

CHAPTER 10

HEAVY LIFTING IS LIGHT WORK



Biblical Lessons for Students, Athletes & More

Individual or Group Experience

FOCAL VERSE

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

James 4:10 (NIV)

WISE WORDS

"Be one who nurtures and builds. Be one who has an understanding and forgiving heart; one who looks for the best in people. Leave people better than you found them."

—Marvin J. Ashton

Introduction

In the late 90's, I had a short stint as a high school cosmetology instructor. My class was exclusively young women, and it wasn't uncommon for them to tear each other down. They could be vicious. One particular day, I'd had enough. I directed the class to take out a piece of paper and write down three, positive characteristics about each of their classmates. When everyone finished, I had the students read aloud the character traits they had written down for each person. The exercise was uncomfortable for the students, but highly effective. Many students were stunned to know that their peers (and adversaries) saw something good in them that they had never seen in themselves.

We can likely agree that people *of all ages* who don't have a positive self-image, feel more adequate when they're criticizing someone else. Odds are, they're likely motivated by their own insecurities. Truth is, speaking poorly of someone else, (especially when they aren't around to defend themselves), says more about *you* than the person you're talking about. And yes, the author of this study is guilty too. Let's heed the advice of Booker T. Washington: "*If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.*"

Let's take a look at how we can combat this battle against comparing, criticizing, and gossiping. Honestly, it's light work!

Page 65

Starting at the bottom of page 65, I share an experience with a friend—a frustrating situation involving my son's inexperienced basketball coach.

But first...

Thinking back to chapter nine, did you have an opportunity to extend help to someone *or* ask for help? Has it become more apparent that God is your first "go-to" for help?

When asked, "What is more important: prayer or reading the Bible?" I ask, "What is more important: breathing in or breathing out?"

"No man can do me a truer kindness in this world than to pray for me.

Charles Spurgeon



Her response was unexpected but perfectly suited for our Christian friendship. She asked, "*Well, have you prayed for the coach?*" Uhh...



PAUSE after reading the first paragraph on page 66 to discuss:

Wow! What if, *just what if*, any time someone began to complain about something or someone, we simply asked, "*Well, have you prayed about it?*"

- **What difference do you think asking that simple question would make?**
- **What possible reactions might you receive?**

After my friend asked me if I had prayed for the coach, I was immediately convicted. As a follower of Christ, I know enough of God's Truth to realize that talking bad about people, or making fun of them for their shortcomings, is just plain wrong. It's one thing to think it, (which is still a sin), but it's another thing to vocalize it. Right about now, we probably all feel a little twinge of conviction. Remember, conviction is a good thing! It leads us to repentance.

So how do we battle this natural urge to vent out loud? The first thing we need to do is confess our sin of slandering. And it is sin. Let's call it what it is. Ephesians 4:29 says, *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*"

If we do a quick word study of "unwholesome," we quickly learn that unwholesome means "damaging to physical, mental, or moral well-being." When you put it that way, it disturbs me to think that I've contributed to damaging the mental, physical, and moral well-being of not just that particular freshman coach, but anyone I've ever slandered.

If we truly understood how much our words damaged other people's physical, mental, or moral well-being, I think we would be *much* less likely to take part in the practice of slandering and defaming the character of others.

Once you're convicted about this sin in your life, the next step is to confess it and repent. On page 66, I share about my own conviction. Soon after God convicted my heart, I entered into prayer, confessed my sin and began to pray for the coach.

“*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it might benefit those who listen.*
Ephesians 4:29”

Additionally, I confessed my error to my son and encouraged him to pray for his coach as well. I would never tell you *how* to pray because there's no wrong way to pray; however, I do want to offer some direction that was helpful for me during this frustrating period. Rather than praying with a critical spirit, aim to pray with a spirit of humility and encouragement. For example:

EXAMPLE

- Acceptable: "Lord, you know (name) is a new coach and is not very good. Help him/her to be better."
- **Better:** "Lord, I pray that (name's) inexperience will not make him/her feel inadequate. My his/her confidence be in you, not himself. Give him/her more wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the game with each passing day."

- Acceptable: "Lord, Jesus! Help me to watch my mouth today!"
- **Better:** "Father, may the words that come from my mouth today be words that lift others up. May my words bring forth life, not death. Help me to resist any temptation to criticize the coach or players. Give me the courage to steer negative conversations into a positive direction."

- Acceptable: "Lord, help (name) have lots of points, rebounds, and steals today."
- **Better:** "Lord, may (name) reflect your character on the court today, so that You are the one being honored. While impressive stats are fun and pleasing to have, those things are only temporary, but character outlasts them all. If you choose to highlight (name) skills today, may you receive honor in return."

James 4:10 says, "*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*" When I prayed these prayers of confession and prayed for my son's coach with a pure heart, God blessed those prayers. I didn't pray these prayers expecting "good stuff" to come my son's way, but God honored those prayers in a beautiful way. My son played exceptional that night and God taught me a valuable lesson! I enjoy sharing that lesson to this day!

Pages 67-69

- Read through the applications, and answer the questions on pages 68-69.

Page 69

- End with post-game prayer.

Closing Comments

Look for opportunities this week to pray for your coach, and snuff out conversations that are unwholesome.