

Leaving a Mark that Lasts

I was fourteen years old when the new pastor of our small-town church introduced the idea of a student ministry. Before that, anyone from kindergarten through high school was simply part of the children's ministry. The kick-off for this new concept was an after-school event at the church's fellowship hall. I arrived early and waited for the event to start. But even 10 minutes after the start time, I was the only one there. Undeterred, the pastor suggested we hop in his car and head for some ice cream. As we sat in his car eating our soft serve, he laid out his vision—a ministry targeted at the interests and needs of teenagers. But what really changed my life that day was that he shared his belief in my potential to be a leader.

Some men shy away from talking about relationships. In my corporate job, if we had to attend a class on “soft skills,” we mockingly referred to it as being sent to “Charm School.” However, studies clearly show that top performers consistently rank high in areas such as Emotional Intelligence, while poor performers rank low¹.

The encouragement I received from my pastor that afternoon inspired me to live and function at a different level. It was years before I truly understood the significance of that conversation—that our greatest opportunities to make a difference in our world play out, not so much through projects, programs, and achievements, but through relationships. It wasn't his plan for a student ministry that changed me, but the 45 minutes that he spent investing in me.

The reverse is also true. We have the power to dispense discouragement just as easily as encouragement. At times, in a misguided effort to motivate me, my mother would suggest that she wasn't sure that I would ever “amount to much.” For better or worse, as you read this, you may be thinking right now about a relationship from your past that built you up or one that tore you down.² Or you may be wondering whom you have built up or torn down.

¹ Natalie L. Shipley, Mary Jo Jackson, and Sharon Segrest, "The effects of emotional intelligence, age, work experience, and academic performance," *Research in Higher Education Journal* 9 (2010): 1-18, <https://pure.lib.usf.edu/ws/portalfiles/portal/40484584/The%20effects%20of%20emotional%20intelligence%20age%20work%20experience%20and.pdf>

²Eph 4:29-32

Relational Wisdom

The book of Proverbs is packed with relationship advice, largely divided into two categories: the actions of the wise and the actions of the foolish.

*Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute,
but any fool can get himself into a quarrel.*

Proverbs 20:3 (CSB)

“Any fool can get himself into a quarrel...” Indeed!

I usually try to avoid looking foolish, but I have to admit that I’ve experienced firsthand how little effort it takes to commit relational foolishness. I long to put those days behind me. The relational wisdom found in scripture is one of the ways God equips us to fulfill what Jesus said are the two greatest commandments.

He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:37-39 (CSB)

These commandments reveal three areas of relationships where I can express God’s love through my life:

1. My relationship with Him,
2. My relationships with others, and
3. My relationship with myself.

With this starting point, let’s establish a simple definition of what it might mean when we refer to “Relational Wisdom.”

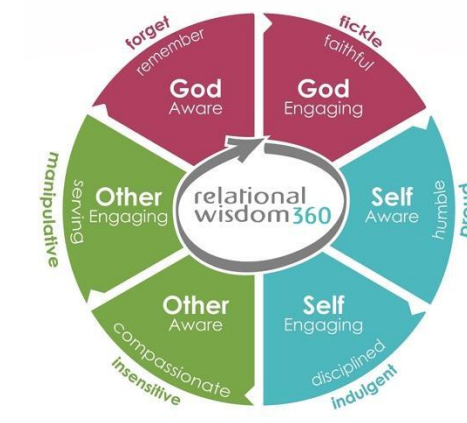
Relational Wisdom³ is the ability to...

- Discern emotions, interests and abilities in myself and others
- Interpret this information in light of God's word, and
- Use these insights to manage my responses and relationships constructively.

Jesus' standard for how you relate to God, yourself and others is simply "love." If you are going to love someone actively, two things must happen.

- First, you must know them, which is **awareness**.
- Second, you need to spend time with them, which is **engagement**.

Applying Christian love through awareness and engagement toward God, ourselves and others gives us six dimensions or skills toward Relational Wisdom. Each can also be represented by a core character trait of a mature believer.



Skill	Represented By Being
God-Awareness is the ability to view all of life in light of God's character, works and promises. (2 Pet 1:3-4)	Mindful vs. forgetful
God-Engagement is the ability to trust, obey and imitate God in a way that pleases and honors him. (Prov 3:5-6)	Faithful vs. fickle
Self-Awareness is the ability to accurately discern my own identity, emotions, thoughts, interests and abilities. (1 Pet 5:5)	Humble vs. proud
Self-Engagement is the ability to manage my own thoughts, emotions, words and actions so that they advance God's purpose. (Titus 2:11-12)	Self-disciplined vs self-indulgent
Other-Awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with the experiences, emotions, values and interests of others. (1 Pet 3:8)	Compassionate vs. insensitive
Other-Engagement is the ability to love, encourage, serve and resolve differences with others in a mutually beneficial way. (1 Pet 3:9)	Serving vs. manipulating

Figure 2 - Skills and character of a relationally wise man of God.

³ <https://rw360.org>

One Man, Many Roles

Each man impacts his world through multiple roles. To begin with, each of us is a brother-in-Christ to the others. Additionally, you may be an employee, a manager or a supervisor, and, in many cases, you will be both. You may be a husband or a father, and in some aspect of your life, you may have some leadership responsibilities. You may also serve others as a volunteer in ministry or in your community.

Think for a moment about how those six skills are present in you as you relate to others in each of your roles.

Like the pastor who invested in me when I was fourteen, each of your roles presents opportunities to leave a mark that may last for 40 or 50 years or more. For each role that applies to you, take a moment and ask God to reveal how you are doing. As a manager or supervisor, are you doing all you should to serve those who report to you? As a husband or father, do you need to be more mindful of God's character and how you should reflect it? For whom do you need to be more self-disciplined? With whom do you need to display more humility?

Putting it into Action

Take a moment to review the table below. Think about how well you model each of the six skills in the roles you fill as a man. Following the example on the first row, record a + (plus sign) in the boxes where you see some success, and where you want to improve, record a Δ (delta).

	Mindfulness	Faithfulness	Humility	Self-Discipline	Compassion	Service
Brother-in-Christ		+	Δ	Δ		
Husband						
Father						
Employee/Coworker						
Manager/Supervisor						
Leader						
Volunteer						

Figure 3- A relationally wise man fills many roles, each with the opportunity to impact others positively or negatively.

- Which column has the most pluses? Well done, brother. Lean into that.
- Which column has the most deltas? Give yourself an assignment to lean into that too. Make the assignment specific and relevant to how you want to grow.
- If you want to take it further, share the assignment you've given yourself with a Christian brother who can lovingly hold you accountable.

For me, I find my greatest struggles in self-awareness and self-discipline. I identify with the Apostle Paul who faced a real struggle between the man he felt like he wanted to be and what he sometimes did.

For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.
Romans 7:15 (CSB)

The good news is that as you grow in these areas of relational wisdom, your ability to leave a mark on those you know also grows.

The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.
Proverbs 16:23 (ESV)

Each role you fill is an opportunity for you to leave a mark and, as the proverb states, to “add persuasiveness to your lips.” It is a place where a little relational wisdom can enable you to encourage a coworker, challenge a brother, or serve as a model to influence others to live differently. Whether you are a dad, a supervisor, a coworker, or just a brother in Christ, having persuasiveness that flows from wisdom is a blessing worth pursuing.

*Kevin Thornsberry serves on the Copperfield Church peacemaking team, which is available to help the Copperfield Church faith family be good stewards of the relationships in their lives and to provide assistance when tensions arise in those relationships. Kevin also provides help outside of Copperfield Church as a Christian Conciliator through the **Institute for Christian Conciliation** (<https://www.aorhope.org/icc>) and **Relational Wisdom 360** (<https://rw360.org>), and is an advanced instructor for **Relational Wisdom 360**. He serves believers locally through his ministry, **The Missing Peace** (<https://missing-peace.org>).*