



www.mitchkruse.com

## ***Wisdom Worksheet: 12 Words to the Wise***

### ***Justice (mishpat) (Prov. 1:3; 16:11; 17:15; 21:3; 28:5)***

#### **Introduction**

How do you apply justice to your relationships when conflict has occurred? The third and final pearl in the strand of *morality* is *justice (mishpat* in Hebrew) (Prov. 1:3). Whereas the pearl of *righteousness* precedes adjustments in conflict, and the pearl of *equity* is often applied during adjustments in conflict, the pearl of *justice* is most predominant after adjustments in conflict. *Justice* comes from the Latin root meaning *lawful*. It applies to God's moral law, our civil laws, our organizational rules, and our relational boundaries. The repentant thief on the cross referred to *justice* as "*getting what our deeds deserve*" (Luke 23:41). The truth is revealed. The wicked get punished. The innocent go free.

When we think of justice, we often see in our minds the imagery of scales. Solomon referenced how these scales affected those in the marketplace. "*Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making*" (Prov. 16:11). Three thousand years ago, scales were used to determine the weight and correlating market value of goods exchanged. The goods for sale were placed on one side of the scale. On the other side was a measurement bag of weights often comprised of stones. It didn't take long for a market-maker to learn how to circumvent justice. When buying goods, the owner of the scales would secretly *add to* the weights in the measurement bag; thus, *receiving more for less*. When selling goods, he would secretly *subtract from* the weights in the measurement bag; thus, *delivering less for more* (Lev.



www.mitchkruse.com

19:35-36). All of this occurred while the unsuspecting party to the transaction had assumed that the measurement bag had weighed what the buyer or seller had said.

In applying the scales of *justice* to our interpersonal conflict, we are tempted to either secretly *add to* or *subtract from* the truth inside our weighing process in an effort to tip the scales in our favor. We speak more than we listen; we act on one side of the story; we are partial to the people who benefit us; and we promote division. The result is *injustice*: the truth is concealed; the wicked go free; and the innocent are punished (Prov. 17:15). However, the God Who is just requires that we measure justly. Jesus said, “*With the measure you use, it will be measured to you*” (Matt. 7:2).

Justice is paramount for our relationships from God’s perspective. “*To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice*” (Prov. 21:3). “*More acceptable*” implies a weighting system with God—no amount of sacrifice outweighs what is *right and just*. Jesus taught *justice* as one of the weightier components of the law—a component that led to and was inseparable from sacrificial giving (Matt. 23:23).

As with wisdom, justice begins with a humble pursuit of God. “*Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it fully*” (Prov. 28:5).

Justice begins with the Lord because He is just (2 Thess. 1:6; Isaiah 30:18).

Consequently, the indwelling of His Spirit requires us to act justly in our relationships (Micah 6:8; Jer. 7:5-7). The justice that resides in the heart of God was directed through the humility of Abraham to reach all future generations (Gen. 18:19). David said that when we humble our hearts to the Lord, He leads us in justice (Ps. 25:9 NASB). A man after God’s own heart, King David administered justice and righteousness for all his



people (2 Sam. 8:15; cf. 1 Chron. 18:14). Solomon humbly asked God to give him justice for conflict management (1 Kings 3:11). God granted his request (1 Kings 3:28). In a study of Proverbs, we see that Solomon had uncovered four weights inside justice's measurement bag: (1) *listening*, (2) *equal opportunity*, (3) *impartiality*, and (4) *resolving conflict*. If we *add to* or *subtract from* one or more of these weights, we elude justice in our relationships.

### **(1) Listening (Prov. 18:13)**

The first weight in the measurement bag of *justice* is *listening*. Solomon said, "*He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame*" (Prov. 18:13). In order to act justly, we must listen beyond the surface of the words to the underlying interests in the heart of each person involved in our conflict. Too often in our interpersonal conflict, we are so quick to speak that we miss out on the weightier component of communication which is listening. When we speak hastily, we act on less than all of the information at hand including the core interests resident in one's heart. Our counterpart recognizes this. Consequently, he discounts our words, often hardening his heart to justice as well.

Listening is vital to bringing justice to our relationships because God listens. God hears our prayers for justice (Prov. 15:29; Ps. 34:17). Perhaps no irony exists in the fact that the man born blind said that God listens to the godly man who does His will (Jn. 9:31). In conflict management, it is imperative that we listen to God in return. Therefore, justice not only listens horizontally in conflict, it listens vertically. Jesus lived a life of bidirectional listening. Listening is one of the primary acts of *love* which Jesus



www.mitchkruse.com

defined as the greatest vertical and horizontal commandment of the Law (Matt. 22:36-40). In Christ, we can wisely listen both vertically to God the Father and horizontally to others, resisting the desire to *add to* or *subtract from* justice.

*Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

*Listen to others at least as much as you speak.* In your interpersonal conflict, make sure that you listen more than you speak. If you typically speak quickly, make a new habit of jotting down your thoughts while a person is speaking to you, rather than interrupting because you fear losing a thought. In order to accomplish bidirectional listening, ask questions that reveal motives, interests, or desires while you maintain vertical sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Maintain eye contact as well as heart contact, and use body language, facial expressions, and gestures that communicate value. While active horizontal listening repeats their words in yours, active vertical listening reveals His Word in yours.

**(2) Equal Opportunity (Prov. 18:17)**

The second weight in the measurement bag of *justice* is *equal opportunity*. One of the biggest mistakes that we make in not bringing justice to our interpersonal conflict is acting on one side of the story. This behavior further hardens our spiritual hearts. Our emotions flare; our thoughts wander; our choices rush; and our prayers miss the mark. In doing so, we internally *add to* or *subtract from* the measurement bag of justice in order to tip the scales in our favor. By reacting to one side of the conflict, we negligently mismanage justice, potentially *receiving more for less* or *delivering less for more*. This leads to concealing the truth, condemning the innocent, and condoning the guilty.



Wisdom calls us to a more complete standard. *“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him”* (Prov. 18:17). When seeking justice, it is wise to get both sides of the story. Justice gives equal opportunity for each party in a conflict to share his side of the story before any judgment is made. In our pursuit of the other side of the story, wisdom warrants that we do not betray confidence; we do not condemn; and we do not cut anyone short. Equal opportunity flows from the heart of God in Christ (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9).

*Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

*Get both sides of the story.* Do not act on one side of the story. Keep your thoughts, choices, feelings, and prayers surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Wisely gather the rest of the story from the other party involved in the conflict. In doing so, do not betray confidence, do not condemn, and do not cut anyone short.

**(3) Impartiality (Prov. 18:5; 24:23; 17:23; 8:15; 19:28; 22:22-23)**

The third weight in the measurement bag of *justice* is *impartiality*. *“It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice”* (Prov. 18:5; cf. 24:23). In our frailty, we are tempted to be partial—incomplete with justice—in essence one-sided. We favor one side of a conflict because we have something to gain or lose in the process. At risk might be our *time, talent, or treasures* as indicators of potentially satisfying our primary desires: *significance, contentment, security, and control*. Desiring the gain or fearing the loss that results in partiality flows from a heart of pride. By contrast, a heart of humility seeks the *impartiality* of justice that is complete to both sides



of the conflict. God said that partiality perverts justice—it deceitfully *adds to* or *subtracts from* justice’s measurement bag (Lev. 19:15).

Partiality often results from some kind of bribe—a benefit from one side of a conflict secretly given toward one judging in an effort to influence the outcome. The Bible says that a bribe toward partiality “*blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous*” (Deut. 16:19). Whereas justice is blind, or impartial to the conflicting parties; injustice is blind toward wisdom, or partial to one of the parties involved in the conflict. This partiality leads to twisted words that pervert justice. Solomon said, “*A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice*” (Prov. 17:23).

Wisdom allows us to make boundaries for interpersonal conflict management that are just, namely impartial (Prov. 8:15). Solomon said that one of those is to be cautious of a corrupt witness, “*A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil*” (Prov. 19:28). The NASB refers to this witness as “*rascally*” meaning “worthless.” Literally, he adds no value to justice because he is partial.

God is impartial (Deut. 10:17). God’s heart desires that justice reaches even the poor who cannot afford defense yet alone entice favoritism (Prov. 29:7; Ex. 23:6; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 140:12). Solomon’s *Thirty Sayings of the Wise* exclaims, “*Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them*” (Prov. 22:22-23). At the same time, justice does not bestow favoritism upon the poor in a lawsuit (Ex. 23:3). Neither does it side with the crowd, displaying favoritism to the majority by doing what is merely



www.mitchkruse.com

popular apart from justice (Ex. 23:2). Because God is impartial, justice is impartial. In Christ, God's impartiality is available to all (Acts 10:34).

*Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

*Be impartial.* When it comes to interpersonal conflict, are you one-sided? Do you favor a particular kind of person or behavior? Do you find yourself either giving or receiving a relational bribe? Is your judgment often swayed by a corrupt witness? If so, you are *adding to* or *subtracting from* justice's measurement bag in order to *receive more for less* or to *deliver less for more*. Each day during the next month, read Solomon's Psalm of Justice—Psalm 72. Let the words sink into your soul and spirit, allowing them to assimilate into your life. This will enhance impartiality in your interpersonal conflict as Christ in you brings justice to your relationships.

**(4) Conflict Resolution (Prov. 12:20; 29:4; 21:15; 18:15; 18:18; 29:26)**

The fourth weight in the measurement bag of *justice is conflict resolution*. Too often, we are quick to condemn a party when we are wronged. This creates division rather than conflict resolution. Jesus warned of the adverse affects on one who harbors condemnation (Matt. 7:1-2). The primary objective of wise conflict management is to navigate through conflict toward community. The joy of community is enhanced through conflict resolution. *"There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace"* (Prov. 12:20). Justice promotes peace. *"By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down"* (Prov. 29:4). Justice upholds peace through *conflict resolution* which brings joy for the righteous, but terror for the wicked (Prov. 21:15). While we are not guaranteed peace in all of our



www.mitchkruse.com

relationships, conflict resolution must be our goal. The Apostle Paul said, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”* (Rom. 12:18).

Justice resolves conflict in part by objectively gathering all necessary information. Solomon counseled, *“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out”* (Prov. 18:15). That information might shed light on more than one possible resolution to the conflict. Three thousand years ago, when all possible outcomes to conflict were equal, a lot was cast. *“Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart”* (Prov. 18:18). In the end, conflict resolution was the goal. Conflict resolution brings God to the interpersonal conflict. *“Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the LORD that man gets justice”* (Prov. 29:26). Gideon concluded, *“The Lord is Peace”* (Judges 6:24). Christ is the embodiment of God’s peace (Eph. 2:14; Isaiah 9:6). It is Christ in us Who empowers us to justly resolve conflict, bringing peace to our relationships.

#### *Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

*Resolve conflict.* Are you characterized and known by unresolved conflict? Do you have strife in your life? Is there unresolved conflict lingering in any of your relationships? Pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance; read the aforementioned verses relating to resolving conflict; seek wise counsel; and then if possible, as far as it depends on you, wisely resolve the conflict.

#### **Conclusion**

Christ is the *justice* of God, and we humbly enter into His justice by faith (Rom. 3:25-26). He fulfilled the Law, clarifying that its intent flowed from the heart of God





www.mitchkruse.com

(Matt. 5:17). Jesus was sent by the Father to proclaim *justice* to the nations (Matt. 12:18; cf. Isaiah 42:1). In Jesus Christ, the condemnation of the innocent brought justice in order to free the guilty (1 Peter 3:18). When we humble all four chambers of our heart to God, He brings justice to our relationships through the person of Christ so that we can navigate through conflict to community. Only through Him do we experience: (1) *listening*, (2) *equal opportunity*, (3) *impartiality*, and (4) *conflict resolution*.