

**Proverbs 9:7-9** (older NKJV)

He who reproves a scoffer gets shame for himself, And he who rebukes a wicked man gets a blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

**Proverbs 9:7-9** (RSV)

He who corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.

**Learning as a Wise Man**

I was in a discussion trying to explain an idea. I was puzzled because there was a lack of understanding. I would say something, and they'd say it wasn't possible or it would require such and such, but I didn't see it. Finally it occurred to me to ask why they thought so, and discovered that I had different meaning associated with the words I was using. In fact the definition I thought was right was *wrong*!

This was a blow to my confidence. Although my intended meaning was correct, the perceived meaning was wrong. And as an adult, I felt as though I should be able to convey my ideas without making such *grave* errors, such as a mistaken definition. It's one matter to not use a word because you don't know what it means, and another matter to use a word incorrectly. If you never use a word, there's never the possibility you use it wrong and have people challenging your definition, and think less about the state of your learning. They may not think much of your vocabulary, but you'll never be *wrong*. And there's a feeling that one is more unreliable if they are wrong. Or at least I had the feeling of being perceived as less reliable.

Then I thought about this in relation to repentance, forgiveness, and learning. I was afraid of being found ignorant although I can still learn! I see myself as being judged by what I know *now*, and not about whatever I learn after my ignorance has been revealed. It's as though I don't expect people to believe I will learn and improve as an adult. It's as though my fate had already been sealed.

Learning is like repentance, a turning from ignorance. An element of teaching is forgiveness of that ignorance. The first step in teaching is for a student to realize his ignorance, similar to reprimanding or chastising that must come before repentance which allows for a completion of forgiveness. The learning of the child is like the process of repentance.

Children learn because they turn away from ignorance. They repent of it. We forgive children of their previous ignorance by accepting them as enlightened when they learn. Is it true that at some time people stop seeing others as growing, but as static entities? A point where we all become "grown-up" and "old dogs" that cannot learn new tricks? And yet, the reality of Proverbs 9:7-9 is that a wise man is always like a child, always gladly repenting from his ignorance, and never static or old.

**Matthew 7:24-27 (RSV)**

"Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

**Matthew 7:6-12 (RSV)**

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

→ I think this is a description that would fit an active wise or just man. If he loves correction, but also what is good, then he will seek and ask, not minding if he is wrong. I see Christ as saying we will find the good we seek from God in our boldness. A wise man would accept gifts of correction, even if it weren't what he was initially seeking.

**2 Timothy 2:23-26 (RSV)**

Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

**James 5:19-20 (RSV)**

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**Matthew 18:15-18 (RSV)**

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

→ As Christians, I see us as following the model of the wise and just men. It gives reason to how we should treat each other, as ones who are open to correction. And also a willingness to go at such great lengths to help each other do what is right.

**Matthew 18:21-35 (RSV)**

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. "

**Philippians 2:1-4 (RSV)**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

→ Philippians 2:1-4 just reminds me of the wise man attitude. There's a lack of seeking conflict, and more of a seeking of *understanding* and harmony.

**The Scenarios**

There are many occasions in life that I've found it useful to remember Proverbs 9:7-9. Sometimes when dealing with personal obstinacy or obstinate people. Is it the obstinacy of a wise man or a scoffer? Or perhaps in my view of others. Should I dare to correct them even though I may find it uncomfortable? They may be gracious to me for it!

The scenarios are based on real events with slight modifications and name changes. Put yourself in everyone's shoes and answer the questions below!

**General thoughts and questions:**

1) Does learning always mean we agree or can we learn more and be yet wiser and still not agree? I think it's not a requirement to always agree. But understanding a disagreement better is always valuable.

**Scenario #1**

A dating couple went to a party together. At one point they wanted some cake, and decided to share a piece of cake rather than have their own separate pieces. After

returning to some seats, they began to talk to some friends at the party. Finally the lady decided to take a bite and looked down at the plate, but it was *empty*! He hadn't made sure she had anything to eat! He had eaten all of it!

Because he didn't show much love in this lack of consideration, the lady read his actions as a reflection of his character and decided the relationship could not last. This ended up being the end of their dating relationship, although they remained friends otherwise.

- a) Should she confront him with his error?
  - i) What's the possible outcome if she does?
  - ii) What are the possible outcomes if she doesn't?
- b) Do we have any experiences we are willing to share that follow this scenario's design?

### Senario #2

There were three friends Jake, Eric, and Tom. Jake and Eric loved to debate each other, but often little was accomplished. In one particular debate Tom tried to moderate and clarify the issues between the two as an outsider, but didn't have much success.

Jake was trying to defend his idea that the engineering and science classes were graded harsher than liberal arts classes like in Eric's political science field of study. Eric disagreed and tried to show that they were equally difficult even though they may be graded differently. Tom saw the confusion between the two because each was becoming so intent on proving their point of view that they were rehashing the same things *over and over* without any increase of understanding on either side, so Tom thought it may be useful for them to write them down on paper. He had them draw a chart to show them where their differences lay. Jake was trying to say that language was easier to attain than math and it was less subjective so it took more skill to get good grades. Eric tried to show that foreigners would have trouble in his classes, but could fare much better in math because it is a more standardized type of language. In this way, math and language are not necessarily easier than one another, but language is usually attained first due to social pressures.

Eric who had been reusing arguments was actually helped by Tom's method of charting, and started to think of new ways of helping Jake see how they were both non-trivial, although different. However, Jake seemed to be unmoved, and continued to make agreements and almost contradict his agreements because they conflicted with the point he still wished to make. Because it was already late, Tom warned them to wrap it up because they would be arguing all night, and nothing new would be accomplished. Then Tom went to bed.

In the morning Tom found Eric and asked how their discussion had ended. Eric said they made some progress (at least he understood the problem better), but Jake and he could never come to any real agreement. They had argued for several more hours after Tom had gone to bed.

- a) Should Tom have stepped in to try and help an agreement be reached?
  - i) What if Tom didn't?
  - ii) What other possibilities could have happened if Jake (the science major) had been more open and accepted what the chart helped reveal?
- b) Are there any similar experiences where two people have continued to argue beyond the point of increased understanding? How does one know when this has been reached?

### Senario #3

At a Christian student meeting, three students were split into a smaller discussion group from the larger group. Their names were Larry, Elizabeth, and Greg. From the start of the discussion, Larry was completely off topic. He was so focused on discrediting Christianity that he brought this up at the beginning of their discussion. Elizabeth whose faith was based on personal experience of God's amazing grace, having survived serious injuries at one point, and other testimonies besides, was astonished by Larry's new attacks on her own faith when she opened up about God's real work in her life. As Larry continued to attack the reality of her experiences, she became more intent on defending them. Greg, seeing the discussion completely off topic because of Larry, and that Larry was not interested in listening to Elizabeth, tried to convince them (or at least Elizabeth) to stop arguing and get back on topic. Unfortunately Elizabeth didn't want to let Larry have the last word in, so it continued until the large group was reconvened, and discussion was no longer possible.

Greg felt that Larry was a scoffer, and Elizabeth could only get hurt in the discussion, whether it was by starting to *hate* Larry, by becoming overly critical about her own faith, or by growing obstinate to questions about her faith altogether. All the pain or blemishes did not need to be explicit to be real, they could be hidden within.

a) Should Elizabeth (the Christian) have continued after Larry (the atheist) made it clear he meant nothing more than to argue?

i) What if she did stop?

ii) What type of response would one expect from Larry if he was not a scoffer?

b) Any times when we've been in the shoes of the scoffer?

c) How can we avoid being a scoffer and be wise in our understanding?

### Additional Reading Material

#### John 2:43-51 (RSV)

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Now Philip was from Beth-saida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathana-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathana-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathana-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Nathana-el said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathana-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

#### Luke 8:4-15 (RSV)

And when a great crowd came together and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable:

"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience."

#### **Luke 22:63-71 (RSV)**

Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God."

And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." And they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

#### **Matthew 26:59-68 (RSV)**

Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'"

And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"