

# UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, sin not only has separated man from God but also caused interpersonal problems. Just in the first book of Genesis:

- Cain and Abel
- Noah and his son Ham
- Sarah and Hagar
- Abraham and Lot
- Esau and Jacob
- Jacob and his father in law Laban
- Rachel and Leah
- Joseph and brothers

**Note:** The atonement of Christ on the cross not only reconciles man to God but also person to person.

**Ephesians 4:1-3**, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, **urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**”

- **Worthy of the calling** speaks about living a life reflecting the life-transforming power of the gospel of Christ.
- **The unity of the Spirit** speaks about maintaining healthy relationships in the body of Christ.
- **To maintain the unity of the Spirit**, it requires humility, gentleness, patience and endurance.
- One of the great marks of humility, gentleness, patience, and endurance is **UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE**.

Speaking about UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE IS a massive subject. Although many issues can be discussed, the purpose of this message is to address non-sinful behavior which we hastily conclude as offensive.

**Remember, we don't look at people as they are; we see them as we think. We behave with others the way we think about them. How we view others shapes our relationship.**

Sadly, we often think about others by keeping 'self' at the center (according to our expectations and offense).

- Cynicism (pessimistic attitude toward others)
- Suspicion
- Judgmentalism
- Assumptions
- Bitter prejudice
- Hasty conclusions

**Greg Morse (writer at Desiring God):** Cynicism and suspicion, I know firsthand, crawl into our minds and make us traitors to ourselves, dangers to our families, and toxins to our churches.

### **Illustrations:**

Sneha shares her painful story with me but I don't emotionally respond to her. She feels that I am not empathetic towards her. But the fact is I am afraid to respond to her because I was afraid of saying the wrong thing.

I call Rajesh and he doesn't pick up the call. I get upset that he ignored my call. But the fact is Rajesh is under tremendous work pressure and also having some problems with his manager. So he was not in a proper state of mind to attend my call.

Joseph and Mary don't invite people to their home for hospitality. I judge them as being unloving and inhospitable. But the fact is that they have a small house and no good household items, and they feel awkward inviting others to their home.

Martha doesn't respond to my texts. She doesn't even pick my call. I get offended by her negligence. But the fact is Martha has been going through severe depression due to family problems and wasn't in a good emotional state to respond.

Simon didn't not call me when he said he would. So I assume him as an irresponsible and negligent person. But when I spoke to him later, I

realized that he had forgotten his phone at home and couldn't call me from his workplace.

When I spoke to Stanley, I felt he was unfriendly in his conversation with me. So I get offended. But the fact is his boss publicly chided him and he was completely shattered and couldn't communicate well with others.

I have observed Sunny has been ignoring me, although I sought to build a relationship with him. I was greatly upset. But the fact is someone told Sunny that I am not a good person to get along. Sunny believed it without examining it and started ignoring me.

Rachel is quite expressive about what's happening in her life in the social media group. So I start judging her for being arrogant and flaunting. When she came to know what I thought about her, she turned silent in the group. But the fact is Rachel is a sanguine person, jolly and a friendly person. Being expressive is not always being arrogant.

John is not a transparent person. He neither confesses his weaknesses nor seeks to receive help. I assume that he is not a humble person who is serious in his pursuit of holiness. But the fact is when John shared about his weaknesses with some people in the past, they gossiped about him and broke his heart. He felt betrayed and stopped opening up himself to others.

I feel unaccepted, rejected, and neglected in the church. So I view people in the church with a critical eye that believers are unloving and groupists. But the fact is that people would love to communicate with me and desire to have a healthy relationship. But, unfortunately, due to my overly sensitive and easily offended attitude (which is a sign of self-absorption), people became afraid to communicate with me lest they offend me.

How many of us assume things without understanding people's intentions?

**Pamela Gannon (writer at Biblical Counseling Coalition), "If I assume a negative motive, I will treat you as if that motive is fact, resulting in hurt and confusion. **When I wrongly assume others' motives, I create division rather than preserve the unity our Lord calls us to enjoy in the body of Christ.**"**

- ❖ **Proverbs 20:5**, “The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water (mysterious, unfathomable), but a man of understanding will draw it out.”

**A crude fact:** WE ARE MORE A PEOPLE OF MISUNDERSTANDING THAN A PEOPLE OF UNDERSTANDING.

**TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE:**

### **1. DO NOT JUDGE PEOPLE BASED ON OUTWARD APPEARANCES.**

- ❖ **John 7:24**, “**Do not judge by appearances**, but judge with right judgment.”
- ❖ **The nature of man is revealed in 1 Samuel 16:7**, For the Lord sees not as man sees: **man looks on the outward appearance**, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

**Edward T. Welch:** People are complex (difficult to understand). We see behaviors, but not the underlying motives behind those behaviors. Behind the “what we do” of our lives is the “why we do it.” Our public actions tell one story; our private intentions can tell another.

**A good question to ask:** WHY DOES THAT PERSON DO WHAT HE DOES?

### **2. KNOW THAT WE ARE NOT OMNISCIENT (not the fourth person of the Trinity). ONLY GOD IS.**

**Pamela Gannon:** Why are we so quick to make negative assumptions of others’ motives? One reason: We may pridefully believe that we are discerning people and can clearly see what is “obviously” going on in someone’s heart.

- ❖ **1 Kings 8:39**, Solomon prayed, “then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (**for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind**).”

- ❖ **1 Chronicles 28:9**, “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; **for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.**”
- ❖ **Hebrews 12:13**, “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but **all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him** to whom we must give account.”

**Caution: DON'T PLAY GOD**

### **3. DENY SELF-CENTERED FEELINGS AND ASSUMPTIONS.**

- ❖ **Proverbs 18:2**, “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

We must admit that—what we see, what we think, what we hear, and what we feel—are prone to deception. Trusting ourselves is foolish.

**Charles Swindoll gives us the right reasons as to why we have to do so:**

- We do not know all the facts.
- We are unable to read motives.
- We find it impossible to be totally objective.
- We lack “the big picture.”
- We live with blind spots.
- We are prejudiced and have blurred perspective.
- Most of all, we ourselves are imperfect and inconsistent.

**A good question to ask: WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE YOU'RE YOUR CONCLUSIONS?**

### **4. DON'T BE QUICKLY OFFENDED AND COME TO CONCLUSIONS ANGRILY.**

- ❖ **Proverbs 14:29**, “**Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding**, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”

- ❖ **Proverbs 17:27**, “Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and **he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.**”

**Ray Ortlund:** Anger is a judging emotion. Anger is our hearts feeling that something is wrong. And a lot is wrong. But wisdom brings this judging emotion itself under judgment. Fools unleash it without filtering it.

- ❖ **Proverbs 19:11**, “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” (ESV)
  - “Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.” (NLT)

**A good question to ask: ARE YOU EMOTIONAL IN YOUR JUDGMENT OF OTHERS?**

## **5. EXAMINE WHAT YOU HEAR**

- ❖ **Exodus 20:16**, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

**Note:** Just as we are prone to conclude about others’ motives hastily, others too are prone to commit the same blunder when they speak to you about someone.

- ❖ **Deuteronomy 19:15**, “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”
- ❖ **2 Corinthians 13:1**, “This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

**Jonathan Akin:** Not only does the fool usually listen only to himself, and not only does the fool speak more than he listens; but when the fool finally decides to listen to someone else, he listens to another fool!

**Question: DO YOU EXAMINE WHAT YOU HEAR?**

## 6. PRAY TO THE ALL-WISE GOD FOR AN UNDERSTANDING MIND

- ❖ **1 Kings 3:9**, “Give your servant therefore an **understanding mind** to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”
- ❖ **Proverbs 2:6**, “For the Lord gives wisdom; **from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.**”

**Question:** DO YOU PRAY TO GOD TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE OR DO YOU THINK YOU ARE SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW PEOPLE’S HEARTS?

## 7. BE AWARE OF THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL

**The devil’s scheme is to sow interpersonal problems and misunderstandings:**

- ❖ **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**, “Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”
- ❖ **Ephesians 4:26-27**, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and **give no opportunity to the devil...v.31**, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice...**v.32**, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted [SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING), forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

**Your mind is shaped by four factors:**

- Flesh (sinful nature)
- World
- Devil
- God’s Word

**One of the schemes of the devil is to sow lies in your minds about people:**

- **John 8:44**, Jesus said that there is no truth in the devil and he is the father of lies.
- **Put on the belt of truth, Ephesians 6:14**, against the schemes of the devil, one of which is to believe the facts about people and not lies and assumptions which the devil sows in your mind.

**Caution:** Rather than issuing an all-out assault on us, which we might more easily recognize, Satan tries to poison our minds with lies about others. This effective weapon is often successful in dividing the body of Christ.

**Question:** ARE YOU LISTENING TO THE LIES OF THE DEVIL ABOUT OTHERS MOTIVES?

## 8. LISTEN WELL TO KNOW THE FACTS

**Garrett Kell:** “What we don’t want to do is create a culture of critics who are constantly eyeing one another for mistakes. But what we do want to see is a church deepen in their love and care for one another so much that they are willing to **engage in deep, painful, graceful, helpful, character-shaping conversations** that will bring God much glory.”

**Observe:** When Solomon prayed to God for “an understanding mind . . . that I may discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9) literally in the Hebrew, “a listening mind.”

- ❖ **James 1:19** provides a very wise word of counsel at this point: “Understand this: **Everyone should be quick to listen [to know the facts]**, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”
- ❖ **Proverbs 18:13**, If one gives an answer [comes to a conclusion] before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

**Tim Keller:** At a deeper level, speaking before listening means to be prejudiced, to literally “prejudge” someone before you know the full truth about them.



If someone's behavior becomes a stumbling block in building a good relationship with that person, instead of judging the person based on assumptions:

- i. **Assume the best of others' intentions rather than the worst (at least be neutral)**
  - **Pamela Gannon:** 1 Corinthians 13:7 tells us that love believes all things; that is, love chooses to believe the best about other people rather than the worst whenever possible. Love gives someone the benefit of the doubt and does not jump to conclusions.
- ii. **Approach the person in person** (not chatting or phone) (One little effort from us to initiate and talk about the problematic issue with the person peacefully can save wonderful relationships.)
- iii. **Ask questions for clarification** (without making concluding statements) (like not lifting the call...)
- iv. **Share what you feel** (without accusation). "I am hurt" rather than "You hurt me".
- v. **Consider their perspective.** Seek to be a man and a woman of understanding and build a healthy relationship to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

### **Remember:**

- ❖ **Proverbs 20:5**, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water (mysterious, unfathomable), but a man of understanding will draw it out."

### **IMITATE CHRIST:**

- ❖ I love the characteristic of the Messiah which was foretold by **Isaiah 11:3-4**: "He shall **not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, BUT WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS HE SHALL JUDGE** the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth..."

The reason why we must understand people rightly is because that's **CHRISTLIKENESS**.