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Wisdom Worksheet: 12 Words to the Wise

Knowledge (*daath*) (Prov. 1:4; 24:3-5)

Introduction

In order to resolve interpersonal conflict, we must connect with the innermost part of the person(s) involved through the Spirit of God. This is *knowledge*, the second of three pearls in memory's strand. One of the twelve purposes of Proverbs was for giving *knowledge* to the young (Prov. 1:4). The Hebrew word for *knowledge* (*daath*) comes from the same root word used when the writer of Genesis said that Adam *knew* his wife and she conceived (Gen. 4:1). Without *knowledge*, negative conflict runs awry. The prophet Hosea, who at the call of God had married unfaithful Gomer, charged the wayward Israelites with God's perspective of the cause of negative conflict among them, "*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge*" (Hos. 4:6).

In nearly three millennia, little has changed. Today, marriages, families, ministries, and marketplace relationships fail from a lack of intimacy, or *knowledge*. Our problem is at least four-fold. First, we hold on to conflict, mulling over our selfish perspective of the two objects attempting to occupy the same space at the same time. Second, we foolishly seek the satisfaction of our selfish motives, neglecting to discover the motives of others involved in the conflict. Third, we fail to effectively communicate our motives. If we attempt to do so, we usually describe only our selfish desires, speaking with pride and foolishness. Finally, we leave the conflict unresolved.

Proverbs tells us that *knowledge*: (1) deepens our relationships and (2) increases our strength to resolve conflict. Our relationships are deepened through intimacy,



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knowledge's experiential connection of our innermost beings with the hearts of others through the Spirit of God. Solomon reflected, “*By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures*” (Prov. 24:3-4). The *rooms* refer to the *inside* of a house that is imagery for any collection of relationships assembled to achieve a common goal—whether the association be in marriage, family, ministry, or the marketplace. Those relationships comprise *rare and beautiful treasures* in our hearts.

Knowledge strengthens our capacity to wisely manage conflict in those relationships. Solomon continued, “*A man of knowledge increases strength*” (Prov. 24:5b). Therefore, *knowledge* intimately navigates us through conflict to community in our relationships. Solomon gave us four steps to wisely connect with the innermost part of the person(s) with whom we are having conflict: (1) *surrender our conflict to God*, (2) *seek the motives of the persons involved*, (3) *spell out our motives humbly and wisely*, and (4) *solve the conflict by discovering common ground*.

(1) Surrender our conflict to God (Prov. 1:7; 2:5-6; 3:19-20; Ps. 139:1, 6, 23-24)

Step one is to *surrender our conflict to God*. Solomon's theme verse of Proverbs says, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*” (Prov. 1:7). *The fear of the LORD* is *surrender* to God. We must surrender to Him: (1) *our motives*, (2) *the person(s)*, (3) *the problem*, and (4) *the outcome*. *Surrender* removes pressure to force our selfish outcomes and frees us from labeling any person as the problem. *Surrender* unfolds through prayer, the intimate connection of our hearts with God's. In this context,



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God shapes our hearts and desires to resemble His will, mind, spirit, and emotions along with His subsequent desires regarding the conflict (Ps. 37:4). He equips us with *knowledge* to wisely manage our relational tension.

Solomon described the benefits of an all-out pursuit of the source of *knowledge*, which is God's heart and His desires: "*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*" (Prov. 2:5-6). Proverbs records this divine trio of God's attributes (*wisdom, understanding, and knowledge*) as the power by which He created the heavens and the earth, "*By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew*" (Prov. 3:19-20). *Knowledge* is a key element in our creation of wise conflict management because it flows from our *surrender* to God.

Solomon's father David described a surrendered relationship with God as paramount to *knowledge*, picturing his Shepherd as the wellspring of that intimate connection. David wrote, "*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me*" (Ps. 139:1). He noted that *knowledge* is not attainable when left to us: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*" (Ps. 139:6). Then David offered his refining prayer that God would first, *examine* his heart and second, help him *surrender* any part of his inner being that he had held back from the Almighty, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Ps. 139:23-24). Both Solomon and David saw surrender to God as the key that unlocks *knowledge* for wise conflict



management. We must surrender to Him: (1) *our motives*, (2) *the person(s)*, (3) *the problem*, and (4) *the outcome*.

Beware of white knuckling selfish desires regarding the conflict (Prov. 22:12)

Conversely, when we hold on to our conflict through the white knuckling of our selfish desires, we experience God's opposition. Solomon noted, "*The eyes of the LORD keep watch over knowledge, but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful*" (Prov. 22:12). God's perspective focuses on *knowledge*. As a result, those who possess it will discover His views regarding their conflict through surrender. However, the *unfaithful* are those who lack *knowledge*, the intimate connection with God, and they experience His opposition in their conflict. We must beware of white knuckling our selfish desires regarding any conflict.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Surrender your conflict to God through prayer. Surrender your *motives*, *the person(s) involved*, *the problem*, and *the outcome*. Ask God to shape your heart and desires to reflect His, giving you the *knowledge* for wise conflict management. Stop white knuckling any selfish desires.

(2) Seek the motives of the person(s) involved (Prov. 18:15; 15:14; 23:12)

Step two is to *seek the motives of the person(s) involved*. Solomon wrote, "*The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out*" (Prov. 18:15). Most poor interpersonal conflict management focuses on the positions not the underlying interests, or motives, of those involved. Solomon saw this as foolish, saying,



“The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly” (Prov. 15:14).

We accomplish seeking motives of the person(s) involved by *asking* and *listening*. Solomon taught, *“Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge”* (Prov. 23:12). First, *asking* questions that search the innermost part of the person opens the door to the motives behind his words. For example, we might ask, “What do you desire? Why?” The answer to “Why?” typically reveals his motives. Second, *listening* to the answers to our questions helps us reach in and connect with the innermost part of the person, namely his motives. Seeking to understand those motives shifts us from focusing on the outside to exploring the inside of that person.

Beware of a fool; it might be you (Prov. 14:6, 7)

All the while, we must beware of the fool who might be resident in us. Solomon cautioned, *“The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning”* (Prov. 14:6). He concluded, *“Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips”* (Prov. 14:7). In our frailty, we tend to interpret and apply these verses exclusively toward the behavior of others involved in our conflict. However, it is crucial that we examine ourselves for foolish motives.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Seek the motives of the person(s) involved in your conflict by *asking* and *listening*. Move from focusing on the outside to exploring the inside of your counterpart(s). First, *ask* questions that reveal motives of the heart: “What do you desire?



Why?” Second, *listen* to what motives the person is attempting to describe. Finally, beware of the fool; it might be you.

(3) Spell out our motives humbly and wisely (Prov. 15:7; 17:27; 20:15)

Step three is to *spell out our motives humbly and wisely* to the other person(s) involved in our conflict. Solomon revealed, “*The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools*” (Prov. 15:7). By first surrendering our conflict to God and seeking our counterpart’s motives, we are then able to communicate pure motives with *humble* hearts and *wise* words that connect with the other person(s) with whom we are communicating.

Solomon cautioned us to choose our words *humbly* and *wisely*, using restraint, “*A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered*” (Prov. 17:27). *Restraint* in Hebrew is *chasak*, meaning “to darken.” We will experience *knowledge* if we *humbly* and *wisely* keep *proud* and *foolish* words in the dark. For example, when discussing a parenting strategy with our spouses, we might *humbly* and *wisely* say, “My desire is to protect our children from making a mistake with severe consequences for them and those around them.” When we are not even-tempered and failing to use our words with restraint, we might *proudly* and *foolishly* say, “Our children learned their foolish behavior from you!” *Proud* and *foolish* words are best kept in the dark in order to experience *knowledge*. This is not easy. Solomon said that one who can spell out his motives *humbly* and *wisely* is rare and valuable, “*Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel*” (Prov. 20:15).

Demonstrate a concern for the poor (Prov. 29:7)



Solomon offered a caution that we can apply to spelling out our motives: *concern for the poor*. He penned, “*The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern*” (Prov. 29:7). *Concern* is translated from the same Hebrew root as *knowledge*. God has *concern* for the least. He desires that we have that same familiarity. Rather than running over the poor amidst conflict as we spell out our motives *proudly* and *foolishly*, we are called to spell out our motives *humbly* and *wisely*, even spelling out the motives of the least when they are unable to do so.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Spell out your motives *humbly* and *wisely*. Use *restraint* by keeping *proud* and *foolish* words in the dark. Always remember to demonstrate a *concern* for the poor.

(4) Solve the conflict by discovering common ground (Prov. 11:9; 9:10; 13:16; 2:10)

Step four is to *solve the conflict by discovering common ground*. Solomon warned, “*With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape*” (Prov. 11:9). Paraphrased, our words either build *bridges* or *walls*. *Knowledge* seeks and discovers common ground in motives to build *bridges*. Often described by psychologists as emotional intelligence, *knowledge* of the Holy Spirit provides us insight into understanding others so that we are equipped to discover common ground where we can build *bridges* that solve conflict. Solomon restated the theme of Proverbs with this secret to conflict resolution in mind, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*” (Prov. 9:10).



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Solomon clarified that in wise conflict management, it is prudent to find common ground and build a *bridge* between the innermost beings of the persons involved when he said, “*Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly*” (Prov. 13:16). In other words, a prudent man builds *bridges*; a foolish man builds *walls*. Building *bridges* that connect motives provides the opportunity to explore many options to solve conflict.

An illustration of building *bridges* or *walls* frequently arises in marriage. For example, most spouses share exactly the same motives: love, joy, peace, faithfulness, and fulfillment, but they often spend too much time focusing on the outside at the expense of exploring the inside. They focus on divided ground rather than common ground. The result is building a *wall*, rather than a *bridge*.

Men often want to *fix* their wives, focusing on the outside, or the surface of the conflict, thereby, constructing a *wall*. Rather, when men *feel* with their wives, they begin to connect with the inside, building a *bridge*. For instance, after a woman shares feelings of sorrow in her tone of voice with her husband, rather than *fix* her with mechanical words, he might *feel* with her by holding her hand and repeating what her nonverbal cues were expressing, “I know you feel hurt. I hurt too.” Building *bridges* on common ground as opposed to building *walls* on divided ground will begin to solve most marital conflict. The same holds true for the balance of family, ministry, and marketplace relationships. Solomon offered insight to the benefits of discovering common ground, “*For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul*” (Prov.



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2:10). Bridging a common ground connection of the innermost part of two or more persons satisfies their heartfelt desires, or motives.

Do not be in a hurry (Prov. 19:2)

Solomon offered a caution when attempting to build intimate bridges: *Do not be in a hurry*. Just like a bridge isn't built overnight—and if it were, we wouldn't want to cross it—so we must not microwave the process of discovering common ground in our motives. Solomon informed, “*It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way*” (Prov. 19:2). The NASB says, “*hasteth with his feet.*” “*Feet*” comes from the Hebrew, *regel*, whose root is *ragal*, meaning “to walk.” Too often, we are hasty to presume motive, manufacturing common ground without first connecting with the heart and genuine desires of the person(s) involved in our conflict. At that point, it is impossible to *walk* across a bridge because it has not been built. Consequently, we miss the way. *Knowledge* helps us *solve our conflict by discovering common ground*, using words that *bridge* our unselfish motives with those of others by exploring their inside rather than hurriedly focusing on their outside during the conflict.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Solve your conflict by discovering common ground in your motives with those of the other person(s) involved. Use words that build *bridges* rather than put up *walls*. Do this by exploring the inside instead of focusing on the outside of your counterpart(s) in the conflict. Don't be in a hurry to force someone into a manufactured quick fix.

Conclusion



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Knowledge provides us with four steps to wisely connect through the Holy Spirit with the innermost part of the person(s) with whom we are having conflict: (1) *surrender our conflict to God*, (2) *seek the motives of the person(s) involved*, (3) *spell out our motives humbly and wisely*, and (4) *solve the conflict by discovering common ground*.

These four steps toward *knowledge* apply to relationships in marriage, family, ministry, and the marketplace. We must proceed with caution because Solomon offered us four caveats: (1) beware of white knuckling selfish desires regarding the conflict (Prov. 22:12); (2) beware of a fool; it might be you (Prov. 14:6-7); (3) demonstrate a concern for the poor (Prov. 29:7); and (4) do not be in a hurry (Prov. 19:2). When we experience an intimate connection with our counterpart(s) in conflict, we won't be doing so alone; rather, we will be connecting through Christ in us.