

## Proverbs — Wisdom For Working With People

**August 25, 2024**

Good morning, CrossWinds! This morning, we continue our summer study in the book of Proverbs. We are almost done with that series. Pastor Jordan and I will switch campuses next week for the last message in the Proverbs series, and then we will begin our fall series in 2 Thessalonians, which will be great. Jordan and I are looking forward to teaching it. After two weeks in 2 Thessalonians, we will take a one-week break to celebrate our 75th Anniversary at the Roof Garden in Arnold's Park. I hope you plan to be there. All of our locations will come together for that day. It will be a great service followed by an excellent meal. It starts at 9:30 AM. Some people asked me why we are taking the time to celebrate. In the Bible, God's people were to stop and celebrate God's faithfulness in the past regularly. They did that with events like Passover and Pentecost. Stopping to remember and celebrate God's faithfulness in the past was to energize them to live with greater confidence that God will continue to be faithful in the future. That is what we want to do with our 75th Anniversary. We want to look back and remember God's faithfulness in the past, and let that inspire us to live even more boldly for Jesus in the future.

That is coming in September. We are not in September. This morning, we are still in August and in the book of Proverbs. Let's turn to our study in that book.

If you have been with us, you know we have not worked through the Book of Proverbs chronologically. We are studying the book thematically, taking key

themes from Proverbs and examining what some of the verses teach us about the topic we are examining.

While preparing for this series, one theme that stuck out to me that is not traditionally considered in Proverbs is what Proverbs teaches us about people skills. How do I work with difficult people and circumstances?

In my research, one author mentioned that the Jews taught Proverbs to the young men they thought would grow up to hold important positions of leadership. One reason they did this is that Proverbs would help them learn to work with difficult people.

That is relevant today. It seems like the world is full of difficult people who think differently than we do. It only takes a misspoken word to start an argument, especially about politics.

This morning, we will examine five lessons from the book of Proverbs on how to work successfully with people.

### **1. Be careful who I have as my friends. I will become like them.**

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. Proverbs 13:20 (ESV)

Proverbs tells us we must be careful about who we select as friends. This is not meant to be elitist or judgmental toward other people. It is simply wise. Who we have as our friends should have nothing to do with their economic status. They are not our friends because of their money. Nor should it be based on their social status. We don't choose our friends based on who is popular. When we choose our friends, we choose them based on the quality of their relationship with Jesus and the way they live their lives.

Why is it so important to discerning who we have as friends? We can not help it. People we have as friends will influence us. They will shape us. It is unavoidable. Do you want proof? Take a person from up north and send them to the deep south where everyone speaks with a thick accent. Two months later when they return, what have they picked up? A southern accent! They didn't try to pick it up. They couldn't help but pick it up. This is why a wise person is very careful about who they allow into their life to influence their life.

An important saying to remember this saying, "Show me your friends, and I will show you your future." You become like the people you spend time with. Someone once said that this time next year, you will be the same person you are today except for the people you spend time with and the books you read. I will add to that a third influence, which is the media you consume. The people we spend time with will shape our lives.

**Foolish friends will encourage me to live a foolish life.**

[Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare. Proverbs 22:24–25 \(ESV\)](#)

This verse reminds us that if we associate with angry people, we will become angry. If we associate with people who carry a grudge, we will learn to carry a grudge instead of being forgiving. We pick up the character of the people we spend time with. We don't just pick up the character of the people we call our friends; we pick up their life choices.

Today, many people are addicted to alcohol or drugs simply because their friends did those things during an impressionable time in their lives, so they copied them. They tried drugs and/or alcohol and were trapped by it. Their high

school friends are long gone from their lives, but the addictions they picked up by copying their life choices are still with them.

Some of you know my story. I grew up in a Christian home, but in sixth grade, I was hit by a car and almost lost my life. While recovering in the hospital, I read my Bible, and a large step of spiritual growth occurred in my life. I returned to school after a few months in recovery and, I was on fire for Jesus.

Growing up outside of New York City, that was also the time when many of my friends began experimenting with substances and sex. I came back to school and lost many of my friends because I was not interested in the lifestyle they were pursuing. I spent much time in tears and prayer, asking God for friends. At the time, I thought God was ignoring my prayers and being hard on me. Now I know he was kind and was protecting me. If I built friendships with many of my peers who were making poor choices, I would have copied their choices and introduced myself to the suffering that comes with sin.

Today, you may be a junior high or a high school student who doesn't have many friends because you love Jesus and your peers don't. It is hard. Know that having a small group of Christian friends is far better than being popular with a large group of people who don't know Jesus. You may not have many friends because God is being good to you. He is protecting you from copying the sinful choices of others.

Today, we don't just need to be mindful of the influence that comes from physical friends. We also need to consider the influence of virtual friends. These

people are called social media influencers. They get enough people watching them; people will buy what they buy and act as they act.

Most of us are naturally more guarded about who we spend time with in a physical friendship, but we are not as guarded about what we watch in a movie, on social media, or on YouTube. What we watch or listen to on our phones influences us positively or negatively. We will start to subconsciously imitate what we put into our minds. This is why we must be careful about who we have as physical and virtual friends.

Remember this.

**We do not just watch something. We are formed by what we watch.**

Advertisers know this. This is why they spend so much money on television commercials and ads on YouTube. They know, that if they can get their product in front of us, that will influence us to purchase their product.

Guarding who we have as our friends is not just true of young adults at an impressionable age, but it is also true for mature adults at any age. How many adults have had their marriages destroyed in divorce because a spouse didn't limit their friendship with someone of the opposite sex at work? They became close friends with someone of the opposite sex at work, then found their hearts entangled with that person to the point that it ended their marriage.

This is the same principle. We should be careful who we call our friends. Our friends will shape us.

**Wise friends will encourage me to live a wise life.**

Proverbs 13:20 warns us about the negative impact relationships can have on us, but the verse also tells us about the positive impact people can have

on us. This verse tells us that whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. We should always look for people who are wiser than us, who are more spiritually mature than we are and intentionally spend time with them and around them to improve ourselves.

Maybe you grew up in a home where your parents had a dysfunctional marriage. Before you get married, find someone with a great marriage and spend time with them. That is something you want to learn by watching other people. If you struggle to control your anger, find somebody who is calm under pressure. Spend time with them and learn how they do it. If you want to learn humility, spend time around humble people who are not full of themselves, and you will learn to become a humble person. If you want to learn to pray more, spend time around people who pray.

When I was growing up, my mom had a notorious habit. if our church had a missionary or a guest speaker, my mom was always the first to ask if she could have the speaker over our home for dinner. She did this so many times the church asked her to give other people a chance. Later, I learned there was a method to her madness. She wanted those Christian leaders to spend time with me around the dinner table in hopes that some of them would rub off on me... I guess it worked!

To this day, I remember one speaker she had over our home. His name was Christy Wilson. He came over to our house for Sunday lunch. When it was time to return to church for the evening service, I was to give him a ride. We got into my little Volkswagen Rabbit, and before we started the car, he asked if he

could pray. It wasn't a long prayer. It was a quick prayer for the safety of our trip and the success of his speaking later that night. At first, I was a little offended. Why did he want to pray before we drove? Was it because I was a 17-year-old driver? Was it because my older VW Rabbit did not inspire confidence on the road?

He later told me he was simply in the habit of praying before driving. Many of us are in the habit of prayerfully thanking God for the food before a meal. He was in the habit of asking God for protection before he drove on the road.

Today, when I get in the car, I don't pray every time before I turn the key. But I do remember what he taught me, and I try to pray before I go anywhere important and do anything important.

Spending time with wise people to make ourselves wise is why youth ministry and AWANA are important at CrossWinds. We want our children to have good friends who love Jesus so they can encourage one another in Jesus. This is why mission trips are important. Many students go through a large step of spiritual growth when they spend time serving Jesus together and encouraging one another. This is also why Hidden Acres, our summer camp, is so important. Students being around other Christian friends who love Jesus fires them up in their love for Jesus.

This is one of the reasons we have Life Groups, and we encourage you to join one. On Sunday mornings, we can only develop a relatively shallow relationship with one another. When you get together with a small group of

Christians in our home, we eat together, we look at the Bible together, and we pray together, we encourage one another in Christ together.

## **2. Learn to Avoid Arguments.**

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.  
Proverbs 20:3 (ESV)

It doesn't take wisdom to get into an argument, any fool can do that. It takes wisdom to stay out of an argument, especially when working with people very different from us. If you are someone who regularly finds yourself in conflict with people and angry, it might be a sign that you are foolish and lacking in the wisdom you need to work with people.

There are many reasons why people argue. One reason people bicker and argue is simply because they do not know what else to do. They do not know what else to talk about. They want a problem. They need a problem. If they have nothing to argue about, they have nothing to talk about. Instead of doing the hard work of loving and encouraging people toward Jesus, they spend their time being critical of others and running people down. I should mention that when we spend our time being angry at other people it blinds us to our own faults and shortcomings of which we can repent.

Proverbs reminds us that foolish people lean conflicts. Those who are wise and have people skills will work hard to avoid conflicts. You and I know that once we start an argument with someone, we will not change their mind. People dig their heels in and protect themselves.



Arguments always go farther than I want and cause more damage than I expected.

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. Proverbs 17:14 (NIV)

I used the NIV translation because I like the way it describes what happens when we start an argument. Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam. After the spring flooding in Spencer, all of us can



relate to a breached dam. The temporary dam in front of Spencer was breached by the flood waters. We all saw the breaching of the dam in Rapidam, MN. Once the water began working around that dam, it eroded away half the dam; then it swallowed a house as it eroded the hillside. What started as a little leak in the dam turned into incalculable damage.

The point is that starting a quarrel or getting angry with someone will start out small, but it will always get far worse and cause far more damage than we expected.

I think of one church I have a chance to work with. At one time, there were over 350 people in the church. An argument began between two people. People began taking sides. Things became heated. In a little over two years, the church had dwindled down to about 40 people. I bet you the two people who started their argument had no idea it would spread and destroy the church both of them loved.

Before we do or say anything contentious or hurtful to another person, we need to carefully consider the potential damage that will be done to the relationship we have with the person, and to many other relationships around us. A wise person knows relationships are precious. Unity is precious, especially in the church around Jesus. A wise person is quick to avoid arguments, not get into one. Sometimes broken relationships are impossible to restore.

**A broken relationship can be hard to restore.**

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle. Proverbs 18:19 (ESV)

We are to forgive and forget, but sometimes, things are hard to forgive and forget. When we start an argument or bicker with someone, it builds a relational barrier between us that can be almost impossible to remove. Restoring a broken relationship may be as hard as conquering a strong city or breaking through iron bars.

As a pastor, I have watched too many marriages end in divorce because of this. One person in the marriage gets harsh and abusive. They yell and fight with their spouse. They are lacking in people skills and conflict resolution. The situation blows over, and the angry man or woman moves on, thinking things have returned to normal. A few days or weeks later, another outburst of anger happens. There is yelling and belittling. The angry spouse calms down and moves on, but the spouse's heart on the receiving end moves further away. Down the road, the person on the receiving end of the conflict asks for a divorce. They say, "I love them. I forgive them. I can't trust myself to them. My heart is far from them." What happened?

Have you played the game of Jenga? In the game, it is a pile of wooden blocks that are pulled off the bottom of the pile and placed on the top of the pile until it collapses. That is a good picture of marriages like this. Every time the yelling and abuse happens, the spouse on the receiving end of it experiences another block pulled out of their marriage, making it unstable. This is what happens to some marriages where, after 15 or 20 years of verbal abuse, a spouse says, "The Jenga tower of my marriage has fallen. I forgive you, but there are too many blocks taken out of my marriage for it to stand it is wise to avoid arguments, not lean into arguments.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18 (ESV)

We must do everything possible to live peaceably with all people, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ church. Remember, brothers and sisters in Christ are not your enemies. They are your brothers and sisters.

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, Ephesians 4:26 (ESV)

If you are conflicted with another person, especially your spouse, make sure you go to bed knowing you have done everything possible to restore the relationship. You have to take the initiative. You make the call. Don't be relationally passive. If you care about someone, you will not let conflict or a broken relationship sit, especially with a fellow Christian. We will go out of our way to restore what is broken.

This past week, in staff meeting, we reviewed our staff values. Let me read to you one of our staff values.

We are not relationally passive. We always take the initiative to build new relationships or repair old ones when they break. — CW Staff Core Value

This value is not just good for staff. It is good for all of us.

**Expect that some conflicts can not be avoided.**

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” Matthew 5:11 (ESV)

While we are on this point, it is worth pointing out that not all conflicts can be avoided. The Bible says in Ephesians 6 that as Christians, we are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in the heavenly realm. The devil is committed to destroying us. It is normal for Christians to find themselves in conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Sometimes, people ask us to do things or say things we know are wrong. When that happens, we should expect conflict and not try to avoid it. Even when we face conflict, as we take our stand for Jesus and holiness, we face those conflicts in a loving and respectful way. Just realize some conflicts, especially opposition to Jesus, simply can't be avoided. It is the price of following Jesus. The early church would only say, “Jesus is Lord.” They wouldn't say, “Caesar is Lord.” They respected the government but they wouldn't worship the government or its leaders. For that, some lost their businesses. Others lost their life. That is the price of living for Jesus in a fallen world.

**3. Learn to control my emotions.**

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. Proverbs 15:18 (ESV)

Proverbs clearly say we are not just to avoid quarrels, but wise people learn to control their emotions when they are hurt or when someone says something that hurts them.

This doesn't come naturally. When someone says something hurtful to me, it is amazing how quickly my brain can think of a sarcastic or defensive comeback. Does anyone else have that gift? While our brain has no problem thinking of those things, a wise person will not say those things. When we feel attacked or insulted, when people raise their voices at us, and our anger rises, a person with good people skills will not get hot under the collar and yell back. A wise person will stay calm under pressure and not get emotional under pressure.

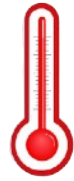
If you are married, you know how this works. Conflict just happens. Your spouse says or does something silly. Rather than being kind to them, you are angry and critical of them. That doesn't sit well. They return the volley with an insult back to you. You return the volley with an insult back to them. After a while, you are screaming at one another in the kitchen, and you have no idea what started the argument. You are just lobbing verbal grenades at someone you love. It all began by not learning to control our emotions when hurt.

**It takes two to start an argument but only one to stop it.**

Here is a bit of wisdom. It takes two people to start an argument but only one person to stop it. If you are married, decide that no matter what happens, you will stay as cool as a cucumber and not yell at your spouse. If you do this, you won't have arguments in your home. If your spouse is upset and they raise their voice, you can stop the argument by refusing to get upset back and raise

your voice. Even if you are hurt, refuse to get emotional. It is the wise thing to do and the right thing to do.

In premarital counseling, I always talk to the guys about the importance of being a thermostat in their marriage, not a thermometer. A thermometer responds to the temperature in the room. If things get hot, a



thermometer goes up. A thermostat sets the temperature in the room. When things get hot, a thermostat brings the temperature down. I remind the guys that they will come home one day, and their wives

will not have had a good day. The kids will have driven her crazy. Her emotions may be all over the place. You have a choice. When she raises the temperature in the room, do you respond in anger like a thermometer and start a fight? As the man of the house, you need to provide leadership by staying cool and calm when she is upset and bringing down the emotional temperature by loving her. How many people does it take to start an argument? Two! How many people does it take to stop an argument? One! Let that person be you!

#### **Learn to ignore insults.**

[The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.](#)  
Proverbs 12:16 (ESV)

When someone says something hurtful to you or about you, learn to ignore it. Move on. Learn not to take it personally. That may be hard, but it is the wise thing to do. Expect people to say hurtful, demeaning, or insulting things to you or about you and your family. Most people will say those things behind your back but some will be brazen enough to say it to your face. Sinful people are that

way. When those insulting words come, too many people let themselves become crippled by them. They are devastated. Instead of being crippled by someone else's words, learn what you can and ignore the rest. A friend of mine once put it this way. "Keep the wheat, but discard the husk."

Don't take someone's verbal attack so seriously that it debilitates you.

Let me tell you what I have learned. The people who attack and vilify you usually have a problem that is far more serious than anything they are criticising you about. Their lack of love and the wickedness of their words reveal deep problems.

**Assume the best of people, not the worst.**

Sometimes, people try to be funny, but their humor doesn't work. It falls flat on its face. Sometimes, people say things but don't realize how their words are understood by others. They didn't say something with evil motives. They just said the wrong thing at the wrong time, and the wrong way. Sometimes that happens. It happens more frequently than we realize.



That is why it is important to separate methods and motives.

**Separate motives and methods.**

To remind me about separating methods and motives, I use M&M candies. Look at the package. When you can separate those two M's, you have a guy with a smile on his face on the package. Let me give you some examples of what this looks like.

When I met Cindy, one of the ways she won my heart was through my stomach. She is a great cook. Her spaghetti and lasagne are amazing. The only

way to get more was to make her my wife. While Cindy is a good cook, my cooking leaves much to be desired. When I make dinner, she looks at it, there is a long pause, then she says, "You meant well." She doesn't throw me under the bus. She knows my heart is in the right place. I am trying my best. My motives are good. but my methods are terrible. I am not a good cook. That was a fun example. Let me give you a practical one.

Today, we have watches that get our text messages. They are always ringing, buzzing, and interrupting us. I had one of the first Apple Watches. Before church, I was conversing with a sweet elderly man in the foyer and my watch kept buzzing because of a texting conversation. We were having trouble getting ready for service, and the staff was texting each other like crazy, trying to get things together at the last minute.

I tried maintaining eye contact in the conversation, but I was distracted and kept looking at my watch. As the conversation finished, the man said to me, "You really don't want to talk to me. You kept checking your watch to see how soon you could leave." That wasn't true. I wasn't trying to get out of a conversation. I was just doing a terrible job of multitasking while trying to talk to people in the foyer and take care of a staff crisis simultaneously. I tried explaining what happened and that I was looking at texts on my phone. At that point, he furrowed his brow and said, "Now I know you are lying to me. Watches can't get text messages." In desperation, I told him, "They can now!"

Was it my fault for being distracted? Definitely. My motive was not to make him feel unimportant. My method of handling the conversation was wrong, not



the intentions of my heart. The key to getting through that was separating methods and motives. Assume people have the best motives, not the worst, especially if they are a brother or sister in Jesus.

Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.  
Proverbs 19:11 (ESV)

#### **4. Learn there are right and wrong times to speak.**

Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing. Proverbs 27:14 (ESV)

This verse is humorous but practical. If you want to have a good relationship with your next-door neighbor, don't greet him with a loud voice first thing in the morning before he has his coffee.

Cindy and I are opposites when it comes to our sleep schedules. I like to go to bed early and get up early. She likes to stay up late and sleep in the morning. You can imagine what happened on our first Saturday morning after our wedding. I bounced out of bed at 6:00 or 7:00 AM. I was excited to get up and spend the day together. I laid out breakfast and had plans for the day. I returned to the room and turned on all the lights. That was followed by a loud, "Good morning, wonderful wife!" She responded by curling up in the fetal position under the covers and putting the pillow over her head as she muttered something from under the pillow. From that day on, I learned to use my quiet voice with her in the morning. If we are going to speak to people and have good people skills, we need to know the right timing for the conversation.

Let me give a practical illustration. Is anyone here part of a group text thread? My wife is part of a group text thread with some of her lady friends. Sometimes, when one of those ladies can not sleep, at 3:30 AM, they finally read

their texts and respond to the group text. When that happens, my phone lights up on my nightstand and vibrates loud enough on the wood to wake me up. I assume the other ten to two people on the group text thread also find their sleep disturbed at 3:30 AM. The worst part is there is not just one insomniac in the group. The other insomniacs see the text reply, and at 3:30 AM, they reply to the message and start a conversation in a group text thread because they can't sleep. Now, the rest of the people in the group text are awake and ready to bury their phones in the backyard. Has this happened to you?

Listen to the Bible on this one. Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice early in the morning will be called cursed. There is a right and wrong time to speak and a right and wrong time to text.

**Love people like Jesus loves me.**

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)

I can not emphasize this enough. If we want quality relationships and people skills, the best way to do that is to love people. How should we love people? Philippians 2 shows us what true love for others looks like.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:3–8 (ESV)

We count others more significant than ourselves. We look out for the interests of others, not just our own interests. When we do that to the point that we are really sacrificing for them, like Jesus sacrificed for us to save us, that kind

of love makes a difference with people. It de-escalates conflicts. It brings peace where there is hatred. Just as Jesus' amazing sacrificial love for us changes us, loving others like Jesus loves us brings peace in place of conflict.

## Conclusion

As I was thinking of how to wrap this message up, while Proverbs teaches us what good people skills look like and how to make wise choices to work with difficult people, I don't want you to leave this morning thinking the word for the day is simply try harder and do better.

I want to turn you to Jesus.

This week, when I was reading my Take Up and Read Bible reading plan that we are doing as a church, I was in Galatians 5. This chapter discusses the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. When we confess our sins to Jesus and ask his death on the cross to pay for our sins, the Bible says we are not only forgiven by God, but God sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts and makes us a new person. One of the ways we can recognize someone has trusted in Jesus is when the Holy Spirit comes into their life and makes a radical change in how they treat people. Look how Galatians 5 describes relationships before Christ and relationships after Christ.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:19–23 (ESV)

My friends, Proverbs teaches us how to work with difficult people. We need to know that ultimately, developing great people skills doesn't come from trying harder in my heart but from letting Jesus change my heart.

This week, we should examine our friends and their influence on our lives. We should do our best to avoid arguments and stay calm. We should avoid getting emotional under pressure. Most important of all, we should turn to Jesus and walk with him. He will change our hearts and give us a love for difficult people that only the Holy Spirit at work in us can produce.

Remember that developing great people skills doesn't come from trying harder in my heart but from letting Jesus change my heart.



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