The Friendship Factor
Proverbs 17:17; 18:24

The Book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about friends. In fact, the word for friend is translated by six different Hebrew words. Sometimes the word is translated “friend”; sometimes “companion”; and sometimes “neighbor.”

I have heard people say, “I really don't need friends; I have the Lord.” While that may be intended as a spiritual statement, it actually reflects spiritual immaturity. All of us need friends. Real friends. True friends. Everyone needs friends and everyone needs to be a friend.

-God never intended that we as Christians should live the Christian life by ourselves. It is through relationships and friendships that God does some of His most important work in our lives. Life is difficult from any perspective, and everyone needs friends to help them through the difficult times. Anyone who says they don't need or want friends has a deeper problem. God made us to be in relationships with one another.

Solomon points out three things about friends and friendships:

The Vain Friendship

It is interesting that most of what Solomon tells us about friends and friendships is which kinds of friends to avoid. We should choose our friends carefully. Friends can either lift us up or bring us down.

What kind of folks should we avoid as friends?

A. Avoid Making Friends with the Wicked – 4:14-17, 23-27

You can almost hear Solomon shouting, “Avoid wicked men like the plague!” The word “avoid” means “to leave them alone, stay as far away from them as possible, don't even get near them!”

-It's interesting that Solomon gives these instructions to young people. When he directs his instructions to “my Son,” he is talking to his son before he has hair on his chin.
-In 4:23-27, Solomon says that young people should strongly guard his heart (23), his mouth (24), his eyes (25), and his feet (26). Sin can enter your life through any of the avenues.
-Out of the heart are the issues of life. What a world of evil pours from the perverse mouth. Your eyes are the light of the body and what you focus your eyes upon will either corrupt or enhance your thought life and character. If Eve had not focused on the forbidden fruit and if Lot's wife had not turned around for one last look at Sodom, if Achan had not focused on the accursed thing, if David had not looked with lust upon Bathsheba, their lives would not have been ruined. Every step should be carefully weighed so that we can walk before the Lord.

B. Avoid making Friends with a man with a Foul Mouth – 4:24

Deceitful, corrupt, or perverse language should not grace our lips because it twists, distorts, perverts, and misrepresents the truth. What comes from our lips should be pure and truthful. Dump all filthy language into the garbage can. Use your mouth to help and encourage others.

- Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:
- Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Proverbs 25:9 One of the best ways to lose a friend is to devolve secrets and betray confidence.
Proverbs 20:19  A talebearer: His name describes his work. He makes “tales” of everything he sees or hears. He has a dangerous, unfaithful character, for he reveals secrets. -Some folks are drawn to those that gossip because they want to hear the latest news or scandal. It's as if they are addicted to gossip and can't get enough. The gossiper loves to spread secrets and will use flattery to learn the secrets of others. We are to avoid those who gossip because those who will gossip to you will gossip about YOU. If you hang around a person who has a reputation for being a gossip, people will assume that you are a gossiper, too.

C. Avoid making Friends with Drunks and Party Animals – 23:19-21

Solomon warns against a besetting temptation. Avoid carousing and spending time with party animals. Why? People like that are trouble, that's why.

Poverty and shame are temporal fruits, but the eternal ruin is far more deadly.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous sent Ann Landers the following:
- We drink for happiness and become unhappy.
- We drink for joy and become miserable.
- We drink for sophistication and become obnoxious.
- We drink for friendship and make enemies.
- We drink for sleep and awaken without rest.
- We drink for strength and felt weak.
- We drink for relaxation and got the shakes.
- We drink for bravery and become afraid.
- We drink for confidence and become doubtful.
- We drink to make conversation easier and slurred our speech.
- We drink to forget and were forever haunted.
- We drank for freedom and became slaves.
- We drink to erase problems and saw them multiply.
- We drink to cope with life and invite death.

D. Avoid Making Friends with Bullies – 3:31

People that are violent, cocky, and oppressive are mean spirited, but unfortunately, they tend to attract those who desire power, attention, and the fear of others.

-Some folks look at the bully and want what the bully has. The bully may have a gang that follows him, or a pretty girl hanging on his arm. Others who may be insecure or have little, see this and say, “I want that, too. I want people to fear me. I want to have power and control.”

-Solomon says that we are not to envy people who are harsh and inflict pain on other people. Don't copy or imitate their ways at all. There's nothing glamorous about hurting people or treating them like dirt. Bullies are always in conflict. Those who follow them do not do so because they love them, but because they fear them. Their's is a hard life. They must always look over their shoulder. How much better to have the fruit of the spirit growing in your life.

II. The Value of Friendships

A true friend is of great value. A friend is one you can share with, confide in, pray with, talk with, cry with, rejoice with, laugh with, and be with. He is one who defends you, consoles you, understands you reproves you, and corrects you.

A. A True Friend Gives you Good Advice – 27:9
Ointment brings healing and perfume is sweet and soothing. That's what hearty counsel does. It is counsel from the heart that is genuine, sincere and filled with goodwill. It is counsel that is good for you with the desire to bring you success. These are friends who are not driven away from you in hard times. In fact, hard times draw them closer to you. They will challenge you and encourage you with what you need to hear and not what you want to hear. Good counsel always sweetens your relationship with your friend. A true friend can be trusted and someone you can have confidence in.

B. A True Friend will make you a Better Person – 27:17

It takes iron to sharpen iron. Sharpening iron requires iron at least as hard as the knife. Once sharpened, the knife is bright, sharp, and ready for more productive service.
-Iron that sharpens a knife doesn't just make a knife look better; it makes it better. A true friend sharpens, improves, and knocks off the dullness of his friend. Prov. 13:20
-Are the folks you call friends making you a better person or a worse person. Only those who make you a better person are true friends.

C. A True Friend will Lovingly correct you when you are wrong – 27:5-6

A true friend will not flatter you if you are wrong and act like he is doing you a favor by allowing you to continue in the wrong direction, knowing things will end badly for you. Even if the truth is painful for a moment or wounds your heart for a time, rebuke given in love, not only sets you on the right path, but cements your friendship.

III. Some Virtues of a Friend

A. A friend should be cordial – 18:24a

If you want to have good relationships with other people, then it's important that you be friendly. Someone put it like this, “The best vitamin for developing friends is B1.” Be a friend.

Jesus is the best Friend anyone could have. “Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

B. A friend should be consistent – 17:17

True friends are loyal to you, in the good times and the hard times.

Heb 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

C. A friend should be caring – Ecc. 4:9-12

Jesus is the best Friend of all!

How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me,
Things so undeserved, yet you gave to prove your love for me.
The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude
All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee.

To God be the glory, To God be the glory, To God be the glory
for the things He has done.
With His blood, He has saved me; With His pow'r, He has raised me;
To God be the glory For the things He has done.

Just let me live my life; Let it be pleasing, Lord to Thee.
And should I gain any praise, Let it go to Calvary.
With His blood he has save me, with His pow'r He has raised me.
To God be the glory for the things He has done.