

# Proverbs

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Date: 15 June 2014

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, let's think about Proverbs again. Much of Proverbs consists in wise sayings that often appear to be randomly arranged.

! It's a series of little word pictures. And some are so obvious that they're banal, aren't they? So look at chapter 27 and verse 12. When the righteous triumph, there is great glory. But when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.

Well, you know, it's pretty obvious, isn't it, that? Very, very obvious. Look at chapter 27, verse 1. Sometimes Proverbs expresses something in a very fresh and intriguing way.

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Verse 3. A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food.

[ 1 : 07 ] There's a hint of humor, isn't there, in many places. Look at verse 14. Verse 14 is a very helpful verse. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord. I read it from verse 28. No wonder I've seen it.

None of you noticed. None of you did. You're all just none of you. Anyway, we'll go back to that. Anyway, so 27 verse 12. So the prudence is the danger of hiding themselves, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

27 verse 1. Do not boast about tomorrow. What a great verse. But you do not know what a day may come forth. And then, you've got such great humor, haven't you? In verse 14.

Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing. But, the second half of the book of Proverbs, it seems so random, doesn't it?

We went through it kind of passage by passage. But, the second half seems so random of Proverbs. And yet, as you read it, you reread it, you'll find consistent themes emerge from it.

[ 2 : 15 ] Life on this earth is to be lived in relationship to the creator God. The creator God, who alone is the one, can provide wisdom. And he can make sense of it.

And so the key that unlocks the book of Proverbs is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And that comes up many, many times and sums up the whole book.

It is his love and it is his concern that make all the varied experiences of people of your life meaningful. And he provides you and me with a goal to strive for.

Which lifts us out of the pettiness and the vanity and the futility of kind of our human endeavor. But I think with the book of Proverbs, you really need to kind of get the whole sweep, isn't it?

So I'm not a great fan of people who say, well I read a verse of Proverbs each day. Although there's wisdom in that. I think actually it is reading the large sweeps of Proverbs that we pick up the themes.

[ 3 : 15 ] And if we look at just a few verses at a time, I think you missed that. Because in Proverbs, certain types and certain characters emerge from the book of Proverbs. We've seen them, haven't we? The wise man, the fool, the sluggard, the good wife, the nagging wife.

But among those stands the friends. Friendship is so enormously important to human beings. Carole King, I don't know if you saw the documentary on it this week.

She sang it, didn't you? You've got a friend. I'm with James Taylor. I'd like to sing it to you. No, I'm worried. Now what makes that song so powerful is the recognition that friendship lies deeper in the human personality than romantic love.

Friendship lies deeper in the human personality than romantic love. So she sang, isn't it good to know that you've got a friend? When people can be so cold, they'll hurt you and desert you and take your soul if you let them.

But don't you let them. You just call out my name. And you know that wherever I am, I'll come running. Yeah, yeah, yeah. To see you again. Winter, spring, summer or fall.

[ 4 : 36 ] All you have to do is call and I'll be there. Yes, I will. You've got a friend. And friendship lies deeper in the romantic love.

We long to have a friend. Emerson said, a friend may well be reckoned to a masterpiece of nature. And you may know the poignant story that there was a poet, Rupert Brooks, when he was boarding a transatlantic liner at Southampton.

And he had no one to see him off. He could not bear the prospect of standing at the rail as the boat left the key with nobody there to wave him off. So he paid a small boy to wave a handkerchief until he's out of sight.

Friendship is a universal human need. And we neglect it at our peril. We neglect it at our peril. And I think it's so relevant to us as a congregation.

A congregation made up of different people from different backgrounds and different nationalities.

Some may be here tonight. And this is a painful subject. And you are lovely.

[ 5 : 43 ] And you need friendship. You need friends. And there may be others of us who are maybe in relationships. And we are so caught up in those relationships. That we have let friendships wither on the vine.

And I want to say to you, friendship is a very, very important theme in the Bible. And we neglect it at our peril. And there are pitfalls to be avoided.

And the Pope of Proverbs is very clear on the danger of friendship. The danger of friendship. The dangers of friendship. We are gregarious creatures.

We need companionship. It's not good for man to be alone. So you and I, we must pick our friends carefully. Says the book of Proverbs. You become like those you live with.

We become like those we consort with. Proverbs chapter 13 verse 20. Can you see that? Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. But a companion of fools will suffer harm.

[ 6 : 46 ] Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. Proverbs 24 verse 22 verse 24 and 25. Make no friendship with a man given to anger.

Nor with a wrathful man. Lest you learn his ways. And entangle yourself in a snare. Now we know I get something of the power of peer pressure.

It is extraordinarily hard to resist. Isn't it? But particularly for the young. So let me read you about an experiment. That was conducted on teenagers.

From one of James Dolph's books. There was a team of doctors. That decided to conduct an experiment. To look at the way peer pressure influences young people. And to accomplish this.

They invited 10 teenagers into a room. And they told them they were going to evaluate their perception. In order to learn how well they could see the front of the room. That was the kind of ruse to get them in.

[ 7 : 45 ] How they could see the front of the room from where they sat. In fact all the teenagers would start very close to the front of the room. And everybody could see quite easily. But what the doctors were actually studying.

Was not the students eyesight. But the effects of group pressure. The doctors said we're going to hold up some cards. At the front of the room. And on each card there will be three lines. Line A. Line B. And line C. Each of a different length. In some cases line A will be the longest. And other times line B will be the longest. Other times line C.

Several dozen cards were shown. With the lines in a different order. We'll hold them up and point to each in turn. When we point to the longest line.

Please raise your hand. To show that it's longer than all the others. They repeated the directions. Make sure everybody understood. And then they raised the first card. And pointed to the top line.

[ 8 : 41 ] What one teenager in the group didn't know. Was that the other line had been secretly informed earlier. To vote for the second longest line. In other words. They'd been told to vote wrongly.

The doctors held up the first card. Pointed to line A. Which was clearly shorter. Than line B and C. At this point.

All nine students cooperated in the scheme. And raised their hands. The fellow being studied. Looked around in disbelief. It was obvious that line B. Was the longest line.

And that everybody seemed to think. Line A was the longer line. He later admitted that he thought. I can't have been listening. During the directions. Somehow I must have missed the point. And I better do what everyone else is doing.

Or they laugh at me. And he carefully raised his hand. With the rest of the group. Then the researchers repeated their instructions again. Vote for the longest line. Raise your hand when we come to the longest line.

[ 9 : 37 ] What could be more simple? Then they held up the second card. And again nine people voted for the wrong line. The confused fellow became more tense over his predicament. And eventually he raised his hand with the group once again.

Over and over again. He voted with the group. Even though he knew they were wrong. This one young man was not unusual. In fact more than 75% of the young people tested behaved the same way.

They sat there time after time saying a short line was longer than a longer line. They simply didn't have the courage to say the group is wrong.

I can't explain why. But all you guys are confused. A small percentage. Only 25% out of 100%. 25 out of 100.

The courage to take their stand against the group. Even when the majority was so obviously wrong. And that is what group pressure does. Another very interesting characteristic was released by the study.

[ 10 : 39 ] If just one other student voted for the right line. Then the chances were greatly increased. That the fellow who was being studied. Would also do what he thought was right. We should be surprised by that should we?

You probably listened intently to that. Did it surprise you? Haven't you done it? How many of us who were Christians at school.

Could not stand. When 9 out of 10 told us that the short line was longer than the long line. How many of us adults.

Hadn't done what we knew was right. Or how many of us have done what we knew was wrong. Because the world told us it was right.

It's acceptable. It was fine. Peer pressure. And it's no good you and I trying to laugh at those teenagers being studied. Because we are satisfied too. And so Christian friendship is hugely important for us.

[ 11 : 47 ] Because we are going to stand as Christians at work. In our neighbourhood. In our classroom. And I wonder if you have ever thought about that. I wonder if you have ever prayed about that.

About the sort of people that you associate with. And are friends with. And the influence that they are having on your life. Day by day. Over by moment. Because your friends have an influence. They really do. And perhaps you are somebody who is considering the Christian faith tonight. And you have not yet identified yourself with it. Jesus is not a real and a living saviour to you. Well what aspect of the choice before you.

One aspect will be this. What choice of companion will you go through with life. Who do you want to walk alongside through life. The materialist. Nice as they are. The cheerful and apnal.

Easy going. Pleasure seeking hedonist. Or people who are following Jesus. And the choice is ours. And the book of Proverbs says to me.

[ 12 : 52 ] And it says to you. Choose your friends well. Choose your friends well. So avoid bad friends. 12.26 One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbour.

But the way of the wicked leads them astray. But it also says. To you and I. Avoid being a bad friend. Avoid being a bad friend. There can be a superficiality in friendship.

And I think this is very prevalent in churches. That we are to be warned against. It might not be what we see in 27 verse 14. Whoever blesses his neighbour with a loud voice.

Rising early in the morning will be counted as a cursing. Or it might not be the insensitivity. Of chapter 25 verse 17. Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house. Lest the air be fill of you and hate you.

Or the flatterer. Chapter 29 verse 5. A man who flatters his neighbour. Spreads a net for his feet. Or the practical joker. The madman who throws firebrands around.

[ 13 : 56 ] And arrows. And death. Is the man who deceives his neighbour. And says I'm only joking. Superficial friendship. Proverbs says it's over hearty. It's insensitive.

It's over jokey. And it's all talk. And no reality. And perhaps the most serious warning. Is against being a fair weather friend.

Look at chapter 19. Verses 6 and 7. Many seek the favour of a generous man. And everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. All a poor man's brothers hate him.

How much more do his friends go far from him. He pursues them with words. But does not have them. And that is one of a number of warnings.

It's kind of fair weather friends. There is a right motive for friendship. The right motive for friendship. Is that we might give and receive encouragement.

[ 14 : 55 ] To live lives. The way that we ought to live. That is the right motive for friendship. But there are wrong motives for friendship. That we may benefit materially.

Or in terms of power. Or prestige. Or popularity. And again I think beware there. Of the endless search. For the inner circle. Do you know what I mean?

That feeling in life. That there is an inner circle. Of companionship. Of friendship. That we have not yet quite broken our way into. An inner circle. Where our decisions are made.

Where power resides. Where the really popular and cool people are. The decision makers. Where acceptability lies. And that group we long to be part of.

We long to be in that. And it is an endless search. Because if our motive is for power or acceptability. However far we get in.

[ 15 : 55 ] We will always feel that there is another inner circle that we are not part of. And that search goes on forever. The dangers of friendship. Avoid bad friends.

And avoid being a bad friend. Don't be a farewell friend. Secondly. The gift of friendship. Friendship is a talent.

It is a talent that we all have. That you have. And which we can use. By giving our friendship to others. Now I think we often don't see this.

So we think that we friends float in. And they float out of our lives. And we take the process for granted. It just happens. Or it doesn't just happen.

But I think we need to realise. That our friendship. Is a gift that we have received. From God. And I can use it.

[ 16 : 54 ] As I choose to. I can choose to be friends. I can take my friendship to someone. And share it with them. And I'm responsible for the process.

You see friendship need not just happen. It is a gift to be used. And I don't know if you've discovered that. About your own friendship.

Yes. Every single person has this gift. This gift of friendship. And you and I use it. As we choose. Now you may have noticed.

As you've read through Proverbs. That the common word for friend in Proverbs. Is often translated neighbour. Same word. Neighbour. Companion. Friend. The lesson is absolutely clear.

We need to turn our neighbours. Into our friends. Friendship is precious. Friendship is costly. It is fragile.

[ 17 : 52 ] And it needs to be worked out. As I think tonight. One of the applications is. We need to go home. And we need to think. What are the friendships. That I really need to work on.

What are the friendships. I have let wither on the vine. Don't send them a Facebook message. Don't tweet them. Or whatever it is you do. Give them a ring.

Go and see them. Because friendship is precious. 27 verse 10. Look at that warning. Do not forsake your friend. And your father's friend.

Do not go to your brother's house. In the day of your calamity. That is a neighbour who is near. That a brother who is far away. So we live. Don't we. In a very unstable. Transient society.

Very few of us. That's what I think. How many of us. I don't know. Probably three. Four of us. Are living in the neighbourhood. We were born. I think of Alice. Very few of us.

[ 18 : 55 ] Is there the Sebbers. Not those. It's Chris. I think there might be a couple of others. But very few of us. Are living. In the neighbourhood where we were born. And in a church like this.

What happens. Well you make good friends. Don't you. I see this with some of you. You make really close friendships. And then people go and move. To the other ends of the earth. And we need to keep making friends.

And starting from scratch. And exercising this gift. Of friendship. To build up friends. Around us. And we need to work on it.

And we need to pay the price. That true friendship demands. And I think it's easy. To become jaded. In a church like this. Where people come. And people go. And you can kind of.

Hold back. And I think we've got to keep. Encouraging one another. No. Friendship is costly. But it is a wonderful thing. And it may be tonight. That you need to do.

[ 19 : 53 ] A friendship audit. On your lives. And are we letting friendships. Just happen. Or not happen. As the case may be. As if we're kind of. The victims. Of unfortunate forces.

In this matter of friendship. Or should we be. Taking charge of it. I know. Some Americans. Are in a. You know. One of these.

Airport base. You know. Not the art. Whatever the air. Air force base. Isn't it. They turned up. To church in America. On the first Sunday. They went to a couple. Or a friend of mine. And said. We are going to be friends.

They never met my friends before. And they said. We're going to be friends. We've got a year. We can't waste time. Mucking around. We are going to be friends. Now there's something in me. I quite like about that. Isn't it. You don't have any choice. We are going to be friends.

And it may be something. That we need to have. That kind of audit. Working harder. At some friendships. Friendships. Seeking to maintain. Some friendships. That are strained.

[ 20 : 52 ] Seeking to turn neighbours. Into friends. Perhaps actually. It may be lending some other friendships. Cool. That aren't leading us onto godliness. Or lapse. Proverbs says.

Work at friendships. Do not leave them to chance. We've got the dangers of friendships. Avoid bad friends. Remember the power of the peer group.

Avoid being a bad friend. And the gift of friendship. Work at it. And now finally. The good friend. And Proverbs gives us this lovely picture. Of the good friend.

Look at chapter 17. Verse 17. A friend loves at all times. And a brother is born for adversity. So the emphasis in the book of Proverbs.

Is not just on the virtue of the friend. The goodness of the friend. But on his or her availability. Their accessibility. So friendship.

[ 21 : 53 ] Friendship is about relational proximity. I hate phrases like that. I absolutely hate them. But it's the best thing to come up with. Friendship is about relational proximity.

It's about being close. And about being available. That's what that verse is saying. Relational proximity. A friend must be accessible. They must be available.

William Pitt paid the tribute to a fellow politician. Henry Dundas. And he said. Dundas is no orator. He's not even a speaker. But he will go out with you in any weather.

Well that is friendship. Well that is friendship isn't it? To be prepared to go out. In any weather. A good friend is constant. Secondly.

He or she is also candid. He or she will know when to be silent. Chapter 11 verse 12. Whoever belittles his neighbour lacks sense.

[ 22 : 55 ] But a man of understanding remains silent. And he'll know when to reassure. Chapter 27 verse 9. Oil and perfume make the heart glad.

And the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. But he or she will be ready to speak the truth in love. And those verses from chapter 27.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse many other kisses of an enemy. As iron sharpens iron. One man sharpens another. And how we need friends don't we? Friends who will help us to be better people. To love the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if friends love one another. They will not hold back from telling us what we need to hear. Even when it hurts. And good friends should disagree at times.

[ 24 : 05 ] And good friends should disagree strongly at times. Billy Graves says to my husband and wife. If they both agree about everything all the time.

One of them is unnecessary. I think that's good. We need friends don't we? I certainly need friends. Who will not hold back.

From telling us what we need to hear. Even when it hurts. Do you have such a friend? I hope so. Men you have such a friend. I really hope you do men. But as you read the book of Proverbs.

What you find is this portrait of the good friend. Is pointing forward isn't it? It's pointing forward to one person. The wisdom of God is pointing forward to the wisdom of God.

[ 25 : 02 ] Which is Jesus Christ. And there are friends in life who pretend to be friends. But there is a friend who is such a little brother. And behind all merely human friendship stands.

The one who is called the friend of sinners. The one who says to his disciples. I no longer call you servants. I call you friends.

You are my friends. If you do as I command. You've got a friend. You said Carl King. And I doubt very much she was thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But for every one of us in him. We've got a friend. A constant friend. Do you see Jesus' accessibility.

And availability. To you and me as we go through this week. You cannot take your husband. Or your wife with you to work probably. You cannot take your parents to school.

[ 26 : 09 ] You cannot take your children with you. You can't take your sweetheart. Whoever that might be. Through some of the experiences that you will face. We cannot take whoever it might be with us.

But we will be in his friendship. And his companionship. And his company through every moment of this coming week. He is a candid friend isn't he? The Lord Jesus does not flatter.

He will not soft soap us. He will tell us the truth. And he will bring us face to face with the truth. And the last resort.

This is a comment on the whole book really. Christianity is not a challenge to you and me to be more friendly. To be better friends. Or to have better friends. Christianity is an offer of friendship.

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. And that's the book of Proverbs. An offer of friendship. From God.

[ 27 : 16 ] And we are called to accept. That one friend. On whom all friendship is based. Bad friends. Dangerous to avoid all their bad friends.

And avoid being a bad friend. The gift of friendship. That you and I are to work. That's it. And this good friend. Who is there for you and I.

To love. And to live with. Let's pray. Amen.