

## I. Introduction

- A. I think the most exciting professional sport to watch live is hockey. As a kid, I watched the Chicago Black Hawks play more games than I can count. And, as a kid, what part of hockey do you think was most exciting for me? Right—the fights. There’s something about the gloves down on the ice, and guys trying to land a punch while they’re sliding around, that made me stand up and cheer.
- B. In 1977 the league created a new rule. It’s called the “Third Man In” rule, and it says that, when two guys start fighting on the ice, the next guy who joins the fight gets ejected from the game. The idea is that if two players are fighting, stay out of it. The Third Man In rule is our topic for today.
- C. This is week three in our series called Bite Me. We are talking about sins of the tongue. Tame your tongue, heal your heart. And our topic for today is “Stay Out Of It.”
- D. Stay Out Of It.
- E. If two people are fighting, stay out of it. You only make it worse by letting one of them gripe about the other. You only make it worse by gossiping about it. You only make it worse by taking sides. You only make it worse by offering an opinion.
- F. Stay out of it. If you’re the third man in, the third woman in, you get ejected from the game, spiritually speaking.
- G. Stay out of it. Don’t be the third person in.
- H. There was this guy named David, in the Bible, and he was an expert at triangulated communication. Everybody talked about David. If there had been a National Enquirer 3,000 years ago, David would be all over the front page, pretty much every day for forty years.
- I. It was as if David had a target painted on his back for every gossip in town. Every backbiter, slanderer, whisperer, tale-bearer, and critic had something to say about David. He knew what it felt like to be on the receiving end of sins of the tongue.
- J. So when God wanted to write down in Scripture one of His most powerful messages about the tongue, He tapped David and said, write Psalm 15. He starts with the most important question any follower of Jesus can ask.

## II. Psalm 15

- A. *“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?”* Psalms 15:1, NKJV.
  - 1. The tabernacle was a big tent. They packed it around and kept it repaired for something like 400 years.
  - 2. This is where the priests offered sacrifices, and acted out the theology of salvation. This is where the priests stored the law and the prophets; where they read and explained the word.
  - 3. And this is where they kept the Ark of the Covenant—a gold covered box that symbolized the presence of God.
  - 4. When David wrote this, the tabernacle was pitched on a hill—the holy hill.
  - 5. And when David asks who can abide in God’s tabernacle, and who can dwell on God’s holy hill, he was asking a super important question.
  - 6. I’ll bet you’ve asked the same question, but not in the same words.
  - 7. What he asking is who gets to experience the personal presence of God?
  - 8. Lord, who gets to feel close to You? Who gets to experience Your presence? Who gets to feel like You are genuinely a part of their everyday life?
  - 9. More than an idea, more than a habit, but a personal closeness to God: Psalm 15 asks who gets to experience the personal closeness of God.
  - 10. And I’ll bet most of us would point to really saintly people—people who feed the hungry, maybe. Or who clothe the poor; maybe the people who serve on our prayer team, and minister to you after church. Or maybe the pastor—right? I’m a pastor, and that means, by definition, I’m saintly, right?
  - 11. Or how about people who serve as missionaries—they get to feel extra close to God.
  - 12. When I hear the question, “Who gets to hang out with God in an extra special way...” I would never in a million years have answered it the way David answered it.
- B. *“He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart;”* Psalms 15:2, NKJV.
  - 1. Check out the three verbs: walks, works, and speaks. These are three of the most common words in the Hebrew language. Every day, you do all three. Every day you walk, you work, and you speak.
  - 2. What he’s saying is that you experience God in the plainness of everyday life. Don’t go chasing God in special events. Instead meet with Him in everyday life.
    - a) *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ‘You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.’”* Deuteronomy 6:6-7, NKJV.
  - 3. I want to meddle today, because if God is NOT part of your everyday life, you have lopped off about 75% of the happiness that could be yours.
  - 4. Who gets to hang out with God?
  - 5. The person who does three actions:
    - a) You walk uprightly—that word means fullness, wholeness. It refers to a person who is the same on Monday as you were on Sunday or Saturday at church. You don’t have different compartments in your life, where you cram God in on the weekends, but then elbow Him out the rest of your life. To walk uprightly means to have God’s Word integrated throughout all the compartments of your life.
    - b) You work righteousness. Back during the era of the pilgrims, a Scottish pastor, named Thomas Boston, wrote, “A man must be righteous before he can work righteousness.” If you’re a churchy person, you might equate the word righteous with good, and it is. It is the goodness that is good enough for God. But it is more than that. Righteousness is the goodness that is good enough for God, that we have opened our

hearts to receive from God. Because the simple truth is that nobody has innate righteousness. The only righteousness we have that's worth anything is the righteousness that God has put inside us. And because He put it inside us when we received Jesus, we now get to work it outside us—in kindness, in respect, in decency, and in honesty.

- c) You speak truth in your heart. That's the third quality of a person who hangs with God. You speak truth in your heart. Your inner dialogue has been modified by God to reflect the truth of God's Word. Do you ever listen to your own inner voices? Steven King said he felt like a bunch of aliens landed in his head and took over. C.S. Lewis talked about a shadowy zoo within. Even Augustine talked about the beasts within his heart. And it's so important to let your inner dialogue mirror the Scriptures. Because it's just a matter of time before what you say in your inner world squirts out into what you say in your outer world.

6. And that's where verse 3 goes with it.

- C. *"He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;"* Psalms 15:3, NKJV.
1. Here you go with three sins of the tongue. Remember the original question of this psalm: who gets to feel God's presence in your life. Answer—verse 3.
  2. Maybe one reason God seems far away; maybe a reason why you feel God ignores your prayers (He doesn't, but that's how you feel); maybe a reason why God is just a word, and you've been in church all your life, but God still feels far away—maybe the reason is because you backbite with your tongue or send evil your neighbor's way, or take up a reproach.
  3. If God seems far away, who didn't bite his or her tongue?
  4. Backbiting: To backbite means to find out bad stuff about people, and talk about it behind their back. When you slander, you do it in front of them. When you backbite, you do it behind their back. One old time preacher said,
    - a) All slanderers are the devil's bellows to blow up contention, but those are the worst which blow at the back of the fire. (Spurgeon)
  5. The original Hebrew word even conveys the idea of being a spy. You spy on people. You look for bad stuff, just so you can talk about it.
    - a) *"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD."* Leviticus 19:16, NKJV.
  6. If you know something bad about a person, STAY OUT OF IT. That's between that person and God or that person and their spouse, or boss, or teacher, or roommate, or whatever. If you're not involved, stay out of it. Don't you be the third person in it. That is the Word of the Lord to you today.
  7. Because if you poke your long proboscis into somebody else's bad stuff, you not only hurt them, but you also hurt yourself. You harden your heart to the presence of God. He's there, but you don't feel Him, so you don't believe it.
  8. St Paul classifies backbiters in the same category as haters of God, murderers, and fornicators (Rom 1:30).
    - a) *"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins."* Proverbs 10:12, NKJV.
  9. When you hear something bad about a person, the whole goal is that that bad news would die with you. Don't get on the phone and call your buddies, or your girlfriend. Don't shoot out that email. Bite your tongue, and bring the badness to God. The goal is to cover up all sins.
  10. The next phrase says to not do evil to a neighbor, and especially not with your words. Love your neighbor as yourself.
  11. The central principle is this: all human life is sacred. Every person belongs to God. God is at work in that person in a way you can never imagine. Your words should show respect for the God-given sacredness of every person, every word all the time.
  12. And then he says not to take up a reproach against your friend. Don't be part of any conversation that would make another person feel ashamed. Stay out of it.
  13. Stay out of both sides of the equation. Refuse to spread the bad news with your mouth. And refuse to hear the bad news with your ears.
    - a) John Trapp, from the 1600's, preached.... "The tale-bearer carries the devil in his mouth, and the tale-hearer carries the devil in his ears."
  14. You don't want to be on either side of that equation. Don't you be the third man in.
  15. Especially when your friend is trying to get you to take sides—this is called "taking up an offense." I hurt you, and so you're mad at me. And instead of coming to me, you run to your friend, and say what an evil so-and-so Bill is and then you get your friend to take sides against me. Have I done anything to your friend? No. But your friend is mad, and now it's a mess.
  16. If you're the friend, stay out of it. As soon as you know where the story is headed say, "I really care about you, and I hope you and Bill work it out, but it's best for me not to hear the rest of this—I need to stay out of it."
  17. You do that, and the angels rejoice. And you'll know that God is close. And you'll be dwelling in the shadow of the Most High.

### III. What's So Bad About the Third Person?

- A. There are two more verses in this Psalm that get away from sins of the tongue, and we'll leave them for another time.
- B. I want to ask, what's so bad about the third person? Yeah, it's bad, but why?
- C. I think if you understand why, it will make more sense to you.
- D. God says,
  1. *My grace is sufficient for you, (2 Cor 12:9).*

2. *As your days, so shall your strength be, (Deut 33:25).*

- E. What He's saying is that God hands out all the grace and strength you need one day at a time. He doesn't give you tomorrow's grace today. If you have a struggle today, you have from God all you need to face that struggle today.
- F. That's why it's crazy to worry about tomorrow. God hasn't handed out tomorrow's grace today, so you're on your own.
- G. But what you need today, God has already supplied the grace and the strength and it's just in time, and it's never late.
- H. Got that part?
- I. This applies to relationships too. When you get hurt or mad or wounded, God gives you the grace to forgive. God gives you the strength to work through the problem with the person who hurt you. God supplies all you need to move on with your life and if it's safe to do so, God supplies all you need to move on with your relationship too.
- J. Think of how impossible life would be if we didn't forgive each other. Strike one, YOU'RE OUT!
- K. There would be no marriage, no friendship, no community, no relationship, no clubs, and no teams. For this glue that is love to work, we need to forgive each other and the great thing is that God gives you the power to forgive.
- L. He gives you all you need, just in time. His grace is sufficient for you. Got that part?
- M. So, when I hurt you, God gives you the grace to forgive me.
- N. But when you run off and blab to your friend about how I hurt you, and when you convince your friend to take up the offense against me—question—is God giving that third party the grace to forgive me for hurting you?
- O. NO.
- P. I didn't offend that person. I didn't hurt that person. God's grace isn't there to forgive me; because God's supernatural grace doesn't go where it isn't needed.
- Q. When you get hurt God gives the grace.
- R. But when someone else is hurt, that's their business, and God isn't giving anybody any grace to do anything where you should have just stayed out of it.
- S. When you're the third person into a fight, you're on your own.
- T. Which means it's actually WORSE for you than for the person who was originally hurt!
  - 1. *"It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel."* Proverbs 20:3, NKJV.
- U. Stay out of it. If two people are fighting, don't play God, let God deal with their hearts. You, stay out of it. Bite your tongue. Cover your ears.
- V. Keep your heart warm toward God; draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

#### IV. But How?

- A. Has this series made you feel some conviction from God? It's done that to me. God has been making me more alert to my tongue. Complaining, whining, and talking bad about people.
- B. I am super-convicted about that right now.
- C. I hope you are too.
- D. But there's a truth I don't ever want us to get far away from. Christianity is not simply about morality. The heart of our message is NOT about you being a better person.
- E. The heart of our message is that you can't be a better person, because you are a fallen person, a fallen member of a broken race, and we are all collectively helpless to do anything about it.
- F. But there is a God who loves us. And He loves us because of Who and what He is, never because of who and what we are.
- G. And even though we are messed up, He still loves us. Like we said last week: God didn't save you because He has good taste. He saved you because He has a soft spot for losers.
- H. And don't take the personally, because it's true of everybody.
- I. In His love, God made a way to restore you to the life He planned for you before the human race fell.
- J. That way is Jesus and His grace—beginning, middle, and end.
- K. By His death, Jesus absorbed our sins. In the most theologically packed book in the Bible, when St Paul wants to talk about human sin, guess what kind of sin he highlights:
  - 1. *"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.'" Romans 3:10-18, NKJV.*
- L. Sins of the tongue—the way we murder each other in speech. Jesus absorbed that sin from us like a sponge absorbs a mess. He died for those sins. This made it right for God to forgive us.
- M. But there's more.
- N. Jesus also rose from the dead. He did this to give you a new nature, a new status, and a new power.
- O. Grace doesn't just mean God forgives you, it means God empowers you. Christ lives inside you. Jesus is operating on you from the inside out. He is your power.
- P. You've heard the letters WWJD? What would Jesus do?
- Q. In this series we need to ask, what would Jesus say?
- R. And what would Jesus not say?
- S. And I'm telling you, that you cannot live like Jesus, and you can't speak like Jesus by your own strength. You need His strength. He's the WWJD master, and He's in you to do and say what Jesus would do and say once again, through you.
- T. I'm saying that the only way you will tame your tongue is if you
  - 1. Get saved, so Christ lives inside you.
  - 2. Trust Jesus to live through you day by day, so He can tame your tongue.

3. Grow mature as a Christian so your trust grows deeper, strong, and more consistent every year.

V. A tribe of encouragers

- A. One last thing and we're done. I want to invite you to begin a 40 day fast from sins of the tongue. No complaining for 40 days. No boasting, criticizing, whining, cursing, lying, hating, backbiting, slandering, gossiping—if it isn't kind, if it isn't encouraging, don't say it.
- B. Now, I know we have jobs and businesses, and all that.
- C. So you have to use your own judgment—our focus is on two things:
  - 1. Preserving relationships
  - 2. Preserving dignity
- D. So as long as you preserve relationships, and preserve dignity, you can return a defective item, and fight for your rights with the cable company. I get that part.
- E. But otherwise, a total fast from negative speech.
- F. And to motivate you, and to make you aware, we have these little banks to give out.
- G. Every time you say something negative, stuff some money into it. And make it something you feel—\$5 or something like that. I gave banks to my kids and told them every time they whine they have to put in a coin. Their eyes got big, and they said, "Then we're not going to do any whining."
- H. I think for some people, these banks will be too small. That's okay, though. Fill them up, and bring them back, and we'll put this money toward our Building on Grace Fund so more people can discover the love of Jesus.
- I. In the Bible, this guy named John Mark wimped out during a very difficult missionary journey with Paul. We don't know exactly what happened, but John Mark became a coward, and wimped out in some way.
- J. Paul washed his hands of John Mark. I want nothing to do with that messed up kid, he said.
- K. But another strong leader named Barnabas, pulled John Mark to his side and mentored him back into a leadership role (Acts 15:36-41, go read it).
- L. The name Barnabas literally means Son of Encouragement.
- M. Your words will make or break the people around you. Do you want to be more like Paul—washing your hands of John Mark because you're ticked off or like Barnabas—drawing broken people in, and encouraging them?
- N. My prayer for NCR is that we would become a tribe of encouragers. Can you imagine what would happen in this city, if the most positive, faith-filled, encouraging people that anybody could meet were faithful followers of Jesus?
- O. A tribe of encouragers.
- P. This is how you hang with God. This is how you feel God's love and presence in your life. This is how you abide in His tabernacle and dwell on His holy hill.
- Q. Impossible? Yes. In the energy of the flesh.
- R. But with God all things are possible.
- S. Bite your tongue, and don't be the third person in.
- T. Bring your bank back when it's full.