

Topics from Proverbs: The Friend - Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good morning.

Good morning. No, I feel a little bad. We were giving you money out of a fire. We may need to upgrade that at some point. Good morning. So, we're going to continue this morning.

If you haven't been here the last couple Sundays, we're going to continue the series that we've been going through. It's a topical one as we take different topics out of the book of Proverbs specifically.

And so we're going to continue that this morning. And I thought I could come right out and tell you what we're going to study. Is my mic on? I think so. I'm going to pull it up. It's green.

Can you guys hear me better now? No? It's not on. The sound's not on. How about now? Still no? All right.

[1:07] I'll talk loudly for a second here. We're going to play some audio for you. So, there we go. Okay, we're on. What I was saying is we're going through the book of Proverbs. We're picking out some different topics.

And I was going to come out and just tell you exactly what the topic is. But instead of that, let's make it a little bit more exciting. And we're going to play a little bit of a guessing game. And what we're going to do is I'm going to play just a short clip from two songs.

And I want you to listen to the song. And I want you to think, what is the common theme between these two songs? And that will be the topic that we study. So, and we're not going to show you what it is.

We're just going to play the audio. So, Kelsey, if you can play the first clip. Okay. The younger generation is like, well, I don't even know what that is.

All right. Next one. This one, you probably won't resonate with this either. But play the second song. Yes, we have two people that definitely know that one. So, if you're thinking in your head, what is the theme?

[2:08] It is friends. Friends. Friendship. You got it. And so, this morning, we're going to look at the topic of friends or friendship as it relates to Proverbs.

And also, a few other passages as well. And just to kind of start, I want to mention that, you know, the topic of friendship is really an interesting one.

That I would say has drastically changed over the last 15 years. If you had gone back 15 years and you had asked, you know, my 18-year-old self then, what are your, who are your friends?

Like, how did you become friends? What, what, how do you define a friend? I would say, you know, a friend is someone that I either spend time with, a friend is someone that I talk to, a friend is someone that I have, like, some kind of shared experience with, whether it's we go to church together, we're in youth group together, we go to school together, neighborhood, work, whatever it may be.

And I would say, in the last 15 years, that, that term has really changed. And a lot of it has to do with social media. No longer, you know, does a friend have to be someone that you have shared kind of that maybe physical or, you know, kind of that, that experience with.

[3:27] But a friend is someone that you may define as just being connected with on one of these, you know, kind of social media platforms. And, you know, truth be told, I think if you're, if you're on any of these, you know, Facebooks, anything like that, if you honestly kind of

look at it, you would say, yeah, there's, there's probably a number of people on here that I, I kind of know.

Maybe I barely know. Maybe I don't even really know. Maybe it's like we, we met years ago for a weekend and, and we've kind of connected then. But, but since then it's kind of gone away. And so you kind of see where I'm going with this. So you have kind of what used to be the, the definition of a friend or friendship that has changed over the last, you know, 15 years or so. Now it's kind of more of a broader definition of just people that you're connected with even loosely. But then it's interesting because a lot of studies will say that, and these are many studies, this isn't just one specifically, but many will say that each person has about the capacity to manage about 150 relationships.

And, and 150 relationships, including family as well. And these studies also say that out of 150 kind of broader relationships that you have, kind of actively managed relationships, about 14 or so are kind of within more of an inner circle.

[4:54] And then even specifically, there was a, a survey done a few years back and they said, how many like best friends would you say you had? And the average was about four, what people would say is best friends.

The number of 150 has kind of stayed constant over the years. Four best friends is actually up from 2006 where people said they had an average of two best friends.

And even going back to 1985, people said they had an average of three best friends. And so you may hear these numbers and say, you know what, I, uh, my numbers are a little bit different. You know, I'm a little bit higher, a little bit lower, whatever it may be. But you, you'll kind of get this general trend in kind of the direction I'm going here. 1985, people said they have an average of three best friends.

It kind of dipped down to two in 2006. And then people say now they have an average of four close friends. But the interesting thing is, you know, despite all of this, I'm not going to harp on social media the whole time, but, uh, 70, uh, 85% of people polled said that their friends on social media act differently than their friends in real life.

[6:10] 77% said that their friends were not authentic online. And so you, you start to say, well, you know, sure, your, your numbers of friends are increasing.

And the number of people you're able to kind of stay connected with is increasing. Um, but maybe it's not all a good thing. You know, you're kind of losing some of that authentic, you know, interpersonal relationship there.

And then even, even kind of going further, uh, despite all of these opportunities to connect with people and kind of, you know, stay up to date with, with what's going on, um, there's this kind of widely growing body of research that says teenagers are dealing with a greater rate of depression, anxiety, and feeling lonely.

And I think, wow, that, that's, that's really interesting. Loneliness is a, is an issue in kind of this age of, of social media. Um, and, and just to be very frank, for many in this room, you may think, yeah, that's not surprising.

You know, we, we can kind of see through this facade of what, what is true friendship and what is not. But maybe if you're in that camp, you're thinking, yeah, I can see how social media isn't, isn't quite cutting it as far as kind of true relationships.

[7:22] But I'm having a hard time connecting with people that have become so dependent on kind of this way of, um, of being relational. And so whether you're on, on one side of the fence or, or the other, maybe you're on the side of the fence of like, hey, I have all these friends.

I can, I can say that I'm connected with hundreds of people, whatever it may be. Um, but my true friends are, are really kind of lacking or, or I'd like to kind of, um, go in further depth with, with some of these relationships.

Or maybe you're on the other end, you're like, hey, I don't really deal with the social media stuff, but I'm having a tough time really connecting with people nowadays because it is totally different than what it used to be. Um, and I need to like understand what, what true friendship means or how, how I can kind of relate to people in that.

Um, and so I would say, thankfully, the Lord has provided an answer to these questions. And, and he does a great job of, of laying out, um, this answer in the book of Proverbs.

And I will say, you know, friendship was not in this perfect state before the likes of Facebook came along. Um, and there are many examples in Proverbs of what a poor friend looks like.

[8:34] And so we're going to kind of look at those as well. So you can kind of understand, you know, what, what the good in the bad, um, looks like. So what we're going to do this morning is we're going to just look at four kind of biblical qualities of true friendship.

And then we're going to answer a question that I really struggled with. And that is, how, how do I become, um, maybe the word is motivated to, to really desire to have these true relationships?

You know, you, I can, I can see what a true relationship, a good, a good friendship looks like. Um, I can go through these four examples of how to become a good friend or how to deepen that friendship with other people.

But let's just be honest. Like, if, if the, if the desire is not there, it's not going to happen. And I don't see him in the room.

But at Sunday school, Mike Carey had a good point of just like as time goes on and as you get a little bit older, sometimes you become a little bit more introverted and a little bit less of a desire to, to, to spend time with people and to invest in other people.

[9:47] And, and to do those things and to kind of, you know, um, continue to grow in that, it's not going to be something that you're going to pull out of your own power.

And I'll give you the hint right now. The answer, if you're a believer, is going to be a, a reliance on the Holy Spirit and a focus on the Lord.

Because the Lord gives us this great example of what his love looks like. He is, he has displayed it. God has displayed that by giving his son to die on the cross.

Um, and by looking at him and by, by focusing on the Lord, we can, we can, um, again, with the power of the Holy Spirit, become imitators of that. And when that, when that, when that love of Christ is imitated in our own life, that is the only way that we are going to be able to experience true friendship.

So I'll stop right there. Let's, let's open in prayer. Lord, we just thank you for this morning. Thank you for your word. Um, as we often say, Lord, may you be pleased in, in, in this message.

[10:58] May, may your word go forth. Um, Lord, you have, uh, you have instituted what, what, what a, what a friendship looks like. And we, uh, we thank you for that.

We thank you that you have not just put us out, uh, on an island to, to live life by ourselves without the love and support of friends. And, and we, we thank you that you have given us examples of, um, what good friendship looks like, what, what bad friendship looks like that we should avoid.

And so may, may, may we here this morning, uh, just walk away with a reliance on, on the Holy Spirit that you have given each believer here, uh, and relying on that power to, to, to look at you and to look at what your son did on the cross for us, that ultimate display of love, that we may imitate that and stay focused on you.

So may we do that with, uh, not only our friends, but our family, uh, those within the church, those without, outside of the church. Uh, Lord, thank you for this, this topic of friendship here.

Amen. Amen. So again, just to kind of, you know, go over what we're going to talk about this morning, it's going to be four topics on just kind of what, what does biblical friendship look like? Or how, how does, like, what are some of the qualities of it?

[12:15] And just to give kind of credit where credit's due, this is kind of broken down by the, the commentary that's, uh, shared with a lot of us over Proverbs, a commentary written by a guy named Derek Kinder, kinder.

And so these four qualities are this, constancy, candor, counsel, and tact.

Constancy, candor, counsel, and tact. And we'll kind of go through each of these, I'll define them, give a couple verses that support them, maybe an example or two and we'll move on.

So first is, is constancy, and constancy is, is, is essentially someone that is faithful, dependable.

Think of, like, someone that's a friend during good times and bad through the thick and thin.

And Proverbs 14 talks about, um, talks about this, but in, in the bad friend scenario. So think of, like, this is how, like, a bad friend acts. Check yourself.

[13:15] Is this, is this how you act? Is this how friends that you know act? Um, if so, this may be something you want to reconsider. Proverbs 14 says, it talks about the, how the poor is disliked by his neighbor, but the rich man has many friends.

See that kind of dependency there? The guy's rich, the guy has friends. You'll hear the word neighbor, you'll, you'll hear the word brother, the word friend. It all comes kind of from this root Hebrew word, *rea*.

And, and *rea* actually kind of represents the full spectrum of your relationship. With someone else. It can be someone that you, like, barely know. Like, an acquaintance, an associate. Um, someone that I just barely know that lives down the street.

Whatever it may be. Uh, and then it can be someone that is more of a companion, a friend. Uh, then you kind of become into, like, you know, as you kind of go down the spectrum of someone you really know.

Like, maybe a brother, a spouse, something like that. If you've been watching any of the blues series, you would know that the, the San Jose Sharks are friends with the referees. And the referees have, have given them favorable calls.

[14:20] And I would say it's more on the more intimate side of that spectrum. Going back to the bad example.

If your friends are only friends with you, or if you're only friends with someone because they're rich, that's not someone that is a faithful friend. That is not someone that is being, um, constant in their friendship.

As soon as that wealth leaves, so will that friendship leave. Proverbs 19 says the same thing. It says that, uh, a man, it says everyone is friends with a man who gives gifts.

Again, like, the person that is giving something is, you know, a friend, uh, or is, is befriended by many. And that, that's just not what you're looking for. Those are what we call fair-weather friends. You know, a true friend does not depend on kind of the good fortune of the state you're in. And the example I'll give, and, um, just want to kind of brag on my stepdad, Scott, for a minute. But, like, my stepdad, Scott, is a good example of a guy that, you know, he, he could be talking to the wealthiest or the least wealthy or, or the most important or least important person in the room.

[15:28] And he will talk to that person with the same amount of attention as anyone else. And so I really appreciate that about Scott. And on the flip side, there are people that I know that I will not name names, but, like, you're talking to them.

And you know that as soon as someone more important walks into the room, that attention will be diverted to that person. And so you're just sitting there, like, looking at the door, like, hey, who's going to be the next person that walks in? Because that friendship is more dependent on wealth, status, importance.

And that is just not a good, that's not true friendship. So that is a reminder to me, as I'm talking to someone, do not, do not base your friendship or that level of the relationship or the engagement with that person based on kind of the outward appearance.

This is a good one. If you turn, if you, I'm only going to give you a couple passages if you really want to turn to, but, because we're going to be kind of jumping around. If you want to turn to Proverbs 17, Proverbs 17, 17 specifically.

This verse has a little humor in it for me. It says, a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

[16:42] So when you first read that, you think, and Teresa and I had a nice little laugh about this. A friend loves at all times, we'll get to that in a second. But a brother is born for adversity.

If you have sons or if you have brothers, you think, yes, there is the purpose of a brother right there. It is for that conflict. It is for that adversity. That makes sense.

It is biblical. So now as I watch my sons fight and argue and bicker, I'm like, well, that's what brothers are for. It's for adversity. The truth is, many scholars say that that should be slightly kind of reworded in the way it's translated.

Kind of a better wording for it is a friend loves at all times the same way a brother is born for adversity or born for the purpose of supporting you in adversity.

That is what a true constant friend looks like. A friend that is a friend like a brother when the times are good and when there's adversity and bad times.

[17:51] Proverbs 27.10 says, better is a neighbor or a friend that is near than a brother that is far away. Appreciate those that are close to you and constant with you, even physically close to you.

You know, you can be, you know, far removed from maybe your close group of friends and family. It can really make for a challenging time. So even just kind of that physical proximity is important.

I think about, you know, the examples of like friendship in the Bible. You think of Jonathan and David. You think of, you know, Nate brought up in, you know, the communion time.

Paul and Barnabas. You know, close friends, obviously, before kind of their split over Mark. But, you know, there's some good examples there. And kind of going to the example of Jonathan and David, I think of this passage in 1 Samuel 23.

And it says, and Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. So this wasn't like this rosy time. I mean, this is like Saul losing his position as king.

[19:01] This is something that Jonathan would have eventually had gotten, you know, had kind of the normal course of action happen. Jonathan would have been kind of that next king. But he says, Jonathan says, don't be afraid.

He said, my father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this. The two of them made a covenant before the Lord.

And so, again, just a great example of through the thick and thin, a constant friend. When the times are good and when the times are bad. The second quality is someone that is of candor.

Someone that is open and honest. Someone that is frank. And, again, I can kind of think back to it. And I'm sure everybody here can think of like a friend. Just take a minute and kind of pause. Like, we all have a friend that speaks their mind, you know.

And it probably kind of brings a chuckle because you've heard some funny things. Like, man, I can't believe that person said that. But, you know, the beauty of that is oftentimes that person, if they are a true friend, they are speaking truth.

[20:08] And so that is the quality that we want to take here. Someone that is open and honest in speaking truth. Proverbs 27, 6 says, faithful are, this is interesting. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Profuse are the kisses of the enemy. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Like, wounding someone doesn't seem like something a true friend would do.

But when someone is speaking honestly to you, and maybe it is a tough thing to hear, oftentimes those wounds from a friend are meant to cut to the heart for the purpose of something good.

Whereas the kisses of the enemy are meant to appease the heart and really typically meant to kind of cover up or hide something that really should be addressed.

Proverbs 29 says, A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. Suggesting that the man who is laying this net to ensnare you will probably ensnare himself as well.

[21:18] So, a good friend. Be a good friend that is constant through the good times and through the bad.

Be a good friend that is speaking truth candidly. And the next one is be a friend that is giving good counsel. And you need counsel along with being candid because if you are just speaking your mind, but it is not biblical advice, then it is not going to be helpful.

So, speaking truth and giving advice. Again, just to quote a couple verses from Proverbs 27. It says, Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

And then one that we all know very well, Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another. You know, these are both examples of how biblical counsel is what is needed for true friendship like this.

And then lastly, the fourth quality is one of tact. And being, tact is just another way of saying being thoughtful or being considerate or being appropriate in what you are saying.

[22:40] So, you kind of take all four of these things, and you really have a very powerful way of going deeper in your relationship with your

friends. You know, being constant with someone through the good and through the bad.

Being candid with them and speaking truth. But doing it with biblical counsel and doing it at the appropriate time. Respecting their feelings. There's a really funny verse in Proverbs 27 that says, Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

If I wake Teresa up this morning, or, you know, tomorrow morning at five in the morning, and I'm like, I love you! I don't think she's going to be like, Wow, that is exactly what I needed here. You know, it will come down with cursing. And so, being appropriate and thoughtful and considerate with the things that you share, and kind of, you know, the counsel and the candid feedback. So, those are the four kind of, you know, areas of biblical qualities of a friend. And so, this is kind of where I want to spend just a few minutes, and that is just, how do we become this true friend? [23:58] You know, I can say, like, this is what you need to do, but like, if there's not like an answer as to like, where does this come from, to me, it's just going to go one ear and not the other.

You may think about it this afternoon, maybe not even this afternoon, and it's going to be gone. And, this applies to a number of things, but it's really been something that's been laid on my heart, just in, as I said in the beginning, relying on the Holy Spirit for these things. Has anyone ever heard of Francis Chan? I mentioned this to Brad last night. Francis Chan, anyway, he's a pastor, he's written some books, out in California, and essentially, his story is this. the most recent book that he wrote, was called, Letters to the Church, and he, started a church about 25 years ago, it grew and grew and grew, and became this behemoth of a church. And, a couple years ago, he started to really notice, a lot of his, kind of elders were leaving the church. And, anytime they left, they said, you know what, I, I'm leaving, because I just don't, I just don't know if we're really, like, acting in a, in a way that, you know, that a church should, kind of, as it looks in the Bible, it just doesn't quite look like what we're doing here.

[25:14] And that's, that's kind of a, a red flag, you know, that's an alarm going off. And so, and I think in a very humble way, he kind of took a lot of that feedback, and said like, okay, what, what does the church look like, in the New Testament?

And does this church that we have built, or does this church that we, that we, that we attend, kind of align with that? And one of the things that really stood out to him is, he felt like the, the church had really become disconnected in its friendship, or its love for one another.

It's like true, earnest friendship with each other. And, and that actually caused him to leave his own church that he had, you know, attended and kind of started 25 years before.

And, and now he just simply does these home churches. And, and one of his big reasons was because he felt like the, the true love for one another, that true friendship had gone away.

John 13 says, you know, Jesus says, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. A pretty straightforward commandment there.

[26:25] But then the next verse is interesting, because it says, by this, all people will know you are my disciples. If you love one another, this isn't just something for the edification of yourself. Hey, I'm going to have all these friends when I, when I apply these four principles, it is going to be for the testimony of Jesus.

In Ephesians four, it talks about kind of these, these relationships within the church. It says, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint in which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow, so that it builds itself, builds itself up in love.

And just to, just to kind of wrap it up here, I would say, a lot of this comes, as far as, where is this going to come from?

Like I said, it's going to come from the Holy Spirit. That, that is the bottom line. We need to be praying that, that we, we can just be totally reliant on the Holy Spirit. And, there's a great passage in 1 John, where it says, and this is just all about love, so just hang with me for a second.

I'm going to kind of emphasize a few points of it, but this, this undertone of, of the importance of love, is what drives, the desire, and the need for friendship.

[27:54] And it says, beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. So there is, there is the example that we've been given. And whoever loves has been born of God, and knows God.

Anyone who does not love, does not know God, because God is love. In this, the love of God has been made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, that we might live through him.

There is the example. It's the gospel. God sent his son, Jesus, to come into this world, to pay the price for our sins. That is the ultimate example of love.

And he goes on to say, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, if we, if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

And here's the last verse, that's really, I think, a good one here. By this we know that we are, that we abide in him, and he in us, because he has given us, his spirit.

[28:57] So he has given us his spirit. We have, we have seen the example of God's love. We should become imitators of that love.

And when we're seeking the Lord, and I think those two things, and seeking the power of the spirit, and, and, and praying that we can be imitators of his love, then that will lead to us being, just good friends, and seeking that quality of friendship.

Someone that is constant, someone that is candid, someone that gives good counsel, and someone that does that, all with the appropriate tact. The musicians want to come up, we'll just wrap up with this point here.

My prayer is that we leave here, with, with two things in mind, as it, as it relates to our friendships. One is that, God calls, us to love one another, by imitating, God the Father, who displayed that perfect example of love.

And second, that we recognize, the only way, that we can love our neighbor, as ourselves, is by leaning on the power, given to us, in the Holy Spirit.

[30:17] You're only going to build, and maintain true relationships, if you lean on the Holy Spirit. If you try to do it on your own, it will come and go. You will, you will lose the desire, you will lose, the, the, the strength to do that.

We easily become prideful, and selfish. I, I skipped over a verse, in, in 1 Corinthians, but it talks about, you know, as you know, love is, love is, love is patient, love is kind, it goes on, all these different things, love does not envy, it is not arrogant.

To me, that is my issue. What keeps me from loving a friend, or to, you know, going deeper with that friend, it is, it is just arrogance. It is thinking, you know, myself, love is more important than that person.

The way I spend my time, the way I, the way I interact with people, it is more selfish. Let's see others through the lens of Christ. True friendship, like we see in Proverbs, will help us be real with each other, admitting our weaknesses, and taking off kind of the Christian mask that we often put on, you know, where someone says, hey, how you doing?

I'm doing okay. Instead of, instead of, instead of getting kind of that facade, let's be very honest with each other. Let's be very candid with each other.

[31:39] All of this, you know, done out of, out of love. Instead of running from the church when things get hard, let's be eager to lean on our brothers and sisters here to, to bear our burdens when, when, when there are tough times.

to, to be very honest and open with each other. And, and to be on the other end of that, to be very open to receiving that. If you notice that there is someone that is going through a tough time, approach that person and say, hey, how can I help you?

How can I pray for you? Is there something that we can kind of, you know, talk about, or is there, is there a burden I can help share? That is what true friendship looks like. Let's close in prayer.

Lord, Lord, as, as we look outside and see the rain come down, Lord, we, we think about just the, the body of believers here in this building.

And we just, we think about many of the friends that we have, many of these friendships and relationships here in this room go back many years. And, and for that, we just want to say thank you.

[32:48] Thank you for, for friendship. Lord, may we apply these principles that you have given us in Proverbs to, to be constant friends, to be, to be providing good counsel, to be tactful, to be candid in, in what we say.

Lord, may, may we as, those giving these qualities, may, may we just seek the Holy Spirit in, in giving us the, the strength to do that. May you give us guidance in what to say, especially in the world that, that seems so confused as to what true friendship looks like.

Lord, I admit that I, I oftentimes wonder how can we connect with people to share your word, to share the testimony of what you have done in my life when it, when it seems that we are so fragmented and so disconnected.

Lord, but these principles are timeless. These are not something that, that applied hundreds of years ago and, and we're only, right then. Lord, these are things that we can use today and may we do that as we leave here.

Maybe, maybe look around and, and say who, who are our friends and are we investing in those relationships? Lord, and maybe, maybe you open our eyes to those around that are hurting, maybe friends that are soon to become friends and Lord, just, just, just direct us to be able to show the love of Christ to them because that, that is so powerful and that is so needed especially in today's world that, as I think we heard earlier, we, we, they've become desensitized to, to, to, to, Lord yourself, your son Jesus, what he has done on the cross and so, may we be just a living testimony of, of your love by displaying that and, and, in, the way we, treat others.

[34:43] We just thank you for these things. Amen.sec Ce Note the