



TIME OF GRACE®

How to Deal With People

Study Notes

Summary

Your new year will be filled with all kinds of people. Fun people, draining people, hurtful people, beautiful people, critical people, encouraging people, and all the other kinds of people. How do you deal with them all without losing your mind (and your faith)? The answer is to remember how God dealt with a particular person—you. Remembering God’s patience to the “chief of sinners” is how you deal with people in your life.

- **Proverbs 14:7:** Stay away from a fool.
- A red-light person says “_____” to their sin.
- **Proverbs 13:20:** Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.
- A green-light person is _____. When you walk with these people, you too will grow _____.
- Yellow-light people = slow down and _____.
- **Proverbs 2:4:** If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure.
- Finding a wise person is like finding a hidden _____.
- **Proverbs 18:24:** There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Points to Ponder

1. Could a red-light person be a member of a local church? If so, how? If that seems unlikely, why would being part of a church be a great way to become wiser? Read Hebrews 10:23-25 for a few of God’s answers

2. Meditate on Proverbs 3:9,10 and Proverbs 23:4,5, two classic passages on dealing with money. Jot down at least three insights, and then pray that God would make you wise with every dollar he puts into your hands.
3. Do you know someone who struggles with worry and fear? Invite them to watch next week's message so God can teach them how to deal with anxiety.

Homework for Next Week

Read Philippians 4:6.

Time of Grace Ministry
How to Deal with People
Proverbs 2:4; Proverbs 13:20; Proverbs 14:7; Proverbs 18:24
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According to a 2013 story from "The New York Times," the average American knows about 600 people. That means if you put together your family and your extended family, your friends and your acquaintances, your roommates, your neighbors, your classmates, your cousins, your second cousins, the people...you kind of recognize, put all of that together and the average one of us knows about 600 people.

And I love thinking about that number, because I have learned in life what many of you have - that people have potential, that you do not need 1,000 people to change your life. You do not even need 600 people. You do not need 60 people. You do not even need six people. Sometimes it is just one, or two, or a very small group of people that influence us in profound ways, and the exact same thing is true for you.

In the next month, the next year, the next decade, a few of those people could bring you closer to Jesus than ever before. It is going to be that person you meet at college, or in the neighborhood after you move, in the nursing home. Someone that shows you kindness and love. Someone that prays for you and encourages you. That person that just nudges you, day after day, in the direction of Jesus.

Or, if I can be real with you, it might be one person that does the opposite. There are a lot of addicts here at our church, and if you ask an addict about their story, it often goes back to one person - one person who invited them out for a drink, one person who offered them a drug for the first time, one person who brought them to the party where they were introduced to their future dealer. It only takes one person.

You see, people have potential and that is true no matter how old you are, male, female, church-going or not. People can lead you in one of two directions. And that is why today I want to ask a big question. The question is this. How do you deal? How do you deal with people? If you are like the average American and God is going to put 600 people into your life, in this next year, how do you deal with them?

Now, I have to admit, in the past my answer to that question has been pretty good, but not really good. Some of you know my answer of how to treat people in your family, at work, at church, often comes down to these two words, "You first." Right? Love people. Put them first. Put their

wants before your needs, but be selfless, sacrificial, like Jesus. That is how we are blessed. That is how we thrive.

But I have learned that is not always good advice. And I learned that from the wisest man in the ancient world. Some of you have heard the name of King Solomon. He was the third king of Israel. He was known as this man of great wisdom, and he wrote this in the Bible. "The righteous choose their friends carefully." Now, today we obviously cannot talk about 600 different scenarios, so I want to break the people that you know down into three groups, what I am going to call red light people, green light people, and yellow light people.

And we are going to open to King Solomon's words here in the Proverbs and see a wise way to treat each group of those people. So, let us start with the red-light people. Most of you out there who drive, you know that red means stop. Did you know that God himself says that some of the relationships that are going along in your life need to stop? Like, people you are hanging out with, people you are texting with, people you are partying with, God says, "I want you to stop, U-turn, hit the gas, and get away." Now, that might not seem very Christian, right? But it is very Christian.

In fact, let me prove it to you. The Proverbs say, Chapter 14, Verse 7, "Stay away from a fool." Okay. Okay, God, we are listening, but what do you mean by, "a fool?" I mean, are you talking about people who sin, because we all sin? Are you talking about people who struggle with sin and go back to old habits? Because, I do not know, all of us do that in one way or another. Who exactly are we supposed to stay away from?

I tried to find an answer to that question in the Book of Proverbs. A few weeks ago, I actually read the whole Book of Proverbs, all 31 chapters, from start to finish, and I was trying to look specifically for who qualifies as a fool, and here is what I learned - that foolish people often do foolish actions. You know, they are angry people, they run their tongue, they drink too much, whatever. But it really was not the actions that a person did, but the attitude behind those actions that qualified them as a fool. And if I could summarize a fool's attitude in one word, the word would be, "whatever." You know someone in your life is a fool when they are doing something that is bad and their reaction is, "Whatever."

You know, you want to talk about your family. Maybe your husband is working too much. Maybe your wife is over-committed, and it is stressed, and there are issues. A foolish spouse would say, "Whatever, it is fine." Or maybe you are dating someone and there are some red flags - the way he gets like, so tense, even angry, maybe even violent when he is frustrated, when he is out of control, and you say, "Maybe we should talk to someone. Maybe we should go see the pastor. Maybe we should schedule a visit with a counselor." And if he is a fool, he will say, "Whatever." Maybe you have some friends and you are concerned that going out for a drink has turned into something more. It is compulsive, it is a habit, it is an addiction, and you want to talk, like, "I do not think this is normal." "Whatever," they say. God says when you see a person who is "whatever-ing" their sin, where God says, "This is not okay, this is not fine," and they say, "It is fine, it is okay, do not worry about it. Stop bringing it up."

God says as much as you can, depending on the relationship status - if this is your roommate, your friend, your neighbor, your teammate - stay away from a fool, and here is why. That might seem a little bit like tough love, like kind of un-Christian and unkind, but the Bible says this - "A companion of fools suffers harm." Now, my childhood pastor used to describe it like this. Here in this Ziploc bag, I have put one, two, three, four, five, six pieces of dark, black, dusty coal. Now, let us imagine for a second that these are six foolish people at your school or in your circle of friends. Now, what do you think would happen if I opened this Ziploc bag and I dropped in you? This is you. What is going to happen? Will this big marshmallow automatically turn into a piece of coal? No, but you can guess what would happen. Zip this up. Let these people hang out with each other, spend too much time. And...it rubs off.

My childhood pastor used to say, "Show me your friends and I will show you your future. You might not become them, but you will become affected by them." Now, our Heavenly Father in this passage says the exact same thing. He is a good dad and he says, "Watch out, a companion of fools suffers harm." So, let me ask you directly, are you thinking about anyone right now? Is there a friend that you have been making excuses for, for too long? Too many times, have you gotten caught up in the drama, like she is a gossip and you are too close, and so, people lump you in with her? He has an anger problem, but he is your teammate and you have been excusing it, and you find yourself in the middle of the arguments, and the fights, and all of the drama. It is not fun even anymore to play.

Our Heavenly Father, in love, says what I would say to my own kids. "Stay away from a fool, for a companion of fools suffers harm. The righteous choose their friends carefully." Before I move on, let me speak really directly to those of you who have struggled with addiction in your life. A couple of months ago, I went to drug court with a friend who has really been struggling, and the judge there that day who runs the county drug court, she said, "Young lady, if you really want to change, if you are as sorry as you claim to be and you want the next chapter to be different than the last one, what you need are new people, new places, and new things."

I thought that was great advice. If you want to change, if you want life to be different, you need new people because, "The righteous choose their friends carefully." So, brothers, sisters, choose people carefully. If you know a fool in your life, stay away, "For a companion of fools suffers harm." So, those are the red-light people.

Let us swing all the way over now and talk about the green light people. The Scripture says, "Walk with the wise and grow wise." If those chunks of coal and that marshmallow were not foolishness, but wisdom, the same thing would happen to you. The closer you get to people like that, the more their wisdom rubs off on you. And think for a second what that passage must have meant 3,000 years ago. There was no texting, no direct messaging, no Facebook chats, no Facetime, no Zoom. If you wanted to walk with wise people, you literally had to walk with wise people! You had to be in their presence. I mean, that is the supercharged way to become wise, to be with people.

So, let me ask you a similarly direct question. Do you know anyone who is wise? You know, as you think about that big circle of 600 people that you kind of know, is there anyone whose life,

or faith, or family, whose parenting, whose character just... it is different, it is better, it is not average? You know, maybe you have a friend who has been through cancer. And it was agonizing, like cancer is, and they were sick, like so often cancer patients are, and yet - and yet, through the midst of it, she did not take her eyes off of Jesus. And when you spoke with her, faith just came out of her - Scripture, promises, and truth. That is a wise person. Have you ever seen that family that, I do not know, they are just, they are close? It has been how many years since the honeymoon, and he still holds her hand.

In a world where it is so easy to poke fun at the other gender, she does not scoff at her husband, but respects him, builds him up, makes him feel bigger. Those are some wise people. And I am not sure what it is, but I bet if you stop and think, if you let the Holy Spirit bring some names into your heart and mind, you will know the people that God wants you to walk with. And once those names come to mind, here is the command of your loving Father - "Walk with the wise and grow wise."

Now, I will warn you, this will not necessarily be easy. There is kind of a famous book that came out a few years ago from an Australian author named Bronnie Ware. She wrote about her experiences in speaking with dying people in palliative care. And in particular, Bronnie asked them if they had any regrets. You know, she was speaking to these people during the last days of their life. And do you know what the dying people told her? They told her that they regretted not walking with the wise. Bronnie said this. "They told me, "I wish I would have stayed in touch with my friends." You know, in the busyness of life, and work, and career, and moving - you know, people always said, "Oh, you know, we should get together. We should do this more often." But, they did not and the busyness of life just swept them away."

And so, today I want to encourage you to learn from their example. Here is my simple advice to you. Schedule your steps. If there is someone wise that you know and they are open to a relationship like that, schedule it. Maybe that is my Type A trying to be imposed on you, but I think if you get it on the calendar - you know, every first Saturday of the month, we are going to do breakfast. Every Friday, after we drop the kids off at school, we are going to get together for coffee. You know, once a quarter, all of our friends, we are going to put it on the calendar, prioritize it, protect it, because God has given us this great promise, "The one who walks with the wise will grow wise."

So, today I want to encourage you to do the same. Which means, friends, we are down to one last category. Red light people, stay away from a fool. Green light people, walk with the wise. And that brings us to yellow light people. Now, some of you speed demons out there should know that technically - I Googled this - technically, a yellow light is not for hitting the gas. You know, the official governmental recommendation is a yellow light means to slow down and proceed with caution, and that is a really good way to think about most of the 600 people that you know. They are probably not notably wise. Like, "Oh, yeah, him, him, him, him, her, her, her." You probably do not know that much yet, and I am hoping and guessing that most of them are not fools, either, say whatever. Most of them are kind of in the middle.

So, what should you do? Here is what King Solomon says. He writes in Proverbs 2, "Look for wisdom as for silver, and search for wisdom as for hidden treasure." I love those verbs - look for it, search for it. Like, finding a wise person is like a hidden treasure. It is more valuable than silver, so keep your eyes open and search. And here is the part I love. Because if you do, you might find them. I was thinking of my own story the other day. Do you know that the people I am closest to today, the people that I reach out to when I need prayer, the people I unload my burdens on and confess my sins to, the people that I can send a 9-1-1 text, "I am not in a good spot and I need you right now," the people who bring me back to the cross of Jesus Christ, those people, most of them, I did not even know ten years ago.

But then I moved to a new city, I came to a new church, and these strangers walked through the door. And at first, they were just another face, and then, they were kind of an acquaintance, and then, I kind of knew them from Bible study, and then, they became friends, and then great friends. And I love thinking about that, that there was this treasure of a relationship and I had to look for it, and search for it, and grasp and hold onto it, and the same thing is true for you. In my experience, you can go to a church and you can have brothers, and sisters, and cousins. You can have co-workers. You can have a roommate. You could have a small group, a Bible study. But that will never become a great relationship to walk with until you get real.

And so, I encouraged them. I said, "Go back to church. Go back to group. Swallow hard, swallow your pride, and be real - and then, look. Confess what you are struggling with. Admit vulnerably a sin that you have committed - and then, look." Because in moments like that, wise people take a step forward. They say, "Me, too." They encourage. "I will pray for you." They might not say anything in the moment, but a day later or further on in that week, they will text you. "Hey, I have been thinking - how are you doing?" And wise people, selfless people, with strong character, will step forward and you will know exactly who to walk with.

The Bible says do not speed through life like it is all a green light. Slow down. Proceed with caution. Open your eyes and ears, confess, be real, and search, because you just might find a hidden treasure. So, put all of that together and what have you got? I think you have got God's wisdom on how to deal with people. Stay away from fools, walk with the wise, slow down and search. And I would love to say, "Amen," but I need to tell you about one thing that happened to me while I prepared that message.

As I was thinking about these three categories of people, I started to imagine if Jesus himself would be sitting right there - front and center, Jesus is listening to my message. He is taking notes about foolish people, and wise people, and searching for wisdom. And I wonder what Jesus would think as he looked at me? Would he want to be with... with me? Would Jesus, as I was actually preaching, slowly get up from his seat and sit in the back to stay away from me? I did not like thinking about that. I try not to be a fool, but I honestly can think of times when someone criticized me and my reaction was, "Whatever, it is fine." I can think of times where I could have been a wise person, and could have been different and could have been better, but I, you know, gave in to sinful ways.

And it made me ask the question, what would Jesus think of me? If Jesus, who is the wisdom of God, wants to deal with people in God's way, how would he deal with me? But then, I remembered what I read. There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Jesus knew the passage. He was one with the Holy Spirit, who inspired these words, "A companion of fools suffers harm." But Jesus, in shocking love, was willing to be harmed. He walked with Judas, with Peter, with James and John, with sinners, and he walks with us, too. He walked all the way to a cross. He was willing to be ruined so that we could walk with God forever.

There is an old hymn that says, "What a friend we have in Jesus," and isn't that true? Jesus sticks with us. You might have some great people in your life, or not, but through faith, Jesus sticks with you. You might have a great group of people to do life with that you can be totally transparent with, or maybe you do not, not yet, but you can with Jesus.

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus gave his disciples a great mission, and then, he gave them a great promise - "Surely, I will be with you always." And so, I will admit, 600 people, it is complicated. It is difficult to know what is the wise thing to do. But, brothers and sisters, you have a firm foundation. You have Jesus. The Jesus who will never leave you, who will never forsake you, who always walks by your side. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." He guides me. He leads me. His mercy and goodness are following me. I have Jesus, so I know how to deal - and you have him, too. With his help, you will always know how to deal with people.

Let us pray.

Jesus, thank you so much for being with us today. Thank you that our sin, our foolishness, and our lack of wisdom did not push you back up into heaven and away from your great mission to make us the friends of God.

I pray today, Heavenly Father, as a father myself. As I am raising my girls, I know they are going to be profoundly influenced by the people that they meet these next three or four years of their life. So, God, give my girls wisdom.

I think of our church family. I think of how many people who are growing because they have met the right people, and I think of how many people who are stuck, especially in addiction, because they have not let go of the wrong people.

Father, this matters - so, help us. Give us wisdom, and give us the courage to do what we have to do in our relationships. We want to thrive, and grow, and become wise as we walk with Jesus. So, please help us. Help us deal with people just like Jesus did, with love, compassion, patience, and grace. We pray this all in his beautiful name. Amen.