

Compassion Demonstrated

Following God's wisdom is demonstrated in how a person treats others.

Proverbs 3:21-35



What makes it so difficult to love other people, especially those with whom we disagree?

Love for God is purely academic if it's not expressed in real ways toward people. The cocoon we often make for ourselves keeps us from demonstrating the authenticity of our love for God by loving others. How we treat others is the acid test of our spiritual maturity. But loving people is not always easy. We need biblical wisdom to know how to relate to others, especially to those with whom we disagree.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Solomon was a parent. Like any parent, he wanted his son to be happy. That is why he urged his son to seek the wisdom of God.

Wisdom is not only essential and characteristic of the life of the believer, it also produces joy. In Proverbs 3:13-18, words like “happy” and “pleasant” describe the wise person. Further, wisdom is something that is acquired, pursued, embraced, and practiced. The wisdom that comes from God is more important than personal opinions or preferences. Wisdom is like a tree that gives life to those who live under its shade. Joy is the outcome of the person who values and seeks godly wisdom.

Where does the wisdom that produces lasting joy come from? True wisdom is grounded in the person and character of God. Before anything existed in creation, a wise, holy, and all-powerful God existed. It is in Him that all wisdom resides. In the end, wisdom from God produces the life that enables a person to have a clear conscience. It is within the context of God-centered wisdom that Solomon gave his son instructions on how to fairly and rightly treat others.

PROVERBS 3:21-35

- 21** Maintain sound wisdom and discretion.
My son, don't lose sight of them.
- 22** They will be life for you
and **adornment for your neck** **A**.
- 23** Then you will go safely on your way;
your foot will not stumble.
- 24** When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant.
- 25** Don't fear sudden danger
or the ruin of the wicked when it comes,
26 for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from a snare.
- 27** When it is in your power,
don't withhold **good** **B** from the one to whom
it belongs.
- 28** Don't say to your neighbor, "Go away! Come
back later.
I'll give it tomorrow"—when it is there with you.
- 29** Don't plan any harm against your neighbor,
for he trusts you and lives near you.
- 30** Don't accuse anyone without cause,
when he has done you no harm.
- 31** Don't envy a violent man
or choose any of his ways;
- 32** for the devious are **detestable** **C** to the Lord,
but he is a **friend to the upright** **D**.
- 33** The Lord's curse is on the household of
the wicked,
but he blesses the home of the righteous;
- 34** He **mocks those who mock** **E**,
but gives grace to the humble.
- 35** The wise will inherit honor,
but he holds up fools to dishonor.

Passage Outline

Confidence Gained
(Prov. 3:21-26)

Kindness Expressed
(Prov. 3:27-30)

Blessing Secured
(Prov. 3:31-35)

Keywords

- A. Metaphor suggesting that those who hold on to wisdom are charming and have favor with others. "Adornment" literally means "grace" (KJV).
- B. May refer to the pay earned by workers, the help the poor needs, the justice victims deserve, or the repayment owed to those who have loaned money
- C. God "detests" (NIV) or "hates" (NCV) the wicked—the reason one should not envy or follow violent persons.
- D. God takes "into his confidence" (NIV) "those who are honest" (AMP) and brings them into intimate relationship with Himself. (See Job 29:4.)
- E. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) translates these words as, "The Lord resists the proud." (See Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The benefits of godly wisdom are many. Solomon explained that the person who trusts in God will find rest from fear. This is why Solomon defended the idea that the believer must maintain and embrace wise actions and humble discretion.

How does self-confidence differ from a confidence grounded in God's presence? How does confidence in God lead to peace?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation. Commit Proverbs 3:27 to memory. Repeat the verse out loud. As you reflect on the verse, think about how it can render a positive “do” message. Next, consider situations in your life when you tend to ignore the needs of people around you. Ask the Lord to enable you so you can show His kindness.

In what ways do our lives show that we are following God's wisdom? One sure evidence is the way we treat others. In verses 27-30, Solomon gave four examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion.

Why might a person try to excuse himself from helping others?

What makes getting involved in community gossip so tempting? How does getting involved in gossip potentially impact a believer's witness?

With our confidence in God growing and our desire to demonstrate kindness to our neighbors developing, we can live in light of the blessings of God. Nothing is more rewarding than being faithful to God—even when others do not understand our humble service and even when it is not reciprocated. The point is to be faithful to God—not what we get in return.

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him (Deut. 8:18).

Solomon had already warned his son about the temptation of taking the path of a violent man (see 2:12-15). Entrusting themselves to God's wisdom, wise people choose to ignore the example of the violent person. The gain of possessions and fair-weather friends is no comparison to God's presence and counsel in our lives. God's grace to the humble puts them on the path of honor. The Lord will make sure that those who embrace His wisdom will inherit a place of honor.

How does taking on the role of judge get in the way of a believer demonstrating trust in God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God offers His peace to those who trust Him.
- God expects His people to treat others with kindness.
- God blesses those who know Him.

List areas in your life where you struggle to find peace. How are these areas connected to your trust in God? What steps can you take to trust Him more in these areas?

Discuss with the group challenges to being kind. What barriers must a person cross in order to demonstrate kindness? How can the group help each other overcome these barriers?

What actions might a person take to invest more deeply in his or her relationship with God? Of these actions, in which ones do you need to be more diligent? How will you do so?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: True confidence comes from knowing God.

Read Proverbs 3:21-26, considering the place of wisdom in a believer's life.

True wisdom provides a wall of safety around the wise, protecting the wise person from foolish decisions he might make and enabling him to lay his head down at night in peace as a result of having a clear conscience. The wisdom of God keeps us from stumbling over our own sins and the evil behavior of those who oppose God. Godly wisdom aids the believer in avoiding the traps that lead to danger and ruin.

The confidence we need to live out a wise and God-centered life does not come from avoiding those we may fear, especially those who oppose God. True confidence comes from knowing and loving God—for *the LORD will be your confidence*. God is with us, and it is His presence that produces our confidence.

Our confidence emanates from the awareness that nothing matters more than God's presence in our lives. We can face life's challenges and dangers confidently as long as we know that He is with us. (See Ps. 23:4). The path of foolish people is full of snares, but Solomon assured his son that following God's wisdom would render a sense of peace. The person who seeks God's wisdom can know for certain that he will not suffer the calamity intended for a foolish person.

When have you depended on yourself instead of God's presence? How does confidence in God lead you to have to peace?

Day 2: Don't make excuses for not helping others.

Read Proverbs 3:27-28, identifying how Solomon guides us to treat our neighbors.

In verses 27-30, Solomon gave four examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion. Today, we will look at the first two. First, *when it is in your power, don't withhold good from the one to whom it belongs*. This portrays us as employers who have the ability to pay this person for his work because we have the money in our hands. We agreed on the amount of money we would pay the worker before he started the job. When he completes the work, he should be paid because the money rightfully belongs to him. Second, *don't say to your neighbor, "Go away! Come back later. I'll give it tomorrow."* This neighbor could have been a neighbor who needed to be paid for a job that had been completed or a neighbor who simply had a need. Solomon directed his son to act immediately, without excuse. Too often we make excuses—I'm too busy; it's not the right time; I'll help later; I don't know how to help—that keep us from obeying God and helping others.

When have you tried to excuse yourself from helping others?

Day 3: Believers should not participate in gossip.

Read Proverbs 3:29-30, again considering how Solomon guides us to treat our neighbors.

Today we will examine the third and fourth examples of ways the Lord expects His people to treat others with fairness and compassion. Third, *Don't plan any harm against your neighbor*. The person who follows godly wisdom not only proactively acts to help his neighbor but will resist acting in ways that would bring harm to his neighbor. Solomon noted that your neighbor *trusts you and lives near you*. Through our godly behavior we have hopefully built a level of trust, but it easily can be destroyed and dismantled by our sinful actions. Fourth, *Don't accuse anyone without cause, when he has done you no harm*. While this may have been a reference to frivolous litigation in a court of law, it also reminds us that the wise believer will not participate in slander or community gossip.

What makes getting involved in community gossip so tempting? How does getting involved in gossip potentially impact your witness?

Day 4: Believers should leave judgment in the hands of God.

Read Proverbs 3:31:34, noting who holds the power of judgement.

Solomon presented three separate and distinct comparisons between the wise and the unwise, the righteous and the unrighteous. First, God pronounced a curse on the household of the wicked. God's curse involves the removal of God's presence. As God's people, we are called to love both friend and enemy. Judgment and divine wrath are God's and His alone (Ps. 94:1-2; Heb. 10:30). When we take vengeance into our own hands, it rarely goes well. The Bible warns believers to refrain from taking matters into their own hands. (See Rom. 12:19.) Instead, we can live with the confidence that God is able to act justly and will execute His justice in His time. As we live righteously and wisely before God and our neighbors, we leave the judgment of all things—people, places, and events—to Him. It is when we take matters into our own hands that we will suffer from our own sinful attitudes and actions.

Second, God not only curses wicked people, He also mocks them. With their behavior, they make a mockery of Him and His ways. In response to their unwillingness to give themselves to Him, He turns a deaf ear to them. In contrast to the mockers, God gives grace to the humble. Instead of turning a deaf ear, we can be confident that He takes care of the humble. The humble in Proverbs includes those who are poor because they have been oppressed or exploited (see 15:15; 22:22; 30:14).

How does taking on the role of judge get in the way of your ability to demonstrate trust in God?

Day 5: God shows grace to the humble.

Read Proverbs 3:35, noting the value in being wise.

Finally, Solomon used the concept of *honor* to illustrate the difference between the righteous and unrighteous. God's grace to the humble puts them on the path of honor. The Lord will make sure that those who embrace His wisdom will inherit a place of honor. Living with honor means enjoying the blessings that come from having an honorable reputation. Honor also suggests the contentment that comes from God's smile on us as we grow in our personal walk with Him.

Foolish people cannot expect to enjoy the promise of being honored by God. Instead, they will experience *dishonor*. The Lord will disgrace them. That's the certain fate of fools who ignore Him. In due time, they will pay the price of their foolish choice.

God's Word directs us in wise living. What about that is hard for you right now?



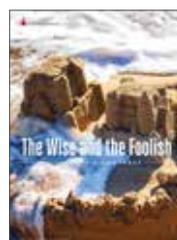
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Proverbs 3, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How might fear prevent us from loving our neighbors?

What's significant about Solomon emphasizing "neighbors" as opposed to people in general? What does this mean for how we treat strangers?

Why might people be tempted to envy a violent man or choose his ways?



For additional context, read "The Wise and the Foolish: A Contrast" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.