



COMPASSION DEMONSTRATED

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

PROVERBS 3:21-35

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.

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

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 3:13-35

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.

Read Proverbs 3:21-35, looking for the results of wise living. What is the connection between wise living and treating others?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONFIDENCE GAINED (PROV. 3:21-26)

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.

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.

VERSES 21-22

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. Again, he pictured wisdom as something that is to be pursued and lived. Solomon reminded his son to keep his eyes on the prize of the wisdom of God. In order for his son to be able to benefit from the treasures of wisdom and discretion, he would need to never let them out of his sight. ***My son, don't lose sight of them*** because ***they will be life for you.***

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to keep our eyes on Jesus—the source and perfecter of our faith. Here in Proverbs 3 we are told to keep our eyes fastened on God's wisdom.

VERSES 23-26

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.

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.

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.

KINDNESS EXPRESSED (PROV. 3:27-30)

²⁷ When it is in your power, don't withhold good 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.

VERSES 27-28

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.

First, ***when it is in your power, don't withhold good from the one to whom it belongs.*** The *one to whom it belongs* likely is a reference to someone who has been working for us. 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.

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

BAD NEIGHBOR – GOOD NEIGHBOR

What Proverbs Teaches about Neighbors

- Bad neighbors betray their neighbors' trust (3:29).
- Bad neighbors say bad things about their neighbors (11:9,12; 24:28; 25:18).
- Bad neighbors try to entice their neighbors to sin (16:29).
- Bad neighbors are inconsiderate of their neighbors (21:10).
- Bad neighbors lie to their neighbors (26:19).
- Bad neighbors are loud and obnoxious neighbors (27:14).

Restating each negative action above as a positive action, how would you describe a good neighbor?

VERSES 29-30

A third example of compassionate treatment of others is found in verse 29: *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 notes 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.

The fourth demonstration of compassion is in verse 30: *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 a believer's witness?

BLESSING SECURED (PROV. 3:31-35)

³¹ Don't envy a violent man or choose any of his ways; ³² for the devious are detestable to the LORD, but he is a friend to the upright. 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, but gives grace to the humble. ³⁵ The wise will inherit honor, but he holds up fools to dishonor.

VERSES 31-35

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. Solomon warned about desiring the possessions of the wealthy who secured them through questionable means. He emphasized that God ***blesses the home of the •righteous***, offering them His ***grace*** and ***honor***.

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). Anyone who



used violence to get what he wanted would have a reputation for being cruel and unscrupulous. For that reason, people would be afraid of such a person. It would be tempting to *envy* him because he got whatever he wanted without having to work for it. However, a violent man in Solomon's day was nothing more than a criminal. Accordingly, to *choose any of his ways* meant engaging in criminal activity. That's why God's people would not give in to the temptation to be like him. 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. Nothing compares to being on friendly terms with God.

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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. This is strong language. The pronouncement of a curse was a dreadful thing. But notice who made the curse: *the LORD*.

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.

In contrast to the curse on the household of the wicked, God's people enjoy the benefits of His blessing. The *home of the righteous* would exhibit the superlative value of a relationship with God. They would be eager to do what's right, and they would be known for their goodness.

Second, God not only curses wicked people, He also **mocks** them. With their behavior, they make a mockery of Him and His ways. They laugh at His commands, they sneer at His calls to repent, and they treat His compassionate appeals to them with contempt. In response to their unwillingness to give themselves to Him, He turns a deaf ear to them. They find themselves living out His curse on them because of the selfish lifestyles they have embraced. Their pride will definitely result in their fall. In Proverbs 9:12, Solomon said that those who mock will bear the consequences.

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).

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.

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



IN MY CONTEXT

- 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 Needs
