

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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Proverbs: Friendship  
Proverbs 27:5-10**

Good morning, everyone. My name is Paul Tshihamba, and I am the missions pastor here at CPC. It is good to be with all of you. We are in the middle of a series, looking at the wisdom of Proverbs, what it means to be a wise person guided by wisdom. How do we acquire wisdom? How do we live a life where our decisions are made on the basis of wisdom?

Today we are focusing on friendship, the value of friendships, the meaning of friendships, the purpose of friendships. Samuel Coleridge was a well-known British poet. Some of you may remember him from your college lit classes. He wrote, for example, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Nightingale*. What you may not know about Samuel Coleridge is that his wife died of cancer when she was extremely young. He missed her terribly and had a really hard time dealing with her death. He went into a major depression and tried to solve his problems through the use of opium. He became addicted to opium and his life fell apart. He found a friend named William Wordsworth, another famous British poet, familiar to those of you who admire poetry. Wordsworth came alongside his friend Coleridge and tried to calm the raging voices inside his head. He stood with him through thick and thin, through the toughest moments of his life.

One of Coleridge's best-known works was a tribute to his friend, William Wordsworth, and one of the best lines in that poem is, "Friendship is a sheltering tree." Now think about that for a moment. I really love that imagery. I grew up in the tropics, and we had five giant mango trees in our backyard. When I think about this image, it takes me right back to my childhood, and it's a real comforting thought. Think of friends as being like big, beautiful trees with leafy limbs that come around us and spread over us, bringing shade from the sun and protection from the blast of adversity and winter's wind of loneliness. That's what a friend is, a sheltering tree.

We're going to spend the next few minutes tying together some of the thoughts that Proverbs gives us about our relationships, about friendship. One of my goals, really, is to convince us that perhaps we may not have all the friends we need. Perhaps we don't have enough friends. I say that because we live in a culture that kind of mitigates against friendship. Too many of us are raised in church settings where we are told, "When you are mature enough, when you get really spiritual, if you've got your relationship with God handled, if you have God in your life, that's pretty much all you need."

Well, Proverbs would tell us a resounding "No, that's not true!" There are massive amounts of Proverbs that deal with the importance of friendship, so that's the first thing I want to say.

**Friendships are essential.** They are not optional. There's just no substitute for friends who take away our loneliness; when we feel neglected, to give us attention; when we're hurting, to

comfort us; to call us out when we need comforting. Proverbs will tell us that friends aren't just optional; in fact, they're totally essential. Proverbs 17:17,

<sup>17</sup> A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

You're a blessed person if, in whatever challenges you are going through in your life, a friend is there with you. Proverbs says you are a blessed person if you have friends to surround you because they love at all times.

<sup>24</sup> A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother [Proverbs 18:24].

There are times we need those folks who stick to us, closer than a sibling, than someone connected to us by blood. But I think there can be too much sometimes. Proverbs 25:17,

<sup>17</sup> Don't set foot too frequently in your neighbor's house . . . .

and I love this part here,

. . . lest he become weary of you and hate you.

There is a great scene in *Crocodile Dundee*, you know the movie about this wild, rugged guy from the Australian outback who comes to New York. He is brought over by a woman who is an American newspaper reporter. She brings him to a glitzy party in New York City, and they are talking to a woman there about all sorts of problems she has. When the woman leaves, Dundee turns to the reporter and asks, "What's wrong with her? What's up with her?" The reporter says, "She has lots of problems, but I guess the biggest problem is that she's just changed shrinks." Dundee says, "Shrink? What's a shrink?" And the reporter says, "That's a person you pay to tell your problems to." "Oh," he says, "you mean she doesn't have any mates?" "Mates? What's a mate?" "Mates, you know, friends. That's what mates are for. Back home in Australia, we tell our problems to Wally and Wally tells everyone else, and that takes care of all our problems."

I think there's a lot in that statement that's good. There was a time when most of us knew our next-door neighbors. We'd talk over the fence. For many of us, those days are gone when we would tell Wally and there was a whole network of friends and Wally told all of our friends. What happened then? Our friends came together and somehow our problems got solved. That was a sheltering grove of trees.

Back in Genesis 2 before there was ever a fall, before there was ever a sin, Adam already had a problem. God and Adam would walk alone in the garden in the cool of the night, but Adam had a problem. God showed up in Genesis 2:18.

<sup>18</sup> The LORD God said, "It isn't good for the man to live alone. I need to make a suitable partner for him."

I heard a story last week about a woman who lost her husband to a drunken driver. Three small children. She grieved. She is a Christian woman, and for a year she worked really hard trying to get through the hard part of her grief, working through her emotions. Then she begins to tell

others and in a woman's Bible study, she gets vulnerable and says, "You know, I am dealing with another emotion, one that I hadn't anticipated. I've grieved. I have worked through my grief. It has been about a year now and I am lonely." One of the women in the small group Bible study, one of her Christian friends, says, "Well, you have God, don't you?" Implication: all you need is God. Implication: if you were a good Christian, you wouldn't be lonely. If you have God, that is enough. "I am lonely." "Well, you have God," they told her.

She needed comfort and received condemnation. Six months later she attempted suicide, even with three preschoolers to take care of. It is not good for a man or a woman, for human beings, to be alone. What that says is, you can have the closest relationship with God that you can ever imagine, but that's not enough. You see, we need God. We don't question that. We need Him, but we also need each other, which leads me to the second point.

**Friends impact our lives, so choose them carefully.** Chose them wisely. Proverbs 13:20,

<sup>20</sup> Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Friends aren't neutral. If you run with good friends, you will tend to become better. If you run with wise people, you will tend to become wiser. If you walk with bad people, you will tend to get worse. If you run with foolish people, you will tend to become rather foolish. This is why the parents of teenagers are so concerned about the choices that their kids make, because they have been around the block. We have been around the block. We know this is true. If you are a teenager here today, I want to encourage you that when your parents ask about your friends, don't blow them off. Don't get angry with them. They've been where you are. Proverbs 28:7,

<sup>7</sup> He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons . . . .

Now this verse is repeated several times throughout Proverbs. You can fill in a different word here, but a companion of gluttons, a companion of fools, a companion of prostitutes, a companion of gluttons, disgraces

. . . disgraces his father.

Proverbs 12:26,

<sup>26</sup> The righteous person is cautious in his friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

You see, you want to choose cautiously, wisely. If you are a rebel, you pick friends who tend to be rebels. If you are a gossip, you usually run with gossips. If you are not a gossip but run with gossips, chances are you are going to be influenced in that way. That is what that Scripture is saying there. When we choose, we want to choose so that our friends are energizers, building into our lives rather than tearing them down, like perfume to the heart.

<sup>9</sup> Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness . . . .

the sweetness

. . . of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice [Proverbs 27:9].

Do you have any friends in your life who are like perfume? I have friends I just like being around because when I'm around them, everything is better. They make me a better person. They are like perfume to my life. Think of some people in your life who when you're around them, when you spend time with them, it's like perfume wafting over your soul. Some of you would smile and go, "I've got some of those." Some of us would say, "We don't have anybody like that." It is good to have friends. It is good to choose good friends.

Jesus chose His friends carefully, didn't he? Before He chose the 12 disciples, He had met all of them. He had spent time with them. The night before He selected the 12, He fasted and prayed all night long. We sometimes tend to forget how deep His friendships went. We sometimes think of Doubting Thomas, old Doubting Thomas. I think he gets a bad rap. "Unless I put my finger in the nail prints in Your hands and unless I put my finger in the scar in Your side, I won't believe You are resurrected." Jesus actually lets him put his finger there and for the rest of history, he's known as Doubting Thomas, the guy who didn't believe.

But we miss some of the good stuff about Thomas. About a month earlier Jesus had decided it was time to go to Jerusalem, and what does Thomas say? He says, "No, no, no. Things aren't good in Jerusalem. If You go there, they are going to kill You!" Nevertheless, the Scriptures say, Jesus turned and faced Jerusalem. He started walking, and it was Thomas who said to the rest of the disciples,

<sup>16</sup> . . . . "Let us also go, that we may die with him [John 11:16]."

That's a pretty good friend. Jesus was careful in selecting his friends. Proverbs 18:24,

<sup>24</sup> A man of many companions may come to ruin . . . .

You can have a whole lot of friends, but they don't always help you.

. . . but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Can you imagine that there is a different level of friendship between somebody who is just a companion and you are around them and everything gets ruined, and the friend who sticks closer than a brother, a sibling, a sister, a mother? Of course you could. What we are going to see here is that it is not enough to just have a friend. Proverbs talks about multiple levels of friendship, not just one, but I'm going to talk about **four classifications that I want to flow out of the life of Jesus**.

First of all, we will talk about *acquaintances*. We have lots and lots of acquaintances. Yesterday afternoon just out of curiosity, I went on my Facebook account and saw that I have 1,520 friends. Now half of those people I don't think I would even recognize if they were standing right in front of me. Among them are all of these classifications of friends, but that is just an illustration of how sometimes the word *friend* can mean very little. You know my name. I know your name. We're acquaintances. Acquaintances are people you basically have sporadic, superficial connection with. "Hey, how are you doing?" "Oh, I'm fine," and I'm thinking, "I'm not really fine, but I can't tell you." You cannot share your deepest pain and deepest secrets with

them. Jesus had a lot of acquaintances. In John, chapter 2, you can see how Jesus handled his acquaintances.

<sup>23</sup> . . . many people believed in his name because they saw the miraculous signs he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.

He knew what was in the heart of a person. There were a lot of these folks, a multitude of these folks, the Bible says. Jesus knew them and chatted with them, but they were just acquaintances.

Then there are *casual* friends. This is the next level. There is more contact, more common interests. You feel free to ask specific questions perhaps, maybe even ask an opinion of a casual friend. A little closer but not close. You still keep a safe distance. Jesus had a lot of casual friends. In Matthew 11:19, they criticized Jesus but the criticism was a blessing.

19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

They could only say that Jesus spent a lot of time with those folks. He had a lot of casual friends.

Then *close* friends, a little more intense level. Similar life goals, free to ask hard questions of. These are people you do things with, play tennis with or basketball, folks you do life with. Jesus had a lot of close friends. "How are you doing?" "Oh, not very well. I found a stash of pot tucked under Lizzie's mattress last night." Now your close friend might say, "I'm so sorry to hear about that" because she knows Lizzie. Luke 10 says Jesus had 72 close friends. He called His 72 close friends together and said, "I want you to go out into the villages and preach the good news. I want you to heal the sick. I want you to cast out demons." Those 72 people went out there. They were all fired up. They were excited. Then they came back to Jesus and said, "Oh, man, it was awesome! We had a great time." These were His close friends, people he had invested time in.

The 12 disciples were Jesus' close friends. Jesus gathered 12 of His close friends together and said to them in John 15,

<sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants . . . Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You see an openness there.

But there is an even deeper level. You and I might call them our *intimate* friends. Regular contact, deep commitment, mutual character development, totally open and honest. You have fewer intimate friends. You take all kind of criticism, constructive comments, or reproof from an intimate friend and feel free to give it back. Jesus had intimate friends. As I said, He had selected His twelve disciples, but when it came time for the most important, the most significant moment in His earthly ministry, His Transfiguration, the Bible says that He picked Peter and James and John. "Hey, guys, I want you to enjoy this moment with Me."

1 . . . Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

These three guys were His most intimate friends.

Now let me show you how this works. I want to put an inverted V up on the screen. We have these classifications: the acquaintances, the casual friends, the close friends, and finally the intimate friends. So you if have this V here and at the top, I'm going to write the word *open*. You are less open with acquaintances, a little more open with casual friends, a good deal more open with close friends, and totally open with your intimate friends. There are no secrets from an intimate friend.

Let's turn the V right side up. You have lots and lots of acquaintances, lots of casual friendships, some close friends, and very, very few intimate friends. Up here I'm going to write the word *numbers*. The numbers become less and less, the more you become intimate with an individual. The more open you are, the fewer friends you have. In fact, I have heard it said that if in your lifetime, you have two or three intimate friends, you are a very blessed person. Many people, I would venture to say most people, go through life and never have a real intimate friend.

That might be true here this weekend. Some of you can look back over your lives and you are sitting here pleased because you have two or three intimate friends. If you are married, you are especially blessed if your spouse is an intimate friend. Some of you are sitting here going, "You know, nobody has ever known me. Nobody has ever really, really known me. I've never had an intimate friend." My premise is that most of us don't have enough friends, and life is a lot harder when you don't have enough friends.

Lastly I want to say that **friends sometimes betray us, let us down**. It is really startling how many times in Proverbs the subject of betrayal comes up. Sometimes friends disappoint us. Sometimes friends just flat out let us down. That really makes sense, doesn't it, because if you get really close to somebody, then they are the ones who have the potential to cause pain. It's not the ones you have a casual relationship with. King David had Ahithophel, his most trusted advisor. Ahithophel conspired with David's son, Absalom, to overthrow him and humiliate him in front of the kingdom. Caesar had Brutus. Jesus had Judas, and you have fill-in-the-blank. Whose name will you put there? We all have had friends who have disappointed us, turned their backs on us. I love what G. K. Chesterton says. He says, "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people." I love that! Proverbs acknowledges that betrayal among friends happens. Proverbs 27:10,

<sup>10</sup> Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend . . . .

Do you know what that says to me? It is actually possible to forsake, turn your back on your friend. I heard a heart-wrenching story from a pastor about a woman we'll call Jane. At a conference they were both attending, Jane started sharing her story during a small group session. With tears in her eyes she shared an experience she had had with her parents in childhood. Her dad had wanted to go on an outing somewhere and her mom really didn't want to go. Her dad insisted and so reluctantly her mom went but was angry about it. The mom and dad took Jane over to a neighbor's home to be cared for while they were away on this trip and while she was at the neighbor's, she was attacked by their dog. She said, "I remember waking up with

blood all over my face and chest, my heart racing in terror. When my mom came to pick me up, she was really angry.” Now Jane began to sob. “My mom was not angry at the neighbors. She was angry at *me*. My mom said, “How could you let this happen?” Of course, at this point everybody in the small group was stunned. Jane said, “But it gets worse. The dog hadn’t been vaccinated. I remember my mom and dad talking between themselves about what to do. Rabies has no symptoms until it’s too late. If they took me for shots, the neighbors would get upset and might have to put their dog down, so they decided not to get shots for me. I learned that day that the neighbor’s dog meant more to my mom and dad than I did.”

Talk about rejection! Talk about betrayal! But if a parent could do that to a child, could you imagine that Ahithophel could do that to David? Or if a parent could do that to a child, could you imagine that Judas could do that to Jesus? If a parent could do that to a child, could you imagine that fill-in-the-blank could do that to you? Friends sometimes forsake us. In fact, Proverbs gives us instructions about how to respond when a friend hurts you. Proverbs 24,

<sup>28</sup> Do not testify against your neighbor without a reason, and do not deceive with your lips. <sup>29</sup> Do not say, “I’ll treat him as he treated me. I’ll pay him back for what he has done to me.”

We don’t get even because then we get into that retribution thing, that bitterness cycle. It really can destroy a friendship. Instead, here is some advice. Proverbs 17,

9 He who covers over an offense promotes love . . . .

Now is that saying that you just ignore it as if it didn’t happen? That is *not* what it is saying here. Let’s just say you’ve had a friend for years but the friend has really hurt you. My temptation would be to put up my defenses. “You have really hurt me so I’m going to put up my defenses. I’m going to write you off.” I’ve known him for twenty years and if he has done something really stupid, it would sure be a shame for me to give up twenty years of friendship just because of a stupid thing. Friendships are too precious to throw away. I want you to underline this passage from Ecclesiastes, chapter 7. It says this.

21 Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you-- 22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

What is this saying? Your friend may have hurt you pretty badly, but take it easy. You’ve probably done a little hurting yourself in your lifetime. Friendships are too important to throw away. That’s why there’s a large grouping of Proverbs about cultivating friends. Friends don’t come automatically. Proverbs 18,

24 A man who has friends must himself be friendly . . . .

One day a wagon came through town to Farmer Jones’ gate. The folks in the wagon said, “We’re moving here to Mankato. Can you tell us what neighbors here are like?” Farmer Jones says, “Well, what were the neighbors like where you came from?” The guy says, “They were the worst people ever. They were gossipy. They were unkind. They were indifferent. We’re glad we are moving away.” Farmer Jones says, “You are going to find the same kind of people right here.” Next day another wagon comes through town. They are coming from the same place the other wagon came from, and they ask the same thing. “We are moving here to Mankato and we

want to find out what the neighbors are like here.” Farmer Jones says, “Well, what are they like where you came from?” The people say, “They are the very best people in the world. They are kind and considerate. They love us. They are generous. It breaks our hearts to be moving away.” Farmer Jones says, “That is exactly the same kind of people you are going to find here in Mankato.” It’s all about your perspective. It’s all about how you approach it.

Friendships need to be cultivated. If you are going to have friends, you need to show yourself friendly. The model that we have for friendship, of course, is Jesus Christ Himself. In John 15 He said, “I no longer consider you my servants but my friends.” Just before that Jesus says,

<sup>12</sup> My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you.

When Jesus Christ says this, suddenly the whole history of the world can be understood in terms of friendship. God is a friendship. The Biblical God is a friendship: Father-Son-Holy Spirit, knowing and loving one another. And, He made us in His image, meaning we need friendship.

Jesus Christ on the cross experienced what we should have experienced so we can basically say, “He was the perfect friend. He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He is a friend who goes to the mat, to the depths of hell, so that we don’t perish.” If I know that Jesus Christ has let me all the way in, that Jesus Christ has welcomed me as a friend and loves me no matter what, then I can move out of being afraid of being let down because all my eggs are not in the human friendship basket. Then when I am freed to be the friend I want to be, the friend I’m meant to be, I’ll find myself getting the friends I need to have, and so will you.

God, we thank You so much that we have a friend in You. We thank You, God, that because of Your model of friendship to us, we can truly be a friend. We pray, God, for this Word to sink down to the depths of our souls. In Christ’s Name. Amen.

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