

**PROVERBS | DIRECTIONS FOR LIFE: WISDOM AND FRIENDSHIP**  
**PROVERBS 18:24; 27:6-19**  
**2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, 18 APRIL 2010**  
**GREGG LAMM | LEAD PASTOR-TEACHER**  
**www.2ndstreet.org**

Welcome to 2nd Street. This morning we'll dive into *The Old Testament* book of **PROVERBS** for the eleventh and the last time. Over the past few months we've looked at a number of different topics from this amazing book ... including wisdom as Jesus Christ personified, the differences between wisdom and folly, God's wisdom about finances, laziness, parenting, evil men and evil women, and the virtuous woman. And in this final teaching, we'll look at what God says to us through Solomon's words in **PROVERBS** about finding, cultivating, and keeping successful, God-centered friendships. Here's the dictionary definition of the word **success** ...

**suc·cess** (noun) 1. The favorable or prosperous completion of attempts or endeavors. 2. The attainment of wealth, position, honors, or the like.

But how many of you know that the secret to **success** in any of the wide-array of circumstances we find ourselves in in this life (in our relationships, in our vocations, with our health, with our money, or in spiritual beliefs ... **success** in any of these circumstances of our lives will only be a by-product of Godly living.

Because as maturing followers of Jesus Christ our primary purpose isn't to achieve **success** in a human definition of **success** ... **BUT TO HONOR AND SERVE GOD**. Because, when we do what Jesus commands us to do in **MATTHEW 6:33**, **success** in meeting our primary purpose of **HONORING GOD AND SERVING GOD** will be the fruit of your obedience and my obedience.

**MATTHEW 6:33 (BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH)**

<sup>33</sup> **But let your first care be for God's kingdom and God's righteousness; and all these other things will be given to you in addition.**

Several years ago, *Psychology Today* cited a survey in which more than 40,000 Americans were asked what they valued most in a friend. Here were the top four answers they received ...

1. The ability to keep a confidence.
2. Warmth and affection.
3. Loyalty.
4. The willingness to frequently give gift cards to their friends.

Okay, I made up the fourth one. I shared with you last Sunday that deep-spirited friendships don't just happen ... but that they're the fruit of pursuing God's ways of

thinking and living as a consistent way of life, instead of just as something we do when it's convenient.

True friendships happen when you and I invite Christ to shape our character into His character ... and to transform our minds, words, actions, and priorities into His mind, His words, His actions, and His priorities. Turn with me to **PROVERBS 18:24** ... and let's unpack the instruction Solomon has for us regarding God's plans for friendship.

**PROVERBS 18:24 (BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH)**

<sup>24</sup> **A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.**

Have you ever had a friend you thought you'd have forever, but then something happened and the friendship blew apart - or maybe just drifted apart? It's one thing to ***FIND*** a great spouse, or ***FIND*** a great friend ... but it can be a whole 'nother story to ***KEEP*** that great spouse, or ***KEEP*** that great friend. It takes work to hang onto the people in our lives ... even the important people.

Dig into your own story and I'm sure that like me, you'll be able to find examples of a friendship or a relationship where you got lax and self-indulgent ... where you started expecting something for nothing, or where you wanted the other person to do all the heavy lifting, all the giving. And that friendship or relationship didn't work out too well, did it? And I see our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

**FAITH LESSON ...**

**We easily become “relationship lazy”. To have friendships and relationships that *ADD* to our lives instead of *SUBTRACT* from our lives, we have to learn how to *GIVE* as well as to *TAKE*.**

We cultivate and grow friendships much in the same way we cultivate and grow fruits, flowers, or vegetables. ***WE REAP WHAT WE SOW***. If we want a good harvest, we have to plant good seed into ground that's been worked up, fertilized, and tended to. In order to get something that's healthy and desirable out of the ground, we first have to put something of value into the ground.

It takes time and effort to invest in someone other than our own self. We sow into a friendship by being friendly. The farmer doesn't wake up in the morning and say to himself, **“I can't wait to have a good crop this year. And as soon as that soil out there in that field, and as soon as that seed in my barn, comes right here into my bedroom and parades across the floor in front of me so that I can plow it and plant it while I stay here in my bed, then everything's going to go great!”** No way.

When it comes to friendships that work, and to having deep-spirited relationships with other followers of Jesus Christ - relationships and friendships where we watch out for one another, care for one another, and connect with one another, we've got to take the initiative to see till the ground, regularly plant seeds, and see that the plants are consistently and lovingly tended to. And how do we do these things?

If we want wise, maturing, Christ-centered friendship, then we have to **WATER** and **WEED** our friendships the same way a farmer waters and weeds their crops.

1. Friendships are **WATERED** by intercessory prayer.
2. And friendships are **WEEDED** by getting rid of thoughts of judgment, anger, resentment, jealousy, or mistrust from our hearts and minds that we allow to build up toward our friends.

Gang, a lot of friendships go south because we're waiting around for the other person to do most of the **TILLING, PLANTING, WEEDING, WATERING, and TENDING**. And in order for relationships and friendship to start strong and then remain strong, we have to pay the price of friendship by becoming the kind of friend we long to find in others.

**ILLUSTRATION** ... Two friends went Caribou hunting in Alaska. After waking up one morning, but not yet completely dressed, one of the men let out a loud yell. Startled, his buddy looked up and saw a Grizzly Bear charging toward them. The first man started frantically putting on his tennis shoes ... and his friend asked, "What are you doing? You can't outrun a Grizzly Bear!" "I don't have to outrun the Grizzly Bear" he replied, "I just have to outrun you!"

When wisdom instructs us about friendship in **PROVERBS**, she isn't talking just about acquaintances, or someone we chat with occasionally when we see them on the street or at the store. She's talking about the kind of relationship that exists between people whose hearts and minds have been woven together by God ... the kind of friendship where one of the friends is willing to lay down their life for the other person ... the kind of friendship Jonathan and David had in *The Old Testament*, and that's described in **FIRST SAMUEL 18:1** ...

#### **FIRST SAMUEL 18:1** (THE MESSAGE)

<sup>1</sup> By the time David had finished reporting to Saul, Jonathan was deeply impressed with David - an immediate bond was forged between them. He became totally committed to David. From that point on he would be David's number-one advocate and friend.

In Hebrew (the language *The Old Testament* was written in, and the language of the Jews still today), like in English, there are many different words to describe the same thing. Let's look back at **PROVERBS 18:24** again ...

#### **PROVERBS 18:24** (BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH)

<sup>24</sup> A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

The two words Solomon uses in this verse translated "friend" are significantly different from one another. The word translated friends in the first half of the verse is the Hebrew word *rea*, which means **associate or neighbor**. But the word translated friend in the second half of the verse is the Hebrew word *ahab*, which comes from a primitive Hebrew root word meaning **to have a deep and biding affection for**.

So do you see the difference between these two kinds of friends Solomon introduces us to in this verse? A **rea** is a **neighbor**, or **someone we associate with**, and an **ahab** is a **friend**, and **someone we share a real, a deep, and an abiding affection with**. An **ahab** is the kind of friend described in **FIRST SAMUEL 18:1** ... **bonded, forged, committed**, it's the kind of friends who will **advocate for one another**.

Solomon is saying that if we want to have a lot of **reas**, just a lot of **associates**, **people we're neighborly with**, that we'll **come to ruin**. But that if we want to avoid ruin (and frankly, who doesn't?!), then we'll pursue **ahabs**, **true friends**, because in our **ahabs** we'll know **honesty and stability**. In our drama, the one man kept reaching out to try and build a deeper friendship with his neighbor ... but the *Christian guy* didn't want to transition from being a **rea** to an **ahab** with his neighbor. And like the Narrator in the drama asked ...

**“What would happen if Frank engaged Jim in a conversation about God? A bridge built or a bridge burned? What would happen if he took this next step of faith?”**

Gang, authentic **ahab** friendships are based on mutual relationship and are always about **GIVE AND TAKE**, not just one person giving and the other one taking. This is the truth Jesus spoke about when He said in **MATTHEW 7:12a** ...

**MATTHEW 7:12b** (THE MESSAGE)

<sup>12b</sup> ... **ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them.**

And I see our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** here ...

**FAITH LESSON** ...

**Friendship is based on mutual relationship ... and for a friendship to transform and mature from **rea** to **ahab**, it's got to become a two-way street. When we expect others to be friendly to us, we've got to get the ball rolling by first, being friendly to them.**

Turn with me to the next book in your Bible after **PROVERBS** ... to **ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12** and let's read from another book by Solomon, where he shares with us more great insight into the true **NATURE** and **FRUIT** of friendship.

There was a time in Solomon's life when he got out of step with God. He still believed that God loved him, but his priorities got messed up, and because of the seeds he was planting, he was harvesting some pretty nasty fruit.

In this chapter of Solomon's life, he turned from God to self, and tried to quench his **SPIRITUAL THIRST WITH MATERIAL THINGS** (fame, money, sex, success defined by **ACCUMULATION** and **ACCOMPLISHMENT** instead of by the development of a godly character). And in the end, he discovered the truth that the only way to quench our **SPIRITUAL THIRST IS WITH AN INTENTIONAL, MATURING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

In **ECCLESIASTES**, we find a nearly day-by-day reckoning of Solomon's unholy experiment. And when this becomes the lens we read **ECCLESIASTES** through, then this book that's been described as "a morbid piece of literature" is transformed into a stream out of which we can drink God's knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Reading through **ECCLESIASTES 4**, there are several verses that really stand out - because they're some of the only openly positive, encouraging verses in the book. And in these verses Solomon offers God's wise instruction to us about friendship.

**ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)**

<sup>9-10</sup> **Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together. If one falls down, the other can help him up. But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls, because no one is there to help.**

You've probably heard the old saying "two heads are better than one." And that's usually true. And it's in line with the principle of "sowing and reaping" I mentioned earlier. In **MATTHEW 18:19** Jesus said that **when two people agree in prayer on anything, that God will hear their prayer and answer it.** Maybe this was why Jesus always sent His disciples out in pairs (**LUKE 10:1**). But the point Solomon is making is that **TWO CAN GET MORE DONE THAN ONE.**

And it's not only about the **QUANTITY OF WORK** two people can get done when working, serving, and ministering alongside one another that Solomon is talking about here ... it's also about the **QUALITY OF WORK** two people can accomplish together when compared to the **QUALITY OF THE WORK** one person can accomplish alone.

I love the truth in **v. 10**, that **when we fall, if we have a friend nearby we can get back up, but that if we don't have a friend nearby, we might be down for the count.** Gang, like I've said before, it takes work to build a real friendship. Because even the best of friends don't always get along. And sometimes, the very thing that drives two friends apart, is the same thing that brought them together in the first place ... **THAT THEY'RE ALIKE.** Friends are often brought together by the ways they're alike, and conversely, friends are often broken apart **BY THE WAYS THEY'RE DIFFERENT.**

The first murder was when Cain killed Abel. A brother killed a brother. Have you ever noticed that some of the worse fights take place between two brothers? But at other times, like in the story of David and Jonathan, two friends can even get so close that they're like one soul. And I think that most of us will quickly admit that there's usually no one we're more at odds with **THAN YOUR OWN SELF!** But there's also no other human being who knows us better than **OUR OWN SELF!**

Friends, if you're married and you're a Christian, then other than the Lord Jesus Christ, your best friend on earth should be your spouse - and hopefully they're also a follower of Jesus Christ. And if you're a Christian, and you're not married, then your best friend should also be a follower of Jesus Christ. Because whether we're married or not, we're in trouble if we can't talk about spiritual things with our best friend.

This is why I don't believe in **love at first sight.** True and lasting love doesn't just happen - we don't just fall into it, and neither is true love just found or stumbled

into. **TRUE LOVE DEVELOPS OVER TIME**. This is why marriage isn't really built on love; at least, not the sloppy, sentimental kind of love we see portrayed in movies, that we read about in books, and that we hear sung about in songs.

Other than the shared foundation of God, successful marriages between two Christians will always be built on friendship. **TRUE LOVE** grows out of **TRUE FRIENDSHIP**. And if **TRUE FRIENDSHIP** is the ground that **TRUE LOVE** grows out of, then **TRUE FRIENDSHIP** is the foundation, the root, and the starting point of it all, not **TRUE LOVE**. I love how Jesus talked about this in **JOHN 15:14** ...

**JOHN 15:12-14** (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

<sup>12-14</sup> This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

If two people aren't **TRUE FRIENDS** when they get married, or if they let their friendship wither and even die after they're married, their marriage will be on life-support before they know it. Let's look at **ECCLESIASTES 4:11-12** ...

**ECCLESIASTES 4:11-12** (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

<sup>11-12</sup> If two lie down together, they will be warm, but a person alone will not be warm. An enemy might defeat one person, but two people together can defend themselves; a rope [or cord] that is woven of three strands is hard to break. [*emphasis added*]

I love the imagery in v. 12 ... that friendship is actually a **cord made out of three strands**. When we become a Jesus follower, something gets added to give our friendship extra strength to make it through the temptations and suffering that life throws at us. And this **third strand IS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF**. When a husband and wife, or two friends are Christians, Jesus Christ **BECOMES ONE WITH THEM**. And with His divine presence, voice, guidance, and support, that marriage or friendship will be able to withstand anything that comes against it! Anything.

Let's turn back to **PROVERBS** ... to **PROVERBS 27** and we'll see that when Jesus Christ is the third person in a marriage or in any relationship or friendship, He will equip and enable the people in the marriage or in the friendship to **correct, counsel, support, sharpen, and reflect truth back to their friend** in ways they never could if Jesus Christ was absent and their cord only had two strands. **FIRST**, let's look at how friends can **CORRECT** one another when Jesus is part of their relationship.

**PROVERBS 27:6** (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

If you've ever had a friend **CORRECT** you, how did you receive it? Real friends can do this, because maturing people receive **CORRECTION** from a friend, because they're teachable. Gang, let's make sure we watch out for people who do nothing but praise

us - because history has shown us over and over again that when that happens, very often, the one giving the praise, is our enemy in disguise. Because a **REAL FRIEND CORRECTS**. Maybe you remember what Jesus said about this in **LUKE 6:26** ...

**LUKE 6:26 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>26</sup> Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.**

We're all human. We all make mistakes. There isn't one of us who is immune to error. When we're following Jesus Christ, He's changing us from the inside out as we surrender to Him, and allow Him to transform our character to reflect His character more than the character we're born with. But just like a child who's crowned King or Queen might have the title, but then needs to mature and learn about what it means to be a King or Queen ... so too, you and I as the **children of God** have to learn how to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the One whose name we bear as Christians.

And one the things we need to have happen for us to move toward maturity in Jesus Christ is that we need to have people in our lives who refuse to be impressed with us, who we've given permission to tell us the truth, and who we've freed up to tell us when we've gotten off-track and are heading down the wrong road. Like Jesus said, if everyone always tells us how wonderful we are, we'll never improve. Do you see why we need a **true friend** who will "level" with us about what they see?

**v. 6 ... Faithful are the wounds of a friend ... Why would a friend wound us?** Precisely because they're our friend. Because they love us and wants the best for us. **LOVE IS KIND. BUT IT'S ALSO TRUTHFUL**. And gang, when a friend **wounds** us, **corrects** us, or **tells us the truth** about what they're seeing in our lives, it's for our own good ... it's not to hurt us, but actually to heal us, and help us get back on the road that leads to life! One of the hardest things we'll ever do is to tell someone we love that what they're doing is wrong. But this is precisely what a true friend will do.

**PROVERBS 28:23 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)**

**<sup>23</sup> In the end, people appreciate frankness more than flattery.**

Right in the moment, the hardest thing in the world is to **REBUKE** or **CORRECT** a friend. But notice what Solomon tells us here ... that **in the end**, the one who's **frank** is more loved and appreciated than the one who **flatters**. People who are compassionate and sensitive will be hesitant to **CORRECT** a friend. I get that. And that's good. For sure we've got to look at our motives, and make sure they're pure and honest. But when we avoid **CORRECTING** a friend because we're too afraid they'll misunderstand us, or get angry, then we're not being a true friend.

But on the other hand, like I've told you before, God hasn't given anyone **THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF BRASH ADMONISHMENT**. I don't care what you think. It doesn't exist as a spiritual gift. Oh it exists all right ... as a way to try and verbally backhand somebody into change ... but it won't ever work.

And so if you think that you have this spiritual gift, you're wrong. You don't have it. Nobody does. But for sure, there's a balance that has to be found here. Because when our motives are pure and we act out of love, we won't damage the friend or the friendship by being honest, even when we offer **CORRECTION** - in fact, just the opposite - both the friendship and the friend will be strengthened and matured. But a friend not only **CORRECTS**, a friend also **COUNSELS** and **SUPPORTS**.

**PROVERBS 27:9-10a** (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>9</sup> Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

<sup>10a</sup> Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity;

When a friend tells us the truth, it might not feel all that great right in the moment, but when their truth-speaking motivates us to get off center and head in the right direction, God will confirm to us that they spoke God's words to us, and we'll be blessed when we follow their **COUNSEL**. And their words, even though they once smelled **OFFENSIVE**, will now smell **SWEET** because of the fruit they brings about in our lives when we surrender to them.

Solomon is also instructing us in **v. 10** about how foolish it is to turn our back on an old, trusted friend, when a new one comes along. We've all done this ... and if we're doing it right now, we need to stop. And finally, Solomon is also telling us here that wise people don't reject the counsel of people older than themselves ... and that in fact, wise people seek out the counsel of folks who are older, wiser, and have more experience than them. And I see a **THIRD FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

**FAITH LESSON** ...

We don't have enough time, energy, money, or emotion to learn everything we need to learn about life and faith through the *tried-and-not-so-true method of trial and error*. Let's learn from God's Word, and from the wise friends God lovingly brings into our lives.

Why is it so important to have real friends in our lives? I love how the end of **v. 10** answers this critical question for us ...

**PROVERBS 27:10b** (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>10b</sup> ... better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.

The people we're actually related to might live too far away from us to be much help in times of real trouble. But a friend who lives close by proves their worth by coming through for us in the crisis times of our lives, by lending us a helping hand and walking with us through the hard chapters of our lives. **UP-CLOSE SUPPORT** is usually more helpful than **LONG-DISTANCE WELL WISHING**. A good friend not only **CORRECTS**, **COUNSELS** and **SUPPORTS** us. A good friend also **SHARPENS** us.

**PROVERBS 27:17 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>17</sup> Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

Have you and a good friend ever rubbed each another the wrong way? If you know what I'm talking about, then you also know that when this happens, it can actually help a friendship grow, because there are times when you and I need to be rubbed the wrong way. Because when this doesn't happen we get dull, like a knife that's been used too long. You don't sharpen a knife with a cube of butter ... you sharpen it with a grinding wheel.

And so when you and your spouse, or you and your good friend are together, and "spiritual sparks" start to fly, don't get upset, or defensive, or start looking for a quick escape route. Because you can't grind a knife back to sharpness without a few sparks! And this is one of the reasons God has given us good friends - to keep us **SHARP**.

**AND GANG, WE DON'T NEED A LOT OF FRIENDS.** In fact, friends are kind of like cheesecake. A couple of bites are good, but too much will make us sick. Most of us are fortunate if we have one or two good friends we can confide in, and who can confide in us.

Even Jesus didn't have a lot of friends. Of the twelve disciples, Peter, James, and John were the only three who were really close to Him. And of these three, John seemed to be the closest. It's usually a sign of insecurity to try and have a lot of close friends. And I see a **FOURTH FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

**FAITH LESSON ...**

**Our identity and our confidence needs to be in Jesus Christ, and not in the support or approval of the people we run with. Thank God for your one or two close friends. Because what we need are just a few, key people who will be there for us - rain or shine, and in the good times and in the bad times. What more could we ask for?**

A good friend **CORRECTS, COUNSELS, SUPPORTS, and SHARPENS** us ... but a good friend also **HELPS US SEE OUR TRUE REFLECTION**.

**PROVERBS 27:19 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>19</sup> As in water face *reflects* face, so the heart of man *reflects* man.**

During Bible times, water was seen **AS A REFLECTOR OF TRUE REALITY**. Of course, today we have mirrors and cameras ... both of which tell us the truth without flattery or exaggeration. Just the facts. And that's what a good friend does. Just like looking in a mirror and seeing that we need to comb our hair - or looking at a photo and seeing that we need to start exercising, a good friend can reveal our faults to us in a loving way so we can deal with them. **THE TRUTH** is one of our best friends ... because like Jesus Christ said in **JOHN 8:32** ...

**JOHN 8:32 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

**ILLUSTRATION** ... Maybe you heard about the young man who told his dad ... “Nobody likes me.” And his dad said, “Come on son, don’t say that – everybody hasn’t met you yet.” I know. Brutal.

If you’ve heard Solomon’s instruction to you about friendship this morning and realized that you don’t have the true kind of friends he’s been talking about ... friends who **CORRECT, COUNSEL, SUPPORT** and **SHARPEN** you ... friends who **HELPS YOU SEE YOUR TRUE REFLECTION**, then maybe you haven’t taken the time or the effort to cultivate real friendships with anyone. If this describes you, what are you going to do about it? I don’t want you to leave here today without hope. We started this morning’s teaching by looking at **PROVERBS 18:24** ... let’s look back at the second part of this verse as we wrap up ...

**PROVERBS 18:24b (BIBLE IN BASIC ENGLISH)**

<sup>24b</sup> ... but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

This is Solomon’s promise of the most lasting friendship any of us can know here on earth. Because in spite what some of you might be thinking this morning, you do have a Friend. In fact, this Friend went through an incredible amount of effort and expense to make sure He could have an axis-tilting, world-rocking, make-all-things-new kind of relationship with you.

Before the foundations of the earth were put into place, this Person purposely and carefully crafted a plan for you to become His friend. And He prized a friendship with Him so much that He spared no expense. Taking love to the max, He died on the cross of Calvary to destroy the barrier of sin that stood between you and Him. And now that the barrier of sin has been removed, this person, Jesus Christ, invites you to become His friend. It’s been said ...

**A friend is someone who understands your *past*, believes in your *future*, and accepts you *today* just the way you are.**

So friends, no matter how close to the edge of failure you might be this morning ... and no matter how weary you are with life and all it’s been throwing at you ... be strengthened by knowing that you have a Friend **who will always stick closer than a brother, and who will never leave you or forsake you**. There’s no problem up ahead or around the corner that you and Jesus can’t handle together. If you’ve never met this Friend, I want to give you the opportunity to meet Him now. Because He truly is, as Solomon describes Him here, **the Friend who will stick closer than a brother**. Won’t you open up your heart and mind to Him today? Let’s pray.

**NEXT SUNDAY ...**

**YOUR 2ND STREET ELDERS WILL BE TEACHING ON “SERVANTS TO GOD AND TO ONE ANOTHER.” COME PRAYING & EXPECTING!**