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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

Annoying Behavior

Not all bad behavior is what we would call sinful, selfish, or even unwise. It’s just ... it’s just ... well, it’s just plain annoying!

I would put in this category chewing with your mouth open, brohugs, and using your iPad to video a concert when I am sitting in the row behind you trying to watch my kid perform. But I’ll resist checking off all my personal pet peeves (I’m sure my friends wish I’d correct some of my bad habits, too). Still, I find it very interesting that the book of Proverbs identifies a few behaviors to avoid simply because they irritate everyone else in the room.

We might find this too trivial to deserve a place in God’s revealed word. But, pleasant behavior is part of loving your neighbor as yourself. Besides, it’s good to be liked by all (Rom. 12:17–18). It would be difficult to reach out with the gospel if people cringed and looked for the exit when they saw you drawing near. Irritating behavior is likely to drive away friends, coworkers, and new prospects alike.

Without getting more worked up than Solomon intends, here are a few annoying behaviors that the book of Proverbs encourages us to avoid:

Drawing Too Much Attention to Yourself

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips (Proverbs 27:2).

Patting yourself on the back is often a sign of insecurity or desperation. It's also very prideful. In college we used to have a joke about how long it would take a Harvard grad to slip into a conversation the fact that he was a Harvard grad. Hey, everyone wants to be recognized for an accomplishment or a job well done. Let it come naturally. Better to "clothe yourselves with humility" (1 Peter 5:5) and "not to think more highly of himself than he ought" (Rom. 12:3). The real estimation is not how I think I did, but how others think I did. What a massive difference exists between "have you heard me play the piano?" and "have you heard her play the piano?"

Getting in the Middle of Other People's Affairs

Like one who takes a dog by the ears,
Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him
(Proverbs 26:17).

It's common decency to stay out of an argument that doesn't involve you. It also is a path of safety—people often get injured when they jump into a dogfight! Sure, be helpful and loving to work toward the reconciliation of other people (Phil. 4:2, Matt. 5:9). But pick your battles, and learn when your input is welcome, and when it's better to keep your nose out of other people's business.

Inappropriate Mirth

Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda,
Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart (Proverbs 25:20).

Vinegar on soda and a blast of freezing air on bare skin cause shocking reactions. A joke told at a funeral causes the same. Let's learn to be a little more mindful of our surroundings.

Trying to cheer up a grieving person is well-meaning, yet very unkind. Usually such blunders occur because we as comforters aren't sure of what to say to those who grieve. You don't have to say anything. Job's three friends did their best work when they kept quiet (Job 2:13). A grieving person doesn't want to be told everything is fine, or to be invited to the movies to get his mind off things. A griever certainly does not want to be told "I know how you feel" (which is very presumptuous) or "it's not that bad" (which is very insensitive).

Dropping in All the Time

Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house,
Or he will become weary of you and hate you (Proverbs 25:17).

Of course, we want to be hospitable and loving (Rom. 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9), and it's mostly a joy when people come over. But pop in unexpectedly, or too frequently, and such intrusions will become dreaded rather than appreciated. They add the burden of entertaining others to an already busy schedule, or distract from the few precious moments of purely family time that people have these days. People may not come out and say that you're a pain, but they'll be thinking it.

Calling Too Early

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning,
It will be reckoned a curse to him (Proverbs 27:14).

I know you couldn't wait to tell me your kid won an award, but it could have waited until after 6:00am. Have some common courtesy, would ya? Not everyone is a morning person. Save it for 8:00am or 9:00am so you don't ruin my whole day. 'Nuff said.

Kidding Around Too Much

Like a madman who throws
Firebrands, arrows, and death,
So is a man who deceives his neighbor
And says, “Was I not kidding?” (Proverbs 26:18–19).

Practical jokes and playful insults are all fun and games, if you know the other person well enough, and if you don't take it too far. It can be perceived as very inappropriate if it's directed at a new acquaintance who doesn't get your humor yet, or anytime it crosses the line.

Sarcasm also takes a deft touch, and too much of it becomes a real turn-off. I especially encourage married couples not to use sarcasm with each other at all. Saying, “I was just kidding” does not erase the nagging suspicion that there was a grain of truth to that cutting remark.

Cutting People Off Mid-Sentence

He who gives an answer before he hears,
It is folly and shame to him (Proverbs 18:13).

Did you know that on Jeopardy, the little thumb buzzer doesn't work until Alex Trebek finishes reading the last word of the questions? I wish this were true in everyday conversation. You may think you already know what I'm going to say, but be quiet anyway and let me finish talking. Because you probably don't, and even if you happen to guess right, you're being rude by not letting me finish my thoughts. It makes me think you don't care about what I have to say; you just want me to hush so that you can spill out your great wisdom. Have some manners. Half of being a good friend is being a good listener. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Discovery: seeing what everybody has seen, but thinking what nobody has thought.”
—*Alber Szent Gyorgi*