

113. Proper Attitudes

By Arland Steen

The first nine chapters of Proverbs are not really proverbs (individual wise sayings) – they are essays on wisdom passed down from Samuel to David to Solomon to us. If they were not connected to the true proverbs that follow, they could collectively be called The Book of Essays. These nine essays or chapters teach submission and authority to prepare us to make wise choices in life. I want to give you a quick overview of Proverbs 1 and then zero in on two verses.

The Attitudes of Proverbs 1

Chapter 1 is the introduction to Essays on Wisdom. It challenges us to lay a foundation for success by developing four proper attitudes.

The first is a proper attitude towards God. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge* (Proverbs 1:7).

The second is a proper attitude towards authority. *My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother* (Proverbs 1:8 but in total verses 8-9).

A proper attitude towards authority begins in the home toward parents.

The third is a proper attitude towards money. *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent* (Proverbs 1:10 but in total verses 10-19).

A proper attitude towards money begins when greed is dealt with.

The fourth is a proper attitude towards wisdom. *Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares ... Turn at my rebuke.* (Proverbs 1:20 but in total verses 20-23).

A proper attitude towards wisdom begins when you learn to take constructive criticism.

Having proper attitudes in these four areas prepares a person to receive the teachings contained in the next eight chapters.

These attitudes are also needed to achieve success and happiness in any area of life:

- They help a person become a better husband, wife, parent or child
- They are essential in the workplace, helping us improve as employers or employees.
- Developing them into our lives will make us happier and more successful no matter our profession

A Proper Attitude Toward Authority

Proverbs 1:8-9 (NKJ): My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head and chains about your neck.

Most people possess a greater potential for success than they realize. It is human nature to become preoccupied with failures and present conditions and neglect to focus on future opportunities, which leads to unwise choices.

● At Home

A person's attitude toward authority starts in the home. As a newborn baby starts his life, he is totally undisciplined and has no self-control. Fortunately, he doesn't have any obligations or responsibilities either. This is when he faces his first representative authority, a parent. As the baby grows, he adapts to the policies of his parents and develops attitudes that will most likely stay with him for life.

During this time, some children develop a bad attitude toward authority. There could be a number of different causes:

- (a) The parents may not have administered proper discipline

- (b) A child may be influenced by things he sees on television or by the example of other children.
- (c) There may have been some form of abuse that damaged the normal development of respect for those in authority.

Whatever the cause, these children grow up without a healthy respect for authority.

● At School

As soon as a child enters school, he encounters another authority – the teacher -telling him what to do:

- Where he may sit
- When he may sharpen his pencil
- When he may get a drink of water

Teachers are able to have a tremendous impact on the life of a child. Some can successfully encourage an obstinate child to change his attitude toward authority. But in most cases, teachers simply endure or enjoy the attitudes that a child brings with him from home.

When a child is in school, it is always a challenge to maintain a good attitude. However, there are several factors that provide pressure to conform and can help encourage a good attitude toward authority:

- desire for acceptance by fellow students
- desire for approval from teachers
- desire to avoid discipline problems
- desire for a good report card

Unfortunately, poor attitudes in school are a common problem. A number of negative factors can influence a child to develop a bad attitude in school:

- family influences
- learning difficulties
- wrong friends
- wrong entertainment
- use of drugs or alcohol
- incompetent teacher

● At Work

Young people commonly acquire some type of job while still in school. This is usually their first exposure to the public work force. In order to keep his job, a person must fulfill the purpose for which he was hired. Most of the time there is a supervisor or boss telling him what to do. At work, the boss is the most visual representative of authority.

After the initial excitement of having a new job wears off, the person's attitude will surface – good or bad. If his attitude toward authority has not been respectful up to this point, the young person will probably rebel and start moving from job to job, each time blaming the last boss. Eventually, he will improve his attitude just enough to get by.

Factors that could produce change

The opportunity to earn money can be a great incentive to comply with the expectations of an employer and submit to his authority. An employee usually must demonstrate a good attitude in order to keep his job; this is especially true if he has any hopes of being promoted to a higher position.

Of course, it is also possible that the employee may learn poor work ethics from co-workers. This results in a person defying his employer's authority by stealing, lying, complaining and wasting time. Still, in most cases, the work environment has a good effect on a person.

When Adam sinned, God re-shaped conditions so that man would have to work. It is true that it was a part of his punishment, but it was also good for him in his fallen state.

● In Society

Eventually a person has to deal with society and the local community, the state and the federal government. Once again, he confronts forces that have the power to control many areas of his life. Everywhere he turns, he is faced with society's authority, as he drives down the street, fills out a tax form, or walks through an airport. The attitude he has already developed will either plague him or help him. The policeman and other law-enforcement officers are a visual representative of society's authority.

If a person has refused to submit to God-given authorities up to this point, he certainly will rebel now, passively or actively. He may simply choose to sit around with rebellious friends and talk about how things should be different, or he may defy society's authority by participating in the activities of gangs and lawbreakers.

Factors that tend to produce change:

Certain governmental controls such as fines and penalties have been designed to produce changes in people's behavior. The threat of imprisonment also drives people toward right actions. A person may decide to conform just enough to get by, or he may be inspired to make some genuine, inner changes.

● With God

Ultimately, a person has to stand before God's authority and must respond to it. At the time of creation, God established laws that govern the world and help people function on this earth. He has recorded these for us in His Word. The more a person adjusts to God's laws, the happier he will be. Rebellion against these laws leads to frustration and confusion. Total rejection of God's authority leads to judgment in this life and the next. The most visual representative of God's authority is usually a pastor and the influences God may use to prompt change in attitudes are the Bible, church, godly people and feelings of guilt when we sin.

Even with all of these, if a person has rejected the other levels of authority, he will usually have difficulty responding properly to God's authority.

Decreasing Tolerance

It is easiest to learn submission to authority at home when a child or he will have problems respecting school rules, conforming to the work environment, adjusting to society and responding to God. He will become bitter and further diminish his enjoyment of life.

As a rebellious young person moves up through the different levels of authority, there is decreasing tolerance for his poor behavior.

- Parents naturally tend to be the most tolerant of their children
- Teachers tend to be less tolerant than parents because they have the responsibility to keep order in the entire classroom
- Employers are less tolerant than teachers because they are not obligated to continue employing people who are rebellious
- Law enforcement officers are less tolerant than a supervisor in the workplace. Fines, penalties, imprisonment or death await those who will not obey the law.
- If a person goes into eternity without submitting to God's grace and authority, he will find zero tolerance!

Increasing Opportunity

As tolerance is decreasing for those who are rebellious, opportunity is increasing for those who exhibit the proper attitude towards authority. A person's response to each level of authority in his life either limits or expands his opportunities for the future.

- The home gives a person the fundamental tools to prosper. A young person who becomes well pleasing in the eyes of his parents will usually receive their support and advice. Parents find it easier to sacrifice their time and money to help a child who is kind and considerate. Even in a "bad" home, children can develop an outlook on life that will benefit them as they go on into school and work environments.
- At school, teachers strive to help all students equally. Yet a student with a good attitude easily finds extra help, support, advice, encouragement and eventually a good job recommendation. Once a person is fully involved in the work force, his training becomes more focused. He will gain tools specifically designed to equip him for his daily occupation. Employers do not hide the fact that they will advance those who possess a cooperative and teachable spirit. Proper respect for authority in the workplace greatly accelerates a person's fulfillment and success.
- Society offers a relatively safe environment for a person as he works to achieve his full potential. It gives protection from those who would try to do him harm or steal from him. In addition, society can provide opportunities for education, business networking and public service.
- God makes it clear in His Word that He will give special honor to those who learn to submit. God is the source of power, comfort, peace, assurance – and best of all, eternal life!

The Story of Naaman (an adult who learned submission to authority late in life.)

- He was a military captain and held a position of great authority in Syria. He was also intelligent, brave and a person of integrity. However, a terrible future lay ahead for him because he had contracted the dreaded disease of leprosy, for which there was no cure.
- Naaman's wife had a young servant girl who was taken captive from the land of Israel. This young girl convinced Naaman that he could be healed if he would go and visit the prophet Elisha in Israel.
- Naaman organized the trip and before long he and his servants were standing in front of the house of Elisha. Words can hardly describe how shocked the mighty captain was when Elisha did not even come to the door and speak with him. Instead, Elisha sent his servant to tell Naaman to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan River.
- Naaman was enraged! He assumed that the prophet would heal him in some spectacular manner. Besides, this powerful captain was accustomed to giving orders, not taking them! 2 Kings 5:12 says, "So he turned and went away in a rage."
- However, Naaman's servants showed a better understanding of the situation and tactfully spoke to him. They suggested that if he would submit to the prophet's authority and do what he said, he might find healing for the leprosy.
- Naaman soon realized his entire future was at stake and this might be his only opportunity to receive help. He made a wise choice and obeyed the prophet's command. He was healed after dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times!

2 Kings 5:13-14 (NKJ): ¹³And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean?' ¹⁴So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

A person with an improper attitude toward authority will always be conscious of authority figures that try to dictate over him. He will constantly be involved in a “power struggle” and will never reach his full potential.

In contrast, when a person has a proper attitude, each level of authority in his life actually becomes a level of opportunity. The levels of authority in your life are bridges to your future success.