

## **“BFF: Best Friends Forever”**

### **Proverbs 1:10-19**

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

In a magazine cartoon, a thief was wearing one of those “Lone Ranger” masks. His gun was pointed toward his frightened victim as he yelled, “Okay, gimme all your valuables.”

The victim commenced to stuffing into the sack all *his friends*.

We continue our new sermon series on the Old Testament book of Proverbs, a series which began last Sunday with an overview of the book.

This brief series is not an exposition of every verse, nor even every chapter in Proverbs. Instead, it is a topical series. A general reading of Proverbs shows it addresses various topics important for God’s people to cultivate and manifest in their lives. Among those topics are – money, friends, words, sexual purity, work, self-control, guidance, pride, leadership, marriage, and sin. Today, we study what Proverbs has to say about “friends.”

Friends have massive influence on each other. *Who doesn’t want friends?* Someone has said, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

True story. In October 1993 in Worcester, Massachusetts, an old woman was found dead on her kitchen floor. She had been there four years! *How could such a thing happen?* Some four years earlier, neighbors sensed something was wrong and contacted the police. When the police called her brother, he said she had gone into a nursing home. Police advised the Post Office to stop delivering mail. One neighbor paid her grandson to cut the grass to keep the house from looking run-down. Another neighbor had the water shut off when a pipe froze, broke, and sent water spilling out the door.

*Can that be all to the story?* Hold tight – One friend from her past said, “She didn’t want anyone bothering her at all. I guess she got her wish, but it’s awfully sad.” Her brother said the family hadn’t been close since their mother died in 1979. His sister had live in her house in a middle-class neighborhood for 40 years, but none of her neighbors knew her well. The woman who lived across the street said, “If she saw you outside, she never said hello to you.”

Friendships take work! The main text before us today teaches us the need for good friends.

#### **Proverbs 1:10-19:**

“My son, if sinners entice you,  
Do not consent.

<sup>11</sup> If they say, “Come with us,  
Let us lie in wait to *shed* blood;  
Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;

<sup>12</sup> Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,  
And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;

<sup>13</sup> We shall find all *kinds* of precious possessions,  
We shall fill our houses with spoil;

<sup>14</sup> Cast in your lot among us,  
 Let us all have one purse" —  
<sup>15</sup> My son, do not walk in the way with them,  
 Keep your foot from their path;  
<sup>16</sup> For their feet run to evil,  
 And they make haste to shed blood.  
<sup>17</sup> Surely, in vain the net is spread  
 In the sight of any bird;  
<sup>18</sup> But they lie in wait for their *own* blood,  
 They lurk secretly for their *own* lives.  
<sup>19</sup> So *are* the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;  
 It takes away the life of its owners."

Since the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (eating the fruit God forbid them to eat), this is a fallen world. Terrible things take place that shouldn't happen; unexpectedly bad things take place. Let's face it – the times can be downright scary! The people in the text we just read reveal some people "wait to shed blood and lurk to swallow the innocent" because "their feet run to evil; to shed blood." Oh, how each of us need godly, Christian friends who will help us walk the line with God's Word as we navigate life in a world which often disappoints.

One day a farmer grabbed his shot gun to shoot at a flock of pesky crows. Unfortunately, he didn't see his sociable parrot that had joined the crows. After firing a few shots, he walked over to the fallen birds and was surprised to find his parrot badly ruffled with a broken wing. When the farmer's children saw the injured bird, they asked, "Dad, what happened?" The farmer simply replied, "Bad company."

Proverbs address this – we must carefully choose the people with whom we spend most of our time. "The most important quality to look for in those who would be your close friends is godliness – an integration of Christian faith and character." (Wingate, 35) Consider:

\* **Proverbs 13:20** – "He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."

\* **Proverbs 14:7** – "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive *in him* the lips of knowledge."

\* **Proverbs 22:24-25** – "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul."

You may be familiar with the 1987 Contemporary Christian hit song "Friends" written and performed by Michael W. Smith. This is the refrain:

"And friends are friends forever,  
 If the Lord's the Lord of them.  
 And a friend will not say never  
 'cause the welcome will not end.  
 Though it's hard to let you go,  
 In the Father's hands we know.  
 That a lifetime's not too long  
 To live as friends."

Playing the companion of fools and being the foolish, angry and furious man kill friendships as Proverbs teaches. *Want to lose your friends? Do you have difficulty making them?* Then maybe you should hear and heed these Proverbs:

\* **Proverbs 16:28** – “A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.”

\* **Proverbs 17:9** – “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.”

\* **Proverbs 27:14** – “He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, It will be counted a curse to him.

A good and Godly friend will forgive and choose not to revisit the hurt caused by a friend. We all say and do things we wish we hadn't, and even though we regret what we said or did, to keep your friends and to grow closer to them, we must overlook, rather than remember, the offenses of our friends. **1 Peter 4:8** is so good in addressing this, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’”

My formative years were heavily influenced by music, and some big hits touched on relationships with friends. In 1971, Carole King released her song, “You’ve Got a Friend,” which became a huge hit performed by James Taylor. You may know the chorus:

“You just call out my name  
And you know wherever I am  
I'll come running, to see you again!  
Winter, spring, summer or fall;  
All you have to do is call!  
And I'll be there;  
You've got a friend.”

When you need a friend, a true friend will be there through thick and thin. More than a decade later, another smash hit carried a similar message.

The mid-1980's saw the release of a song written for AIDS research and prevention. “That’s What Friends are For”, was a song featuring big-name singers like Dionne Warwick, Gladys Night, Elton John, and Stevie Wonder. Here’s the chorus:

“Keep smiling, keep shining  
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure  
That's what friends are for  
For good times and bad times  
I'll be on your side forever more  
That's what friends are for.”

Let’s look more closely at the benefit of having good and Godly friends. Again, Proverbs helps us with this:

\* **Proverbs 17:17** – “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Friends choose us; they love us even when we’re not lovely!

\* **Proverbs 18:24** – “A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend *who sticks* closer than a brother.” The ‘sticking’ spoken of here is reminiscent of the cleaving of a husband and wife when they come together for marriage. True friends ‘stick’ with us.

\* **Proverbs 27:6** – “Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.”

\* **Proverbs 27:17** – “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

The benefit of a good friend who tells us of our bad breath, and the things about us that we don’t realize is immeasurable. Genuine friendship brings with it the desire to help each other grow and be better.

\* **Proverbs 27:9** – “Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend *gives delight* by hearty counsel.”

\* **Proverbs 15:22** – “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.” Friends are vested; they can say things to us that others may not be able to get away with. Yet, their intent is always for our betterment; they provide advice and help when asked. Listen well, and in being another’s friend, provide good and Godly advice from Scripture.

When I’m away from home, I sometimes wonder who would come pick me up if I ever needed the assist. As I go down a listing of people who may be willing to help me, if asked, I truly wonder if some of them would lend me a hand. *Conversely, I also wonder if called upon, would I be the answer to someone else’s prayers?* This can be a sobering, humbling exercise.

Ralph Adams was one of my best friends while on active duty with the Air Force. We were unlikely friends. He was raised in Oregon, and I was raised in northern Illinois. He was raised Roman Catholic; I was raised Protestant. Ralph was 7 years older than me. Given I was 22 years old when we met, he was 29 - a significant difference at my age. That would have made him one third of my entire life older than I was.

We were both stationed at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming in the early 1980’s. Eventually, we were both selected to fill staff positions in the squadron we were assigned. I was appointed Ralph’s supervisor. And we hit it off big-time. We quickly became close friends, spending lots of time with each other – we had common interests in music and sports, and Ralph and his wife Carole became good friends to Jan and I.

There are many stories I can tell about Ralph, and probably will sometime. But one that stands out is an illustration of genuine, sacrificial friendship. In December 1984 Jan and I were driving back to Cheyenne after a couple weeks of leave with family over the holidays. To make a long story short, we had a vehicle accident, totaling our vehicle. We were several hours from home, and the only person I could think of to call was Ralph. (This was in the days before cellphones). After telling Ralph what happened, he said he’d be right out to get us – a 320 mile drive each way! Ralph showed up in Carole’s station wagon to pick us up, along with our two cocker spaniels, and our bags and stuff. He took us home, and even loaned us a vehicle until we could get transportation of our own.

Ralph was a friend, indeed. When Jan and I really needed a friend, Ralph answered the call. Let us all strive to be the friend who sticks closer than a brother. And, let us do whatever it takes to reconcile, showing the unbelieving world what Jesus is able to do.