

Proverbs 18: 24

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[0 : 0 0] can go to the proverb. We're looking at Proverbs 18.24. It's this, a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Now, immediately we think of Jesus, of course, because we're good Christians. But remember, Jesus wasn't around yet. And so this proverb had a very important meaning to its original audience. It has some very good practical day-to-day wisdom for our lives, as I hope we'll see. And wisdom, as we've seen already in the last few weeks, is the art of living well. And the wisdom that the Bible gives us is the wisdom that God has woven into, knitted into creation. And it's all good, important wisdom. And if you go through the Proverbs, it's actually interesting to see how many Proverbs talk about the topic of friendship. And it's surprising, especially to our modern ears, because we don't often give friendship a lot of attention. But there's a lot of Proverbs that talk about friendship. It's a neglected topic today, especially because we can have hundreds of friends, can't we? I mean, how many Facebook friends do you have if you're on Facebook? You've probably got hundreds of friends. I've got like 400 and something friends,

I think. But I haven't even met all of them. And I bet most of them have unsubscribed so they don't see my life on their feeds, because they're not that interested in me. That's kind of what friendship has become in today's world. It's quite shallow. It's just really talking about casual acquaintances. But Proverbs teaches us that part of living wisely is actually nurturing more important, deeper friendships than just the acquaintances that we normally have in our lives. One of the wisest things to understand, though, as we see in this proverb, is that there are different kinds of friendships. We need to go into life realizing that not all friends are friends. That there are different types of the thing we call friendship. In fact, in the Hebrew, which is the language of Proverbs are written, there's a lot of different words for our one English word friendship. And this proverb actually uses two of those different words, which are translated here, companions and friends, or a friend. So it compares two different types of friendships, what it calls companions, and what it calls true friends. And what you'll also notice about this, there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. This friend, this type of friendship is compared, not only a contrast, not only to mere companions, it's also contrasted to family. It's a different type of relationship, even to your family relationships, which is quite interesting. So you see that it's distinguished both from companions and from family relationships. It's a unique type of relationship that if you have in your life, it can give you what these other relationships can't give you, what mere companions can't give you, and what even family can't give you. A true friend.

Now, let's understand what it means by companions. Well, companions is the shallow friend. It's the Facebook friend. And it's not hard to find in our lives. It's very easy to get those kind of friends, people we maybe have things in common with that we can, you know, go to the pub and get a drink with, and we'll have something to talk about. And we don't hate each other's company, typically. And we're Facebook friends. That's typically what companions are. And they're typically people who benefit in some way from being your friend, even if they don't realize it. They like it, they enjoy it, they get something from it. And it doesn't cost them much to be your friend. That's what a companion is.

And that's why you'll see in this proverb, even if you have many of those types of friends, companions, you may still come to ruin. A man or a woman of many companions may still come to ruin. In other words, what it's saying about these companions is that they're the type of people who aren't going to save you when trouble comes. In other words, they're not going to be around when it costs them something to stick around. So they're fair weather friends. Maybe you know the type well. Basically, they're people who are your friends as long as the benefit outweighs the cost of being your friend.

They're low maintenance. In other words, you know, they will not spend a lot maintaining you. As long as you're low maintenance, and they're low maintenance, it's fine. But as soon as there's a cost involved, as soon as they're going to have to sacrifice something, they're suddenly nowhere to be seen.

[4 : 59] Those are companions. And that's really the first difference between companions and true friends. Because look at what the proverb says again. The friend, the type of friendship that this proverb talks about is a friend who sticks. Sticks. Closer than a brother. That word, the original for that word, is a very rare word.

It only occurs three times in the Bible in that form. And the other time it's used is to describe the welding of the two seraphim that sit on top of the Ark of the Covenant and how their wings are welded together.

That welding word. So it's translated weld. Or elsewhere it can be used to describe a loyalty. A loyalty that you swear fealty to someone and no matter what comes, you're loyal to that leader, that ruler.

That's how the word is used. But here it's used of a friend. A friend who sticks. In other words, true friends are consistent. They stick around even when the cost outweighs the benefit of being your friend. As we read through the Proverbs and we look for this idea of true friendship, and I encourage you to do that, find what Proverbs talk about friends. Another aspect that comes out is that they're accessible. They're around. They don't disappear when things get tough.

They're available when you need them, even when no one else is. They'll always blue tick you, in other words. When you send them a message, they're not one of those people who can check the messages and decide whether to blue tick or not. You get apps like that, where you can see the messages. I actually have one on my phone, I shouldn't say. But you can see the messages, and you might not want them to see that you've seen the message. This kind of friend doesn't do that. He's always accessible. He'll happily stop what he's doing and listen to you. He's accessible.

[6 : 56] Even more so than family. Proverbs 27, verse 10. Now, I know I'm going away to another proverb, but it's interesting. It says, better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away. And that neighbor, it's talking about this kind of friend who is closer than your family because he's actually just more accessible. Your family might live far away. They may have lost contact with you. They may not be involved in your daily life. This kind of friend is. Another key idea to the sticking, you see, it's a friend who sticks. Another aspect of sticking is, and the Proverbs teach us this forgiveness, which is a surprising one. But to stick close to someone, you need to be able to forgive them when they offend you. Otherwise, you're going to put a wedge in the relationship.

They don't hold failures against someone. When offended, and typically when we get offended, we tend to want recompense. We tend to want the person to recognize what they've done and apologize. And we draw out there and make them intimately aware of it. It's like siblings. I have brothers. I know what it's like, where you make sure everybody knows about your siblings' fault, right? Especially them. But if they don't want to hear about it, everyone else will as well.

A true friend doesn't need to do that. A true friend doesn't do that. A true friend, the Proverbs actually say, covers over the offense of others. They don't repeat a matter. They don't dredge it up. But they cover over it. They forgive it. They can leave it behind because the friendship is more important. Now, I've just highlighted some of the aspects of the wise friend. But I'm sure you would agree with me that this type of relationship that's distinct from mere companions and also distinct from family relationships, it's very hard to find, isn't it? Maybe you've had one or two people like that in your life. But it's very rare. And the reason it's rare is because we're not focused on pursuing friendships. We're focused on pursuing all kinds of other relationships. The world is wired not to pursue friendship, not to value friendship nearly as much as it used to.

You know, so you don't get a, on the Men's Health magazine cover, you never read the highlight 10 hot tips for killer friendships. You know, because it's all about romantic relationships and things that make you feel something and things that are exciting. That's the relationships people are focused on pursuing. This proverb challenges us to actually stop and think about friendships.

And to focus, to intentionally seek out these friendships in our daily lives. Do you do that in the week coming? What plans have you put in place to seek out developing true friendships? We don't plan for it. We don't think about that. C.S. Lewis, who writes a brilliant book called *The Four Loves* on this topic of friendship, he calls it the least natural of loves. I quote, he says, 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. You see what he's saying? We naturally don't seek out friendship. And that's why we need wisdom to tell us to. Wisdom tells us the things that we don't naturally do.

[10:32] And this type of friendship is not natural because it's supernatural. It's only possible because we're made in God's image. This type of friendship is not something you see in the animal kingdom.

This friendship is actually an aspect of God's character. And that's why we do end up with Jesus. That he's the ultimate friend who sticks closer than a brother because God, when he came in the form of his son, Jesus, he demonstrated this kind of friendship to humans, to us. A friendship that forgives, that doesn't cover over wrongs because of his death on the cross for his people. A friendship that's reliable.

He's not going to change his mind. His promises are sure. A friendship that costs. For Jesus to be our friend, it costs him a lot. And a friendship that is always accessible. He is always waiting for us to access him. And so Jesus is this type of friend that we all need. And we saw earlier in John that he calls us his friends. I'm going to read it again to close. John 15, 12 to 14.

This is my command. Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. And so those who have experienced Jesus' costly, forgiving, reliable friendship in the cross, in the gospel, those of us who are his people, his friends can and must be friends like that too because we are able to, because we've experienced it ourselves. And learn to show that type of friendship to the people God has put in our lives. Forgiving, reliable, sacrificial friendship that sticks because it's a friendship that we can't easily find in the world. Well, that's the wisdom of friendship. I hope that's given you something to think about as you go into the week.

Thank you.