

Part 16: How to Not Destroy Your Neighbor

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 11:9-15

February 14, 2021

In the 1930's one man recognized that there were two primary hurdles which held the average American back from succeeding in life and business. Those two hurdles were how to communicate one's self, and how to interact with others.

In 1936 he published a book called: "How to Win Friends and Influence People." The author was Dale Carnegie and his subtitle was: "The only book you need to lead you to success."

Since its publication nearly 90 years ago, the book was still in Amazon's top 20 sales for this past week, is a staple for the self-help and leadership industry selling over 30 million copies worldwide.

Why is there such a market for books like these? Because people are eager to learn what will make them successful in their dealings with the world and with others.

The beauty of our study in the book of Proverbs is that it often lines up with the real longings in our lives. I'm going to read our text for us today and I want you to notice the way in which this passage also upholds the picture of a thriving private and public life: **Proverbs 11:9-15**.

This text wants to protect people from financial ruin and poor investments in verse 15, this passage wants to make us winsome in our counsel, and well respected in our community. This text speaks to the felt needs that our culture has an endless appetite for.

Yet, this text is not like any other self-help book. This is unique. While this passage addresses public perception and interpersonal communication, Solomon doesn't start with either of those two things.

While this book does provide the relational wisdom you might desire in life it actually begins, as we've seen all throughout Proverbs, with what you know about God.

This is what we will look at today. First we are going to see: **Personal Conviction** (vs. 9), then we will see in verses 10-11 **Public Witness**, and lastly in verses 12-15 **Interpersonal Wisdom**.

What's interesting about our passage today is it begins not with those who want to bless their community but with those who would destroy it.

Look at **Proverbs 11:9**. In verse 15 the wise man is cautious with his investments so that he is able to lend generously to those who need it. But here we see in verse nine that the godless man is flippant with his mouth and with it he would destroy his neighbor.

Solomon here doesn't tell us how the wicked would destroy his neighbor, but at this point we've seen that the words of the fool are often a double edged sword. Proverbs has already shown us that the babbling lips of a fool often conceal violence by intentionally seek to harm. But we've also seen that sometimes the mouth of a fool simply leads to ruin not because the person desires to deceive, but simply because what he communicates is not in accord with God's reality.

This is where we see the real source of this threat both to us and to our neighbor: his heart. This man is godless. Now, even in our post-Christian culture this word is still an offensive word isn't it? It tends to communicate a sense of total moral ruin.

While there is a moral connotation the biggest implication is just that this person is without God. This man does not know God, and therefore has a heart detached from the God who created us and the God who himself knows what's best for us.

Why is this dangerous? Look at what we saw last week **Proverbs 11:4**. The riches of this world cannot save us from death. Which means that in listening to these babbling mouths we might find ourselves destroyed now in a deceitful scheme or we might find ourselves destroyed later when we realize all the wisdom modeled for us in the world isn't able to satisfy and certainly isn't able to save.

It is like the dehydrated man drinking salt water because to quench his thirst not realizing that it is exactly what is killing him.

It's in the face of this ominous talker that we see the distinction of Christian wisdom. This is our first point today: **Personal Conviction**.

Look back again at **Proverbs 11:9**. Did you see that? You see Proverbs is not a merely pragmatic book where you find the best principles in life and apply them as you see fit.

Proverbs doesn't start with the principle of being wise in this world, Proverbs starts with the principle of being wise towards God. The righteous are delivered from the mouth of the wicked by their knowledge. We will get to the wonderful relational wisdom you need in society and in relationships but the relational wisdom of Proverbs starts with a relational knowledge of God and his righteousness.

Look back at **Proverbs 1:7**.

The principle of biblical wisdom starts with a conviction of the God of wisdom. Remember what we saw last week, the righteous are not those who just act righteously, the righteous are those act in faithfulness to God's loving care in their own life.

You can pick up most self-help books and apply it to your life regardless of your view on God, but Proverbs is not that kind of book. Proverbs is primarily a God-help book. God helps us by showing how faithful he is to bring salvation to his people in Jesus Christ.

This is where we learn to see the beauty of God in the gospel. In Jesus Christ we see that our hearts are the godless hearts, we are the ones destined for destruction but by grace God wakes us up to the reality of redemption in Jesus Christ.

We are woefully unrighteous, we have no hope against the mouth of man let alone the judgment of God. But Jesus gives us his righteousness by taking our sin. The more we come to know the depth of Jesus' work on the cross the more we find him trustworthy in life's difficult decisions.

How many of you get calls about your car's extended warranty?

These calls are at first really ominous. But what delivers us? Knowledge. At some point we realize that we never purchased an extended warranty and therefore we don't need to fear this.

When we see that Jesus himself purchased our deliverance from death, we can encounter the schemes of sin in our hearts and the schemes of man against us and we can say: I know I don't need this. I know I have in the gospel everything I need to stand firm in a difficult world.

In the face of those who would seek to destroy you, the righteous know God and are delivered. Why? Because they know they don't need to sin to save themselves from sin. They know they don't need to buy their satisfaction from a dissatisfied world.

Do you have this kind of relational knowledge of God in Jesus? Look at what Paul says in **Philippians 3:8-11**.

Life in this world is hard and difficult, there will be public places where you feel threatened and personal relationships which seem overwhelming, but the righteous know that trusting and obeying Jesus will always be the best course of action even when it's hardest.

This relational conviction that you must have in the gospel is key not only to your own deliverance, but it's also what your neighbors need to be delivered!

Where the wicked would destroy their neighbor, Solomon goes on to show that the righteous would seek to bless them. In other words what we know about God in the gospel is what gives us the ability to live uniquely as a witness not for godlessness, but for godly blessing.

This is where we now transition into our second point today: **Public Witness**.

Read with me: **Proverbs 11:9-11**.

Here we see the wonderful application of this first principle right? If the godless brings destruction to his neighbor, the righteous who know God bring joy to their community.

This public witness is part of why God created Adam and Eve in his own image. He created Adam and Eve and put them to work so that they might expand the garden, and as they expand the garden and filled the earth with offspring, other people would see the wonderful God of the Bible reflected throughout all of creation and they would be better off for it!

In Missoula, our city has taken up certain beautification projects and most of these look like public art. It's the painting of the electrical junction boxes on the streets and the murals we see around town.

Christians walking in righteousness are God's beautification program on the world. We are meant to be vibrant images of the infinite glory, goodness of the God who is only good and staggeringly loving.

In other words, pursuing righteousness is not only what is best for you, it is what is best for those around you. It is actually what loves your neighbor most deeply.

We see this in multiple places in scripture don't we, that even in a godless context like Babylon and Egypt, men like Daniel and Joseph were praised because of their uprightness and integrity in the city and in the workplace.

Christians generally provide a blessing to those around them. Now why is that? Well if we look at what we just saw in verse 9, it's because Christians see life through the knowledge of God. Which means that you know what God thinks about what harms us, and you know what God thinks about what helps us.

Meaning that when any Joe-blow seeks to help his community he has the whole spectrum he needs to think through and experiment with. The believer looks at how he can contribute to his community and he knows immediately that going against God's design for his creation is never the solution to our problems.

For example I was talking to one of our members here who is in healthcare and recognizes that women's care and reproductive health have generally been underserved in our society. But she also knows that the solution to this is not to create a culture of casual sex or abortion as those are clearly harmful to everyone involved when viewed from God's perspective.

This identifies two sides of a coin that Christians need to become comfortable with.

The first is that as we follow Jesus privately our public life will follow and act as a witness to God. Look at what Jesus himself says in **Matthew 5:16**.

We should be optimistic that as we seek to pursue holiness and live life in light of God's glory that others will see that joy and beauty that comes from that as well.

This means that we should desire to have influence and a voice in places like government, school boards, non-profits, neighborhood communities, study groups and in the church!

In fact the goal of our community groups that we are humbly working towards is that we would encourage one another and serve the city in this very way. Why do we want to do this? Because it is good for us to obey God in this way and it is actually good for our community as well.

But there is a flip side in this. We no longer live in an Israelite city where everyone is trying to follow the same God. We live in a post-Christian culture where what is seen as loving and righteous in the eyes of God is sometimes seen as hostility in the eyes of the world.

This isn't new. In Acts 19, the gospel goes forth mightily in Ephesus, people are coming to Jesus left and right. But then a riot happens to remove the disciples from the city. Why? Not because it was illegal to preach Christ, but because so many people had stopped worshipping idols that it destroyed the businesses of the idol makers in the city.

In Acts chapter 16 Paul and Silas cast the demon out of a young girl who was not only spiritually oppressed by who was being exploited by her masters as a fortune teller. When they freed her from the evil spirit within her, which was also the one providing the fortune telling spirit, look at what happened: **Acts 16:19-20**.

The gospel freed a woman from physical and spiritual slavery, but it threatened the lively hood of those who profit on unjust gain.

This world is not heaven, and the church is not the Kingdom of God. Which means that in this life gospel principles and gospel realities of love and justice and flourishing will not match up with the love, justice and flourishing of our world.

But this is why we must look back up to where this passage started: a robust knowledge of God and the comfort of righteousness. We live righteously because we do actually care what the world thinks! We do want them to stand in awe of the God who knows what's best for us. But at times when the world thinks us crazy, we must look at what Jesus had done for us and ask ourselves what God thinks of us.

The only way you will stand in those positions of opposition and not default to fighting evil with evil is if you have learned to take deep comfort from the righteousness of Christ and know that you stand in that moment robed in the affection of God even if met with the disdain of man.

But where lives of righteousness may not be praised in the city, how much more should they be praised here in the church. Good things are rarely contagious for us, but here we see that the benefit of the righteous is!

As a body let us cheer the righteousness we see in others as we ourselves are encouraged to live our lives in joyful obedience to Jesus Christ.

But this is where Solomon transitions away from your activity in the broader community and now zooms into our third point today: **Interpersonal Wisdom**.

Read with me: **Proverbs 11:12-14**.

Three verses, back to back to back, all which deal with how we interact with others on the basis of our words. Specifically what is being contrasted is the way in which the wicked use their words and the way in which the righteous use their words, all of which actually reveal the heart of the one speaking.

When we view these three passages as a whole what we actually see isn't a guide of when to speak and when not to speak, what we actually see is a guide for our hearts when we do speak.

We are going to spend a bit on each one of these as each is really practical to how we as a church pursue discipleship and counsel.

First we see that when it comes to interpersonal relationships the wise **Start with love not hate**.

Proverbs 11:12.

There is a contrast here between the belittling speak of the fool and the silence of the wise man. But more specifically we see assumed contrast of the heart here. The fool belittles others because he lacks sense, or to put it another way, he lacks heart.

The fool belittles people because they do not have the right heart towards them. The wise, are different.

The principle here is not that you will never speak to someone who differs on opinions or who has sinned against you. The principle is that when the righteous have the proper understanding of their own heart before God, and see how God loved them through Jesus, they do not turn towards those who are in sin with a desire to belittle them.

Understanding your own heart before God saved you allows you to change your heart towards those who are of a different opinion before you.

One big downside of our 21st century world is that much of our conversation has become depersonalized through social media. Meaning we rarely encounter people, but we often encounter the opinions of people.

The difficult side effect of this is that we begin to interact with people as if they are opinions and not people. It's very easy to belittle those who are seen only as a competing opinions. But Jesus didn't die for opinions he died for people, and people with bad opinions at that.

That's not to say there aren't bad opinions, and dangerous mistakes, but that is to say that the Christian understands that apart from the grace of God in their life it could be themselves in that place.

And you know what, the one with a right understanding of one's own self understands that they might be the one with the wrong view. And were that ever to come to our attention don't we want someone correcting us whose goal is not to belittle or hate us, but to love us and restore us to a more biblical understanding?

Second, the righteous are responsible to **Pursue Help not Harm**. Read with me: **Proverbs 11:13**.

So here we have a scenario where the wicked receive some secret from a friend, and they immediately go about slandering and revealing that secret. But the wise person is trustworthy and keeps the thing covered.

What does this mean? It means a couple things. First we should pursue the type of relationship where our brothers and sisters, and even our neighbors feel safe enough to share with us the difficult and even shameful things they are going through.

Second, it means that when people share these things with you that you prove trustworthy with them and seek not to slander and reveal but to care and to cover.

When Solomon is talking of secrets here, I don't he's talking about someone telling you good news like: "I lost ten pounds." I bet it's more like, "I'm having a really hard time in my marriage," or "I really blew it and messed up in this area of sexual sin."

When that happens our hearts dictate what we do with that information. The careless person can use that information to harm the individual. They can share it because they want others to think less of the secret teller. Or they can actually share it so that they might leverage their own standing: "So and so trust me so much that they told me this!" Or "So and so struggles with this and I don't understand how a Christian could even do that!"

The intent of such speaking is not from a helpful heart, it's actually from a heart that doesn't care if that individual is harmed.

But the trustworthy spirit wants to help in a genuine way. It knows that the nature of the secret implies a level of vulnerability and they want to help with that. So they carefully invite others into the situation not to create a peep show, but to gain wisdom to care for this individual.

Look at what James says: **James 5:19-20**. Covering sins doesn't mean not addressing secrets, but it does look like helping them with all the gentleness of grace we can to bring them into the light of the gospel.

So a question to ask yourself when a secret is shared with you is am I being trustworthy both with the gospel of grace and with the individual who has confided in me.

But what we've seen is that in interpersonal care the wise person is loving not belittling, is committed to helping by grace instead of harming, and now we can actually learn to trust the goodness of faithful and biblical counsel. This is **Counsel not Carelessness**.

Read with me **Proverbs 11:14**.

Why do we lovingly speak godly counsel to those around us? Because if we aren't willing to provide, as part of God's people, guidance to our church and our neighbors then the community will fall.

Quite frankly, it's easier to see your brothers and sisters in Christ living in a way that is sinful, or making decisions without considering the impact of the gospel, and to just stay silent. But Proverbs 11:9 already frames out hearts: we are not those who would destroy our neighbors but we are those who trust in righteousness.

The greatest commands to love God and love others prohibits us from not caring. This again is why we have membership at Sovereign Hope. Membership is where we say to our fellow members, I want you to guide me back to righteousness when it appears I might have chosen the wrong path. It says that when you're wrestling with a difficult decision about a relationship or your career that you want those who love God to help you consider the options more clearly.

This means that you understand your own role as part of the abundance of counselors. Built into this statement on counsel is the affirmation of humility. We need each other to care for each other. I am not competent to provide exclusive counsel to each of you, my counsel is better when considered also with the counsel of others.

This also means that it is a privilege to have others who want to speak into your life even if at times it seems annoying. This is why we must look at the unity of this text. If we see that the wise speak out of humility of understanding to love not hate, and to carefully help not harm, to bring safety not shame then we can honestly say "Who wouldn't want this help?" When others approach us and help guide us to the path of righteousness we too must learn to trust in righteousness, that this is part of God's good for me.

Without righteousness everything fails, but when we know God through the righteousness of Jesus we know what path is best. We know how to live in public and care for others even when it's difficult. This is the hope for us as individuals and us as a local church.