

# Is It Sometimes O. K. To Mind Other People's Business?

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**M**ind your own business!" or "It's none of your business!" is a common expression which we hear, use, or sometimes have at the tip of our tongue to say to the person who is intruding into matters we consider personal and private. The wisdom of not prying into other people's affairs is well documented in many writings from ancient times including the Bible. For example, the wise man, Solomon, wrote: "Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears." (Prov. 26:17, ESV). Paul admonished Christians thus: "aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands..." (1 Thess. 4:11, ESV). He also spoke disparagingly of women who "learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." (1 Tim. 5:13, ESV). Clearly, if we give less time and attention to what is happening in other people's lives we will save ourselves a lot of stress and trouble and even have more time to invest in ourselves so we can become more productive.

Having said all that, it is of equal importance to note that the aforementioned verses are tempered by other verses of Scripture which encourage



Christians to become responsibly involved in matters that do not affect them directly or personally. There are indeed instances when it is right and proper to break the ethical rule of minding your own business. Here are some examples:

## 1. When the well-being of the community is being threatened in some way

A mantra in our day to stop crime is "If you see something, say something" This is a call to report suspicious activity to local law enforcement so that our families, neighbours and communities can be kept safe. To say, "It's not my business" when gunmen are threatening the life of your neighbour not only demonstrates callousness of heart but also the ugly underside of a person who has broken ranks with the civic-minded. In fact, it is people like you who caused Albert Einstein to say: "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing."

The prophets in the Old Testament, by and large, were men who were considered meddlesome by the rich and powerful of

their society. For example, the prophet Amos was told by King Amaziah to go back to Judah where he came from and not to meddle into Israel's affairs:

Then Amaziah sent orders to Amos: "Get out of here, you prophet! Go on back to the land of Judah, and earn your living by prophesying there! Don't bother us with your prophecies here in Bethel. This is the king's sanctuary and the national place of worship!" (Amos 7:12-13, NLT)

Wherever morality is on the decline and there is a social drift away from God, Christians need to be that prophetic voice to speak up and speak out. And yes, someone will shout at us, "You need to mind your own business!" These shouts, however, should not deter us from being the salt and light God has commanded us to be (Matt. 5:13-16).

## 2. When moral issues are affecting the witness of the church

There are many church members who know that Brother X is living a double life. They also know that it is only in church that Sister Y wears her saintly façade. Outside the church she is an insufferable bully wreaking havoc in the lives of those too weak to stand up to her. Nobody sees the need to "meddle" into the personal lives of these prominent members who hold important offices in the church and who wield spiritual influence among those who look to them for godly leadership. One may also hear "Who am I to judge? Each person has to give an account to God for themselves."

The Bible is clear that getting involved in other people's business is sometimes necessary when other people's business is adversely affecting God's business. It was this understanding that motivated persons

from Chloe's household to bring to Paul's attention matters that needed to be addressed in the Corinthian church.

*My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. (I Cor. 1:11, NIV)*

It is instructive that the Lord Jesus Himself rebuked the church at Thyatira for doing nothing while a false prophetess was leading His people astray (Rev. 2:20). Presumably, the members of the church felt they should not be meddling into those matters. Perhaps they had erroneously concluded that nobody had the right to "touch the Lord's anointed." Maybe some persons were saying, "when God is ready to deal with that situation He will." How different the Lord's assessment would have been had members of the Thyatiran congregation minded their own business less and the church's business more!

## 3. When someone needs to be saved from some self-destructive behaviour

Self-destructive behaviour covers a wide range of actions by an individual that are damaging and causes self-harm either physically or emotionally. Examples include eating disorders, substance abuse, sex addiction, acts of self-mutilation, and suicide attempts. While self-destructive behaviour ranges from mild to severe, those who engage in such behaviour often lack healthy coping mechanisms and simply do not know how to help themselves. They may push others away who genuinely want to help them. But should you stand there and watch a friend commit suicide without preventing him? Do you need his permission before you interrupt? Of course not!

Persistent care and support are of utmost importance. We are called to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). You may need to get others involved. You may need to remove potentially dangerous items from the person's environment even if this goes against the wishes of the person with suicidal thoughts. This is definitely an occasion where minding somebody else's business can make a difference between life and death. It is worthy of note that the Bible offers a message of hope for the wide range of emotions that gives rise to suicidal feelings: loneliness, sadness, guilt, fear, and disillusionment (Joshua 1:9; Psa. 23:4, 34:17-19, 55:22; I Peter 5:7). We should pray for wisdom to communicate this message in a non-judgmental way so healing can be experienced by those who have fallen prey to feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

#### 4. When there is a genuine opportunity to alleviate an unexpressed need

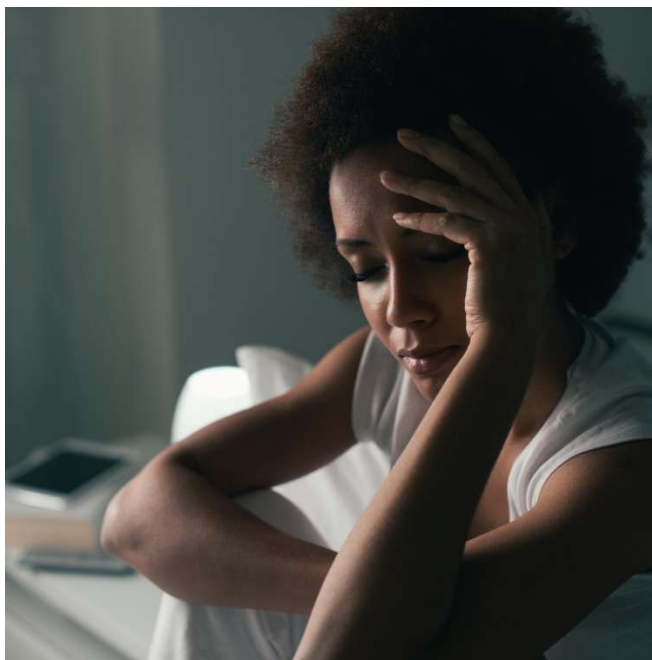
We generally evaluate one's spiritual depth by their fervor in worship, the number of Bible verses they can reel off, and their faithfulness in practicing the spiritual disciplines. God's Word, however, goes further and links spirituality with a sense of compassion. Consider the words of the apostle John:

“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—

how can God's love be in that person?” (I John 3:17, NLT)

Note carefully that the verse says, “If someone ... **sees** a brother or sister in need...” The obvious meaning here is that our powers of observation are a reliable enough guide to spur us to provide practical help. We should not necessarily wait for the needy person to ask. We should get involved. And of course, in doing so we should be tactful enough to spare them from any unnecessary feelings of embarrassment

which acts of charity sometimes engender. Instead of drawing attention to their need by saying, “I see that you need ... so here am I to help” you can simply ask, “Is it O. K. to share some .... with you?”



#### 5. When the oppressed are too weak to speak up for themselves or to end their oppression

Sadly, in many parts of the world today, human life is devalued. Disrupt Human Trafficking (DHT), a nonprofit organization that actively disrupts human trafficking networks internationally, reports that, “Traffickers are exploiting 25 million people annually ... This is a thriving financial institution that makes a profit of \$150 Billion a year and is only growing.”

Our communities are rife with cases of domestic abuse. According to the World Health Organization, “about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to

either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.” In many parts of the world the statistics on elderly abuse, child abuse, child homicide, abuse of the unborn are all trending in the wrong direction.

We should not stand idly by and allow these painful statistics to skyrocket. The morally right thing to do is to show initiative and bravery in order to help persons who do not have the ability or resources to defend themselves. Proverbs 24:11-12 gives a clear command to do just that:

*Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?*

So, are you still unsure as to when you should be minding other people’s business? Search your own heart. Ask yourself these two questions: What are my intentions in becoming involved in this situation? If I don’t get involved, would I be responsible in any way for the outcome? Let us commit to being less of a busybody prying into other people’s affairs and more of a concerned Christian helping others experience the fullness of life Christ came to give (John 10:10).