

Watercooler Joe

Inspired by Mark 8:27-35

Joe and his department employees set out down the hall to the conference room. Along the way, he asked his closest co-workers, "Who do the other people in the company say that I am?" They said in reply, "Joe the Boss Man," others call you "The Fearless Leader," still others, "One of the Upper Brass." Of course, Joe had heard all of these clever nicknames, plus a few others that weren't so generous. He paused by the elevator, brushed back his rapidly graying hair and asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter said to his boss and friend, "You are the Vice President, a very hard worker, and the provider for your family who is facing many challenges at home right now." Joe warned them not to tell anyone about his troubles. He felt he could separate the great work he does for the company and his family in crisis. Joe's wife had major surgery last year, and their oldest son was killed in a car accident the same day. Their daughter attempted suicide shortly after. Since then, Joe's wife has been struggling with depression and her dependency on pain medicine. Yes, he carries a tremendous amount strapped on his shoulders and wrapped around his heart. The weight of it all had begun to show in subtle lines across his forehead. Peter saw it in Joe's eyes — dark tunnels that seem to drop off a deep edge deep inside.

The team gathered around the long table by the window. As Joe looked out at the city below, he asked, "And when you're gathered around the water cooler, who do you say that I am?" He left that hanging over the room for a few minutes, then he began to teach them about the dangers of saying nice things in front of a person and talking differently about them behind their back. He told them people will suffer greatly and wind up being rejected by ones who don't even know them. Some ride a rumor for the long haul, building the thick, juicy stories across the community, feeding a ravenous, never-sated hunger for gossip.

Others launch a missile of trash-talk, killing the spirit without ever looking back. Still others sensationalize the truth, working it for three days, and disguising it as compassionate care and concern for the other.

He spoke openly about the hardships and healing works happening in his family. Then, Peter took Joe aside and began to rebuke him saying that he might cause a setback in his career being so forthright about his personal problems. At this, Joe turned around, and looking at his team of co-workers, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me friend or get out of the way. You aren't always thinking and acting in my best interest."

Joe summoned his department staff and said to them, "Whoever wishes to stay in this company must deny the temptation to speak or listen to rumors, taking up the cause for courageous truth, and following a code of honorable conduct. For whoever wishes to save face will lose respect, but whoever loses gossip for the sake of peace and true care for co-worker, friend, neighbor will save the spirit of light and life for all.

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