

Wisdom in Relationships

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- [0 : 00] What kind of friends do you have? What kind of friend are you? I may have mentioned before that I had a challenging time with friends in high school.
- I longed for friends, but I had none. Excuse me. I longed for good friends to be accepted and included. I longed for friends to stand by me through tough times.
- But for much of my school life, I was friendless. Now, this term may have dropped out of use with the current generation, but when I was at school, I was called Nigel.
- Nigel was the name given to the person with no friends. Nigel, no friends. I found out that the internet backs me up. Nigel is a term for, what's it say?
- Male social misfit, friendless person. That was me in high school. Anyone know Nigel? No one? No one here knows Helen.
- [1 : 09] Do you know Nigel? Helen knows Nigel. I think it's a white Australian culture thing. Why? Why, Nigel, no friends? As far as I can tell, because it starts with N.
- It's just another sign of the hilarious cruelty of high schoolers, although not all high schoolers I know. For a while at school, it wasn't all bad.
- For a time in year eight, there was a boy who was my friend. We were close, and that was nice. I might have called him my best friend, but there wasn't a lot of competition. When year nine began, my friend began to hang out with some other people in the grade, and they didn't like me, and I don't know why.
- They told my friend that we shouldn't be friends anymore. And one day they reported to me, he doesn't want to hang around with you anymore.
- He doesn't like you. And I went back to being Nigel. No friends. Year nine boys, hey? Not all, I know. The HTY boys are all angels.
- [2 : 25] For many people with many different experiences of friendship, it can often be very sad or dissatisfying.
- I wonder what your experience of friendship has been like. What kind of friends have you had? What kind of friend have you been? A good friend?
- A best friend? A fair weather friend? Have you thought about how and why you choose and accept friends? Do you stand by your friends at all times?
- Well, tonight, continuing our series, we're going to explore what the Proverbs have to say about friendship. They contain some interesting and challenging reflections on friendship, and we'll consider how we should seek to be involved in friendship as people who've been undeservingly befriended by the best friend of all, Jesus Christ.
- The Bible says lots about friendship. It's not only a human term. God is called friend. God has friends. The word friend is often synonymous with neighbor or brother and sister.
- [3 : 42] Friends are said to be open, honest, supportive, trustworthy. A friendly person is peaceful and safe to have around. The friendship of King David and Jonathan is described as one in spirit.

They loved each other as they loved themselves. Friendship is presented in God's word as important, special, and serious. Friendship comes up over and over in the Proverbs.

Friendship comes up over and over in the Proverbs. Friendship comes up over and over in the Proverbs. What friends are like. What friends should do. How people pursue and behave in friendships. Last week, as Victor reminded us, Mark helped us to understand success in Proverbs in light of God's wisdom, fearing and trusting him.

Today, we'll see how fearing and trusting God helps us recognize and practice Christ-like friendship. Some of you may ask, what does friendship have to do with fearing God?

Lots of people have friends who don't fear God. But the Bible teaches us that friendship flows out of fearing God. Job says to his friends, withholding kindness from a friend is done by one who has no fear of God.

[5 : 00] So, let's take a look. The first thing that we'll see, point one, is that friends choose wisely. It feels a bit gross sometimes to talk about choosing friends.

Sometimes it feels a bit judgy. But whether you think about it or not, we do choose our friends. You may have heard the saying, you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family.

And while that saying is more about loving the family you're born with, it's true that you can choose your friends. Solomon says, we do and should.

In chapter 12, verse 26 on the screen, it says, The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. How much do you think about how you choose your friends?

What affects your decision? Are you motivated by what you get out of it? Solomon also observes that not everyone chooses wisely.

[6 : 09] The following two proverbs sound a bit odd when thinking about wisdom in friendship. Listen again on the screen. 14:20 says, the poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.

And 19:4, wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor deserts them. Do you see what I mean by odd? These might make us think that if you want friends, you need to be rich.

Or if you're choosing friends, you should stay away from the poor. I wonder what you thought about these as Nathan read them. It's good to keep in mind when reading proverbs that even though they teach us God's wisdom, many of them are simply an observation.

And he sees that money attracts and poverty repels. He observes that people choose friends for themselves.

And while he doesn't comment here, whether it's right or wrong, he does make other observations. Like 27:24, riches do not endure forever.

[7 : 25] And a crown is not secure for all generations. And 28:6, better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.

And so there is wisdom in these odd proverbs for us who seek to fear God in friendship. We should be wise in the way we choose our friends.

Riches shouldn't be what attract us because they are fleeting. And choosing friends like this may easily become more about me.

What will I get? How will it serve me? The example in the New Testament of befriending people in the church is because of who someone is in Christ, not because of what they have or what they can do for you.

The lesson in a great letter called Philemon is befriending at great personal cost, choosing that we don't, choosing those we don't think deserve our love and our friendship, bringing them close, even into the family.

[8 : 40] The letter to Philemon tells us about a slave called Onesimus who runs off and is converted when he meets Paul. Paul expects Philemon, who owned Onesimus as a slave, to accept him back, not simply as a slave, but as a brother.

This is a big ask, especially if the slave wronged the owner, which in this case he may have. In verse 15 of Philemon, there's only one chapter, Paul says, Perhaps the reason he was separated from you a little while was that you might have him back forever.

No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He's very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. What are the reasons that you refuse to befriend people?

Who won't you accept in your life? Are there people in church, part of the body of Christ, who you won't befriend in the way that Christ has chosen to befriend you?

[9 : 59] It's so easy to allow near us those who we think are easy, more fun, more interesting.

It's easy to be driven by popularity or comfort, to shun those we think are different, and just choose your different category for rich or poor.

It could be awkward or cool, boring or fun, annoying or funny. We've already heard from proverbs that riches do not endure forever.

Christ has shown us that he chose those who were unworthy and undeserving to be his friends. And Paul encourages choosing and accepting friends in the same way.

And so now we ask ourselves, by what criteria do I befriend people? Who do I seek to be my friend? Who do I allow to be my friend?

[11 : 02] What unhealthy things drive my decision? You may think that you're always on the other end of friendship choosing, even in church.

You may think that because of this, it's always the job of the other to accept and include you. But the Christ-like friendship model is still for you to love and befriend those whom you don't think deserve it.

To love those you think ignore you. Because Jesus doesn't wait for us to come to him before he offers friendship.

Jesus isn't friends with everyone and nor will you be, but the offer is on the table. Who will you not offer the hand of friendship to?

Well, having looked at how to begin or pursue friends, now we'll think about wise behaviour in friendships, point two. And the thing we're going to think about is how friends stand by or stick around, if you like.

[12 : 22] Proverbs 27.10 says, Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family and do not go to your relative's house when disaster strikes you. Better a neighbour nearby than a relative far away.

This proverb basically says, Stick around. Don't run off when disaster strikes, whether yours or theirs.

Don't forsake a friend. This proverb is about sticking around your friends who are struggling and the value of nearby friends in tough times.

But while we can't control the actions of others, the right response for us is to think about how we react when disaster strikes a neighbour or a friend.

The wisdom is, don't forsake your friend. And even that a friend or neighbour is, a neighbour nearby is better than family who are far away.

[13 : 26] I see the value of this having a family who is very far away. Friends nearby during hardship is good. But some hardship of friends is hard, isn't it?

Hard to manage. Hard to deal with. Hard to stand by with. Some hardship of our friends affects us too. Some hardship of our friends costs.

And we might think, Is this really my fight? I didn't sign up for this. At these times, we learn about our friendship. In 1824, it says, One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother or sister, if you like.

Are you a reliable friend? Will you stick closer than family? You may think, Yes, absolutely.

He's like my brother. She's my own blood. David and Jonathan, they were like strangers compared to us. And that's a great sentiment, isn't it?

[14 : 36] And it feels very warming to have that. But it's worth asking, Is there any situation they face where I would balk at sticking with them?

Because it's easy to have a strong desire to stick with a friend, and harder to do it when the time comes. I'm sure you'll agree. Think of the great example of the disciples when Jesus is arrested.

How close were they to him? How much did they adore him? When Jesus told his disciples they would all abandon him, Peter said in Mark 14, Even if all fall away, I will not.

Jesus answered, Truly I tell you today, yes, tonight, before the rooster crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times. But Peter insisted emphatically, Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

And all the others said the same. Can you hear the conviction? The unwavering desire to stand by, I will never disown you.

[15 : 47] You're my best bud. I would die for you. And do you know what happened? Yes, Peter fought and cut off an ear, but his support was misplaced.

He denied, and they all scattered. The purpose of looking at the disciples is not to make us feel bad or say you would always do the same, but to see that our strength to stand by our friends is tied to our fear and trust of God.

Of course, not always will standing by our friends seem so important to the kingdom. But there is a character of sacrifice and love exemplified by Jesus who died for his friends.

The one who fears God lives like Jesus who feared him perfectly. The one who fears God will stand by friends the way Jesus stood by his, not like the way his friends stood by him.

Well, at the start I asked, what kind of friend are you? What kind of friends do you have?

[17 : 10] Do you know? Are you a BFF? A best friend forever? The world's idea of best friends has some merit, doesn't it?

The one you love the most. But I wonder if the BFF is sometimes a status symbol. Who's your best friend? Whose best friend are you? This isn't something I only hear among young people.

In Proverbs, friends aren't called best. They're just called friends. In 1717, it says, a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

This is a great challenge as we think about what a BFF really is. There's no provisos or caveats or exceptions. A friend loves at all times.

And while we struggle to love at all times, this is exactly what we see in the example of Christ, who died for his friends and his enemies too.

[18 : 16] Jesus is the best friend of all. And while you may not be everyone's best friend, Christ does set an example, set us an example in relating to our friends, to lay down our life for them, which will nearly never mean die, but to befriend, not because of status or what you might receive, but with loving service.

My experience of friendship at school was painful, but many years later, I could see how God was working in it. He used it to develop Christ-like friendships at church in a great youth group.

These friends accepted me because of Christ, not because of how cool or uncool I was. And it was Christ-like friends who began to teach me how to befriend like Christ.

It was Christ-like friends who stuck closer even than brothers and still do. In Christ, God teaches us what best friends really look like.

Jesus feared God completely, which means he fully entrusted himself to his father. Non-believers can love their friends, but they can't love like Jesus.

[19 : 48] Believers don't fear God perfectly, but we can learn how to befriend like Christ. So because of the wisdom of God given to you who listen to him, be a best friend like Jesus.

Choose those whom Christ chooses, the unworthy, the undeserving, don't wait to be accepted or befriended. Love like Christ, even if they don't stand by.

Even, sorry, when we are best friends like Jesus, following in his steps, loving like him, trusting in God, then we will not simply be his servants.

We will be called his friends. And since he laid down his life for us, he will be our best friend forever.

How about I pray? Thanks God that Jesus is the best friend who laid down his life for us.

[20 : 58] Help us to fear you and befriend like Jesus. Amen.