



Wisdom Worksheet: 12 Words to the Wise

Righteousness (tsedeq) (Prov. 1:3; 21:3)

Introduction

Proverbs is the Old Testament's book of wisdom. While it appears as a list of nearly 1,000 random pithy sayings, *Proverbs* is one of the Old Testament's most tightly outlined books designed to equip young leaders with wisdom to navigate through life's conflict toward community. In its introduction, Solomon reveals 12 words to the wise—12 pearls—that serve as the foundational teachings of this literary gem. They can be organized into 4 strands of 3 pearls each: (1) *morality: righteousness, equity, and justice*; (2) *mystery: wise behavior, understanding, and riddles*; (3) *mastery: prudence, discretion, and wise counsel*; and (4) *memory: discipline, knowledge, and learning*. The strand of *morality* begins with the pearl of *righteousness*.

Righteousness is *tsedeq* in Hebrew. The NIV translates it as “*doing what is right*” (Prov. 1:3). *Righteousness* is doing what is right in God's sight. It comes from God rather than the good works of any individual (Prov. 2:6-9). *Righteousness* is often juxtaposed in *Proverbs* with *wickedness*—doing what is wrong in God's sight. Left to our own pride and foolishness, we will too often choose what God deems wrong over what He sees as right. Solomon clarified God's perspective of the importance of doing what is right, “*To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice*” (Prov. 21:3). An examination of the uses of *righteousness* in *Proverbs* uncovers four contextual patterns. They are *righteous*: (1) *decisions*, (2) *talk*, (3) *strength*, and (4) *walk*.



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(1) Decisions (Prov. 12:5; 15:28)

Our major *decisions* surface in at least 3 areas: (1) *career*, (2) *community*, and (3) *challenges*. Proverbs equips us for righteous decisions in all three. Solomon penned, “*The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful*” (Prov. 12:5). Wisdom offers us a righteous grid to process our decisions before we make them. “*The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil*” (Prov. 15:28).

Career (Prov. 11:18; 11:6; 13:21; 13:25; 15:6)

Righteous decisions enrich our *careers*. Righteous decisions for our careers occur more frequently in the midst of our work than in our choice of the right profession. Though the latter carries long-term consequences, Proverbs does not neglect the weight of the former. “*The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward*” (Prov. 11:18). Life flows inside-out from the heart (Prov. 4:23). Who we are to *be* determines what we are to *do* which determines where we are to *go*. Too often we get it backwards. We believe that if we *go* there, we will *do* this in order to *be* that. Consequently, it is important for us to bloom where we are planted, sowing righteousness in order to *reap a sure reward*. The righteous are delivered from evil desires that stem from an unfaithful heart—one that divides its loyalty between right and wrong, frequently fleshed out in a duplicitous relationship between one’s present employer and a potential future one (Prov. 11:6). Solomon warned of the consequences of this alluring sin versus the reward of doing what is right in God’s sight, “*Misfortune pursues the sinner, but prosperity is the reward of the righteous*” (Prov. 13:21). Proverbs



alludes to the fact that the righteous generally have jobs while the wicked often go hungry (Prov. 13:25). Generally true, most of the time, righteous decisions regarding how we function in our careers lead to a financial cushion; whereas, the income of the wicked is spelled, *t-r-o-u-b-l-e* (Prov. 15:6).

Community (Prov. 3:33; 11:10; 29:2)

Righteous decisions enhance *community*, or relationships; wicked ones hurt them. Righteous decisions improve our relationship with God; however, wicked decisions damage our relationship with Him. Solomon communicated, “*The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous*” (Prov. 3:33). Similarly, righteous decisions deepen our relationships with others, while wicked ones diminish them. Solomon exclaimed, “*When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy*” (Prov. 11:10). Conversely, the people groan when the wicked rule (Prov. 29:2).

Challenges (Prov. 11:8; 11:21; 12:13)

Righteous decisions guide us through life’s *challenges*. Wicked decisions hide us through life’s challenges. Typically, we follow our wicked decisions with pretense in an effort to hide the source of those decisions—an unrighteous, or unfaithful, heart. Solomon described the guiding versus the hiding, stating, “*The righteous man is rescued from trouble, and it comes on the wicked instead*” (Prov. 11:8). Restated, the wicked get punished; the righteous go free (Prov. 11:21). When referencing the challenges of life, Solomon likened the benefit of righteous decisions to freedom, and the consequences of wicked ones to a trap (Prov. 12:13).



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Pause and Let Wisdom Work

What *decisions* are you facing that require righteousness? Are you in the midst of making decisions in your *career*, in your *community*, or in your *challenges*? Has your pattern been paraphrased as, “If I just *go* there, then I will *do* this in order to *be* that.” Let who you are designed to *be* determine what you are to *do* and where you are to *go*. Read through Proverbs for God’s righteousness before you make your next major decision.

(2) Talk (Prov. 10:20)

Righteous *talk* is paramount in achieving wisdom for the conflict in our lives. Solomon said, “*The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value*” (Prov. 10:20). Proverbs offers 3 wise traits for righteousness in our speech. Righteous talk is: (1) *honest*, (2) *hopeful*, and (3) *helpful*.

Honest (Prov. 10:11)

Righteous talk is *honest*. Solomon poetically stated, “*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked*” (Prov. 10:11). A fountain is pure, clear, and consistent. It is life-giving. These are characteristics of honest speech. Contrastingly, the words of the wicked are dishonest: mixed, cloudy, and sporadic. They are life-taking.

Hopeful (Prov. 10:25; 10:28)

Righteous talk is *hopeful*. Solomon described the aftereffects of a stormy conflict where our words often get us into trouble. He said, “*When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever*” (Prov. 10:25). Amidst life’s storms, the righteous are hopeful with their words, but the wicked are full of despair.



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After their heated exchanges, the wicked often flee the scene. Solomon went on to describe this hopelessness of the wicked, “*The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing*” (Prov. 10:28). Hope will not come from wicked words.

Helpful (Prov. 10:21; 10:31; 10:32)

Righteous talk is *helpful*. Righteous words are helpful to all who listen. First, they are helpful because they are *nourishing*. “*The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment*” (Prov. 10:21). Second, they are helpful because they are *wise*. “*The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out*” (Prov. 10:31). Third, they are helpful because they are *fitting*. “*The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse*” (Prov. 10:32). *Fitting* is translated from the Hebrew word, *ratson*. The NASB translates *ratson* as *acceptable* which means bringing favor, or good will.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

What part of your speech needs to change in order for your words to be righteous? Is your *talk: honest, hopeful, and helpful*? Ask a close friend the answer to these questions, and exchange any wicked words that tear down others for righteous ones that build them up.

(3) Strength (Prov. 12:3; 12:7; 18:10)

Often, we are attracted to quickly gained success offered through an act that twists a wrong in an attempt to make it right. Solomon warned of the consequences of such foolishness when he said, “*A man cannot be established through wickedness, but the*



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righteous cannot be uprooted” (Prov. 12:3). True strength is found in righteousness.

This righteousness provides both a foundation and framework that endure. *“Wicked men are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous stands firm”* (Prov.

12:7). This righteousness is not a righteousness that comes from us; rather, it is a righteousness that comes only from God. Solomon scribed that nothing is stronger than

the righteous identity of God, *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe”* (Prov. 18:10). This righteousness is available to those who

humble themselves and run to the Lord. Righteousness strengthens us with: (1) *resilience*, (2) *relationship*, and (3) *resolve*.

Resilience (Prov. 24:16; 10:30)

Righteousness strengthens us with *resilience*—the ability to endure, or withstand conflict. *“For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity”* (Prov. 24:16). The righteous tend to experience

longevity in their endeavors; whereas, the wicked are more likely to encounter failure. *“The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land”* (Prov.

10:30). Paul challenged believers to resilience when he said, *“And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right”* (2 Thess. 3:13).

Relationship (Prov. 14:2; 15:29)

Righteousness strengthens our *relationship* with God. *“He whose walk is upright fears the LORD, but he whose ways are devious despises him”* (Prov. 14:2). Our bond with the Divine is enhanced through prayer—the connection of our hearts with His. *“The*

LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29).



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Resolve (Prov. 14:34; 28:1)

Righteousness strengthens us with *resolve*—the ability to work out, or settle, conflict. “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*” (Prov. 14:34). A nation is exalted with the resolve that flows from righteous leaders. This resolve provides courage to work out, or settle, conflict because the righteous have nothing to hide. King Hezekiah’s men copied Solomon’s wise saying regarding this matter, “*The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion*” (Prov. 28:1).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

What weakness of yours can be transformed to *strength* through righteousness? Would *resilience* strengthen you? Are you willing to pray in order to strengthen your *relationship* with God? Are you in need of *resolve* to work out your conflict? Block out 5 minutes each day to pray for righteousness. Ask God for strength that is evidenced in *resilience, relationship, and resolve*.

(4) Walk (Prov. 2:20; 20:7)

Walk is used by Bible writers as a metaphor for *life*. The path where our feet take us comprises our life. We choose either a pathway toward righteousness or one toward wickedness. God’s desire for us is the wise pathway of righteousness. Characterizing wisdom’s connection with righteousness, Solomon said, “*Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous*” (Prov. 2:20; cf. 8:20). This path is free of blame and passed on to further generations. “*The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him*” (Prov. 20:7). Jesus summed it up,



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“Wisdom is proved right by her actions” (Matt. 11:19). Wisdom is proved righteous by its walk. A righteous walk is (1) *heart-guarded*, (2) *abundant*, and (3) *eternal*.

Heart-Guarded (Prov. 4:23; 13:6)

A righteous walk is *heart-guarded*. Solomon wrote one of the most foundational passages in all of Scripture when he penned, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”* (Prov. 4:23). Paul said that when we fully surrender our hearts to Christ, we receive not only His righteousness, but also His prayer-inspired peace that guards our hearts like a military fortress (Phil. 3:9; 4:6-7). Solomon described full surrender when he said, *“Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner”* (Prov. 13:6). *Integrity* means *complete*. Complete surrender of our hearts to the Lord leads to complete surrender of our paths to Him (Prov. 3:5-6).

Abundant (Prov. 13:9; 4:18; 16:8; 21:21)

A righteous walk is *abundant*. Solomon observed, *“The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out”* (Prov. 13:9). A light that shines brightly illuminates abundantly, providing all of the light that we will ever need. Solomon proclaimed, *“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day”* (Prov. 4:18). The light of a righteous walk satisfies; the darkness of a wicked walk dissatisfies. Solomon stated, *“Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice”* (Prov. 16:8). He concluded that a righteous walk satisfies with the hallmarks of an abundant life. *“He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor”* (Prov. 21:21).

Eternal (Prov. 12:28; 11:4; 11:19; 14:32)



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A righteous walk is *eternal*. According to Solomon, it brings life that never ends. “*In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality*” (Prov. 12:28). Eternity includes judgment, one that each of us will face with God. When we do, no amount of earthly success will pay for our unrighteousness. Only the righteousness of Another can pay for our sin. Solomon reflected, “*Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death*” (Prov. 11:4). If we reject the righteousness of Christ, we will experience death—eternal separation from God. Solomon summarized, “*The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death*” (Prov. 11:19). Along these lines, Solomon pleaded, “*When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge*” (Prov. 14:32). Christ is the refuge of the righteous.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

What part of your *walk* needs to change in order to be righteous? Where do your feet take you? That’s your life. Do your steps lead you to a click, a smoke, a toke, a binge, a pop, a fix, a fling, or even a self-righteous act? That’s your death. Are you willing to walk toward the *heart-guarded, abundant, and eternal* righteous refuge of Christ? Your life led to his death; His death led to your life.

Conclusion

We begin our wise strand of *morality* with the pearl of *righteousness* by applying the righteousness of Christ to our *decisions*, our *talk*, our *strength*, and our *walk*. Jesus called us to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). We must be careful not to create our own self-righteousness. Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel’s



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leaders and their self-righteous followers who had created a righteousness of their own, rather than the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ (Rom. 10:3-4; cf. Phil. 3:9). Jesus commanded his disciples amidst nearly 20,000 other listeners, *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:20). The righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law is the righteousness of Christ because He is the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). We humble our hearts to Him in order to receive His righteousness. Then He brings His wisdom, including His righteousness, to our *decisions*, our *talk*, our *strength*, and our *walk*.