

Lifecraft from God – The Wisdom of Friendship

How to lose friends and alienate people?

Good morning I'm Matt, one of the leaders at the vineyard here. It is great to see you all here today. Has everyone been enjoying the sunshine and warmth we have had recently? Perhaps you have been on holiday and or maybe you are heading off soon? Whatever you're up to over the summer, I hope you get the opportunity to rest and encounter God in simple, different and profound ways. We have been doing a series on Proverbs covering different themes that have emerged from this book - varying from the nature of wisdom itself, work, rest, trust, speech and money. Today, I would like to look at what Proverbs has to say about friendship and what wisdom we can get from it on this subject. Let me pray before I continue. Father, would you reach into us, pouring out your love and changing us to be more like you in every way. Would our everyday ordinary lives, our relationships, our work, our home lives reflect you and be an offering of thanks for what you have done and continue to do for us. Amen.

Friendships - where to start?

I would like, from the outset, to state that I am in no way an expert on the subject of friendships. Growing up, I would often look around at others in my school or at church, envious of their abilities to attract hoards of friends and yet, here I was in my anxiety not able to have the confidence to develop friendships. I had a great loving family but when it came to friendships, in the first few years of secondary school I was severely lacking. I had pulled away from church and only really connected with people through school. I started hanging out with the cool crowd and the ones who were taunting the teachers. They were just on the cusp of welcoming me in to their fellowship when my parents invited me to attend the church weekend away. For a year or so before this, I had felt very lonely and isolated and began to pray for friends! So when this opportunity came up, I decided to give it a go. Well, there were some girls there at the youth group so I was hooked! God got me into church again and as a result began forming some longer lasting friendships. It was certainly not the end of my exploration of friendship, but it was a beginning. I have had a few people through my life who have been gracious enough to demonstrate healthy and constructive friendships. One such person is Anne, my wife. She has demonstrated so much of what Proverbs describes in healthy life-giving friendships and I am all the more blessed for it. What I talk about from Proverbs is in every way reminding myself of some much needed wisdom on friendship!

How to lose friends and alienate people!

I thought we could take a tongue-in-cheek look at what Proverbs says about friendship and what you should do if you want to lose friends and alienate people! Or what TO do if you do want friends! This title is taken from a Simon Pegg film of the same name. I don't know if any of you have seen this film, but it makes me laugh because I can identify with some of the awkwardness he creates in his friendships and in the workplace. Proverbs has much wisdom on relationships in general and I have picked out just some of this wisdom today.

1. Be careless about choosing your close friends!

Proverbs 13:20 says, *"One who walks with the wise gets wise, but the friend of stupid people experiences evil things"*

We often talk about considering carefully how to spend your money or who the right person to marry is or what career to chose. We spend much time and thought pondering these questions, but do we spend the same amount of time thinking about who we spend our time and energy on in friendship? Or do friendships just happen? Are they a function of who we grew up with, who we live next to or work with or who's in our family? Do we simply chose the first person who comes along offering friendship? Sometimes, that can be a great thing - and I have been blessed with some great friends who God has put in my path like that.

But in Proverbs 27:6-7 it says, *"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. One who is full loathes honey from the comb, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet."*

Some people are confident, have many friends and are "full" whereas some of us lack confidence and struggle to know how valuable we are to God and to others. We may not have many, if any, friends and so when someone does come along, we feel this must be it, this must be all I deserve. Sometimes, whether through loneliness or low self-worth, we feel obliged to stick with socalled friends - Stupid people as Proverbs 13:20 puts it - foolish people who cause you trouble, who get you into trouble, who try to destroy what God has done in your life. Do we think that we're not worth anything more than how this person is treating us? Can I encourage you that your friendship is like gold dust and you are worth dying for in God's eyes! You can only be a good friend to a small number of people, so which privileged few are going to receive this reward?

2. Outstay your welcome

Proverbs 25: 17 says, *"Let your foot hold back from your neighbour's house, lest he gets his fill of you and reject you."*

So if you really want to go all out with this one, why not do this next time you are at small group? When everyone has left, don't. Stay. Enjoy good conversation, you notice your hosts yawning widely muttering about having a busy day tomorrow, ignore. Ask for a drink and stay some more. When you notice the clock on the mantel piece passing midnight, this would seem an appropriate time to leave... Have you ever been in that position? I know I have inflicted this on many people. Unaware of having overstayed my welcome, I go on wittering on or vegeing out on the sofa enjoying another glass of wine.

It's generally Anne who will kick me or look at me menacingly that I realise I am outstaying my welcome. If you don't have an Anne, I suggest you get some Ann-tennae to be sensitive to the signals that people give you - leave people wanting more of you rather having had too much and being loathed to invite you round again, lest they get another sleep deprived night!

3. Keep things superficial!

Proverbs 18:24 says, *"There are neighbours to act like neighbours, and there's one who gives himself, who sticks firmer than a brother."*

In order to get this right, act as a friend like most people act as neighbours! Keep it superficial. Be nice. Say hi. But don't do much more than that. And certainly don't get involved in your friend's life. Don't go the extra mile. Don't really listen. And definitely don't be there when the going gets tough! Or alternatively, stick around and see the fruit of your friendship blossom in times of adversity. See your connection go deeper with others as you stick around for the long haul - through the good times and the bad. Take the effort to keep in touch - which by the way I am pretty terrible at - I am still working on this! One thing I learnt growing up was that friendships were not easily forthcoming for me. I went through a period of feeling lonely and having few friendships and so I made a commitment with myself - as you do. I was not going to complain to myself or God about not having friends until I had given all I should to a friendship. If I had given 100% of my side of the friendship, I could then moan, I could have a grump with God, I could allow myself to have a complex about the friendship. I would like to say that I have never managed 100% and am still not in a position to moan about friendships! I have discovered that this principle has helped me keep pushing into friendships. Even when I have worried that the other person doesn't like me, doesn't want to spend time with me (because they haven't been in touch or haven't answered my text messages) or I have a superiority or inferiority complex with some people, I have been reminded that I need to give myself to the other person. And until I have done that, I cannot give up on friendships. It has helped me realise that most of the things we believe about others often aren't true - many times people do like seeing you or hanging out and they hadn't been in touch because they were just busy or their phones had stopped working and so they hadn't even received your text. I have learnt to be the "one who gives himself..." as the verse says. If we want to have friends and connect with others, then we need to expect to give ourselves to another.

4. Don't challenge your friends to develop!

Proverbs 27:17 says, *"Iron sharpens iron, and a person sharpens the edge of his friend."*

If you want to perfect this point, then fill your time and talk with friends with a can't do attitude. Remind friends about the futility of anything we do. Don't encourage your friends in learning and certainly don't engage in stimulating conversation. Get engrossed in juicy gossip about others in small group or at work - feast your ears on other people's woes and misadventures. Or alternatively, consider how you might be able to see your friends change, ask them how their faith is going and what God is doing in and through them? If they have no faith in God, ask them what they think about life - what it's all about? Aim to live out a Christ-centred, church based and gospel focussed life - looking to inspire those around you to move closer to Jesus and his empowering love. Spark off your friends - have the courage to challenge each other if their thinking and actions don't match up to how God calls us to live, learn together and from each other, worship together, serve together, pray together, relax together - inspire each other so that you can both be sharpened and go deeper in understanding.

Summary

We have looked at some of what Proverbs has to offer on friendship. If you want to work on friendships, consider these points:

1. **Choose your friends wisely** - because you're worth it!
2. **Don't outstay your welcome** - leave people wanting more of you...
3. **Learn to give yourself wholeheartedly to friendships** - hold up your end of the friendship
4. **Sharpen your friends** - in every way inspiring them to go deeper with Jesus

You may be an amazing friend and have lots of good friends and that is fantastic. I would encourage you to keep on being a great friend and demonstrating to the rest of us what that looks like. Maybe you are someone like me who has found friendships harder or perhaps you feel that you don't have friends and have never been shown what a good friend looks like. I would love it if you went away today knowing most importantly that you can find a close friend in Jesus. Not only this, that Leeds Vineyard is a place where you will find a warm welcome, where you can get to know and be known by people without anyone judging you. No matter what you have done, who you are or how much or little you can offer to others, I hope you will find opportunities to make friends and no longer feel isolated or alone but a part of a loving community of faith.

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