

Real Friends Don't Grow on Trees

Intro: One of the reasons I enjoy the lectures is because it give me the rare opportunity to spend time with many of my friends around the country, most of whom are also preachers. Because of our work it is difficult to spend time together, and the lectures always afford us a chance to catch up on news and to enjoy being together. I am grateful for the many friends I have. And it is sad to read the word of Howard Hughes, who wrote when worth approximately 4 billion dollars, "I'd give it all for one good friend." (The Hidden Value of a Man, Smalley, Trent, pp. 133ff)

All of us know how valuable friends are. They enrich our lives in immeasurable ways. And Hughes comments may also reveal how rare friends are! **Real friends don't grow on trees.** Instead, friendship is the result of the application of Biblical principles in our relationships with others. To live a better life we must learn to be a better friend to others so that we can enjoy the blessings of the friendship of others.

No book of the Bible has more to say about friendship than the practical wisdoms of the Proverbs. Almost all of our verses today come from the collection of Solomon's wise sayings. His wisdom can guide us as we learn how to choose and be a better friend.

True friends are people of moral character.

Solomon warned of the dangers of becoming friends with just anyone who seeks to be our friend. He warned particularly about two different kinds of friendships:

The first is friendship with evil doers.

He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

The second is friendship with those who see others as someone to use rather to have a mutual relationship of love and giving.

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

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. (Prov. 19:7)

I don't think Solomon was cynical about friendship, just realistic. As a rich and powerful man he well knew how drawn people are to the powerful or influential and the wealthy, and how often they turn away from the weak and poor because they can do nothing for you. Yet, underlying these statements is the principle that friendships can't be based on selfish considerations. Instead they should be based on character. True friends will come from people of wisdom and character.

Young people need to learn that lesson early in life and it is one that should follow us all through life.

True friends are always kind to their friends.

They will recognize the differences in personality. I wondered if Solomon was thinking of this in Prov. 27:14. Some people are morning people; they bound out of bed when the light hits their face (they sing in the shower at the top of their lungs and they can't wait to get on the phone to talk to others.) Others are not morning people; they wake up slowly and like peace and quiet.) These differences may have been behind Solomon's proverb:

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

What this specialized proverb seems to indicate is the importance of being kind and considerate of others. It is important to understand our friends' personalities and habits and seek to treat them with consideration and kindness.

True friends are there when you need them.

Sometimes we learn in difficult times who our true friends are.

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

Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man? (Prov. 20:6)

A true friend is there when others may be walking away. Winner of contest in England seeking to define a friend: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

True friends will rally to our side when we hurt or suffer.

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

27:10 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.

A true friend tells us what we need to hear rather than what we want to hear.

All of us can benefit from the advice of others.

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

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

Sometimes we prove our true friendship by telling a friend the truth, even when it may hurt. A friend who risks rejection to tell someone the truth is a friend to be cherished.

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

Conclusion: We may not be able to do much about how other people act. But we can do a great deal about how we act, and that would be the best way to teach others as well.

Nothing in the world is friendlier than a wet dog. - Dan Bennett