

Friends – Episode 1: The one with purpose

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BIG IDEA – Reverse the friend recession, be a friend, make a friend.

scripture focus - **Proverbs 27:9 TPT** “Sweet friendships refresh the soul and awaken our hearts with joy, for good friends are like the anointing oil that yields the fragrant incense of God’s presence.”

This is wild. We have a friendship dilemma, a friendship recession. Has gotten so bad that the surgeon general has had to put out a warning. **On May 3, 2023, the Surgeon General just announced we are in an “Epidemic of loneliness and isolation.”** Some are calling it the **“Friend Recession.”** It may have worse effects on us than a financial recession! He even said, **“loneliness is as deadly as smoking!”** A new report finds a lack of connection is killing us. God designed us to have and be friends. But what is helpful about friends?

“Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. **It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death.** The **mortality impact of being socially disconnected is like that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity.** Well, Hallelujah, something is finally more dangerous than being overweight!

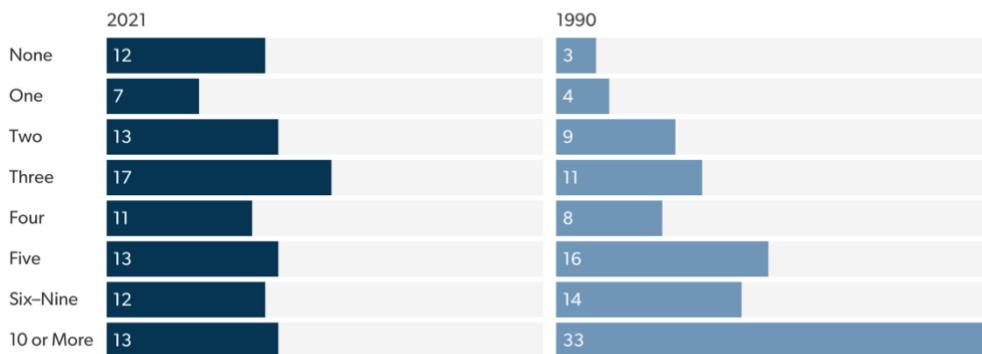
We may have avoided quick death by Covid, but we’ve isolated ourselves away to our own slow demise.

And we know we’re in trouble because **Women report having a more challenging time than men did!**

The numbers have significantly dropped over the years... Higher numbers on the left are percentage of FEWER friends. **Percent of those who have NO FRIENDS has increased from 3 to 12%.** Until you get to five or more – then it tells that about a third (33%) of us used to have 10 or more friends, but now only 13% can say that.

The Number of Close Friendships That Americans Have Has Declined Over the Past Several Decades

Percentage of Americans who say they have the following number of close friends, not counting their relatives . . .



Note: Figure does not include respondents who answered "don't know" or "refused". Survey of US adults [N=2,019]. The Gallup survey was conducted over the telephone.
Source: American Perspectives Survey, May 2021; Gallup, 1990.

It is just not good when are alone. We are not good when we are alone. We get worse when we hide from God and others. The paradoxical ache to be unseen yet known is exhausting. Friendship is a deeply beautiful and troublesome journey.

We need some help from friendship experts – **The wisest are people observers not people pleasers.**

Thankfully, God gave us a book, a manuscript on wisdom and it turns out that the friendship theme is huge. Solomon and his advisors were wise in knowledge and understanding of God and those He created – US.

We are body, soul, and spirit. In body, we are what we eat (That's why I look like a burrito). In soul and spirit, we are the company we keep.

We can be friends of and with God and we should have friends for our health and well being – in our physical body, our soul and spirit.

Friendship is life!

- A friend will give you a lift, but a good friend will do an airport run!
- A friend may water your plants while you're out, but a good friend will watch your kids.
- You can call a friend when you're in a jamb, but you call a good friend when you're in jail.
- A friend will help you move, but a good friend will help you move a body!

Secular doctors even rave about the benefits of friendship.

WeMd.com

"If you've ever had a friend that you could laugh, cry, and share your most intimate secrets with, then you know how powerful friendship can be. It's having someone in your life that can lift you up when you're low and celebrate your victories with you.

Friendships can have a major impact on your health and well-being, but it's not always easy to build or maintain them."

The Mayo Clinic even lists basic "how to's" to make and maintain healthy friendships. In the notes.

- Be kind
- Be a good listener
- Open up
- Show that you can be trusted
- Make yourself available
- Manage your nerves with mindfulness

Since I am a Pastor and not a psychologist or behavioral scientist, I am going to give you God's perspective on why friendships are important.

To do that we are going to go skipping through Proverbs together and pick up some godly advice.

Friends are critical and helpful in supporting us, shaping us, and setting us up for success.

Here are six simple but effective verses to remind us of what's available in great friendships.

1. They are like essential oils for our soul – aromatic and medicinal

“Sweet friendships refresh the soul and awaken our hearts with joy, for good friends are like the anointing oil that yields the fragrant incense of God’s presence.” **Proverbs 27:9 TPT**

Essential oils are all the rage. If you talk to someone that knows what they are doing, these are amazingly helpful to bring health and de-stress our bodies.

2. They are like boomerangs and super glue – they just keep showing up and sticking around

“A dear friend will love you no matter what, and a family sticks together through all kinds of trouble.” **Proverbs 17:17 TPT**

One commentator writes, it may be translated, “**a friend loves, but in adversity he is born (or becomes) a brother.**” Either way, true friends, rich in grace, mercy and patience are sometimes the ONLY one that shows up when everyone else leaves.

When my friends go through devastating times of failure and everything in their life seems to blow up – that is the moment I want to be there. That is not the time to pull away and treat them like the plague and label them with a big red letter “A.” **As a true friend I think we rush towards them, not run away.**

FYI – in the same scene where Peter denies Christ, we discover that John, the beloved, did not. And, in fact John opened the door for Peter to come in to witness the mock trial of Jesus! John 18:15-16 NLT

“Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest’s courtyard with Jesus. Peter had

to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in.”

3. They are better than A.I. or Chat GPT – because they are investors not MLM’s (multi level marketers) – this is a two-fer...

“Your plans will fall apart right in front of you if you fail to get good advice. But if you first seek out multiple counselors, you’ll watch your plans succeed. Everyone enjoys giving great advice. But how delightful it is to say the right thing at the right time!” **Proverbs 15:22-23 TPT**

True friends aren’t just using you to get ahead, they are opening doors of opportunity for you to succeed. **They are willing to not only share their advice in a timely manner, but they are also willing to risk their own reputation by sharing their network of friends.**

Do you want someone to look out for you, have your back and help promote your growth? This is what true, deep friendships give you.

One commentator went further to suggest that this kind of wisdom among friends is infectious – affecting even national leaders ¹

4. They are all-stars on our team – they win with you not against you

“If you want to grow in wisdom, spend time with the wise. Walk with the wicked and you’ll eventually become just like them.” **Proverbs 13:20 TPT**

We are inevitably a version of the friends we keep!

Cambridge Bible - Walk with wise men and be wise. Walk with fools and be broken.

When you chose your friends well, you join a team of people who not only begin to sound alike, and maybe look alike, but you all

share a destination. Yes, who are are with greatly affects your destination.

Story about El, national speaker and advocate for children in foster care. Sitting across the table at Mi Casa, I asked him about being raised in a Pastor's home and the church and finding himself in prison. **What did you think about where you came from compared to where he ended up?**

First, El's life was filled with abuse and abandonment from his own family and the church did not help matters at all. He was shipped off to an aunt in Oregon when she died suddenly, leaving a lost and broken teenager to fend for himself. His family here in Los Angeles didn't want him and foster care was brutal.

El is a big guy, a huge guy! He raised up out of his seat and leaned far across the table so that he was only a foot away from my face. He said, **"I ended up exactly where everyone expected a young black man to be – in prison!"** As a young man **El had found a home and a family with a gang and the rest was a stereotypical story.**

The miracle: It's how God found him, saved, and redeemed him! He got out, put himself through college and connected with a prestigious speaker's bureau. He posted this last week.



5. **They are a good mirror not a TikTok filter – truth tellers**

“You can trust a friend who wounds you with his honesty, but your enemy’s pretended flattery comes from insincerity.” **Proverbs 27:6 TPT**

A great friend is a fantastic friend. They are more than just someone who tells you that you have spinach in your teeth. They tell you things that are in our blind spots. Things no one else will tell us because they are worried, they will lose your friendship or the benefits they provide for you. A great friend in all grace and truth will tell us the truth. That truth will help adjust our own self awareness to make us better.

Welcome these wounds that smart because they will make us smarter.

I just had a friend do this to me and it was for me, not against me. **The question is, “am I secure enough to receive the help I desperately need?”** If I am going to grow and leave behind some dysfunctional thinking or some codependent behaviors, I better have great friends that are willing to send these this kind of love our way!

Psalm 141:5 says, Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don’t let me refuse it.”

Notice the wisdom writers warn of what ESV calls “profuse” kisses of an enemy? Oddly enough, the Hebrew word here for deceitful is “athar” which means “to be abundant or multiplied.” Reminds me of Judas’ betrayal kiss he gave Jesus in the garden.

6. They help keep our edge – because a dull blade is a dangerous blade

“It takes a grinding wheel to sharpen a blade, and so one person sharpens the character of another.” **Proverbs 27:17 TPT**

Proverbs is not suggesting our friends are tools... however, a great friend knows how to keep our countenance keen. That's what the Hebrew word for sharpens means, "chadad: to be sharp, keen."

One translation writes, **"Iron sharpeneth iron; So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."** Because the literal translation of the Hebrew word for character or countenance is "face." So, it really reads, **"Iron is sharpened by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his friend."**

What are friends for? Oh, so many things.

What would you say friends are good for?

I think friends are amazing for joy, camaraderie, accountability, investment, and community.

I believe that are natural antidepressants, a prescription to loneliness, and management for unrealistic expectations we put on life and others.

Friends are like the air in our balloons!

Friends can inflate us when we're feeling flat and deflate us when we are feeling snobbish.

Like Daddy Pig on Peppa Pig says, "I'm a quite an expert in this matter" I have become so much better about making friends.

What gives me giddy joy is the fact that people say it is all because of my personality.

My personality makes me a good friend maker? What they don't know is that I was not that great at making friends. **They do not know it is the grace of God that has changed my life.** The only person in this room knows who I was before Christ, and immediately following my commitment to Jesus is Robin. And she will tell you, that I was

very, very quiet, shy guy, very much to myself for quite a while. She will also tell you over the years that God has grown me challenged me and changed me into a friend maker. Anything that I am even remotely good at today is because of Jesus.

When Robin and I were young marrieds, I would do **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) on Robin at the Lakewood mall.** I don't know if you remember but **going through the Lakewood mall you would have to go through the gauntlet of sales folks and questionnaires from people that would hang out in the center area of the walkways going through the Lakewood mall.** People would do anything to avoid the salespeople gathering in those areas and you could see them as soon as you entered the mall. Robin and I could not stand it. However, I began challenge my fear of "the pitch people," by slowly, calmly walking through their midst and gracefully say with a smile, "no thank you" to each of them. It took a lot of nerve to walk through the pitch people gauntlet. But I persevered. I would ask Robin to go with me. She couldn't stand it. She could not see herself being able to pass through the pitch people gauntlet calmly and gracefully. But if I remember right, she did it a couple times with me. And I was very proud of her. Today Robin is a completely different person than she was then. She is so much more of a friend maker. Friends are an asset, a bonus, a gift. And yes, to get one, you need to start by making one.

NOTES

Scriptures

"Sweet friendships refresh the soul and awaken our hearts with joy, for good friends are like the anointing oil that yields the fragrant incense of God's presence." **Proverbs 27:9 TPT**

"A dear friend will love you no matter what, and a family sticks together through all kinds of trouble." **Proverbs 17:17 TPT**

“Your plans will fall apart right in front of you if you fail to get good advice. But if you first seek out multiple counselors, you’ll watch your plans succeed. Everyone enjoys giving great advice. But how delightful it is to say the right thing at the right time!” **Proverbs 15:22-23 TPT**

“If you want to grow in wisdom, spend time with the wise. Walk with the wicked and you’ll eventually become just like them.” **Proverbs 13:20 TPT**

“You can trust a friend who wounds you with his honesty, but your enemy’s pretended flattery comes from insincerity.” **Proverbs 27:6 TPT**

“Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don’t let me refuse it.” **Psalms 141:5**

“It takes a grinding wheel to sharpen a blade, and so one person sharpens the character of another.” **Proverbs 27:17 TPT**

Questions

Q: Do you believe the Surgeon General about the epidemic of loneliness?

Q: Have you personally felt the effects of a “friend recession?”

Q: Do you agree with the serious health risks associated with a lack of friends?”

Q: Were you aware of the friendship wisdom found in Proverbs?

Q: What are some of your favorite scriptures regarding friendship?

Q: What do you think of friends being investors in your own life?

Q: Do you agree or disagree that we **become** the company we keep?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Gil’s Exposition of the Entire Bible

Proverbs 27:9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart,.... Meaning not the holy anointing oil for sacred use, or the perfume or incense offered on the altar of incense; but **common oil or ointment used at entertainments, poured on the heads of the guests; and incense in censuring of rooms, which were very delightful, pleased the senses, and so exhilarated the heart.**

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend,.... That is, **friendly reproofs; which, though they may be severe, at least thought so, and may grieve and wound, and cause pain and uneasiness for the present, yet, proceeding from a spirit of love, faithfulness, and integrity, and designed for the good of the person reproved, ought to be kindly received;** see [Psalm 141:5](#);

but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful; flow from a deceitful heart, and not to be confided in, as the kisses of Joab and Judas. It may be rather rendered, "are to be deprecated" (y); prayed against, as real evils, hurtful and pernicious; and so the Targum renders it, "are evil". Good is the advice of Isocrates

Pulpit Commentary

Proverbs 27:9 Similarly, perfumes prepared from spices, roses, and aromatic plants were employed; rooms were fumigated, persons were sprinkled with rose water, and incense was applied to the face and beard.

Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament

Proverbs 27:9 Regarding the perfuming with dry aromas, and sprinkling with liquid aromas, as a mark of honour towards guests, and as a means of promoting joyful social fellowship.

Proverbs 17:17 Brother is more than friend, he stands to one nearer than a friend does, Psalm 35:14; **but the relation of a friend may deepen itself into a spiritual, moral brotherhood, Psalm 18:24.**

Proverbs 15:22 But it cannot become a rule of morals not to accept of counsel that we may not go astray; on the contrary, **it is and remains a rule of morals: not stubbornly to follow one's own heart (head), and not obstinately to carry out one's own will, and not in the darkness of wisdom to regard one's own plans as unimproveable, and not needing to be examined;** but to listen to the counsel of intelligent and honest friends, and, especially where weighty matters are in hand, not affecting one's own person, but the common good, not to listen merely to one counsellor, but to many.

¹ **Not merely the organism of the modern state, but also of old the Mosaic arrangement of the Israelitish community, with its representative organization, its courts and councils, rested on the acknowledged justice and importance of the saying uttered in Proverbs 11:14 - "Without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers."**

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Proverbs 17:17 Some take the proverb to describe (as in [Proverbs 18:24](#)) the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother:" and render: At all times, **a friend loveth, but in adversity he is born (i. e., becomes) a brother.**

Geneva Bible Study

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a {h} brother is born for adversity. (h) So that he is more than a friend, even a brother that helps in time of adversity.

Benson Commentary

Proverbs 15:22-23 *A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth* — By a wise or good and seasonable answer: that is, “**It is a great pleasure to a man to give wholesome counsel, and a greater to see the good success of it; but the greatest of all, both to himself and others, is to have given it so seasonably,** that a business was easily effected by it, which had not been done without it.” *For a word spoken in due season* — **Counsel or comfort given to another in a fit time and manner; how good is it!** — **It is highly acceptable and useful.**

Proverbs 13:20 That is, who keeps company, and commonly converses with them; shall be wise — Shall learn wisdom and goodness, both from their counsels and examples; but a companion of fools — **But he who associates himself with the wicked; shall be destroyed — Shall be as certainly ruined as he will be unavoidably infected with their wickedness. Evil pursueth sinners** — The evil of punishment, in proportion to their evil of sin, shall certainly, sooner or later, overtake them, although they may please themselves with hopes of impunity.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

Proverbs 13:20 Walk with wise men and be wise. Walk with fools and be broken.

Internet Links

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

The State of American Friendship: Change, Challenges, and Loss

<https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/>

Oddly, Women report having had a more challenging time than men did!

There are bigger sociological forces at work

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most obvious culprit in the national friendship decline, but broader structural forces may be playing a more important role.

First, Americans are marrying later than ever and are more geographically

mobile than in the past—two trends that are strongly associated with increasing rates of self-reported social isolation and feelings of loneliness.[1] **Second**, American parents are spending twice as much time with their children compared to previous generations, crowding out other types of relationships, including friendships.[2] **Finally**, Americans are working longer hours and traveling more for work, which may come at the cost of maintaining and developing friendships.[3] In fact, perhaps reflecting its central place in the hierarchy of American social life, Americans are now more likely to make friends at work than any other way—including at school, in their neighborhood, at their place of worship, or even through existing friends.

Benefits of friendship

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/psychological-benefits-of-friendship>

Friends not only prevent loneliness, but they also:

- Increase your sense of belonging and purpose
- Boost your happiness and reduce your stress
- Improve your self-confidence and self-worth
- Help you cope with traumas, such as divorce, serious illness, job loss, or the death of a loved one
- Encourage you to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as excessive drinking or lack of exercise
- Help put your problems in context to develop a stronger sense of meaning and direction
- Increase feelings of security and help protect against stress
- Ease the emotional impact of difficulties and offer new ideas about tackling them

Make and maintain healthy friendships

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>

What's a healthy number of friends?

Quality counts more than quantity. While it may be good to cultivate a diverse network of friends and acquaintances, you may feel a greater sense of belonging and well-being by nurturing close, meaningful relationships that will support you through thick and thin.

What are some ways to meet new friends?

It's possible to develop friendships with people who are already in your social network. Think through people you've interacted with — even very casually — who made a positive impression.

You may make new friends and nurture existing relationships by:

- Staying in touch with people with whom you've worked or taken classes
- Reconnecting with old friends
- Reaching out to people you've enjoyed chatting with at social gatherings
- Introducing yourself to neighbors
- Making time to connect with family members

If anyone stands out in your memory as someone you'd like to know better, reach out. Ask mutual friends or acquaintances to share the person's contact information, or — even better — to reintroduce the two of you with a text, email or in-person visit. Extend an invitation to coffee or lunch.

To meet new people who might become your friends, you have to go to places where others are gathered. Don't limit yourself to one strategy for meeting people. The broader your efforts, the greater your likelihood of success.

Persistence also matters. Take the initiative rather than waiting for invitations to come your way and keep trying. You may need to suggest plans a few times before you can tell if your interest in a new friend is mutual.

For example, try several of these ideas:

- **Attend community events.** Look for groups or clubs that gather around an interest or hobby you share. You may find these groups online, or they may be listed in the newspaper or on community bulletin boards. There are also many websites that help you connect with new friends in your neighborhood or city. Do a Google search using terms such as [your city] + social network, or [your neighborhood] + meet ups.
- **Volunteer.** Offer your time or talents at a hospital, place of worship, museum, community center, charitable group, or other organization. You can form strong connections when you work with people who have mutual interests.
- **Extend and accept invitations.** Invite a friend to join you for coffee or lunch. When you're invited to a social gathering, say yes. Contact someone who recently invited you to an activity and return the favor.
- **Take up a new interest.** Take a college or community education course to meet people who have similar interests. Join a class at a local gym, senior center or community fitness facility.

- **Join a faith community.** Take advantage of special activities and get-to-know-you events for new members.
- **Take a walk.** Grab your kids or pet and head outside. Chat with neighbors who are also out and about or head to a popular park and strike up conversations there.

How can I nurture my friendships?

Developing and maintaining healthy friendships involves give-and-take. Sometimes you're the one giving support, and other times you're on the receiving end. Letting friends know you care about them and appreciate them can help strengthen your bond. It's as important for you to be a good friend as it is to surround yourself with good friends.

To nurture your friendships:

- **Be kind.** This most-basic behavior remains the core of successful relationships. Think of friendship as an emotional bank account. Every act of kindness and every expression of gratitude are deposits into this account, while criticism and negativity draw down the account.
- **Be a good listener.** Ask what's going on in your friends' lives. Let the other person know you are paying close attention through eye contact, body language and occasional brief comments such as, "That sounds fun." When friends share details of hard times or difficult experiences, be empathetic, but don't give advice unless your friends ask for it.
- **Open up.** Build intimacy with your friends by opening up about yourself. Being willing to disclose personal experiences and concerns shows that your friend holds a special place in your life, and it may deepen your connection.
- **Show that you can be trusted.** Being responsible, reliable and dependable is key to forming strong friendships. Keep your engagements and arrive on time. Follow through on commitments you've made to your friends. When your friends share confidential information, keep it private.
- **Make yourself available.** Building a close friendship takes time — together. Make an effort to see new friends regularly, and to check in with them in between meet ups. You may feel awkward the first few times you talk on the phone or get together, but this feeling is likely to pass as you get more comfortable with each other.
- **Manage your nerves with mindfulness.** You may find yourself imagining the worst of social situations, and you may feel tempted to stay home. Use mindfulness exercises to reshape your thinking. Each time you imagine the worst, pay attention to how often the embarrassing situations you're afraid of actually take place. You may notice that the scenarios you fear usually don't happen.

When embarrassing situations do happen, remind yourself that your feelings will pass, and you can handle them until they do.

Yoga and other mind-body relaxation practices also may reduce anxiety and help you face situations that make you feel nervous.

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