

*New Peace from Ancient Wisdom*

## **Looking for a Friend**

Various Proverbs

We live in a society of loneliness. Everyone, from little children to aging seniors may experience feelings of isolation, rejection and seclusion. We may think of single people who live alone as being lonely, but loneliness also walks the souls of married people, even with a house full of children.

According to one study, the average American today meets as many people in one year as their ancestors 100 years ago met in a lifetime, yet loneliness is a huge problem facing Americans today.

But what kind of friendship should we seek? What do we look for in a friend? And—knowing that the best way to get a friend is to be a friend—what kind of person should we be so as to be a friend to others?

Confining ourselves to the study of the Book of Proverbs, we find three characteristics of a true friend. **We should be looking for a friend who makes us a better person by their example, confronts our faults by their honesty, and sticks with us by their loyalty.**

[Display toolbox. Take out three tools that will serve to represent visually these three characteristics of a good friendship—a carpenter’s level, a chisel, and a vice grip.]

### **We should look for a friend who...**

#### **1. Makes us a better person by their example.**

Proverbs 12:26, “A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Proverbs 13:20, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

Proverbs 24:1-2, “Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.”

Proverbs 1:10-19, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, ‘Come along with us; let’s lie in wait for someone’s blood, let’s waylay some harmless soul...do not go along with them...these men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves.’”

[Example: One young man was only 17 years old when he began hanging with a tough guy who was 22. He thought it was cool. His older friend could even buy beer they could both share together. Sure, his friend was a little rough around the edges, but it was fun to live a little on the edge. But one day, the older friend went into the 7/11 to get beer while the 17 year old waited in the car. Suddenly, the older guy came running out—not carrying anything—and jumped into the car. “Let’s get out of here fast.” They peeled out of the parking lot. It was then that the young driver noticed his friend’s hands were bloody. The friend had decided to steal the beer instead of paying for it, and the clerk had confronted him with a knife. They had fought over it, and the clerk had been stabbed in the altercation. They later heard on the news the clerk had died. Later that evening, the police showed up at his door. Someone had given a description of the car and a partial plate number, leading them right to him. Though he was 17 he was tried as an adult. Though he didn’t know what his friend intended to do, he was tried for murder. Even though he was a good kid, he was convicted and sent away for life.]

That may not be the usual outcome, but a whole lot of wreckage is strewn along the beaches of life by those who did not choose their companions with care—paralyzed passengers of drunken drivers, pregnant gals who could not stand up to the pressure of a selfish boyfriend; or the more subtle changes within that comes from being companions with those who mock God and live life as cynics.

We should look for a friend who makes us a better person by their example. To remember this advice, remember this **carpenter’s level**. Does their character keep you straight, or lead you astray?

## **2. Confronts our faults by their honesty.**

Oscar Wild, “A true friend always stabs you in the front.” The Proverbs say it these ways:

Proverbs 27:6, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”

Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Proverbs 25:12, “Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear.”

I prayed that I would develop a “listening ear” to hear rebuke non-defensively during the year 2005. In each of the last three years, as a kind of New Year’s Resolution, I have asked the Holy Spirit to point out a specific character flaw or place of spiritual immaturity to submit to his searchlight in the upcoming year. The area I prayed to improve and gave attention to in 2005 was being non-defensive when criticized or confronted.

It is a freeing condition to be able to receive criticism and the confrontation of your faults. And it is great when you have friends who are motivated by your best interest to speak truth into your ear so that you might take it to heart.

We should look for a friend who confronts our faults by their honesty. To remember this advice, remember this **chisel**. Are they being used by God to chip away flaws from your character?

### **3. Sticks with us by their loyalty**

Pepper Rogers, coach of UCLA's football team suffered through a poor season. He came under intense criticism and pressure from alumni and fans. Things got so bad that he felt as if all his friends were gone. "My dog was my only true friend," he said. "I told my wife that every man needs at least two good friends—and she bought me another dog."

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

Proverbs 25:19, "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble."

When your health left you, who was there? When your spouse left you, who cared? When your finances failed, who listened? When you were fired, who prayed? When you had nothing to offer but your brokenness, who said, "I'm still here"? If you have gone through times crisis—whether health, marital, vocational, financial, or other—you have seen the value of true friends.

We should look for a friend who sticks with us by their loyalty. To remember this advice, remember this **vice grip**. Does your friend grab on and hold on?

### **Part Two: Jesus is the best friend you'll ever have.**

The longing we feel to have a friend who can touch our lives in these ways will always be frustrated. Never will we find someone—even in the friendship of a spouse—who will always perfectly fulfill the qualities of a true friend: to make us a better person by their example, to confront our faults by their honesty, and to stick with us by their loyalty.

But that person we search for in flesh and blood can be found in the One who took on flesh and blood. God, who walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, who was a Friend to Abraham, who spoke to Moses face to face, who called David a 'man after his own heart'—that God became man in Jesus. In doing so, Jesus could become our Friend. Jesus is our friend. The African-American spiritual says, "There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus."

*There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus. No not one, no not one.  
None else could heal all our soul's diseases. No not one, no not one.*

*There's not an hour that He is not near us. No not one, no not one.  
No night so dark but His love can cheer us. No not one, no not one.  
Did ever saint find this friend forsake Him? No not one, no not one.  
Or sinner find that He would not take Him? No not one, no not one.*

Jesus is “Lowly” because he laid aside the glory of the Godhead to be shrouded in humanity. “He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself.” (Philippians 2:7)

In doing so, God came within reach of us to be our Friend. “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” Do you hear what Jesus calls us, his followers? He calls us “Friend.”

And Jesus is the best friend we will ever have. He perfectly fulfills what Proverbs says we should be seeking in a friend.

**Jesus makes us a better person by his example.** Spending time with Jesus, by listening to his voice in the Gospels and speaking to him in prayer, will affect you. His love will transform you. He encourages us by loving us all the way right now. His love for you is not conditional upon your behavior. He loves you all the way, right now. And in so doing, he encourages our best.

**Jesus confronts our faults by his honesty.** Because he loves us so much right now, he doesn’t leave us the way we are in defeat and discouragement. He calls us to improvement, to Christ-likeness. In so doing he tells us the truth about our sin. Through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us the honest truth.

**Jesus sticks with us in loyalty** And Jesus also sticks with us in loyalty. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).” Invite Jesus to be your friend today. He’s never too busy to include you in his circle of friendship.

In a few minutes we will have a sharing time, an opportunity to have you give true-life illustrations of this sermon. In which of these ways has Jesus come alongside you as Friend: to make you a better person by his example, to confront your faults in honesty, and to stand by you in loyalty. Let me give a special invitation to share for those who have not yet taken the opportunity to raise your hand for a microphone to speak to our congregation. We want to know your story. We want to know how Jesus has been your Friend. Has this sermon been truth? Tell us how Jesus has been your Friend.