

FOCUS ON FAITH

ENCOURAGEMENT

What is it about the British psyche that we seem to be more interested in the bad news?

I don't know but I'd hazard a guess that most of us would probably like to hear good things about ourselves rather than bad things but if we're really honest we sometimes find it impossible not to "dish the dirt" on others, complain or criticise them and bemoan our lot in life.

I've been thinking about this because last week I saw a TV programme which criticised a company I used to work for. The allegations were about people who were misleading others and "using the system" for their own ends. And despite my best intentions there was a feeling inside that they were getting what they deserved – adverse publicity – and that it served them right. Yet this company was very good to me but rather than considering the benefits I'd enjoyed whilst I worked for them, I was thinking more about the fact that I was glad I was out of there.

But we see and hear it all around us. The news is full of political intrigue; celebrity marriages that are on the rocks; rogue tradesmen or companies trying to gain unfair advantage; all the latest scams. Don't get me wrong – we need to hear about these things and it's important that the media keeps us up to speed with what's happening but sometimes I feel there is a tendency for rumours to be invented in order to keep up with our almost insatiable appetite for gossip and the latest revelations.

The Bible has a lot to say about this. King Solomon – the wisest man that ever lived – wrote in the Book of Proverbs 20:19, "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a person who talks too much." He also wrote that people who gossip separate close friends but those who are trustworthy keep a secret. How many of us have experienced relationships that have become strained or even broken because something confidential we've shared has been inappropriately divulged?

So how should we deal with this? The Apostle Paul writing to the church in Rome said, "If a man's gift is... encouraging, let him encourage..." (Chapter 12: 6-8). We all need encouragement and support even if we haven't got it altogether. In fact it is especially when you're in a spot of difficulty that we need people around us who will be supportive rather than critical. Think about it: your best friends are the ones who encourage you. Most of us don't hang around people who put us down. After all, there will always be people who seem to enjoy taking chunks out of us!

William James said, "(One of) the deepest principles in human nature is the craving to be appreciated."

Most of us *think* wonderful things about people but how often do we actually *tell* them how much they are appreciated?

Praise only becomes valuable if you impart it. So, instead of thinking the worst about someone or a situation, try and go out of your way to encourage instead of criticise; to be positive instead of negative and supportive rather than indifferent.

After all, the Bible says that we should treat others in the same way we ourselves would like to be treated – Luke's Gospel 6:11. And my guess is that we'd prefer it if other people think well of us.

If you'd like to find out more about the real, radical Christian faith, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.



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