

THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP (VARIOUS PASSAGES)

Tonight, I want to show you from Proverbs why friendship is so important. And next week, we'll learn how to *choose* and *be* a good friend. And we're looking at this topic because friendship comes up a LOT in Proverbs!

1. Friendship is essential for life.

Proverbs 18:24 "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Solomon is saying that, in some ways, friendship is more valuable than family. Which is remarkable when you consider how family-oriented the Hebrew culture was. Family was everything to them.

He's saying, friendship can bring some things into your life that family can't bring. Why? Because friendships (unlike family) come from mutual choice. You don't choose your family and they don't choose you—but you choose your friends and they choose you and that choice has to be mutual.

Illustration: Ever have someone that chooses you for a friend that you don't choose back? It's awkward. They kind of latch onto you but you never initiated the friendship.

Friendships in Christ can, in some ways, be deeper and more meaningful than family. It's because we're made in the image of God, and God exists in community.

Trinity – God exists eternally as one being in 3 persons—there is community within the Trinity. This is one of the things that makes Christianity different from other religions.

Other religions teach that God created us because he was lonely and bored and needed someone. But the Bible says, "No, God has existed in perfect community for all eternity. He created us not because He was lonely and needed company, but so He could share His love and community with us!

So, when we experience biblical friendship, in some ways we're experiencing a dimension of God. And, on the flipside, to isolate ourselves is to go against the way God designed us to be.

In fact, do you remember the first time the phrase "not good" is used in the Bible? It's when God looks at man and says, "It is not good that man should be alone." So, God made a companion for him – Eve. They had community with each other and with God. But then, because of their sin, they were cursed and went back to being alone – living primarily for themselves and protecting their own interests. Not good!

So, one of the primary goals of Jesus' work on the cross was the restoration of the *friendship* we were supposed to have with each other and with God.

But our culture doesn't value friendship like it does romance and sex. For example, think about how many more movies, songs, and magazines talk about sex and romance than they do about healthy friendships. In celebrity news – no one cares '*who is friends with who*' in Hollywood, but they care '*who is sleeping with who*.'

Here's why: sociologists tell us that we've brought a "consumer-vendor" mentality into all our relationships. It's a relationship that is NOT based on your enjoyment or commitment to each other, but on what you're *getting* out of the relationship.

For example, if you have a coffee shop you really like to go to—you may like the people, and they like you. You may even know their names, but if the quality of the coffee goes down or if the prices go up, or you see rats running around in the place, then you quit going because ultimately the relationship is just a means to an end. You're getting something, and if you're no longer getting it, then you just walk away.

We do this with friendships, marriage, and even with church. It's a "consumer-vendor" mentality.

C. S. Lewis wrote a book called "The Four Loves." In it he said friendship is often the first relationship that is squeezed out of our lives. We continue family relationships, work relationships, but not friendships – especially men. Studies show that men over 30 have few (if any) meaningful friendships.

Now, I want to show you why that is so detrimental...

2. Friends shape who we become.

Proverbs 13:20 "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

It's not saying that *God* will destroy you, but that you'll destroy yourself. It's often been said, "If you want to see what your life will look like 5 years from now, just look at the books you're reading (or the people you follow most on social media) and the people you're hanging around."

Why do our friends have such incredible power over what we become? It's called "the need for acceptance." We have this internal need to be accepted (because we're designed for community) and it is so strong that it often makes us conform to the people around us – good or bad.

Illustration: Prank videos...

- Unsuspecting guy gets onto an empty elevator. As it goes up, people get on one by one at different floors. But they all face the rear when they get on (they're in on it). Well, after the fifth person faced the rear, the original guy also faces the rear.
- In another one, the unsuspecting guy is in a doctor's office. Everybody sits quietly for a while, then one by one people stand up and undress down to their underwear. Unbelievably, the guy who didn't know what was going on eventually did it too!
- Years ago, scientists were trying to figure out why fish swim in schools. So, they isolated the part of the brain that caused the fish to swim in schools and they took one of the fish and did a partial lobotomy on it. They put the fish back in the water and sure enough, he could still swim, but he swam all by himself. And guess what – the rest of the fish followed *that* fish. A BRAINLESS FISH was leading the pack!

And that's how fads start in middle school and high school – one brainless teenager does something random and dumb, and everyone else starts doing it too!

And that's where the importance of friends comes in because it leaves you with two choices...

- 1) You can say, "Don't be influenced by peer pressure," and that is certainly important, but there's a smarter option.

- 2) You can get the right friends around you so the natural, internal pull to be accepted by the people around you is pulling you in the right direction.

This is what Proverbs is saying, “He who walks with wise men will be wise; but the friend of fools shall be destroyed.”

Illustration: Teens making a decision at Camp, Winter Weekend, etc. If you’re serious, you’ll go home and remove bad friends. Otherwise, your decision or commitment won’t last most likely.



But shouldn’t we be friends with outsiders? Yes, but here is how that works...

The Three Circles of Friendship¹

1. The *Intimacy Circle*

This is the innermost and smallest circle. Who you allow into this circle will largely determine the direction of your life.

- They share your core values and ultimate convictions.
- They help forecast your future, because their beliefs and behaviors consistently shape your decisions.
- This circle often includes closest family, friends, and trusted spiritual mentors.

2. The *Influence Circle*

This circle is larger, but still significant.

- There is mutual influence—you shape them, and they shape you.
- These relationships often include fellow Christians in youth group, classmates, teammates, coworkers, etc.
- While they may not share every conviction, they still play an important role in your growth and direction.

3. The *Care Circle*

This is the outermost and largest circle.

- It includes casual friends, acquaintances, neighbors, social media followers, etc.
- You love and care for them because Jesus tells us to love our “neighbor” – our fellow man.

¹ This is adapted from Andy Stanley’s model

- However, they do not carry the same level of influence over your values or decisions.

These circles remind us that everyone deserves love, but not everyone should have influence. Wisdom is not about pushing people away—it's about placing them appropriately in our life.

- Be very *intentional* about who occupies your Intimacy Circle.
- Be *aware* of the influence others have on your thinking and behavior.
- Be *loving and generous* toward everyone, regardless of which circle they're in.

3. Friends keep us from self-destruction.

Proverbs 27:6 "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse [many] are the kisses of an enemy."

A friend can usually tell when you're about to do something stupid and you can't see it. We all have blind spots. All of us need someone who can look us in the face and say, "This is not good!"

Hebrews 3:13 "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Because of our blind spots, our hearts can slowly begin to harden against God, but a good friend(s) can break that up. For some of us, our lives are going bad because there's no one close enough to speak into your life like that. Your blind spots are killing you. That's why we need friends who will tell us what we can't see!

4. Friends support us when life falls apart.

NOTICE: I didn't say *IF* life falls apart, but *WHEN*. Solomon, the same guy who wrote Proverbs, also wrote Ecclesiastes...

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

C. S. Lewis said, when you go through pain, it's not theological reasoning you need most in that moment, it's human sympathy. For example, studies show that women without a close friend are 10x more likely to be depressed. Why? Because they're missing all the benefits that Solomon was talking about!

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When life falls apart, you don't need a bunch of social media friends – you need one that really knows you and loves you! But you also need the wisdom of people that are older than you – people who are farther down life's path! That's one of God's gifts to you in a church.

For example, some of you are making some of the most significant decisions of your life (relationship and career choices), but you're only surrounded by people your own age. That's NOT wise.

Small Groups