

Wisdom for Marriage, Family and Friends

In 1937, the number one fiction best seller was Margret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The number one nonfiction best seller that year was Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Today, *Gone With the Wind* has "gone with the wind;" it does not appear on any best seller list. But *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is still the #5 best-seller on Amazon. Why is that? Because just about everybody has "people problems" and they want to know how to solve them.

Getting along with other people is a key skill in life. If you have developed that skill, you'll have a very satisfying life. If you haven't acquired that skill, it's not too late! Proverbs is the best manual there is for learning how to get along with people because it is written by the Creator of people! This book speaks at length about three kinds of critically important relationships in life: marriage, family and friends. In the time we have, we can only scratch the surface of the wisdom in this book on these topics, but a little scratching is way better than no scratching and it's my hope that it will whet your appetite to scratch even more on your own. So first, let's examine this book's...

I. Wisdom on Marriage

Before He created us, God knew we would mess up His creation and introduce sin, disease and decay into the world. Knowing that, He built into His creation three institutions designed to help us deal with all the problems that sin would cause. Those institutions are the home, the church and the government (Gen. 2:18-25, 9:1-6, Acts 2). These institutions don't solve the problem of sin (only the work of Christ on the cross does that!) but they were intended, when functioning according to God's design, to provide an environment (like a fortress) in which we might find safety and a place of health. The foundational institution, the one upon which the other two are dependent, isn't government or even the church, it's the home. And the home is dependent on the stability of the marriage relationship within the home. So, preserving your healthy marriage is the most patriotic thing you could do.

The biblical view of marriage and family, however, has been so attacked and ridiculed today that it does us good to review what the Creator of the home designed it to be. Genesis chapters 1-3 provides God's definition of a home:

- A home consists of a man and a woman united in marriage (Gen. 2:24)
- If God wills it, that home may be blessed with the gift of children (Gen. 3:1)
- The husband is the leader, the wife is his helper (both equal before God but distinct in their roles) and the children are the followers, required to be obedient to both their parents (Gen. 2, Eph. 5:21 - 6:4)

Now, Proverbs in particular, and the Old Testament in general, affirm all this. With regard to marriage, it's the unity, the oneness of the man and wife that is emphasized. Husbands are warned not to be enticed by the adulteress but:

...rejoice in the wife of your youth. (Prov. 5:18)

And wives are warned not to be quarrelsome, the opposite of being united.

...a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping...

but a prudent wife is from the LORD. (Prov. 19:13, 14)

So, if we do a quick scan of the whole book, what do we find? We find an abbreviated job description for husbands and wives. But if we add the teaching of another book written by Solomon, the Song of Songs, we get a more comprehensive set of job descriptions. So, between the two books, what do we find?

A Godly Wife – respects her husband (Prov. 31:23) *Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among elders of the land.*

Encourages her husband (Prov. 31:12) *She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.*

Loves her husband (S of S 6:3 NASB) *I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.*

A Godly Husband – Trusts his wife (Prov. 31:11 NASB) *The heart of her husband trusts in her.*

Leads his wife (S of S 2:13) *Arise, come my darling; my beautiful one, come with me!*

Protects his wife (S of S 3:8 NASB) *Each man has his sword at his side, guarding against the terrors of the night.*

Loves his wife (S of S 2:4) *His banner over me is love.*

Now, let me ask this question: as you were listening to those job descriptions, which one were you evaluating more closely – the one for you or the one for your spouse? The reason I ask is because, according to Dr. Linda Gottlieb, in a recent 11-year period, the number of patients receiving psychological interventions plummeted 30%. The reasons are several but Dr. Gottlieb believes it's basically because of a shift in attitude in our culture. Eleven years ago, people came to see her to change something in themselves in order to fix the problems in their life. Now, people come because they want someone else to change. ⁱ "The problem," they say, "isn't me. It's them!"

The book of Proverbs isn't about "them," it's about me. Proverbs and, in fact, the whole Bible, talk about marriage like a decision to super-glue your hat on your head. You're free to do it but, once you do, to undo it will be extremely painful.

Christians who divorce for reasons other than infidelity don't understand God and they don't understand love. God says He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Why would you do something God hates? People respond, "But we just don't love each other anymore." Then you don't understand God and you don't understand biblical love. Love isn't a commodity that you have when you first get married and, when it mysteriously evaporates, your marriage is over. No, love is a person – God! When a Christian gets married, God joins you in that relationship. When you experience difficulty and pain (which you will!) it doesn't mean the love is evaporating, it means you are less like God than you thought. Being married to a jerk doesn't mean your happiness is over. It means now you have a chance to develop a joy and happiness that don't depend on another person. Instead, it's so sturdy, so deep, so mature that it is just like the love of Christ. In your difficult marriage, God calls you to receive His power as you never have before. Listen:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:16-19)

You see, if you bail on your difficult marriage, besides making God extremely angry, this is what you lose – the chance to experience firsthand the power of God. This is what Proverbs affirms about marriage – that it was created by God to be the place where you come to experience His power through the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Proverbs gives us...

II. Wisdom on Families

Not everyone gets married but everyone IS part of a family, at least for a couple of decades. The biblical design of a family is a mom and a dad and one or more children. Now, for various reasons, that design can change. It could include only one parent or it could be both parents and several grandparents. Or, sometimes in one house you might find several families living together, but God's design for a family is not endlessly flexible as some contend today. Our definition of a family must come from Scripture, not from sociology.

Proverbs isn't attempting to provide an exhaustive definition of a family, but what it does teach is foundational. We can sum it up in four words: Example, Instruction, Loving Discipline. These four words reveal a basic premise. The premise is this: God's intention is that parents be the teachers and the leaders of their children because they are to be more knowledgeable, more disciplined and more mature. Children are to respect, obey and follow the example of their parents.

We live, however, in a culture that encourages parents to lower themselves, to "get down to your child's level;" to talk, dress, think and even act like a child. I call this the Peter Pan philosophy, "I won't grow up! I don't wanna go to school!" This actually flows from a distinct philosophy of education which believes that the child knows more than the parent! Aging, in this view, is not becoming better but becoming worse, becoming less mature. Your child, being so young, is unspoiled, closer to purity and innocence and what life should be than you are. Growing up in this philosophy is really "growing down."

This is not a biblical philosophy. The Bible teaches that children are not closer to the truth but further from it and need to be shown godly examples, taught with faithful instruction and disciplined with love. God, speaking through Proverbs, says... Parents, you should be a Godly example:

The righteous man leads a blameless life; Blessed are his children after him. (Prov. 20:7)

Parents, you should give faithful instruction:

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light. (Prov. 6:20-23a)

Parents, you should provide loving discipline:

Do not withhold discipline from a child... He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. (Prov. 23:13; 13:24)

Now, I know that some of you are chocking over the word 'rod' in that last verse. "What is God saying? Is He suggesting we beat our kids with sticks? This is crazy!!" That's a legitimate question and I don't have time to discuss it fully now, but I've provided several teaching resources on our website that you can read if you're interested. But let me make this clear: God is not condoning physical abuse of children nor is He endorsing painless discipline. So, if you follow a philosophy of parenting that excludes all forms of discipline, you are sending your child down a very dark road. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus:

...learned obedience from what he suffered... (Heb. 5:8)

If painful discipline was beneficial for Jesus who never sinned, don't you think it will be beneficial for your sinful child? The pain doesn't have to be physical but it must draw a line that delineates the boundary between right and wrong. This is one part of loving your child. Without that line, your love is actually more like hate.

So, Proverbs' lesson for families is that parents are to teach their children the wisdom of God through example, instruction and loving discipline. If you don't do that, you'd better fasten your seatbelt because there's turbulence ahead. But if you do, it's not a promise, but a high probability that Prov. 22:6 will be in your future:

**Train a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not turn from it.**

That's lasting wisdom for families. Finally, we need to hear Proverbs...

III. Wisdom on Friends

The Hebrew word for "friend" and "neighbor" is the same word. Do you think of your neighbors as friends? What would need to happen for your neighbors to become your friends? Proverbs acknowledges that we have relationships with people who aren't our friends. Prov. 18:24 says:

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Do you have a real friend? Let's test and see. Your flight is late in getting into Bradley, really late!! It's after midnight. Besides your spouse, if you're married, whom will you call to come and pick you up? Quick, think of a name!! How many come to mind? Five... three... one... none? If you can't come up with a name, you have no friends, only companions. You say, "That's not a problem. I'll just take a cab!!" Yeah, okay, and when your father dies or you get fired from your job or the doctor says, "I'm sorry to tell you this, but that lump is cancer," whom are you going to talk to about that - the cab driver?

No, man or woman, you need a friend and frankly, someone needs you as a friend. Actually, if you're a Jesus follower, you're commanded to BE a friend. So, what is a friend? What's the biblical definition? I'm glad you asked, because Proverbs is all over that question. In fact, Proverbs says more about friendship than any other teacher in the Bible except One? Guess who? That's right - Jesus.

So, what does Proverbs have to say? Well, it gives us seven qualities of a real friend. Briefly, here they are:

1. True friends keep a confidence. *A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.* (Prov. 11:13)
2. A true friend controls his tongue. *A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.* (Prov. 11:12)
3. True friends are lovingly honest with one another. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.* (Prov. 27:6 NASB)
4. True friends encourage one another with good counsel. *...the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.* (Prov. 27:9b)
5. True friends are sensitive to each other's feelings. *Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day... is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.* (Prov. 25:20)
6. A true friend is loyal. *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* (Prov. 18:24)
7. A true friend always loves. *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.* (Prov. 17:17) ⁱⁱ

So, as we've gone through these topics today, what's your response? Have these issues caused you some angst? Do you know why that is? Because we haven't just been talking about people in general, we've been talking about the people closest to you – your husband, your wife, your parents, your children, your friends; what I call your “Inner Circle.” It's highly unlikely that all those relationships are extremely good - better than they've ever been. Hopefully, some of them are good, but it's kind of like breaking one of your toes. You've still got nine that aren't broken, right? But the one that is broken pretty much overwhelms the others.

So, what can be done about a broken relationship? Well, first of all, here's what NOT to do – don't cut it off! You don't cut off an “Inner Circle” relationship. You need all your toes! So, what should you do? Try this – try being a true friend to the one you're struggling with. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to keep a confidence, to control your tongue, to be lovingly honest and encouraging and sensitive to their feelings. And rely on the Spirit of God to help you to be loyal and to “love at all times.” Why should you do this? What hope is there of this working?

Well, I suggest this for one reason; this is exactly what Jesus did with us when our relationship with Him was hopelessly broken. He treated us like a friend before we were friends. He didn't gossip about us though He knew all of our sins. He didn't try to shame us into a friendship. He was honest with us, but primarily He was encouraging and sensitive and extremely loyal. And did He love us?

...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

What will it take to repair your hopelessly broken relationship? Be Jesus to that person and one day soon perhaps you'll be able to say to them what He now says to you:

You are my friends... (John 15:14)

This is the wisdom of God. Let's pray...

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- ⁱ Lori Gottlieb, "What Brand is Your Therapist?" *The New York Times* (11-23-12)
- ⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Skillful* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2004), pp. 107-109