

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 2-4-18

February 4 we continue a topical series on relationships. Today's message focuses on friendship. Discussion questions are:

1. How does the following statement affect you: *You will not make it in life unless you are good at choosing and keeping terrific friendships.*
2. How is it true that a friend can be better than a sibling?
3. Why is friendship hard work?
4. Why might the death of Jonathan have resulted in David's adultery with Bathsheba?
5. What do you think of Emerson's quote: "*Friendship does not ask 'Do you love me?' so much as, 'Do you see the same truth? Are you passionate about the same thing?'*"
6. Agree/disagree: *Friends rarely talk about their friendship. Friends talk about their common interest.*
7. The 4 qualities of friendship mentioned this morning were: constancy, carefulness, candor, and counsel.
 - a. How do you understand "constancy" in friendship?
 - b. If a friend is careful about your feelings how will that friend show it?
 - c. Why is candor such an important component of friendship?
 - i. Can you share a time when a friend was painfully candid with you?
 - d. Is receiving counsel from a friend a pleasant or painful experience?
8. In your personal life, what is the primary reason you do not have more friends?
9. What do you think Jesus had in mind in John 15:15 when he called his disciples friends?

RELATIONSHIP SERMON 5:

On Friendship

Scriptures from Proverbs:

17:17 - A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

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

25:17 - Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house-- too much of you, and they will hate you.

25:20 - Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, so is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

26:18-19 - Like a madman shooting flaming arrows of death so is one who deceives his friend, and says, "I was only joking."

27: 5 - Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

27:6 - Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

27:9 - Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.

27:14 - If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

28:23 - In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery.

29:5 - Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.

In the Bible the word wisdom means being so in touch with reality that you know the right thing to do in various situations. Proverbs says you are not going to live a wise life unless you are good at choosing and keeping terrific friendships. You will not make it in life unless you are good at choosing and keeping terrific friendships. Those friendship verses we heard a moment ago can be understood under 4 headings:

1. The uniqueness of friendships.
2. How do we discover a friend?
3. How do we build a friendship?
4. Where do we get the power for friendship?

THE UNIQUENESS OF FRIENDSHIPS

18:24 - ...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

A friend can be better than a sibling. That's being said in a culture that was much more family oriented than ours. Why would it be true that a friend is better than a brother? Look at 17:17 - A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. He's saying your family will be there for you in hard times. They care about you and are loyal to you. But they may not like you! Your sibling may easily get tired of you so you don't socialize a lot. A friend, on the other hand, chooses to be with you because he likes you.

One of the best friends I ever had was a person with whom I did not at first want to be friends. His name is Ken. I was a homesick freshman at Oklahoma Christian and was busy sizing up people as potential friends or not. I had mentally put Ken on the "probably not going to be a friend" list. I was sitting in my dorm room on a hot September day with the door open. I was trying to type a term paper on one of those old manual typewriters which, if you made a typo, required you to attempt to erase it which often resulted in rubbing a hole in your paper and getting to start over. I had started over several times and was frustrated. I looked up and there Ken stood in my room. My first thought was, "What's he doing here. I don't have time for this." He asked, "What are you doing?" I replied, "Trying to type this term paper and it's not going very well." He then spoke 4 words that began a lifelong friendship. The 4 words were, "Mind if I try?" He then sat down at my typewriter and proceeded to type flawlessly. We were roommates for 3 years. He was the best man in my wedding and remains in my memory as one of the best men I've ever known. It was a friendship that began with him having a servant's heart, which is the glue that holds all lasting friendships together.

That Proverb we mentioned a moment ago says, *“There is a friend who sticks.”* That word sticks in the Bible is often translated “cleave.” It means commitment out of a passionate love. Friendship brings something into your life that family can’t bring, romance can’t bring, neighbors can’t bring, something nothing else can bring. You have to remember that and value it because every culture will put friendship on the back burner. In our culture we put erotic love, sexual love first. Look at the covers of all those grocery store magazines near the checkout counter. Are they pictures asking who is best friends with who? No, it’s who’s sleeping with who!

If on one side of this pulpit we could stack up all the CDs in the world dealing with romantic love and on the other side all those dealing with friendship, which stack would reach to the ceiling and which stack wouldn’t reach my knees? Our culture isn’t turned on by friendship. It doesn’t sell records. Every culture puts friendship second to something: family, civic relationships, tribal loyalty, something will always be deemed more important than friendship. Why? Because friendship is not a biological or sociological necessity. C.S. Lewis in his famous essay on friendship says, “Friendship is the least instinctive, organic, biological, the least necessary of all our loves. It has the least commerce with our physical systems. There is nothing throaty about it, nothing that quickens the pulse, or turns you red and pale.” In a busy culture like ours all the other relationships will force themselves on you. Your family is going to demand presence and time. You have to network in your job and maintain those relationships. You have to put energy into your romantic life if you wish to keep having one. Likewise friendship, which gets shoved to the back burner, if it is going to happen requires great intentional effort. It’s hard work and sometimes we feel like we just don’t have time for it yet Proverbs says you won’t make it without friends. Friendship love is unique and vital to your well-being. It brings something into your life that a sibling can’t and romance can’t and networking your job can’t.

One of the best stories of friendship in the Bible is the friendship of David and Jonathan. Their friendship began right after David killed Goliath. The text says when the battle was over, *“Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.” – I Samuel 18:3.* You would think they would be competitive since Jonathan was the heir apparent to the throne and David was the God-chosen heir to the throne. But Jonathan becomes David’s protector from the increasingly insane jealousy of his father, King Saul. When Saul attempted to kill David, it was Jonathan who came to the rescue and convinced his father that David was his friend and supporter, not his enemy. The servant heart of Jonathan shines brightly in his counsel to David in *I Samuel 23:17-18*, *“Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you; my father Saul also knows that this is so.” Then the two of them made a covenant before the LORD.”*

One of the things we learn from the friendship of David and Jonathan is how much men need male friends. If you track the timeline between Jonathan’s death and David’s sin with Bathsheba you will find David’s great downfall occurring right on the heels of the death of his good friend Jonathan. What David needed when his great friend died, was another great friend, and there

was none to be had. When there is a friendship void in your life you become an easy target for Satan.

So, how do we get friends?

HOW DO WE DISCOVER A FRIEND?

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

You can have lots of companions but you can't have very many true friends. Why? 27:9 - Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice. That word "pleasantness" means "sweetness." When Proverbs was written nobody had sugar yet. People didn't know how to sweeten food. Certain foods were naturally sweet and that was all the sweet food you would ever enjoy. Can you imagine a world without ice cream and candy bars and sugar for sale by the pound? Friendship is like discovering a source for sweetness in your life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote an essay on friendship in which he said, "Friendship does not ask 'Do you love me?' so much as, 'Do you see the same truth? Are you passionate about the same thing?'" C.S. Lewis puts it like this, "The typical expression of opening friendship would be something like this, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.'" Lovers are always talking about their love for each other. Friends rarely talk about their friendship. Friends talk about their common interest. Friendship typically flows out of "You, too? You think that's important too? You love that too?" Friendship has to be about something. Those who have nothing can share nothing. C.S. Lewis, "Those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travelers." That's why friendship has to be something you discover.

So friendship has to be discovered and then it has to be built.

HOW DO YOU BUILD A FRIENDSHIP?

Proverbs says there are 4 things you have to do to build a friendship:

1. Constancy
2. Carefulness
3. Candor
4. Counsel

Constancy

17:17 - A friend loves at all times.... That does not mean you spend all your time together. 25:17 - "...too much of you, and they will hate you." Love at "all times" means all kinds of times – good times, bad times, ordinary times. In other words you can't be a friend without availability. I was visiting with my good friend, Doug Manning, recently and he told me that for several years now his daily routine was to have a plan for the day but to go with the interruptions. He said he got that idea from looking at how Jesus seemed to go with the interruptions in his daily routine. After I finished visiting with him and was driving home it occurred to me that I was his

interruption for that day and I felt honored to have been given his time when he surely had other choices.

Friendship also means being there when the chips are down. *18:24 - A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* A friend will not let you go to ruin. Here's a bit of a harsh truth: most people who know you do so because you are useful to them and vice versa. Some of your acquaintances are useful for having a good time. Some are useful for meeting other people. Some are useful for getting things done. But when the chips are down and you need a lot of time and a lot of help that's when your companions who are not true friends say, "Call me if you need anything." But a friend will be there because you are not a means to an end but an end in yourself. A friend says, "I will not let you hit bottom. I will be there even when it costs me something."

Carefulness

25:20 - Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, so is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. That's a description of someone who is emotionally disconnected with you. If I can be happy when you are sad, I am not your friend. In friendship you give the gift of emotional connection voluntarily. Here's how you know if that person is really your friend. They can't go about being jolly when you are heavy hearted. It would be impossible for them to do that.

So friendship is forged by constancy. A friend will always be there when you need them. And a friend will be emotionally sensitive you. Thirdly, friendship is forged by...

Candor

27: 5 - Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

27:6 - Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

"Friendly wounds" is a metaphor for words your friend needs that are going to be painful for that person to hear and yet it is absolutely necessary your friend hear the words if they are to be helped. What if you are afraid to say the words that need to be said? Then you are not a friend. Look at that phrase at the end of vs. 5, "hidden love." This is a person who thinks he is loving by hiding the truth from you. Family can be notorious for that. I laugh to this day about something my mother said about my brother. He was entering middle age and putting on weight which was obvious to anyone who had known him long. My brother was standing off some distance where he couldn't hear the conversation. Someone said, "Guy is putting on a little weight isn't he?" My mother replied, "It's just the way he's standing." Now that's being a mother, but it's not being a friend. That's not a criticism of my mother at all. That's just what families do. But listen, friends don't do that!

29:5 - Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet. Let me show you an example of someone who needs a friend to tell him the truth.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=looking+for+a+city+singer+on+youtube&view=detail&mid=BEB92C4AF64793E31C6DBEB92C4AF64793E31C6D&FORM=VIRE>

Somebody has been lying to that poor fellow. What would a friend tell him? A friend would tell him, "Singing is not your gift. Let me help you find your gift and we will look for ways you can be a blessing in the kingdom with that gift."

When I was a child playing army I used to fantasize about flying in a bomber where I was the navigator. Now those of you who know me understand that is a total fantasy because I have absolutely no sense of direction. I once took a backroad from Ft. Smith to Sallisaw just enjoying the scenery when it dawned on me that I had been driving long enough to get to Sallisaw and it was nowhere in sight. I stopped at a store in the middle of nowhere and asked the clerk how far it was to Sallisaw. He replied, "Well, fella, the direction you are headed it's about 25,000 miles." So can you imagine the disaster I would have been as a navigator? If I had stubbornly pursued that as a career goal a friend would have said, "Navigation is not your gift. You have gifts but navigation is not one of them. Let me help you discover your real gifts." Friends don't flatter. They tell you the truth.

The fourth requirement for forging a friendship is...

Counsel

27:9 – "...the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice." Sometimes it's a very pleasant thing to have a friend give you his heartfelt advice. You know he has your best interest at heart and you love him for being honest with you. At other times the counsel of a friend is unpleasant. *27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.* One of the best friends I have is James Freie. I called James one day to tell him about a frustration I was having with a mutual friend who just refused to acknowledge I was right about an important issue in the church. I was hoping James would say, "Of course you are correct and I will call our mutual friend and tell him he is wrong and you are right." James and I had talked about that issue and I knew he agreed with me. So I can't tell you how shocked I was when his answer was, "It is not your church and it is not our mutual friend's church. You both need to leave it alone." That is not what I wanted to hear and I did not like hearing it but I heeded his counsel because he is my friend and his advice was heartfelt, intended only to sharpen me.

WHERE DO WE GET THE POWER FOR FRIENDSHIP?

Would you agree with me that you need more friends? Why is it that you don't? Because you are not giving to others the kind of friendship you need them to give to you. The only way to have a friend is to be a friend. How are you at being there for a person no matter what the cost? Where are we going to get the power to be the friend we need to be so that we can have the friends we need to have? The night before Jesus went to the cross he was desperately trying to get across to his disciples the meaning of what he was about to do. In John 14, 15, 16, and 17 he tries so hard to explain to them what he is about to do. One of the ways he approaches that is with the concept of friendship. He said, *"Tonight I no longer call you servants. A servant does not know his master's business. But tonight I call you friends. Now love one another as I love you. I am laying down my life for my friends."* When Jesus said that suddenly the whole history of the world can be understood in terms of friendship.

On the cross Jesus surrendered his friendship with God so that we could be his friends. Look at his arms, nailed open. How much more open could a friend be? The ultimate friend lets you in and he never lets you down. In the garden when his best friends fall asleep on him, deny him, betray him, the father says “You either have to experience hell or lose your friends.” and Jesus says, “I’ll experience hell.” If I understand that, if I get it that Jesus loves me no matter what, then I can reach out and befriend someone without fear of rejection.

Remember in Genesis 3 when God came walking in the cool of the garden with Adam? “Walking” with someone is a Hebrew metaphor for friendship. God is a friend and since we are made in his image we need to develop our friendship skills. Do you remember what Jesus spent so much time doing with his 12 apostles? He went on walks with them. That is to say he spent time being their friend.

Make him the friend your heart desires and you will have all the friends your heart needs.