

Are You Approachable?

When Wisdom Stops Knocking

This is #2 in my "Guarding Our Inner Life" — Bible Studies. #1 - Discernment, Deception, and the Remedy is available [on Substack](#) and on [my searchable website](#), where all my study archives reside.

Introduction

There's a moment most of us have experienced — standing in a conversation where someone is trying to tell us something we don't particularly want to hear. Maybe it's a spouse gently pointing out a blind spot, or a friend raising an eyebrow at a decision we've already made up our minds about. In that moment, something rises up inside us. It's not anger exactly. It's more like a wall. A quiet, stubborn certainty that says, ***I've already thought this through. I'm fine.***

That feeling — that wall — is exactly what we're going to talk about today.

It starts with a story from ancient Israel, and it ends with a question that might just follow you home.

A Man Named Abner

Picture this: Israel is in the middle of a civil war. King Saul is dead, and his house is crumbling. On one side you have Ish-bo-sheth, Saul's surviving son — weak, uncertain, propped up largely by the muscle and loyalty of one man: Abner, Saul's commander and cousin. On the other side is David, already anointed by Jehovah, already king over Judah, his star rising every day.

Abner is a powerful man. He knows it. Everyone knows it. And Ish-bo-sheth knows it too — which is exactly why what happens next is so fascinating.

In [2 Samuel 3:6-11](#), Ish-bo-sheth makes the mistake of confronting Abner. He accuses him of sleeping with Rizpah, one of Saul's concubines — a serious accusation in that culture, amounting to a claim on the throne. And how does Abner respond?

He explodes.

"Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? This day I am showing kindness to the house of your father Saul, to his brothers and to his friends, and I haven't delivered you into the hand of David — and now you charge me with a fault concerning this woman!" ([2 Samuel 3:8](#))

He doesn't answer the accusation. He doesn't say "you're right" or "you're wrong." He fills the room with so much heat and fury that poor Ish-bo-sheth goes completely silent — the text says he couldn't answer Abner "another word, because he feared him." (v. 11)

Now, **was Abner approachable?** Clearly not.

And here's the sobering question that follows: **Are you?**

Why We Build Walls

It would be easy to look at Abner and feel superior. But let's be honest with ourselves for a moment, because this is where the real study begins.

Why are we — you and I — not more approachable?

Solomon cuts right to it in [Proverbs 21:2](#): *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes."*

That's it. That's the whole problem in one sentence.

Here's how it works in real life. Something happens — a conflict at work, a theological question, a parenting decision, a financial choice. We think about it, pray about it, maybe sleep on it. We gather our reasoning, consult our experiences, and eventually we land on a conclusion. And once we've done that mental and emotional work, something shifts. Our conclusion starts to feel less like an opinion and more like a fact. It stops feeling like *what we think* and starts feeling like *what is true*.

At that point, someone coming to us with a different perspective isn't just offering information. They feel like they're challenging our competence. Our judgment. Perhaps, even our identity.

So we do what Abner did. **We justify**. We deflect. We raise our voice or lower our eyes or change the subject. Sometimes we don't even realize we're doing it. But the wall goes up, and the other person — like Ish-bo-sheth — gets the message and backs down. And we call that "winning."

But is it winning? Or is something being lost?

What Happens When No One Can Reach Us

Let's talk about the danger, because it's real and it's serious.

Solomon comes back to this theme with unusual urgency in [Proverbs 5:11-13](#): *"...you will be full of grief at the end of your life, when your flesh and your body are wasted. And you will say, 'How I hated instruction! How my heart despised correction! I didn't listen to the voice of my teachers. I didn't pay attention to those who were guiding me.'"*

That's a haunting image — an old person, wasted and regretful, finally able to see all the wisdom they pushed away. The walls that felt protective in the moment left them isolated from the very input that could have changed the course of their life.

And [Proverbs 29:1](#) is even more stark: *"He who is often reproved but stiffens his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing."*

Those aren't metaphors designed to scare us. **They're pattern recognition** — the accumulated observations of the wisest man who ever lived, watching people build walls around themselves and then wonder why everything eventually fell apart.

Pharaoh: The Cautionary King

If you want a dramatic, large-scale example of unapproachability, look no further than Pharaoh.

Plague after plague after plague — ten of them in total — and every single one of them was, in a very real sense, Jehovah giving Pharaoh an opportunity to listen. To change course. To let Israel go and save his own nation from destruction.

But Pharaoh's first response tells you everything you need to know: *"Who is Jehovah, that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not know Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go."* ([Exodus 5:2](#))

Not only was he unapproachable — he didn't even recognize the source of the counsel as legitimate. Even when his own magicians threw down their staffs and said, *"This is the finger of God"* ([Exodus 8:19](#)), Pharaoh hardened his heart and kept walking the same direction.

We know how that story ends. The firstborn of Egypt. The Red Sea. A nation broken. And all of it, at least in part, because a powerful man refused to let anyone — including the Creator of the universe — tell him he was wrong.

Noah's Neighbors

Noah is another example. [Genesis 6:5](#) tells us that *"Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. "Noah preached righteousness to his generation for decades" — [2 Peter 2:5](#) calls him "a herald of righteousness" — and not one of his neighbors climbed aboard that ark. Not one.*

They had a living, breathing, building sermon in their neighborhood for over a hundred years, and **they tuned it out** completely. When the rain started, wisdom had already stopped knocking. The door wasn't just closed — it was sealed from the outside by Jehovah himself ([Genesis 7:16](#)).

Samson's Stubbornness

Samson is perhaps the most vivid portrait of a man who was completely unapproachable to wisdom. When he saw a Philistine woman in Timnah and demanded his parents arrange the marriage, their pushback was immediate and reasonable — ***"Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"*** ([Judges 14:3](#)).

His answer was essentially four words: ***"Get her for me"*** — because, as the text literally reads, ***"she is right in my eyes"*** ([Judges 14:3](#)). That phrase should stop us cold. Solomon had already written, ***"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the heart"*** ([Proverbs 21:2](#)). Samson wasn't just making a bad romantic choice. He was living out the very proverb that warns against exactly that kind of self-referential judgment. His eyes were the final authority.

His instincts were the compass. And wisdom(from his parents, from his heritage, from Jehovah) had no seat at the table. We know how that story ends: blind, bound, and grinding grain in a Philistine prison.

So How Do We Change?

Here's where the study gets personal — and practical. Because none of this is meant to just make us feel convicted and then go on with life unchanged. **The point is to grow.** So, what does it actually look like to become more approachable?

1. Start With a Different View of Disagreement

One of the great cultural shifts of our time is the idea that being challenged equals being attacked. That if someone disagrees with you, they must either hate you or be completely wrong. But that's not a biblical framework — it's a defensive reflex.

[Psalm 32:8-9](#) offers a beautiful alternative: ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye on you. Don't be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, which must be held in with bit and bridle, or they will not come near you."***

Think about that image. The mule isn't evil — it's just untrained. It has to be *forced* into position. But a person who has accepted Jehovah's framework for wisdom walks voluntarily toward correction, because they've learned that correction is a gift, not an attack.

The next time someone challenges your thinking, try this: **before you respond, take one breath and ask yourself, "Is there any chance — even a small one — that they're right?"** That pause can change everything.

2. Give People Permission to Speak Into Your Life

Here's a practical and often overlooked step: **tell people you want their input.**

Most of us have people in our lives who see our blind spots clearly — a close friend, a spouse, a parent, a trusted fellow believer — but they don't say anything because they've learned it won't go well. They've been burned before. They've watched us get defensive. So they go quiet.

You can change that dynamic by going first. Tell someone, ***"I want you to be honest with me. I give you permission to push back when you think I'm off."*** That simple act lowers the intimidation level — for both of you — and creates the kind of relationship where real growth can happen.

Think about Ish-bo-sheth again. He tried to confront Abner and got steamrolled into silence. How different might things have been if Abner had genuinely cultivated a culture of honest feedback around him? He never found out.

3. Give Every Idea a Fair Hearing Before You Respond

This doesn't mean agreeing with everything. It means *listening* — actually listening — before you form your counter-argument.

When we acknowledge that we are not infallible, that our perspective is always incomplete, it becomes much easier to sit with someone else's input without immediately reaching for the delete button. You don't have to blindly follow every piece of advice. But give it room. Pray over it. Sleep on it. Ask, **"What if there's something here I'm missing?"**

In almost every case, even advice that ultimately turns out to be wrong contains something useful. A concern worth noting, a perspective worth acknowledging, a relationship worth honoring. Take what's good with gratitude, and gently set the rest aside.

4. Stay in the Word daily.

[Proverbs 8:33](#) says, **"Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it."** Neglect is rarely dramatic. It doesn't usually announce itself. It looks like skipping one morning, then two, then a week slips by and the Bible feels like a stranger on the shelf. In recovery circles, they call it **"getting too busy to work the program"** — and everybody in the room knows exactly how that story ends. The Word of God is not a reference book you consult in emergencies. It is daily bread. Keep it that way.

5. There Is No Shame in Being Wrong

This might be the most liberating truth in the entire study.

[1 John 1:9](#) says: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

[James 5:16](#) adds: **"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."**

And [Proverbs 29:23](#) lands the point squarely: **"A person's pride will bring them down, but one who is humble in spirit will gain honor."**

Pride tells us that admitting we were wrong is weakness. But every great person you've ever admired — every mentor, every leader worth following — has been someone who could say clearly, **"I got that wrong. I'm sorry. Here's what I'm doing differently."** That kind of honesty doesn't diminish a person. It elevates them. It's what makes them trustworthy.

The Invitation

Here's where we land.

[Proverbs 8:33](#) says simply: **"Hear instruction and be wise, and do not refuse it."**

That's the whole thing, really. Hear it. Receive it. Be changed by it.

None of us are Abner. But all of us have built a wall at some point. All of us have sat across from someone who was trying to reach us and made sure — consciously or not — that they couldn't quite get through.

The question isn't whether we've done that. The question is whether we're willing to start taking the walls down.

Jehovah is patient. He'll send the same message ten times if he has to — through Scripture, through friends, through circumstances, through that quiet nudge that wakes you up at 3 AM. But there's a limit to what even patient love can do for a heart that refuses to open.

So take a moment today and ask yourself honestly: ***Is there someone in your life who has been trying to tell you something — and you've been making sure they can't?***

What would happen if you let them?

"My son, pay attention to my wisdom. Lean in and listen carefully, so that you can hold onto sound judgment and your lips can preserve knowledge." — [Proverbs 5:1-2](#)

Desiring to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah ([Deut8:3: Matt4:4](#))

-Sid Nash: 07/17/2026. Latest version: <https://sidnash.org/docs/GIL2Approachable.html>