

Friendship

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[0 : 0 0] This is our 13th look at the book of Proverbs and we've seen that the book of Proverbs says that you can either be wise or you can be a fool. What we've said about wisdom so far is that wisdom is learning how to live when there are no rules telling you how to live. In other words, to do that you have to be in relationship with God which Proverbs calls the fear of the Lord. You have to know that God's created the world, that the world has a moral order, a creational norm that he's applied to this world, relational laws, but it's more than just being moral, it's actually knowing how to live well skillfully before God when there aren't rules telling you exactly how to live and that's most of our lives. There aren't specific commandments in the Bible telling you how to do every single thing, every decision you make in life and so wisdom is the ability to apply the principles of Scripture in the light of God to all the situations you have in life and live life well. Tonight the book of Proverbs is telling us that if you want to be wise you have to have friends. There's a deep association in Proverbs as well as across the whole Bible between friendship, wisdom and blood and you'll see what I mean in a minute. We're going to look at three things. First, that friends are thicker than blood. Second, that true friends will make you bleed. Third, we'll look at the friend who bled. I think across all that you'll see that with the Bible's message about friendship is that true friendship is loving somebody all the way to the point of great cost to you. That's true friendship in the Bible. First, friends are thicker than blood. We said this a number of times recently but the English language doesn't have all the words for love that most languages do.

For instance in Greek which is what the New Testament was written in, there are seven different words for the word love and that's appropriate as it is in most languages besides English actually because there are all sorts of different ways of loving people. Of course the famous example in the 20th century, a book about this was C.S. Lewis's Four Loves and in this book he just gives four that you see in Greek instead of the seven that we see in the New Testament but the first that he writes about is called Storgi. It's just the Greek word for a particular type of love and Storgi, it's the hardest one to kind of get your language, get words around. It's affection for home. It's what many of you will do when you get off the plane in Jackson and you'll say, oh, that's Storgi. It's the love of leather bound books in a beautiful library. It's the love of a good ending to a great film. That's Storgi. You know what I'm talking about. There's of course Eros and Eros is the love of face to face. It's seeing her across the room when you're 19 or whatever. It's the love of romance and it's the love that ultimately keeps people on this world. The greatest of loves that Lewis writes about from the Bible is the love

Agape. Agape, you've heard of Agape. It's divine love. The greatest of love, it's what Jesus Christ introduces into the world and it's the love of steadfast loyalty to sinners.

It's love that really cost. But Lewis writes his fourth essay on the word philos, which is the Greek word for friend. Philos, a friend, and Greek literally means a very particular type of love and the way he describes it is that friendship, the love of friendship, is not love that is born in standing across from somebody face to face like romance or Eros.

It's the love of two people that are standing shoulder to shoulder looking together at something that they have in common. An interest that's out in front of them that they have in common. So he puts it like this, friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, wait, you too? I thought I was the only one. It's shoulder to shoulder, interest, that's where it's born, but it can't stay there. It has to become face to face. Committed friendships have to then turn into deep commitment and love for one another. Like any other great relationship, friendship is founded in knowing somebody and truly loving them. And so it's become a bit of a cliché, I think, now, but Tim Keller's really famous quote now about being known and being loved. It's worth saying again, everybody wants this. And so everybody wants friendship to be loved but not truly known. That's comforting, but that's superficial.

[5 : 11] To be known and not loved, that's the human being's greatest fear for somebody who you really are and not love you. And why? Because it's not, why are we so afraid of that? Because it's not good for human beings to be alone. And that's how it was from the very beginning.

In Genesis chapter two, God creates a woman, Eve, for the first time. And before that relationship was one of eros or romance, which it certainly was, before that it was friendship. And when she's first formed out of Adam's own body, the first thing he says is, at last, at last, one of these, like me, in other words, he was aching for a being in this world that was like him, for companionship, for deep friendship. And so one theologian puts it like this, Adam wasn't longing for a companion because he was imperfect, but because he was perfect.

The ache for friendship is not the result of sin. It's good. We need friends. It's core to who we are as human beings. It's how God created the world. And it's rare today.

What we're talking about this type of friendship, it's rare today. Robert Bella, the sociologist at Berkeley who recently passed away, we've said this a couple of times in our series, he characterized the 20th and 21st century with scholars called the late modern world as an age of the plague of expressive individualism. And some of you have heard that phrase, but basically an expressive individualist culture, people find their worth entirely from within themselves. And so it's a culture that talks a lot about self-esteem and about turning in and finding out your own identity through your feelings and searching yourself. It's a culture that is less concerned about being defined by external relationships. And because of that, Bella says, we've had the plague of expressive individualism means the plague, the disease of loneliness. Loneliness. It's an epidemic in the 21st century. And it doesn't take very much research to find out how much it's changed from the pre-modern era to today, how much lonelier people are. And we know this, it's especially true often times of ministers. And the statistics, and I have a couple studies that I'm not going to reference them for the sake of time, but it says that it's especially men in the 21st century that are prone more than anybody to loneliness, because men are much less likely to start face-to-face relationships than women often are. And so the first point of the book of

Proverbs, which we're diving into now, is you need friends. And so chapter 20, verse 6, Proverbs, many a person professes loyalty, but who can find a loyal friend? Many a person will profess their loyalty to you, but who can really find a true loyal friend? In other words, he's saying everybody's longing for friendship, but they're hard to find, they're hard to get, they're hard to grab onto, and Lewis goes on in that book and says this, why? Why is this the case? And he says because friendship is unnecessary. It's like philosophy, it's like art. It has no survival value. In other words, for busy 21st century people, when you don't have a lot of time, the first type of relationship that's going to go for you is one that doesn't have survival value. What is a relationship with survival value?

[9 : 04] Well, it's a relationship that you can't get out of. It's a relationship you have to have. If you have a child, you'll never stop being a parent. If you're a child, you'll never stop being a son or a daughter. You have to be an employee. You have to be an employer, perhaps, if you're a boss. You've got to work to live to eat. These are all survival relationships, and you've got to have them. But when people are busy in an age of expressive individualism, the first thing that's going to go is relationships that aren't necessary. Friendship's not necessary.

It's not a survival relationship, but we want them. Here's what Lewis says. Friendship has no survival value, but it is one of those things that gives value to survival, like art, like philosophy, like the beauty of architecture. It gives value to survival. It's a great gift of God. So, 26, it's hard to come by. It's not central to the late modern culture that we live in. Part of the fault of that, I think, is that the term friend has been really trivialized, and the concept of friendship has been really trivialized. This is especially in some ways due to the way the term is used on social media. When you use the term friend for something that you can have a thousand of, then the term no longer means what it did in history.

It's been trivialized. The word friend now actually means acquaintance and maybe someone that you have no knowledge of whatsoever. Another reason for that is, look, friendship, it's not like eros. It's not like romance. It doesn't quicken the pulse. It doesn't make the heart flutter. If you listen to music and you go buy a bunch of albums from the 20th and 21st century, just make a stack of how many will list 10 songs about great friendships versus how many will be about great romance. Obviously, it'll be skewed, of course, but friendship is central to both the way God has organized the world and it is a means of his providential care of humanity. Humans get taken care of in God's providence through friendship. In one sense, friendship is at the center of the entire history of redemption. We'll see that in just a second. The first point of Proverbs, you need friends.

Get friends. You need them. Everybody needs friendship. You need them. You need them. You need deep friendship. Why? Because friendship, Proverbs is saying, and we'll see this in just a second, is thicker than blood. Proverbs 17, 17, a friend loves at all times. A brother is born for adversity. A friend loves at all times, but a brother is born for adversity.

A sibling is born for adversity. Now, these Proverbs aren't rules that apply in 100% of cases, but they are general principles of wisdom. What the author is saying is this, that family is going to be there in times of adversity, generally. A sibling's got to be there whenever you're in deep suffering. They got to come because it's blood, because they have to.

[12 : 47] That's the rule. Family will be there when they have to, but a friend. A friend loves at all times. What's the difference? Your family's got to be there because they're your family, but friends are people who actually like you. Family's got to show up, but friends are the people who actually chose you. They wanted you. They're thicker than blood. This is what Jesus is getting at when he says, who is my brother and my sister and my mother and my father? Who are these people? Those people that are doing the will of God, the people I'm walking side by side, shoulder to shoulder with. They're the people that love me and want me. It's thicker than blood. It's bigger than family. The great example of friendship, of course, in the Bible is Jonathan and David, and it's spoke of them. They're not blood related, but it says that their souls were knit together. Friendship is thicker than blood. We know that because we know that great relationships are all fundamentally friendships.

If you haven't been married that long, but I do know that in marriage, there are all sorts of love. Of course, the love of romance is absolutely necessary, the eros that Lewis describes. Really great marriage, of course, is deep, abiding friendship. It's really liking the other person and really wanting them for who they are and chasing after them and all their foes. It's knowing them and loving them. That's friendship. Proverbs says the same thing two other times in chapter 27, verse 10. Do not forsake your friend or your father's friends. Do not go to your brother's house on the day of your calamity. Don't go to your sibling's house. And David, better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.

Now of course, they're not literally saying, don't ever run to your family. That's not the point. The point is to establish the thickness of friendship, of the Bible's idea of friendship. It says it again in 1824. A person of many companions will come to ruin. So there's the condemnation of Facebook friends. Just kidding. A person of many companions will come to ruin.

But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So here's friendship so far in the book of Proverbs. It's very different from what we think of often times today. It's very deep. It's very committed. It's more like one to three people total. That's what it's talking about. You can't have many of these, the type of friend that's being described here. It's intimate. It's committed. It's people who deeply like you and love you and it's hard to come by. So what does real friendship look like? Secondly, we could do a whole series on this, but I'm just going to say one thing that real friendship looks like. This is what's really central in the book of Proverbs. Second point, true friends will make you bleed. For real friendship, and Proverbs at least, says that true friends will make you bleed. So 1226, a friend who is righteous is a guide to you. But the way of the wicked will lead you astray. Now everybody knows that who we are as people and our personalities is formed up by the kind of relationships we have by the people that we're around all the time. When you're a child, much of your formation is based on your parents and the way they raised you. But as you know, you get older and older and more independent and more independent, what the Proverb is simply saying is that the friends you have really matter in your formation. The type of friendship, a friend who is righteous will be your guide, but a friend who is the way of the wicked will lead you astray. And that's basically what the really famous passage in 2717 is getting at, the one that everybody has memorized probably as iron sharpens iron, so one person, so one man sharpens another. But how? How? And in that very same passage, it says this, blessed are the wounds of a friend. The literal word there means something more like blessed are the knife stabbings of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy is deceitful.

In other words, better to have a friend who is willing to slice you open than a person who's going to flatter you. Better to have a friend who will cut you open and cut you deep than a person who's going to flatter you. This is why one poet says it like this, some people would rather make enemies instead of real friends than real friends.

[17 : 46] And that's why I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, I'm saying this, make enemies instead of real friends because the first is a lot easier.

Because here's what the Proverbs is saying, real friendship follows the paradigm of truth and love. And Paul says it in the epistles, friendship is speaking the truth in love.

Now what does he mean like that? If you're one of those people that, if you're willing to really tell people the truth but you do it without love, it hardens and it kills and it cuts, it's not the type of cut that this Proverbs is talking about, it's the type of wound that really destroys when you speak the truth without love.

But if you love everybody, if you love your friends without telling them the truth, that's not deep friendship, that's superficial, that's what's being said here.

In other words, what it's saying is that real friendship is when you are committed to somebody to such an extent, you're so intimate with them, you know them, you're committed to them for such the long haul that you, unlike anybody else in their life, are able to go to them and cut them not with the sword that kills but with the surgeon's scalpel, right?

[19 : 17] To slice them with the surgeon's scalpel in order to heal, to tell them the truth. In other words, to chase after them, to get them to confess their sins to you, to confess your sins to them, to pursue them when they're going astray and doing dumb things.

That's exactly what the author here is talking about, true friends go after one another. In other words, they care deeply about the other person's welfare.

So much so that they don't gossip, they defend them. They're not going to throw them under the bus. Instead, they're going to go after them when they made bad decisions. And they're going to cut them with the knife with the surgeon because the knife with the surgeon is meant to heal.

It's truth and love at the very same time. One of my favorite stories ever in one of the great stories of church history, I know as soon as I say great stories of church history, everybody's like, oh, I thought it was going to be something pretty good.

But this is good, I promise. The story of the apostle John, and there's one of his disciples, John's disciples, was a guy named Clement.

[20 : 25] And Clement wrote a letter in the second century after John had died and recounted this story. That's just incredible. I hope it's true. John, we don't know exactly what happened to John at the end of his life.

John wrote the gospel, he wrote the letters, and he wrote the book of Revelation. But he was a pastor in Ephesus, and he was called away for a while. But before he was called away while he was pastoring, he talked to this young man, young military guy about the gospel, and the guy believes on Jesus.

They become just deep friends, intimate friends. John is really old, probably 90 to 100 years old. And this guy's probably, it seems like they're describing God as 20s or 30s.

But they were deep friends. And John is called away. He has to go visit a number of churches. And John leaves this young man in the care of what Clement calls the bishop, which just means pastor.

He said to this guy, look, this is my best man right here. I want you to take care of him. He says I want you to knit your soul with him and look after him.

[21 : 36] And so John goes off and he's away for years according to Clement. And he comes back, and the first thing he says, basically the Presbytery meeting, is he says, where is my friend?

Clement never names him. He says, where's my friend? The man that I left to you, to this bishop. And the bishop says, he's dead. And John says, where's his body?

How did he die? And he says, well, he's not dead, dead, but he's dead to God. And he recounts to them, look, after you left, he left the church.

He started committing petty crimes. He went off eventually and committed murder. He joined into a band of criminals. And now he hides in the mountains above the city of Ephesus with his band.

And he's now the captain of a great gang, if you will, a first century gang. And this is John's response. What a fine friend you are.

[22 : 39] I should have never left him in your care, that's what Clement records. And then he says, bring me my horse. So this is like a 90-year-old man, bring me my horse. And John rides into the mountains and gets captured by these criminals on purpose, and they beat him, and they take him to their captain to be executed.

And here's, I'm going to just read what Clement says. When the man who was now the captain of this gang saw it was John, he turned from about to hit him, dropped his weapon, and ran away, ashamed.

John, a very old man, ran after him with all his might saying, why are you running from me, your friend, who is unarmed and old? There is hope for you.

I will give an account to Christ for you. I will surrender my life willingly and endure your death as the Lord died for me. For you, I am committed to give my life.

And the man stopped, and he wept bitterly, and they embraced. And John baptized him a second time with his tears.

[23 : 55] True friendship seeks the welfare of the one you are committed to at great cost. Friendship chases after friends.

It doesn't gossip, but it longs for them. It longs for their good and for their welfare. Do you have one of these? Do you have a friendship like this?

Like a John? Somebody that's knit with your soul, that doesn't just like you, they love you. Thicker than blood, that knows you enough to strike you with a wound that will bleed, but heal and make you better and make you holier, make you see your sin.

And the answer, I think, is that some of you probably do, but I think most of us probably don't. That's just a speculation. But it's not very common anymore.

Why not? And I think we can get an answer from this finally, and we'll be brief here in close, by looking at the friend who bled. There are two great examples of friendship in the Bible.

[25 : 04] And this is wisdom friendship, the kind of friendship we've been talking about. The first I've already mentioned, Jonathan and David. Most of you will know the story of Jonathan and David, but in 1st Samuel 18, there's this moment where Jonathan is standing before David, and he takes off his royal robe and removes his belt and his sword and lays it at David's feet.

And if you read a biblical scholars, Hebrew scholars on that, they'll tell you that that's not a small deal in the ancient Near East. What's happening there is something like this.

Jonathan is the rightful heir of the kingship in Israel. He is the firstborn son by blood. It's his throne after Saul.

And what he's doing, this is the son of the king, the son of the father of Israel. And he's taking off his royal robe. He's laying down his sword and he's declaring, I will give up my kingship for you, because you're my friend.

I will do whatever it takes. I will give up my kingship for you for this friendship. Remind you of something else. The second great friendship in the Bible.

[26 : 29] We first start to see it as a friendship in John chapter 15. When Jesus is preparing his disciples for the fact that he's about to go to the cross, and he says to them, I don't call you servants anymore. I now call you my friends.

And this is in the shadows of the cross. He's about to go to the cross. And so he's describing for them, he literally defines for them what is friendship. And he says, greater love has no person than this, but that they lay down their life for a friend.

That's the love of friends. Greater love has nobody than this, and they lay down their life for one's friend. But just before that, literally one chapter, he had asked Peter, will you lay down your life for me?

So now we know that that's what Jesus thinks is friendship. And he had just asked Peter, will you lay down your life for me? And Peter of course says, yeah, absolutely I will. I will go where you go. I will lay down my, in other words, what is Peter saying?

Jesus is saying, will you be my friend? And Peter is saying, I will be your friend. I will go wherever you go. I will suffer for you at great cost.

[27 : 39] And then Jesus asked them, will you come with me to Gethsemane? Because I'm afraid. I'm about to go to the cross.

He was a human being. He knew what he was facing. And he said, will you come and sit with me and pray for me?

And Peter and the rest of them, they abandoned him. They didn't do it. They fell asleep. And he was lonely without friends.

Will you speak for him in front of the authorities? And they abandoned him. Will you say in public that this man was your friend?

And he was abandoned. And we knew this was going to happen. Because he said, foxes have holes, birds have nests. I have nowhere to lay my head.

[28 : 40] And this is no different than what happened in Genesis chapter 2, when God came down and walked with him, and even the garden walking in Hebrew, is a metaphor for friendship. And God said, I'm here as your friend.

And they said, no. You see, it's one thing for Jonathan to take off his robe and say to David, I'll be yours. I'll give up my sonship as king for you, for a friend.

Because David was loyal to Jonathan. They had a great relationship. That's exactly what it should look like. Jesus Christ came into the world and said, I don't call you people, servants. I call you friends.

And he said it not in front of David's or Jonathan's, but to people that betrayed him. Why aren't we able to cultivate deep relationships like this?

Why don't we have friends like this most often? Because we aren't those friends, right? Because we're not that for somebody else.

[29 : 48] I think Peter is reflecting on this precisely in Acts chapter 2 at the end of his sermon. We're closing in just two minutes, but he says, all of you looking out to the people that have persistivated in Pentecost, which is people from all over the world that were not there for Jesus' crucifixion, and he says, all of you crucified him. All of you crucified him.

All of you betrayed him. All of you left him. God came and said, you're my friend, and you said, no. Why don't we have friends? Because of sin. Because relationships are broken.

Because it's been that way since the beginning of history. At the cross, Jesus Christ laid down his royal robe, and he took off his belt and his sword of power.

And he didn't get the love of the David, but he swallowed the betrayal of his friends, me and you. And he did it willingly. And he came to be the friend of people that didn't want him.

In other words, you can think of the entire history of the world as the history of a friend who would not give up the chase. One theologian puts it like this, the world is not itself capable of reconciliation with God.

[31 : 04] He cannot make, man, humans cannot make themselves the friends of God. But in the friendship of Jesus Christ to humans, humans become the friends of God and are no longer his enemies.

This means that the cross is ultimate friendship on display, true friendship. It's going all the way to the point of great cost. And so I'll just close by saying this. I don't have all the practical answers for the curse of loneliness in the modern age.

And that's something that has to really be worked out in everybody's own life. And we could talk about that more. But what I can say is that the cross of Christ is the pronouncement in a cursed world that in Christ Jesus, a person who is lonely, does not have to be forever.

Does not have to be forever. That God will not have it so by faith for now. But one day it will be site.

So look at St. Columbus. We just, St. Columbus just wrote a new philosophy of ministry. And one of the distinctives for our people, especially in that philosophy of ministry that we included, was deep Christian friendship in our cultural ethos as one of our marks of who we are here.

[32 : 24] And this is it. We're committed to this because the Bible is committed to it. So commune with God as his friend. Seek deep, long-term, face-to-face Christian friends in this life, one to three.

Confess your sins to them. Go after them when they do dumb stuff. Call them out, give them hugs, be affectionate, love their families, be on their team, don't gossip about them, and develop a heart that is vulnerable and available and ready to be known and loved.

Do you have any real friends? Go get some. Let's pray. Father, we ask, oh Lord, we give thanks for the friendship of Christ, for the reconciliation of enemies with God, that you didn't come for us because you made a covenant.

You made a covenant because you wanted us to be friends. And that's incredible. So we ask that we would look at you and our relationship that is healing and seek others because we need it. And we pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.