

# The Book of Proverbs and Relational Conflicts

How do we prevent an offense or misunderstanding from turning into a painful conflict? Have you ever evaluated a broken relationship asking, "How in the world did it come to this?" The book of Proverbs gives us wisdom from the One who created us for relationships. One proverb in particular speaks about how friendships are broken. *"He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool"* (Prov. 10:18). How should we respond to someone who has offended us?

If we are wise, we will in a loving manner confront the friend who has offended us and move beyond the painful incident. But as the proverb says, quite often, this is not the way many of us respond. Instead of addressing the hurt, we conceal it. At this point, the seed begins to take root in our spirit. Instead of addressing the hurt honestly, we choose denial, thus, *"He who conceals his hatred has lying lips..."* (10:18). Our negative feelings begin to seep out. We spread slander toward our offender. We may not lie about them. We simply rejoice in giving or receiving a negative report about them.

The consequence of our ill-will is that we become foolish... *"...whoever spreads slander is a fool"* (10:18). A fool in the Bible is not an ignorant or stupid person, but a person who participates in destructive attitudes, words or behavior. Our ill-will can lead to us to become an instrument of disharmony.

Bearing this analysis in mind, how do we prevent the seed of hurt from producing the fruit of a broken relationship? **First, we must resist derision.** *"A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue"* (Prov. 11:12). By deriding someone, we are looking down on them. Think about it this way: If ill-will and slander are the seeds of relational destruction, then derision is the soil in which the seeds grow. Derision enables us to maintain or justify our negative feelings.

When I was growing up, many people read the newspaper, not for the sports page or the crossword puzzles, but for the cartoons. You could always tell whether or not a cartoonist liked his character, because a cartoon was a caricature of a person. If a cartoonist did not like his character, he would magnify the character's weakness or distort his most distinguishing feature. So it is with derision. It reduces people into the wrongs against us. Sadly, long-time friendships may be destroyed over a single hurt. Feelings toward a once close friend are emotionally processed through a negative emotional grid. Derision becomes the soil in which the seeds of ill-will grow. We must resist it!

**Secondly, we must reject revenge.** *"Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did'"* (Prov. 24:29). The language of the proverb is financial, and "payback" certainly applies to relationships. We will not rest until someone pays. Simply put; we seek revenge. The seeds of relational destruction are ill-will and slander. The soil in which these seeds grow is derision. The water that grows the seeds of ill-will and slander in the soil of derision is mental replay. We mentally nurse and rehearse what people have done to us. It is a passive way of making people pay for what they have done to us. We must resist revenge by embracing forgiveness.

Forgiveness begins by choosing to turn off the replay button. Forgiveness may or may not be accompanied by the actual feelings of forgiveness. Forgiveness, at least in its inception, is an act of the will. We work at not rehearsing the offenses of others toward us. We battle, in the Lord's strength, the thoughts of revenge and feelings of resentment. It is hard, I know. But what are our options?

I suggest that there are only two options when someone has hurt us. One option is revenge. The seeds of ill-will, in the soil of derision, watered by mental replay will produce the fruit of revenge. In the process, a spirit of revenge creates a self-inflicted pain greater than the actual offense against us. The offense grows into a monster of evil.

The second option is forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a simple matter. It is often one of our great spiritual battles. However, God can enable us to redeem the principle of *replay*. Instead of replaying the offenses against us, we can choose to replay the gospel. *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* (Col. 3:13).

**Lastly, repay evil with good.** *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you"* (Prov. 25:21-22). One day, justice will come. Forgiveness frees us to shed the role we are not equipped to play - Judge. *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Rom 12:19, 21). Such is the power and freedom of the gospel at work in us.

Great Peace in the Lord

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