

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Proverbs: Topical Applications of Proverbs
III. The Proverbs Themselves, Proverbs 10:1-31:31
S. Developing Good Relationships

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

When a person puts his trust in Christ for salvation from sin, he is spiritually born into the family of God and becomes a part of the body of Christ, the universal Church (cf. Ephesians 2:11-22).

However, due to the effects of sin and the sinful world in which we live, a wide variety of thinking patterns among different people and people groups can make getting along with others a difficult chore, even if it involves relating to fellow believers. This is why the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:18 NIV directed believers, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

(1) This difficulty typically shows up in the “Dear Annie” columns: Pseudonym “Frozen in My Own Home” wrote to Annie Lane’s “Dear Annie” column to explain, “My husband and I have a good marriage except for one issue: the thermostat. I am always freezing, and he is always ‘boiling.’ . . . We have been married for 18 years, and . . . we have discussed the thermostat more than our children, finances and retirement combined. Last week I caught him opening a bedroom window in January while the heat was on . . . How do two otherwise reasonable adults stop fighting over two degrees?” (Republican-American, October 7, 2026, p. B12)

(2) “Not Taking Notes” wrote in the October 8, 2026, paper, B. 12 to the “Dear Annie” column that “(m)y Mom recently went down a rabbit hole of self-help books . . . The problem is she treats every book’s advice as gospel and repeats it to me constantly . . . If I complain about a stressful week at work, she asks if I’ve tried gratitude journaling. She’ll bring up recommendations for ‘optimizing’ my day completely unsolicited . . . I’m tired of feeling like I have a life coach. Do I say something or just wait it out?”

(3) “Holiday Tug-of-war” wrote to Annie reporting, “My parents host a big Thanksgiving and Christmas every year with my siblings, nieces, nephews and all the traditions I grew up with. My mother . . . takes it very personally if we are not there . . . My husband’s parents live several hours away. They are older and do not host a big crowd, but he feels strongly that we should spend more time with them while we still can . . . We have tried everything. Splitting the day leaves us exhausted and sitting in traffic. Alternating years sounds fair, but the family we skip acts wounded. Celebrating on another weekend only brings comments that ‘it is not the same.’ . . . How do we make a decision that is fair without spending every holiday disappointing someone?” (Op. cit., October 13, 2026, p. B12)

Need: *So we ask, “In view of the trials we can face in relating to others, how can we develop good relationships?”*

- I. God’s “wisdom,” His *hokmah*, or fixed eternal moral order for success and blessing, applies to many issues of human concern, including developing good relationships.**
- II. We thus view proverbs as translated from the Hebrew Biblical text (Kittel, Biblia Hebraica) in the Book of Proverbs that provide God’s wisdom on developing good relationships:**
 - A. God directs that we first need to avoid behavior that hinders the development of good friendships (as follows):
 1. We need to respect the precedents and boundaries of other people. Proverbs 22:28 directs, “Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.”
 2. We also need to go slow to condemn other people:
 - a. Proverbs 24:28-29 states, “Do not testify against your neighbor without cause or use your lips to deceive; do not say, ‘I’ll do to him as he has done to me; I’ll pay that man back for what he did.’”
 - b. Proverbs 25:8-10 adds, “Do not speedily bring (your neighbor) into a lawsuit (even if the case involves evidence) that you have seen with your eyes, lest what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame (because you were not well enough prepared)?”
 - c. Proverbs 24:19-20 teaches, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked; because there is no future for the evil man, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.”
 3. We need to be cautious around aggressive people:
 - a. Proverbs 19:6 states, “Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.”
 - b. Proverbs 29:5 warns, “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.”
 - B. God calls us to handle encounters with difficult people well:
 1. We must be kind to our foes: Proverbs 25:21-22 directs, “If your enemy is hungry, give him food; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head and Yahweh will reward you.”

2. We must counter the bad influence of evil people with good influence:
 - a. Proverbs 29:27 notes, “The righteous nobleman detests the dishonest, and the wicked detest the upright.”
 - b. Proverbs 29:7 adds, “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked detest the upright.”
 - c. Proverbs 28:10 teaches, “He who leads the upright along an evil path, he will fall into his own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.”
 - d. Proverbs 28:4 states, “Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law engage in strife against them.”
 - e. Proverbs 28:12 adds, “When the righteous triumph, there is great elation; but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding.”
 - f. Proverbs 29:2 notes, “When the righteous thrive people rejoice, but when the wicked rule people groan.”
- C. On the positive side, God calls us to build good relationships with other people (as follows):
 1. We need to select good people for friends: Proverbs 18:24 claims, “A man of (many) friends will be broken in pieces (in being pulled in many directions), but there is a lover who sticks closer than a brother.”
 2. We need to be a good friend to our friends:
 - a. We need to be truthful with our friends: (i) Proverbs 19:22 states, “What a man desires is loyal love; better to be poor than a liar.” (ii) Proverbs 28:23 claims, “He who rebukes a man will in the end find more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.” (iii) Proverbs 27:9 asserts, “Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel.”
 - b. We need to get understanding and knowledge to be a help to our friend: Proverbs 28:2 says, “When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but by a man of understanding and knowledge it lasts long.”
 - c. We need to interact with our good friend to keep him as a friend: (i) Proverbs 27:17 observes, “As iron sharpens iron, so one nobleman sharpens the face of his colleague.” (ii) Proverbs 27:19 claims, “As water reflects a face, thus the heart of a common man reflects another common man.” (iii) Proverbs 27:10 adds, “Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother’s house when disaster strikes you – better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”

Lesson: *Developing good relationships involves first avoiding behavior that hinders good friendships by respecting the precedents and boundaries of others, by going slow on condemning others and by being cautious around aggressive people. Second, developing good relationships also involves handling encounters with difficult people well by treating our enemies with consideration and countering the bad influence of evil people with good influence. Third, we can build good relationships by choosing good people to be our friends and by being a good friend through being truthful, gaining understanding and knowledge and interacting with our good friend.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God’s gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we then rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit of God to heed God’s directives in Proverbs on developing good relationships.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and/or provide additional guidance . . .)

The issues of concern in our introduction can each be addressed by the application of Proverbs (as follows):

(1) As for the married couple who battle over the thermostat setting, respecting the boundaries of one another (Proverbs 22:28) so as not to be quick to condemn (Proverbs 24:8-10) and handling problem people well (Proverbs 25:21-22), the “cold” spouse can wear warmer clothes, being thankful that the thermostat is set at a level to save on expensive fuel oil! The “boiling” spouse may soon get the point and hopefully make some adjustment!

(2) As for the unsolicited advice from the mother who went down a rabbit hole of self-help books, Proverbs 22:28 on respecting the boundaries of others and Proverbs 19:6 and 29:5 on being cautious around aggressive people can lead the daughter to respond to her mother’s suggestions by saying, “That’s nice, Mom,” and then changing the subject so that her mother eventually learns to drop her pontifications due to the daughter’s lack of interest in her self-help issues. The mother may then learn to have more two-way, balanced conversations with her daughter!

(3) As for the tug-of-war with competing and demanding sets of parents who want their children with them on holidays, Proverbs 18:24 reveals that trying to please both sets of parents will eventually tear the married couple apart! A better solution would be to encourage both sets of parents to gather with their children in the same place! However, a married couple needs to set their own relationship boundaries to protect their marriage (Proverbs 22:28)!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God’s gift of eternal life. May we rely on the Holy Spirit to heed God’s Word in Proverbs on developing good relationships.