

Wisdom 101: Proverbs

Lesson #8 – You’ve Got a Friend

In April of 2009, the New York Times reported a study performed by the University of Virginia, taking them to the base of a steep hill and fitting them with a weighted backpack. They asked the students to estimate the steepness of the hill, placing some next to friends and others alone. The students who stood with friends estimated the steepness lower than those who were alone. The longer the friends had known each other, the less steep the hill became. Professor Karen A. Roberto said, “The consistent message of these studies is that friends make your life better.”

Won’t You Be My Neighbor?

While the definition of “neighbor” has changed in our country over the years, the Proverbs teach us how to help those around us as truly good neighbors.

Try to think of 21st Century applications of these principles.

3:27-29 – “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it’s in your power to help them. If you can help your neighbor now, don’t say, ‘Come back tomorrow, and then I’ll help you.’ Don’t plot harm against your neighbor, for those who live nearby trust you.”

(New Living Translation)

6:1-5 – “My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, have given your pledge for a stranger, if you are snared in the words of your mouth, caught in the words of your mouth, then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into the hand of your neighbor: go, hasten, and plead urgently with your neighbor. Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber: save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of a hunter, like a bird from the hand of a fowler.” (English Standard Version)

11:12 – “A person who despises a neighbor has no sense, but a person who has understanding keeps quiet.” (God’s Word)

12:26 – “The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray.”

(New Living Translation)

14:21 – “He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.”

(New American Standard Version)

22:24-25 – “Do not be a friend of one who has a bad temper, and never keep company with a hothead, or you will learn his ways and set a trap for yourself.” (God’s Word)

25:8-9 – “Don’t be in a hurry to go to court. For what will you do in the end if your neighbor deals you a shameful defeat? When arguing with your neighbor, don’t betray another person’s secret.” (New Living Translation)

What modern applications came to mind?

Which of these is the most challenging as we live with and near those with whom we might disagree? Share your answer with the person next to you, along with the reasons why that particular principle is so difficult for us.

In Romans 12:17-21, Paul gives instructions about dealing with others that goes against our natural instincts. Why is it so tempting to make vengeance our business rather than God’s?

As his UCLA football team suffered through a poor season in the early 1970's, head coach Pepper Rodgers came under intense criticism and pressure from alumni and fans. Things got so bad, he remembers with a smile, that friends became hard to find. "My dog was my only true friend," Rodgers says of that year. "I told my wife that every man needs at least two good friends – and she bought be another dog." *Today in the Word*, November 1996

What Does a Friend Do?

In an era where we have multiple acquaintances, business contacts, and even Facebook friends, we need to discover what God says a friend should do.

14:20 – "A poor person is hated even by his neighbor, but a rich person is loved by many."
(God's Word)

17:17 – "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born of adversity."
(English Standard Version)

18:24 – "A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (New American Standard Version)

25:17-18 – "Do not set foot in our neighbor's house too often. Otherwise, he will see too much of you and hate you. Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow, so is a person who gives false testimony against his neighbor." (God's Word)

26:18-19 – "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'Was I not joking?'" (New Living Translation)

27:6, 9-10, 14 – "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy...Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away...Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing." (English Standard Version)

28:23 – "Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue." (English Standard Version)

29:5 – "To flatter friends is to lay a trap for their feet." (New Living Translation)

Consider David and Jonathan's relationship in the Old Testament.

What made it a strong friendship?

Think about Jesus' relationship with a few of His closest apostles (Peter, James and John).

What does that teach us about our needs for friendship?

What Can Separate Friends?

We have all seen this happen before, and the Proverbs show us how these actions can fracture friendships and instigate loneliness.

16:28 – "A devious person spreads quarrels. A gossip separates the closest of friends."
(God's Word)

17:9 – "You will keep your friends if you forgive them, but you will lose your friends if you keep talking about what they did wrong." (Contemporary English Version)

Have you ever had either of these things happen to you? How does it make us feel when we discover that a friend has done one of these things?