

Sunday Morning Message

July 22, 2023

Title – *More Wisdom from Proverbs – Who Are Your True Friends?*

Text – Proverbs 27

Congregational Reading – Proverbs 27:5 - 17

Introduction

Last Saturday, as a church, we started reading the through the Book of Proverbs in our daily devotional reading, and last Sunday, we preached a message from Proverbs where we briefly explained what the Book of Proverbs was all about. I would encourage you to go back and get the notes for last week's message if you missed it and look at what we taught by way of overview about this very important and insightful Book. We explained that Proverbs is the "the Book of Wisdom." We also stated that it is a wise practice for believers to spend everyday gleaning God's wisdom from this Book. There are 31 chapters in the Book of Proverbs and 31 days in most months, so it would be a good habit for us to read a chapter per day.

What is a Proverb?

- Dictionary – a short, pithy (forcefully expressive) saying in general use, stating a general truth or piece of advice.
- Strong – (mashal) – sentences of ethical wisdom, ethical maxims. Interestingly, the Hebrew word, *mashal*, has been translated into the English word, *parable*, in several places in the Bible. (7 times in Numbers 23 & 24; Job 27:1, 29:1; Psalm 49:4; Proverbs 26:7, 9)
- Proverbs are short sentences drawn from long experience.
- A proverb is a truth that is couched in a form that is easily remembered.

These proverbs declare the wisdom of God. From the Book of Proverbs, we can glean financial wisdom, family wisdom, and wisdom that will keep us from being foolish. The Proverbs are not the only source of God's wisdom; we can glean God's wisdom from a variety of sources, but we cannot have the wisdom that God wants us to have without carefully reading and studying The Book of Proverbs.

In the past week, in our daily devotions, we focused on various topics that the Proverbs discuss:

In the message from last Sunday, we saw that Book of Proverbs shows us that there are some people out there that we are to avoid:

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." - (Proverbs 1:10)

We learned that about "the wicked," "the strange woman," "the foolish," "the talebearer," "the glutton and drunkard," and "the slothful." These are negative human characteristics that all of us have at times, and that some people seem to manifest continuously in their lives, and the Bible states here in the Proverbs that we should stay away from these folks so that they do not influence us to be like them.

In Sunday's devotional blog from pastorerickson.com, the subject discussed was the slothful, where we "considered the ant" from Proverbs 6:6 – 11. We saw that ants are not like slothful people. They are diligent in their work.

Monday's devotion contrasted the two women's voices discussed in Proverbs: one good and one that is bad. The bad one is the "foolish" or "strange woman." The good one is the voice of wisdom, which is referred to in Proverbs in the feminine gender:

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding." (Proverbs 9:1-6)

In Tuesday's devotion, we talked about the truly rich man:

"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." (Proverbs 10:22)

On Wednesday, we learned:

"4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox." (Proverbs 14:4)

We made the application to the local church in that blogpost. The more people you have, the messier it is going to get.

Illustrate – Last week we had VBS and there were 350 different people here, which is a lot for a church our size. Our "crib" got dirty and needed constant cleaning.

On Thursday, we learned about the tongue, and how our use of words can either build somebody up or tear somebody down:

"23 A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Proverbs 15:23)

*"24 Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."
(Proverbs 16:24)*

*"9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. ... 27 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. 28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."
(Proverbs 17:9, 27-28)*

"11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." (Proverbs 25:11)

On Friday, we examined from Proverbs the danger of alcohol:

"1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1)

"17 He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." (Proverbs 21:17)

"29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? 30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. 32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." (Proverbs 23:29-35)

Yesterday, in Pastor Stahl's "Saturday Morning Post," he discussed not being envious of bad people, even when they seem to be prospering:

*"17 Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.
18 For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." (Proverbs 23:17-18)*

"1 Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. 2 For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief." (Proverbs 24:1-2)

Pastor Stahl taught us in yesterday's blogpost from the Proverbs that we should be content with all the good things that God gives us.

In yesterday's "Noon Zoom" Prayer meeting, my devotion, which was from a previous blogpost from Proverbs was focused not quitting when the going gets tough:

"10 If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." (Proverbs 24:10)

There are so many very practical life topics discussed in this wonderful Book. Again, I want to encourage you to begin your day reading the Bible, and in your Bible reading, include at least one chapter from the Book of Proverbs.

Transition

Today, we are going to examine one more very important topic discussed in this Book, and that is the subject of friends.

Chapter twenty-seven of the Book of Proverbs includes the word "friend" several times.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." – (Proverbs 27:6)

"Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off." – (Proverbs 27:10)

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." – (Proverbs 27:17)

From these verses we can get a better, Biblical understanding of what a true friend is. The world would have a broader definition for friendship, but the Bible is much more specific about what a friend is, and what a friend does. We each may have many acquaintances, and people that are friendly at times to us, but if we were to really apply the Biblical understanding of true friendship, we would have to conclude that the number of real friends we have is few.

I. A True Friendship is Secure

The Bible tells us that a true friend is there for us no matter what.

"24 A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

"17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Proverbs 17:17)

When the chips are down in your life, you will find out who your true friends are.

We have all probably heard the expression, "fair weather friends". This type of person is the one that will be your friend if you have something to offer them.

Illustration - I remember years ago when I was newly saved, my wife and I were attending a church in Toms River, NJ. We were both very young Christians, and we had a hard time establishing relationships with some of the other couples that were there. There was one man that suddenly began to take an interest in me. He invited us over to his house, and he really seemed to be trying to reach out to us. I was very flattered, but then this man began to tell me about a business venture that he wanted me to be a part of: something that was going to eventually make me very rich, but at first would require an investment on our part. When this man finally realized that I didn't have any money to invest in his business, he stopped being nice to me. This man was not my friend. He was friendly if he thought I could benefit him in some way.

Another man in that same church tried to get us to buy and then sell his insurance. He was very friendly to us when we were his perspective customers.

A real friend is not merely concerned about what he receives from the relationship but is instead focused on what he can offer to it. True friends will also remain friendly through the good times and the bad.

"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." – (Proverbs 18:24)

II. A True Friendship is Sincere

"6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." (Proverbs 27:6)

"9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." (Proverbs 27:9)

The Bible tells us that a true friend will not be someone that tells us what we want to hear, but rather tells us what we need to hear. I want my friends to help me be a better me. For that to happen they will need to be open and honest with me. There are many things about me that I cannot see. My flesh has set up protections that insulate me from facing myself. My pride causes me to think that I am always right. But I know that can't

possibly be true. So, God has placed some people in my life who love me enough to tell me what I often do not want to hear about myself. Don't misunderstand, these friends do not spend all their time criticizing me, but they will straighten me out when I need it. The greatest friend that I have, besides the Lord, is my wife. She doesn't pull any punches with me: she loves me enough to tell me what I need to hear.

III. A True Friendship is Sharpening

"17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." (Proverbs 27:17)

A good friend will make you better. A bad friend will pull you down. The good friends that I have in my life are the ones that are trying to help me be a better husband, a better father and grandfather, a better pastor, a better Bible teacher.

Consider the people that you consider to be your friends. Are they sharpening you? Are they helping you to become a better person? Are they encouraging you in your spiritual growth? Are they pushing you to become more like Christ?

IV. A True Friendship is Sacrificial

Illustrate – Gerald was always willing to take money out of his wallet to help when we had a need.

A true friend will be willing to sacrifice his time and even his treasure for his friends.

Of course, the Lord is the greatest friend that we have because He gave His life for us. A true friend will give himself unconditionally to those that he loves.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." – (John 15:13)

Conclusion

1. Choose Your Friends Wisely.

Perhaps there is a person in your life that you have called "friend," but they are not your friend at all.

2. Cherish Your Good Friends.

Learn to appreciate the good people that God has placed in your life.

3. Change to Be the Right Kind of Friend to the People in Your Life.

Be friendly. That doesn't just mean that you are kind and pleasant to be around. That means you are a true friend to the people in your life. Be willing to stick by your friend no matter what. Be willing to be sincere, painfully truthful with them when it is necessary. Be willing to sacrifice for them. Be a sharpener. Your friend should be a better person

because they hang around you. Be willing to sacrifice your time and even your money when there is a need.

Good friends are hard to find, and if you have a couple of good friends, consider yourself very fortunate; but being a good friend can also be very difficult at times. With God's help, I want to be that kind of a friend to the people in my life.

4. Challenge Yourself to Be a Friend to Jesus

Jesus said, "14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14)

You can be a friend to Jesus because Jesus is a friend to you.

Illustration – Clarence Sexton re “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

One of our favorite hymns is titled “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” The man who penned the words to this hymn was Joseph Scriven. Mr. Scriven was born in Ireland and immigrated to Canada. Many people think of this hymn as an American hymn, but it was not written by an American.

Mr. Scriven left Ireland after he was engaged to be married and his wife-to-be drowned in an accident, breaking his heart. He moved to Canada a number of years later, met another young lady, and they fell in love. Just weeks before they were to be married, she became very ill and died. He was twenty-five-years-old and broken-hearted again.

Joseph determined as a twenty-five-year-old man that he would give the rest of his life to helping poor people. He became known in his community as a man who carried around a saw with him to do work for people. He could not be employed for money; he did his work for no charge. Anywhere there were poor people in need of help, he pitched in and helped them.

He received news from his homeland that his mother was seriously ill in Dublin, Ireland, but he did not have enough money to visit his dying mother. Instead of making the long journey which he could not afford, he wrote a poem for her, the poem we now know as the song “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee
Thou wilt find a solace there.*

An American attorney later put music to the poem, and we sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Mr. D.L. Moody made the song famous by using it in his travels, especially in England.

The song was also used in World War I and World War II. When a young man was leaving for military service, the congregation in which he worshipped would have him stand in the last service he attended, and they would all sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” He would part from their company with that song on his heart and mind.

If something happened to one of those soldiers who went away in military service, the church would remember them by singing the same song. It became associated with people serving in the armed services as the song of men who were going off to war.

The hymn is precious to me because it was one of the only songs my father knew, and I heard him whistle the tune often before he died. It rings a true note in all of our hearts, the note that we are never alone and never forsaken. We shall never have a friend to compare with the Lord Jesus. What a friend we have in Jesus!¹

¹ Clarence Sexton, “The Gift of Friendship”, *Signature Pastor’s College 2014*, Faith for the Family, Powell TN, 2014, pp. 196 – 198.