

Counting Friends

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Prov. 27:17 - Friendship can be among the most wonderful of relationships, but it can also be among the most destructive.
 - 1. "False friendship, like the ivy, decays and ruins the walls it embraces; but true friendship gives new life and animation to the object it supports." (Richard Burton)
 - 2. Most do not choose friends; they simply allow friendship to happen.
 - 3. Sometimes we chose a friend for no particular quality in them, but merely from circumstance or proximity.
 - 4. As outlined in the text, most people don't have friends. What they commonly call friendships are little more than acquaintances and familiarities. They have people to suffer and rejoice with, but not people who are important to the growth and spiritual development of their lives.
- B. Solomon was given the teaching about friendships by God and the Divine gift of wisdom - 1Kings 4:29-34
 - 1. The word "friend" (Hebrew "rea") is found 30 times in Proverbs.

I. GUIDANCE IN CHOOSING FRIENDS

- A. Prov. 12:26 - One should choose his friends carefully, for a wrong choice can have far-reaching consequences in his life. We need godly counsel in choosing those who will be our closest companions.
- B. Prov. 1:10-16 - It is difficult to say "no" to this invitation. Why?
 - 1. God created us to live as social beings who long to be with other beings. He created the family, the church, community structures, civil government, all of which acknowledging that we were designed to be in relationships.
 - 2. Strong desire to belong is what leads so many into hurtful relationships.
- C. Wisdom urges the young man to look to where the relationship will lead, not just its beginning and middle - Prov. 1:17-18
 - 1. When birds see the snare for what it is, they avoid it.
 - 2. How do I learn to see the snare? - Prov. 1:7

II. HARMFUL RELATIONSHIPS

- A. Proverbs is designed to open our eyes to discern hurtful relationships and to cultivate healthy relationships - Prov. 2:10-22
- B. Two kinds of unhealthy relationships are portrayed in Prov. 2:11-12, 16
 - 1. The rebels who dismiss authority; they appear strong, creative, independent, confident. They are destructive to themselves and everyone around them
 - 2. The heedless hedonists whose entire focus is on physical pleasures; they appear exciting, fun, happy. They are empty, selfish, and careless of how much their pleasure brings suffering to others
 - 3. How can we see through the false promises in these relationships?

4. Start by ridding yourself of your own mythology.
 - a. You do not know better than God
 - b. You are not too strong to fall; it can happen to you
- C. Prov. 6:12-15 - There are warning signs given off by persons who are bad relationship risks
 1. Their lifestyle will eventually catch up with them and destroy them and anyone around them will be collaterally damaged
 2. Prov. 4:14-16 - Do not take the risk. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."
 3. If the prodigal son of Luke 15 had heeded the Proverbs, he would not have made the mistake of thinking he had friends. They were only wanting to use him, and he would have seen through them.

III. SOLOMON'S WARNINGS

- A. The talkers - Prov. 11:13 - The gossip will change when you are not present; you will become the topic of conversation. Not friend material.
- B. The beautiful people - Prov. 11:22 - Beyond the physical beauty, what do they really look like in the sight of God. Not friend material.
- C. The fortunate - Prov. 17:5 - Shows no compassion for those who are in need is symptomatic of deep character problems. Not friend material.
 1. "Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down."
(Oprah Winfrey)
- D. The tough guys - Prov. 12:10 - It is a very short step from cruel to animals to abusive to other people. Not friend material.
- E. The angry person - Prov. 22:24-25 - Don't fear their fists; that would last only for a while. Fear their example; that can cause much longer term harm.
- F. Prov. 7:4-5 - Respect God's wisdom more than your own myths, and you will avoid a great deal of sorrow and pain.

IV. SOLOMON'S COUNSEL

- A. Is it worth the risk and effort to cultivate friendships? Wouldn't be better to be a loner, trusting no one and looking only to one's own resources?
- B. Solomon praises healthy friendships and the blessings that come from them
 1. Prov. 17:17 - A healthy friend is someone who stays with you when everyone else leaves.
 2. Prov. 27:5-6 - A healthy friend will be honest with us, even if it risks the relationship. They are honest because they love us. Friends who tell you what you want to hear love themselves and will not say anything to risk the relationship.
 3. Prov. 27:17 - Countenance seems to point to one's personality and character. We are made better by being with others who are working to be better. They help us achieve our full potential.
 4. Prov. 27:9 - Healthy friendships give us joy in a good relationship rather than filling a void with an unhealthy one.

5. Prov. 18:24 - Healthy friendships enable us to form bonds of esteem and love that often prove stronger than those of kinfolk.
6. Prov. 27:10 - Healthy friendships are to be carefully nurtured and highly treasured. We cannot allow it to become a one way relationship

V. USING SOLOMON'S FRIENDSHIP WISDOM

- A. Prov. 13:20 - Our fall from unhealthy friendships will probably not be sudden, but as a gradual erosion of morals and values. The gradual nature of the destruction is why so many keep bad relationships rather than listen to the counsel of God.
 1. Jehoshaphat was a good king, but he chose bad friends and allies. It resulted in the decline of his kingdom and the idolatry of his children
 2. 1Kings 11:4-6 - Solomon was endowed by God with the gift of wisdom, but he made foolish choices that led to his undoing and eventually that of the nation.
 3. Wisdom must be exercised if it is to be effective, and Solomon turned away from wisdom in his later years.
- B. Getting wisdom is not an easy or quick task. It requires humility, patience, and a willingness to be reproved. It requires that we acknowledge God as the Sovereign Teacher - John 15:13-15
 1. Ecc. 4:9-10
 2. "The wicked have only accomplices, the voluptuous have only companions in debauchery; self-seekers have only associates; politicians have only their factions; the generality of idle men has only connections; princes have only courtiers; virtuous men alone possess friends." (Voltaire)