

A MESSAGE FROM PURITY PARADIGM

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Has your life ever provided fuel for the rumour mill?

Mine has.

Have you known the twin walls between you and others of shame (self) and judgement (others)?

I have.

A couple of years ago when speaking on the topic of gossip at a mothers group, a young mum – not then walking with God – made a very insightful comment. She said “there seems to be so much more to gossip about within the church because there is so much more to fail at”.

She’s right on each count.

The expectations of Christian life are higher – there is more to fail at and therefore more to be gossiped about.

Further to that, she commented that Christian Christianize gossip because we turn everything into ‘sharing’ or ‘prayer needs’.

Does a gossip come alongside a hurting broken person and help them find their way forward? Generally not. Recognising sin or failure doesn’t mean you ignore it, but Jesus speaks words of life and growth not of death and condemnation. Jesus never whitewashed a sin but he pointed the way forward from that place.

One of the worst things about being gossip fuel is that gossip generally contains a measure of truth. Slander that is built on lies alone. Every one of us seeks people who understand our stuff – either through experience or grace (usually both). No one can bear to have their stuff discussed by people who don’t really understand, don’t have all the facts, don’t actually love you and who therefore will diagnose, hypothesise, draw conclusions, sit in judgement, gloat, enlarge and repeat what may in fact be true to a degree and be causing you immense pain.

Sin is sin. True.

God made a way through sin to Himself and to Life.

How can we, his representatives learn to do the same?

Some years ago when there was some gossip circulating about us, I drove into the school yard one morning waving to someone whose child was friends with mine and who would normally have waved and smiled in return.

This particular day it was plain that some new 'knowledge' recently received about us could not allow him to handle a friendly response to me. Instead of waving, he turned and walked away. In self protection I immediately thought "perhaps he didn't see me... perhaps he didn't recognise my car". This had to be dismissed as I knew he'd met my eye – plus which I drive a great hulking dark green Tarago. Hardly something unrecognisable, plus which - one his son had often ridden in.

I left the schoolyard sobbing that day, wondering who else might turn from the very appearance of my car.

Then God did something beautiful.

To preface what He did next I need to back track a couple of years.

I love a bargain, and I love to op shop! One particular sweltering summers day while op shopping there was also in the store a teenage mum, feeding her newborn as she browsed, barefoot, unkempt and with her father. Clearly she was setting up house for her and her baby as baby bath and curtains were being lugged by her Dad. Being that I thought we had finished having babies, I asked her what else she needed, gave her my phone number and encouraged her to give me a call as it would make me feel better to give all our stuff to a real person than just donate it somewhere. Within a few days she gave me a call and I took a carload of assorted baby things to the shed in the middle of a bush property where she'd set up her home. She was so very grateful and though I offered to keep in touch with her, I never heard from her again.

Then there was the day I arrived at the supermarket drying my tears.

A stunning little girl riding in the seat of a trolley caught my attention. Her mother was barefoot and wearing a pyjama top with a skirt. She caught my eye and said "are you Heather?" When I replied, she reintroduced herself and her daughter asking me "do you drive a dark green Tarago? I say a little prayer of thanks for you and what you did every time I see one".

Dear Lord... I cried a little bit more.

How come God can strategically place people who don't even know Him and use them for His glory, yet sometimes His own people seem set on flattening each other?

'Course, I've never flattened or judged anybody have I. Noooooooo. Not much. Particularly not another parent. Noooooooo. Someone about whom I didn't have all the facts... or love... or seek to encourage... or seek to come alongside... Noooooooo.

Hmmm.

Once upon a time in the same school yard I met a little boy. At the time of our meeting he was swinging on our Tarago front door. Hands stretched up behind his head, kicking off the seat and having a fine old time. Little snot.

That kind of set the tone for how I felt about him and his family for years to follow. Turned out they'd even done the same parenting courses we had. I just couldn't understand it. Obviously an application problem.

Over time, as I've lived the painful realisation that some people have thought just as ungraciously of me and mine at times, I've come to so regret how I thought towards that family.

As is often the case among Christian families, so many of us have leadership roles of one sort or another. Sometimes we fail, sometimes we think we fail and sometimes other people think we fail. Sometimes we think people are waiting for us to fail, sometimes they actually are, and sometimes we wait for them to fail too. It allows us to feel better about ourselves when someone else is failing - right?

I spoke to a Pastor of a church recently who resigned his church of 500. Just one example of the difficulty of parenting at the forefront of leadership was when he told me the elders would receive letters on Monday morning if his kids wriggled too much in church on Sunday.

That family of the door swinging boy has hit some hard times. Ten years later I cried for them and for my failure in friendship just last night. The teenage rumour mill fed back to me through our son. My response now was no longer along the lines of thoughts like "What's wrong with those parents? Why couldn't they see where this was going? Why didn't they act before this? Gotcha now." Instead I said as I truly felt "if that is true, his parents' hearts must be breaking. I'm so sorry I don't have a friendship with that mother where I could pick up the phone and try and give her some sort of encouragement now".

It took 10 years for God to turn my attitude around. It may be too late for relationship with them, but it's not too late for others. I'm so glad God is patient with His frail and fallible creatures.

A local pastor in our city who I respect immensely had a pastoring father who 'fell from grace' in quite a public way. The younger of the two once challenged the church in a sermon I heard, asking each one if the church could continue if he ever failed and fell. His point was - not to put our faith in our leaders but in God himself. Yes listen to and respect them but always weigh what they say by the Word, Life and principles of God rather than man. Not to do something because "Pastor___" said so. Not to do something because an expert or teacher or mentor says so, but because it resonated with the Word of God in your own heart.

When we place people on pedestals, the only way to go is down.

God doesn't need a pedestal. His Name is already higher than any other.
Only He is to be exalted.

Let's better get to know Whom It Is that we serve.

