

Fool Proof: A Study in Proverbs

Week 3 | Friendship

Today we'll hear from one of Christ Fellowship's elders, Neal Mackey who'll be preaching on friendship from Proverbs this Sunday.

Watch Neal: <https://vimeo.com/564693461>

Ask yourself

- Neal cited a study that found the average American has only one, true, friend. Do you find that hard to believe? Or is it consistent with your experience?
- Neal wonders what makes a “real” or “true” friend? What do you hope to find in a friend? What kind of friend do you hope to be?

Pray

Almighty God, source of love, you are faithful and worthy of our complete trust. Creator of all, you walked with Abraham and Moses and called them friends. Though we are not worthy, you unveil your plans, reveal your ways and call your servants your friends.

Teach us the true meaning of friendship. Show us how to be faithful friends who “love at all times.”

In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Talk about it

Who are you discussing Proverbs with this summer? As we've learned, wisdom is often revealed in community. Let the “talk about it” questions each day prompt a meaningful conversation. These questions are great to think through on your own, but even better to discuss.

- Discuss with someone else the qualities that make a “real” or “true” friend? Do you agree on the definition of friendship?
- Talk about modern friendships. Do you think it's harder to make and keep friends in our current culture? If so, why? What factors are at play?

Day 2

Lisa Scheffler, author

A January 2020 survey revealed that year over year, loneliness is on the rise in America. Even before COVID-19 restrictions kept people apart, things weren't good.

Some of the key findings of this survey were:

- Three in five Americans (61%) report that they are lonely
- Men are slightly lonelier than women
- Younger people (18-22) are lonelier than older people (72+)
- Social media has a major impact on loneliness with very heavy social media users significantly more likely to feel alone, isolated, left out and without companionship.¹

Someone can have hundreds of Facebook or Snapchat “friends,” but that doesn't mean they are experiencing the deep connection that God designed them for. Knowing carefully curated information about someone does not mean knowing them.

Proverbs teaches us that wise people cultivate genuine friendships. Today, let's look at a few verses from Proverbs that help us understand what true friendship looks like. As you read, think about what scripture is telling us makes a good friend.

Read

Proverbs 17:17

¹⁷ A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 18:24

²⁴ One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 27:9–10

⁹ Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness of a friend
springs from their heartfelt advice.

¹⁰ 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 neighbor nearby than a relative far away.

Proverbs 27:6

⁵ Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.
⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted,
but an enemy multiplies kisses.

¹ Cigna, 2020 Loneliness Index, <https://www.cigna.com/about-us/newsroom/news-and-views/press-releases/2020/cigna-takes-action-to-combat-the-rise-of-loneliness-and-improve-mental-wellness-in-america>

Proverbs 27:17

¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 15:22

²² Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed.

Ask Yourself

- What place should friendship have in wise person's life?
- According to these verses, what are the qualities of a good friend?
- How are you as a friend? Could these verses describe you? Some of the time? Most of the time? What do you struggle with?

Read what others say

The value of friendship

From James E. Smith:

“At all times the friend loves and a brother for adversity is born.” Even in adversity, when friendship experiences the ultimate test, the friend/brother is there with support. A genuine friend is regarded as superior to a blood relative in a time of emergency (cf. 18:24; 27:10). In this verse “a brother” is a synonym for a true friend.²

From Warren Wiersbe:

Proverbs makes it clear that true friendship is based on love, because only love will endure the tests that friends experience as they go through life together. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (17:17, NKJV). It's possible to have many companions and no real friend. “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (18:24, NIV). Friendship is something that has to be cultivated and its roots must go deep.³

Explore on your own

“Modern friendship has become distant and shallow for many, amounting to a shared interest or social media interactions, but as Christians, we're called to pursue something deeper and more intimate.”

² James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 591.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Skillful*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 107.

In this [short three-minute video](#), author and evangelist Sam Allberry shares some amazing insight into our need for true friends.

Pray

In a sermon on Proverbs, Pastor Tim Keller warns that if we really study the proverbs about friendship, we may feel both longing and regret. We will long for the type of friend that Proverbs describes and regret that we are not better friends ourselves. Notice when you experience those two emotions as we go through the week and then take those feelings to the Father in prayer.

Today, consider the longing that might come from reading the proverbs above. Though we need good and genuine friendships, we experience a longing for love and acceptance that the greatest human friend in the world couldn't fill. We need Jesus! Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with peace, love, joy, and hope because you are so deeply loved by Jesus. Ask him to guide you in your friendships. Human friendships can't bear the weight of our ultimate needs.

The more we experience the love of God, the better friend we can be to others. Even as we think about the need to cultivate genuine friendship, let's remember who the ultimate source of love is.

Talk about it

- Proverbs tells us that good friends offer wise counsel. Based on your own experiences, discuss how can that be done well. When, where, how, and how often should we offer advice? How should we receive a friend's counsel? Under what circumstances should we take it to heart?
- In Christian circles, you may hear the phrase "iron sharpening iron" a lot. What does that mean to you? How can we disagree, while helping one another grow?

Day 3

What are your favorite songs about friendship? Would any of these make your top ten?

I'll be there for you
(When the rain starts to pour)
I'll be there for you
(Like I've been there before)
I'll be there for you
(Cause you're there for me too)

["I'll be there for you" The Rembrandts](#)

Lean on me
When you're not strong

*And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on...*

*For it won't be long
Till I'm gonna need somebody to lean on*

[“Lean on Me” Bill Withers](#)

*You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
You got troubles, I've got 'em too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me*

[“You've Got a Friend in me” Randy Newman](#)

I could have listed so many more.

One of the consistent themes in songs about friendship is the idea that friends are there for each other. A good friend is dependable, reliable, trustworthy, and compassionate. Even if it's 3 a.m., if you need them, a true friend will show up to help. These songs express what Proverbs 17:17 says so beautifully, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”

This week we're exploring the biblical idea of friendship. Yesterday we considered some of the marks of a good and true friend. The following proverbs offer us wisdom in maintaining healthy friendships, and warning signs when one is unhealthy.

Read

Proverbs 25:16–20

- ¹⁶ If you find honey, eat just enough—
too much of it, and you will vomit.
- ¹⁷ Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—
too much of you, and they will hate you.
- ¹⁸ Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow
is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor.
- ¹⁹ Like a broken tooth or a lame foot
is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble.
- ²⁰ Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,
or like vinegar poured on a wound,
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Proverbs 27:14

¹⁴ If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning,
it will be taken as a curse.

Ask Yourself

- Most of these proverbs teach us what *not* to do in a friendship. What wisdom do you find here? Can you think of examples from your own life to go with any of the verses listed above?

What Read what others say

On maintaining healthy friendships

From Warren Wiersbe:

Friends and neighbors must *exercise tact and be sensitive to each other's feelings*. If we spend too much time together, we may wear out our welcome. "Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you" (Prov. 25:17, NKJV). I've known people who spent so much time with each other that they eventually destroyed their friendship. If we're going to grow, we need space; space comes from privacy and solitude. Even husbands and wives must respect each other's privacy and not be constantly together if their love is to mature.

"He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him" (27:14, NKJV). Beware the "friend" who loudly and frequently praises you and tells you what a good friend you are, because true friendship doesn't depend on such antics—especially if he wakes you up to do it! Love is sensitive to other people's feelings and needs, and true friends try to say the right thing at the right time in the right way (25:20).⁴

Explore on your own

In this [short discussion](#) of Wesley Hill's book *Spiritual Friendship*, learn six helpful ways of thinking about intentional, committed, friendships.

Author and speaker Jennie Allen discusses why friendships are so important. [You can read the blog post, or listen to her podcast](#), "Why we all need real, raw, honest friendship."

Pray

Yesterday we talked about how reflecting on proverbs about friendship could deepen our longing for real friends. But, as many of our mothers said on the first day of school, to have a friend, you need to be a friend.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, 110.

Pray over the proverbs above. Invite the Spirit to give you wisdom on how to be a better friend. Sometimes we need to address a relational tic that we don't even realize we have.

Talk about it

- Sometimes when relationships fail it's because of a lack of sensitivity. Sometimes we can be self-absorbed and not realize how our behavior affects our friends. Discuss the importance of being tactful and sensitive to our friends' needs. Based on the proverbs above, what does that look like?

Day 4

At some point in our lives, we've probably all been warned against "peer pressure." It's mostly kids and teens who hear this warning, but that doesn't mean adults aren't susceptible. Most of us want to fit in and feel liked and find it all too easy to just "go along to get along."

One way to avoid the dangers of "peer pressure," is to surround yourself with people who are trying to do what is good and wise. Hopefully, any pressure you feel from these friends will be to do the right thing.

Proverbs teaches us the benefits of good friendships but warns us against the destructive nature of bad ones. Notice the kinds of people Proverbs advises us to avoid.

Read

Proverbs 4:14–15

¹⁴ Do not set foot on the path of the wicked
or walk in the way of evildoers.

¹⁵ Avoid it, do not travel on it;
turn from it and go on your way.

Proverbs 11:9

⁹ With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors,
but through knowledge the righteous escape.

Proverbs 12:26

²⁶ The righteous choose their friends carefully,
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 13:20

²⁰ Walk with the wise and become wise,
for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Proverbs 22:24-25

²⁴ Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,

do not associate with one easily angered,
²⁵ or you may learn their ways
and get yourself ensnared.

Ask yourself

- Proverbs 13:20 encourages us to walk with the wise. From our study of Proverbs, how would you describe a wise person? How does that contrast with a foolish person? What about a wicked one?
- Proverbs 22:24–25 warns against a hot-tempered person because you might learn their ways. What are some other “ensnaring” ways we can learn from others? How can we avoid that kind of influence?

Read what others say

The Importance of healthy friendships

From Ellen Davis:

Jesus likewise valued friendship highly; these were apparently the human bonds that were most important to him (John 15:15; Mark 3:31–35). The biblical emphasis on the importance and joy of friendship—as expressed also in the stories of Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David—is instructive for us.

Though countless self-help books treat the health of sexual and familial relations, the pleasures and the art of friendship are largely ignored...Millions of people in our mobile society derive most of their emotional sustenance from friends. Fostering and celebrating healthy friendships, then, no less than healthy marriages and good parenting, should be part of the pastoral ministry of the church. None of these primary emotional bonds can be separated from the life of faith; each of them is an avenue along which we can move deeply into life with God.⁵

Wise Friendships

From Warren Wiersbe:

God’s people must be especially careful in choosing their friends. “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (12:26, NKJV). “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (13:20). Friendships that are based on money (6:1–5; 14:20; 19:4, 6–7) or sin (16:29–30; 1:10–19) are destined to be disappointing. So are friendships with people who have bad tempers (22:24–25), who speak foolishly (14:7), who rebel against authority (24:21–22, NIV), or who are dishonest (29:27). Believers need to heed Psalm 1:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–18.⁶

⁵ Ellen F. Davis, 114–115.

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, 107.

Explore on your own

In this [short three-minute video](#), author and pastor Drew Hunter takes us on a quick tour through the Bible to show how we were made for friendship.

Pray

Centuries after the Book of Proverbs was compiled, the apostle Paul echoed its wisdom in his first letter to the Corinthian church, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Cor 15:33).

As his followers, Jesus calls to be salt and light in the world, so, Paul is not telling us to retreat into our Christian bubbles. He is warning us to be careful about the people we allow to influence us by helping shape our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We should also remember that non-Christians aren’t automatically “bad company,” and all Christians aren’t necessarily good influences. Yet, they do see world through different lenses, and that matters.

Knowing how to be “in the world, but not of the world” takes — you guessed it — wisdom. Pray for the wisdom to be out in the world building relationships with those who don’t know Jesus so you can demonstrate the goodness of God, while cultivating good, honest, encouraging friendships with other believers.

Talk about it

- Discuss how believers can avoid becoming “ensnared” in the unwise ways of others, yet still be a witness of Jesus’ goodness, grace, and love in the world? Together, talk through some everyday scenarios where you need wisdom — neighborhood get-togethers, after work happy hours, golfing buddies, other parents from your kid’s team, etc. How can you cultivate genuine relationships with non-Christians where they can experience Christ in you? But how can you “walk with the wise”?

Day 5

Someone in my life recently had a friendship “break-up.” It was a tough situation, and she was badly hurt. She thought this person was a true friend. When her confidence was betrayed, it was incredibly painful.

It’s sad how often friendships implode over words that are spoken. Proverbs has a lot of wisdom to offer us about our speech. Adopting it will help us with our friendships.

Read

Proverbs 25:9–10

⁹ If you take your neighbor to court,

do not betray another's confidence,
¹⁰ or the one who hears it may shame you
and the charge against you will stand.

Proverbs 11:9; 12–13

⁹ With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors,
but through knowledge the righteous escape.
¹² Whoever derides their neighbor has no sense,
but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.
¹³ A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.

Proverbs 24:28–29

²⁸ Do not testify against your neighbor without cause—
would you use your lips to mislead?
²⁹ Do not say, “I’ll do to them as they have done to me;
I’ll pay them back for what they did.”

Proverbs 26:18–19

¹⁸ Like a maniac shooting
flaming arrows of death
¹⁹ is one who deceives their neighbor
and says, “I was only joking!”

Ask Yourself

- Read back over the proverbs above. Make a list of what's at issue.
- Do you have any personal experiences with these issues? Were you at fault? Or was it the other person, or both of you?

Read what others say

From Warren Wiersbe:

True friends know how to *keep a confidence*. “If you argue your case with a neighbor, do not betray another man's confidence, or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation” (25:9–10, NIV). If you have a disagreement with somebody, don't bring another person into the discussion by betraying confidence, because you'll end up losing both your reputation (“You can't trust him with anything confidential!”) and your friend who trusted you with his private thoughts. “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (11:13, NIV; see 20:19). If we aren't careful, gossip can ruin a friendship (16:28), so the wise thing to do is to cover offenses with love (17:9; 1 Peter 4:8).

This leads to the next important quality for true friends and good neighbors: *the ability to control the tongue*. “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape” (Prov. 11:9, NIV). Don't believe the first thing you hear about a matter,

because it may be wrong (18:17); remember that “a man of understanding holds his tongue” (11:12, NIV). If your neighbor or friend speaks falsely of you, talk to him about it privately, but don’t seek to avenge yourself by lying about him (24:28–29; 25:18). And beware of people who cause trouble and then say, “I was only joking” (26:18–19).

Explore on your own

How can we cultivate Christ-centered friendships? “Christ-centered friendship is about serving others, asking ourselves how God might use us in our friends’ lives and how He might want to use them in our lives.” Read the [entire article](#) from Tabletalk Magazine.

Pray

Father, thank you for friendship. Thank you for the love and care we receive from friends, and the opportunity to imitate your Son in loving and caring for them. Give us wisdom in our friendships. Guide us to be better friends.

Heal our hurts from broken relationships. Convict us when we have harmed others and send us to seek forgiveness. Spirit, reconcile and redeem as only you can.

Jesus, may we love and serve our friends as you have loved and served us. May we cultivate friendships where we link arms and move forward, strengthening and encouraging one another on the path to be more and more like Jesus.

Talk about it

- Discuss the role conversation and speech has in a friendship. What role do meaningful conversations have in cultivating and growing a friendship? How can unwise speech destroy a friendship?

Coming next week

Next week in our study of Proverbs, we’ll continue thinking about the role conversations plays in our lives. Proverbs has a lot to say about what we should and shouldn’t say!