

WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs - Part four
Teaching #1833 - Sunday, October 4th, 2015 - 6:00 p.m.
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FRIENDSHIP - HOW OUR LIVES ARE SHAPED FOR GLORY OR RUIN

It is natural that we would move from our studies of wisdom and foolishness into study on the nature and value of friendship. That's because, especially in the book of Proverbs, but throughout the Scriptures in general, wisdom and foolishness don't come from libraries and universities. They come from the established relationships of life.

This is the first point in tonight's study:

1) **FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, YOU BECOME WHAT YOUR FRIENDS ALREADY ARE**

Proverbs 13:20 - "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

In other words, you will be more shaped by family and friends than by all the books and sermons in the world. This is a matter that has such power to shape destiny that the New Testament won't let the idea rest:

1 Corinthians 15:33 - "Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

This is not a person who **started out** with bad morals. He started out with good. He was wise enough to learn the truth and walk in it. His life was on the right track. He was going somewhere positive. But this was all reversed and turned inside-out by "**bad company**." This good and wise person probably never **planned** to reject wisdom and goodness outright. Perhaps he thought he would actually **turn his bad company to the light**. But it never works that way. The text says he becomes **corrupt**. The word is used to describe **gradual decay**. It's the kind you don't see coming.

So we learn something important right off the bat. Most of us form friendships on the basis that we simply "**get along**" with some people better than we do others. When you're young you form friendships on the basis of those with whom you have the most **fun**.

But friendship has far too much life shaping power to be established solely on those terms. The wise person considers the **influence** those friends have on his or her life. He no more leaves his friendships to chance than he would blindly put any substance into his mouth and swallow it. Like everything else in the believer's life, friendships come under the Lordship of Jesus **before** they are measured by **personal taste and comfort**. We must form friendships with those who will draw us closer to Jesus Christ.

2) **NOT ONLY DO FRIENDSHIPS SHAPE OUR LIVES, THEY CAN OFFER GREATER STRENGTH AND SUPPORT IN TIMES OF TRIAL OR NEED**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. [10] For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! [11] Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? [12] And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Again, two can do what one cannot. But this strength of friendship is a blessing only if we have established the **right kind** of friendship in the first place. In other words, it's not **enough** that your friend support you when you're down if that friend isn't a good influence on your life **morally**. The friend's support must be more than merely **sentimentally** helpful (ie. telling you that you are right when you're wrong, or merely telling you what he thinks you want to hear, or failing to confront you when you persist in something dead wrong).

A friend is not a good friend **just** because he will encourage you in whatever you are doing. If the friend is a truly good friend he must also be making you into the right kind of person - the kind God wants you to be. Your friends must support you in the ways of the Lord.

3) **A GOOD FRIEND WILL STAND BY YOUR SIDE IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD**

This is an oft repeated theme in the book of Proverbs. The fickle nature of many friendships is laid painfully bare:

Proverbs 19:4, 6-7 - "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend....[6] Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. [7] All a poor man's brothers hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! He pursues them with words, but does not have them."

Take note of the nearness of your friends when you aren't in the finest of season of life. You will discover who your friends really are. Fair-weather friends receive nothing but scorn and rebuke in Proverbs. The whole Word of God judges the common mentality of establishing friendships on the basis of wealth and social status. Such friendships are worthless and have nothing of permanence or beauty in them. True friendship reveals itself most when hard times come:

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

4) **A TRUE AND FAITHFUL FRIEND WILL NOT ONLY OFFER SUPPORT IN TIME OF NEED, BUT HONESTY IN TIMES OF CORRECTION**

This is the flip side of Solomon's comforting words in Ecclesiastes regarding the strength and support friends can give in our time of need. True friends also give loving guidance when we are losing our way:

Proverbs 27:6 - "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

It takes great patience and grace to reach this level of friendship. You will only reach it with a very few during your earthly life. Two friends have to be very close indeed to ***see through the masks we all wear at times*** and also to be ***understanding and humble enough to hear words of correction without letting pride destroy the friendship that brought them to you.***

This may well be the highest form of true friendship in the Scriptures. And the Bible tells us of many great people who failed right at this point in their relationships:

1 Kings 1:5-6 - "Now Adonijah the son of Haggith [Adonijah's mother] exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. [6] His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom."

David failed his fourth born son Adonijah because he never wanted to say anything that would anger or upset him, even when he was clearly going down the wrong path. And it ended up costing Adonijah his life.

Good friends, and good parents, frequently have the duty to bring ***"faithful wounds"*** into the lives of those they truly love.

5) **GOOD FRIENDS ARE FAITHFUL IN BRINGING GODLY COUNSEL INTO ONE ANOTHER'S LIVES**

Proverbs chapter 27 offers very telling instruction on this theme. Because we are prone to different seasons and situations, wise and discerning friends will know how to vary their advice to fit the particular need and condition of their companions:

Proverbs 27:9 - "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel."

Oil is put into wounds. Friends know how to help bring healing to those they love. This is not the time for a lecture. This is the time for encouragement, and good friends know the difference:

1 Samuel 23:15-16 - "David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. [16] And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and ***strengthened his hand in God.***"

This is one of the richest and rarest blessings of close friendship. But there is also the time for another kind of advice in the relationship of friends:

Proverbs 27:17 - "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."

So there are times when advice should heal and soothe like oil. And there are others times when the friend's words should sharpen and brace. Good friends know when each is needed and how to apply their words in Godly timing and proportion. Sometimes the friend's words provide comfort. Sometimes they provide shrewd and pointed ideas.

6) **A GOOD FRIEND TAKES THE TIME TO TRULY KNOW THE SEASONS OF YOUR LIFE. HE HAS A SENSE OF TACT AND TIMING IN THE THINGS HE SAYS AND DOES**

Proverbs 27:14 - "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing."

This is a very simple picture that has more application than waking up someone who is sleeping in. Friends *know* where their companions are at in life. They have taken the time to examine and analyze what the other is facing, the state of mind they are in, the trials or blessings they are experiencing. And they *incorporate* that knowledge into their relationships with them:

Proverbs 25:20 - "Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda."

This is a classic example of a person who may know quite well how he himself feels. He obviously feels good enough to sing songs out loud. The problem is he is motivating his action by nothing *but* the way he feels. He is totally oblivious to the fact that his song feels like vinegar to the troubled heart of his friend.

7) **HOW TO MAKE GOOD FRIENDS**

a) ***To make friends requires diligent, repeated effort* - Proverbs 18:24 - "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."**

This is such an important point because our fallen nature leads us all to blame failed relationships on the faults of others - ***"That church just wasn't friendly so we left and went somewhere else."*** I've heard that all the years of my ministry. But *other* people find *any* church friendly. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that the problem may well lie somewhere else.

b) ***Avoid the gossip* - Proverbs 17:9 - "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends."**

People with lots of friends aren't naive people who don't know the truth about others - warts and all. They are not stupid or blind to human faults. They are simply people who have learned not to ***focus on these things. They don't repeat them - either to others or to their own minds.***

Gossip is the weak man's way to muster attention. He's involved. He's active. He's ***"in the loop."*** But gossips rarely make good friends for themselves. And even if they make such friends, these friends will soon see their true colors and turn away. For all his behind the scenes activity, the gossip truly lives a lonely life. In all the world there is not a single statue erected in memory of a critic.

c) ***Avoid the person of quick temper* - Proverbs 22:24-25 - "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, [25] lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare."**

I find people are actually shocked when they learn the Bible says there are certain people we shouldn't include in our company. But it does. And high on the list is the man with a quick temper. This man brings ruin wherever he goes. And his foolish example is contagious.

d) ***Keep the Word and ways of God prayerfully at the center of all your relationships* - Psalms 1:1-3 - "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."**

The important point here is that you can't separate the entrance and power of the Word of God in your life

from the kind of company you keep. Don't build friendships on mere emotional attachments. Pick the one that increase the flood of God into your soul. This is the surest way to guarantee prosperity in everything else you do.