

# Wisdom for True Friendship

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Date: 17 June 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Friendship has fallen on hard times and social media doesn't help. I'm sure you'd agree. You can have hundreds of Facebook friends, thousands in fact if you're popular enough, or if you know enough random people that you can invite to be your friend.

But have you noticed, if you use Facebook or social media, have you noticed that you can unsubscribe from your friend's feeds and keep them as your friends? Which really betrays what friendship has become in our world, doesn't it? You can have countless friends and yet still no one who's actually interested in you as a person. And that's sad. That's how we consider friendship to be today. It's just a casual, convenient acquaintance. That's how the world considers what a friend is.

And that is why Proverbs are so important to us, and especially Proverbs 18.24, which will appear on the screen behind me. And the reason it's important for us is because it teaches us some very important lessons about friends and friendship in this world. It says, a man or person who, of many companions, may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Okay, now what's important about this proverb that we're going to look at this morning is that it distinguishes between two different types of relationships. Do you see that? It talks about the Facebook friends, the companions, of which you can have hundreds or thousands, those convenient acquaintances in life. But then it also talks about another type of relationship, translated friend, which is a totally different relationship to who we would consider friends.

It's a different level of relationship. And it's a type of relationship which we don't come across very often. It's much harder to come by in today's world. You know, you might have many companions in your life, many people you can meet up for a drink. But how many real friends, real friends, would you say you have in your life? Think about that. Because what this proverb teaches us about friendship is that to live a wise life, part of living a wise life, which proverbs has been teaching us so far, part of living a wise life is to have true friendships. That's part of what God intends for you in your life. Not just passing companions, but true friends. And proverbs teaches us, not just in this verse, but many others, a lot about what this true friendship really is. And not only where to find it, but also how to be a true friend to others. And so that's what we're going to be looking at this morning. And we're going to answer three questions. What is true friendship?

[ 2 : 57 ] Why do we need it? And where do we find it? So that's where we're going this morning. So firstly, what is true friendship? Now, we've already seen in Proverbs 18, 24, that true friendship is more than just companionship, right? The proverb says you can have many companions, but you might still come to ruin. In other words, these are the type of people, these companions are the types of people who they're fun to have around, but they're not going to save you when trouble comes. They're around so long as you're low maintenance. You know what I mean? But when you're in need or when you're going through a struggle, those times in your life when being friends with you is costly, then these companions are suddenly nowhere to be found. You know what I'm talking about?

You know those type of companions who are there when everything's going well, but are very scarce when things are going badly. And that's why you can have many companions, but still come to ruin.

On the other hand, a true friend, we're told in this proverb, sticks closer than a brother. Now that's an incredible description, if you think about it. If you think of the relationship of brothers, maybe you're lucky enough to have brothers, and that talks about a very consistent, deep relationship. Especially given that this was in the Jewish culture, where family was all important, far more important than in today's world. And in that culture, there was nothing closer than a family relationship, nothing more loyal than the relationship of brothers.

nothing closer than that. And yet this proverb comes and makes the shocking claim that, well, there is a relationship closer even than that, even closer than a family bond. And it's this true friendship. And so according to this proverb, true friendship, this, this elusive relationship that it's talking about, that so many of us lack in our lives is a very unique type of relationship relationship that we have with other people, certain people. It's a relationship distinct from mere companionship, not just your passing friends. And it's distinct from a family relationship as well. And it's a relationship that can give you something that none of these other relationships in life can give you. And that's what Proverbs wants us to know. That's what God wants us to know through the Proverbs, that there's a relationship in your life which is very important to pursue, this true friendship. Now, of course, this relationship might overlap with family relationships. If you're lucky, your relationship with a sibling might be true friendship like this. But that's not always a given. In fact, more often than not, it's not the case. There's often sibling rivalry.

There's often conflicts between siblings that last their whole lives. And this true friendship is a distinct relationship from that. And it's closer even than that. And there are various characteristics that distinguish this particular relationship from all the other relationships we have in life. And they are as follows. And I'm getting this from the rest of the book of Proverbs.

[ 6 : 09 ] First, it's reliability. It is a reliable relationship, even more than the reliability of family, this relationship of a true friend. And that's the main way your true friends differ from your mere companions, in that a true friend is there when you're going through trouble. They stick by you, even through those hard times. They're not just your friend when it benefits them. They stay with you even when it costs them. Secondly, a true friend is not only there with you in trouble, they also really care for you. They're caring. Now, in the real sense of the word care, I think care as a word has kind of also fallen on hard times. We think of, you know, some moisturizing soap or something when we think of care. But you know what the actual word care means? If you look at its, where that word comes from, its etymology, its origin, it comes from an old Germanic word which means to grieve, which is quite insightful. To care for someone, to truly care for someone, means to grieve with someone when they are grieving. That's the real sense of the word care. It means to feel what another person is feeling. And there's one proverb that actually describes the opposite of true friendship, and it's this, Proverbs 25, 20. Listen to this. It says, 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.

Now, vinegar poured on a wound, or taking away a garment on a cold day, is talking about making something that is already bad worse. And so this proverb says that someone who sings songs to a heavy heart is no better than vinegar poured on a wound. They are making what's already bad worse.

When someone who is cheerful, just singing songs when you're grieving, that's what it's talking about. Someone who is happy when you're sad. And you know what? A true friend can't be that. A true friend doesn't do that. A true friend grieves with you. They can't sing songs and be happy when you're sad.

And that's part of what it means to stick closer than a brother. They're stuck to you emotionally as well. They're emotionally invested in you. They've chosen to bind their happiness to yours.

And that is a mark of true friendship, according to the Bible. Another mark of true friendship is honesty. Proverbs 27, 5 to 6 says, Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

[ 9 : 11 ] That's very wise. Because it's saying that a true friend, as opposed to just a companion, is one who's willing to rebuke you rather than flatter you. Isn't that something? A true friend will rebuke you sooner than they'll flatter you. And his or her rebukes are described as wounds.

Wounds from a friend. They're not easy to listen to. When someone points out a habit in your life that's not good for you. When they point out issues in your life, sins you would rather ignore, you don't want to hear that. It undercuts your pride. It wounds you. And mere companions won't tell you about those things. Even if they know those negative points about you, they wouldn't tell them to your face. They'll just talk about them behind your back, won't they? True friends will tell those things to your face, honestly. And then a final characteristic of true friendship we see in Proverbs, a vital characteristic of true friendship, which is so often lacking, is forgiveness.

Proverbs 17.9 says, He who covers over an offense promotes love or friendship, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Okay, so this teaches us that true friendship is marked by a willingness to overlook a wrong done, rather than to, you know, dredge it out and make the other person intimately aware of everything they've done wrong, which let's be honest is what we want to do when we've been offended, don't we?

When we've been wrong, when someone has hurt us, we want to draw it out. We want to make sure they know everything they've done wrong. We want to present all the evidence for just how wrong they've been, like a big court case. So we feel vindicated for being offended. But a true friend doesn't do that.

[ 11 : 07 ] A true friend does the very difficult task of covering over an offense of their friend. They forgive truly. They don't just, you know, keep dredging up everything the other person's done wrong. That's true forgiveness. It's wiping the slate clean and leaving it behind never to come up again. That is a mark of true friendship. But where do we see that in this world? So often, not just other people bringing up our faults over and over again, but us bringing up the faults of others, holding things against them, remembering what they've done wrong, you know, 13 years ago, and never forgetting it. That's not true friendship. True friendship overlooks, covers an offense, covers it over, buries it so it's no longer there. Okay, so just from looking at some of these proverbs, we see God's model of true friendship. God is trying to tell us this morning what true friendship really is. We don't see it in the world. We can't find it in the world. We find it in the

Bible. And the marks of true friendship, according to proverbs, are reliability, caring, a true friend cares, they grieve with you, honesty, and forgiveness. And yet, as I said earlier, this is a type of relationship we don't often see. And I think one of the reasons for that is we just don't focus on pursuing these type of relationships in our lives. The world that we live in is not wired to pursue friendship, and to make a thing of friendship, and to pursue what true friendship means. I mean, you don't find feature articles in the men's health magazines on nurturing friendships, do you? I mean, think about it. Six hot friendship tips on the men's health cover. Building killer friendships. Boost your friendship appeal. You just don't see that, do you? It's all about romantic relationships, sexual relationships. That's what the magazines want to talk about, because those things are exciting.

Those things get the blood flowing, but not friendships. The world is not interested in good friendships. People will do anything to pursue romance, and yet they'll do very little to pursue friendship. And so that's what this proverb is in the Bible for, 1824. It is challenging us to think about the friendships we have in our life, and to value, and to pursue, and to work on, and to invest in true friendship in our lives. Because we need it more than we know, and this is why.

Moving to the second question, why we need true friendship. We need close relationships, outside of our family relationships, if for nothing else, because we may not see our family regularly.

[ 13 : 55 ] We may live far away. We may not be in contact with our family like we were growing up. Proverbs 27.10 is very practical advice on this. It says, Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.

And that's saying, when you need someone to help you out, to support you, you know those times when those mere companions are scarce, when they suddenly disappear. You can't always, in those times in life, you can't always fall back on your family for help.

Because they might be far away. They might not be involved in your everyday life. You need someone who is like family, but who is close by, who is accessible, who is involved in your daily life. And that's where true friendship comes in. That's why we need it. Another reason we need true friends is linked to the honesty and the good wounds that I spoke about earlier, the rebukes that a true friend is willing to give you. We need that in our lives. Our family too often doesn't, because our family, you know, family relationships sometimes are so full of tension. And the first priority when you gather together with family, you know, twice a year or however much it might be, is just don't rock the boat.

You know, just don't say anything which might offend your sister. Or, you know, don't bring that up again. It's all just about treading on eggshells often. But we need close relationships that we can rely on who will be able to speak to us honestly about problems, who doesn't care about stepping on eggshells. That's where true friends come in. And we need that because of what Proverbs 27, 17 says.

[ 15 : 47 ] It says, as iron sharpens iron, so one man or woman sharpens another. You see, you need other people in your life who are willing to be honest with you, to sharpen you, to shape you. Because you are who you are based largely on the people in your life who have shaped you to be who you are today.

You might not know that. You might not realize that. But you are shaped by the relationships you've had in the past. People who have helped you to see things about yourself that needed changing. People who have sharpened you. People who have shaped you. And that is one of the roles of true friendship, to do just that. To sharpen you, to shape you. That's why we need it. We need to pursue and develop and work on these true friendships in our lives, the Bible says. And the reason we need to work on these relationships particularly is because these relationships don't come naturally. We don't actually naturally work on true friendship. We might naturally work on our marriages and work on our family relationships in so far as we can. Work on our relationships with our children or our parents.

But true friendship is a relationship that is often just neglected. It's not worked on because it doesn't come naturally. It's not actually a natural relationship, so to speak. C.S. Lewis, the great Christian philosopher and author, describes true friendship as the least natural of loves. He says this, quote, with romantic love, none of us would have been begotten. And without, sorry, without romantic love, none of us would have been begotten. And without family love, none of us would have been reared. But we can live and breed without friendship. The species biologically considered has no need of it. In other words, what he's saying is, is this is a kind of relationship that we don't instinctively chase after? You know, we instinctively are part of a family. We instinctively chase after the, the, the, you know, blood flowing relationship of romance, those kind of relationships with the opposite sex. But we don't instinctively chase after friendship. And that's why we need wisdom in the Bible to tell us to chase after it, to invest time and effort in building those kinds of friendships. Which leads then to our final question this morning. And that is, where do we find true friendship in this world, in our lives? Because, because it doesn't happen automatically. We don't find it happening by nature in our lives. We don't actually see this kind of relationship in nature at all. In the animal kingdom, there is actually no relationship like this one. Yes, animals can display factors of it. Your dog, for example, can show great affection and loyalty. I'm not going to burst your bubble and say that's actually just survival instincts showing through and pack mentality. That's fine. Your dog can be very loyal to you. In fact, it can be far more loyal than many human companions, can't it? But true friendship is much more than that. It goes beyond what we find in nature. And the reason is it is not natural. It is supernatural. It is supernatural. Because it comes from God. This relationship, true friendship, is a relationship that comes from God. It's only because humans are made in God's image as opposed to animals. It's only because of that that we are able to have this kind of friendship that we don't find anywhere else, in any other species, in any other creature. All the things that we've already seen that mark out this unique relationship are actually attributes of God himself. And it's because we're in God's image, made in God's image, Genesis tells us, that we are able to display these attributes in relationships. So, for example, in Exodus 34, you don't have to turn there, when God revealed his glory to Moses, this is what he revealed about himself. He said, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

[ 20 : 02 ] And so, this God's character described here is the standard of true friendship. The ability for a human to be a true friend flows out of the character of their creator.

And so, if you're looking for a true friend in your life, you're looking for someone who bears the image of God. You're looking for someone who displays God's attributes.

But the problem is, because of sin in our world, that kind of person is very rare. Because of our broken relationship with our creator, and the image of God being broken and distorted in us, what that means, because we all have a, none of us display the image of God in our lives, like we should. It's all been broken by our sin in our hearts, and because of that, even your closest friends are going to let you down. I can assure you of that right now, and I can assure you of something else. You are going to let them down. You know, if you compare yourself, just do it for a second, compare yourself to the standards of friendships that we've been looking at, the standards of true friendship in these Proverbs.

[ 21 : 23 ] You know, compare yourself to honesty, and loyalty, and forgiveness, and care. How do you measure up when you test yourself according to those standards of friendship?

You know, when we read the Proverbs, they often leave us in a very sorry state, don't they? Because they present to us the wise life. We've been seeing that over the last few weeks. And yet, as we've read about that life, we realize that it is always just out of our reach. Have you felt that? When you read the Proverbs, as you study these Proverbs, as we've been doing in growth groups, we get this picture of the wise life, the right life, and yet we, in the back of our mind, we go, but, ah, I'm just not there.

You know? It's like a rainbow. The more we chase after the wise life, the further away it seems to be. But that's the point. That's the point.

Because Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, like all other books in the Bible, is meant to do one thing above all else. You know what that is? It's meant to point us to Jesus Christ.

[ 22 : 36 ] Every book in the Bible is meant to point us to God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Son of God who came to this earth to be our wisdom for us.

To be our wise life for us. And specifically, I mean, okay, take a step back. In saying that, in saying that 1 Corinthians, Jesus says, Paul says, Jesus is our wisdom.

God sent Jesus to be our wisdom because we are fools. Okay? We are not wise. We can't live the wise life by ourselves. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And the fear of God comes through His revelation, which is encapsulated in His Son.

And so we live a wise life through following Jesus. And Jesus is our wisdom in all of these areas in life. He enables us to live a wise life. Jesus is wisdom embodied in every single category that wisdom falls into.

We've seen work. We're looking at friendship this morning. Every single one of these categories, Jesus is perfect wisdom. So for this topic, this morning, friendship, Jesus came to earth to be your true friend, your perfect friend.

[ 23 : 52 ] Jesus came to be the friend you've always wanted. and the friend you could never be. Jesus came to be that for you in your life. To give you that relationship which we've seen you need so much.

And Jesus embodied true friendship. I mean, think about how He lived when He was on earth. He crossed class and cultural barriers to be a friend to people who had no friends.

To be a friend to prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners. I mean, He crossed the ultimate barrier, didn't He? From heaven to earth to be your friend when you have no other true friends.

And He shows the characteristics of a true friend. All of these characteristics we've been seeing, Jesus embodies them. He is reliable. He's not a fair weather friend.

On the contrary, when all of His disciples abandoned Him in His time of need and they ran away to save their own skins, what did He do? He still went on to give His life to save them in their greatest need when they didn't deserve it.

[ 25 : 00 ] And if you're a disciple, then He is completely consistent in His love for you. Even if you're not consistent in your love for Him, He is always consistent in His love for you.

Always reliable. And He's a caring friend, too, in the true sense of the word, because He grieves with us. He wept with Lazarus' sisters when Lazarus died.

He wept. Shortest verse in the Bible, Jesus wept, but it's profound because it shows us that He grieves with us. He came to this earth and He entered into our muck and our rubbish and our pain and He felt it for us to show us that He is a grieving friend.

He is a caring friend. He didn't have to. He chose to. He chose to bind Himself to us emotionally. To emotionally invest in us.

Hebrews says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us. And more than that, He cares so much that He went to the cross and He felt the ultimate pain of the punishment for sin that you were meant to take.

[ 26 : 16 ] And He's an honest friend. Read His words in the Bible because He tells you how it is, doesn't He? He doesn't beat around the bush. He tells you what's wrong in your life if you read the Bible.

That's why people don't want to read the Bible. That's why people keep it closed. That's why it gathers dust on the bookshelf because the Bible, Jesus, through it, His Word tells you what is wrong in your life, what needs to change.

And He does it for your good. He exposes those things in your life that need to change. He sharpens you through His Word. He molds you into the person God wants you to be.

And so don't... These are wounds from a friend. The words of the Bible. When you open it up, it's going to hurt. But it's wounds from a friend for your good.

But most of all, in His life and His death, Jesus shows the greatest characteristic of true friendship, which is forgiveness. See, Jesus came to this earth for one reason, and that was to cover over your sins, to bury them, to wipe the slate clean by dying in your place and taking the justice for your sin on the cross so that the slate could be wiped clean justly and that the judge of the universe will not judge you because He's judged Jesus in your place.

[ 27 : 37 ] And justice is served and you are forgiven through the cross. And that's why Jesus is the friend you've always wanted, even if you don't realize it. And wisdom teaches us to pursue true friendship in our lives.

And if Jesus is the true friend, wisdom is teaching us to pursue that friendship above all others in your life. That relationship, relationship with Jesus Christ.

And you can have that relationship in reality every day because Jesus is alive today. He rose from the dead. He is alive right now and He is closer than a brother because He is always accessible to you through prayer and through the Word.

He's never too busy and He's never too far away. In fact, one of the reasons He left earth physically was so that He could be accessible to you and me 24-7. Now, His disciples weren't too chuffed with Him initially when He ascended, when He left earth physically.

They were, where are you going, Jesus? But it was for us and ultimately for them as well that He left so He could be intimately accessible to you and me.

[ 28 : 53 ] But do you, is that part of your life? That, what Jesus has done to give you that relationship, do you take advantage of it?

Are you pursuing that friendship? Are you investing time and effort into that relationship? Because if you are, I promise you, it will change your life.

That friendship. You know how, I said earlier, who you are today is a result of the friendships that you've had in the past. Those people, those relationships, you are, you are molded by those relationships will be the most molding, the most important, the most life-changing relationship that you can experience is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

And I'm not assuming that because you are in church, you have that relationship. Many people believe the gospel. Many people can say the Apostles' Creed off path.

Many people can sing these songs that we sing and yet, they don't have an active, real relationship with Jesus on a daily basis. but when you do, it will change your life.

[ 30 : 03 ] It changed the disciples' lives and it enabled them, in fact, for the first time to be true friends themselves. This is the amazing thing. You know, Proverbs, wisdom shows us how difficult it is to find true friendship in our lives but also how difficult it is to be true friends because of our sin and yet here, in Jesus, we find the solution for how to be a true friend to others in benefiting from his friendship to us and that's what Jesus tells his disciples in John chapter 15.

He says, My command is this, listen to this, My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. That's where it starts. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends. If you do what I command, this is my command, love each other. So you see what he's saying here? To all of his disciples back then and today, he's saying because they've experienced his sacrificial, forgiving, honest, reliable love for them, they can start showing that love to others now.

And so because of his love for us, we are now called to be sacrificial, forgiving, honest, reliable friends to others and therefore to show the very character of God to a world who's lost and in darkness.

We show the character of God amongst other things through our friendships. We witness who God is amongst other things through our friendships with people.

[ 31 : 48 ] there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother and that's Jesus. He's the ultimate friend that this proverb is talking about.

But is he your friend? Can you really say that Jesus is your friend daily? That you are in a daily walk with him? That you are speaking to him?

That you are listening to him? That you are hanging out with him like you would with a friend?

Because he is the friend that you've always wanted. And if so, if he is your friend, are you going to go out and start being that kind of friend to the people that he's put in your life?

Let's pray that that would be the case. Yes, Lord, we thank you for helping us to understand this unique relationship of true friendship. Lord, we live in a world where friendship really has lost its meaning and so we pray that you would help us as Christians to not just understand what true friendship is but to seek it out in our lives, to find it in you and then to pursue that with other people. Help us, Lord, to be true friends to others like you are to us so that we can witness through our relationships that we can point people to the God who is the ultimate friend to us.  
[ 33 : 12 ] And Lord, through that would you be glorified in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.  
Amen.