

Like a Good Neighbor

PROVERBS 3:27-35

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This morning I would invite you to return with me to Proverbs 3 (p. 1005). Last week we looked at the value of godly wisdom in verses 13-26. In that passage, Solomon describes wisdom as a blessing from God, and he also explains that godly wisdom comes with a number of amazing promises. Today, we move on to verses 27-32, and we have a series of **“do nots.”** Not “donuts,” but **“do nots,”** a brief series of things that we are NOT to do. And as we are about to discover, all of these are in some way related to how we interact with other people. So, in a sense, we are talking about how to be a good neighbor, how to improve our relationships with others. We know that as a king, King Solomon most likely had to interact with many people - all day long.

Over the past week or so, I have been reading *The Reagan Diaries*, a compilation of various entries from the personal diary of Ronald Reagan. Reagan was president as I was growing up, we went to his presidential library on a trip to California several years ago, and a while back I found this book at a thrift store, so I thought I would browse through it a bit. I’m not too far into it, but I did appreciate the entry on the day he was shot. He said, “Getting shot hurts.” He had a knack for stating the obvious! But beyond that, I’ve been impressed with how busy his days were - from early in the morning until late at night - one meeting after another. And at one point I remember him mentioning that he hardly had any time to prepare, or even think, between those meetings - just a constant stream of people coming through his office all day long. I’m assuming this is true for all presidents and world leaders, and I mention this because it was probably also true of Solomon. And so, as King Solomon gives advice to his sons, as he prepares them to take over in his place, he gives some special advice on how to interact with others, some advice on how to be a good neighbor.

This morning, then, as we look at this passage, I want us to think about the people we interact with on a daily basis - our friends, the people we work with, the people we go to school with, the people in our own families, and even our neighbors - and I hope we can apply some of these words to our lives today. And the reason is: God cares about how we treat people. This morning, then, we’re looking at Solomon’s advice on how to improve our relationships with others. If you will, please look with me at Proverbs 3:27-35 - the words of King Solomon - we have a series of five “do nots” (in verses 27-31) and then we have four reasons for these warnings (in verses 32-35) - Proverbs 3:27-35,

- ²⁷ ***Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
When it is in your power to do it.***
- ²⁸ ***Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back,
And tomorrow I will give it,"
When you have it with you.***
- ²⁹ ***Do not devise harm against your neighbor,
While he lives securely beside you.***
- ³⁰ ***Do not contend with a man without cause,
If he has done you no harm.***
- ³¹ ***Do not envy a man of violence
And do not choose any of his ways.***
- ³² ***For the devious are an abomination to the Lord;
But He is intimate with the upright.***
- ³³ ***The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked,
But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.***
- ³⁴ ***Though He scoffs at the scoffers,
Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.***
- ³⁵ ***The wise will inherit honor,
But fools display dishonor.***

- I. Again, we have the warnings, and then we have some reasons, but as we begin, we notice in verses 27-31 that King Solomon gives some **DO NOTS**. And I don't know whether this is the best way to word this, but as I read this over and over again this week, I would summarize what Solomon is saying here with the heading **DON'T BE A JERK - DON'T BE A MEAN PERSON.**
- A. And the first very practical ***"do not"*** comes in verse 27 as Solomon says, ***"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it."***

In other words: When you have an opportunity to do good, do it! Do not hold back from doing good. If we have the power to help in some way, we are not to hold back, but we are to do good. Someone has said, "I cannot do all the good that the world needs, but the world needs all the good that I can do." Most of us would agree with that.

And we certainly think of what Paul said in Galatians 6:10, ***"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."*** Or, we think of what James said in James 4:17, ***"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."*** James reminds us here that yes, there are some sins we might actively commit, but we can also sin by not doing what we should do. In Acts 10:38, Peter was preaching to Cornelius and described Jesus as someone who ***"went around doing good."*** That's who Jesus was. That's what Jesus did. He ***"went around doing good."*** And as his followers, we do the best we can to do what he did. We also go around doing good. We look for opportunities, and when we see those opportunities, we jump in and do something. And the good we do could be anything. It could be a big thing, but it could be a small thing - anything from opening a door, to paying off somebody's mortgage, to giving somebody a car, to helping somebody with yard work or snow removal. As God's people following the example of His Son, we do whatever we can to do good. We ***"do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in our power to do it."***

- B. The next practical ***“do not”*** comes in verse 28 as Solomon says, ***“Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you.”***

We have a few things going on here. To start with, this is the first time Solomon uses the word ***“neighbor”*** in this passage. And most of us, when we think of ***“neighbor”*** in the Bible, we think of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, that parable Jason read for us a few moments ago. Of course, Jesus explains how we need to love God and love our neighbor, and then the lawyer wants to know, ***“Who is my neighbor?”*** And in that parable, Jesus basically defines ***“neighbor”*** as anybody who needs our help, even if it’s somebody not like us who has been beat up and left for dead by the side of the road. And before we think that the lesson is that we need to help Samaritans, we need to remember that it is the Samaritan who does the helping in that story! We aren’t told the national or ethnic background of the guy who gets beat up. But it is the hated Samaritan who does the helping! And by using the outsider to do the helping, Jesus is shaming the priests and the Levites as they are the ones who ignore the man in need. It is the outsider, the Samaritan, who does what needs to be done. And the point of story is: Be like the Samaritan! Do whatever it is that needs to be done. Treat others as you would like to be treated. And we do this regardless of whether the person who needs help is a close friend or a foreigner, because God has a rather loose definition of who our ***“neighbors”*** really are. We think back to the Law itself. In Deuteronomy 10:17-19, God said,

17 For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

I should probably point out here that we as God’s people today have this obligation personally. I can’t think, ***“This is why I pay taxes, and I’m going to let the government handle this,”*** thinking that I have fulfilled my responsibility. Instead, this is something that I personally need to do - not taking money from somebody else to do it, but me personally doing this. I think of what we’re doing to help some of the homeless students at Kennedy. I think of what we are doing to help the children at Shults-Lewis. As a church and as individuals, by providing food and warm clothing, we are personally helping the poor and the alien; we are personally helping the fatherless and the outsider.

But the other aspect of that story that ties in here (besides the use of the word ***“neighbor”***), is the idea that the Good Samaritan did what he did immediately! He didn’t put it off. He did not wait for somebody else to do it. The priest and the Levite DID wait. They avoided the situation. They put it off indefinitely. The Samaritan, though, steps in immediately. If my neighbor is hungry right now, it does no good for me to wait to help until tomorrow. So when it comes to helping people, we are not to put off until tomorrow what we have the power and ability to do today. This goes for daily necessities, but it also applies to other ways we might help somebody - a word of encouragement, an expression of sympathy, or maybe some other kind of very practical help. We think about the Golden Rule. If I personally get up the courage to ask somebody for help with something, there’s a good chance I probably need the help right now. I don’t need it a week from now, but I need it right now. In the same way, when we are asked to help, we should not put it off if it is in our power to do something good right away.

Of course, if I do NOT have the ability to help, I don’t need to lie and tell them to come back tomorrow, but I just need to tell the truth: I cannot do what you are asking me to do. I would much rather hear that myself than to have somebody tell me to come back tomorrow, hoping that I forget or go find somebody else. This almost sounds like something we might tell a 3-year old when they want something, ***“Ask me tomorrow,”*** and

then we hope they forget about it - not that I've ever really done that! But the point is: Don't be a jerk! If you can help your neighbor, then help, and do it quickly.

- C. The next ***"do not"*** comes in verse 29, where Solomon warns, ***"Do not devise harm against your neighbor, while he lives securely beside you."***

So, do not make evil plans against your neighbor. Obviously, we are not to actually harm our neighbor, but the warning here is: Do not ***"devise"*** harm against your neighbor. In other words, don't even think about it. Don't lay awake at night planning the next border skirmish with your neighbor. Don't be thinking up scenarios. Don't be daydreaming about all of the terrible things you'd like to try doing to your neighbor. Because, as we know, plans have a way of turning into reality. We think of the guy in Maine who poisoned his entire church family a number of years ago. As I remember it, they had a communion table that sat up against the wall (like ours up here does), and somebody donated a new table that fit better and sat out from the wall a bit. And this guy didn't like it, so he put arsenic in the church's coffee one morning. All over the position of the communion table! With all of the renovations we've done around here, I plan on eating last at the Soup Slurp...just in case. But I'm pretty sure Solomon would say: Don't do that! Do not devise harm against your neighbor. Don't be taking advantage of your neighbor letting down his guard around you.

- D. The next ***"do not"*** is in verse 30 as Solomon warns, ***"Do not contend with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm."***

In other words, don't be a bully! Don't be picking on people for no reason! I guess the other side of this is: If we contend with somebody, we'd better have a cause! But we are not to contend (or fight) with someone for no reason. Generally speaking, we are to be peacemakers. We are to find solutions. Generally speaking, it seems that we need to assume the best of people, even in our own families, even in the congregation. If somebody does something that could be taken in several different ways, assume that it's the best way, and move on. We don't take pleasure in fighting with other people - physically or otherwise.

One author has said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are several things we don't know: 1.) We don't know how hard they tried not to sin, 2.) We don't know the power of the forces that assaulted them, and 3.) We also don't know what we might have done in the same circumstances. The point is: We don't know all the facts, so we need to be gentle and slow to speak out against someone. We are not to pick a fight for no reason.

- E. The final ***"do not"*** comes in verse 31 as Solomon says, ***"Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways."***

So, not only are we not to contend with no cause, but we are not to envy those who do - we must not envy a man of violence, and we must not choose any of his ways; we are not to allow ourselves to go in that direction. Some of you might have noticed a study released just this past week and presented on Monday at the American Academy of Pediatrics. It's been shared quite a bit online, but the gist of it is: Researchers have apparently discovered that superheroes are more violent than villains, and their conclusion is: We need to be careful who our children imitate. The abstract to the study is titled, "Violence Depicted in Superhero-Based Films Stratified by Protagonist/Antagonist and Gender reveals superheroes actually perform more acts of violence per hour than their villain counterparts." They studied ten of the top-grossing DC and Marvel superhero movies between 2015-2016, they divided the characters between protagonists (that is, the good guys) and the antagonists (the bad guys), and they classified their actions according to level of violence.

Apparently, the heroes (the good guys) performed an average of 23 violent acts per hour, but researchers were surprised that the villains (the bad guys) not only performed less violent acts, but they also did fewer violent acts at only 18 violent acts per hour. The heroes committed acts of murder at almost twice the rate as their villainous counterparts. The study found that superheroes committed 168 murders compared to the villains only committing 93. The good guys did, though, commit fewer acts of bullying, torture, and intimidation. Overall, though, the heroes were more violent. And I know it's complicated - Deadpool and Suicide Squad were thrown in here, right along with Superman and Captain America. But do we even think about some of this anymore? Especially in light of the fact that Solomon specifically tells us not to envy a ***"man of violence"***?

What about the Punisher? A year or so ago, some of you might have noticed I had a Punisher sticker on my car for a bit. It had the thin blue line on it, representing support for law enforcement. Well, my daughter called me on it, "Dad, have you really thought about who the Punisher is and what he does?" Okay, fine! So I took it off. But I think she had a point, based on this verse. We are not to idolize those who live lives of violence. It might be a superhero, it might be another kid at school, it might be some figure from history, it might be an athlete, but Solomon says that we are not to envy their behavior. Here I am cutting on the Punisher and Captain America on Veterans Day - on the 11th hour, or the 11th day, of the 11th month - exactly 100 years after the end of WWI - but Solomon is still true, ***"Do not envy the violent man."*** This is the reason why King David was not allowed to build the temple. Instead of envying the violent man, it seems that we should probably put a bit more effort into trying to be like Jesus.

But these are the warnings. These are the ***"do not's."***

- II. **As we go back to our text, we find the rest of this passage is where Solomon gives us a reason for these warnings, and the basic reason is that GOD WILL HOLD US ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR BEHAVIOR.**

Or, as I've put it on the wall up here, we are not to be a jerk...or else! So, in verses 32-35 we have a series of contrasts - bad behavior with a bad result, followed by a good behavior with a good result - four times in a row: bad/good, bad/good, bad/good, bad/good. And in the big picture here, we find that God notices. God pays attention. We might think we can be a jerk to people in private, we might think we can hold back from doing good, we might think we can just privately envy those who are violent, or that God doesn't really care what we do on our own time, or whatever, but here at the end, we find that God notices! God holds us accountable for our behavior - there is some justice coming, there is some recompense on the horizon, there are some consequences to face.

- A. And we start in verse 32 with the word ***"for"*** - do not do all of these bad things, ***"for,"*** that is, ***"because,"*** God sees what you are doing and, ***"...the devious are an abomination to the Lord; but He is intimate with the upright."***

The word ***"devious"*** in this passage literally refers to those who turn aside from the accepted path. Some translations refer to the ***"perverse"*** or the ***"perverted."*** The Message (a paraphrase of the Bible) says that ***"God can't stand twisted souls,"*** and that's basically the idea here. Don't be a jerk to people, because ***"...the devious are an abomination to the Lord; but He is intimate with the upright."*** The word ***"intimate"*** in this passage refers to the sharing of secrets. And so, the idea is, if you are upright, God will share things with you that he might not share with other people. He is close to those who are upright. As we decide how to treat

people, then, we need to decide: Do we want to leave the path of righteousness and be an abomination to the Lord, or are we willing to do the right thing and be intimate with God?

- B. In verse 33, we have a second contrast, ***“The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.”***

He is against those who are wicked, but he blesses the righteous.

- C. In verse 34, we find that, ***“Though [God] scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted.”***

So there is another contrast. To ***“scoff”*** is to ***“scorn”*** or ***“mock.”*** God can’t stand bitterness in our hearts. And if we mock or make fun of others, he will make fun of us. On the other hand, though, he gives ***“favor”*** or ***“grace”*** to the ***“humble”*** or ***“afflicted.”***

- D. And then, in verse 35, we find that ***“The wise will inherit honor, but fools display dishonor.”***

So, we have a series of contrasts here, the good and the bad. If we heed these warnings up at the beginning, we have nothing to fear. If we are ***“upright,” “righteous,” “humble,”*** and ***“wise,”*** we do well. But, if we are jerks to those around us, if we are ***“devious,” “wicked,” “scornful,”*** and ***“foolish,”*** God promises that there will be some terrifying consequences.

Conclusion:

In summary, it almost seems as if Solomon is telling us in this passage to be like Jesus! In fact, what Solomon tells us here is pretty close to what Jesus says in Luke 6:30-36,

³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. ³¹ Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. ³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

And not only did Jesus TEACH this, but he LIVED it. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. As Peter once wrote (in 1 Peter 2:21-24), Jesus Christ,

...also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example for [us] to follow in His steps, ²² [he] committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

If we follow him, he should make a difference in our lives. And as we've learned this morning, his word really needs to change how we treat other people. How do we respond to this morning's passage? If we're not treating people the way we want to be treated, if we're being mean to those around us, if we're not being generous, then we change. We repent. We acknowledge our failures, and we turn around. We turn toward Jesus.

If you are not yet a Christian, we would invite you to take the first steps, to obey the good news. We turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, and the Christian life begins. If you would like to study further, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com