

Ancient Wisdom for Today: Relating to Others **The Wise Person Stands Upright**

...His secret counsel is with the upright (Proverbs 3:32 NKJV).

...His confidential communion and secret counsel are with the [uncompromisingly] righteous [those that are upright and in right standing with Him] (Proverbs 3:32 Amplified).

Many a mother has counseled her daughter to stand up straight. To improve posture, a young girl might walk through her home with a stack of books on her head. In that upright position, it is impossible to look down or to the left or to the right without toppling the books. Her gaze must be forward. Her concentration is straight ahead.

Standing erect is not only good for your posture. It is imperative for your spiritual life. Those who are upright are disciplined in righteousness, justice and integrity.

The definition of upright is an object that is vertical or erect or a person that is honorable or honest. In the Amplified Bible, the word upright is often translated as consistently or uncompromisingly righteous, one who walks uprightly, in right standing with God or moral and spiritual rectitude in every area and relation.

An upright person is not perfect, but focused. Occasionally the books will fall. The posture of a focused Christian will improve with time and practice. The more determined one is to love God and please Him, the more disciplined he will be.

Every failure or sin is a lesson learned. Don't go there again. When you are down, look up at God. Ask for His forgiveness and accept it. Mary Pickford, 1873-1979, said, "You may have a fresh start any time you chose, for this thing we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."

After a Christian has sinned and asked for forgiveness, Satan loves to keep him wallowing in guilt, refusing to feel forgiven. God knows we will fall yet He is righteous and just to forgive us our sin – through His Son.

The upright godly person walks with wisdom, looking forward, considering the steps of the path before him and is determined not to let distractions turn him aside from the path God has chosen for him.

With eyes forward, *let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2 NIV).

For further study, highlight every passage in Proverbs with relevant meanings of "upright." Compare these with the New Testament armor found in Ephesians 6:10-13 – focusing on the breastplate of righteousness.

The Wise Person Watches His Speech

A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (Proverbs 25:11).

Quarreling children on a playground sometimes say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That saying is not true. Relationships have been crushed and lives have been destroyed because of words. Even in America, where the law clearly declares one innocent until proven guilty, the mere accusation of a crime can ruin a life.

Scripture is full of admonition to be careful with our words. It is a recurrent theme in such books as Proverbs in the Old Testament and James in the New.

One of the best examples of a godly man who did not sin with his mouth was Job. At the end of his trials and the conclusion of the book of Job, God addresses the so-called friends who gave Job advice throughout his experiences. He was angry at them because they did not speak of Him what was right, as His servant Job had. Those friends were saved only through the prayers of Job, a righteous man before God.

Isaiah’s vision convicted him that he and his people were guilty of unclean lips. Jesus said that what a man says comes out of the overflow of his heart. Paul advised the Ephesian church to refrain from unwholesome speech and only say those things that would build others up. James warned Christians to be slow to speak and slow to anger.

The contrasts between proper and improper speech are plentiful in the book of Proverbs. For instance:

- *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is not wise (10:19)*
- *He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity (22:23).*
- *Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue (17:28)*

These verses might lead those who are naturally quiet to think that being godly is easier because they don’t talk a lot. However, the Bible does not say that God is pleased only with silence. He wants us to use our tongues to witness (Romans 10:14), confess Jesus as Lord (Philippians 2:11), give God thanks (Colossians 3:17), encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

For further study, search through Proverbs for the contrasts of good and evil speech. There are seven sets of these in chapter 10 alone.

Two of the Ten Commandments deal directly with speech. Compare these with other verses about the tongue.

The Wise Person Cares for Others

A body of water with no inlet or outlet becomes a stagnant, insect-infested pond. Without living water flowing in and out, the result is not only unattractive and uncomfortable but unhealthy as well.

A healthy Christian life includes service to others. Jesus not only said that the greatest commandment was to love God with everything you are, but to love others as you love yourself. He gave His closest disciples a new commandment to love each other just as He had loved them.

There is no place for a self-absorbed Christian in God's family. Jesus warned against keeping your light under a bushel or neglecting to become salt in a world that desperately needs it. Vital, living Christianity flows with the Living Water of the One who gave His life for ours.

Satan does not care how much you theorize about Christianity or how much you profess to know Christ. What he opposes vigorously is the way you live for Christ - the way you become an instrument of mercy, compassion, and love through which He manifests Himself to the world.

Mother Teresa said, "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have been done. We will be judged by 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless and you took me in.'"

Throughout the book of Proverbs, a common theme is caring for others. It described gracious, merciful, generous people who are concerned about the needs of others and extend their hands to help them. The old saying, "What goes around comes around" can be applied in the positive sense as well as the negative. The unexpected consequence of helping others is the blessings you receive when you do. Proverbs says that a caring person attains honor, does himself good, will be prosperous, happy, blessed, and will himself be watered and kindness and truth will come to him.

Paul instructed the church in Rome to receive Phoebe and assist her for "*she has been a helper of many and of myself also*" (Romans 16:1-2). Name the ways God has cared for you. Can you model that same kind of care to others?

For further study examine these verses in Proverbs about caring for others.

- Family and close friends: See 11:16, 11:17, 11:25, 11:26, 14:21, 14:22, 22:9, 24:23-25.
- Neighbors: Proverbs 11:9, 11:12, 14:21a, 24:29, 25:8-10, 26:17-19, 29:5
- Poor: 4:21b, 14:31; 17:5, 19:17, 21:13, 22:9, 22:22, 24:29, 28:27, 29:7, 29:14, 31:8-9, 31:20
- Enemies: 6:7, 20:22, 24:17, 24:19, 24:23-25, 25:19-21

The Wise Person Works and Leaves the Results to God

...He who has begun a good work in you will complete it...We are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, you are God's building (Philippians 1:6, 1 Corinthians 3:9).

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. That is how Proverbs begins. It ends with a description of a godly woman. Because she fears God, this woman will bear fruit and *her own works will praise her in the gates*. In Old Testament times, the men gathered in the gates for daily conversation. This woman's husband was well known and sat with the other leaders in the city gate. His wife made him proud.

This truth is carried out in Jesus' teaching. When you reflect His light, others will see your good works and the Father will be glorified. A child of God who makes the Father proud is someone who trusts Him in every area of life. His life and his work testify that He loves God and fears Him.

The universal human questions: who is God, who am I, what is my purpose are answered in this context. God is all in all and deserves my respect. I am His creation and His child (if I am a believer). My purpose is to do His will and glorify His name.

Some confuse work with their vocation or the job they have. Whatever a believer does, he should do well, for he serves the Lord Jesus. A Christian should be the best employee in a company. A vocation is only part of your life, however. Your work encompasses not only your profession but every area of life.

How to approach work is a common thread throughout the book of Proverbs. It addresses the need to be diligent in your work or to pay steady, constant attention to what you are called to do.

A book of contrasts, Proverbs instructs sluggards to consider the ways of ants. Consider this humorous comparison between these small creatures: ants and slugs. Ants are instinctively productive workers. People have a choice.

For further study, see Proverbs 10:4-5, 12:11, 12:24, 12:27, 13:4, 21:5, 22:29, 24:27, 28:19 in conjunction with Colossians 3:17-24 and Ephesians 6:7-8 in light of being diligent in your work.

To contrast diligence and laziness, see Proverbs 6:6-9; 10:26, 19:15, 19:24, 20:4, 20:13, 21:17, 21:25, 22:13, 24:30-34, 26:14-16, 30:24-28.

Examine these verses in light of honoring the Lord and sowing righteousness with your lifestyle and productivity: Proverbs 3:9, 10:16, 11:18, 11:28, 12:12, 16:8, 31:20-31

Summary of Ancient Wisdom for Today

He who gains wisdom loves his own life (Proverbs 19:8 Amplified).

The wise person accepts God's love.

He fears God, strives to understand, obeys the commandments and accepts discipline.

The wise person reflects God's love.

He stands upright, watches his words, cares for others and works according to God's plan for his life.

The wise person trusts in God and leaves the results to Him.

God judges our attitude and our work. He rewards the wise person who honors Him and does His will. The rewards are earthly and eternal.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord... So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom (Psalm 90:12, 1 Corinthians 15:58).