

Proverbs 23:22-25

Wisdom for the Holidays: Family

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

For our Christmas series this year—*Wisdom for the Holidays*—I’ve extended our time in Proverbs. I’ve done this because we could all use a little help **navigating** a fun but sometimes difficult time of year. The first week I spoke on **gifts**, the second week on **drinks**, and this week I’m talking about family. For many of us, **spending time with** family, whether our **nuclear** family (**immediate**)—**parents** and **children**—or our **extended** family—**in-laws, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents**, etc—is a big part of Christmas.

For some this time with family is **great**. It’s **fun**. You have an **easy time** with your family. For others your family can really **stress** you out and cause a lot of **anxiety**. Or maybe you’re somewhere **in-between**. You **love** your family, but **moments arise** where you **wonder** if you were **swapped at birth**.

Today I have **three gifts of wisdom** from **God’s Word** that I think might help us all **navigate** time with family this Christmas. There are so many different things **we can buy**, but these gifts **don’t cost** you any **money**, but **neither** are they exactly **free**, because they will **cost you**. The three gifts are *the gift of peace, the gift of respect, and the gift of contentment*. The first gift to give to your family is...

The gift of peace

Proverbs says just how **important peace is** by how much it judges **troublemakers**.

Proverbs 6:16-19 (NIV)

16 There are six things the LORD hates,
seven that are detestable to him:

- 17 haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,
19 a false witness who pours out lies
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

God hates those who **stirs up conflict within a family**. The ESV translates v19 as the Lord hates “one who **sows discord among brothers**.” That’s closer to the **Hebrew** so this wisdom first **applies to the family**. As you spend time with your brothers, sisters, parents, and grandparents over the Holidays, try to **avoid fighting** (Prov 18:19). *I have **three ways** you can give the gift of peace:*

1. Don’t start conflict.

Your family knows **exactly** what will get you **riled up**. They know your “**buttons**” and we know theirs. We practically gave each other our buttons, as a gift. It can be **tempting** to push them, to talk about that **political issue** or to make that **passing comment** that makes you feel a **little better than them**.

Proverbs 17:14 (NIV)

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam;
so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

Jesus didn't say "blessed are the **instigators**." Rather he said...

Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Children of God are to be **children of peace**. We are to be characterized by **peace** and **harmony**. My son really likes **Daniel Tiger** these days. *Daniel Tiger* is a **PBS** show inspired by *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. The main star is Daniel the tiger. Every episode there's a lesson. In one episode Daniel get's **mad** because he can't go to **jungle beach** so his mom teaches him a song to sing when he's mad.

When you feel so mad
that you wanna roar,
take a deep breath,
and count to 4.

1.2.3.4.¹ (with accompanying hand motion)

We could **all benefit** from this song when we are **feeling upset** or **mad**. So if **family member's** start getting **upset** over Christmas, flip on *Daniel Tiger season one episode 4* on **Amazon Prime**. *Don't start conflict*.

2. Don't further conflict.

You know how some people say, "They **started it** but I'm going to **finish it**." That never leads anywhere good. If conflict is already happening, don't **add fuel** to the fire. There's a **number of ways** we do this, like when we start gossiping about other members of our family (Prov 16:28).

Proverbs 26:20 (NIV)

Without wood a fire goes out;
without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

It helps to define gossip.

Gossip: saying something negative about anyone or anything to someone who can't do anything about it. (Stephen Mansfield – The EntreLeadership Podcast #303)

Do I need to **give examples** of family gossip? "Last Christmas I gave her a **really nice gift** and she gave me **socks...**" "Their **kids act that way** because they're **always fighting...**" "I can't believe **he did it again...**" Gossip can further a conflict but so can **wading** into a conflict to try and **solve it**.

Proverbs 26:17 (NIV)

Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears
is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.

It's easy to **take sides** in your family; especially since **you** know the **history**, but Proverbs warns against getting into someone else's fight. *If we don't start a conflict, and we don't further conflict, it can help make peace. But one more way to give the gift of peace, this time a positive way.*

3. Be patient.

Be patient with your family. **Endure** with them. Proverbs tells us **practicing patience** is actually one way to help **create peace** in the **midst of conflict**.

Proverbs 15:18 (NIV)

A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict,
but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

The **quarrel** is **ongoing**, but patience helps bring it to an **end**. So instead of wading in and trying to solve everything, **prayerfully pray** for **peace** and **patiently endure**. But how about when a family member tries to **start something** with you? Or you hear your family talking **about you**?

Proverbs 19:11 (NIV)

A person's wisdom yields patience;
it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

This doesn't mean we should **avoid talking with someone** if there's a problem. If you find yourself **gripping** about them or **feeling wounded** please do. But if possible it's your "glory" to **not be offended**.

As I was studying for my **sermon on gift-giving** several weeks ago I ran across an article on giving gifts that resonated with me. In it the author, **Jon Bloom**, a **staff writer** for **desiringGod**, talks about the importance of **love** at **Christmas**:

Love gives the gift of patience when Christmas celebrations don't go as planned. Love gives the gift of kindness when holiday tempers flare, insensitive comments are spoken, and expectations are disappointed. Love gives the gift of not envying those whose Christmases seem happier, not boasting over social media with a picture-perfect (and misleading) holiday moment, not seeking its own way in a group decision over a holiday leisure activity, not being irritable with adrenalized children or crabby relatives, and not carrying resentment over past or present relational offenses...²

We give the gift of peace by not starting conflict, not furthering it, and by being patient. This **isn't possible** in our **own power**. In order to do this, we need to **remember the gospel**.

The gospel makes peace possible.

In you have sin you are God's **enemy**, a child of **wrath** (Eph 2:3). But "gospel" means "good news." The good news is that you can be **reconciled** to God. That means you don't have to be enemies anymore. You can become his **friend**. He's made this possible through the **sacrificial death** of his **Son**. **Jesus** had to **die** to **pay the penalty** for **your sin**. That means you are **far more sinful** than you realize; but you're also **more loved** than you can **imagine**.³ Now because **we've experience peace with God** we can **extend peace to others**.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NIV) 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

If you want a peaceful Christmas with family, the first thing you need to do is **get reconciled** with your **heavenly family**, with **God the Father** through his **Son Christ Jesus**. The Bible says if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus we will know that peace. If you don't know Christ, can I **encourage** you to **think** about it? **Ask yourself if you want peace with God**. God wants to be reconciled **with you**; and then to work **through you** to be **reconciled** with your family and for them to be **reconciled to him** too. God will help you **through his Holy Spirit** and through the **gospel changing your life**. *We can give the gift of peace because of the gospel.* The **gospel makes possible** our **next two gifts** as well.

The gift of respect

There's nothing like bringing the gift of respect to your family Christmas party—respect for your **parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews**. I want to focus on a few key relationships in the family.

1. Children, respect your parents over the Holidays.

Proverbs continually calls children to bring joy to their parents.

Proverbs 15:20 (NIV)

A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish man despises his mother.

First I'm speaking to our children and youth. How can you honor and thank your parents for all they do for you this Christmas? Chances are they spend a lot of time and money on making Christmas fun. Have you thanked them? I'm also thinking of our **adults with parents**. How can you respect the **grandparents** (Prov 19:26)? **How** can you **include them**? Normally, **parents** take a lot of **pride in their children**. Proverbs actually **reverses** that so that children take pride in their parents.

Proverbs 17:6 (NIV)

Children's children are a crown to the aged,
and parents are the pride of their children.

Take pride in your parents (and your grandparents). Look for **what's best in them**. **Thank God** for them. *Children, respect your parents over the Holidays*. Now parents, this implies you are acting in a way **worthy of their respect**.

2. Parents, model respect for your children.

Treat your children with **as much respect as you wish to be treated**. If we want our kids to treat us with respect, we have to **first treat** them with respect. If we want our kids to **speak respectfully** about **others**, we have to speak respectfully about **others in front of them**. We see an **example of modeling respect** in Proverbs as **the father figure teaches and models how to live for his son**.

Proverbs 20:7 (NIV)

The righteous lead blameless lives;
blessed are their children after them.

If you're **following Jesus**, Lord willing, your children will want to join you. This is not an **absolute rule** but a **general principle**. **Whether** or not your children want to follow you, **they're still receiving a blessing** as you follow Christ. *Parents, model respect for your children*.

3. We show respect by listening to each other.

You can give your parents and grandparents the gift of respect when you **listen to them**, their **opinions**, their **advice**, and their **stories**. They might have something to teach you, an experience or memory.

Proverbs 23:22-23 (NIV)

22 Listen to your father, who gave you life,
and do not despise your mother when she is old.
23 Buy the truth and do not sell it—
wisdom, instruction and insight as well.

We show respect when we ask good questions and listen to their response, questions like:

- What was your childhood and teenage years like?
- Where did you go to school? Did you like it there?
- What did you look for in your husband or wife?
- What do you think of this theology I'm wrestling with?
- How have you been encouraged in your faith recently?

Over Thanksgiving I had the opportunity to ask my dad some questions and I learned some things I'd never known before. Like my uncle once owned a **really beat up house** on a **lake** that my parents would go and visit. It was like a **horror-story lake house**. I never knew that! That sounds kinda fun. I found that out by asking questions like these. *We show respect by listening to each other's stories. This Christmas give the gift of peace and the gift of respect and the third gift...*

The gift of contentment

This final gift is really a **gift to yourself**. Even if you are family **makes peace difficult**, and there's a **lack of respect**, by **God's grace** we can **still experience contentment** (Phil 4:11). This can take some **effort**.

1. Find contentment in the family God has given you.

I don't give this next verse to say you **always have to travel home for the Holidays** or have to spend as much time as possible with the **in-laws**, but to **encourage** you to **find contentment where God has you**.

Proverbs 27:8 (NIV)

Like a bird that flees its nest
is anyone who flees from home.

There is a time when it's right to **leave** the nest and **migrate south** for the **winter**, but there's also a time to **stay** and **be with the family** God has given you. But what about those of us who have really **difficult families**, or none at all?

2. Seek contentment in your Heavenly Father.

Our earthly families are **not always safe**, but our Heavenly Father is **always a refuge**.

Proverbs 28:25 (NIV)

The greedy stir up conflict,
but those who trust in the Lord will prosper.

God offers us **eternal security in him** (Prov 28:26). *It's through a relationship with our Heavenly Father that we will be able to extend peace and respect and to know contentment* (Prov 10:12). It's **knowing him** that **makes this all possible**. *Give the gift of peace, respect, and contentment to your family this Christmas.*

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

¹ Season 1. Episode 4. Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood.

² Jon Bloom, *You Are Not Obligated to Give Gifts This Year*, published December 19, 2017, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/you-are-not-obligated-to-give-gifts-this-year>

³ See *Christianity Explored*.