

PP Proverbs: A Friend for All Times

Proverbs 27:5-10

March 29-30, 2014

PP Illus C.S Lewis says that a new friendship starts out this way: *‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one?’*

There is such power in a good friendship, but study after study reveals that good friendships are so scarce for us

How many of us can identify with the friendship that David had with Jonathon?

PP *“...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”* 1 Samuel 18:1

PP David felt the same and expressed it in song at Jonathon’s funeral: *“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.”* 2 Samuel 1:26

Some have misconstrued this as homosexual love, but it’s because it is so rare, they don’t recognize it as deep, soul-binding friendship

For David, Jonathan was the peer, friend, and confidant that no wife could ever have been in that society; and his untimely death left a gaping hole in David’s soul

Friendship was important for David, he taught it well to his son Solomon who today teaches us

Let’s keep in mind that in the Old Testament, the most common word for ‘friend’ in the Old Testament can also be translated *neighbor*

Friends were often synonymous with neighbors, the people you lived life with as even **verse 10** indicates: *“Do not forsake your friend...Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.”*

So how do we develop deep, lasting, helpful friendships with those we live among?

Wisdom would offer us the skill to make great friendships

PP 1-Wise friends lovingly speak the truth

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” 5-6

What we read as ‘*rebuke*’ is best understood as *constructive criticism*

And how we respond to it will reveal whether we are a wise person or a fool

PP *“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.”* Prov 12:1

Parents, for us to love our children, but we don’t speak up on matters of correction because we are afraid of their responses, then we are being captured by the phrase ‘*hidden love*’

We’ll gain their friendship in the short-term, but in the long-term, we will lose them

Though David was a man after God’s own heart, the Bible says of him while his son Adonijah

PP was arrogantly trying to assume the throne, *“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?”* 1 Kings 1:6

David had hidden love for his son, not wanting to ‘*displease*’ him at any time, a word that means to *painfully shape* something

This word is used in Job 10:48, to describe God creating human beings

If David would have given constructive criticism to his son, it would have shaped his heart, rather than allow Adonijah’s sin to find its full expression unhindered

A true friend will put a finger on your faults without rubbing them in

Ken Sandte with Peacemaking Ministries has developed an easy way to categorize people's responses when something happens that could lead to conflict

Some people are peace-breakers, angry, loud, condemning people who find a way to make sure the other person is convinced that it is his or her fault for the issue producing conflict

These types of friends seem to gain some pleasure from inflicting the wounds,

Others are what verse 6 shows us...peace-fakers

***"profuse are the kisses of an enemy."* 27:6b**

Flattery helps no one, Judas kisses only deceive, and they both prove the person can't be trusted

But wisdom will teach us to be skillful friends who know how to be peace-makers, not breakers or fakers, and the way to do that is again, echoing verse 5, ***'faithful are the wounds of a friend'*** 27:6a

The truth might hurt but it will never harm

A wise friend doesn't fear correction, but actually hopes for it, because how else can they improve, and grow, and see their blind areas?

But a wise friend will carefully correct, and only in love, their tongue a healing balm, their friendship a tool of redemption shaping the other into a clear picture of Christ!

PP 2-Wise friends maintain balance

Sometimes in Proverbs, a verse might seem to be randomly and haphazardly thrown in a passage. For example, we go from wise friends telling the truth in verses 5-6, then to verses 7-8 which seem to be an entirely new topic, only to return to friendship in verses 9 and 10

PP Yet, we learn in Ecclesiastes, ***"Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care."***
Ecclesiastes 12:9

So we should view these next two verses in the context of friendship

"One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet." 7

Full, means you cannot eat another bite, satisfied, so that sweet treat is not even appealing!

And in the context of friends, a person can have a social calendar so full of activity, that an appeal from someone for friendship is spurned...I don't have time, or interest

The number of Facebook '*friends*' or Twitter '*followers*' can create an illusion of healthy friendships

PP ***"A man of many companions may come to ruin..."*** Proverbs 18:24

That same illusion can come about by a life of busyness, even within the church

It is possible we are so full of the world that we do not want or see the need for deep, abiding, redemptive friends

And when that '*relational fullness*' comes into the church, what can develop is a friendly church, not a relational church: *I found Cornerstone friendly, but I couldn't make friends there*

Solomon used '*honey*' elsewhere as a symbol to teach keeping a balance in life

PP ***"If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it."*** Proverbs 25:16

The connection to friendship is seen in the next verse: ***"Let your foot be seldom in your***

PP ***neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you."*** Proverbs 25:17

There is wisdom in the balance of the number of close friends you travel through life together
 with, as well as how often you spend time with each other
 A clingy, possessive friend will usually squelch the life out of a friendship

Let me ask you a question: Do you have a friend the like of which Aristotle once wrote,

PP *'Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies'?*

Some of you ladies may be close to tears longing for this so deeply

Some of us men might be thinking this is a sermon for the ladies, we don't need friendship
 like this!

PP This was the quandary of the man that Solomon wrote about in **Ecclesiastes 4**, *"I saw...one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, 'For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?' This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 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!"* **Ecclesiastes 4:7-10**

PP 3-Wise friends are faithful

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. From the

PP thousands of entries, here was the winning definition: *"A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."*

Solomon gets at this faithfulness in friendship in verse 8, *"Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home."*

Again it seems like this isn't really talking about friendships, at least not at first glance

But the word **'home'** doesn't mean house, but rather the place God has put us

God has a will and plan for our lives, even determining the place where we live our lives

This includes our family, but even more broadly, the community in which we live

The moment God saved you, He gave you a new citizenship, so that you no longer are a citizen
 of this world, rather an alien, or pilgrim living here

He gave you a new citizenship, so that now you belong to, and have all the rights of the kingdom
 of God, the kingdom of heaven

And that new kingdom is growing, and finding its expression here on earth *in the church*

Christian, like it or not, God has placed you into His church, and His will and plan for your life is
 unfolding through the Body of Christ

God has placed us into relationship with each other for a purpose, to develop deep friendships
 with one another, sometimes for a specific season of time, sometimes for life

To desert relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, is to be *"Like a bird that strays from its nest"* or like *"a man who strays from his home."*

PP The word **'strays'** usually means forced to flee, sent into to flight

A bird put to flight from a predator, leaving the eggs alone, assuring that they will never hatch

A trial, or difficulty occurs, and the person pulls away, maybe leaves the church, the support
 system of his/her faith, and the purposes of God are in jeopardy of not being fulfilled

Do you see your friends as given to you by God, to fulfill His purposes in your lives, and that to
 abandon them when difficulty comes is to forfeit God's strength for you

Friends must be faithful, and not pull away from each other when difficulty comes

PP 4-Wise friends encourage

PP George Eliot writes: *“Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness blow the rest away”*

“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.” 9

When a friend speaks, it should be honest, gracious and healing

Even when it is a painful rebuke, verses 5-6, it should end with gladness of the heart

‘Oil’ most often refers to Olive oil, which was used for a variety of purposes

To soothe burns and cuts, to rejuvenate dry skin

When the counsel of a good friend cuts like a knife, the love of that friend immediately heals

True friends refresh and heal their friends’ hearts

Perfumed oils are still used in some cultures today, being rubbed into men’s beards at the conclusion of a feast

I learned a lot more about beards preparing for this sermon than I ever knew

There are dozens of names for facial hair

PP There is the Friendly Mutton Chop

PP And the French Fork

PP As well as the Old Dutch, **PP** and Chin Curtain, **PP** and even the Anchor

And for all and any beard type, there is an assortment of beard oils, which will lead to *“softer, more manageable whiskers that hold their shape better and smell nice”!*

All this time of having a goatee and I have allowed my beard hair to remain limp and smelly

Solomon teaches us, friendship, like oil, revitalizes and strengthens and heals

‘perfume’ in Old Testament times was a luxury reserved for special occasions and celebrations
Its aroma was a symbol of joy, sweet and comforting

But perfume was also ancient deodorant, covering over offensive smells, reminding us of the

PP counsel of Solomon, ***“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.” Prov. 10:12***

A true friend loves at all times, willing to cover over offenses like perfume covers a stench, and instead brings the pleasing aroma of comfort and joy

PP 5-Wise friends are available

“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.” 10

When that trial or calamity of verse 8 comes into our lives, Solomon says to seek support from your friends you live life with rather than a family member who is far away

This doesn’t mean you can’t call that parent, or sibling in another state when you are struggling

Solomon says we have to be there for each other, to help each other in time of need

Be willing to drop everything and do all in your power to help, knowing that your time of need will likely come when you need others

Normally in Israel, relationships among family are help up to be guarded and lived out closely
But what Solomon has in mind is that the family who is far away offers limited help

PP So let wisdom teach you how to develop deep, meaningful friendships, for “...*there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*” **Proverbs 18:24**

Do you have these kinds of friends?

Wisdom would teach us how to be the kind of friend that creates a powerful friendship

PP Speaking the truth in such gracious love that your friend’s heart opens up to receive it

PP Maintaining a balance that allows friendship love to grow in a healthy way

PP Being faithful to help your friend love and serve God, becoming more like Him

PP Proving to be a source of encouragement

PP And proving to be available when difficulty comes into their live

Can I encourage you to take 1 or 2 of these qualities, and ask God to help you live wisely, developing them more deeply in your friendships?

Amen?

Pray