

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP**

(VARIOUS PASSAGES)

\*This sermon series is adapted from JD Greear's series called "Still Standing."

Tonight, we're learning how to *choose* a good friend, and how to *be* a good friend. This is our second week looking at this topic because friendship comes up a LOT in Proverbs! So, let me show you five characteristics that will show up in your life, and your friend's life, if it's a true friendship.

### **1. Genuineness**

***Proverbs 19:4 "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend."***

When you have lots of money, you also have lots of people wanting to be your friend. But, of course, they're not really your friend. They're just using you for something they really want. They think you're the gateway to—power, influence, popularity, money, attention, convenience, etc.

But a *real* friend remains even when you're in poverty, or when you're no longer popular. My guess is, some of you have gone through a tough time and you never realized how committed that friend was until you had nothing. And they were there for you.

In other words, a real friend walks *in* when everyone else walks *out*. So, you need to ask God to give you wisdom to recognize when someone is using you, and when someone truly loves you as a friend. And when you find that type of friend, you need to treasure them as a gift from God!

BTW, this same principle applies in a dating relationship. There are people who will date you as long as they're getting what they want from you. And some of you girls especially need to be careful about this. You see, girls are naturally more compassionate. So, there are guys who will abuse and manipulate your compassion to get what they want from you.

For example, if he treats you like dirt *except* when he's about to lose you, but he doesn't care enough to be genuine and sincere the rest of the time – you need to walk away. You're just a means to an end to get what

he wants. Because, if he doesn't get what he wants, he'll either "desert" you or he'll stay and cheat behind your back.

And I'm not just picking on the guys – there are girls who do the same thing. They don't love you for YOU; they just want the influence, popularity, money, attention, or convenience that they can get from you.

True friends don't treat you that way.

## **2. Dependability**

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

For a friend to love "at all times" – it means they love you when you're unlovable, because no one is lovable all the time. We all have our good days and our bad days. Then Solomon gives an illustration...

***Proverbs 25:19 "Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips."***

We can all relate to a bad tooth, right? Your teeth are something you depend on and even take for granted. But a bad tooth – something you depended on – is no longer trustworthy. That tooth is now a source of uncertainty and pain.

That's what an undependable friend is like. A true friend is dependable – consistently the same when you're around them. But a false friend is undependable and inconsistent. In fact, you never know what kind of mood they'll be in. It's like a bad tooth that brings a constant sense of uncertainty and pain.

But Solomon also compares an undependable friend to a foot that slips. If you've ever slipped and fell and hurt yourself, you know what Solomon is getting at. Most of us don't think about our feet when we walk – we take them for granted. You want (and expect) your footing to be firm, dependable, and consistent. But, when your foot slips unexpectedly, you can really hurt yourself.

The same is true with a friend. You want (and expect) your friend to be dependable and consistent. But, when they're undependable (especially in time of trouble), it really hurts.

### 3. Honesty

***Proverbs 24:26 "Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips."***

The *New Living Translation* says, "An honest answer is like a kiss of friendship."

In other words, true friends tell each other the truth even when it's painful. We won't spend long on this one because we touched on it last week. But a friend who won't tell you the truth is not really a friend.

In other words, if you see something in your friend's life that is killing them and you think, "Oh, I care too much to hurt their feelings like that," what you're really saying is, "I care too much about *myself* to go through the pain of telling them."

Or if you say, "Yeah, I know they're making some really bad choices right now, but it's none of my business." That's not a true friend according to Proverbs. Friends make it their business because they genuinely care!

Keep in mind: I'm not talking about friends who say rude or mean things all the time and then turn around and say, "Well, I'm just being truthful." That's not a true friend either. There's a balance of honesty and kindness because you genuinely love your friend.

### 4. Empathy

If you break down the word "empathy," it literally means *to enter into* a person's feelings. And Solomon has an interesting way of illustrating this...

***Proverbs 27:14 "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing."***



*How many of you love to be around someone who is loud and over-the-top when you first wake up in the morning?*

A real friend is always aware of your emotions, and they match their emotions to yours. He's not saying that you have to *cater* to your friend's irrational emotions. He's just saying that when a true friend is hurting, you're going to hurt too. When a true friend is rejoicing, you're going to genuinely rejoice with them. You'll enter into their emotion, and they will enter into yours.

But a false friend doesn't genuinely celebrate with you – they are jealous of your success. That's why it's hard to be a real friend because you tie your emotional wellbeing to theirs.

And that's why it's so important for you to surround yourself with wise, Christ-honoring friends, rather than friends who drag you into their constant emotional and relational drama.

## **5. Boundaries**

***Proverbs 25:17 "Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you."***

Solomon is saying: "Don't be *that* friend who is clingy and needy!" So, I'll just say what Solomon is really getting at...

This is the friend who smothers you. They never know when to go home. They're extremely needy. If you make this kind of person your roommate, your life is over. This is the friend who sends a text, and then calls 30 seconds later to make sure you got the text. You're like, "Listen, I can't return every text or call within two minutes!"

All jokes aside, this kind of friendship can become very unhealthy. This is the type of friend who will expect you to be everything to them – even their source of *spiritual* strength. And you've just got to tell them: "Listen, I can't be at all places, at all times, and meet all the deepest needs of your soul. Only Jesus can do that for you."

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These are the characteristics that describe a true friendship. But remember, this is also the type of friend *we* should be to others! Why would you hold a friend to that standard if you're not willing to be that kind of friend?

And I don't know if you realized it yet, but it's impossible for anyone to be this kind of friend in their own strength. Where do you get the ability to be this kind of friend?

When Jesus was talking to His disciples about friendship in John 15, he says, "As I have loved you, love one another." The ability to be this kind of friend comes from experiencing Jesus' friendship toward you.

Jesus did all those things I just mentioned:

- His love is *genuine*; He literally laid down His life for you.
- His love is *constant*; He loved you when you were at your worst. And He still does.
- His love is *dependable*. He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you.
- His love is *honest*. He told us what we needed to hear even when it made us mad enough to crucify Him.
- His love is *empathetic*. He enters into our pain – weeping when we weep (like at the tomb of His friend Lazarus) and rejoicing when we rejoice. He actually took our pain upon Himself.

As the old hymn says, “What a friend we have in Jesus!” When you experience that daily friendship with Jesus, you’ll become a better friend. You won’t have to use, manipulate, or smother your friends anymore because your soul will be satisfied in Christ.

Your thirst for love and acceptance will be quenched by the God of the universe. You’ll know that you’re accepted and approved by the only One whose opinion really matters anyway.

So, when people let you down, it won’t devastate you as much. You’ll see that God accepted you at your worst, and you’ll be empowered to love others that way. That’s what Jesus did for us – He knew us completely and loved us thoroughly.

So, real friendship is the expression and extension of the Gospel!

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### **Small Groups**