

Wisdom from Proverbs Four Features of a Good Friend

Intro: The book of Proverbs offers a lot of valuable insight into many of life's relationships (family, government, neighbors); but one area that receives special attention is friendship. The Hebrew word for "friend" (re'a) has a semantic range that includes in the broadest sense our fellow-human beings and in the most specific sense our true friends. Solomon's observations about friends and friendship will help you be a better and wiser friend to others.

Let consider four features of a good friend. A good friend is known for his...(four C's)

Constancy

Solomon had learned that there were a lot of people who would be a friend if it served their self-centered goals, if there was something to get from another, especially money and what it can buy.

For example many people are interested in being friends with the wealthy.

The poor is hated even by his neighbor, but those who love the rich are many. (Proverbs 14:20)

Wealth adds many friends, but a poor man is separated from his friend. (Proverbs 19:4)

Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, and every man is a friend to him who gives gifts. (19:6)

In stark contrast, Solomon observed the despite that a poor person would feel and gives the pitiful sight of him begging them to stay. *All the brothers of a poor man hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! He pursues them with words, but they are gone.*

Consequently Solomon extolled the person who could arise above being a "fair weather" friend or who entered relationships only for self-serving purposes.

A man of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

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

He urges us to appreciate those who have shown loyalty and helpfulness and not abandon friendship with them for the sake of others.

Do not forsake your own friend or 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 far away. (Proverbs 27:10)

A real friend is someone who is characterized by constancy. They do not merely use you for what they want at the time; but they are there to help when you are in need as well.

Candor

At times we may rather someone tell us what we want to hear rather than what we need to hear; but there is price to pay:

*A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.
(Proverbs 29:5)*

Instead a true friend tells us the truth, even when it may sting a bit.

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

Solomon understood that it may be awhile before a person might appreciate such candor.

He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue. (Proverbs 28:23)

And so we can say that a true friend is someone who speaks the truth to us instead of telling him what he might want to hear.

Counsel

Solomon stressed the two sides of good advice. First he praises the counsel of agreement that makes us feel more secure.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. (Proverbs 27:9)

Sometimes what we need from our friends is just the support that says, "You're doing the right thing! I'm with you 100 percent".

Second he praises the counsel of disagreement that makes us better.

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (27:17).

Honest disagreement can make us aware of flaws in our thinking, inconsistencies in our practice, dangers we had not seen. As the result, we sharpen our swords by the independent evaluation of ideas.

Take time to confirm the good judgment of others without feeling the need to be contrarian or the need to improve what is already sound; but if you can truly see a higher course of wisdom don't hesitate to share it and let it bring your friends to a higher level of wisdom.

Consideration (Tact)

Solomon observed that people do not always have an educated sensitivity to the personalities and feelings of others. They may trade on their affections, taking advantage of them and misusing them. That can happen in several ways:

Overstaying our welcome or taking advantage of generosity

Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you. (Proverbs 25:17)

Being insensitive to another's personality or patterns of communication

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him. (Proverbs 27:14)

Invalidating another's feelings instead of participating in them

Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, is he who sings songs to a troubled heart. (Proverbs 25:20)

Misleading jests that cause hurt and insecurity

Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "Was I not joking?"

(Proverbs 26:18-19)

Conclusion: To experience loyal friendship is a great thing. To have such friends, we must be such friends. Use this wisdom this week with all your "neighbors"; but especially with the closest ones, "your friends".