



www.mitchkruse.com

Wisdom Worksheet: 12 Words to the Wise

Discretion (*mezimmah*) “Being a Cream Separator” (Prov. 1:4; 2:1-22)

Introduction

Have you ever heard the saying, “The cream rises to the top?” The adage stems from how cream is made—ala a cream separator. A cream separator introduces air to milk which causes it to spin. The separator’s motion results in the cream rising to the top. Originally, this was done so that dairy farmers could maximize their revenue from their milk by producing a commodity that would last longer. If they did not use a cream separator, their entire product could spoil. Consequently, they separated the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*.

Discretion means “to separate.” Proverbs tells us that during interpersonal conflict, we need to introduce the air of the Holy Spirit in order to separate what is *valuable* from what is *vulnerable*. It is this Spirit of Christ Who allows what is *valuable*, the cream, to rise to the top. Without *discretion*, our lives, our relationships, and our efforts to manage conflict will all spoil. Consequently, we must ask this question, “*When two objects attempt to occupy the same space at the same time, how will we separate the valuable from the vulnerable?*” In essence, how will we allow the cream to rise to the top so that we do not let it all spoil? Wisdom’s answer is *discretion*. From Proverbs, we learn that *discretion* separates: (1) *wisdom from foolishness*, (2) *walk from talk*, (3) *long term benefits from short term pleasure*, and (4) *right from wrong*.

(1) Wisdom from Foolishness (Prov. 2:1-11; 11:22)



www.mitchkruse.com

First, *discretion separates wisdom from foolishness*. As he set the course for his collection of wise sayings, Solomon emphasized how our search for wisdom must be paramount in our lives in order for us to choose it. We cannot discern *wisdom from foolishness* if we cannot distinguish the authentic version of God's heart intersecting with street smarts from a counterfeit when we see it.

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you” (Prov. 2:11).

In order to discover wisdom, it must be of great value to us. We must be willing to accept it, store it up, listen for it, apply our hearts to it, call for it, cry aloud for it, look and search for it as for hidden treasure, understanding that it comes from the person of God. His Spirit provides the discernment between wisdom and foolishness so that the cream can rise to the top in our interpersonal conflict. Of course, the best, or most



www.mitchkruse.com

valuable, of the two is wisdom. Left to ourselves, foolishness rises to the top during our conflict with others, leaving us *vulnerable*.

Solomon noted how foolish a beautiful woman looks when she lacks *discretion*, “*Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion*” (Prov. 11:22). Lasting beauty flows from the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 31:30). That fear of the Lord is humility directed toward God (Prov. 9:10; 11:2). The ability to separate *wisdom from foolishness* flows from humility toward our Creator that includes an all-out pursuit of wisdom from His Spirit Who protects us from foolish behavior and its consequences (Prov. 2:11). His *discretion* guides us to separate the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Separate wisdom from foolishness. Think of a beautiful girl from your high school years who lacked *discretion*, the ability to separate life’s most *valuable* from its most *vulnerable*. Now think of someone who had less beauty on the outside, but lasting beauty on the inside. Who is more beautiful today? The beginning of separating *wisdom from foolishness* is humility toward the Spirit of God accompanied by an all-out pursuit of His heart intersecting with street smarts. Begin your journey of *discretion*, separating *wisdom from foolishness*, by storing up Scripture in your heart. Memorize one verse from the Bible, and let it sink into your heart as you apply it to your life. The verse might come from Proverbs, other Old Testament writings, the words of Jesus, or a writer in the New Testament—perhaps James, the half-brother of Jesus, who focused on wisdom.

(2) Walk from Talk (Prov. 2:12-15; 3:21-26)



www.mitchkruse.com

Second, *discretion separates walk from talk*. Solomon noted how we must be able to discern the difference between a person's walk and his talk when they are inconsistent, even when we might be the ones behaving with the dichotomy.

“Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways” (Prov. 2:12-15).

Walking in “*dark ways*” is often combined with perverse talk, or speech that alters truth. Those *vulnerable* paths are *crooked* and *dark* as opposed to *valuable* paths which are *straight* and full of *light*. *Dark* is evil. *Light* is good. Consequently, the person who walks those dark paths often disguises his speech with false light. *Discretion* from the Spirit of God guides us to separate the two, so that when motivated by hearing what we want to hear, we do not act naively upon those words representing false light.

Solomon warned that we do not lose our focus on *discretion* because it will give us a safe walk, one that is straight and full of light. That walk is commensurate with our talk when we pursue the Holy Spirit.

“My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared” (Prov. 3:21-26).



www.mitchkruse.com

“An ornament to grace your neck” refers to the heart beating through the arteries. *Discretion* gives us life that flows from the heart (Prov. 3:21). That life is perpetuated by a heart that beats for God. Walking with Him allows us to look past the words of false light and recognize a walk that is apart from His design. We must discern this irony even when it is our own walk that does not match our talk. Separating *walk from talk* equips us to distinguish what is *valuable* from what is *vulnerable*.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Separate walk from talk. When you engage with another person and experience negative conflict—tension that includes at least one sinful option—begin to use *discretion* to separate that person’s walk from his talk. *Look* past his words into his behavior and weigh the two. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in this process and help you choose accordingly. Let the cream rise to the top as you separate the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*.

(3) Long Term Benefits from Short Term Pleasure (Prov. 2:16-19; 5:1-6)

Third, *discretion separates long term benefits from short term pleasure.* Solomon described wisdom’s long term benefits that result from resisting the temptation to pursue short term pleasure.

“It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life” (Prov. 2:16-19).



www.mitchkruse.com

Discretion allows us to recognize the difference between *long term benefits* and *short term pleasure*, most notably when it is difficult to do so. When temptation surrounds us, we need the Holy Spirit to guide us to the safety of long term benefits. He upholds our ability to see that safe harbor amidst a clouded and stormy environment. Solomon was clear in his description of *discretion*'s benefit during these circumstances.

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not” (Prov. 5:1-6).

The consequences of short term pleasure include long term detriments—the opposite of long term benefits. Thus, making the distinction between long term benefits and short term pleasure means equating selfish short term gain with long term pain. When it comes to temptation, first, we need to play it all the way out in our minds, specifically noting the consequences of the perceived short term gain juxtaposed with the long term benefits of obedience. Second, we must ask the Holy Spirit for *discretion* to *separate long term benefits from short term pleasure*. Finally, we must listen to His prompting. *Discretion* needs to be maintained in our hearts in order for our behavior and our words to move away from any such temptation (Prov. 5:2). The agony of falling prey to the temptation is simply not worth the few moments of selfish gratification. *Discretion* equips us to separate the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*.



www.mitchkruse.com

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Separate long term benefits from short term pleasure. Are you nearing or in a temptation toward the short term pleasure of selfish gratification? If so, play it all the way out in your mind. Not the lustful experience, but the consequences of such. Include in those images: the loss of credibility in your community, the damage to family relationships, the infrequency of existing friendships, the delay of meeting immediate ministry opportunities, the weakening of marketplace productivity, the division of assets, the reduction of autonomy, and the increase of economic burden. Compare those images with the long term benefits that *discretion* offers: gained credibility in your community, deepened family relationships, frequent friendships, responding to ministry opportunities, strengthened marketplace productivity, whole assets, increased autonomy, and decreased economic burden. Ask a loving God to make clear which is best for you. Listen to His prompting to separate the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*.

(4) Right from Wrong (Prov. 2:20-22; 8:12-13)

Fourth, *discretion* separates *right from wrong*. Too often in our culture it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so. In 3,000 years, little has changed. Read how Solomon described the benefits of *discretion's* protection as he juxtaposed right and wrong.

“Then you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it” (Prov. 2:20-22).



www.mitchkruse.com

Righteous refers to “who is right in God’s sight.” Its antonym is *wicked* which means “who is wrong in God’s sight.” The Spirit of God guides us to make the distinction between the two including *what* is right and *what* is wrong, meaning *behavior*. Unfortunately, left to ourselves, we choose to determine what is right and what is wrong based on our own fallen, inconsistent, inequitable standards. Connecting with the Spirit of God in order to discern what is right or wrong in His sight appears elementary outside conflict, but becomes advanced in its difficulty to do so during the heat of interpersonal tension. Solomon reiterated that we need wisdom in order to do so.

“I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (Prov. 8:12-13).

Once again, *discretion* flows from an all-out pursuit of wisdom that begins with humility directed toward God (Prov. 8:12). When we bend the knees of our hearts to Him we learn to hate what is wrong because God hates what is wrong along with its source which is pride (Prov. 8:13). That humility toward our heavenly Father is what leads to His Spirit being placed to dwell in us. Paul referred to that Spirit as the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). He guides us in our *discretion* to separate life’s most *valuable* from its most *vulnerable* including *right from wrong*.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Separate right from wrong. Fear the Lord. Humble your heart, your desires, as well as your time, talent, and treasures to God in order to wisely implement *discretion* between right and wrong in your life. Operate by yielding to the judgment of His Spirit



www.mitchkruse.com

in you, rather than defaulting to your own fallen, inconsistent, inequitable determination of what is right and wrong. Pray to God specifically regarding your request to know the difference.

Conclusion

In conflict, we use *discretion* to separate: (1) *wisdom from foolishness*, (2) *walk from talk*, (3) *long term benefits from short term pleasure*, and (4) *right from wrong* so that the cream will rise to the top, rather than letting our lives, our relationships, and our efforts to manage conflict all spoil. We will not be the one's separating the *valuable* from the *vulnerable*; rather, it will be the Spirit of Christ in us.