

Christ and Your Friendships

Proverbs 27: 6, 9 (07/16/17)

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Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy. (Prov. 27:6)

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. (Prov. 27:9)

My goal this morning is to help us grow in becoming God's kind of friend. We will be drawing from the book of Proverbs with its rich wisdom on friendship. Christ is the author of Proverbs and every godly quality of a good friend was perfectly fulfilled by Him. He calls us His friends and gave us the ultimate description of a true friend in John 15:13, *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* That's exactly what Christ did! He loved us even when we were yet sinners and paid that ultimate price on the cross.

No one will ever love you more than Christ. Even in your failures and sins He won't stop loving His own! What a friend we have in Jesus! Don't look for any human friend to take the place of Jesus in your heart. Don't cement your identity or your hopes and dreams in any earthly friend. Don't make your friendship an idol of your heart. To some degree, every human friend will disappoint you.

*Earthly friends may prove untrue, fears and doubts assail.
One still loves and cares for you, One who will not fail. Jesus never fails!*

Friendships are a huge part of life. Christian business man and motivational speaker Charles "Tremendous" Jones is known for this statement: *You'll be the same person in five years except for the books you read and the people you meet.* The people we meet, befriend, hang out with, call for counsel, spend time with, and respect will have a huge impact on our lives. Abraham Lincoln would have agreed. In a letter written in 1849 he wrote, *The better part of one's life consists of his friendships.*

God uses people in our lives to enrich us, challenge us, and help us grow. Who are the people that have made a difference in your life? Or better, what kind of friend are you? Are you God's kind of friend? That's what we want to talk about this morning. I want to give you four marks of godly friendships – the kind of friend you should want to be, and the kind of friendships you should want to develop.

God's kind of friend is developing wise character. Proverbs 9:10, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

A godly friend fears the Lord and is growing in faithfulness, trustworthiness, kindness, and integrity. Proverbs warns us about five kinds of people not to befriend: The gossip (20:19), the angry person (22:24), the rebel (24:21), the glutton (28:7), and the immoral person (29:23). We should befriend lost people, neighbors, work associates, fellow students, servers, bank tellers, dental hygienists, fellow soldiers and other people God brings across your path. George Whitefield and Ben Franklin were pretty close friends. Franklin gave Whitefield a place to stay above his shop, built a place for Whitefield to preach when churches closed their doors to him, and even gave money to support the orphanage down in Georgia. But they didn't have a godly friendship; one had a relationship with Christ and the other didn't. Whitefield tried to win Franklin to Christ, but all he could manage was to win Mr. Franklin's respect.

Our friendship discussion this morning is about godly friendships, those within the body of Christ. Proverbs tells us how to encourage one another in our walk with God and in our growth in godly

wisdom. Colossians 3:16 says we are to let Christ's Word dwell in us richly so we can teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. God's kind of friend will be developing wise character. Proverbs gives us a list of qualities of wise character.

- You enjoy growing in understanding God's truth – 1:5
- You have a deep reverence for God – 1:7.
- You respond positively to godly counsel – 9:8.
- You bring joy to your parents (especially if you are a young person) – 10:1.
- You welcome God's Word into your life – 10:8.
- You invest your heart in God's truth – 10:14.
- You restrain your words – 10:19.
- You influence others for Christ – 11:30
- You listen to counsel – 12:15.
- Your words bring healing, not strife – 12:18.
- You receive your father's correction – 13:1.
- Your teaching encourages others – 13:14.
- You walk with wise people. You develop good friendships – 13:20.
- You build up your family spiritually – 14:1.
- You make God's truth attractive to others – 15:2.
- You control your speech – 16:14.
- You are frugal and know how to save – 21:20.
- You know how to persuade others with God's truth – 21:22.
- You know how to calm hot tempers – 29:8.
- You know how to restrain your own anger – 29:11.

These are some of the character qualities of a godly friend. Proverbs also gives us a list of qualities of a fool, which you can search and discover on your own. But remember, Christ is our wisdom, and any true godly wisdom you have developed in your life is by the grace of God and to the glory of God. On our own and in our sin we would all come short of these wise qualities.

God's kind of friend is learning how to give and receive biblical counsel. Proverbs 27:9, *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.* Proverbs 27:17, *Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.*

Thank God when He brings this kind of friend into your life. You know he or she means only good for you and wants to help you live for God's glory. You may need guidance in making a decision or handling some trial. Proverbs 12:26 says the righteous is a guide to his neighbor; a guide pointing you in the right direction. When we visited Washington D. C. a few weeks ago, a guide showed us the way and explained what we were seeing. We stopped at Gettysburg on our return trip and again a guide pointed out Cemetery Ridge, the path of Pickett's Charge, and other significant sites on the battlefield. A godly friend's counsel or guidance is one of the great blessings of life, sweet like perfume and oil. You may need a friend to counsel you about handling a sin or temptation or a relationship or a romance or your finances or how to study the Bible or what books to read or handling conflict or your future, what school you should attend, what major you should pursue, what kind of job you should look for.

I met Kevin Kottke on the first day of seminary in 1975 in the break room at Grace Seminary. That began a continuing relationship. He has pastored Plainfield Bible Church near Indianapolis since 1978. He had me speak one Sunday and that's how we ended here in Evansville. I still call Kevin for his opinion and counsel with questions about authors, schools, movements, and more. God is sovereign over our friendships and brings people into our lives to help us deal with life. We should be thankful. A good friend is a person you know is on your team. You know he or she wants the best for you. He isn't going to flatter you but rather help you and pray for you and give you biblical counsel. And you can trust his confidences. Some people just can't handle other

people's foibles and failures without leaking them out to others. Proverbs 11:13, *He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.*

Let's add Proverbs 27:17 right here. *Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.* God has placed people in your life for you to rub up against and sharpen each other. We grow dull and dim all by ourselves; we are like a lawn mower blade needing a grinding stone to sharpen its cut. How good to have a "sharpening" relationship with another person. This isn't someone who pontificates all the answers he thinks he has, but someone you can discuss issues with without worrying if you'll pay for being honest with this brother or sister. They are trustworthy and faithful and we might add, humble. When we were first saved, my friend Ron always sharpened me. He was always ahead of me but without a smidgeon of arrogance or belittling. He'd give me a new perspective on a truth or passage asking, "Did you ever look at it like this?" Sharpening often uses the fine art of asking good questions rather than just impressing your friend with all you know. Do you have a sharpening friend in your life?

God's kind of friend is learning how to give and receive loving correction. Proverbs 27:5, *Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.* Proverbs 27:6, *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*

You may be at a fork in your road and a godly friend gives you biblical counsel to help you make a God-honoring decision. Other times you have already gone down the wrong path and you're heading into trouble. Maybe you're already looking at pornography or starting up a romantic relationship with an unbeliever, or expressing your bitterness toward a fellow believer who offended you. A godly, wise, trustworthy, faithful, loving friend who is true to your soul will correct you. He or she will love you enough to warn you and assure you that you are going the wrong way and encourage you to turn around, now!

Jonathan Edwards Memoirs tells about a time Edwards and Whitefield were traveling along together, probably on horseback. Their friendship was firmly based on the gospel ministry. Edwards took the opportunity to bring some correction to Whitefield about two things: Whitefield's penchant to follow feelings and impulses to determine God's will (he made some foolish decisions because of this error), and also his tendency to rather quickly judge other people to be unconverted. How Whitefield received these corrections is unknown, but their friendship remained solid and mutual.

A true friend tells you when you've got ketchup on your chin. He cares enough to tell you the truth, even if it hurts. Notice what an enemy does in verse 6; he kisses you and assures you you're doing well and you should not let anyone tell you what to do. A true friend tells you the truth and does it with love and kindness, like a surgeon who has to cut out the cancer before it spreads. Lovingly, gently, but firmly he cuts and brings healing with his hurting. Dave Harvey describes correcting like this, "This is a soul you're slicing open. Go very slowly. Cut very gently."

Watch Nathan when he had to inflict a faithful wound to the soul of his friend David. He didn't barge in and blast away. First he helped David see his sin with a story and ended with that memorable rebuke surely given in deepest love, maybe even with tears, "David, you are the man!" And David's response? "I have sinned against the Lord!" A godly friend is willing to bring the hard truth to you. And a wise person will receive it and repent.

God's kind of friend is learning how to give and receive encouraging comfort. Proverbs 17:1, *A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.*

In the Hebrew, "at all times" is first in this sentence for emphasis. It could be translated, "In every circumstance a friend loves." Above all, God's kind of friend is a loving encourager. We should work hard to be encouraging friends. I'm thankful for the encouraging friends I have here at this church. I'm sure you are too. Dan Jost has been an encouraging friend from the beginning of our church. I was opening and closing the doors at the Evansville Day School, where we first met as

a church. One day Dan came up beside me and said, "You don't need to be doing that! I've got it." Keith Carter has been an amazingly encouraging friend to me for over 20 years now. He is a 21st century Barnabas, Son of Encouragement. We could call him Keith the Barnabas Carter. He's always encouraging us to read good books and intentionally thinks of how he can encourage others in their walk with Christ.

David had this kind of friend in Jonathan, King Saul's son. Saul was filled with bitter jealousy and hatred toward David and was chasing him all over the wilderness. Jonathan risked his own life to be God's friend to David. 1 Samuel 23:15-17, *Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and **encouraged (strengthened) him in God.** Thus he said to him, 'Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also.'*

That's a genuine "got your back," laying-down-your-life-for-your-friend kind of loving friendship. Jonathan risked everything for David. And he knew how to encourage David in God. What did Jonathan say? He took David's faltering heart and placed it firmly on God's promises. He surely encouraged David with the very truths Jerry Bridges reminds us of in his book *Trusting God*. *David, our God is completely sovereign here. He is in charge. He is infinitely wise. He knows exactly what He's doing. He loves perfectly and nothing will separate you from His love, David! Trust Him."*

We are fallen sinners, stumbling and struggling along in a fallen world. How good to have a godly, wise friend to counsel you, correct you, and comfort you in your journey. Your friendships are God's gifts to you. God is sovereign over your friendships. You moved to Evansville, googled a Reformed church and FBC popped up. You began attending, liked what you heard, joined the Newcomers Class and made a friend or two. Then you got involved in a small group. You came to the ladies' Bible study or joined the men's study and began meeting with one or two others, perhaps reading through a book together. You put yourself out there, getting to know people. Maybe you needed some biblical counsel to handle some stuff in your life, and over time God brought you into a circle of friends, any one of which will give you counsel, correction, and comfort, some closer than others, but still godly friends. You began serving in the nursery, wiping noses, and comforting screaming babies, all the while getting to know others doing the same thing. You served in VBS and at Camp Reveal; friendships often develop through mutual serving. Sometimes you may meet that one special godly friend while you're serving. "Wow, she knows how to handle those kids doing crafts. She's a real servant. Hmmm."

But friendships are not always silky smooth. God brought a trial into your life, a relationship went sour, you offended someone without meaning to, what seemed so easy and sweet suddenly turned hard and complicated. What happened? One thing you can know for sure, God is growing you. God is teaching you and humbling you and working through this hard situation to help you trust Him and become more like His Son. God brought this about to help you learn to show mercy, grace, and forgiveness. No relationship in this fallen world will be seamless and always sweet. Sometimes the closer you get to that friend, the more you'll see their flaws, their failures, their faults. Now your friendship and your love are tested. No one is perfect. Is your friendship just all about you, or are you learning to resolve conflict and esteem others above yourself as Philippians 2:3-5 encourages you to do?

Remember that as wonderful as your friends are, and as much of a godly friend you want to be, there's that one Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). He is the Friend of sinners. Only Christ can satisfy your soul. Only Christ is perfect. Others can give you godly counsel and encouragement, but only Jesus, your wonderful Counselor, will love at all times, through thick and thin, to the uttermost, as He said in the upper room to His disciple friends. He is our brother-friend, born for us as the God-man to redeem us from our adversity, from our sin, laying down His life for us, and bringing us safely to His heavenly Father.

*There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus; no not one, no not one.
Jesus knows all about our struggles; He will guide till the day is done.*