

Let's Be Reasonable

The Peace of God Part 4
Philippians 4:5a 4/1/2017

Summary: Be so reasonable that others (not just yourself) see you as reasonable. Don't be wise in your own eyes, listen, guard your tongue, don't be argumentative, don't react to insults, be fair, win the person, not the argument, edify, be kind and use tact.

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Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all.

Introduction

David's brothers were all at the front lines of the battle, fighting for King Saul against the Philistines, and David gets sent to bring some food to his brothers. When he arrives, he asks what's going on, and his brother overhears.

1 Samuel 17:28 When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."

Don't you just love it when someone takes that approach with you? They won't listen to you, they barrage you with questions, they don't give you a chance to even answer, the questions are belittling and insulting, and they assume bad motives on your part. Eliab wins the most unreasonable conversationalist award for the OT. And look at the effect it has on David:

29 "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?" 30 He then turned away to someone else.

Unreasonable people are exasperating – even to a man after God's own heart. The problem is, all of us have a little bit of Eliab in us, don't we? Paul's going to help us with that tonight.

In this section (Php.4:4-9) Paul is giving us 3 principles for preparing our hearts for unity and harmony in relationships. The first one we saw last time in v.4 – enjoy God. Enjoy God so that your joy level stays up high enough so that hard, painful circumstances don't steal your joy and cause you to be irritable toward others. The second way to prepare your heart for harmony is in v.5.

Definition

5 Let your gentleness be evident to all.

This isn't the typical word for gentleness. The Holman translates it *graciousness*, but I think the best translation of this word is in the ESV – they render it *reasonableness*. That's really the idea. It's a word that means to give people a fair hearing, to give deference, or to yield. You can think of it as *relational generosity*. A *financially* generous person is quick to sacrifice in order to give you what you need with regard to money or possessions. A *relationally* generous person is quick to sacrifice in order to give you what you need with respect to the relationship. So it means you are generous when it comes to giving others the benefit of the doubt when they disagree with you or hurt you. You're generous with your attitude toward the person. You're generous with your listening ear. You're generous with your sympathy for their point of view – especially when it's conflicting with your point of view. Relational generosity. One scholar defined it as a *sweet reasonableness*. And as I read through all the commentaries, one scholar after another after another referred back to that as the best way to describe what this word means – a sweet reasonableness. It's the opposite of being stubborn or quarrelsome.¹ When someone disagrees with you, you're reasonable – not in a begrudging way, but with a sweet, soft attitude toward the person.

So ask yourself, how generous are you toward people with your attitude, your listening ear, your sympathy toward their point of view, or giving the benefit of the doubt? Are you tight-fisted and stingy with your attitude? Or are you magnanimous and generous with them?

Context

Now, in v.4 we had to think a little bit to see the connection with unity. We had to think through how joy in the Lord helps cut down on fighting. But this one isn't hard at all to see the connection. Obviously we're going to get along better if we are all sweetly reasonable toward one another. The first principle (happiness in the Lord) – that prepares your heart in relationship to God. This second one – sweet reasonableness and relational generosity – that prepares your heart in relationship to people. And it has to come in that order.

So often we start with people, and try to get our joy and happiness from them. And that always causes conflict, because when you try to get your happiness from a person, that person will never be able to deliver, and you'll start to resent them. Any time you have a taking posture toward someone, rather than a giving posture, you'll ruin that relationship. We receive from God, and then give to people. That way you never run out, because God has an infinite supply, and you can afford to be relationally generous with the people around you. So, with regard to God, find joy in him. With regard to people, give joy to them. And doing that requires reasonableness.

Tested in Conflict

So, are you reasonable? Do you listen to reason? Most people would say, "Of course I listen to reason." Hardly anyone would say, "Nope, not me – I never listen to sound reason." Most people think they listen to reason. The problem is, too many of us define "sound reason" as "that which I already believe." And unsound, bad reasoning is any reasoning that conflicts with my reasoning. And so sure – they will listen to reason, but only if it doesn't contradict what they currently think. And, of course, that's not reasonableness. That's just agreeing with yourself, and even the most unreasonable people will do

¹ See 1 Pe.2:18, 1 Tim.3:3, Tit.3:2.

that. Reasonableness is when you give a fair, generous hearing to your opponent's reasoning even when it contradicts your reasoning.

And so the test for reasonableness is conflict. When someone disagrees with you, confronts you, contradicts you, or is against you in some way – that's when you find out how reasonable you are.

So what does reasonableness look like? If all I do is tell you to be reasonable and then move on, that's not going to be very helpful since different people may have differing ideas of what's reasonable and what isn't, and most unreasonable people don't think they are unreasonable. This is something that is hard to assess in your own heart, so I decided to read through the book of Proverbs to see what I could find on this subject. And I found a lot – more than we have time for today. But let me give you a quick summary. I'd like to quickly run through 9 aspects of reasonableness that I found in Proverbs.

Principles of Reasonableness from Proverbs

1) Don't Be Wise in Your Own Eyes

The first one is probably the most foundational.

Proverbs 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes

That is repeated many times in Proverbs. Would you all agree that unreasonable people tend to be wise in their own eyes?

Proverbs 26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

People who think all their opinions are superior to everyone else's opinions – there's no hope for those people. They can't ever make any progress or grow or learn because they think they are smarter than everyone else, so no one can tell them anything.

There's a great bumper sticker I saw once: "Don't believe everything you think." Excellent advice. Most of us have way too high an opinion of our own opinions. Which is crazy when you think about how many times you've been wrong in the past. Isn't it true that you've been wrong thousands and thousands of times? So now you're in an argument with someone and you're so sure that you couldn't possibly be wrong. You have a track record of being wrong thousands of times, but now suddenly you're infallible?

For many people, there is no distinction in their mind between facts and opinions. If they are convinced of something, they think that makes it a fact. There are some things we can know with absolute certainty. I know that Jesus is Lord – there is zero chance I'm wrong about that. But there really aren't that many things we can know with that level of certainty. Most things have some element of opinion, or judgment call, and why would we assume that our judgment calls and opinions are so much more sound than everyone else's, given our past track record? If I've been a million times in the past, why would I assume I can't be wrong this time?

When Theodore Roosevelt was President he once said that if he could be right 75% of the time, he would reach the highest measure of his expectation. Dale Carnegie commented on that and said, "If that's the best that one of the most distinguished figures of the 20th Century could hope to attain, what about you and me? If you could be sure of being right just 55% of the time, you could go down to Wall Street and make a million dollars a day."² None of us are doing that. So if we can't even be sure that we're right 55% of the time, why are we so confident in our disagreements that we are right and they are wrong?

It's kind of ironic, because being wise in your own eyes is one of the greatest proofs that you're not wise.

Proverbs 28:26 He who trusts in himself is a fool

² Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 118.

One of the biggest steps toward becoming a wise person is realizing that there are a whole lot of things that really, really seem right to you – you can just feel it deep down in your bones that it's right, and in reality it's wrong. Don't trust the way things seem.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him

Pride has a blinding effect on our perception. When you are fighting with your spouse about how to discipline the kids, or how to spend or not spend money, or arguing with someone at work about how something should be done – why are you arguing for your side? It's because you think you're right – you know better than this other person. You're so smart. You have so much wisdom. And that's great, but ask yourself this – “Is all this wisdom I have wisdom from heaven, or is it wisdom from hell?”

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, reasonable (same word as in Php.4:5), submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

One way to know whether your wisdom is from God or from demons is by checking your attitude. Reasonableness is a function of true wisdom. Unreasonableness is a function of demonic wisdom. If you are pure, peace-loving, reasonable, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, that means your wisdom is from God. But if your wisdom is marked by pride, selfishness, strife, fighting, belittling the other person, harshness – then congratulations professor, you've received an honorary doctorate from hell.

You would think that it would be obvious that if I'm behaving like a 2 year old, then I'm not really being very wise. But pride has a blinding effect because of self-flattery.

Psalm 36:2 For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

Evident

So the first principle of reasonableness: don't be wise in your own eyes. Realize that there is at least a possibility that your opinion might not be the best opinion. And here's the kicker – say that to the other person. Remember, the command in Philippians 4:5 isn't just “Be reasonable.” The command is **Let your reasonableness be evident to all**. Why do you suppose Paul said that, instead of just telling us to be reasonable? Could it be because of self-deception? Even the most unreasonable people usually think they are reasonable, and everyone else is the problem. It's easy to talk yourself into thinking you're being perfectly reasonable. But if you really are reasonable, other people will be able to see it. If others can't see it, it probably doesn't exist.

So don't be satisfied until you have a reputation for reasonableness. Make sure your reasonableness is evident to all. And that will happen when you verbalize it. So, when someone disagrees with you on some opinion or judgment call, remind yourself of how many times you've been wrong in the past and then tell the person, “Well, I thought differently, but I could be wrong. I frequently am, so let me hear your reasoning?” One of the wisest and most reasonable things you can do in a conflict is start by saying, “I could be wrong. I frequently am, so let me hear your reasoning.”

That is so foreign to some people that they would probably choke if they tried to utter the words. They are so focused on winning the argument instead of the person, they couldn't even bring themselves to say these words. Some of you might need to practice this – get in front of a mirror and practice saying the words out loud: “That's a good point.” “I have to admit, that's a strong argument you just made.” “I acknowledge, this part of my argument is somewhat weak.” “I hadn't really considered that – I'm going to have to give that some thought.” “Hmm, I could be wrong. I frequently am. Let me hear your reasoning.”

2) Listen

Then, once you've said that, go ahead and actually *listen* to their reasoning. The #1 mark of an unreasonable person is he won't listen. When I use the phrase "an unreasonable person" most of you probably have someone who comes to mind. If so, isn't it true that the most frustrating thing about that person is he/she just won't listen?

Proverbs 18:13 He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.

When someone disagrees with you, step 1 is not to convince them. Step 1 is not to prove them wrong. Step 1 is to listen. And when I say "listen," I don't mean just give them a turn to talk. I mean take what they are saying to heart. Give what they are saying a fair hearing. Don't just listen for holes in their argument that you can exploit. Don't just listen for errors or weak points in their view. Listen with a sympathetic ear. Listen to them the way you want them to listen to you.

There is a reason why they hold the view they have. Dale Carnegie said: When you think someone is wrong, "Don't condemn them. Any fool can do that. Try to understand them. Only wise exceptional people will even try to do that. There is a reason why the other man thinks and acts as he does. Ferret out that reason – and you have the key to his actions, perhaps to his personality."³

Before you argue against his opinion, take the time to find out why he holds his opinion.

Proverbs 20:5 The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

Receive Correction

Now, most of us are willing to do that to some extent – right up to the point where the person starts criticizing us. And that's typically when listening stops and our defenses kick in. But according to Proverbs, that's the point where we should listen the most.

Proverbs 12:1 he who hates correction is stupid.

And if that offends you, then you're one of the people who hates being corrected, which means you're stupid.

Proverbs 15:12 A mocker resents correction

Proverbs 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

We all make a lot of mistakes and bad decisions. And that causes harm to us and others. But the harm is ten times worse when we dig in our heels and refuse to change. Some people, once they have made up their mind on something, will never consider changing – even if they find out they are wrong, because changing course makes them look weak, or wishy washy. That's folly.

So in a disagreement, do you listen? Can someone who disagrees with you on some important issue ever get anywhere by talking to you about it? Or do you only listen for the purpose of trying to find holes in their argument that you can exploit? That's the opposite of reasonableness, and it is sin. It's a sin, not only against that person, but against the unity of the church, which makes it an especially egregious and damaging sin.

3) Guard your Tongue

The third principle is the flip side of the second – guard your tongue. Listen more and talk less.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

³ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 55.

If you don't have a filter on your mouth, so whatever you think or feel just comes out – that's going to ruin your life.

Proverbs 18:2 A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

Fools get pleasure from just announcing their opinions. They just seem to think that if it's their opinion, it must be helpful and everyone should hear about it. If you find enjoyment in simply stating your opinions – that's a mark of a fool.

Proverbs 29:20 Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 12:23 A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly.

Very few things that are blurted out are wise or helpful.

Proverbs 17:27 A man of knowledge uses words with restraint

So when you're in a conflict, don't give the silent treatment, and don't be coy or evasive, but if you find you're talking more than the other person is talking – or worse, you're talking *while* the other person is talking, throttle it back.

4) Don't Be Argumentative

So don't be wise in your own eyes, listen more, and guard your tongue. Next, don't be argumentative. Have enough wisdom to be able to see when a discussion is headed toward becoming an argument.

Proverbs 17:14 Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

Once you break a dam, there's no stopping the flood. You can't just wait until midway through the flood and say, "Oh, I regret starting this – I'll stop it now." You're going to have damage and devastation. The only solution is don't break the dam to begin with. If you're in a conflict, and you realize, "This is starting to become an argument. It's starting to become emotional. We were just talking about two sides of a point, but now I can see it's starting to become distressing to the other person" – drop it. That first indication that it's becoming emotional for you or the other party – that's the Hoover dam making creaking noises. When a dam is making creaking noises, that's a signal that it's time to stop digging at it or putting pressure on it.

Argumentative people are like fuel on fire – they just have a way of stoking fires of disagreement instead of putting them out. Wherever they go, you'll see quarrels.

Proverbs 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. 21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

Anytime he's around, it's just a matter of time before there will be an argument about something.

Proverbs 22:10 Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.

Don't be that guy.

Proverbs 20:3 It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

All of us have a little bit of argumentative tendencies. But there are some people who just seem to be spark plugs for bringing that out wherever they go. If you find that you are routinely in arguments, chances are you have argumentative characteristics that just tend to ignite the flame in other people. Don't be the kind of person who stirs up anger or arguing.

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Don't provoke people.

Proverbs 27:3 Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.

The book of Proverbs repeatedly reminds us that it's better to live on the corner of a rooftop than in a house with a quarrelsome wife (21:9, 25:24). So it seems that this is a particular tendency for certain wives.

Proverbs 27:15 A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day

So there are several warnings about quarrelsome wives, but the principle applies to any quarrelsome person – if you're like that, people would be better off living in a box somewhere than being around you.

Proverbs 17:1 Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

5) Don't React to Insult

So don't be argumentative, don't provoke the other person's anger, and also, don't let your anger be provoked. Even when you're trying to be reasonable and fair and kind, the other person might still be obnoxious and insulting – don't let that suck you in. The most dangerous thing about dealing with a fool is the fact that fools have a way of making everyone around them behave like fools.

Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

Watch out for that. You never have to allow anyone to "push your buttons." Sometimes people try to justify their sinful responses by saying, "She just knows how to push all my buttons." The problem there is that you have buttons. Why have buttons? Why allow other people to control your emotions? You don't have to do that. You can choose to respond however you want – you don't have to turn the keys of your emotions over to the guy on the highway who cuts you off. It's bad enough he cut you off, why let him control your emotions? Why be a fool?

Proverbs 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

Proverbs 14:16 a fool is hotheaded

If your goal is to persuade, maintaining control of your emotions will give you far more influence than raising your voice.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Proverbs 16:32 Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

6) Be Fair

Don't be wise in your own eyes, listen more, talk less, don't be argumentative, don't react to insult – another one: be fair. This word for **reasonableness** also carries the idea of fairness or justice. Whenever someone disagrees with you, especially if they insult you or hurt you, the natural response is to be unfair in the way you consider their points. We do this in politics. The guy I voted for – if he does or says something that seems a little off, and I'll cut him some slack. "He probably didn't really mean it that way," or "Maybe he knows something I don't know." The guy I didn't vote for – he says something that sounds off and I'm all over his case: "What a moron." I take it in the worst possible light. And when I tell you about it, I put it in terms that make it even a little worse. Or I'll assume they have bad motives. I'm not being fair.

Someone does something that hurts you or that you disagree with, and it makes no sense to you at all – the natural temptation is to just conclude – "he's an idiot." Or that he has some bad motive. Nevermind

all the many times you've done things that didn't make sense to other people. And you wished at the time they would have just heard you out and given you the benefit of the doubt or assumed the best instead of the worst. You wished they would have been fair with you. When other people act in strange ways, show them the same fairness that you wish they would show you when they think you're acting in ways that seem strange to them.

You give people a fair hearing or an unfair hearing based on your feelings about that person. And so when someone contradicts you, in your flesh, your natural response will be to hear them and interpret what they say through an unfair filter. But a reasonable person will resist that temptation, and give a fair hearing.

Proverbs 20:10 Differing weights and differing measures— the LORD detests them both.

When you weigh what the person is saying, don't put your thumb on the negative side of the scale. Don't be unfair. The guy misspeaks a little bit, and you repeat it like that's what he really meant – that's unfair. He stumbles in his words and you take the exact quotation to make it seem like he's saying something worse than what he's really trying to say. Not fair. You don't do that to people on your side; you shouldn't do it to anybody.

Acknowledge their Strengths and Your Weaknesses

When you get into an argument, do you acknowledge the strengths of your opponent's points? Do you ever say, "Ok, I admit, what you just said there is a valid point"? "I'm still not persuaded of your view, but I have to admit, that point you just made there is a strong point." Do you ever do that? And do you ever acknowledge the weakness of your side? Do you ever say, "I still believe my view, but I have to admit, there are some weaknesses to it"? When the other person makes an argument, is your only response to try to defeat it? Or do you actually give their points a fair hearing, take them under consideration, and try to see it from their point of view?

That's one thing that really impressed me when I got into graduate school and had professors who were scholars. The professors I had in my undergraduate classes would make the strongest case they could for their view, and they made the opposing views sound stupid. I came away thinking, "Why would anyone believe that other way?" Then, years later, I met some people who held those other views and found out that they actually had some very strong arguments. And that made me question other things that the professors had convinced me of, because I realized they weren't being fair. But the scholars, they will tell you exactly what their view is, what the other views are, what is strong and weak about their own view, and what is strong and weak about their opponents' view. And when they did that, it was even more persuasive to me, because I could see they were being fair to the other view. People are afraid, "If I acknowledge that they have a good point, that will weaken my position. And the person will use that against me in future arguments – 'You admitted this is a good point'."

7) Win the Person, not the Argument

It seems like it might weaken your position, but in reality it will strengthen your position and make you more persuasive. And here's why – people are far more influenced by relationship than they are by argument. The default in our hearts is to find ways to agree with those we have a good relationship with, and to resist the ideas of those we are at odds with relationally. As soon as you set yourself against that person, or above that person, they will naturally try to find ways to resist your reasoning.

Proverbs 18:19 An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city

As soon as you offend them or hurt them, the gates close, the bars lock, the defenses rise up, and that weakens your position with them. But if they like you, they will try to find ways to agree with you. That's why you can't really win an argument. In an argument, if you lose, then you've lost. If you win – if you defeat the other person, then you've really lost, because now you've won the debate and lost the

person. Far better to win the person than the argument. When you have a disagreement, make that your goal.

Most people come out of a heated argument even more convinced of their position than they were to begin with. And most people come out of a friendly discussion more open to consider the other side. So if you approach them with humility and relational generosity, and you give their argument a fair hearing and really take it to heart, that will make them much more disposed to listening when it comes time for you to make your points. That person will be less defensive, they will respect you more, and that will give you 1000 times more influence on that person than if you just steamroll them in a debate.

So being reasonable gives you more influence with the person, not less. However, even if it did weaken your position – even if it did make the person think he’s right and you’re wrong, still, isn’t it worth it? If you lose the argument and gain the person’s heart, isn’t that almost always a net gain rather than a net loss? Think back to when you have won arguments, but lost the person’s respect. Has that ever turned out well? Friendship and the respect of others is far more valuable than being proved right, or appearing more clever.

Someone who does damage to the relationship because he always has to win an argument is like a basketball player tackles all the opposing players. Every time he’s on the floor he ends up tackling someone – or tackling the ref. And so the team always loses because of penalties. They ask him, "Why are you doing that?" and he says " Because I have to *win*." He thinks if he can tackle them and pin them, that’s winning. And he doesn't realize it’s not winning; it’s losing.

So many people do that with arguments. If you are willing to do damage to the relationship in order to win the debate, you might be playing the wrong game. You’re in a basketball game, and you think you’re in a wrestling match.

It’s not worth it to turn that person against you just so you can prove yourself right. Nor is it worth turning God against you. The Bible says God opposes the proud but he fights for the oppressed (Jas 4:6, Dt.20:4). That means if you are oppressing the other person or clinging to your pride, God is fighting against you for them. Can you imagine anything worse than fighting God? Imagine the folly of the man who says, "I'm doing this because I have to win!" and the thing he's doing causes God to fight against him. Newsflash – if you do something to provoke God to fight against you, the outcome is not going to be a win for you.

8) Edify

Be humble, listen more, talk less, don’t argue, don’t react to insults, be fair, win the person, not the argument and #8, seek to edify.

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Ask yourself, “Are my words having an edifying, upbuilding, healing, nourishing effect?”

Proverbs 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 10:21 The lips of the righteous nourish many

But Proverbs 11:9 With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor

Proverbs 14:1 The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.

How many wives or moms are so immersed in selfishness that they are tearing down their own households with their words? How many men work long hours to provide for their household, then come home and tear it apart with their words? Our words should not be for the purpose of defeating the person, but rather for the purpose of edifying and building up and healing.

Proverbs 12:18 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:4 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

9) Be Kind & Use Tact

And what makes speech edifying is not only the content, but also the manner – the way you say things. Sometimes there are some hard things that need to be said, no question about that. But generally speaking, is your speech sweet or bitter? Are they seasoned with salt, or poison? Do you use kindness and tact, or are you a bull in a china shop? Our culture glorifies a good, verbal smackdown. Someone says something you disagree with, and you come back with a really clever zinger that just puts them in their place. We love a good comeback. That will get you some laughs, and some thumbs up on Facebook, but does it instruct or persuade anyone?

Proverbs 16:21 pleasant words promote instruction.

ESV sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

The way you talk matters just as much as the logic of your argument.

Proverbs 27:9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

Timing

And a lot of this has to do with timing.

Proverbs 27:14 If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

Even if what you're saying is wonderful, if you say it at the wrong time with the wrong volume, it's not going to be received well. Proverbs has a lot to say about tact – saying the right thing in the right way at the right time.

Proverbs 10:32 The lips of the righteous know what is fitting

Proverbs 15:23 A man finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word!

Proverbs 25:11 A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Prayer & Q&A

Workshop

Break into small groups and see which of these principles of reasonableness and unreasonableness you can find in 1 Samuel 25 (don't look at your notes – try to do it from memory).

In this case, David is confronted by a fool and David doesn't have a good reaction. That principle about not answering a fool according to his folly lest you end up acting just like him – David falls into that trap with a fool by the name of Nabal. David's men tried to reason with Nabal, but he was unreasonable. Verse 17 says **no one can talk to him**. That was Nabal's reputation. Nabal is disrespectful and unkind to David, and so David becomes enraged and decides to slaughter Nabal and his entire household. They tried reasoning with Nabal, but he was unreasonable, and so David becomes unreasonable.

So now Nabal's wife hears about it. This angry man is behaving like a fool and is coming to kill everybody, including her. How does she react? Is she going to get drawn in and behave like a fool too? No, she shows tact and kindness and respect. She assumes the best of David (she can't assume anything good about what David was doing, because it was evil, so she assumes David will change course and do the right thing now). She says nothing about her interests – she focuses on David's interests. She talks

about his reputation, his conscience, his standing before God, his future kingship – how doing the right thing would be beneficial to him. So not only does she show tact, but her words are edifying. She makes righteousness look attractive to David. And she wins him over. She could have made a very strong argument about how sinful David was being, but that probably wouldn't have won his heart like her approach did.

Then what happened? Was David too stubborn to listen? No, he took her words to heart. Was David too proud to change course, since he had made up his mind and had already started taking action? No. Was he too proud to listen to some peasant woman teaching him spiritual principles? No.

1 Samuel 25:32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands."

Benediction: Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Find as many of these principles as you can in 1 Samuel 25
- 2) Find as many of these principles as you can in 1 Samuel 17:28,29
- 3) Find as many of these principles as you can in 2 Samuel 16:5-13