

Proverbs: Friendship Pt. 1, 8/5/18

Ben Franklin and George Whitefield, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, Oprah and Gayle, Lucy and Ethel, Harry and Lloyd, Sponge Bob and Patrick Starfish...they all have something in common. They all understand the vital importance of **friendship**. In fact, whether these friends know it or not, their friendship reveals something essential about the nature of God. Friendship reveals the fingerprints of God on humanity. As Christians, we believe that God is not an aloof, impersonal God but that He is deeply relational, revealed in the Trinity. We believe in a triune God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit- dwelling as co-equal, in perfect love and harmony and in complete unity. In other words- God has friends. And he created humanity in his image so that we would share in this loving friendship with Him and each other. Genesis- Not good for a man to be alone. Since friendship is his design, he knows best about how we should choose, forge and keep good friendships. The Book of Proverbs reveals God's wisdom on friendship. I think this is so important I want to take two weeks to study this.

The Importance of Good Friends

This two-part series is a call to examine our friendships. Some of us might not have the kind of friends we should. But others, if we are honest, we don't have strong friendships. Maybe it's because it hasn't been that important to you. But let's look three proverbs that teach about why it is important to have good friends. These are quick because they are self-evident.

1) Friends Shape Who We Become

Proverbs 13:20

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

This needs to be the theme verse for some of us. We'd like to think that we are such self-made individuals who determine who we are and what we become...no we are shaped by our companions...whether positively or negatively. 1 Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good character."* Look back at your life and this becomes self-evident.

Illustration: Through his close friendship with Tolkien, Lewis found God and became a Christian. Tolkien and Lewis also influenced each other intellectually on the nature of language, imagination, myth, and religion. Lewis in turn provided a matchless gift that Tolkien later described: "The unpayable debt that I owe him was not 'influence' as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer **encouragement**. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my 'stuff' could be more than a private hobby. But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought The Lord of the Rings to a conclusion."

The wise friends can shape your perspective on how you spend retirement, how you deal with suffering and loss, your outlook on life. **What are your friendships saying about who you are, or are becoming?**

2) Friends Help in Hard Times

Proverbs 17:17

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

Ecclesiastes 4:10

For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

Picture of Gunnar Molin in Foxhole

3) Friends Fulfill the God-given Longing to be Loved

Proverbs 19:22

What is desired in a man is steadfast love.

At the end of it all, relationships is all we have.

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

Two today, two next week. Now I don't want you to merely look for these qualities in finding friends, but even more importantly, to ask if you possess these qualities.

Constancy

Proverbs 17:17

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

This doesn't mean that you are together all the time, but it means they are friends in all kinds of times. When you are celebrating blessings, when you are mourning tragedies, when you have great news or you have great doubts and questions. Your friend is there when you need someone to cry with or you need someone to help you move...they are on the other side of the couch. Listen, if you have a friend that you can only share the good times with? That's not a true friend. They want to party, but not grieve...You cannot be a friend without the quality of availability.

Proverbs 18:24

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

This Hebrew word for sticks closer- cleave...to weld together. How different this is than someone who may have many companions. Many acquaintances...when stuff hits the fan. An acquaintance just says...let me know if you need anything. They just can't be bothered with the drama. A real friend just shows up. See most relationships are about usefulness. For having a good time, for getting things done, for influence. But when things are really bad- it's the friend that takes it on the chin for you...who goes to the mat. Even when it costs them something. This is why you can't have that many. It's rare and precious.

Ex: Friends affair

Are you making yourself available? What does your availability say about your friendships?

Carefulness

What do these Proverbs have in common?

Proverbs 26:18-19

Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!"

Proverbs 27:14

Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

Proverbs 25:17

Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.

Proverbs 25:20

Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.

It is the portrait of someone who is emotionally disconnected. Someone who is not aware or does not care about how the other person is really doing or what they really need. They don't understand a joke that hurts or is poorly timed. They don't care to know that you aren't a morning person. Or it's the friend who is constantly wanting to hang out, come over, call or text and it's just too much...suffocating. Benjamin Franklin said, "Guests, like fish, stink after three days." The one who sing songs to a heavy heart- joyfully singing when you are going through a hard time. Perhaps you have had this kind of a friend. They think they are bringing you joy, but they are depriving you of the warmth you need. These friends are as worthless as vinegar neutralized by washing soda:

- The look-on-the-bright-side guy: You tell him you've just lost your job and he says, "Well, at least you have your health." Thanks
- The class-clown guy: There's not a serious moment with him. You tell him something serious and he cracks a joke in the name of good fun.
- The super-spiritual guy: Confess some struggle you're having and all he can say is, "Well, praise God in all circumstances," and walks away whistling his favorite hymn. Again, thanks.
- The Advice Guy: You need a shoulder to cry on and they want to tell you what to do.
- The All About Me guy: You have a challenge our a hardship and you want your friend to just listen but somehow it comes back to them and what they have going on?

Instead true friends are careful. They will sit with you and take on your grief. A real friend will suffer with you emotionally. Experience what you are going through. Emotionally sensitive to you. Not using you.

Who do you go to when you are in deep pain? Are you the kind of person your friends can go to in deep pain?

Now we are only two into the four attributes and we are going to stop here, But already I find these attributes both inspiring and crushing at the same. I think of the times I haven't been there like I should have for my friends, or when things got difficult I just was too busy or distracted or consumed with my own life that I really wasn't available like I needed to be. Or the times I haven't been emotionally available for my friends and quick to lighten the mood instead of engage in the pain. Can you relate? This kind of friendship is hard. See at best, we are fuzzy portrait of these attributes. And maybe you have been disillusioned because you have wanted to have this kind of friend but have been let down and now you have a hard time making very close friends because you don't want to open up your heart to them again. And the reason we don't have these kinds of friends often is because we aren't these kind of friends. We are afraid. Is there anyone who will always be available? Who is willing to take it on the chin for us and go to the mat for us when we are going through hardship? Will there anyone who we can bear our deepest fears and anxieties and shame with?

The answer is yes. Jesus, the night before betrayed...

John 15:13,15

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends...I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends.

When Jesus said this, suddenly, The whole history of the world could be understood in terms of friendship. God made us for friendship but we turn from him. We betrayed him. But what Jesus said was I'm the ultimate friend. "I am the ultimate friend born for adversity. I am the one who will take it on the chin for you! Instead of afflicting those wounds, he's received them." Even when we don't keep up our side of the friendship, he sticks closer than a brother.