

Neighborly Advice Proverbs 3:27-35

Turn in your Bibles today to **Proverbs 3:27-35**. It is in this passage that we will see how wisdom works through some of the more challenging relationships we may have in life. Together we'll uncover three truths from Solomon as he stresses how we can relate to others around us. It is my desire that we be led by the Holy Spirit to encourage improvement in relationships with others by practicing these godly virtues.

Live wisely toward the needy

Live wisely toward the neighbor

Live wisely toward the nasty

I. LIVE WISELY TOWARD THE NEEDY – v. 27-28

The story is told of a High School football coach in South Carolina named Harold Jones. It's the 1970's. In the south and in the '70's he put his reputation on the line by extending kindness to an illiterate, mentally challenged young black man. Day after day from the practice field, the coach watched him push his shopping cart filled with simple treasures but it wasn't until an incident occurred in the life of this young man that the coach began to take a greater interest in him. One day a number of his players tied him up and locked him in a tool shed.

The coach began to take time to get to know the boy. He discovered through talking with him that the boy had an interest in radios and Motown music. From then on he was given the nickname "Radio." Giving him a place of honor along the sidelines, Coach Jones made him the team manager. He had a contagious enthusiasm that excited the crowd. Eventually he began attending school and was able to make morning announcements over the PA.

But there were cruel and heartless people who continued to marginalize him and mock him, showing no compassion or understanding for him.

In spite of all this Coach Jones continued to stand by him and more than once he was challenged to stand his ground in affirming his position toward the young man.

In the movie made about this story we learn that the reason Coach Jones took such an interest in the life of Radio was because of an incident earlier in life where he chose to ignore a need. Regret and guilt plagued him until he had this opportunity to reach out to someone in need. His example of kindness and helpfulness changed an entire community where previously they would have cast him aside.

Verses 27-35 present a series of instructions on how to treat others, in a word, to show neighborliness. We see five negative commands with neighborly advice. They begin with two simple words: **"DO NOT."** It seems that a negative command is clearer than a positive command. Which has greater clarity?

"Go outside and play in the yard."

"Go outside, but DO NOT play in the street."

Notice in verses 27 and 28 the first two of these commands as they relate to living wisely toward the needy. (Read verses)

The first thing we see is do not deny good.

A. Do Not Deny Good – v. 27

Most scholars understand **verse 27** in two ways. The verse literally means **"Do not withhold good from its owner."** In other words, it means that we need to pay our obligations immediately, we should not procrastinate or deny them what is rightfully theirs.

1. **First it speaks to paying wages promptly.** In those days people were paid wages on a daily basis for their work. **(Steve, how would you like to do that today?)** People did their work and at the end of the day they all lined up and got paid. Jesus told the story about a guy who needed workers so he kept

going back to the town square to find workers. But at the end of the day when they were paid there were complainers who thought the owner should pay them more.

Without refrigeration or canned goods to make meals they bought things daily so they needed to be paid daily. It was a principle very clearly outlined in the Law.

Deuteronomy 24:15 “Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”

If you owe someone, pay up.

2. Now the second way scholars view this verse is not to withhold help from a needy person when we have the tangible means to meet that need. It teaches us the general principle of being generous with our neighbor when there is a legitimate need. Both the Old and New Testaments speak to our obligation to help the needy, especially the widows and orphans.

Leviticus 9:9-10

James 4:17 “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

God takes seriously the business of helping the needy. **Deuteronomy 10:18** notes that He defends the cause of the orphan and widow and shows love to foreigners. Denying or delaying help is considered sin when we have the means to assist. Who are those that you know a need exists. **What is that need and how can you help?**

John takes the idea a bit further than the Old Testament law in Deuteronomy and the admonition of James in the New. **I John 3:17-18 (The Amplified Bible)** “But if anyone has this world’s goods (resources for sustaining life) and sees his brother and fellow believer in need, yet closes his heart of compassion against him, how can the love of God live and remain in him? Little

children, let us not love (merely) in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth (in practice and in sincerity).”

Now, admittedly I struggle with this a bit. **What constitutes a need? Who constitutes the needy?** I think we all tend to be a bit gun shy when it comes to people standing on the corner with their little signs telling us they’re unemployed and need to feed a family of 6, or they’ll work for food but here they are standing idle. We hear or read about too many scams that leave us very skeptical about helping others. **One cardboard sign I read recently asked people to donate so the person could buy a house.**

A guy who admittedly didn’t have a job and wasn’t looking for a job posted a video on Youtube this last week asking people to send him money for rent, clothes and beer.

We’re cautious with our money, and don’t want to throw it around willy nilly.

When I read verse 27 I think it provides the key that helps to qualify just who the needy person. It says that that we are not to withhold good from those “**who deserve it.**” John says it is the stuff that sustains life. Now we don’t know everyone’s situation, but we ought to know people within our own congregation well enough to know if a need is legitimate. Solomon has a lot to say about and against the lazy person and Paul says we ought to avoid the lazy person.

Once in a while, not very often, but once in a while I’ll get a note from a pastor friend who shares a need within his congregation. He’s passing the need on to other local churches to see if additional help can be obtained. Knowing these pastors I don’t mind bringing a need to you because I can trust them that the need is real and valid.

We need to be observant to those around us in order to assist as we are able. It may not be monetary. It may be fixing a meal or taking some groceries or helping with car or home repair or just sitting with them when they are lonely. It may be baby-sitting so a young couple who lives next door can get out for an evening when they have not had the opportunity for months. The point is, observe and act, don't walk around with blinders on.

The need to give is sometimes greater than the need to get. If it is in our ability, our power, we need to heed the advice of verse 27 and not delay in doing good for others. Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

We would all agree that there is no lack of needs. Here's what I believe to be the point of the passage: *we can't help everyone but we can help someone; we can't help with all needs, but we can help with some needs.* When it is in our ability, we must assist those in need.

Galatians 6:10 bears this principle: **“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”**

Then we see in verse 28 that we should not deceive.

B. Do Not Deceive – v. 28

Now here is what some people would do when it came to debt whether it was paying someone for work done or repaying a loan given. Let's say that you borrowed money from someone today and agreed that at the end of the week when you got your paycheck on Friday you would repay what you borrowed. Friday rolls around and the guy you borrowed money from comes by to collect the amount he loaned you. But instead of repaying what you owed you tell him to come back tomorrow, when in fact you did have it to pay back.

Dorothy Sayers may not be a name known here in America, but in England she was a well known author and playwright. Among her contributions to the world of literature were a series of murder mysteries. One of her novels beautifully illustrates this verse. Lord Peter Wimsey had purchased a home in the country where he and his bride were to spend their honeymoon. Late on the night of their wedding they arrived only to find that the place was locked and in complete shambles. The arrangement made for the purchase of the home of which they had paid cash was that everything would be in perfect order – the owner had given them that reassurance. Finding a way into the house they also found evidence that the previous owner had continued to live there after the sale. But it appeared that he had vanished.

As the story unfolds we find that he was deep in debt. Among those he owed money to was the gardener who had invested in one of the owner's many ventures. When he demanded payment, was only given promises. They fell into a heated argument.

On further investigation of the house Lord Wimsey found the previous owner dead in the basement. When they searched the body, they found a very large sum of money, the money Lord Wimsey had paid for the house. All along he had the money to pay the gardener but gave only excuses.

Again the Old Testament law is very clear: **“Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.”**
Leviticus 19:13

Solomon is advising that if we have borrowed money and have the means to pay someone back as promised, honor the agreement and don't make excuses. Excuses are only a cover for selfishness and greed. Maybe the person hopes the other will forget the matter. Do not deceive.

We need to live wisely toward the needy.
We need to live wisely toward our neighbor.

II. LIVE WISELY TOWARD OUR NEIGHBOR – v. 29-30

The wise person not only plans to do good, but also purposely plans not to do evil, especially when it comes to his neighbors. If we could say it another way, we would say that the wise person chooses not to have a quarrel with his neighbor, but rather to live in peace or be at peace with him.

Would you agree that neighbors sometimes argue over the most ridiculous things and the arguments get so heated that violence breaks out?

In December of last year a man who happened to be drunk, shouted at a neighbor about something. An argument broke out, the man went into his house retrieved a shotgun, shot once in the air and then shot out the window of the ladies SUV, with her still inside.

“Your tree limbs hang too far over my fence.
“Your dog is digging holes in my flower bed.
“Your kids are too noisy playing in the back yard.
“Your grass needs to be mown more often.
“Your (and you fill in the blanks).

Verse 29 tells us that we should not devise evil or plot harm against a neighbor.

A. Do Not Devise Evil – v. 29

The basic meaning of the word devise is to cut into something. It was sometimes used to describe an engraver cutting into a piece of metal. It was also used in farming to speak about the furrow a farmer would dig when plowing. Used metaphorically, it speaks of plotting evil and is always connected with doing evil. It refers both to thinking of something to do against the neighbor that is wrong and in carrying it out. (Ex: Ahab/Naboth, Saul/David)

The idea then that Solomon is conveying is that the wise person will not plot evil against his neighbor to harm him. He is to be treated with respect and fairness and decency, even if you don't get that kind of respect in return. In this way you are showing him the love of God. Harming him violates the trust he otherwise should have in you.

Paul tells us in **Romans 12:18** to do what is right and appropriate and to live at peace with all people. Proverbs is saying the same thing. Don't act maliciously. Don't purposely pick fights or have arguments.

Paul admonishes the **Colossians (3:13)** that if someone has a quarrel with another, we are to forgive just as Christ forgave us.

So we see that in verse 29 we are not to devise or plot against them and in verse 30 we are told not to dispute with the neighbor.

B. Do Not Dispute – v. 30

I Samuel 25:1-17 (14-17) (Nabal)

Just who is your neighbor?

Your neighbor might be right next door.
Your neighbor might be the person in the locker next to yours at school.
Your neighbor might be the person next to you on the assembly line or in the next cubicle or the check-out clerk at Kroger.

When we investigated the new lighting for the church parking lot, Rich spent a lot of time evaluating what would provide sufficient lighting, better than what we had and enough to provide illumination of the parking lot for people here late at night, especially in the winter. He was concerned that if the lighting was too bright it would create tension with some of the condo owners on the south side. We want to be good neighbors.

We need to take down some trees because they're leaning over the condos. We could have just hacked them down and called it good, but we want

to be good neighbors, so Art has contacted the condo association to let them know of our intentions. We want to be good neighbors.

We want to minimize tension so that our example of Christlikeness is evident in all that we do in the community. We don't want to do things that will purposely tick people off leaving them with a sour taste of Christ and Christianity. We don't want just to appear to be religious. Wasn't that the whole point of Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, found in **Luke 10**, where He qualified who should be considered our neighbor and how we should assist them? Without stating it, you could infer that the priest and Pharisee who did nothing to help the "neighbor" were in essence plotting or devising evil against the guy because they were willing to let him lay there and die.

Just how are we to treat our neighbor? Jesus gives this advice found in **Mark 12:28-31**.

What kind of relationship do you have with your neighbor?

Live wisely toward the needy.
Live wisely toward the neighbor.
Live wisely toward the nasty.

III. LIVE WISELY TOWARD THE NASTY – v. 31-35

Here is the fifth **"Do not"** principle brought out in this passage if we are to live wisely with others. Do not desire.

A. Do Not Desire – v. 31

Envy is a powerful emotion. Unfortunately its motivation is often in the wrong direction. It often results in taking a wrong path.

Bertrand Russell once said that envy is one of the most potent causes of unhappiness. The person

with envy is not only rendered unhappy, he also wishes to inflict misfortune on the other person with whom he is envious.

Envy is resentful emotion when a person lacks what someone else has and something you want. It covets anything from possessions to positions to profits to personality to popularity.

Now, we use the term loosely like when someone sends pictures of their vacation in Hawaii and we say we envy them. Real envy stirs up emotions that ignite a series of events that can be devastating with long term ramifications. Bitterness and resentment become infused with the envious person. **Hebrews 12:15** warns against bitterness and concludes that when it takes root and springs up in a person's life, many others become corrupted by its poison.

Proverbs 27:4 "Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy?"

(NLT) "...who can survive the destructiveness of jealousy."

James 3:16 "For where envying and strife (selfish ambition and chaos – NLT) is there is every evil work."

It was envy that led Eve to take of the forbidden fruit because she believed God was holding something back from her.

It was envy that led Cain to kill Abel because Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God.

It was envy that led 11 brothers to devise an evil plot to get rid of their obnoxious brother Joseph. It was envy that led Saul on a wild chase after David to kill him.

It was envy that led David to commit adultery with Uriah because he had a more beautiful wife, which led to deception and murder.

It was envy that led Haman to contrive a plan against the Jews on account of Mordecai.

It was envy that led political leaders to scheme against Daniel.

It was envy that led the religious leaders to plot against Jesus.

Some of you will remember in 1994 that it was out of envy that led Tonya Harding to plot an attack on Nancy Kerrigan to dethrone her from the US skating title by hiring a hit man to break her leg.

Where ever there is envy violence of some kind will follow. That's why the advice of Solomon is so critical to heed. Envy does something inside that can cause us to do irrational things.

Don't envy what the wicked have.

Don't envy their nice cars or big homes or fancy clothes.

Don't envy popularity or prestige or some position they got and you thought you deserved.

Don't envy someone's grades or athletic prowess.

Don't envy what the wicked have because it will only lead you to trouble.

He is a person who has chosen the wrong path. **So why is it important not to envy them? Verse 32** gives a very compelling reason. **"The Lord detests them."** They are an abomination to Him. This kind of man is loathing to the Lord. The choice should be clear. **Would you rather choose a path that the Lord detests and hates or one in which you have a good relationship with Him? Is there really any choice? You don't want to be in the same company with the wicked do you?**

God is against the wicked.

In verse 32 we see that the Lord hates the perverse, but he counsels with the righteous.

In verse 33 we see that the Lord curses the wicked, but He blesses the righteous.

In verse 34 we see that the Lord mocks those that mock Him, but He gives grace or favor to the humble. A mocker is someone who ridicules the things of God.

James 4:6 "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

In verse 35 we see that the Lord shames the fool but He honors the wise.

The path to follow seems pretty clear. The choice is yours and mine to make.

Jacob and Esau were two brothers, twins, who shared the same parents, brought up under the same moral and religious teachings.

Esau founded a house of infidelity, worldliness, and injustice. His descendants, the Edomites became the bitter enemies of God's people. His descendants left a deep scar on Israel. Of his descendants it was Herod the Great who murdered the babies in Bethlehem. Herod Antipas murdered John the Baptist and openly mocked Jesus. Herod Agrippa I murdered James and sought to kill Peter. **Malachi 3:1** explains that the land of Esau's inheritance was left as a desert wasteland for jackals. God mocks the mockers and detests the wicked.

On the other hand, there was Jacob. He founded the lineage of the Messiah. His sons became the founders of the 12 tribes of Israel. Moses was a descendant. Jesus was a descendant. God blesses the righteous, the ones who follow Him in wisdom.

The wicked inherit shame and disgrace.

The wise inherit honor and glory.

The name David Livingstone is one in which many know even today. In the 19th century he served as a medical missionary with the London Missionary Society in Africa. He came from a very humble and poor family, yet rose above his circumstances to become a doctor.

He had a goal to evangelize Africa through his efforts as a medical missionary. But in the process saw firsthand the horrors of the slave trade so he established a second goal – to emancipate the slaves.

His stories awoke the consciousness of the English people. In his quest to both evangelize and emancipate the people he had come to love, his neighbors, he continued deeper and deeper into the interior navigating the many tangle of rivers that wound through the country. He was then driven to find the hidden sources of Africa's greatest river the Nile River, which fed many of the tributaries he followed. And so it was that he added a third quest to his list of goals to accomplish –explore.

His greatest desire was to live for the glory of God and secondly to live for the good of the African people. Those were his two driving ambitions. He embraced the greatest two commandments to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and to love his neighbor as himself.

For all his efforts he was praised by his countrymen. When he disappeared somewhere in Africa, the New York Herald newspaper funded the expedition of Henry Stanley to search for him.

David Livingstone died in a village in what is present-day Zambia in 1873. He took his final breaths kneeling in prayer at his bedside. Britain wanted the body in order to give it a proper burial, but the tribe would not give his body to them. Finally the tribe relented, but cut the heart out and put a note on the body that said, "You can have his body, but his heart belongs in Africa!"

Livingstone's heart was buried under a tree near the spot where he died. His body was returned to England where it was given a State funeral and buried in Westminster Abbey. Perhaps the greatest tribute was written in a magazine that typically was devoted to humor. Of David Livingstone it wrote:

He needs no epitaph to guard his name,
Which men shall prize while worthy work is known.
He lived and died for God, be this his fame,
LET MARBLE CRUMBLE, THIS IS LIVING STONE.

When it comes to being neighborly, honor or disgrace, the choice is yours to make and the consequences or rewards for that choice are the Lord's to give.

What kind of neighbor will you choose to be?

Live wisely toward the needy.

Live wisely toward the neighbor.

Live wisely toward the nasty.