



LESSON 5: "Friendship" Date: _____

KEY VERSE: Proverbs 17:17 – "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother born for adversity."

INTRODUCTION

Stop the average American and ask him what he would consider his greatest longing and he would very likely respond "friendship." Our world is over populated with lonely people and there are many Christians who find themselves contributing to this population explosion. America's present divorce rate is up 700 percent since 1900. The average American escapes interpersonal relationships by watching six or more hours of TV per day. Twenty percent of all American homes will move this year. These statistics have helped to make loneliness the most pervasive problem of the twentieth century.

In these days of brief, surface relationships, it is necessary that the wise Christian realize the need for good quality Christian friendships. The Creator realized this need. The first recorded statement God made regarding His creation is, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Virtually every great Bible leader had a great friend. Moses had Aaron. David had Jonathan. Christ had the twelve. Paul had Timothy, Luke, and many others. To be successful, we need to have and to be friends.

Good friendships do not just happen. Good friendships are built, brick by brick. For this reason, we must establish biblical principles with which we can build the structure of a super friendship. There is no finer book from which to glean the principles for a happy friendship than the book of Proverbs.

A friend is one who cares about the life and interests of others. Therefore, the opposite of friendliness is selfishness.

- **A friend is someone who loves.** At times, the idea of "love" is presented (14:20; 18:24c; 27:6). This "love" covers a broad range of meaning. It can mean "lust," or undesirable attraction; on the

other hand, it can convey the thought of sacrificial esteem, or genuine love.

- **A friend is someone who respects.** The second concept related by the authors is the idea of "respect." Literally, the authors are picturing one who is the "leader of 1,000" or "chief person." Because of his abilities we "respect" our friend (16:28; 17:19).
- **A friend is someone who chooses.** Finally, the authors can be using a word which carries the idea of "choosing." We "choose" our friends because of something in them that is delightful and appealing (18:24a; 19:7; 22:24).

Did you get the picture? Proverbs says a friend is someone we love and care for. A friend is someone we respect and trust. A friend is someone we choose and enjoy. Care, trust, and enjoyment are three vital ingredients of the friendships of the wise man.

Theme: Wise believers will find wise friendships.

Let's look at what Proverbs has to say about friends as we learn to be wise in our friendships.

MAKING FRIENDS

A young man came charging into my office one afternoon obviously disturbed about something or someone. He slumped into a chair, peered at me with a scowl, and proclaimed, "This must be the coldest church in the world!" No doubt to this young man, the statement was true. But the problem wasn't with the church, it was with the young man. This young man was a real life example of the fact that "he that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24). This young man's appearance, attitude, and conduct said something. But they did not say, "I want to be your friend."

Obviously, the person with a quick temper, a cruel mouth, and an arrogant attitude will have difficulty making friends. But what can you do to show yourself friendly? Let's look at some practical tips.

PRACTICAL TIPS —

1. *The friendly person listens.*

Good friends are good listeners. No one wants to be with someone that never pays attention to others. Did you know that listening is an art? It is an art that must be understood and practiced. You must learn to *stop*. In other words, you need to quit doing anything else and simply listen. You must learn to *look*. A good listener practices the art of eye contact. You must learn to *listen*. Really hear what others are saying.

2. *The friendly person responds.*

If you have really paid attention, your response will have genuine meaning. This may sound like it contradicts what has just been said, but a friendly person is a good talker. He talks about things of interest to others. He thinks about the subjects that will interest the other person then he introduces topics that will appeal to his “friend.”

3. *The friendly person smiles.*

You say a lot about yourself when you smile. You say, “I know I wear braces, but I still like myself.” You say, “I’m happy today and I want to share my happiness with you.” You say, “I do know who I am and I like myself.” Proverbs 15:13 says, “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance.” If you are happy inside, it will show outside and you will soon be making friends. Frank Hamrick suggests that smiling requires self-forgetfulness, reflects warm-heartedness, and relaxes nervousness.

SCRIPTURAL TIPS —

1. *The true friend overlooks the faults of others.*

There are some things that Proverbs says a true friend will do. First, the true friend overlooks the faults of others. “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Proverbs 17:9). In 1983 I surveyed the youth in our church, asking them, “If you could change any particular problem in our youth program, what

would you change?” Over 90% answered, “The way we talk about one another.” At first this response surprised me, but it should have. The Scriptures warn about the deadly tongue. These young people were pointing out that the problematic tongue continues to spew out its evil poison. With this survey in mind, it is easy to assume that the gossip and the critic will find it difficult to make friends. In fact, the life of the verbal violator causes friends that “respect” one another to become enemies. If you really want friends, you must be willing to “speak evil of no man.” No one trusts the gossip!

2. *The true friend overpowers fright.*

Many people say, “I’m too shy to have friends.” Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man what hath friends must show himself friendly.” In other words, you must learn to overpower fright. Don’t let fear of the unknown stand in the way of Christian friendship.

3. *The true friend overcomes his failures.*

Finally, Proverbs says that overcoming our failures will help us to make friends. “He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend” (Proverbs 22:11). No one wants a friend that can’t be trusted. The clean Christian life will make a man desirable as a friend even to those of very high social position. People can buy courses on social conduct, but no one can purchase character. It is the character within that makes a man desirable without.

KEEPING FRIENDS

Our nation’s staggering divorce rate is ample evidence of the fact that friendships once made are not always maintained. Proverbs stresses the need to maintain our relationship with God in order to maintain our relationships with others. Friendship is not so much based on who we know, as who we are.

Dr. Theodore Rueben has said, “People without friends are usually emotionally disturbed, withdrawn, and secluded.” However, the Christian walking in wisdom should be known for his stability. The Psalmist has pictured the wise Christian as a “tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season” (Psalm 1:3). To help us maintain our friendships, the book of Proverbs suggests that we incorporate into our lives the following traits:

1. *We must be careful in our financial dealings (Prov. 6:1-3).*

Many friendships are destroyed because of financial and material loans. “A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend” (Proverbs 17:18). Have you ever made a loan that was never returned, or that was returned in less than perfect condition? Do you remember the bitter feeling that overwhelmed you? Low cost loans may cost much in terms of friendship, so be careful not to loan what you would not willingly give.

2. *We must be willing to sacrifice for one another (Prov. 17:18).*

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:18). Do you really want to enrich your friendship? Make yourself available during the time of crisis. Many are present in the time of happiness, but in the time of sorrow, when solace is most needed, a true friendship is tested. Yes, it is difficult. Yes, you would rather be somewhere else. But true friendship should draw you to the side of the grieving as well as the joyful.

3. *We must be willing to forgive (Prov. 17:9).*

Forgiveness is an essential element of friendship. “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love” (Proverbs 17:9). A friend must willingly forget the failures of others. Peter failed the Lord in the hour of greatest need. As Christ was being tried, Peter denied that he even knew the Messiah. Yet, Christ was willing to forgive, and Peter came to be the spokesman for Christianity in Jerusalem and all the world. True friends must be willing to forgive.

4. *We must be loyal (Prov. 27:10).*

Be loyal! Loyalty will inevitably be tested. Will you listen as your friend is unjustly criticized? Will your friendship be forgotten to gain acceptance with the “in crowd?” Proverbs urges us to be loyal to our friends despite the circumstances.

5. *We must be honest in our advice (Prov. 27:6).*

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6). The author uses the word for

“loving friendship” in the verse. He tells us that true friends must at times be willing to “stick their necks out” and give the counsel that is good and true. It may hurt, but friendship is shown by honesty, not flattery.

Careful financial dealings, sacrifice, forgiveness, loyalty, and honesty are all essential if we desire to maintain the friendships that God brings our way.

LOSING FRIENDS

Proverbs points out that some people possess certain flaws of character that cause them to lose friends. We need to evaluate ourselves and be careful to avoid such characteristics.

1. *Anger*

Anger should be avoided in our lives, and we should “Make no friendship with an angry man” (Proverbs 22:24). This verse pictures a man building up steam to the point of explosion. When the angry man explodes, he scalds those around him. It is interesting to note that the word for “friend” in Proverbs 22:24 means “to choose because of something appealing.” Many contentious men have become modern day heroes for the stand they take and the crowds their outspoken behavior attracts. Anger, though impressive, is often unhealthy. Uncontrolled anger can be one of the most destructive forces in any relationship.

2. *Flattery*

The insincere flatterer should likewise be avoided. Proverbs 27:14 presents a very outlandish picture saying, “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.” It seems that the flattering friend goes out of his way to travel to the home of the friend that he intends to flatter. There is only one problem. The recipient of the flatterer is still in bed. Apparently this doesn't matter to the flatterer; he shouts his praise early in the morning. Thus, instead of delighting his friend, he receives wrath. Flattery and insincerity are never appropriate elements of a Christian friendship.

3. ***Gossip***

Prov. 16:28 says that “a whisperer separateth chief friends.” The Hebrew word translated “chief friends” pictures a person well-respected. The respected friend may be sadly lost when the words of the gossip are considered. Prov. 25:23 provides practical advice for those who would deal wisely with the gossip—meet them with a stern countenance!

4. ***Financial instability***

The financially dependent risk loneliness. The wealthy are sought after, and the penniless are shunned.

CONCLUSION

The importance of building good Christian friendships cannot be underestimated. We are known by the friends that we keep (Proverbs 28:7). Jonathan is associated with David, Aaron is associated with Moses – with whom are you associated? Remember, the wise Christian must find friends of spiritual character and maturity, for as “iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17).