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Wisdom Worksheet: 12 Words to the Wise

Prudence (*ormah*) (Prov. 1:4; 8:12; Matt. 10:16)

Introduction

Do you ever feel simple, or gullible, when dealing with a strong personality during interpersonal conflict? Typically, when our will attempts to occupy the same space at the same time as that of a challenging person, we retort foolishly. We immediately react to the insensitivity of an insult; we speed blindly into the unknown, losing all foresight of the danger that lies ahead; we cease the pursuit of all pertinent information; and we flaunt what little knowledge we have.

Solomon's third string of pearls in his twelve words to the wise is the strand of *mastery*. In order to wisely manage interpersonal conflict, we must learn to master the pearl of *prudence*. Solomon held up *prudence* as one of the key purposes of his book of Proverbs, "*for giving prudence to the simple*" (Prov. 1:4). Where we find wisdom, we find *prudence* (Prov. 8:12). *Prudence* can be defined as "being shrewd and innocent." When sending His disciples to advance the news of the kingdom of heaven amidst challenging interpersonal conflict, Jesus said, "*I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves*" (Matt. 10:16). As we encounter the wolves of interpersonal conflict, we want to humbly advance the kingdom of heaven in their hearts. We accomplish this through mastering wisdom's shrewd and innocent practice of *prudence*. *Shrewd* means "sharp, keen, clever, creative, or cunning." In essence, to be *shrewd* is to be *street-smart*. *Innocent* can be defined as "harmless, or without sin." Consequently, *prudence* is shrewd about discovering the



innocent sweet-spot where God’s interest intersects with our unselfish interests and the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-5). That is where we discover the kingdom of heaven.

When we examine its contextual usages in Proverbs, we see four shrewd and innocent patterns of *prudence*: (1) *ignore insults*, (2) *foresee danger*, (3) *be informed*, and (4) *do not flaunt knowledge*.

(1) Ignore Insults (Prov. 12:16; 19:11)

First, when encountering the wolves of conflict, we must *ignore insults*. Solomon taught, “*A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult*” (Prov. 12:16). A difficult person designs and deploys an insult to generate a reaction—one that gives him control. When we do not react, the insult is defused. In order to be prudent, we must *ignore insults*, rather than immediately showing our annoyance. Ignoring an insult includes maintaining listening body posture and attentive facial expressions while we deflect flaming arrows soaring our way. An example from the Old Testament is Jonathan who ignored his father Saul’s insult (1 Sam. 20:30-31).

To *ignore insults* requires patience. Solomon advised, “*A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense*” (Prov. 19:11). Usually, our first reaction to an offense is to immediately address it. Solomon counseled that it is to our benefit to overlook it. If our offender is a friend or even a family member, we will most likely address a pattern of insulting behavior at some point. However, this is not best done in the heat of the insult. This means looking past the demeaning behavior and into the heart of that person.



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Jesus taught His disciples to *ignore insults*, “*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*” (Matt. 5:39). A strike on the right cheek was made with the back of one’s right hand (considered the dominant hand). The phrase “*strikes you on the right cheek*” was an idiomatic expression for an insult. Today, we use similar phraseology when we say, “That was a backhanded comment.” An insult is an attack on our *talent*—the unique person God has created us to be. In turning the other cheek, we are ignoring the insult which is both shrewd and innocent.

Jesus modeled what he taught. His disciple Peter described Jesus’ response to the ultimate insult, “*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*” (1 Peter 2:23). “*Entrusted*” is translated from the Greek, *paradidomi*, which means “to hand over.” When insulted, we can hand over the insult as well as our subsequent thoughts, feelings, choices, and prayers to God. Paul offered the imagery of a warrior, teaching that we should take up the shield of faith that allows us to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (Eph. 6:16).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Ignore insults. When the wolves of conflict insult you, ignore it. Don’t retaliate. Don’t make threats. Instead, hand it over to God, and deflect the demeaning words with your shield of faith.

(2) Foresee Danger (Prov. 14:15; 14:8; 22:3; 27:12)

Second, when encountering the wolves of conflict, we must *foresee danger*.

Rather than speed blindly ahead into our own fallen reactions, we are called to exercise



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foresight into the potential danger lying ahead in: (1) our *steps*, (2) our *pathway*, and (3) our *destination* of conflict management.

Prudence foresees the danger of simple steps. Solomon warned of gullibility in interpersonal conflict, “*A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps*” (Prov. 14:15). Our *steps* include our *words and actions*. They will be either *simple* or *prudent*. This translates into the necessity of shrewdly and innocently filtering the words and actions of our counterpart before we take our next *steps*.

Prudence foresees the danger of a deceptive pathway. When we *foresee danger*, we look forward to the *pathway* where our next *steps* lead. This includes the *consequences* of both our words and our actions. Solomon advised, “*The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception*” (Prov. 14:8). *Simple*, or gullible, words and actions are strewn along the *pathway of deception*. *Deception* implies “part of the whole,” meaning something is hidden in the communication. *Prudent* words and actions line the *pathway of integrity*. *Integrity* means “complete,” implying that communication is whole and not lacking. We must wisely examine the consequences of not only our words and actions, but also the words and actions of others for either *deception* or *integrity*.

Prudence foresees the danger of a suffering destination. When we *foresee danger*, we look forward to the *destination* of our conflict management, meaning its effect on the relationship. It will be one of either *suffering* or *safety*. Solomon counseled, “*A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it*” (Prov. 22:3; cf. 27:12). In the heat of conflict, we often blindly keep going with our



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simple steps along their consequential *pathway of deception* leading to the *destination of suffering*. This *suffering* is manifested in the circumstances of *misunderstanding* that affect both parties involved in the conflict. *Prudence* stops our *simple steps* toward the danger of *suffering* and takes those that lead to *safety*. That safety is a mutual *understanding* that is discovered in Christ.

Jesus warned His disciples to *foresee danger* among the wolves of conflict, “*Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles*” (Matt. 10:17-18). Whereas, we might not experience physical persecution for advancing the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of others, we are guaranteed opposition to our efforts. Christ, our safe refuge, guides us to *foresee danger* in our *steps*, our *pathway*, and our *destination*.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Foresee danger. When you encounter the wolves of conflict, *foresee the danger* in your *steps*, your *pathway*, and your *destination*. Ask God if your *steps* are *simple* or *prudent*, if your *pathway* is *deception* or *integrity*, and if your *destination* is *suffering* or *safety*. If you discern that His Spirit is prompting you of *simple steps*, then exchange those for *prudent* ones.

(3) Be Informed (Prov. 13:16; 14:18; 15:5; 18:15)

Third, when encountering the wolves of conflict, we must *be informed*. Solomon referred to this information as *knowledge*, which is an intimate experience—the connection of two or more innermost beings with God. The wise King of Israel said,



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“Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly” (Prov. 13:16). *Prudence* flows from *knowledge*. At the same time, the more we act with *prudence*, the more *knowledge* we receive. Solomon continued, *“The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge”* (Prov. 14:18). A sincere quest for *knowledge* includes a willingness to be corrected when we are wrong. A prudent person yields to correction. A foolish person does not. Solomon added, *“A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence”* (Prov. 15:5). In order to be *informed*, we need to *ask* prudent questions. Solomon taught that we should utilize the ears of our hearts, *“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out”* (Prov. 18:15). Our shrewd and innocent questions will be directed both vertically to God and horizontally to others. After we *ask*, we must *listen*, *learn*, and *lean* on God (Prov. 22:17-19).

Jesus trained His disciples to be informed by the Spirit of God. *“But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”* (Matt. 10:19-20).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Be informed. When you encounter the wolves of conflict, seek knowledge from God. *Ask* prudent questions of God and of others. Next, *listen*, *learn*, and *lean* on your heavenly Father. Garner an intimate experience with His Spirit in order to act with *prudence*.

(4) Do Not Flaunt Knowledge (Prov. 12:23; 17:27, 28)

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Fourth, when encountering the wolves of conflict, we *do not flaunt knowledge*. Only fools tell all they know. Solomon cautioned, “*A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly*” (Prov. 12:23). Too often in conflict, we desire to come out on top by flaunting information albeit derogatory of our detractor or flattering of our own cause. In order to be prudent, we must discern what knowledge is appropriate to speak. This discretion comes from seeking the Holy Spirit Who provides us with shrewd and innocent words. The filtering process brings *prudence* to our conflict management. Solomon observed, “*A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even tempered*” (Prov. 17:27). Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will guide us to not speak at all. Solomon illustrated the perceived wisdom of silence, “*Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue*” (Prov. 17:28).

Jesus did not flaunt His knowledge. When encountering Herod Antipas, a member of the wolves of conflict, Jesus wisely refrained from answering the deceitful ruler’s questions (Luke 23:9). At times during His arrest, He refrained from answering Pilate as well (John 19:9). However, there were occurrences when Jesus did engage Pilate with words. This was an example of *prudence* not flaunting knowledge.

Jesus had explained to His disciples who were advancing the kingdom of heaven amidst interpersonal conflict that the Spirit of their Father would be speaking through them (Matt. 10:20). Later, He poetically elaborated, “*What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs*” (Matt. 10:27).



The Spirit of Christ will guide us in what information is prudent to reveal; however, in no case will He lead us to loosely mishandle the truth (Matt. 7:6).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Do not flaunt knowledge. When you encounter the wolves of conflict, resist the temptation to tell all you know. Do not use information to criticize others or flatter yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in the discernment of what shrewd and innocent words to say.

Conclusion

Proverbs offers four shrewd and innocent patterns of *prudence*: (1) *ignore insults*, (2) *foresee danger*, (3) *be informed*, and (4) *do not flaunt knowledge*. Each was inspired, modeled, and taught in the life of Christ. When we master *prudence*, it is not merely we who are advancing the kingdom of heaven amidst challenging interpersonal conflict. Rather, it is Christ in us.