

HOW TO RELATE WISELY TO OTHERS

James 3:13-18; Verses from Proverbs

Every day we encounter people who are difficult to live with. We need to learn how to deal with each other without conflict. James 3:18 says "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." In every relationship, we are sowing seeds over time. Sowing seeds of anger or trust, seeds of conflict or peace.

How do we plant seeds of peace in our relationships? By being wise toward people. Not knowledgeable but wise. Have you noticed how uncommon, common sense is? Sometimes we do the exact opposite of what we need to do toward people. We act foolishly toward them, and it causes conflict. James shows how wisdom differs from our normal reactions.

Our James passage defines real wisdom. In **verse 13** James says, "Wisdom is a lifestyle." It is the way we relate to people and to the Almighty. It has more to do with works than with our words. With the way we live. It is practical use of knowledge. It is our character and our relationships, not our intelligence or education.

Then James says in **verses 14 to 16**, "A lack of wisdom causes problems with people." When I'm unwise toward someone, it causes problems - at home, at work, on the street, in church, and even with God. Lack of wisdom is seen in envy, selfish ambition, false to the truth, earthly desires, boastfulness, devilish, disrespect, disorder, and wickedness of every kind. James urges us to follow heavenly wisdom, not earthly wisdom. being thankful for the people around us.

Next James details how wisdom operates. He says, **verse 17**, "Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." The Bible says if I am wise, I will act in specific positive ways towards other people. And since it is Thanksgiving – it is good to point out, a key part of wisdom from above is being thankful for those in our lives.

Let's explore other verses to understand our text from James. **First, If I am wise, I won't compromise my integrity.** That's the bottom line. The wisdom that comes from heaven is pure. That means uncorrupted, authentic. Clean enough to approach God. If I am wise, I am not going to lie to you, cheat you, take advantage of you, trick you, or deliberately mislead you. Why does the Bible say, "the wisdom from above is first pure"? It is because relationships are built on trust. We want people to trust to have good friendships.

Dr Leonard Keeler invented the lie detector. After interviewing 25,000 people on the lie detector machine, he came to a conclusion about the human race: People lie. As a result, that is why we have bad relationships. If I am wise, I will not compromise my integrity. ***Proverbs 10:9*** informs, "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out."

Second, to build better relationships, **I wisely will not antagonize your anger.** Wise people work at maintaining harmony. They are peace loving. They are not looking for a fight. Some people have argumentative natures. Have you heard of the guy who was so argumentative that he would only eat food that disagreed with him?

Proverbs 20:3 instructs us, "It is honorable to refrain from strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel." Anyone who has been married, knows they can deliberately, successfully get their mate mad, between the door of the church and the car door. But a wise person avoids pulling out the arsenal, avoids those hot buttons. It is dumb to do it, but so often we do it, don't we? If I am wise, I will not antagonize you.

There are three things that always cause anger. ***Comparing*** makes people mad. "Why can't you be like.... You're just like... My first husband did..." ***II Corinthians 10:12*** says, "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves.... But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense."

Another frequent cause of anger is, ***Condemning.*** "It is all your fault. You should be ashamed."

Almost any time you begin a sentence with "you" we are condemning. "You ought...You must... You always.... You never.... You should.... You should not...." Just go ahead and lay on the guilt. A lot of marriages are buried by a lot of little digs. Always attacking and condemning equals having relationship problems. Of course, the person doing the condemning believes they are innocent.

Third, *Contradicting* always causes anger. How many of us like to be interrupted? How many of us like to have someone correct our story? It makes us angry and embarrasses those listening. How many conversations have gone like this?

Husband: "I went out fishing on May fourth."

Wife: "Honey, it was the third."

Husband: "On the third John and I went..."

Wife: "Honey it was Bill you went with."

Husband: "Well, we went out fishing."

Wife: "It was hunting, honey."

By that time, who cares? Just let the guy tell the story! The persons who are listening do not care about the details. They want the friendship. To be fair, it can be the husband who is doing the contradicting. But if we have any ounce of wisdom, if we are thankful for people, we do not sweat the small stuff. We are impartial. William James said, "Wisdom is the art of knowing what to overlook." *Proverbs 14:29* tells us, "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but the one who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

If I am wise, I will not compromise my integrity. I will level with you. I will not antagonize your patience & anger. Wisdom is peace loving, easy on comparing, condemning, and contradicting.

A third way to relate wisely to others is, **I will not minimize your feelings**. This is a difficult word to translate from Greek. It has the sense of knowing when it is wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. Leeway, being full of mercy, is because we are grateful for each other. This wisdom trait is to be gentle and considerate, which means be mindful of the feelings of others. One of the mistakes we make is the logic that thinks, "If you

feel a certain way and I do not feel that way, then your feelings are invalid." This is faulty logic, which is often rooted in selfishness.

The fact is feelings are usually neither right nor wrong. They generally are not good & evil. Being gentle, considerate, and merciful, means I do not minimize your feelings. What are we to do with the temperature in the sanctuary? The person besides you says, "I'm feeling hot." Do you say, "No you're not. I'm feeling cold?" The fact is we are both right. We just have different body temperatures or different hot flashes or different amounts of clothes on or different size breakfasts. It is a feeling. So, let's live with the differences.

Proverbs 15:4 informs us, "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Our typical reaction to feelings, in the first place is we belittle them in our thoughts, facial expressions, attitudes, or by our words. "You should not feel that way; You are not depressed; It is not a big deal; If you only had an ounce of brains, you would not feel that way." This is not being considerate or merciful or peaceful.

Some people like to play psychologist and say, "The reason you feel that way is because..." People generally do not want to be psychoanalyzed. Instead, we want sympathy, understanding, consideration, gentleness, to be heard.

Have you and your family at the end of the day played the, "I've had a tougher day than you game?" At times the whole family, gets into the game of listing everything we have done, and everything we individually must do so we can get out of doing household chores. As a parent I get caught up in the game. "Those ungrateful unhelpful children, they can just pay for their own university! We need to allow each other to be tired and to not minimize the feelings. Peter wrote, "Husbands be considerate of your wives."

If I am wise I will not minimize my integrity. I will not cheat, compromise, or lie. I will not provoke your anger because wisdom is peace loving. I know your hot buttons but I'm not going to use them. I am not going to minimize your feelings - even though it does not make sense to

me, but I am still going to accept them. Why? Because I am wise, and I am thankful for friendships and support and want to sow peace.

Fourth, **If I am wise, I will not criticize your suggestions.** The word is willing to yield, submissive. It does not mean, I put myself under your thumb. It has the meaning of, "easy to be persuaded. I am open for suggestions. I am willing to listen to reason and to appeals." True wisdom is not rigidity but is willing to listen and skillfully knowing when it is wise to yield. This means encouraging discussion. If I am wise, I will not criticize your suggestions and be deferential.

Wise people can learn from anyone. They are not defensive. They are teachable, open and humble. It is unwise people who are afraid to learn, they are not teachable. That is why they are unwise. They do not listen to suggestions. If I am wise, I can be reasoned with. Can your children reason with you? Wives, can your husband reason with you? Husbands, can your wife persuade you? Are you open to discussion or are you a closed person?

Most of us are so sensitive to criticism and to suggestions, that we never learn. That is why we do not become wise in relationships. Wisdom is yielding, submissive, willing to learn, and values all the people in our lives. ***Proverbs 12:15*** warns us, "Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice." So, when we get criticized here is what to do: 1. Listen, evaluate, and learn from it. 2. If it seems untrue, research it, then if need be - ignore it and forget it. 3. Realize that ultimately God is the only judge of our lives. 4. Work on being humble as we do good deeds.

We do not have to accept every criticism, but we ought to listen to it. We ought to evaluate it. If we never change our mind, it just says that we are not growing. One time President Lincoln was criticized for changing his mind from one day to the next. It is called flip flopping. They were criticizing him ruthlessly for changing his mind. He said, "I do not think much of the man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday." Give people the same freedom we want to have as we are willing to learn and change our own minds.

Next, **If I am wise, I will not emphasize your mistakes.** Wisdom is full of mercy. Do we jump on every fault and blunder? Every time somebody stumbles, do we think or say, "Smooth move, klutzo!" Do we get a thrill out of watching people flub? Do we frequently laugh at people? Do we gloss over a mistake, or do you continually bring up the past as leverage?

The Bible says that is dumb! If I am wise, I will not emphasize your mistakes. Wisdom is full of mercy. ***Proverbs 17:9*** tells us, "One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend." Real friends do not rub your mistakes in. They do not keep on harping on all your slip-ups. They do not become history buffs by emphasizing your failures. Instead, friends are full of mercy and considerate.

What is mercy? It is giving people what they need, not what they deserve. It is the way God is towards you. If God gave us what we deserve, none of us would be here today. We do not get what we deserve from God. God gives us what we need, not what we deserve, because the Almighty is a merciful God. Our Creator wants us to be that way with each other. Encourage people with mercy, kindness, respect, and thankfulness.

This point has two parts. *Wisdom is full of mercy and good fruit.* Good fruit means it is not just talk and attitude. It is action. It is not just sympathy; it is doing kind things for people. It is not just emotion; it is practical help. ***James says in chapter 2, verse 13,*** "Mercy triumphs over judgement." That is because treating people with mercy often leads to stronger relationships.

Sixth, if I am wise, I will not disguise my weaknesses. There are two words here in verse 17. Wisdom is being impartial and sincere. Or as the RSV says, wisdom is "without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." What this means is that I will not play the phony and fake it. Hypocrite is a Greek theater term for an actor who would play several different parts. He would come out wearing one mask, then go backstage and get another mask, and come out again. Over the course of a play, he could play five or six roles.

The point is that wise people do not fake it. They are open, sincere, genuine, real, authentic, humble, - warts and all. What you see is what you get. They are not trying to hide their real selves. They let people know where they are growing, where they are struggling and what they think.

This one point alone would improve relationships so much. Would you agree there is a lot of phoniness in relationships? Often politics or looking good, get in the way of genuine relationship. People saying one thing to one person and another thing to another person. Everyone has a plastic smile that says, "Hi I'm friendly but you will not get past the outer shell." People appreciate honesty, directness, openness, being who you are and not trying to be who you are not. Wisdom is straight forward, sincere, genuine, not masked, and with thankfulness.

The word impartial here has the normal meaning of the word, which is objective, neutral, unbiased. But in Greek there is also the meaning of knowing your own mind, choosing your course and abiding by it. True wisdom is not wavering and vacillating. There are those who think it is smart never to make up one's mind. They speak about having an open mind and about suspending judgement. But our wisdom is based on Christian certainties, values, truths, and traits, which come to us from the Bible, and God through Jesus. Jesus is clear we are to love each another.

So being sincere, not a hypocrite, and being impartial, not partial, means, be genuinely yourself, clearly yourself in Jesus Christ. There is a deeper meaning here than simply being impartial and sincere. It is being distinguishable as to who you are and where you stand. It is being open about our doubts and what we really believe. It is not presenting ourselves as something we are not. It is pleasing Jesus most of all in all relationships.

The Bible says it is dumb to pretend that we are perfect. **Proverbs 28:13** tells us, "No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." When you leave here being wiser, honest, humble & open about your weaknesses, be ready for a big

surprise. People already know them. God knows them. You are the only one trying to hide them.

So how do we match up to James' list of wisdom? How pure and wise and peaceful are we in our relationships? How do we receive wisdom? **Wisdom begins with knowing God. Psalm 111:10** says, "Reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge, we look around to get. Wisdom, we look up to receive. Knowledge is something we work for. Wisdom is a gift from God. Knowledge is something we gain from experience. Wisdom is a revelation from God as we mature spiritually.

Wisdom is the capacity to make appropriate use of knowledge. When Solomon asked for wisdom and insight on how to apply the knowledge effectively that God gave him, he was praised and granted things like riches, wealth, and honor. (I Kings 3:5-15)

James 1:5 says, "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you." So, ask the Holy Spirit for relationship wisdom. Ask for wisdom to be wise toward your children, boss, spouse, co-workers, church members, family, parents, enemies, and even Jesus Himself.

Let Jesus build your wisdom from within. Colossians explains, "I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (2:2-3)

As we learn to allow Jesus to live in us more and more, we get wiser and more thankful in the way we relate to others and to our Creator. Wisdom has everything to do with our disposition and character and spirituality. May Jesus Christ continue to work in us to make us wiser in relationships, so we reap a harvest of righteousness. Plus, godly wise people are full of gratitude and thankfulness.

(Adapted from a Rick Warren sermon)