

Proverbs – Live Well

Sermon 5 – Proverbs 13.20

F.R.I.E.N.D.S. | Real. Close. Friends.

Indoor Services starting first weekend in November with childcare.

Intro

If I told you right now that just before I got up here we held a raffle with the names of everyone who RSVP'd to today's service and the winner gets all expense paid trip to the Bahamas for you and 3 close friends of yours. If you are married, your spouse doesn't count. This is a guys trip or girls trip. But the catch is that without telling those 3 friends what is going on, you have to convince them to be here by the end of this sermon and when they get here they have to be able to share 3 things you've got going on in your life that they are praying about for you. Could you make that happen? Some of you are about to become best friends with the stranger next to you.

See today I'm going to show you what the bible, specifically the book of proverbs, says about friends. And there's this concern I have that you might overlook the significance of friendship because it doesn't seem urgent or pressing on your life. But what I want you to see this morning is that God's greatest gifts to you on planet earth are friends. That people who travel through life with real, close Jesus loving friends have less stress, better marriages, fewer financial troubles, better kids, more joy, and fewer heart attacks than people who go through life without them.

MPS: Jesus-loving friends are God's primary instruments of love, blessing, and formation in your life.

And I am confident you will not make it in life unless you are good at choosing, building, and maintaining great friendships.

Good news is Proverbs is FULL of wisdom about friendship. It's a pillar in proverbs. I want to show you what Proverbs says about

1. why real close Jesus loving friends are so important
2. how to be a good friend (which is also what to look for)

Then I'm going to close by addressing some common objections I hear when it comes to building these kinds of friendships. Specifically I'm going to talk about community groups here at mercy and what keeps you from those. That's at the end though.

1. Why God says real close Jesus loving friends are so important.

1. Friendship is the fundamental expression of Christian love.

- a. **Proverbs 27.10** – Don't abandon your friend or your father's friend, and don't go to your brother's house in the time of calamity; better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.
- b. **Proverbs 18:24**: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Sticks closer than a brother – that word sticks there is the Hebrew word "cleave." It's used in Genesis 2 to talk about

how a man is to cleave to his wife. That alone may make a lot of you uncomfortable but I share that to show you the significance or depth of what we are talking about here.

Closer than a brother – I'm not sure if you are close with your siblings if you have them. But even if you are its most likely not like the kind of closeness families had when this was written. This was written into a strong group culture dynamic where your family was like the sun the rest of your life orbited around. And Solomon is saying there is a friend who is closer than a BROTHER? That is VERY close.

What's he getting at? Well a couple of things. First, friendship in Christ has a different starting point than your family. Your starting point is your shared identity in the gospel not your shared gene pool & family of origin. Secondly, you choose your friends and you don't choose your family. Real, close, Jesus loving friendships require a mutual commitment to one another.

Proof – ever had someone think of you as their best friend but you didn't feel the same way? If not...you were that friend.

Scripture is saying though is there is something found in friendship that is beyond what any other relationship can provide. Even, listen to me, even different than what a spouse can supply.

Think about Jesus' last words to his disciples before he is arrested and crucified. It's John 17. And what does he spend time talking and praying about? About friendship. About their unity with one another. In fact he prays father let them be one

as we are one. He's asking for them to experience a kind of community that reflects the very trinity itself.

- Catch this church – The Christian doctrine of the trinity, that God is 3 in one, directly informs your friendships. Christians believe there is one god who exists in 3 persons. God was not some sad lonely being who needed to create people in order to have community. No, God existed and still exists in loving mutually committed community. And he created us to experience that kind of love in him and with one another! The MODEL for friendship is The father, son, and spirit. The shared identity – we are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3.28) and the power to be a friend is found in the spirit of God that binds us together (Eph 2)
- SO when we experience true friendship we are experiencing a dimension of God himself that he designed us for. And on the flipside if we remain in isolation we experience a sub-human life.

According to John 17 THE distinguishing mark of Christians would be love for one another. It would be FRIENDSHIP. Because in our friendships non-christians would see a reflection of the trinitarian God who created them and be drawn in to that love.

And this kind of friendship...it's not prized in our culture. Our music prizes romantic love almost exclusively. I listened to Spotify's top 20 this week...and it was enlightening. But everyone from Cardi B to Justin B to Jason D is talking about Romantic love. And if you come back at me with "yeah but what about the show friends?" Well, that last episode aired

around the same time some of these college students were born. And it was about romantic love more than friendship.

While it isn't prized like romantic love...people CRAVE real friendship. Because. You are created for it. So even if you can't describe that craving you express it. I see married people put absurd expectations on their spouse because they are trying to get out of a spouse a friendship that they should find in fellow believers. Social Media scrollers are looking for real friends. Everybody is looking for friends.

Leads me right to another reason I want to show you from Proverbs that God says friends are so important. Not only are they the fundamental expression of Christian love,

2. Your Friendships form you

Proverbs 13.20 – The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm.

Years ago I heard a pastor explain this verse by saying you show me your friends, I'll show you your future.¹ This is one of those things that is so true, you don't need me to spend a lot of time explaining how true it is. It's the need for acceptance that drives us to become like the people we are around. We all do it. Even subconsciously. Because the need for acceptance is so strong and so deeply rooted in us.

- *Years ago scientist were trying to decide why fish swam in schools. They had isolated the part of the brain that caused the fish to swim in schools so they took one of*

the fish and did a partial lobotomy on it. They put the fish back in the water. Sure enough, he could still swim but he swam all by himself and not in a school. Do you know what happened? The rest of the fish followed that fish. A BRAINLESS FISH leading the pack. I thought – this is now called Tik Tok.

Now what do you do with this reality That your friends FORM you? You can either try to will yourself NOT to be influenced by others. Like "I'm gonna be ME." I conform to no one. And to a degree that is important. Don't just blindly follow.

BUT – here's the other important side of this – you can get some quality friends around you. by being more like them...you will become more like Christ himself. That's what Prov 13 is getting at. Your present friends are who you will be. So my question is...look at your close friends right now. Is that who you want to be?

Parents naturally I gotta talk to you here. If this is true then the MOST formative thing for your kids is going to be their friend group. So, who are they around?

- Listen I'm not here to beat you up and you can only decide this for them up to a certain age. But if they play 15 different sports and 10 different school clubs and have no friendships in their local church and no meaningful connection with YOU...what do you expect is going to happen? When they tell you they don't want anything to do with God and you say "I didn't

¹ Craig Groeschel said it. I can't track down the sermon, but its definitely his line.

raise them that way"...YES YOU DID. Its not what you taught them, it's the companions you allowed them to run with.

- Again I know that's an oversimplification but it's a common problem here in the activity rich culture we live in. Your kid can very easily grow up to be a mediocre high school baseball player and LOSE HIS SOUL. So young parents, make good decisions now. Parents who are wondering if its too late, it's never too late to obey Jesus. In fact, don't underestimate the power of going to your teenage or grown children and repenting to them for not modeling the power of real, close, Jesus loving friendships for them. Then tell them you are going to go first in trying to figure it out. Invite them along. And trust Jesus with the outcome.

Third reason the bible says real, close, Jesus loving friendships are so important...

3. Friends protect you from yourself

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful Proverbs 27.6

You know this to be true. That's part of the power of proverbs. Though written thousands of years ago, they ring true to your life experience here and now. The wounds of a friend are the words spoken to you or actions done to you that hurt in the moment but later prove to be for your benefit. And a friend only needs to wound you when you are about to wound yourself way worse.

This is why you need real, close, Jesus loving friends. Because you have blind spots. And if you disagree with me about that...then self-awareness is one of your blind spots. You need those kinds of friends that I've called sparring partners. The people you train with so that when you are in the real fight you don't get knocked out cold. They see your blind spots and call them out. And some of yall are really thick headed. So you need a friend willing to knock you upside the head.

I've had this SO MANY TIMES. Because I'm stubborn ya'll. Pastor Scott has been this friend to me, couple other guys here have been this friend to me. Who is your friend who will say "THAT GUY YOU ARE DATING IS AWFUL FOR YOU. He's not into Jesus. You certainly don't want to be under his spiritual leadership not to mention raise a kid with his character. Get out now. Stop flirting with self-destruction." Do you have a friend like that you will listen to? AND BTW – don't just start lobbing truth bombs at people after this sermon ok? You have to be given a license by your friend to say those kinds of things. Truth in love people.

But for real – I've seen too many pastors fall into adultery or other really dark things and almost always they were really isolated. No friends. David Powlison said things in a secret garden almost always grow mutant. He was right.

4. Friends care for you when life falls apart

- In another book Solomon wrote right after this one, he has a very interesting and, I would say, culturally inappropriate way of making this point: *Ecclesiastes 4:9–11, Two are better than one... For if they fall, one*

will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? When you lie down in life's cold, you need someone to spoon with.

- Seriously: **C. S. Lewis**: when you go through pain, it's not theological reasoning you most need, it's the slightest touch of human sympathy. **Studies have shown that women without a close friend are 10x more likely to be depressed.**
- **Proverbs 18:24**: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*²
 - **You see companion there** – think follower. Think “friend request” friend. Think water cooler or lunch table companion. There is a difference between that kind of person and the person who will speak into my life when either to rebuke me or to care for me.

Ok lets talk about how to be a good friend / what to look for

1. A Jesus-loving friend...LOVES Jesus!

- a. That one might almost seem too easy but listen...if you become like those you are around, you need to make sure your closest friends are people who inspire you with their own walk with Jesus. So if you tell me “but aren't we supposed to be friends with non-christians?”

ABSOLUTELY! But remember, just like the trinity invites us in to the friendship love of God himself. You need Jesus-loving friendships those non-christians can witness. And ya'll the principle is what it is...you are a part of the body of Christ. You need others. You are a part of the family. You need your brothers and sisters. And by the way – the best thing you can start doing today is spending time with Jesus. He's the one who models friendship & gives the power for friendship. So start with him.

2. A Jesus-loving friend is dependable

- a. **“A friend loves at all times” – Proverbs 17.17**
 - i. Man listen nobody is lovable at all times. Nobody. ESPECIALLY IN 2020. A friend loves you when you are in a rough spot. When you are so ANNOYING with your pity party. ALL TIMES. You don't have to wonder.
- b. Listen Proverbs 19.4 says that \$\$ brings new friends. But new friends aren't always true friends. Jesus-loving friends don't care whether you got \$\$ or not. In fact think of it this way – The friends you are after are the ones who walk in when everyone else walks out.
- c. This is a friend you can always count on. Listen to become a dependable friend...man you gotta free up some margin in your life. Friendship

² Spooning section borrowed from J.D. Greear's sermon on friendship in the 2009 still standing series.

takes TIME. The real test for this is the moving test. When is the last time you helped a friend move? That's real.

3. A Jesus-loving friend is honest

- a. **Proverbs 24:26** *An honest answer is the sign of true friendship.*

Again this feels like what we talked about above but I can't overstate it. You need friends who are willing to speak honestly with you about what they are seeing in your life. And by the way because we are in such a fake-polite culture...you will have to extend that trust to them multiple times before they do it.

And once you have that trust...you speak truth in love. If you see something in that person's life that's killing them, but avoid telling them because you don't want to hurt their feelings...you actually just don't want to go through the awkward pain of telling them. So, you care too much about YOU. A friend makes his friend's business...his business.

4. A Jesus loving friend is caring

A good friend is able to sense your emotion and meet you in it. This is the thing I have to get better at as a friend. I want to be more caring.

- **Proverbs 27:14** *He who blesses His neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him.*

A right word said at the wrong time...like before I've had my coffee...I'm not ready for it. So it actually frustrates me and

doesn't help me. A real friend knows that if they have to say something that will hurt, it will hurt them to say it. They enter in and that is HUGE in my ability to receive that word.

And...a friend knows that sometimes I don't need a word at all. I just need your presence with me while I suffer. I've learned this in marriage. Courtney just needs me to listen and to feel what she feels. Not to fix the problem.

A good friend can rejoice when you rejoice and grieve when you grieve. Basically you are sticking so close your emotional well being is tied to their emotional well being. And MAN, don't we need that right now?

Where does the power for friendship come?

John 15 – Jesus says love one another AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. We get to know the love of Jesus for us. The ability to be a Jesus-loving friend is to first experience the love of Jesus for us.

Typically when we betray a friend, that friend turns on you. But Jesus Christ is the ultimate friend who loves at all times, born for adversity, the ultimate friend who will cleave to you at all times at any cost so that you will not be ruined. He says: "Here's how I'm the ultimate friend, whose wounds are the wounds of love, because rather than afflicting them, I'm going to take them."

- On the cross Christ lost his friendship with God so that we can have friendship with God. He lets you in and He never lets you down. In Gethsemane, God says to Jesus "You are going to have to lose your friends (us) or die, and Jesus says, "I'll go to Hell" – that is a friend who sticks to his friends – a friend who

dies for us.

- If we know this and believe this, then we are liberated to be the friend we need to be. If I know that Jesus has let me all the way in and loves me, then I can move out towards others and not be afraid of rejection. Because Jesus will never let me down, I can move out with fear of being let down by others. All my eggs are not in the human-friends-egg-basket. Believing this and becoming this friend, will enable me to have the true friends I need.

How to build friends here at Mercy: Community Groups

I told you we have a space for you to build these kinds of friendships. Because it isn't automatic. We call them community groups and they really are the heartbeat of our church. And I've been around groups long enough to know the prospect of getting into one can be daunting. Here are some common objections I hear and maybe speaking to them will help you out:

1. I'm too busy – Well, based on what we've said about the importance of community...And the danger of going through life alone...I'd argue you can't afford NOT to be in community.

2. I don't want people to know my business – Well too bad. God already knows your business. And if you are ok with God knowing your business but not a fellow sinner? You have misunderstood God...and fellow sinners.

3. Financially I can't afford a babysitter every week – No problem. Mercy has budgeted to pay for a substantial portion of your childcare cost so you can attend a community group.

Seriously its that important to us. Find out more on our website.

4. I had a bad experience in the past.

Well, first if it wasn't at Mercy, nothing I can really do about that but to say I'm sorry that you went through it. We are all fellow sinners trying to honor the Lord here. But if it was at Mercy I'll say that just because one didn't go great doesn't mean the next one wont be the greenhouse for some really deep Jesus-loving friendships. Maybe you can start one.

Also, what if we use this biblical understanding of friendship to alter how you look at community group, realizing that God's grace ministers to lame, dysfunctional people of all types, including you.

5. I don't need more friends

Well, I'm not talking about social club. I'm talking about people you are growing with into the image of Christ.

Close