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Proverbs: Neighbors



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg explores the value of neighbors as highlighted in the biblical book of Proverbs. Drawing from various verses in the book, Gregg emphasizes the importance of being a good neighbor and treating others with honesty and respect. He also provides practical advice, such as avoiding frivolous lawsuits and settling disputes amicably. Overall, the presentation offers insights on building strong and positive relationships with those around us.

Transcript

For the last several lectures in Proverbs, we've been looking at what Solomon has to say about various human relationships, lots of different kinds of relationships. Of course, he first talked about a relationship with God back when we talked about a God-conscious life. Now, we're talking about a relationship with human beings.

There have been several different specific kinds of relationships, each of which have their own dynamics and their own expectations. We come to the last of these, which is perhaps the most general of all the relationships, and that is the relationship between neighbors. We've talked about friends and brothers and enemies.

All of those, of course, fall under the general rubric of neighbors. Now, when we think of neighbors, we might think of the people who live in our neighborhood, the people nearby. And no doubt, there was something intended by the word neighbors to suggest proximity.

In many of the Proverbs, when neighbors are mentioned, it's obvious that some kind of proximity of dwelling is intended. Though we know from what Jesus taught that the word neighbor is far more broad, and that to Jesus, a neighbor is anyone who shares your world with you. You may encounter your neighbor far from home.

That doesn't mean you're far from home and you meet someone who lives near you who's also far from home, but rather, wherever you may be, whoever you have contact with is your neighbor. And so, the parable of the Good Samaritan was intended to convey that a person who is of a different country, a person who is of a different religion, a

person with whom you might ordinarily have no cordial relationships, yet running into a person like that in need is running into a neighbor. And thus, falls under the general obligation to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Now, Solomon has some things to say about neighbors. They're general and multiple. And as in the case of the other subjects, we're not really doing a topical subject.

I mean, this is not the way I would do a topical study on a subject in general using the whole Bible, but we're using Proverbs primarily. And that being so, in the nature of the book of Proverbs, there's a lot of different miscellaneous points made. Rather than if I were preparing a topical study from the Bible on any given subject, I would want to have it considerably more of a flow of thought that's smooth and would arrange it that way.

But in Proverbs, we have just a thing here and a thing there on the topic, and it's not always easy to arrange them into groups of thoughts that are similar to each other. But I have arranged them a little bit. The first point we're going to look at is what Solomon considers to be the value of a neighbor.

And in chapter 18 of Proverbs, in verse 17, it says, The first one to plead his cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him. Now, here, obviously, a neighbor is just anybody. The idea is that you're hearing one side of the story from somebody, and you're not hearing the other side immediately.

So, you are convinced and sympathetic toward the side which you first heard. And this is always, or almost always the case, unless you become wary of this. That is, you can become cautious about this tendency when you've heard somebody tell an unflattering story about somebody else, and you've heard no other side.

Of course, the tendency is to think unflattering thoughts toward that person. Or when you've heard somebody present their case in a dispute, and they've presented the evidence they hope to present in their own favor, but you've heard nothing about the evidence against them, or the evidence in favor of another position. And so, the tendency is to have sympathy toward the first person who speaks to you, because that's why they're speaking to you.

They're speaking to curry your sympathy. They're speaking to get you to see it their way. And they have calculated their presentation to include all of those factors that make them look good, and to conceal all of those factors that make their case look weak.

And so, the tendency is to make a quick judgment about something when we've only heard one side of the matter. A verse that I consider to be similar to this in meaning is in the same chapter, verse 13, which doesn't mention neighbors, but it's still the same concept that we have in verse 17. Meaning, he who answers a matter before he hears it is a folly and shame to him.

Before he hears the whole story, in other words. If you hear of something and you give an answer and you have not heard both sides, then you're likely to make a foolish call. Because the first man who makes his case seems right until a neighbor comes and cross-examines him, and then the other person sounds kind of right, too.

Then you begin to wonder whether the first person was right after all. It's very valuable to be able to hear two sides of a story, and that's the value of a neighbor. If you lived in a world without other people, and you didn't have other people in your life, you would not have as much opportunity to hear multiple opinions because people have different views of things.

If you hear only one view of things, maybe the view you're raised with. Maybe your family always, your parents and siblings and the culture of your own home, always saw things a certain way and you never get outside your own home. You're always going to see things through that lens until you get out abroad and you rub shoulders with other people and see how they think in their families and how they operate or how other cultures are.

And you begin to say, well, I wonder, really, if the way I was raised is really correct. I never would have questioned it, except there are neighbors. There are people in my world who don't see it my way, who have a different way of looking at things than the way that I first heard and I first considered.

This is certainly true in terms of theological questions because there are many theological controversies, as you have become aware, I'm sure. For example, when I was raised, I was raised under very persuasive teaching of a very good teacher. A teacher who was able to point out chapter and verse for almost everything he said.

And his teaching conformed to a particular theological school of thought. I didn't know that. I just thought what he was teaching was what the Bible said.

He never told me there was a name for this viewpoint or that there were other viewpoints that credibly should be considered. And so I memorized the viewpoint and memorized the proofs for the viewpoint, the proof texts and so forth. And became a persuasive teacher myself of the same viewpoint until some years passed when I encountered somebody who had a different view.

And I began to weigh new ideas against the ideas I've been taught and reached the conclusion actually that some of the views I had not heard previously were the right ones and that the ones I've been taught were not necessarily the strongest. And I thought of this verse in those days because in fact that's the connection in which I thought of it. In this case, a neighbor is valuable because he's got another viewpoint.

A neighbor is valuable because he's an individual who's not you. And therefore sees a

different perspective, sees different facts. Not because the facts are really different, but he sees different facts than the ones you're noticing.

He's paying attention to other factors and bringing them up. Two heads are better than one. And to have a neighbor, have somebody in other words in your life who is able to challenge the first thing you've heard or thought is a valuable thing.

And it's a valuable thing, I believe, for Christians to be exposed to other Christians of different viewpoints on many things because they can then weigh issues and decide what the truth is for themselves. Many churches I have found do not feel there's a great value in that. They believe they should maintain almost a monopoly over the teaching of the people who attend their church and they don't think it's a good or safe thing for their people to be confused by hearing other viewpoints.

That's what they would say, confused. And many times of course people are confused by hearing different viewpoints. But it's not necessary to be confused.

Just as you can refuse to be offended, you can also refuse to be confused. That's something I realized when I was quite young. When I first began to hear different viewpoints and I wasn't sure which one was right.

Initially I tended to be confused about it, but then I realized it's not necessary to become confused just because I don't know the answer. Confusion is a negative state of mind, definitely. Confusion is a disordered state of mind.

It's an out of balance state of mind, being confused. And God is not the author of confusion. But that doesn't mean that one is in danger of spiritual harm if they remain undecided about questions about which they feel they have not yet received enough data.

They've not heard all the signs yet. You may know that there are two different opinions and you're not sure what all the arguments are for each opinion so you can't decide between them because you want to be fair minded. While you are remaining undecided, one option would be to be confused.

Another option is to not be confused, just be undecided. You don't have to be out of balance in your mind because you can't decide right now which view has the better taste. It is very wise to realize that there is, on most issues, another side.

There's very few things that everybody will agree about. And to say there's another side doesn't mean that all sides are equally valid. This is not some kind of a plea for relativism where every view is considered to be true relatively.

There is absolute truth, obviously. The question is, are we to assume that the first thing we've heard is the absolute truth? We are likely to do so if we don't have a neighbor to

come and examine us, to come and question. That neighbor might be someone who writes a book, a neighbor we've never met, but their influence comes into our life through something they've written or what we hear through the media from them or whatever.

But the point is, if we were alone in the world and had no neighbors, no fellows, no one there to look at it from another angle, then we would be doomed to have only our own opinion, which we would derive from the first thing that was presented to us, probably. The first opinion that comes along is likely to stay in place unless something persuasive comes along to challenge it. And that's the value of having other persons, other neighbors in the world with you, is they can challenge what you believe.

And as long as you're not putting your identity in your particular viewpoint, if your identity is in Christ, then of course your identity is not in being an Arminian or a Calvinist or a charismatic or a non-charismatic or a dispensationalist or a covenant theologian or whatever the different issues may be. Your identity isn't in that. Your identity is in Christ and in following the truth.

And so you're not threatened if your opinion has to be reexamined and maybe even is shown to be weak. And perhaps something may be discarded in favor of something more correct. That's fine.

That's good. That's a benefit. The person who corrects you is doing you a favor.

And so that's a good thing about neighbors. One good thing. Now, in chapter 27 and verse 10, we've seen this verse when we're talking about brothers, I believe, but it's now talking about neighbors as well.

Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. For better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away. So a neighbor in this case is a person who lives in proximity to you.

And better to have somebody nearby, even if he's not a brother, than somebody who is a brother and isn't available. Better to have a human being even that you don't know well. Now, this is why the law says you should love your neighbor as you love yourself.

You should be available to your neighbor, even if he's not your brother. If he's near you, he's there as somebody you can help and somebody that can help you. So we see that also in some of the other Proverbs that we shall encounter here.

A number of Proverbs indicate ways in which people may be unjust or may cheat their neighbor and must not do so. Treating your neighbor right is strongly advocated in a number of Proverbs and in different ways. In chapter 3, verses 27 through 29, it says, Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do so.

Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you. Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety's sake. OK, now here I mentioned that the reasoning of neighbors is for mutual assistance.

It says he dwells by you for safety's sake. It's nice to have your own space and in many societies, agrarian societies, houses are pretty far from each other. People have lots of acreage and their house is kind of remote.

Even if there are neighbors that are some distance away. I had a place like that in Oregon and I had another place like that in Idaho where we didn't have large acreage, but our acreage was such that our house in each case was not visible from other houses. It wasn't very far from other houses and there were neighbors, but we couldn't really see them from our house.

It felt remote and it's kind of a nice feeling to feel remote. You kind of feel like you've got your own space, no one's around. But it was kind of nice sometimes too to hear the neighbor's kids, though we couldn't see them far off.

It's nice to know there were human beings around because when you're that remote, you also can become targeted by people who say, well, you know, because you don't have any neighbors, there's no one there to keep an eye on you. There's no neighborhood watch going on if there's no neighbors. Although it is nice to have space and privacy, it's also a good thing to be not too remote, to be in a place where there are neighbors who, if you are in danger, you can call them.

Or if they're in danger, they can call you and you can be there for very long. That's what it means in verse 30, that your neighbor dwells by you for safety's sake. The reason you have neighbors is so that you can help each other out when things are unsafe.

When you need help, when your barn catches on fire, you need help putting the fire out or when you've got other dangers that come your way. Facing them alone is not an easy thing and so that's what neighbors are for. But it says in verse 27 and 28, don't say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I'll give it to you when you have it with you.

This is probably referring to employment situations, although it could easily seem to be if you've borrowed something that belongs to your neighbor and he wants it back, you say, well, I'll give it to you tomorrow. You give back to him when he wants it. But I think more likely it's talking about a situation where you've hired your neighbor to do some work and in biblical times people were paid the same day.

They didn't go a week or two and then get a paycheck. They worked a day and they got paid at night. They worked another day, they got paid the next night.

They got paid day by day because they made so little. There really was no buffer against hunger. So they had to have the income every day to buy food for the next day.

And so if you owe him something and he asks for it and you have it to give, don't say, well, come back tomorrow for it, I'll give it to you then. Don't withhold it from him when you have it to give. This is also, I think, true in situations where you're in debt or you have bills to pay and you maybe have the money to pay them, but you kind of hoped to use the money for something else that you preferred.

And you've decided to put your creditor off a little bit so the money that you have, you can use for something you'd prefer to use it for at the moment. For some, maybe luxury, for some entertainment, for something that you don't necessarily need, but you kind of would like to do with the money. And here's a bill sitting there that you owe.

Don't say to the neighbor, come another day and I'll pay it for you when you have it with you. Pay up what you owe your neighbor now. Put your debt to your neighbor first before you do something else.

Instead of postponing that because you don't want to deliver that money over right away. In other words, be neighborly. If you have a debt to your neighbor, if you've got something he wants, something that he has a right to, don't postpone giving it to him.

Be prompt about that. As you, of course, would want done to you. You're supposed to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

That means you'd do to your neighbor what you'd want done to you. You would not want him to withhold from you what is owed to you just because he's in no hurry to surrender it. In chapter six, in verse twenty nine, of course, we have that discussion about adultery.

And it says, well, in verse twenty seven through twenty nine, can a man take fire to his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes to his neighbor's wife. Whoever touches her shall not be innocent. So this is again under the general heading.

Don't cheat your neighbor. If you owe your neighbor something, give it to him. Don't postpone payment.

If he's got a wife, leave her alone. You don't cheat your neighbor. You treat your neighbor as you'd want to be treated yourself.

Obviously, you would not want anyone to touch your wife. You don't touch anyone else's wife either. In chapter twenty four and verse twenty eight, it says, do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause.

For would you deceive with your lips? This is no doubt talking about a court case where

somebody, maybe somebody who's a closer friend than your neighbor is to you, has a case against your neighbor or wants to have a case against your neighbor, wants to bring charges, wants to sue or wants to do something like that and wants you to bear testimony in court against your neighbor. Of course, in our litigious society, that could happen in many situations where somebody wants to sue somebody else. And we know that lawsuits are often very frivolous.

But in a court of law, they have to have witnesses. And perhaps somebody you know is bringing a suit against somebody else, but it's not really a very valid suit. And they'd like you to testify on behalf.

A lot of times, if people are going through a divorce and there's a decision being made about custody of the children, witnesses, friends may be brought in to bear testimony. And the tendency is to testify on the side of your friend, possibly against your neighbor, even though your neighbor has a better case than what your friend has. The tendency is to speak against your neighbor if there's some benefit to you or to somebody you care more about than you care about your neighbor.

And you may, in fact, bend justice that way by testifying against somebody without a real good cause. Sometimes it's the case that your friend may not be the best custodial parent. But because they're your friend, they want you to give them a character reference.

And they want you to speak up against their estranged spouse who might have a better case to be the custodial parent. I get these things in the mail. You probably do, too, about there's some class action suit against people who've used some kind of product and somebody's decided to sue the company over it because of something or another that's happened.

And I've had no problem with the product. I mean, maybe the product, I've used it and I've got no case against the manufacturer. But they say, well, you can get involved in this and you can get a share of the take and so forth.

And I think this is a frivolous lawsuit. This is not just. What do I care about getting a portion of the take if it's unjust gain? To bring a suit against somebody and bear witness against somebody without a cause, that is to say they're not guilty of anything or at least I don't have a genuine complaint against them, is not the right way to treat a neighbor.

You certainly don't want your neighbors to treat you that way. Gossip comes up in this category, too. Now, there's going to be a separate treatment of all the things that Proverbs says about gossip because it is a subject that comes up frequently.

But gossip is often slander. It's not always slander. Slander is, of course, an untrue and damaging report that you give about somebody.

Gossip might be true or untrue. In any case, gossip is when you're giving damaging information about somebody who's not present. And behind their back, you're saying things to somebody else who doesn't need to hear them, but perhaps you've got a personal grudge against somebody and you'd like to have company in that grudge.

And so you're encouraging someone else to share that grudge. And for you to take up a complaint, to take up a report against your neighbor without a good cause, is here what would be forbidden. He says, would you deceive with your lips? If you bring a false witness or bring a witness without cause against your neighbor, that is forbidden by God.

It is not, of course, treating your neighbor as you would treat yourself or would have them treat you. In chapter 26, verse 19, actually 18 and 19 go together. Because verse 19 is not actually a complete sentence.

It begins in verse 18. Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, I was only joking. That's sometimes the way that people will get out of being caught in a lie.

Oh, you took me seriously? I was just kidding. When they weren't, they were really hoping to deceive you, but you caught them and then they have to somehow make it sound like they weren't lying. Say, oh, I was only joking.

When you deceive a neighbor and he takes you seriously or you intend for him to, but then you get caught and just say, oh, I was just joking. You're not taking truth very seriously. You're not taking responsibility for having bent the truth.

You're like a madman throwing dangerous objects, throwing firebrands. That would be a dangerous individual throwing firebrands around. He's a madman throwing arrows and death.

This man is not doing something that is light. It's a very damaging thing to do, to deceive people and then think you can get away with just saying, oh, well, I was not serious when I said that. I was just joking.

Those are all different ways that Proverbs talks about cheating your neighbor and how we should not do so. Now, another thing that is said about neighbor relations is that although it has nothing to do with cheating your neighbor, it has to do with annoying your neighbor, perhaps. And that is to not tax his hospitality.

In chapter 25 and verse 17, it says, seldom set foot in your neighbor's house. Proverbs 25, 17. Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you.

He may get too much of you. You may overcharge his hospitality. A lot of people just are not sensitive about other people's lives.

Other people have lives, too, and sometimes they're not intending for you to be in the middle of it all the time. They have other relationships they need time for. They have other business they have to do.

They might even just want their privacy. And there are certain people who just come over, and I don't want to mention any, but I know some, because I don't want to mention any, they might hear this recording, but I don't want to. I know some people who apparently don't have an awful lot going on in their own life, but they have a neighbor who has an unlocked front door, and they just come on, pop in at any time and just hang out.

I do know somebody who has a neighbor who comes over whenever she wants to, and she'll just come at mealtime or any other time, just walk in the door and sit around and talk like she was invited, and stay for hours if they're not going somewhere and they can't say, well, we have to leave now. It's hard to get rid of. And this person, no doubt, regards these people as friends, they're neighbors, but that's a good way to tax your friendship, to realize that somebody else's house isn't yours.

Now, it might be that the person, as a Christian, should have an open door policy, should be very hospitable and so forth. There's such a thing as hospitality, but there's also such a thing as you taking advantage of somebody's hospitality selfishly. And even if somebody likes you, and even if someone doesn't mind having you over once in a while, if you're there all the time, you can become an annoyance, someone that they begin to resent.

In most cases, unless somebody's your best friend, you don't really want to be with them all the time. And even if someone is your best friend, there's times when you like to have some time alone. If somebody is your very best friend, you might like to be with them most of the time, but not everyone's your best friend.

You've got a lot of friends that you like in moderation. And you should assume that that's how people are toward you, too. Not everyone thinks you're wonderful and thinks that every moment they spend with you is a blessing to them.

You need to be careful and make sure you're not overtaxing somebody's hospitality. Another possible meaning of this proverb would not be that you're overtaxing someone's hospitality, but you're mistaking a neighbor for a friend. That is, you're thinking they want to be around you because you think of them as a friend, but they're really just a neighbor, not a friend, and they're not really glad to have you there.

They're not enjoying you. But because they're a neighbor, they're vulnerable to you coming by. But they're not necessarily eager to have you come by.

And I think most of us can think of scenarios that fit this general pattern. Do not set foot

too often in your neighbor's house or spend too much time there. I think the King James says, withdraw your foot from your neighbor's house.

I'm not sure which is closer to the actual Hebrew, but withdraw your foot from your neighbor's house, lest he be filled with thee and hate thee. It is possible to get too much of even a good friend. You should realize that you might not be as good a friend as you think you are.

In their mind, they might wish that you wouldn't be there so much. And somebody who might actually like you in moderation may come to very much dislike you if you're not sensitive about this. And that's what he says, they may come to hate you.

They wouldn't necessarily hate you. If you were just a neighbor who had normal contact with them, this would be appropriate for the relationship. You see, this is an important thing about relationships.

Relationships become embittered almost precisely to the degree that expectations are unmet. If somebody does not have expectations upon you, there's very little that you can do that will disappoint them because they don't expect anything from you. But if they have expectations and you don't meet them, then they can become embittered.

They think you should know that they expected such and such and you didn't know or you acted like you didn't know or they thought you did know but you didn't do what you knew they expected or whatever. If somebody has expectations on somebody else in a relationship, then that relationship is one in which disappointment and bitterness can come in. If there's no expectations or there's little expectations, then of course there's almost no opportunity to disappoint somebody unless you actually do something criminal against them.

At least all people have this much expectation that you're not going to cheat them or do criminal actions toward them. Some people expect far more. And the expectations in a relationship are different with the different kinds of relationships.

A husband and wife expect more from each other than two friends expect of each other. Two friends expect something more of each other than just two neighbors expect. Just because somebody is your neighbor doesn't mean they're your friend.

Friends are a special kind of relationship. Neighbors are a different kind and there are different expectations involved. And it's possible that this verse is suggesting that you think somebody is your friend and they just think of you as a neighbor.

You don't mind your friends coming over a lot but your neighbor who's not particularly your friend hanging around a lot can just become an annoyance. And so it may be that this is saying don't mistake a neighbor for a friend. Somebody who's not a friend and you think they are but they don't think they are.

You're not the person that they want to sacrifice all their free time for. There might be people they would like to do that with but you're not that person. You flatter yourself.

You think everybody thinks you're wonderful to be around. Some people probably do. Everybody probably doesn't.

And so you might be sensitive about that. Whether you're thinking your expectation is that this person is a good friend and that they'll be glad to have you come by just any time to hang out for a long time. Their expectation is that you're just a neighbor and they've got to leave them alone a lot of the time.

And that you ought to just show up when you have a special need or when they have a special need and neighbors need to be neighborly and helpful. So you need to be sensitive about what other people think the relationship is as well as what you think it is. Now there's a lot of proverbs that have to do with neighbors that are not good neighbors.

There are bad neighbors and different ways in which neighbors can be bad neighbors. In chapter 11 and verse 9 says, The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. The meaning of this is not entirely clear but it makes it very clear that someone being hypocritical toward his neighbor is not a good neighbor.

That is, a hypocrite is somebody who is pretending to be something they're not. A hypocrite is not somebody who believes one thing and falls short of living up to it. That's not a hypocrite.

Everybody has higher values than they actually live up to. I would hope. Because everyone does poorly at some things but I hope that that doesn't reflect their values.

When they do badly their values I hope are higher than that. Everybody falls short of what they think they should do. So to say that someone believes something but they don't always do it is not to say they're a hypocrite, it just means they're human.

But a hypocrite is somebody who's pretending to be something they're not. The word hypocrite means a play actor, someone who's playing a role. They want to be seen in a certain light but they really know they're something else and hope other people won't find out.

They're wearing a mask, they're wearing a costume, they're playing a role. Now if that's how you are toward your neighbors, in some way or another Solomon pictures somebody destroying his neighbor that way. But I'm not really sure what kind of destruction, since destroy is a rather general term.

And it's not clear what the scenario is. But he certainly is saying that you should be forthright, you should be transparent at least in measure, at least you should be honest

about who you are rather than pretending something. I suppose the main way that neighbors would be hypocritical toward each other would be if they feigned friendship with each other when they're really not feeling it.

They don't really have a friendly commitment toward their neighbor, that they're faking it. Now there is such a thing as just being cordial whether you like somebody or not. That's not the same thing as being a hypocrite.

That's just being polite. But if you're perhaps trying to win some kind of favor from your neighbor by pretending to be more of a friend than you are, pretending to like them better than you do, that would be hypocritical and that could lead to situations where you're able to do harm to your neighbor because he takes you to be something you're not. And his guard is down or he becomes cooperative in some venture that he thinks you're one kind of person and you're really somebody else.

In general, of course, just being a hypocrite is a bad thing. And your neighbor is anybody in your life. So you do harm to other people if you don't represent yourself as you really are.

Chapter 11 and verse 12 says, He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace. Now despises his neighbor in this proverb apparently means verbally speaks against his neighbor because it's contrasted with a wiser man who doesn't speak. He may think badly of his neighbor, but he holds his peace.

It's like your mother always used to say, if you can't think of something nice to say, don't say anything at all about someone. And so here's a person who a wise man. Yeah, he could find things to criticize his neighbor for, but he just doesn't see the need to do so.

And he holds his peace and he keeps the peace that way. In chapter 14 and verse 20 and 21 says, The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor. But the rich man has many friends.

He who despises his neighbor sins. That is, again, the contempt issue. But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Now notice that here the neighbor in question in these two verses, because of the contrast in the parallelism, the neighbor here is a poor man. And for most, in most cases, in biblical times, your neighbor was going to be a poor man unless you lived in a ritzy neighborhood. And they didn't really have ritzy neighborhoods.

The king lived in a ritzy home. And other rich men owned, you know, expensive places. But probably at least 90% of the population were peasants.

And therefore, almost every neighbor you had was relatively poor. Some would be dirt poor. We don't have neighbors like that very often, unless we are ourselves very hard luck cases and live in really bad neighborhoods.

But we have, in America, most people are middle class. And because of that, we live in neighborhoods where our neighbors are not really poor. Now they could be more poor now because of the economy than they might have been 10 years ago.

We may have neighbors that are actually losing their homes and have lost their jobs and may be losing more. If that's the case, then we may actually have some poor neighbors now. But in America, for most of the past history, Americans didn't have really poor neighbors most of the time.

But most of our neighbors were able to take care of themselves, at least since World War II. It's been a pretty prosperous society. And we may not be able to picture what Solomon is picturing, where the average neighbor that a person had was a poor man, a peasant.

If he had a farm, he could at least sustain himself. He might not make a lot of money, but he could sustain himself with his property. Lots of people didn't own farms, and they couldn't sustain themselves.

So there were a lot of poor neighbors. And he says in verse 20, the poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich have many friends. He who despises his neighbor, and in this case would be his poor neighbor, sins, because it's contrasted with he who has mercy on the poor, happy as he.

If you look down on your neighbor because he's poor, because he's of a lower class, then you're sinning. This would be a sin that's actually institutionalized in some societies. For example, in countries like India, where there'd be the untouchable class, or there'd be a caste system, where certain people just don't associate with people of a different caste, a lower rung in the economic ladder.

And to despise or look down on someone because of his poverty is actually a sin. Unfortunately, a poor man often experiences that contempt from other people. He's hated even by his own neighbor in many cases.

Only by a bad neighbor, however. A good neighbor will not despise his neighbor even if he's poor. In chapter 16, verse 29, a violent man entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good.

That is, of course, illustrated in the first chapter of Proverbs, where Saul is warning his son not to associate with those who want to entice him to participate with them in criminal activity to get money. There was also a proverb we encountered when we were talking about friends, about the danger of having the wrong kind of friends. And it said

that a man must choose his friends carefully because a wicked man will entice him.

If you go the wrong way, so here also. A neighbor who will seek to get you to participate in criminal activity is obviously not the kind of neighbor you want to have. In chapter 21, verse 10, it says, The soul of the wicked desires evil.

His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes. There are people who are just wicked. His neighbor is going to be despised by him and find no favor in his eyes just because of the person's own wickedness, not because the neighbor is worthy of contempt, but because wicked people don't have good reasons for what they do.

They're wicked. And therefore, they just choose who they're going to despise almost randomly. And so, the neighbor has no possibility of gaining favor in the eyes of somebody who doesn't have any principles.

Remember, Paul said in Romans chapter 12, If it is possible, as much as lies in you, live at peace with all men. He indicates that there perhaps are men that you cannot live at peace with because it just won't be possible. The entirety of the relationship doesn't lie with you.

There are two people who have to be participants in the relationship. If your neighbor is a decent person, then you should be able to live peaceably with them because the part that's your part, you can do. You can be a peaceable person.

You can be a good neighbor. You can be a friend. You can be helpful.

That's the part that depends on you. But sometimes, even though you do the part that depends on you, the neighbor is just not a good person. And they're wicked.

And you will find no favor in their eyes, it says. No matter what you do. In which case, you're not going to be at peace with them.

Although, that won't be your fault. That will be their choices. Now, in chapter 29, in verse 5, Solomon said, A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

This probably means that the man who's flattering his neighbor is intentionally setting a trap for him. Although, there's another way to take it, and that is if you think too highly of yourself. If you're overconfident because people have flattered you, then you have succumbed to that which is not good for you, and you've actually been snared by your own pride.

And you've been caught in the prison of your own high self-esteem, which is basically unjustified. Flattery, by definition, is not just a compliment. It's a compliment that isn't entirely warranted.

When you're flattering somebody, you're saying things positive about them that aren't

necessarily demanded by truth. If you're complimenting somebody, if you are praising somebody justly, that's not flattery. That's just giving people recognition for something that's true.

That's acknowledging good things about somebody that are really there. When you're flattering someone, by definition, that is you're trying to butter them up. You're saying more than reality would really warrant.

You're telling them good things about themselves that you might not even feel to be true, but you know that they would like to hear it, and therefore they will respond to that in a way that you're hoping to get them to respond. That is a manipulative device. And so the man who flatters his neighbor is most likely hoping to persuade his neighbor to respond in some way that the neighbor would not be disposed to do so without being flattered.

That's the point. Flattery is a manipulation, and it's not usually a manipulation to do something that's good for the neighbor. But something that the flatterer hopes to gain.

He's laying a trap, and the bait is flattery. The bait is pride responding to flattery. And that person then is not a good neighbor who flatters.

Because that neighbor may, you know, you may like a neighbor who flatters you. Because our ego is such that we really like people to say nice things about us, but that person may be the neighbor we really appreciate because they're always saying kind things or flattering things about us, but that person is not really a good neighbor. They have some ulterior motives for their flattery.

Now, there's one other passage I want to look at before we're done here, and that's in chapter 25. And this talks about the settlement of disputes between neighbors. And neighbors often will have disputes.

It may be a dispute over boundaries. In those days, you know, sometimes people would move the boundary stones and would enlarge their land at their neighbor's expense. Or there'd be some other problem.

Somebody's ox would break loose and go into the neighbor's field and eat their standing grain or tear up their vineyards or something, and there'd be some economic damage done to a neighbor, and there are disputes. There could be any kind of disputes. People are always having something they can fight about.

And so how do you settle disputes among neighbors? According to chapter 25, verses 8 and 9, it says, Do not go hastily to court, for what will you do in the end when your neighbor has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbor himself, and do not disclose the secret to another, lest he who hears it expose your shame and your reputation be ruined. Now, the point here is, if you've got a dispute with someone, that

means that you have a side that you're defending and he has a side that he's defending. If that's not the case, there'll be no dispute.

If you have a side that you're defending, but he doesn't have a side that he's defending, and he, in other words, he doesn't resist what you're saying, then there's no dispute. There's an acquiescence. A dispute occurs when one person thinks he's right and the other party thinks he's right.

And each is defending his own side. Now, of course, you believe you're right, and maybe you are. There are times when you may be clearly right, but the neighbor might have a case to make too.

It may not be a valid case, but it might be a persuasive one. And therefore, if you go to court, you're going to publicize both sides. And who knows what your neighbor will say about you in defending himself.

Even if what he says is not valid. In order to defend himself, he may bring out all kinds of negative things about you, and you could look bad. Even if he's lying.

Those who hear about it will not necessarily know he's lying, and therefore, you end up being ashamed because of the publicity that's given to this dispute by going to court. Better to do it privately. Settle the case privately.

Go to him yourself. And settle out of court. Now, Jesus gave quite a few instructions of this very kind.

And it's very agreeable with what Proverbs says here. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, for example. In Matthew chapter 5, in verse 40, he says, If anyone wants to sue you, and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

In other words, if somebody wants to get something from you and wants to go to court, don't go to court. Give him what he wants. Even give him more.

Lacate him. Do anything you need to do to keep this out of court. The assumption here is that he really does have something against you.

But maybe he doesn't. Maybe he just exacts your coat. Jesus doesn't even talk about whether justice is on your side or not.

But just give it to him. Keep peace with him, he says. Now, no doubt this is what we call a hyperbole.

Because this particular instruction falls within a number of short sayings that do contain hyperbole in them. For example, when he says, in verse 39, the verse before this, I tell you not to resist the evil person, but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. Well, you could also just walk away.

I mean, basically what he's saying is don't respond in kind. If you turn the other cheek, you're resisting the temptation to be provoked. You're not becoming provoked.

But not becoming provoked doesn't mean you necessarily always offer the other cheek. You could just walk away. That'd be also a legitimate answer.

To turn the other cheek is perhaps the most extreme way to show that you're not provoked. And when he says in verse 41, whoever compels you to go a mile, go with him too. That's a good way to show that you're willing to be compliant and willing to serve your enemy, the Roman soldier who had the right under Roman law to make you carry his stuff one mile.

And that was the Roman law, that a Roman soldier could just compel any bystander to carry his gear for a mile, but only a mile. Jesus said, well, if he compels you to go a mile, go too. Save him the trouble of finding another bystander to go the second mile.

But of course, there might be times when the soldier only needs to go one mile. And if he insists on going two, you're not doing him a favor. In other words, these things are not always going to be literally followed.

They're illustrating a principle. In verse 42, he says, give to him who asks you. And from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

Well, okay, give to the person who asks you. Be generous. But should you give to everybody who asks you? Does every beggar deserve to have you take your money and support his alcoholism or something? Should you give your children everything they ask for? I don't think so.

These are hyperboles. These are simply somewhat exaggerated statements that might, in some cases, be followed to the letter. But they basically are not always to be followed to the letter.

They're simply stating a principle. If somebody wishes to take advantage of you in some way or another, wishes to have your money, wishes to sue you for something, wants to strike you on the cheek, well, be generous. That's basically what he's saying.

Be generous. Don't defend your rights in the matter. If somebody wants something, give it to them.

So this matter of if someone wants to take you to court and sue you and get your tunic, let them have your cloak also, this would not be something that would always be literally the response. But the idea would be to avoid court is a good idea. In fact, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6, he said that Christians should not go to the law courts.

He said if they have disputes, they should settle them between themselves. And he said

the ideal settlement is for you to let yourself be defrauded. Paul is obviously applying what Jesus said here.

Let yourself be defrauded by the other party. Just turn the other cheek, as it were. You see what he says in 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Corinthians 6, he says in verse 1, Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unrighteous, that means the pagan courts, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? You think Christians should be able to settle these things and arbitrate them without the courts.

Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so that there's not a wise man among you, a Christian, even one who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers. Now, therefore, is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another.

Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded? So Paul is saying, if there's a dispute between you and your brother, the highest road to take would be just let him defraud you. That is, give up your rights and let him have whatever it is he thinks he has coming to him, even if you disagree with him about it. Paul is obviously applying what Jesus said here.

But if you can't take that high road, then at least let another Christian judge between you, rather than going to the pagans. Why let them decide? They don't even know right and wrong. This is true also in terms of the divorce course.

I don't think Christians should ever divorce before pagans, because the courts don't know anything about marriage. They don't know anything about justice. They don't know what's good for children.

Such things should be handled by the church, by spiritual men, wise men. The Bible says, is there not a wise man among you who can judge these matters? There should be among those Christians who have Christian values, people who are wise enough to settle those matters. But the point is, Paul says Christians shouldn't go to court with each other.

And as far as your neighbor, who's not a Christian, should you go to court with him? Well, in Matthew 5, verse 25, Jesus said, Agree with your adversary quickly while you're on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge. And the judge hand you over to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Now, I say, if you have a dispute with your adversary, settle with him out of court.

Settle with him before he takes it to court. If he takes it to court, then the judge gets involved. And the judge might not rule in your favor.

You never know how it's going to go in court. You might even be the one in the right. There's no guarantee the judge will see it that way.

Again, I think in divorce, in the case of Christians getting divorced, is going before pagan judges and allowing the judge to decide who should raise the children. The judge has no idea what's spiritually good for children. The judge, if he's not a Christian, he can't be expected to make a decision that would be agreeable with Christian principles as to the rearing of the children.

Unless, of course, God is superintending, because the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. There was a time when I was in a dispute with my ex-wife over the custody of my daughter, and the pagan judge ruled very righteously in the matter. And I didn't even have to say a word.

I was praying and fasting, and the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. And he turns it, soever he will, like the rivers of water. It turned out that the judge gave me full custody of my daughter and didn't even give her mother visitation.

I gave her visitation, but that was my prerogative. But the judge recognized that her mother was really not a good influence, not a good person. And as it turned out, they ruled in my favor, which doesn't usually happen.

It's not usually the case that the father gets full custody without making a case. I didn't make a case in court. I didn't want to.

I didn't want to make a case against my ex-wife. But I didn't have to. I didn't actually have to speak.

My lawyer didn't have to speak. My ex-wife's lawyer spoke four words and the judge ruled against her. And it was really a miracle.

It was one of the most stunning things I've ever seen in a court. But I didn't want to go to court. You never know that the judges are going to do the right thing.

And so you could settle with your neighbor, your adversary, out of court. Don't let it go to court. You never know if the judge will turn you over to the officer and throw you in jail.

It's possible the judge will not see your side. And it's not always the case that the righteous are vindicated in courts. Sometimes the wicked can bribe the judge.

And the innocent actually goes to jail. So Jesus says, settle disputes personally between you and your neighbor and settle out of court. That's also what the Proverbs says.

So basically that last Proverb and harmonizing with the New Testament teaching is that Christians should stay out of court pretty much. There are times when you don't have any choice because someone's taking you to court and you're summons. You can't not show up.

But the idea is if you know somebody wants to take you to court, if you know somebody has a dispute against you, go to them and be as conciliatory as you can. Do they want your coat? Give them your coat also. Stay out of court at all costs if you can.

That's what Jesus said and that's what the Proverbs says also. Remember there's that one Proverb that says as the letting out of water is so is the beginning of strife. One translation says as soon loose a flood as initiate court proceedings.

If you initiate a court proceeding you might as well loose a flood. It's out of your control. Once you give it to the courts to decide well you never know which direction it's going to go because the courts are not necessarily righteous, not necessarily conscientious, not necessarily going to hear all the evidence clearly.

And so the pagan courts are simply not an ideal place for Christians to solve disputes between themselves and other people. A Christian arbitrator, a Christian negotiator or whatever would be a good option. But the ideal Paul said and what Jesus seems to say is just let yourself be defrauded.

There will be times when that's not really the right way to go. There's times when if you let your adversary defraud you you're not the only one who's going to suffer. There may be other people whose benefits you need to stand up for and you are standing up for others in some cases when you stand up for your own side in a case.

But when it's only you, when it's a matter of making peace and all it costs you is to loose the case, loose whatever the person wants then there's often something to be said for just giving it up in order to keep the peace with the neighbor. If you have a neighbor remember they're there for your safety and you're there for their safety. Neighbors should be neighborly and if you end up having an ongoing dispute with them and have a bad neighbor then it can be not too many things much worse than having a neighbor who's an enemy.

I guess one of the few things worse would be having a spouse that's an enemy. But a neighbor that's an enemy is not a good thing either. So much says Proverbs on these subjects.

And so we finish our consideration in Proverbs of the various kinds of relationships. Proverbs of the various kinds of relationships