Nobody likes a gossip, plain and simple. Last week's Maranatha Mat Chat discussed the 5 Situations You're BEST to Be Silent and described situation number 4 as "When It's Not Your Business--enough said." When it's not your business, it's not your business. Enough said. Unfortunately, it can be challenging for people in a regular social group to refrain from commenting on other people within that group. While I think this is true of almost every social organization, one in particular ought to be the exception -- Church.

Church gossip can be very obvious, like fitness class gossip, however, I've found these 3 subtle games of church gossip to be accepted and even worse encouraged.

1. Prayer Request
Often we confide in our friends at church for various reasons. Having a strong sense of community the "friend" feels free to share this personal information with other sisters in the spirit of praying for the "problem". This is perfectly fine if the "friend" has asked permission or the sister-in-need has asked to share this information with others in order to pray. Without this permission, any Facebook, text or over coffee prayer requests is gossip.

How to sit out: If you receive a prayer request like this, ask your "friend" if they have received permission to share this request. This "friend" may or may not be open to the fact they are a gossip, however, you can stop the cycle and change the subject.

2. Consulting Leadership

In this gossip game, a sister has become privy to information that they are uncertain about. In the spirit of "getting advice" as the Bible encourages us to do, the sister feels free to share another's personal information with the church leader.

How to sit out: Mathew 18:15-16 clear establishes a protocol for this situation, at least when sin is involved. Notice each time you are involving the person who is potentially in sin--not talking about them to someone else!

3. Blind Speculation

My mother-in-law likes to say, "you don't know what it's like to walk in their shoes." People have funky moods, miss church, don't say hi, are busy and give looks (this is only a very small sample of what people do). Making a judgement or speculating on this with another is gossip.

How to sit out:
Make sure that any conversations you have on behavior are focused on how to be helpful, not speculating motives or infractions.

Sitting out of the gossip games in church may mean sitting out of specific discussions or groups, even the leadership group. You may find yourself needing to establish boundaries with a church gossip. Obviously churches need to discuss issues of people's behavior, but keep in mind that any discussion of another person in a negative way, without their express permission or participation is gossip. One key in avoiding gossip then is to always involve the person under discussion. Although this does avoid gossip, it could lead to being a busy body if taken to the extreme, but that is another blog...