

"The Friend"

Themes from Proverbs

--CEFC 10/28/18; 8/97; 12/21/86

In his book, *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis writes about
the uniqueness of the kind of love found in Friendship.
"Friendship is—in a sense not at all derogatory to it—
the least natural of loves," he wrote.

"[Friendship is] the least instinctive, organic, biological,
gregarious and necessary."

"Without Eros [or sensual love] none of us would have been begotten
and without Affection [or parental love]

none of us would have been reared;
but we can live and breed without Friendship" (p. 88).

Lewis continued:

"I have no duty to be anyone's friend,
and no man in the world has a duty to be mine.
No claims, no shadow of necessity.

Friendship is unnecessary,
like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create).

[Friendship] has no survival value;
rather it is one of those things which give value to survival" (p. 103). //

What would life be like without friendship?

One might as well ask what life would be like without the color of a sunset
or without the taste of hot apple pie
or without the sound of beautiful music.

Friendship, as Lewis says,
is one of those things which give value to life itself.

According to Ralph Waldo Emerson,

"A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."

You see, our friendships are a reflection of who we are

as creatures created in the image of God--
we are personal creatures, created for relationships—friendships you might say—
with one another,
and with God himself.

Throughout human history friendships have been a thing to be prized--

Aristotle, in the fourth century B.C., philosophized about friendship,
famously described friendship as "a single soul dwelling in two bodies."

"Friends are an aid to the young, to guard them from error;
to the elderly, to attend to their wants and to supplement their

failing power of action; to those in the prime of life, to assist them to noble deeds.”

“Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods.”

And the Roman orator and statesman Cicero, in the first century before Christ,
wrote a whole book on the subject
that is still read today.
He said, "To take the sun out of the world is to take friendship out of life,
for we have nothing better from God, and nothing more pleasant."¹

And in the Bible, we have host of beautiful examples of friendship--
Ruth and Naomi,
David and Jonathan,
Paul and Timothy,
and Jesus and the beloved disciple.

We can gain great insight in studying those examples,
but it is in the book of Proverbs
that the most explicit and practical biblical teaching on friendship
is given to us.

And as we continue in our study of various themes from the Proverbs,
this morning we focus on the subject of "The Friend."
Again, this is part of the instruction of a father to his son
on how to live well in God's world,
with a wisdom grounded in the fear of the Lord.
And surely, wisdom about friendship is essential to living well.

But before we talk about friendship,
we'll begin by first considering what the book has to teach us
about the broader and more fundamental subject
of being a good neighbor.

And again, I am much indebted in this study,
to the work of Derek Kidner in his Tyndale Commentary on the Proverbs.

So, first, **being a Good Neighbor**.

Being a good neighbor concerns our responsibility toward everybody
God puts in our path,
and it is out of the context of our neighborliness
that our deeper friendships emerge.

But this is also an appropriate place to begin
because this provides the basis for a civil society—
something that seems to be eroding quickly in our day.

¹ctied in Bernard, *Love of God*, p. 241.

First of all, the good neighbor is to be a **man or woman of peace**.

The good neighbor is reluctant to start a fight for no reason--
 Prov. 3:29-30—"Do not plot harm against your neighbor,
 who lives trustfully near you.

**Do not accuse a man for no reason--
 when he has done you no harm."**

That seems pretty reasonable.

Too bad many people don't take it to heart.

But even if there might be cause for a conflict
 don't be quick to initiate legal action that might make things worse.

Legal action, even when justified,
 is not necessarily the right course.

Things may not turn out as you hoped.

25:8—"What you have seen with your eyes
 do not bring hastily to court,
 for what will you do in the end
 if your neighbor puts you to shame?"

Far better to settle out of court.

Seeking peace is always a better way,
 for squabbles have a way of escalating.

17:14--"Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam;
 so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."

"Blessed are the peacemakers," Jesus said.

In this polarized world, we need to hear that.

Think about these words the next time you have a discussion
 with someone on the other side of the political spectrum.

You see, the good neighbor displays a disarming quality of kindness.
 In today's climate there can be something distinctively Christian
 about simply being "nice" to people who differ with you.

Note the rising sequence in these proverbs--

First, there's no place for *Schadenfreude*--

that secret joy we get when our opponents suffer.

24:17—"Do not gloat when your enemy falls;
 when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, . . ."

Nor should we be envious of the success of wrongdoers--

24:19—"Do not fret because of evil men
 or be envious of the wicked, . . ."

Instead, we are to do good to all, and perhaps,

especially to those who don't deserve it.

In 25:21-22 (in words cited by Paul in Romans 12), we read:

**"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.**

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head,"

Heaping burning coals on someone's head is a rather obscure metaphor,
but in this context, it speaks of treating someone with such unexpected goodness
that it actually brings a person to a point of shame.

And such action is pleasing to God,

for that proverb continues: **"and the Lord will reward you."**

I have often thought that if for some reason we were ever confronted with protesters
here at the church,

the first thing we would do is offer them coffee and donuts.

The good neighbor will realize that silence is often wiser than criticism--

11:12—"A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue."

The good neighbor will realize that a person who has failed

should evoke compassion rather than contempt--

14:21—"He who despises his neighbor sins,
but blessed is he who is kind to the needy."

And a refusal to show mercy to your neighbor

may be a sign of the corruption of your own heart--

21:10—"The wicked man craves evil;
his neighbor gets no mercy from him."

But the kindness of the good neighbor must not overbalance into sentimentality.

The good neighbor must also be able to keep his distance from some people--

22:24,25—"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man,
do not associate with one easily angered,
or you may learn his ways
and get yourself ensnared."

"Bad company corrupts good morals"--so beware!

And the good neighbor, though he be merciful and generous,

still must be able to say 'no' to an unwise transaction.

Listen to this important piece of wisdom--

6:1-3—"My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,
if you have struck hands in pledge for another,
if you have been trapped by what you said,
ensnared by the words of your mouth,"

that is, if you have let yourself get caught in a bad business deal,

or by some impulsive promise—

and risked more than you can afford to lose,

and feel trapped by speaking and acting too hastily—

seek to get out of it as soon as you can.

"then do this, my son, to free yourself,
 since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands:
 Go and humble yourself;
 press your plea with your neighbor!
 Allow no sleep to your eyes,
 no slumber to your eyelids.
 Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,
 like a bird from the snare of the fowler."

Here we have piece of very practical advice urged with great vigor in Proverbs.
 It warns against engaging yourself in *unlimited liability*,
 particularly through putting up security for someone else's debt.
 22:26--"Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge
 or puts up security for debts;
 if you lack the means to pay,
 your very bed will be snatched from under you."

As Kidner puts it, the intent of this is not to banish generosity;
 it is nearer to banishing gambling.
 That is, a man's giving should be fully voluntary:
 its amount should be determined by him
 and not wrung out of him by events outside his control.
 Then its effectiveness can be judged,
 and competing claims on his resources can be assessed.
 Even to the recipient,
 an unconditional pledge may be an unintended disservice
 by exposing him to temptation
 and, when things go badly,
 to the subsequent grief of having brought a friend to ruin.

"Lending money to a friend is dangerous--" someone has said,
 "it could damage his memory."²

Even in the New Testament we see Paul, in his letter to the slave owner, Philemon,
 accepting the new convert Onesimus's past liabilities,
 but not his future ones (Phlm. 18,19).
 It is a good practice only to lend money you are willing to lose.

But though the good neighbor knows when to say "no" to an unwise transaction,
 he will still be prompt in saying 'yes' to a proper claim--
 3:27,28--Do not withhold good from those who deserve it,
 when it is in your power to act.
 "Do not say to your neighbor,
 "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow,"
 when you have it with you.

And this should not preclude outright generosity,

²Illustrations Unlimited, p. 227.

as displayed in that story we read of the Good Samaritan,
 who promised to pay for any extra expenses
 the injured man may accrue at the inn.

When you come right down to it,
 the heart of neighborliness is found in mutual respect.
 It's the Golden Rule--Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
 Don't we need that in our culture today?

The neighborly qualities which Proverbs urges on us
 add up to nothing less than love, though the word itself is not prominent.
 But it is the same idea found in Lev. 19:18--
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 The roots of all of Jesus' teaching are found right here--
 in the teaching of Proverbs on being a good neighbor.

From teaching on being a good neighbor
 we turn now to teaching on being a Good Friend.

First, a few general comments.

The book is emphatic that a few close friends
 are better than a host of mere acquaintances.
 We're not talking about Facebook friends here.

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

Many mere companions are no comparison to one real friend.
 And such a friend is a treasure to be cherished.

I like how Aristotle puts it:
 "The antidote for fifty enemies is one friend."

The first imperative is that to be a good friend
 you must be a good person--
 friendship begins with character.
 22:11—"He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious
 will have the king for his friend."

"a pure heart," "gracious speech"—Do these characterize you?

There is a moral quality involved in friendship--
 for friendship demands certain moral dimensions in order to thrive--
 things like patience and forgiveness
 and humility and self-sacrifice.

Without these, it is difficult to be a real friend with anyone.

These are the costs involved in being a real friend.

MIT professor Sherry Turkle,
 in her book *Alone Together:
 Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*,
 wrote, "We're designing technologies that will give us the illusion of companionship
 without the demands of friendship."³
 Don't be deceived--there are moral demands in every real friendship.

Friendship begins with moral character.
 And then the Proverbs urge us to check our motives--
 Does your desire for friendship involve a quest for power or material gain?
 19:6—"Many curry favor with a ruler,
and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts."
 This is not saying that this is the way it ought to be--
 this is simply an observation of the way things really are.

So you can be sure that that person in South Carolina who won last week's mega-lottery
 will be inundated with new "friends."

It is easy to treat people as means to an end rather than as ends in themselves.
 As one gregarious man once boasted,
 "I have friends I haven't even used yet."
 Friends can be helpful,
 but they're not meant to be tools for our advancement.

So then, what can we learn about the good friend?

Five qualities of a good friend are highlighted in the Proverbs--

1. The first quality of a good friend is his Constancy--

Fair-weather friends are common in Proverbs--

14:20--**The poor are shunned even by their neighbors,
 but the rich have many friends.**

19:4--**Wealth brings many friends,
 but a poor man's friend deserts him.**

But there is such a thing as the constancy of a true friend--

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

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

As someone has said, "A real friend is one who walks in

³ Cited in John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture*, p. 117.

when the rest of the world walks out." (Walter Winchell).

Or in the immortal words of Justin Bieber,
 "Friends are the best to turn to when you're having a rough day."

And the wise son is urged by his father to give this kind of loyalty-
 27:10—"Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father,"

This advice is directed especially toward the old friend of the family
 who may easily be dropped in a search for new company,
 but whose fidelity has stood the test of time.

As Andy Rooney once put it:
 "Good old friends are worth keeping whether you like them or not."
 They are tried and true.

In another bit of ancient Jewish wisdom we read:
 "Do not forget the friend who fought your battles" (Ecclesiasticus 37:6--JB).
 That kind of faithful service requires loyalty.

It's been said,
 "A false friend is like your shadow,
 keeping close to us while we walk in the sunshine,
 but leaving us when we cross into the shade."⁴

The first and perhaps the highest quality of a friend is constancy, faithfulness--
 for the thing that most quickly destroys a friendship is betrayal.

Do you stand up for your friend
 when others turn against them?
 Do you speak up for your friend
 when their reputation is being maligned?
 Do you stand with your friend
 when others are turning away?

"A friend loves at all times."

A good friend, then, is first of all constant and faithful.

2. The second quality of a good friend is his Candor.

And that is captured in the words of 27:6--
 "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

You see, a good friend cares enough to tell us the truth,
 even if that truth hurts.

⁴Christian Bovee, cited in *ibid.*, p. 227.

A true friendship has a moral concern
to seek the good of the other person.

Do you care about another person to tell them the truth?
That's a question we all must ask ourselves.

And the opposite of this kind of candor is mere flattery,
which is what we would all rather hear,
but which can lead to disaster.

29:5—"Whoever flatters his neighbor
is spreading a net for his feet."

How we all need the candor of a good friend.
But just remember,

any thanks that a friend gets for this service are likely to be delayed:
you must be prepared to wait till later to receive it--

28:23--"He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor
than he who has a flattering tongue."

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Constancy,
Candor

3. The third quality of a good friend is his Counsel--

The good friend knows how to give a good word.

We'll hear more about "good words" in a couple of weeks.

But let me mention two sides to a friend's counsel--

A. The first comes in words of Encouragement--

simply in the cheering effect of friendly fellowship--

27:9--"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness of one's friend
springs from his earnest counsel."

I think of Jonathan strengthening David in his time of trial--

1 Sam. 23:16--"Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh

and helped him find strength in God" with words of encouragement.

Have you ever helped a friend "find strength in God"?

A good friend is always quick to ask, "How can I pray for you?"

Words of prayer are always encouraging.

B. The other side of this counsel comes through words of Challenge--

This takes place through the healthy clash of personalities or viewpoints--

27:17--"As iron sharpen iron,
so one man sharpens [his friend]."

"A true friendship," Kidner comments, "should have both elements,

the reassuring and the bracing"--

offering words of counsel that sometimes add sweetness
and other times sharpness to our lives.

Isn't that the kind of friend you want?
Is that the kind of friend you want to be?

4. The fourth quality of a good friend is his Confidentiality--

11:13--"A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."

17:9--"he who covers over an offense promotes love,
but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."

Without confidentiality there can be no trust;
and without trust there can be no self-disclosure, no transparency--
and, consequently, no depth of relationship.

This kind of trust takes time to develop, but it can be shattered in an instant.
I like these words from the English poet Dinah Craik:
"Oh, the comfort--the inexpressible comfort
of feeling safe with a person,
having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words,
but pouring them out, just as they are--
chaff and grain together--certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them,
keep what is worth keeping
and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away."⁵

We must work at cultivating this kind of transparency in our friendships.
But to develop that transparency, the Proverbs tell us,
a good friend keeps his mouth shut.

Constancy,
Candor,
Counsel,
Confidentiality,
and finally,

5. The fifth quality of a good friend is his Care--
his care to maintain and nurture his friendships.

I think of the words of Samuel Johnson, who said,
"A man, Sir, should keep his friendships in constant repair."

You can't take friendship for granted--
people drift apart; they lose touch.
More than that,
we can irritate each other and offend each other,

⁵ from chapter 16 of a novel titled "A life for a life" (published in 1859).

thus, damaging our friendship.

That's why there is a need for tact and sensitivity in friendships--
And in this area of care,
we are given several pieces of very down-to-earth advice in the Proverbs.

1. Know when a joke is not funny--

26:18,19--**Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows
is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I was only joking!"**

Here I would say there is not only a need to beware of practical jokes
that somehow go too far,
but I would also and especially say
beware of the humor of sarcasm--
especially the sarcasm that is insensitive to the tender points of a person's life.
First, know when a joke is not funny.

Second, to care for a friendship, know when to back off--

Outstaying one's welcome
(or forcing one's friendship onto another person)
can be a poison--

25:16-17--**If you find honey, eat just enough--
too much of it, and you will vomit.
Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house--
too much of you, and he will hate you.**

We must give our friends some space.

3. To care for a friendship, know when the time is right--

Beware of being joyful and exuberant at the wrong time---
perhaps, when it is unwelcome--
27:14--**If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning,
it will be taken as a curse.**

or even when it is cruelly inappropriate--
25:20--**Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,
or like vinegar poured on soda,
[adding one bitter thing onto another]
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.**

Learn how to rejoice with those who rejoice
and to weep with those who weep.

Friendships deserve our care,
for a friendship is a wonderful thing--
Brenda Hunter describes them as "the fire we warm ourselves by

in the sometimes lonely, often tumultuous journey called life."⁶

Beer commercials show men sitting by a campfire,
 enjoying the warmth of deep friendships,
 and say, "It just doesn't get any better than this."

We long for real friendships.

But what can we do when we feel the loneliness of being without close friends—
 a condition more and more common in our mobile world?

Back in the 1960s when Pepper Rogers was in the middle of a terrible season
 as football coach at UCLA,
 he was bombarded with criticism from all sides.

It got so bad that it even upset his home life,
 causing tension in his marriage.

He recalls, "My dog was my only friend.

I told my wife that a man needs at least two friends, . . .
 so she bought me another dog."

Rather than urging you to get a dog,
 let me close with two final pieces of advice--

1. Find a friend by making one--

I like the story psychologist Harville Hendrix shares about a client named Walter:
 Walter came into his office.

"Harville," he said as he slumped into the chair,
 "I feel really terrible.

I just don't have any friends."

I was sympathetic with him.

"You must be very sad. It's lonely not having any friends."

"Yeah. I can't seem to . . . I don't know.

there are no friends in my life.

I keep looking and looking, and I can't seem to find any."

Walter was locked into a view of the world that went something like this:
 wandering around the world were people on whose forehead

were stamped the words, "Friends of Walter,"

and his job was merely to search until he found them.

"Walter," I said with a sigh,

"do you understand why you don't have any friends?"

He perked up. "No. Tell me!"

"The reason you don't have any friends is that there aren't any friends out there."

His shoulders slumped.

I was relentless.

"That's right," I told him.

"There are no friends out there.

⁶*The Company of Women*, p. 142.

What you want does not exist."
 I let him stew in this sad state of affairs for a few seconds.
 "All people in the world are strangers.
 If you want a friend, you're going to have to go out and make one!"⁷

It's true.

So how do you make friends?

First, by developing the qualities of character that make friendship possible--
 kindness, generosity, patience, and a concern for other people.

That happens as you allow the Spirit of God conform you to image of Christ,
 and he sets you free from the selfishness of your own sin.

Second, you make friends

by developing interests around which friendships can form.

An interest, a passion, for the things of God is a good place to begin;
 but then there are other things, too, that can help friendships to form--

a hobby, a sports team, a political cause, a service project--

anything will do.

Friendships form around shared interests

just as fish gather around a sunken ship.

Lovers, C. S. Lewis observed, stand face to face;

Friends stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, looking outward to the world
 as they engage in some activity together.

Common activities and interests are a prime breeding ground for good friends. /

Take the initiative in making friends--

look for opportunities—

and being a regular part of a church community group

is one good way to develop friendships.

and be patient—it can take time.

Find a friend by making one.

My last piece of advice to you is this--

2. Become a friend by trusting One--

For there is one friend who is waiting to be discovered by each one of us--

Listen to the words of Jesus--

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command.

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" (John 15:12-15).

⁷Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, pp. 93,94.

Here is a friendship that gives value to living--
 here is a friendship that satisfies more deeply
 than any merely human friendship ever can.
 It is the friendship offered to us by Jesus Christ.

It is a friendship in which he takes the initiative--
 he reaches out to us--
 in fact, he lays down his life in love for his friends.

He reveals himself and his Father to his friends--
 as by his Spirit he makes that divine love known to our hearts.

And we can become his friend simply by turning to him in faith--
 with a faith that entrusts our lives to him
 such that we do what he commands.

All the beauty of all human friendships
 are but pale reflections of this one.

This, indeed, is the friendship of one who sticks closer than a brother--
 here is a friend who loves at all times—
 even though he knows all your faults and failures better than you do;
 here is a friend whose wounds are indeed faithful;
 he will never forsake you,
 and he will certainly not betray you.

Here is a friendship that will last forever.
 And here is a friendship available to all who would receive it.

Do you want a friend?
 Become a friend by trusting Jesus Christ.

Gleaning Wisdom from the Proverbs, #6
Oct. 28, 2018

"The Friend"

Friendship, writes C. S. Lewis, "has not survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." As personal creatures created in God's own image, we are made for relationships, and friendship is one of life's richest ways of relating. This morning we mine the Proverbs for wisdom on friendship and look to the one who is our ultimate friend.

I. Being a Good Neighbor

II. Being a Good Friend

Five Qualities of a Good Friend:

1. Constancy

2. Candor

3. Counsel

Encouragement

Challenge

4. Confidentiality

5. Care

Find a Friend by Making One

Find a Friend by Trusting One

Scripture Reading Wisdom from Proverbs on "Friends"

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

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

19:4--Wealth brings many friends,
19:4 but a poor man's friend deserts him.

19:6--Many curry favor with a ruler,
and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.

22:11--He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious
will have the king for his friend.

27:9--Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

27:10--Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father,
and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strike you--
better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

27:17--As iron sharpen iron,
so one man sharpens another.

27:6--The kisses of an enemy may be profuse,
but faithful are the wounds of a friend.

17:9--He who covers over an offense promotes love,
but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Jesus said, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. 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." (John 15:12-15)

Sermon Response:
Gleaning Wisdom from the Proverbs, #6

"The Friend"

- Think of one friendship that has been particularly meaningful to you. What made it so special?
- Do you consider yourself a "good neighbor"? Why or why not? What do you learn from the Proverbs about what that would mean?
- Why is moral character so important to friendship?
- Which of the qualities that make for good friendship—constancy, candor, counsel, confidentiality, and care—do you think you most need to improve to improve your friendships?
- Prov. 28:23--"He who rebukes a man will *in the end* gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue."
How good are you at rebuking a friend?
- How could you be better at "making" friends? and better at maintaining the friendship you already have?
- How is Jesus a friend to you?