

Proverbs
Some Friendly Advice about Friends

Sunday, May 30, 2010

Text: 1 Samuel 18:1-3

There are a great many blessings that God has been pleased to give to his saints, but one that must surely be listed near the top is the blessing of friendship. The Lord has created us to be social creatures. We have not only the capacity, but a fundamental need to interact with other people—that is, to live in relationship. Those who have no relationships, people who are truly loners and live in a self-imposed isolation, living in their own little world, only exist in mental wards. And I mean this seriously. To shun relationship, to avoid meaningful interaction with others, is a sign of mental illness. But for normal people with healthy psyches, our relationships are among the most rewarding aspects of life. Why is it, do you suppose, that solitary confinement is sometimes used as a punishment? It's a psychological torment that can be as devastating as any corporal punishment. It's a deprivation of one of our most basic needs as a human being.

God himself, you realize, is a social being. He is not like the god of Islam, for example, who for all eternity prior to creation existed as a monad—alone, with no relationship of any kind with anyone or anything. By way contrast, relationship is fundamental to the very being of the Triune God of Holy Scripture. He exists in three persons, and has done so forever, meaning that relationship is fundamental to his being. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have related to each other—have *loved* each other—forever, even before the creation of the world.

There never was a time when God was not in relationship. He is not dependent, like Allah, upon his creation to have an object of his love. We may say, therefore, that relationship, that *love* is fundamental to God's being in a way that could never be true of Allah, or of any other so-called god, which is why the kind of civilization that Christianity produces is very different from the kind of civilization that Islam produces.

So God himself is a social being, and he has created us to be social beings. He has created us to interact with others, to live in relationship with others. The most meaningful interaction—the most emotionally satisfying and fulfilling relationships—are to be found, of course, in the family. But I would suggest to you that a close second is to be found in friendships.

We are introduced to the friendship of David and Jonathan in our opening text, and this friendship, as it unfolds and develops in First Samuel, is one of the great subplots of Scripture. It's a very touching narrative, even in this briefest of introductions. Notice the language that is used. "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David." What a beautiful way of expressing it! "And Jonathan loved him as his own soul." His love for him was so great that he was moved to make a covenant with him. They were not mere acquaintances. They were the very best of friends. They were soul mates, kindred spirits. We will use their friendship to illustrate some of the things that Proverbs has to say on the subject of friends.

One of the first lessons about friendship that we can learn from Proverbs is that we must choose our friends very carefully.

I. Choose Your Friends Very Carefully

- A. We are profoundly affected by our friends, far more so than most of us will ever realize. Even those of us who are older and more experienced in life, do not fully understand how deeply we are affected by our friends.
 - 1. The most obvious way we are affected is by their *speech* and *conduct*, both in terms of:
 - a. what they choose to say and do
 - b. and what they choose *not* to say and do
 - 2. We are affected by their approval and disapproval
 - a. We naturally desire the approval of our friends, and fear their disapproval
 - i. This is a good thing if our friends are godly and wise. There is then a positive peer pressure.
 - ii. It's a bad thing if our friends are ungodly and foolish, for then we experience a negative peer pressure
 - 3. We are affected by their values, which are expressed in a thousand different ways—some of them very subtle so that we are not even aware of them
- B. Good friends build you up; by their speech and conduct, by their approval or disapproval, by their values reflected in their character. They make you a better person just by being around them.

1. "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (13:20)
 - a. We become like those with whom we most associate; and especially like those whose approval we seek
 - b. We begin to think like them, talk like them, behave like them; all the more so if they have a dominant personality
 - i. Have you ever been in a part of the country that has a distinctive dialect, say in the South, and you begin, quite unintentionally, to talk like them, adopting their vocabulary, their accent?
 - c. The same sort of thing is true, not only of our speech patterns, but our ways of thinking. And if we're hanging out with the wise, it will contribute to our gaining in wisdom. "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise." The wisdom of the wise will rub off on you.
 2. Godly friends build you up. Not only unintentionally, by quiet example, but on purpose.
 - a. The godly make it a point to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24)
 - b. "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel" (27:9)
 3. David and Jonathan built one another up. They encouraged each other to be faithful to the Lord. They were of one heart and mind on this. And let me tell you, you cannot ask for a truer or better friend.
- C. On the other hand, bad friends tear you down. By a bad friend I mean a person of bad character.
1. 1:10-16

2. "The partner [*friend*] of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse, but discloses nothing" (29:24).
3. 22:24-25 "Make no friendship with a man given to anger..."
4. "Leave your simple ways [or, *leave the company of the simple*], and live" (9:6)
5. "Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge" (14:7)
6. "Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat [do not be such a man yourself, nor hang out with such people so as to learn from their ways], for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags" (23:20-21)
7. "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals' " (1 Cor. 15:33)
8. "Let him who has done this be removed from among you... Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:3, 6)

II. Friends are a Blessing in a Time of Need

- A. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (17:17)
 1. A friend is a friend forever, in good times and in bad. A true friend is not fair-weather friend. He will stand by you in hard times
- B. Better is a neighbor [*friend*] who is near than a brother who is far away" (27:10)
- C. Especially a tried and true friend
 1. "A man of many companions may [*still*] come to ruin [*because his friends wimp out on him*], but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (18:24)

D. Jonathan was a blessing to David

1. He interceded on David's behalf before Saul (1 Sam. 19:1-7)
2. He helped David escape from Saul (1 Sam. 20:1-42)
3. He sided with righteous against his own father, and against his own self-interest

E. David was a blessing to Jonathan

1. After Jonathan died in battle, David sought out his relatives to show kindness to them (2 Sam. 9:1-13)

III. Beware of False Friends

- A. "The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends" (hah!) (14:20)
- B. "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend (19:4)
- C. "Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts" (19:6)
- D. "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" (19:7)

IV. A Friend will Tell You what You Don't Want to Hear

- A. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy (27:6)
- B. Nathan proved to be a friend to David when he rebuked him for his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:1-15)
- C. "The sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel" (27:9)

V. A Friend Shows Discretion When Talking About His Friend

- A. "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent (11:12)
- B. "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends" (17:9)
- C. "Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another's secret, lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end" (25:9)

VI. On Making and Keeping Friends

- A. "He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the *king* as his friend" (22:11)
 - 1. Contrast this with 17:9 (V.A.)

VII. The Importance of Loyalty to One's Friends

- A. "Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend" (27:10)

VIII. Don't Wear out the Welcome of Your Friends

- A. "Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you" (25:17)

Conclusion...