

# Friendship

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'd like to invite the Reverend Mike Wenzler up to our pulpit this morning. He's going to be bringing God's word. I'm going to let Mike take over and have him tell us a little bit about himself before he preaches.

And we're grateful that you were able to come today and willing to come. So, welcome to Shining Mountain. Thank you. Thank you. Good morning. Sweet to be with you all. I understand you're in a series through the book of Proverbs.

Is that correct? Wonderful. Appreciate this feedback. Man, this is my first time preaching in person for a few months. I've done some pre-recorded things for our church up in Fort Collins.

But as I was introduced, my name is Mike Wenzler and I'm the RUF campus minister at Colorado State University. Gosh, I think I, how long ago was it when I preached here last?

Eight months? Something like that? It seems, you know, time has both crawled and flown by. But it's, you know, it's a privilege to get to be here. Being a college pastor of sorts, you know, I'm not bound to a specific congregation on Sunday mornings.

[ 1 : 0 3 ] You know, I'm not on staff at a local church. I'm sent to the campus by our presbytery. And I know that you're familiar with RUF. Jeff Kreisel has preached here, who's the campus minister at Air Force Academy.

And, you know, this fall semester is going to be very strange, as I'm sure it is for all of you. The university is still sort of scrambling, and we are really unsure what we can do on campus.

So I would covet your prayers for us, just for wisdom, in terms of how we can pursue students and share the gospel and disciple, while largely doing that virtual, which is a blessing and somewhat a hindrance.

So we've already heard our passage read this morning, so I'll just say a brief prayer for us again, and then we'll get started on the topic of friendship. Father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather.

What a privilege this is, and we are more so aware of this privilege now than maybe we have been in the past. But we do plead with you that you would meet us here this morning. We pray that you would speak to us through your word and apply it to our hearts by your spirit.

[ 2 : 0 6 ] We pray that we would be comforted in the gospel and encouraged and also convicted and humbled. Lord, please allow the cares and the concerns of our lives and of this world to be set aside for a moment to focus on you.

And please give us ears to hear this good news. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. C.S. Lewis famously wrote in his book entitled *Four Loves* the following quote.

He says, In friendship, we think we have chosen our peers. In reality, a few years' difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of the other, the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting, any of these chances might have kept us apart.

But for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, can truly say to every group of Christian friends, Ye have not chosen one another, but I have chosen you for one another.

The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.

[ 3 : 32 ] True friends are gifts from God. You know this through experience. They are God's grace to us, and we need them. One of my little speeches I regularly give to freshmen their first year on campus goes something like this.

You would be better off not dating your freshman year. If, however, you choose to date or have come into college dating, do the best you can to make friends.

And if you're dating, my rule of thumb, which is not unique to me, someone else said this first, but spend at least 50% of your free time with your friends, not the majority with your boyfriend or your girlfriend.

If you think about it, in college, the opportunities for friendships are unique. The time you have is unique. When else do you have that much flexibility with that sort of little responsibility?

There was one particular season of life for me where I lived with two of my best friends who were also Christians. We were sort of always up to something. If it was an impromptu road trip or playing, you know, old school Madden football on PlayStation 2, staying up late watching movies, studying the Bible together, challenging and encouraging one another in our faith.

[ 4 : 44 ] I'm still close with these two guys many years later, and I thank God for them. You know, upon reflection, we don't earn relationships like these. They didn't happen randomly.

C.S. Lewis was right. Jesus can truly say to every group of friends, you have not chosen one another, but I've chosen you for one another. But a good friendship isn't always easy, is it?

Friends take work and time and resources, and they sometimes hurt you and they disappoint you, and oftentimes they take without giving back. And good friends are hard to find. You know, one recent study I read showed that 45% of adults say they find it difficult to make friends.

The average adult hasn't made any new friends in the last five years, and apparently popularity hits its peak at age 23. So that, you know, puts us over the hill for many of us.

Moreover, loneliness is something that's devastatingly widespread. I read two different sources that claim between 60 and 75% of Americans today are lonely. So friendship is hard.

[ 5 : 51 ] Loneliness is everywhere. And if you are being honest, you might admit that you are a big part of the problem. Sometimes you let your friends down. Sometimes you are the needy one, and you wear your friends out.

You hurt them with your words or with your actions. You neglect them because you're preoccupied elsewhere. You take them for granted or expect too much of them. Proverbs is a very practical book of the Bible, which I'm sure Matthew has pointed out to you already.

It's considered wisdom literature, and wisdom is said to be skill in the art of godly living. We need skills in our relationships in order to live them in a way that pleases God.

My aim this morning is to really answer one question. How does wisdom describe a godly friend? How does wisdom describe a godly friend? Wisdom says friends do three things.

Friends wound, friends encourage, and friends love. So first, let's do friends wound. I believe this is in your bulletin. Proverbs 27, verses 5 through 6.

[ 6 : 57 ] Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. You know, lots of times we find these better than statements in poetry.

Open rebuke is better than hidden love. This idea is that true love is costly. True love is costly. It's not fun to wound your friends.

You probably won't enjoy it, and they probably won't like it. But as one author once wrote, if your friend is wrong, then to kiss when we should kill is to put ourselves among his enemies.

Unless you want to be an enemy, Proverbs says you need to speak up. Of course, there is perceived risk when wounding and approaching and rebuking a friend.

What if they get mad and walk away? Now, sure, that's possible, but it's also unlikely. You know, experience says, and wisdom says, if you correct a friend in love and humility, chances are they will not leave you, but rather this will improve your friendship and make it stronger.

[ 8 : 03 ] Plus, you don't really have an alternative. You're not about to be their enemy and let them continue in their sin. Then you'll pursue them, even if it may cost you. Thinking back to the first six months of marriage for my wife, Lauren, and I, Lauren and our kids are up in Fort Collins.

You know, we had just moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, and I had begun seminary, and the first six months of our time there were dreadful, to say the least. You know, we couldn't settle on a church.

Lauren hated her job, and because of all of this, I was really questioning my call to ministry. Like, gosh, I don't know if I'm supposed to be here. Lauren's suffering, and we're not doing well, and marriage is hard.

Maybe I'm not supposed to be in ministry. So we were about to give up, kind of throwing the towel after a semester and move back to Wisconsin, when a friend, a new friend, sat me down and said, I really think you would be foolish to leave.

And so we stayed. And in God's providence and grace, the next two and a half years were particularly sweet. Years of our marriage, we can look back on in thankfulness.

[ 9 : 12 ] We need friends to speak to us this way. Let's continue. Look at Proverbs 27, verse 17. The writer writes, iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

You know, poetry is kind of remarkable in the Bible. It communicates so much with so little. That's really what poetry does. So we read it slow. That's how you ought to approach poetry.

You let it, you marinate on the words, you know, like soak that meat in those flavors in the fridge for a while. And we twist the lens, really to focus it on our hearts. To sharpen a piece of metal, another piece of metal is required.

Without two pieces, neither could be sharpened. Sharpening, of course, implies growth and correction and change. And this comes through a continual hammering and pounding to make a sharp edge.

Now found in this context of friendship, we learn that wounding a friend actually sharpens a friend. Friends don't have to agree on everything, but it has been said that friends ought to be able to discuss anything.

[ 10 : 20 ] They don't have to agree on everything, but they ought to be able to discuss anything. Just an initial word of application on this first point. Wisdom describes a godly friend who wounds. This needs to be standard practice in your relationships.

It needs to be. There's no way that you can persist in a close friendship for a long period of time and never disagree and never need to correct one another. Now some of you hate conflict and avoid it like the coronavirus, but you need to see wounding as a redemptive, grace-giving component of friendship.

You need to be bold and honest and humble and speak truthfully, even when it's hard and potentially costly. The New Testament confirms this. Galatians 6.1, Paul writes, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Wounding a friend is restorative. Now on the flip side, of course, you need to be able to receive correction.

Let your friends know that you are willing to be wounded for the sake of being sharpened. This means deflecting your natural tendency to be defensive when your friend is brave enough to call you out on something.

[ 11 : 40 ] This is so easy to do, to be defensive when someone, you know, sort of points their finger at you. But our reflex to this ought to be, ought to speak, quick to listen.

So again, we need to be honest and humble and receive the wounds from your friend in faith. Secondly, though, what is a godly friend?

Godly friends encourage. Friends encourage. Look again at Proverbs 27, verses 9 through 10. Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go into your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. So perhaps equally as important as wounding is encouraging.

These images of oil and perfume are meant to invoke pleasantness and satisfaction and joy. In short, as we see in our passage, they make the heart glad.

[ 12 : 46 ] If you think about it, a glad heart is secure. A glad heart is at rest. A glad heart is content. These rare jewels of security, rest, and contentment ultimately come from knowing God, but are often administered to us through the earnest counsel of a sweet friend.

The situations in life where we need godly, sweet, friendly counsel and encouragement are, of course, everyday and ubiquitous. You know, should I take this job? Or should I go back to school?

Should we move and buy this house? Should I pursue this degree? Should I date this person or should I break up with this person? Should we see a counselor? Should we step in and help our kids figure it out or sort of let them do it on their own?

Should I save, you know, this much money every month? Should I invite my elderly parents to come live with us? Should I live with these roommates? I mean, all of these questions and so many more, we ought to turn to our godly friends for counsel.

The sweetness of a friend comes from his or her earnest counsel and wisdom says we need true friends to speak into our lives and encourage us.

[ 14 : 01 ] And the New Testament confirms this again in many places. In Romans 15, Paul wrote, for whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

We need friends to encourage us in the faith. We also need friends to build us up. Again, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5, therefore encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing, Paul says.

We also need friends to stir us toward love and good works. The writer of the Hebrews in Hebrews 10 says, and let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

It dawned on me when I'm trying to teach my children how to do something, you know, it could be riding a bike or doing a flip on the trampoline, which I used to be able to do much better when I was in high school, or, you know, even just learn their letters correctly.

They often get frustrated and want to give up, and in times like these, I'm also humbled at my own sin and not handling that very well, and I can try to encourage them. I can try to say things like, you know, hey, learning a new skill takes patience and perseverance.

[ 15 : 18 ] You've got to hang in there, you know, but often my words land flat and are ineffective with my kids. However, I've seen this when a friend, it could be a cousin, a neighbor on the street, someone from school, encourages them to keep trying it.

Those words are like magic bullets. Coming from a friend, they have this unique, special power. It's because encouragement from a friend is powerful.

It's absolutely necessary, and as we've seen from the New Testament, it actually is transformative to give us hope and encouragement and love. A little bit more of application.

Wisdom describes a godly friend as an encourager. Now, just to say this, it's completely acceptable with your friends just to hang out and laugh and tell stories and talk about hobbies and news and politics, but it's also completely necessary to encourage one another and to take counsel with one another.

If you want a friend like this, I think the scriptures would tell us to start by being a friend like this. Be humble and ask for counsel.

[ 16 : 31 ] Let your friends know when you need encouragement and offer well-timed words of comfort to others. The third thing that wisdom says a godly friend is is a person who loves.

So friends love. Look again at Proverbs 17, 17. It says, A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.

And I don't know if this is in your bulletin, but 18, 24. It says, A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Just going slow for a moment, I think this is pretty revealing.

We, and this is pretty uniform for every person, want to be loved at all times. We want this. We want to be loved at all times.

We want someone to walk with us through, to use this language, the valleys, the switchbacks up, and the peaks of life. We want someone to walk with us always, loving us constantly through all of this.

[ 17 : 42 ] King David, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote this in Psalm 23. He said, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

You are with me, writes David. This hunger for love and security from earthly actually exposes our need for love from our heavenly friend.

What's more, actually, I would argue the love of a true godly friend shows us the love of Christ. Jesus loves his people at all times. He loves us when we are broken and weak.

He loves us when we're sinful and exposed. He loves us when we're wrong and rebellious. He loves us when we're filled with doubt. He loves us when we're angry and afraid.

[ 18 : 41 ] You know, we're going to sing this song right after this message, but in the year 1910, John Wilbur Chapman wrote the hymn, Jesus, what a friend for sinners.

The first verse says this, Jesus, what a friend for sinners. Jesus, lover of my soul, friends may fail me, foes assail me, he, my savior, makes me whole.

The purest friendship available is found in the love and friendship of Jesus. A friend who sticks closer than a brother is a friend who bears your burdens with you.

Paul, again, in Galatians 6.2, says, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. So a loving friend doesn't stand far off and, you know, sort of shout from a distance, I'm so sorry, it's really hard that you're going through this, you know, I'll shoot you a text next week.

Rather, a loving friend draws near, sort of climbs down into the emotional pit that you're in, cries with you and stays with you.

[ 19 : 53 ] It's what David was getting at when he said, the Lord is with me through the valleys. And in the gospel, Jesus' friendship with you goes even further. The apostle John recorded Jesus saying these words, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

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. The love of Jesus took him somewhere.

It took him to that skull-shaped hill called Golgotha in Jerusalem where he bled and suffered and died. Why? To save his friends. We love as friends because Jesus first loved us.

Thinking about sacrificial love reminded me of this story. It's in the context of marriage but it's the story about B.B. Warfield and his love for his wife Annie.

[ 21 : 03 ] So B.B. Warfield was a professor of theology at Princeton Seminary. After their wedding B.B. or Benjamin and Annie traveled across Europe and so the story goes while on a walk through the Harz Mountains the couple was caught in a violent thunderstorm.

Annie suffered a severe trauma to her nervous system from which she never recovered. One author wrote she was so severely traumatized that she would spend the rest of her life as an invalid becoming increasingly more incapacitative as the years went by.

Her husband B.B. was to spend the rest of their lives together giving her his constant care and attention until her death in 1915. Another Princeton professor wrote this.

His name was Oswald Alice. He said I used to see them walking together and the gentleness of his manner was striking proof of the loving care with which he surrounded her.

They had no children. During the years spent at Princeton he rarely if ever was absent for any length of time. Thinking about friendship and true love true love will cost you it will bend you and it will change you.

[ 22 : 18 ] Jesus was not afraid to put it frankly to his disciples. This is my commandment he says love one another as I have loved you.

Knowing the true and pure love of Christ with the help of God's Holy Spirit you are enabled to love your friends at all times. No of course you will not love your friends perfectly.

You are not Jesus of course your friends need Jesus but the Bible tells us they also need you. Your friends need you. So to recap true friends are a gift from God.

They're God's grace to us and we need them and friendship of course is hard and we are often a big part of the problem and loneliness is crushing. We need skills hence wisdom to please and honor God with our relationships and wisdom says that true friends wound and encourage and love like Jesus.

I want to close by quoting Paul again from Colossians 3 which I really think nicely summarizes a godly friendship. Paul writes put on them as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

[ 23 : 55 ] Let me pray for us. Father we thank you for your word to us this morning we thank you that you have given us friends you've given us the church which is really a community of special friendship relationships where we're more than that we're actually brothers and sisters in Christ or we pray for boldness for wisdom to know when to wound and encourage and how to love our friends and we pray that our motivation to do this our source of strength would really be in the gospel in Jesus' love for us may we be challenged by his love also equipped and sent out to go and love others and really I pray that Christian friendships would be on display for the world to see that would make them jealous and curious to pursue you and to ask about the gospel please Lord be with us equip us and send us out today we pray in Jesus name Amen