

Shayla: How can I graciously refuse to commend the wicked son of someone I love?

Meforshim:

“Don’t make accusations against someone who hasn’t wronged you.”¹ Don’t bring up any of the things you have heard unless you have personal, direct knowledge of them. Even if 90% of it is true – if you get one fact wrong she’ll focus on that and use it to discredit everything else you say.

You are basically an honest person. You have integrity. Allow that inner standard that is amplified by the Holy Spirit to guide you throughout the conversation.² Don’t “over think” what you will say because you will start second guessing and even projecting. Everyone knows that “smooth words may hide a wicked heart, just as a pretty glaze covers a common clay pot.”³ Isn’t it a “slick salesman” or a “smooth-talking politician” that everyone despises? Don’t try to be too politically correct as you talk to her. She’ll pick up on that effort, and in her disappointment at your refusal, may choose to assign you with negative motivations.

“Gentle words bring life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”⁴ Note the contrast is between “gentle” and “deceitful”? We would normally think the contrast should be between “gentle” and “harsh”. However, Quohaleth advises that the best way to deal with people is to gently tell them the truth. Tell her from the get go that you cannot write a letter of commendation. Don’t work your way up to it. Just say it from the start and then work your way through the rest of the conversation.

You don’t owe her an explanation. “A shrewd person conceals knowledge...”⁵ Just because you know something doesn’t mean you have to say it. Furthermore, just because you may end up having to say it, today may not be the day.⁶

Loyalty makes a person attractive.⁷ If you want to maintain a friendship with this woman, then you need to tell her at some point that though you cannot do this for her, you still love and respect her. In fact, it’s your loyalty to her that causes you to refuse her request. You are not the best witness for her son and you don’t want to do him wrong.

¹ Proverbs 3:30

² Proverbs 11:3, 5; Jeremiah 1:4-9; Mark 13:11

³ Proverbs 26:23

⁴ Proverbs 15:4

⁵ Proverbs 12:23

⁶ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

⁷ Proverbs 19:22a