

SELECTED PROVERBS

[SCRIPTURE READING]

9:10: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

12:25: *Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.*

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

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

19:4: *Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.*

22:24–25: *Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.*

25:20: *Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day...*

26:18–19: *Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!"*

27:5–6: *Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

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

27:17: *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

Jn 15:13: *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- We're in a series called *Foolproof: God's Wisdom for Your Life*.
- We're thinking about how to make real life work really well—that's biblical wisdom: **skill in living**.
- And it all begins with God—with **reverence** and **awe** for who he is and what he's done for us in the gospel.
 - Proverbs isn't a book of mystical sayings or a list of tips and tricks.
 - Instead, it shows us how to live to the fullest in joyful obedience to God.
- Last week: We got a little wet and saw how we can be wise with our words.
- This week: Wisdom and FRIENDSHIP.
 - We've read the Proverbs already.
 - So let me pray, and then we'll get into it.

[INTRODUCTION]

Friendship: Did you have a best friend growing up? Who comes to mind?

- **I think** of a wild group of guys: one Neil and two Alasdairs.
 - We played **soccer** on a field that was more mud than grass. One time I came home so filthy my mum hosed me down in the garden.
 - I remember one **night in college**: we met at the library to study for a huge test the next day and somehow ended up leaving to go camping. The test did not go well.
 - We were the **best men** at each other's weddings, and the ones who'd answer that call in the **middle of the night**.
 - We dreamed about the **future**—what we would do, who we would become.
 - That future came faster than any of us expected—jobs and families, joys and loss.
 - These days we don't keep up as much as we'd like—but I'd still drop everything to go camping.
- **What about you?**
 - When you think of friendship—what names/faces come to mind?
 - From your past? Or, perhaps more importantly, from life today?
- For an **increasing number** of us, that last question is difficult to answer.
 - 15% of American men say they have no close friends—a fivefold increase since 1990.¹
 - And about half of all American adults report experiencing loneliness.²
- Fortunately, **the Bible** has a lot to say about friendship.
 - From the very beginning, we were not made to be alone.
 - We were made for relationship—with God and with each other.
 - Friendship isn't a luxury or a bonus.
 - It's part of what it means to be human.

[Transition]: So, let's get our arms around the Bible's teaching using the **same headings** as last week—starting with:

THE POWER OF FRIENDS—Your friends shape you

[State]

- **13:20:** Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
- **22:24–25:** Make no friendship with a man given to anger... lest you learn his ways.
- Proverbs makes a simple observation: **we become like our friends**.
 - One study followed thousands of people over 32 years and found that this is true **physically**: if a close friend becomes obese, a person's own likelihood of becoming obese rises by 57%—even if that friend lives miles away.³
 - It's not just true physically—we **become like** the people we spend time with.
 - We're **influenced** by them—the language we use, the shows we watch, the clothes we wear, the hobbies we choose.

- But more than that, we're **formed** by them.
 - Their ways become our ways.
 - Their character becomes our character.
 - Their loves become our loves.

[Illustrate]: This power cuts both ways.

- It can work for **harm**:
 - Every **parent** knows this—that's why we worry about the friend group more than almost anything.
 - But it **doesn't end** in middle school:
 - The **roommate** who makes it easy to have one too many, blow off class, or compromise what you believe.
 - The **coworker** whose cynicism slowly becomes yours.
 - The **group chat** that runs on complaint.
 - **The companion of fools will suffer harm.**
- Or it can work for **good**:
 - This week I'll spend a few days with a **dozen pastors**.
 - We've met every year for more years than I can say.
 - Some are my age. Some are twenty years ahead of me.
 - The older guys are showing me how to finish well.
 - And all of the guys are shaping me.
 - Who comes to **your mind**?
 - The friend who somehow calls something better out of you.
 - You complain less. Gossip less. Make better choices.
 - Most importantly, they bring you closer to Jesus.
 - Some friends make the worst in us feel normal. Others make the best in us feel possible.
 - **Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.**

[Apply]

- That's why Proverbs tells us to **choose our friends** with care.
 - Most friendships happen by proximity: the dorm hall, the next desk over, the kids' soccer team.
 - There's nothing wrong with that—but the wise don't leave it to chance. Seek out friends who will help you become all God is calling you to be.
- Here are **two questions** we can all ask ourselves:
 - Who am I becoming because of the friends I'm walking with?
 - Who are my friends becoming because they're walking with me?

[Transition]: Friendship is powerful.

- So let's dig a little deeper: What kind of friends should we look for—and what kind of friend should we be?
- Thankfully, Proverbs doesn't leave us guessing—which takes us to our second point: 1) The Power of Friends; and now...

THE BEST FRIENDS—What a true friend looks like

- Like last week, I've found Derek Kidner helpful in summarizing Proverbs' teaching.
- Building on his work, let me give you 4 marks of the best friends.⁴

1. CONSTANCY—The best friends stick together

[State]

- Proverbs has much to say about FAIR-WEATHER friends: **19:4: Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.**
- But there is ANOTHER KIND of friend: **18:24b: There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.**
 - This **doesn't mean** you spend ALL your time together: **25:17: Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.**
 - **It means** being there for each other—NO MATTER WHAT.
 - When it's convenient, and when it's not.
 - At your best, and at your worst.

[Illustrate]

- True friendship isn't **transactional**: *I'm here as long as this relationship is working for me.*
- True friendship is **covenantal**: *I'm here for you no matter what.*
 - We show up. We lean in. We stay.
 - That's constancy.

[Apply]: Is there **someone** in your life who's proving a little difficult to love?

- Maybe they're struggling. Maybe they've disappointed you.
- Of course there are times we need boundaries or a relationship runs their course.
 - But don't give up too quickly.
 - As far as it depends on you, be **constant**.

The best friends stick together.

[Transition]: Constancy, yes, and through constancy we develop...

2. COMPREHENSION—The best friends understand each other

[State]

- Proverbs makes this point in the negative:
 - **25:20: Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day...**
 - If I'm cheery and glib when you're hurting...
 - I haven't understood where you're at.
 - **26:18-19: Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!"**
 - If my joke goes too far...
 - I haven't understood that it hurts you.
- That's comprehension—true friendship is about knowing and being known.
 - We're not satisfied to skim along the surface.
 - We want a depth of relationship where things get real.

[Illustrate]: I've got one friend:

- I've noticed he never stops at: How's it **going**?
- He always asks: How are you **doing**?
- The first gets an update. The second gets to the heart.

[Apply]

- Are you being intentional about **knowing your friends**?
 - Taking the time to know them.
 - Beyond updates on kids, work, and sports.
- And letting them **know you** as well?
 - Not the social media version of you but the real you.
 - The good, the bad, and the ugly you.

The best friends understand each other.

[Transition]: Friends who are **constant** and **comprehend** can then (only then) provide:

3. COUNSEL—The best friends encourage each other

[State]

- **27:9:** Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.
- **12:25:** Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.
- The best friends know how to speak into each other's lives.
 - That's counsel—the **right word**, at the **right time**, in the **right way**.
 - Words that encourage, strengthen, and heal.

[Illustrate]

- Did you know ***The Lord of the Rings*** almost didn't get finished?
 - Tolkien worked on it for years, unsure anyone would care.
 - But a friend of his—C. S. Lewis—kept reading the chapters, urging him on.
 - Years later Tolkien wrote: *"The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not 'influence' as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement."*⁵
 - That's the power of encouragement: It may not change what you're facing—but it can give you strength to keep going.
- Or in our lives: Have you ever had someone send a **text** at exactly the right moment?
 - You're having a terrible day and your phone buzzes: *"Hey, you came to mind today. I'm praying for you. You're doing better than you think."*
 - It's a dozen words. It doesn't solve anything. But somehow you stand taller.

[Apply]

- Do you look for ways to **encourage** your friends?
 - You don't need a profound solution to all their problems.
 - Just listen. Pray. Remind them you care. Remind them what is true.
- Our world doesn't have too much encouragement: **Ask** that question. **Say** that word. **Send** that note.

The best friends encourage each other.

[Transition]: Constancy, comprehension, counsel, yes, and finally...

4. CANDOR—The best friends challenge each other

[State]

- **27:5–6:** Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.
- **27:17:** Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.
- The best friends tell you what you **need** to hear—not just what you **want** to hear.
 - None of us has it all figured out.
 - And sometimes we need a friend to point that out!

[Illustrate]

- **Ray Ortlund** puts it well: *“Our various family backgrounds left every one of us at least a little weird. So we need an honest friend from outside the tightly knit family to round us out.”*⁶
- Every one of us has things about ourselves we just can’t see—blind spots. Rough edges. Ways of thinking or behaving that seem normal to us.
- We all need an **honest friend** to tell us the truth.

[Apply]

- This **doesn’t mean** becoming critical, opinionated—know-it-alls who seek out opportunities to call people out.
 - If you’re sitting here thinking of people you’re gonna talk to...
 - You’re not doing this right...
- The best way to apply this teaching is to **start with ourselves**:
 - Who have you given permission to challenge you?
 - Ask them: Is there something in me that I’m not seeing?
 - You might not like the answer—it might sting.
 - But remember: **Faithful are the wounds of a friend.**
The best friends challenge each other.

[Transition]: The BEST friends: **Constancy. Comprehension. Counsel. Candor.**

- When you hear that list, two questions come to mind:
 - How many friends do I have like that?
 - And have I been that kind of friend?
- Like me, you might find that second question tough: We haven’t always **stayed**. We haven’t always **understood**. We haven’t always **encouraged**. And we haven’t always **told the truth** in love.
So where do we get the power to be friends like that?
- That takes us to our final point: 1) The Power of Friends; 2) The Best Friends; and finally, our need for...

THE GREATEST FRIEND

[State]

- **18:24:** There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
Proverbs holds out that friend as an ideal—but the gospel gives him a name.
- **Jn 15:13–15:** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends... No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends.

[Illustrate]

- Jesus is the only friend who **perfectly embodies** all four: **Constancy**: He loves us to the end; **Comprehension**: He understands us completely; **Counsel**: He is the Wonderful Counselor; **Candor**: He is full of grace and truth.
- But then Jesus does something **no other friend can do**.
 - He was wounded for our transgressions (Isa 53:5).
 - Faithful are the wounds of a friend (27:6).

[Apply]

- **[Unbeliever]**: If you don't know Jesus, he's not waiting for you to become wise enough to be his friend.
 - Jn 15:16: You did not choose me, but I chose you.
 - He gave his life for sinners so that sinners could become his friends.
 - Ask him for forgiveness—and he will be your friend.
- **[Believer]**: And if you do know him, this is where we get the power to be the friends Proverbs calls us to be.
 - Remember 1 Jn 4:19: We love because he first loved us.
 - The friendship we've received from him is the friendship we give to others.
 - We consider how he's dealt with us—and we love others this way.
 - What might that look like for you this week?
 - Stay close to someone it would be easier to drift from.
 - Take a friend to lunch and ask them how they're doing—not just how things are going.
 - Send that text to encourage a friend who's going through a hard time.
 - Or love someone enough to have that hard conversation.
 - Give away the friendship you've received from Jesus.
- **[Lonely]**: And if you're lonely today—if you don't have anyone you'd call a friend—you're not alone.
 - Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother.
 - And he's placed you in a **church** where friendship can begin.
 - **Men**: Start by reaching out to Stewart Scott or attending the men's conference on Oct 10. You'll be welcomed as a friend.
 - **Women**: Start by reaching out to Steph Schneider. You'll be welcomed as a friend.
 - **Everyone**: Go to the Welcome Center! We'll help you take a first step.

[CONCLUSION]

- Take all the wisdom Proverbs gives about The **Power** of Friends; and The **Best** Friends; but first, come to The **Greatest** Friend—Jesus.
- 13:20: Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.
 - Walk with Jesus.
 - Love as he loves you.

We can be wise friends because Jesus has befriended us.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*.
- Tim Keller, *Proverbs: True Wisdom for Living*.
- Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*.
- Logos Bible Software.

Endnotes

¹ See Daniel A. Cox, "Men's Social Circles Are Shrinking," Survey Center on American Life, June 29, 2021, accessed [here](#) 9/23/26.

² See Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (2023), 9, accessed [here](#) 9/23/26.

³ See Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, "The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 Years," *New England Journal of Medicine* 357 (2007): 370–379, accessed [here](#) 9/24/26.

⁴ See Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, 41–42. Kidner identifies four marks of friendship: constancy, candour, counsel, and tact. I have adapted "tact" as "comprehension."

⁵ See Colin Duriez, "The Friendship of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien," Desiring God National Conference, September 27, 2013, accessed [here](#) 9/24/26.

⁶ Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, 168.