

Good Morning Fellowship. My name is Christopher Young. I'm a part of the Student Ministries team here and I am excited to be with you today. Over the past few weeks, we have been gaining wisdom about this world. One author says, "wisdom is when we outgrow our misconceptions about how life should work, and we learn how God actually built life to work, and work well." We have indeed been learning how God built life to work concerning trusting God, foolishness, family and words. We have called this series guidelines, Godly wisdom for foolish times. And it doesn't take much for one to look at the news and say, "something's not right." Foolishness seems to pervade our culture in so many ways.

If you've been paying attention to what's happening in culture today, we are coming up on an election cycle. You have people from different sides of the aisle making a case for why we should choose them to lead in this country. And they are making their case using a number of issues like healthcare, immigration, education, the economy... But I'll tell you there is an issue no one is talking about, and it impacts each one of us.

It's something that science has said significantly impacts our health.

An article in the Gospel Coalition told of some of the headlines just last year.

- "Surgeon General Says There's a Loneliness Epidemic" (*The Washington Post*)
- "Young People Report More Loneliness Than the Elderly" (*USA Today*)
- "The Biggest Threat Facing Middle-Aged Men Isn't Smoking or Obesity. It's Loneliness" (*The Boston Globe*)
- "How Social Isolation Is Killing Us" (*The New York Times*)

With all the latest technology connecting us, America has become a lonely nation. A Cigna Study, based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale done last year confirmed every person's need for relationship and community. The former surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy said, "loneliness has the same effect on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

Clinical psychologist, author and pastor, John Ortberg spoke about a research project done by Harvard social scientist, George Kaplan, called the Alameda County Study. He said,

Research shows that the benefits of being relationally connected are not just spiritual. There are actual health benefits associated with relational partnerships. Researchers have found that people who have bad health habits (such as smoking, poor eating habits, obesity, or alcohol use) but strong social ties live significantly longer than people who have great health habits but are isolated. In other words, it's better to eat Twinkies with good friends than to eat broccoli alone." John Ortberg, quoted in *Creating Community*, p. 33

Amen to Twinkies!

(You know what we're talking about, right?) We're talking about friendship. Proverbs 12:26 says, "The righteous choose their friends carefully..."

Friendship – Many of us hear that word, and we feel and think very differently about it.

For some of us....

- We don't trust people enough to let them occupy that space in our lives, we've been there and done that before and it didn't end well
- and we could be sitting here today amongst hundreds of people and still feel lonely. No one really knows what's happening with us. It's not necessarily that we want it to be this way, but this seems to be the best option.
- For others... Friends play the most important role in their lives, sometimes more important than their own spouses. They not only rely on them, but they sometimes worship them. Their complete worth is found in them. And they've allowed friendships to operate in ways God never intended.
- For you... a friend might be someone who affirms everything you do, and never challenges you.
- If that's not you... then maybe you have hundreds if not thousands of friends, mostly acquired by the click of a button, and you can portray whatever you want and that's what makes you likeable. And while being socially popular, the soul silently campaigns for care.
- Some believe you're not a friend unless you're willing to "ride or die with them," even to a fault. Even in wrongdoing they are still to support you.
- For others of you, because of your success and wealth, many people consider themselves friends. But you find it difficult differentiating those that are there for you and not your stuff.
- Music has played a significant role in forming how we see friendships... some of the favorites are by artists like...
 - "Whodini who says" - Play *Friends, how many of us have them* (:20-:40)
 - "Robert Goulet sang by James Taylor" - Play *You've Got a Friend in me* (:10-:34)
 - "Stevie Wonder/Dione Warwick/Elton John/Gladys Knight" – Play *That's what friends are for* (2:06-2:40)
 - "Garth Brooks" – Play *Friends in low places* (:44-1:17)
 - Golden girls theme song (:00 - :15)

There are many feelings and thoughts about friendship. But having said that, there is one thought I want to leave you with this morning. With everything you will hear, please hear this. It's an idea I believe Solomon was getting at throughout proverbs as it relates to friends. You ready for it?

The quality of your friends will determine the quality of your life. (*2)

Hopefully after we take a listen to some of the friendly advice Proverbs offers, we'll begin to consider the quality of our friends, and we'll consider becoming a quality friend. So, how do we identify a good friend? Well, this may sound simple, but...

A Good Friend always Behaves respectfully.

This isn't merely manners, it's a matter of respect. It's being aware and sensitive to where people are in their life and behaving in a way that supports that. Proverbs provides a number of instances where people don't respect another's feelings, and simply lack tact. Know anybody like that? There tacky and clumsy with their behavior... It's like...

Someone who overstays their welcome in your house, or want to force their friendship on you (they didn't read...

- Proverbs 25:17 – Seldom set foot in your neighbor’s house – too much of you, and they will hate you.

They don’t get it... Or someone who is hearty / exuberant at the wrong time, (they obviously didn’t get...

- 27:14 – If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.
- 25:20 – like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

If not those two examples, what about someone who does not get when the joke has gone far enough.

- 26:18, 19 – like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death is one who deceives their neighbor and says, “I was only joking!”

No, A good friend behaves respectfully. They’re sensitive to where you are in life. One of the most famous stories in the bible is about wealthy man in Job, who lost almost everything. He lost his oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants, camels, his children, some of his health. But he didn’t lose his three friends. Now they may have disagreed with Job through the book, but in this moment their behavior respected where Job was. In fact...

Job 2:11 says, “When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.¹² When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. ¹³ Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.”

Job had lost almost everything. In that moment, he didn’t need someone to tell a joke, or ask a million questions. He needed someone who was sensitive to where he was, respecting that place and behaving appropriately.

A few years ago, I had a buddy that I considered close to me. We worked out, played basketball, talked about girls, and had fun. We lived in the same neighborhood and went to the same high school, which is what organically connected us. One day we decided to take our talents to Washington park, a different neighborhood where ballers played on the blacktop. I took my younger siblings DJ, Terrence and Kimberly. It was a beautiful day on the southside of Chicago, about 75 degrees outside and we were ready to play ball. And that’s exactly what we did. We beat every team that stepped on the court. (have fun here).

While all of this is happening, my buddy got this clever idea to get into the face of one of our opponents and begin to talk trash. I was a little confused because I didn’t think that was necessary. And before I could even comprehend what was going on, the guys teammate swung on me and hit the right side of my face. Immediately, I’m looking for my siblings to make sure they are safe. And before I could do anything, another opposing teammate does a bird call, and people come from the buildings and begin running to the court

I haven't always been the best at choosing good friends, and some of my siblings' lives were almost ruined because of it.

A good friend always behaves respectfully. But not just that...

A Good Friend always speaks Frankly.

They're not into flattery. Proverbs 29:5 says, "Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet." Hanging around flatterers will get you caught up. No, good friends tell you what you need to hear. From a loving heart, they keep it real with you. They keep it 100. (work more here)

Proverbs: 27:6 says it this way, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." A friend whose love for you don't mind telling you your faults.

Proverbs 28:23 "Whoever rebukes a man will later on find more favor than someone who flatters with his words."

When I think of someone who speaks frankly, I can't help but think about my wife, Deana. If you've been through one of our training experiences here at fellowship called Repurposed, you know that at the end of that experience, you leave with two defining words that sort of encapsulates a unique God-given purpose for your life. Her two words are Upholding truth. If you've ever met her, you know she doesn't mind speaking frankly. I have been a special target on her radar at home. You see I've suffered from a chronic disease called procrastination. Not sure where I got it. But there was one particular instance where I'm in the middle of the semester at Dallas Seminary where I waited to the last minute to write a few papers and it brought unnecessary stress on me as it always has.

I remember Deana waking me up on one of those mornings I decided to sleep in, and she used a spiritual word to describe my behavior. If you ever want to cause me to get defensive, just go spiritual. She said, "you got a spirit of sloth." And I said, "naw naw naw, I don't have sloth and jumped right out of the bed and began to get ready immediately. She continued to explain to me as I was getting ready, "you can't continue to do this. When you wait to the last minute, it brings unnecessary stress on you and we feel it. The girls and I suffer in times like this. We feel abandoned, you're often curt (not Pastor Kurt, rudely short) and unapproachable, and things don't have to be this way. You need to stop doing that." You have to understand my wife is someone who is organized to where she completes projects months in advanced. That's how she's wired. After her telling me this, although I am still a work-in-progress in this area, I have been particularly focused on doing things early.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." One author said, "real friendship is like sharpening the blade of a sword." Good friends won't let you lose your edge. That's my wife.

I can't tell you how much of my wife speaking frankly has improved the quality of my life. She keeps me sharp.

The quality of your friends will determine the quality of your life.

So, a good friend behaves respectfully, a good friend always speaks frankly, and lastly..

A Good Friend is always Faithful.

They are constantly there, whether times are good or bad. They loyally love you.

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

He/she is a person where in times of distress or personal struggle, they stick like gorilla glue, they are there for you. This person is quite rare.

Proverbs 20:6 says, "many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?"

Typically, when times get tough, many of our so-called friends don't.

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

Tough times call for tough friends, people strong enough to withstand adverse conditions. These are covenant friends not contract friends. They are there even when they're not getting nothing from the relationship. They've committed themselves to you, their hearts have been knitted to yours, they are faithful.

A few years ago I was involved in a relationship that I thought would last forever. I did everything I could possibly do to make it last, but for reasons that I can't completely understand that relationship ended. And I was crushed. I could only stand there and stare at my heart lying on the ground, shattered in a million pieces. This was one of the darkest moments of my life. Like cheap tissue, my life fell apart. I spent nights moving from basement to basement. And it felt like no one could help me. I had to simply absorb the emptiness, the nothingness this left me. And as I'm standing in an empty parking at about 10:30pm in Hammond Indiana shouting at God for help, a man named Derrick White drives up to me in this nice white car, he rolls down his passenger window, because I can only imagine him thinking what I might do, I'm sure I looked troubled. And he says something like, "I saw you over here and felt... in a time when I had nothing to give, this guy was a faithful friend. He provided a place for me to live, food to eat, he among others allowed me time and resources to get back on my feet. And through that friend God nursed me back to health, he strengthened me, and I get to be here with you. Be aware of when God brings someone into your life. He's up to something. My wife and I were just in Chicago last month, we met with Pastor Derrick White and had a good time reminiscing all the memories about the good ole' days when I had nothing. He was there when

I got married, had first child, purchased first home, decided to go to seminary, struggled to adapt to life in Dallas,... He has been there.. He has been a faithful friend. And thanks to Pastor Derrick White, my life has improved.

The quality of your friends will determine the quality of your life.

So, when you're looking for a good friend look for a BFF. Someone who will always Behaves respectfully, someone who always speaks Frankly, and someone who is always Faithful. The Behave, Frank, Faithful... BFF.

And if you didn't know Him, there is a good friend who loves at all times (prov. 17:17), he gave us a counselor to lead and grow us (Jn 16:7), he is the way, the truth and the life (Jn

14:6) so he's quite frank, and he's even gone to the length of laying down his life for you (Jn 15:13-16). He calls you and me friends. His name is Jesus. There is no greater love you'll ever experience apart from his friendship. He wants to be your BFF. Most of us here know him. And if you want to know more about him, there will be people right outside this worship center after the service in prayer rooms who can't wait to tell more about him. Jesus is the friend that changes your life.

... So, as we prepare to leave, I leave you with one challenge. Instead of hoping to find a good friend, seek to become one. There are people in your world who need your friendship. There are people here in this church who need your friendship. I don't think we make it through this transition if people's hearts in this church were not knit together. God has knitting our hearts together. Just imagine if every one of us committed to being BFF's, people who B____, who lovingly speak frankly, and who are faithful. It wouldn't just improve the quality of people's lives; it would improve the quality of this world. We would have less loneliness, and people would experience more of the love of Jesus through you. Ask God to reveal them to you, and then take on the challenge of being the good friend. **The quality of your friends will determine the quality of your life.**

Let's pray.