

Proverbs, Friendship Pt. 2 7/9/18

Review- As Christians, we believe that God is not an aloof, impersonal God but that He is deeply relational, revealed in the Trinity. And he created humanity in his image so that we would share in this loving friendship with Him and each other. Friendship is God's imprint on the human soul and this is why loneliness stings like an open gash in our skin and I'm concerned, and I'm passionate about this topic because I see a troubling trend.

American Sociological review- average American only has 2 close friends. 25 years ago average American had 6 close friends. But more troubling to me is that 1 in 4 Americans say they do not have a single close friend. Many Americans are suffering from loneliness, an impoverished soul. One theologian commenting on this trend said "Humans connect to other humans as so basic a level that when we disconnect, our souls shatter into a thousand little pieces." Psychologists connect loneliness to an depression, narcissism, and suicide and other social disorders. Friendship is God's imprint on the human soul and so when we don't have it we are missing something God designed us for. So if God has designed us for real friendships and fellowship as his image-bearers, if friendship is the antidote to a soul in pieces and tragically lonely, how do we make, forge and keep good friends?

Four Attributes of Friendship: Constancy, Carefulness, Candor, Counsel

Constancy

Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Availability. Friend is the one who shows up at the front door. I was literally in the middle of sharing this attribute and Cassie gets a text from a friend that she had a fall and needed some help and so Cassie had an opportunity to live out this passage in real life.

Carefulness

Not just physically available but emotionally available. They will sit with you and take on your grief. A good friend is paying attention to what you need in the moment. A real friend will suffer with you emotionally. Experience what you are going through. Can others go to you in pain?

However, the next attribute is **Candor**. And you will see why I say however, because it seems like an opposite of carefulness. Truth-telling.

Proverbs 27:5-6

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Friendly wounds...wounding kisses? What does this mean? Metaphor for words that your friend needs that will be painful and yet they have to hear them because they are good. They are like getting shots at the doctor or bad tasting medicine. Now you may say, "I love them too much to say something that would hurt." Then you know what you are doing? Look at the parallel clauses in the proverbs...You are acting more like the enemy- hiding, flattering is the work of an

enemy. Like Judas betraying with a kiss. If you refuse to tell your friend what they need to hear it's just as bad as betraying them. If you say you love them too much to tell them, it actually means that you love yourself too much.

Proverbs 29:5

Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet.

Flattery is actually harming your friend, not loving them. If you don't do this you set them up for a disastrous life. Continuing in folly. Illustration of American Idol Auditions. "My friends, my family all tell me I have a great voice and should follow my dreams."

How much more important is it to tell your friend the truth when it comes to blind spots in their relationship to their spouse? or how they relate to co-workers? Or a bad habit you noticed that is slowly chipping away at their life? Something that is keeping them back from success or spiritual growth? Are you willing to speak the truth? See, we all say, "Someone needs to say something to so and so...but I just don't want it to be me. Let the pastor do it." And guess what? There may be something that you need to hear that no one wants to tell you.

Ex: Someone confronted me about calling something stupid...but Sometimes it's life and death.

James 5:19-20

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Save from death...walking in continued blindness and error AND cover a multitude of sins that could have been committed. This was the case for Nathan confronting David in 2 Samuel 12 about his sin coverup. What would have happened if Nathan the prophet refused to show David his spiritual blindspot? What greater disaster and multitude of sins would have come of it? We would have never had Psalm 51.

Carefulness and Candor- are hard. Because telling the truth to someone is going to cause pain for you because you are emotionally invested. See you can either be careful and just shut up or you can be candid and tell the truth but be emotionally disconnected from it. Going around speaking your mind recklessly or being everyone's self-appointed critic is not friendship. So one without the other isn't that painful. But to be a friend is painful. **Ex: Todd telling me not to date Shannan.**

Are you willing to speak truth in love to a friend? And, are you open to receiving truth in love?

The more successful, powerful, wealthy you become the more resistant people will be to do this for you. So you may need to ask them. When is the last time you had a friend tell you something hard to hear? You may be one conversation away from having your life changed by the words of a friend.

Counsel

Proverbs 27:9

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt counsel.

There are two aspects of Counsel here in the Proverbs. This is the first. See how he describes this counsel? It is like perfume and incense...it is sweet and pleasant. Words, true and meaningful words that convince you that are known and loved. Words that encourage your soul to new heights, carefully timed words that inspire your soul at just the right time. Inspired you to go further, fly higher, believe more. Friends that you know you can talk to about anything...Times together with friends when you know you belong. C.S. Lewis captures this well with a word picture. *“Those are the golden sessions; when four or five of us after a hard day’s walking have come to our inn; when our slippers are on, our feet spread out towards the blaze and our drinks at our elbows; when the whole world, and something beyond the world, opens itself to our minds as we talk; and no one has any claim on or any responsibility for another, but all are freemen and equals as if we had first met an hour ago, while at the same time an affection mellowed by the years enfolds us. Life—natural life—has no better gift to give.”*

Ex: Art and Angela’s wedding. Observed seasoned friendship and counsel. People who had truly done life together. Gave counsel to one another during hard times. Who didn’t let each other go...On three separate occasions someone came up to me, unsolicited, and exhorted me to have these kinds of friends and counselors.

Compare this experience to what for many has become a substitute for “counsel”, social media relationships. Parents, grandparents listen up to this because you need to be aware of how you teach and train your kids on this...Ironically, human friendship is in decline in a day and age of social media when we have more access and connection to other humans than ever before. Now I do not think social media is a great evil or anything. In fact, I think it is a tool that can be used in powerful ways, we use it as a church. But we need to understand that the explosion of social media is redefining how we think of friendship and offering a cheap, alluring substitute that appears to have all the benefits and none of the draw backs. We only allow people to see what we want them to see. Picture at perfect angle, the right filter... getting lots of great comments. We only engage in relationships on our own terms. We can interact with dozens of friends and the snapshots of their lives at any given moment and yet not truly know any of them. I once spoke with a 20 something, who in his honesty, said I have 750 friends on Facebook and yet I cannot name one close friend. A writer for the Atlantic Magazine pointed out- *“it’s a lonely business, wandering the labyrinths of our friends; and pseudo-friends’ projected identities, trying to figure out what part of ourselves we ought to project, who will listen, and what they will hear.”* Social Media cannot be a replacement for this kind of counsel, only a supplement.

Proverbs also speaks of counsel like this.

Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Real friendship is like sharpening the blade of a sword because God wants every one of us to be sharp for him. By ourselves we become dull and blunted and we lose our edge. **Ex: Working out with a buddy who challenges you vs. the one who doesn't. I can always lift more, run farther, sweat more profusely when I have a workout buddy challenging me.** Every one of us needs a friend who will not flatter us but refine us. As Christians, the body of Christ, the local church is designed to be this for you. Spiritual workout buddies...

Hebrews 10:24

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Real Christian friends will provoke you and challenge you, particularly in your faith. Who will ask you, "What are you reading right now that is warming your affections for Jesus?" "How are you seeing the fruit of the Spirit active in your life right now?" "How are you loving your spouse or your kids or your roommate?" "How are you actively fighting sin?" Every one of us needs to go to one other person and say, "Help me see myself. Help me get sharper for Christ."

Attributes of Friendships:

Constancy, Carefulness, Candor and Counsel.

Two Challenges:

For those who have good friends- cherish them...do not take it for granted and go deeper.

For those who struggle to make friends: BE the friend before you will HAVE this friend. Pray, ask the Lord to bring you good friend like this.

For those with bad friends...Get new friends: Some of your friends are going to lead you toward bad decisions, divorce, toward addictions, toward foolish use of your money...getting dramatic? OK. Then some of your friends will lead you toward more of the same. Luke-warm, ho-hum Christianity. **Do you have friends that make you better at what matters most?** Do you have friends that will preach the gospel to back to you?