

Friendship in Proverbs

People are often tempted to settle for unsatisfying levels of friendship and through a variety of reasons have determined never to take the risk of working for something more. But we need friendship. If we are going to change, and come to see and know the goodness and glory of God, we must have friends that help us see life in ways we will never see for ourselves.

So according to Proverbs, **What will cause our friendships to flourish rather than deteriorate?**

1. Our friendships Flourish when we show up in difficulty. Friendship is strengthened when we show up in difficult times.

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17 ESV)

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24 ESV)

The Proverb helps us to understand that real friendship becomes like a safety net for a person. Whereas ‘companions’ or acquaintances are generally untouched by one another’s difficulties.

2. Our friendships Flourish when we take time to understand. Friendship is strengthened when our insider knowledge results in genuine counsel.

C.S. Lewis rightly observes in his book *The Four Loves*, which has a brilliant chapter on friendship. That “Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” -C.S. Lewis

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. (Proverbs 27:9 ESV).

Here the writer of Proverbs gives us some insight into what makes a friend particular sweet to the soul. It’s their ability to speak into our life in a way that reminds us that they know and understand who we are. There is a difference between generally good advice and the sort of “sincere”, “heartfelt” words depicted here that can get past the external circumstances and communicate with the soul. And it doesn’t have to be deep, it just has to be right.

3. Our friendships Flourish through beneficial honesty. Friendship is strengthened when we speak difficult words for one another’s good.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6 ESV)

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17 ESV)

No friendship emerges from surface level niceties. And they do not flourish where there isn’t

the sort of risk-taking that speaks a good word in season.

Oscar Wilde's words on friendship come to mind here. He rightly quipped "***A friend is someone who stabs you in the front.***"

4. Our friendships Flourish when we avoid duplicity. Friendship is destroyed by speaking differently behind someone's back than when you are in front of them.

A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends. (Proverbs 16:28 ESV)

Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends. (Proverbs 17:9 ESV)

5. Our friendships Flourish when they are built on sincerity. Friendship has imitators, so be careful.

The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends. (Proverbs 14:20 ESV)

Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. (Proverbs 19:6 ESV).

Look to Christ

It is almost surprising for us to see in Genesis 18 that the Lord called Abraham into a relationship and spoke to him like person speaks to a friend. The Lord sits with Abraham and tell Him his plans, like a friend rather than a servant. It is an event that James later describes the significance of when He writes in James 2:23 that Abraham was called a friend of God.

But this relationship of friendship was never just intended for Abraham. Jesus uses the pattern of God's friendship with Abraham to help us to understand the powerful essence of friendship when he says to His disciples:

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; ***but I have called you friends***, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:13 ESV)

Jesus purposely calls his disciples...friends. He shows up in difficulty. He understands us perfectly. He speaks with undeniable honesty. And calls us into friendship with sincerity.

It's a picture of His unending love for us. Love that would not only die, but then after Peter's seeks out the friend that denied he even knew Him and restores him with a new hope for the future. That is the gospel story of God's friendship expressed. He takes his enemies and gathers them around His table, not as servants. Through faith in Christ he makes us his friends.