't give you a right to pry into their personal lives, or hassle them if they take their mom square dancing, but the Bible does say:
1. *"Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds;" Proverbs 27:23, NKJV.*
- E. So there are some okay kinds of meddling.
- VI. Messed Up Meddling
- A. That's not what the Bible is against. The Bible is against the sin of being a busybody—digging into someone's private life, and feasting in their drama, and gabbing about it, and shaking your head over it, and judging them for it.
1. A busybody fixates on another person's weakness to avoid the feelings of weakness in your own life.
- B. Does that make sense to you? Have you ever done that?
- C. I think if Jesus could say anything to your Inner Busybody, he would say this:
1. *"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" Matthew 7:3, NKJV.*
- D. Alexander Cruden, the Corrector of Public Morals, was so busy writing tickets for the bad stuff other people did, that he didn't notice his own sins. He ended up in jail three times for stalking women he had a crush on.
- E. We all do the same thing.
- F. And here's what's so crazy about this:
1. The biggest maggot in the universe is the Devil. He's the Lord of Flies. He swarms around rotten stuff.
  2. The devil has a nickname: he's called the Accuser.
  3. He finds the rotten stuff, and whispers about you, and whispers to you. He says you are weak. You can't control your sexual lust. You can't control your hormones. You can't control your gossiping tongue. You can't control your emotions, your mood swings, your spending habits. You are weak against drink, against drugs, against pride, against shopping, against eating, against pride, against selfishness, against temptation, against pornography, against despair, against negativity, against danger.
  4. You are weak against big stuff, weak against little stuff. You are weak, whispers the professional accuser, the devil.
- G. And you nod your head, and you say, I am weak and then you find the one activity that makes you feel better about yourself. You find someone weaker than you, and fixate on it.
- H. Ultimately, the Bible calls sins of the tongue DEMONIC (James 3:15). That's pretty huge. Demonic.
- I. The reason why is that the devil's number one trick is to convince you that you're weak. And the truth is YOU ARE NOT WEAK. In Christ, you have all the power you need to follow Jesus. You are not weak. You are not a failure. You are not damaged goods. You are not hopeless.
- J. You are strong, in Christ, and you can do all things through him. Listen to this incredible promise:
1. *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious*

*promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Peter 1:3, 4, NIV.*

- K. If God’s divine power has given you everything you need for life and godliness, how can you be weak?
- L. You can’t. It’s impossible. The power that flowed through Jesus flows through you, because the Holy Spirit that energized Jesus energizes you too.
- M. And yet, how easily we fall into the devil’s trap. And he says, You are weak and that’s too painful to bear. So it’s like going down a slide—once you start, you can’t stop.
- N. The devil persuades you are weak when you are strong. That’s his number one trick. And then he moves on to his number two trick:
- O. And then the devil persuades you to despise another person’s weakness.
- P. You judge them. You talk about them. You dig for dirt. You actually find pleasure in their pain. You even befriend them just to learn about them, and find their flaws.
- Q. You despise another person for his or her weakness. You look down on them so you can avoid looking down on yourself.

1. And the crazy thing is that you don’t have to look down on anyone if you are in Christ.

#### VII. The Best News

- A. Earlier in this series I said that sins of the tongue are like a river of pus. If you paddle upstream, you’ll find the source. The source is a wounded heart; a wounded spirit.
- B. The devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He’s the ultimate maggot. You chew on other people’s weakness because you feel the sting of the devil chewing on your weakness.
- C. BUT, if you saw yourself as God sees you, you’d never even get started down this path.
- D. To God, you are perfect.
- E. To him, you look like Jesus. You’re joined to Christ, in permanent union with Jesus. God doesn’t see you in your weakness, and failures, and shame. God sees you as a glorious, redeemed, beloved child of the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- F. Because all that stuff that makes you ashamed has been buried in the deepest sea, and cast behind God’s back, never to be remembered against you again. Your sins are gone. Your failures are gone. Your weaknesses are gone. Your past mistakes are gone. Your evil is gone. Abusiveness is gone. Hatred is gone. Adultery is gone. Deceit is gone. Religious Hypocrisy is gone. Selfishness is gone.
- G. Not only in you, but also in that person you’re gossiping about. So the Bible asks...
  - 1. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.
- H. This is a polite way of saying MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. But it gets better than that. Next time you get ready to go maggot-like on another person’s weakness, remember the last half of this verse:
  - 1. “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” Romans 14:4, NKJV.
- I. Just when I’m getting ready to despise you for your weaknesses, I need to remember that God will make you stand; he has that kind of power. God will do it—His power, his effort, his grace.
- J. Your actions may flip-flop from good to bad to good to bad. In your actions.
- K. But your IDENTITY never changes. Nothing shakes who you are. Nothing changes how God sees you.
- L. Tell that to your Inner Busybody next time it wants to chew on some rotten flesh.

#### VIII. Conclusion

- A. I believe in community. It is a central quality of a healthy Christian life. Community. Connection. Relationship.
- B. I believe in Community, but you know what? Community is earned. Community is developed. Community is discovered over time, as you invest in relationships.
- C. And that means, let me be me, and I’ll let you be you, and I’ll trust that God will make each of us stand and pass whatever test he gives.
- D. That was me saying Mind Your Own Business (1 Th 4:11).
- E. Put away your Franklin Busybody.
- F. Turn in your badge as Corrector of Public Morals.
- G. And let’s love one another in both word and deed.
- H. I’m praying that God would make us together a tribe of encouragers.