

This summer we're going through the book of Proverbs, a book that is all about how to live wisely. One definition of wisdom is "competency with regards to the realities of life." In other words, the wise person knows the right thing to do in the majority of situations where the moral rules do not apply. We've looked at many different topics this summer – pride, vision, self-control, decision-making. This morning, I will be doing a shorter sermon on friendship and then opening it up for a time of testimonies.

When it comes to relationships, friendship is just not as glamorous as romantic love. How many songs about friendship have been written compared to songs about romantic love? What about movies about friendship? Nor is friendship seen on the level of familial love. Preach a sermon series on love, sex, and marriage and you can pack a church. Preach a series on parenting and you can do the same. But friendship? Not so much. But if you want to live wisely, you will have a hard time doing it without good friends. And if you want to make disastrous choices in life, one of the best ways to accomplish that is to surround yourself with the wrong friends.

Proverbs tells us three things about good friends:

1) Have a positive influence on you

Consider these two Proverbs:

Proverbs 12:26 - The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 13:20 - Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Or, as Paul put it:

2 Corinthians 6:14 - Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

As any parent can attest, the friends you choose will have an enormous impact on your life and whether you make wise or foolish choices. One of the simplest tests of whether a person in your life is a good friend or not is whether they lead you closer to God, help you be a better or wise person, or lead you farther from God.

At their best, our friends help us to see God in a way that we can not on our own. Listen to this quote from C.S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves*:

“In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him ‘to myself’ now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true Friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend. They can then say, as the blessed souls say in Dante, ‘Here comes one who will augment our loves’... In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious ‘nearness by resemblance’ to Heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ to one another (**Isaiah 6:3**). The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we all have.”

Lewis is talking about what it was like when one of his close friends died, and how instead of having more of the other friend, he now had less of him, because there were certain things about that friend that were only brought out by the deceased friend. A true friend not only brings out unique aspects of our character but also helps us to see God from a different perspective.

2) Are dependable and trustworthy

Proverbs 17:17 - A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 - One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

A friend is dependable. If you are on Facebook, you have many “friends.” But who is really there for you? When you are sick? When you are in pain? When I have needed to talk, another friend has been there again and again. You don't choose your family, but friends choose each other. A true friend can be closer even than family.

And friends are trustworthy; they can be trusted with not only our stuff but with our secrets.

Proverbs 17:9 - Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Some people love to gossip. They love to be the one telling your secrets. That person will not be your friend much longer if that is the way they are.

3) Tell the truth in love

Ephesians 4:15 - Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

In three ways: counsel, confession and confrontation. Good friends are not just polite or uncaring, they care enough to tell you the truth.

Counsel – They know you and give good advice. They know your tendencies, your weaknesses, your desires.

Proverbs 15:22 - Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with **many advisers** they succeed.

Proverbs 27:9 - Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.

Confession.

James 5:16 - Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in Life Together, “In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person.”

Do you see how important friendship is to wise living? Without people who know you, people to whom you can confess anything, sin will have you. Who knows you? Who can you call up and confess when you have sinned?

As Paul David Tripp put it in *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*: “We live in interwoven networks of terminally casual relationships. We live with the delusion that we know one another, but we really don’t. We call our easygoing, self-protective, and often theologically platitudinous conversations ‘fellowship,’ but they seldom ever reach the threshold of true fellowship. We know cold demographic details about one another (married or single, type of job, number of kids, general location of housing, etc.), but we know little about the struggle of faith that is waged every day behind well-maintained personal boundaries.”

One of the things that still shocks me in counseling, even after all these years, is how little I often know about people I have counted as true friends. I can’t tell you how many times, in talking with friends who have come to me for help, that I have been hit with details of difficulty and struggle far beyond anything I would have predicted. Privatism is not just practiced by the lonely unbeliever; it is rampant in the Church as well.”

Take a chance. You need friends to whom you can confess.

Confrontation

Proverbs 27:5–6 - Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Proverbs 27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 28:23 - Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue.

Proverbs 29:5 - Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet.

True friends are honest with each other, because they want the best for each other. If you are afraid to confront you are doing the work of an enemy. You compliment because you want the other person to like you. You are not a real friend; you are spreading a net for their feet – leading them into ruin by not pointing out their sin. Flattery is spreading a net – leading someone into a trap by not pointing out their sin.

Give someone permission to speak into your life.

Be this kind of friend. Dependable and trustworthy. Speaking the truth in love. And pointing others to God. Share the gospel with your friends in hopes that they will be with us for eternity.

Incredibly, the God of the universe calls us His friends:

John 15:12–17 - My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother, who loves at all times, and who speaks the truth in love. The truth is that we betrayed Jesus, but he did not turn on us. In the Garden his friends fell asleep on him, and he still died for them. He is the ultimate friend you are looking for. No matter what our other friends may be like, we have Him. And when we look at all the ways we have failed to be the friend that our friends need, we see Him dying for us to save us and forgive us. Let His love and friendship transform you into the friend you need to be.

There are many opportunities to develop the kinds of relationships that can become good friendships. In the bulletin is a list of community groups and other opportunities for community. Get involved, or find a way to serve together.