

There is a Friend that Sticketh Closer than a Brother

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Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

- [0 : 00] Good morning and a very warm welcome to our service this morning. We come before God in worship and we look to him to give to us that spirit of worship that we would desire for ourselves and for all present.
- We're going to begin our service singing some verses from Psalm 55. Psalm 55 and we're singing from the beginning down to verse 9.
- From the beginning of the psalm. Lord hear my prayer, hide not thyself from my entreating voice. Attend and hear me, in my plent I mourn and make a noise.
- Because of the enemy's voice and for lewd men's oppression great. On me they cast iniquity and they in wrath me hate. So pained within me is my heart.
- Death's terror shall me fall. On me comes trembling. Fear and dread overwhelmed me with awe. Oh that I like a dove had wings said I.
- [1 : 14] Then would I flee far hence. That I might find a place where I in rest might be. Lo then far off I wander would.
- And in the desert stay. From windy storm and tempest I would haste to skip away. Oh Lord on them destruction bring and do their tongues divide.
- For in the city violence and strife I have espied. They day and night upon the walls do go about to drown. There mischief is and sorrow there in midst of it is found.
- Abundant wickedness there is within her inward part. And from her streets deceitfulness and guile do not depart. And so on.
- We are going to sing from the beginning of the song. Lord hear my prayer. Hide not thyself from my entreating voice. Six stanzas from the beginning.
- [2 : 17] Lord hear my prayer. Lord hear my prayer. Hide not thyself from my entreating voice.
- At heaven and here I may end my prayer. I mourn and make a noise.
- Because of the enemy's voice. H corporeal war flood men's oppression gave on me like glass Haupt's ■■■■ hombre But they will not be hid.
- So pinned within me is my heart. Descubriers on me fall.
- On me comes rambling, dear virgin dread. For who am I with all?
- [4 : 06] O that I like a job of always. Sad I then would I please.
- For heaven is not I in my pride. And a place where I arrest my dream.
- Lo then far of thy wonderhood. And then the deserts came.
- From when this dark mountain has died. And there's good skip away.
- O Lord, don't let them destruction bring.
- [5 : 24] And do their tongues divide. For in the city are your lands.

And strive my love aside. The day and night upon the walls.

To go about it round. The day and night upon the night. The day and night upon the night.

The day and night upon the night. In the midst of it is done. upon a downed wickedness that is within our inward heart and from mercy's faithfulness and guile do not depart.

Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. Heavenly blessed God, we marvel at your forbearance with each one of us that we have met in the presence of the God of mercy, the God of all grace, and that we do not despair of asking for forgiveness for our sins, knowing that you are not only willing but able to be stood upon us.

[7 : 36] There are occasions when we need to plead forgiveness from our fellows, and at times we may seek it and find that it is grudgingly given.

And even then, every one of us knows what it is like to have these thoughts fester within our hearts, where our wrongdoings or the wrongs done against us burden us and cause us to continue to contemplate these wrongs rather than forgive and forget, which is what we are able to believe that lies at the heart of the forgiveness of the Most High God that you are.

We can believe that because it is not just forgiveness bestowed without thought or without understanding or appreciation, but that provision has been made whereby the wrong that is done by us has been covered, and covered so as not to come to light ever again.

Those who come to the Lord Jesus Christ, pleading the merits of his finished work, are assured that the sacrifice for sin that he has offered will cover all manner of sin, not just from their own sight or the sights of those wronged against, but most particularly your sight.

Your word speaks to us of the nature of the forgiveness of God, in that you have hidden from view, even into the depths of the deepest ocean, the wrongs that have been done against your own pressure.

[9 : 53] We give thanks for that, and we seek grace to be able to contemplate it with the fullness of understanding, knowing that we need to appreciate that by coming to Christ, that is what is offered to us, that is what is set before us as the provision of the Most High God, but by failing to do so that what awaits us is that every sin, every wrong, our guilt-stained lives will testify to the need that there is for the God of heaven to deal with us as those for whom these sins are still current.

We pray for an understanding of that. And as we meet in your presence today, may the cry come from all our hearts, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner, even as such a cry as came from one who saw the Lord Jesus, and as he passed by, that was his prayer.

And as you pass by in the preaching of the gospel, may that plea come constantly, incessantly from the depth of our being.

Help us to that end, that we may be unified as families, as homes, as communities, as a congregation, that we would know what it is to be covered by the blood of sacrifice, to be covered by the sin, by the sin offering of one who is the Lamb of God.

We pray your blessing upon us, individually, collectively, as homes and families, as we said. May your spirit be poured out upon us, that we may know the blessing that enriches and leaves none wanting.

[12 : 04] We remember before you those that we care for, for whom we may have concerns, for those who are ill, whether they be at home or in hospital, some in the frailty of old age being cared for in places appointed to their care.

We pray for them, and we pray for all who administer that care to them. May they be patient in the way that they carry out their duties, and may they know what it is to have fellow feeling with those for whom they care.

We remember the frail elderly who may have been deprived of their once powerful intellect, and now who are returned to to the infantile behaviour of their babyhood.

We marvel at the fragility of our humanity. We give thanks for those for whom these faculties lie powerfully undiminished, but we are conscious that there are so many forms of illness that affect the body and the mind, and sometimes leave each one of us without the power to live out our existence without assistance.

May we plead to the God of all grace to supply us with that understanding of the needs that we have, that we may bear one another's burdens and do so gladly.

[13 : 57] We remember before your nation and all responsible for carrying out the duties of the state with regard to our welfare, whether it be for young or old.

We think of our health service and those involved in it, and we pray for them. In a day where there are so many distractions and so many difficulties, usurping the calling that is the calling of many to serve others in ministering to their physical needs, we pray Lord for wisdom to be in exercise in the way that we as a nation do all in our power to ensure that our welfare state is secure and that the needs of young and old, the needs of families are preserved.

The wisdom that is necessary to apply to the truth of God that will never ever put anyone in the wrong direction. And yet we see where there is a total independence of the world, that there is purported wisdom that puts the whole ethos and wisdom of God on its head and turns it away from the ultimate end which is the good of every fellow.

We pray then for wisdom, we pray for help from above that you would visit us in mercy, blessing our King and his family, those who serve in government in his name.

May the parliaments that represent the people be mindful of the laws of the Most High God to which they are accountable as we all are.

[16 : 02] Whatever laws are enacted by governments of the day, the standard by which each one of us will be asked to give account are the standards that you have set before us in your own world.

So help us to look to God at all times, to look to the wisdom that you have given to us by which we might live a life in perfect conformity to your will and in harmony with those who are governed by it.

We remember the nations of the earth and we pray for your help to be given to them. Those who have suffered by reason of the bridges in peace that exist in the world where there are nations against nations in war, we pray for them that peace may be brought to reign amongst them.

We pray for those affected by the turmoils of nature, whether it be storm or flood or famine or whatever it is that is current in the world at this time as it always is.

Be merciful to us, we pray. Unify us as our praying people that we might call upon the God of heaven to bring your own resources which are there to aid us and are inexhaustible that you may supply them as we are willing to apply to you for them.

[17 : 37] So hear out prayers remembering the needs of the people, whatever they may be. Remember the grief struck, the grieving, those who have empty places upon which the yoke is fixed at this time.

Be their source of comfort. And we ask Lord for your healing hand to be upon all with the hurts of the day being excised by your own powerful hand.

Forgive our many sins in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We're going to read from the scriptures of the Old Testament and we're reading from the book of Proverbs.

The Old Testament scriptures I'm reading from the book of Proverbs and chapter 18.

Book of Proverbs and chapter 18. Through desire a man having separated himself seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.

[18 : 58] A will a fool hath no delight in understanding but that his heart may discover itself. When the wicked cometh then cometh also contempt and with ignominy reproach.

The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook. It is not good to accept the person of the wicked to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

A fool's lips enter into contention and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool's mouth is his destruction and his lips are the snare of his soul.

The words of a tale bearer are as wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city and as a high wall in his own conceit.

[20 : 16] Before destruction the heart of man is haughty and before honour is humility. He that answereth a matter before he heareth it is folly and shame unto him.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity but a wounded spirit who can bear. The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

A man's gift maketh room for him and bringeth him before great men. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

The lot causes contentions to cease and parteth between the mighty. A brother offended is harder to be one than a strong city and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

[21 : 36] Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord. The poor useth in thrifties but the rich answereth roughly.

A man that hath friends must show himself friendly and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Amen and may the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word and to his name be the praise.

Well boys and girls before you go out to Sunday school I believe that over the last number of weeks and months well weeks anyway I suppose months come into we've been looking at Jesus the great healer and that word is important to us great Jesus is a great healer and there's a story many stories given to us in the Bible of the miracles that he carried out and the way that men and women young people came to him who were unwell in need of being helped and there's one story which I believe you're going to be looking at today is the story of a Roman soldier who had a servant who was unwell and the soldier knew that

Jesus was a great healer and because he knew Jesus was a great healer he went to look for that great healer and the reason he went to the great healer was that he had a great need his own need perhaps was bound up in it because there was nothing wrong with him he was well but he had a servant and the servant was unwell and because of the nature of this man's life and the way that he lived his life he had a great love for his servant you know when you read the story it tells you that the man had a servant more than likely because he was a soldier a Roman soldier a centurion the servant was a slave more than likely he wasn't just somebody that he paid for to paid money to work for him he was probably somebody that he had taken away along with others as slaves in those days that happened very often because he was a slave he had to work for this person maybe

I could be wrong on that but I believe that it could well be the case but even though he was a slave or even though he was just a servant he loved him greatly and because he loved him greatly he went to the greatest person that he knew of to heal him and the story that surrounds this person is that not just was he a person who was nice or who had a soft heart it is clear that he was somebody who did something very rare in those days he helped the Jewish people although he was a Roman and a soldier and his role was to keep Jewish people under control that was his role that was his job he loved the people he loved the

[25 : 52] Jews and the Jews themselves the people of Capernaum which is where he was loved him because he loved them so this is a very interesting story when I read it again I saw somebody who understood that there was a great need and that there was a great healer to which he could go with that need and because of his great love for the people and for his servant he went to this person who belonged to this people that he loved and presented his need to them and when Jesus was introduced to him he asked Jesus to help him and he said don't you come because

I know that you have power I know that you have authority because I myself am a centurion I am an army in the army and those who are in the army do what I tell them so I know that you have authority so all you have to do is say the word and my servant to my love will be healed and Jesus looked at this man and he said something again where the word great appears he said I have never seen a greater faith in all of Israel than the faith that you displayed so we've got a great healer somebody filled with great love for his servant somebody who understands the need that Christ can meet and Jesus sees that person as having the greatest faith do you remember that word great it's all important that you have faith but great faith is not necessary little faith can do a lot of things

Jesus himself tells us that but one story that I came across when I was looking at this it's a story against a minister and ministers can have many stories told against them and this minister had a wee girl she was just five years old and when she was looking at her many toys she decided to go to her father and ask him to make it a doll's house and her father perhaps not too different to this one had his nose in a book and he heard what this little girl had to say daddy will you build me a doll's house and he just lifted his head and said yes of course

I build you a doll's house and he carried on reading his book sitting in his study and a wee while afterwards he looked out his window and there he saw the little girl carting under her arms all her little dolls and taking them out into the garden a whole pile of them one after the other under her arms as many as she could carry and he looked and she carried on taking her bundles one after the other so he asked his wife what on earth is we'll call her Maddie doing oh she said you told her that you were going to build her a doll's house and because you said it she believed it and he jumped up and ran out and caught his toes and began to build the doll's house that he promised because like this centurion this girl had great faith in her father's word i wonder when you read what Jesus says to you in the bible do you believe that he will do all that he says is your faith strong enough to believe that he will do everything that he promises to do for his people well you should and you shouldn't be embarrassed even when people think that you are silly for believing what Jesus says if you like the centurion Jesus said i have never seen faith like it in all is great faith if only we had just a little faith to allow us to trust in a great God that would be all that is needed well we're going to sing as you go out to

Sunday school some words from psalm 88 psalm 88 and we're singing from verse 12 through to the end of the psalm shall thy great wonders in the dark or shall thy righteousness be known to any in the land of deep forgetfulness but lord to thee I cried my prayer at morn prevent shall thee why lord dost thou cast off my soul and hides thy face from me distressed am I and from my youth I ready am to die thy terrors I have borne and am distracted fearfully the dreadful fierceness of thy wrath quite over me doth go thy terrors great have cut me off they did pursue me so for round about me every day like water they did roll and gathering together they have compassed my soul my friends thou hast put far from me and him that did me love and those that mine acquaintance wear it to darkness did remove we're going to sing these words as you go out to

[32 : 38] Sunday school shall thy great wonders in the dark or shall thy righteousness shall shall thy shall thy great wonders in the dark or shall thy righteousness be known to many in the land thy h earth shall at moment eventually while over the cell cast of my soul and I still stay from me distress from my youth

I ready am to die thy said or shy have borne and am distracted the ugly the dreadful fierceness of thy wrath wide over me death rooms thy terror strength and am brave ni hopeless see extending ast Mustang sing home so ■■■■■■■■

Every day Like water They drool And gathering Together The day of God Has said My soul My friends Thou hast So far From me And him That did Me love And those That mine Of windows Where The darkness Did Remove We're going to turn

To the chapter that we read in the Old Testament Scriptures, the book of Proverbs, chapter 18. And we're looking at verse 24, the last proverb that we have in chapter 18.

A man that hath friends must show himself friendly. And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

[36 : 36] A man that hath friends must show himself friendly. The book of Proverbs, as you know, is a collection of wise sayings.

And the understanding is that we have many proverbs ourselves. We have many sayings that arise out of the circumstances.

And people have taken note of what has happened. And they've collected these events and these occurrences. And they've taken out of them some sage understandings.

And the book of Proverbs, I suppose, is a bit like that. But the wisdom that is integral to this book is most important. Not just that it is man's wisdom, it is God's wisdom.

And although it is communicated to us by men. Solomon, the wisest man that is recognized within the Bible.

[37 : 52] Some of the proverbs are ascribed to him. Although not all of them. And not everything that Solomon did was wise.

Not everything that he said was wise. But what God said through him, by way of these proverbs, can be considered wisdom that we need to take to heart.

Somebody describes the book as a book that has within it the best advice. And not only good advice, but the best advice.

And you know and I know that there may be some people and they advise us. They come to us and they say, Well, if I were you, I would do this or I would do that. And often what you say, well, you can take it or leave it.

You don't have to do what I've asked you to do. You don't have to follow this through yourself. You can take it or leave it, which is quite often the case. But with the advice that you find in the book of proverbs, when you understand it to be advice that comes to you from God, it's not really wise for you to do anything other than what God expects you to do or not do.

[39 : 29] We ignore this advice at our peril. And although there are several individuals reckoned to be the source of that, God is really the one who inspires their wisdom.

And as you know, when you read this book, it's not, I suppose, not a book that you can read through. I suppose you can read it through.

And whenever you come across any part of the Bible that has lists, you tend to read that part. And immediately, you know, after a while you switch off.

It's just like a whole series of words that maybe some of them register for a time, but after a while you don't really imbibe.

You don't allow them to fix in your memory. And the book of proverbs is a bit like that. But the way it is designed, it is a word from God that brings certain truth to us repeatedly.

[40 : 44] It moves from one form of wisdom to the next. It speaks of one certain truth, then moves on to the next, and the next, and the next.

But then it comes back to the same thing again. There's a looseness about the way that it is constructed, but at the same time, there is purpose, there is intent, there is the understanding that those who listen to these words of wisdom as they come from God, that they will attach themselves to your memory.

So there's teaching, giving tools of things such as life and death, wisdom and foolishness, marriage and family, things that are common, things that are everyday experiences that we experience that we all have at some point in our life.

And we can recognise what they're saying as our own experience, or we can say, well, maybe it's good that I should remember this, given that this is my experience at the present.

You know, when a person is mourning, when a person is grieving, when a person is dealing with the reality of death, there are certain things that occur at these moments that God's word sets light upon, so that these emotions and feelings and experiences that they have, which may appear to us to be completely at odds with the experience itself, that because of the wisdom of the word of God, it helps us understand, well, why do I feel like this?

[42 : 52] Why do I think like this? Why do I look to God with such anger at this point? And the word speaks to us in that way, telling us what the reason for these experiences and feelings in them.

Well, this last part of it has to do with friendship. And suppose you're saying that's not a very spiritual topic.

Why would God want to teach us anything about friendship? What has that got to do with spiritual life? And yet, in our life, friends are important.

How we live our life would be extremely difficult for us if we had nobody to share our experiences with.

And this statement here is full of meaning, but it's not a stand-alone statement. And I want us to think about what the wise man is drawing to our attention.

[44 : 23] And do so by attracting attention to other passages where he's speaking about friendship and the meaning that he has, that he means us to take from it.

There's two parts to it. A man that hath friends must show himself friendly. And there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Somebody said about a person who came to him and he said, I have no friends.

I have no friends. And he could easily have pointed him in the direction of this verse. The reason why you have no friends is I have a friend to anyone.

It's a simple statement. If you have no friends, well, one reason could be that you're not being friendly to others.

And, you know, there's wisdom there. It's a simple statement of fact. You can't have friends if you're not a friend to anyone.

[45 : 41] And, you know, almost without realising it, you've got a truth confronting you there that you need to address if you have difficulty with the concept of friendship.

But there's two parts, as I said, and we're going to look at it trying to understand what lies at the heart of what the wise are saying to us.

And, as I often do, I look at various passages from the Bible. I cross-check them to see if there are other parts of the scripture that are similar.

And I look also at different Bible translations. And it's very significant the difference that there is between the translation that you have before you in the authorised version and the version that you might be using and many of our congregations are using, which is the ESV.

And it says in the ESV, A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

[47 : 01] A man of many companions may come to ruin. Now, read the words that we have here. A man that hath friends must show himself friendly.

It seems there's no comparison to these two translations. The New English translation that is closer to the ESV, there are companions who harem one another.

Now, interestingly, both of these translations, they're close to one another, but the second part is exactly the same to the authorised version.

And we might have difficulty with that. And the reason why there is a discrepancy between the translations has really got to do with the understanding of how the Hebrew pointing is and how it is to be understood in the context.

But, I mean, without going into the technicalities of that, what both of these translations say, and what this translation says, all of the truth that they contain is contained throughout this book of Proverbs.

[48 : 23] They're not saying, they might appear on the surface to be quite different, quite opposed to one another, but the reality is they're getting to the crux of the matter as far as the importance of having true friends and being in a right relationship with them.

And the consequences of them not being genuine have implications not only for yourself but for them.

And the understanding of what a friend is and what a friend must be has to come to the fore.

Now, I want us to think about bearing in mind these translations which appear so different and this translation a man that have friends must show himself friendly.

In other words, not only will you not have a friend if you're not a friend to anyone, the nature of friendship itself requires you to be in a relationship that is open and honest and frank and that is a two-way street.

[49 : 55] What is I'm going to just cite a couple of things from this book. Not necessarily in order of import but as they occurred to me as I was looking at it.

And you can do this by thinking of your own friends. You can do this by thinking of who you know to be friendly to you and the nature of that friendship.

And the first thing I would say about them is that when you talk about a friend you're talking about somebody that usually has been a friend for a considerable amount of time.

I think when we the older we get the nature of the friendships that we enjoy one thing we can say about them is that that is something that has been ongoing for a while.

When we're in school when we're children we always have a whole series of friends that the people we go to school with the people in the same classes as if you're in a small school like Prius Ketch most of the boys and girls there they have a friendly disposition towards one another sometimes not so strong but if they were to meet one another in Stornoway for example they would probably gravitate towards one another rather than run in the other direction because it's in the nature of that friendly relationship that they do come together but if you go back to the previous chapter it says there a friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity now another thing about this word friend that you find when you look at it there's a

[52 : 01] Hebrew word that is used and translated friend it is also at times used and translated for neighbor so sometimes in Proverbs it speaks about your neighbor and the word used is exactly the same word that's used for friend and the Hebrew allows that kind of translation which the translator has to decide on the basis of context which word is used in the translation but if you look at that version in chapter 17 a friend loveth at all times just simply saying that it is in the nature of friendship that no matter what your friend will remain your friend circumstances are not going to change the nature of the friendship may be tested it may be tried but if that friendship is genuine it will contain that's why there's a difference between being a friend and being an acquaintance sure many of you are on Facebook and if you're a pop star you've got many friends some of them have thousands and thousands of friends but well I don't know how friendly they are with them their names are added to their list of so called acquaintances but do they know them have they ever personally met with them have they ever experienced with them their experiences their losses their gains their sorrows their joys a friend is somebody who very often experiences that the actual

Hebrew word can include as I said a neighbour so a neighbour is somebody who's more fixed in your experience is somebody you're next door with and that well in our current generation if you're a city dweller there are many people there and I think I've probably said it before there are people in their lifetime can move their homes maybe as many times as a dozen times in their lives that's not the way culturally we're we're used to we tend to stay in our homes and our parents' homes are the homes that we had before very rarely do we move too far away from our origins although that is changing clearly but I often say as far as the modern church is concerned that one problem we do have is the spirit of independence that pervades the atmosphere of modern society spirit of independence rather than interdependence and when that happens it reduces our circle of friends and this self-reliance rather than a flexible and an innocent and a totally happy experience of having a resource and being a resource to others is something that is lost because for the simple reason that you don't feel embarrassment about going to a friend to borrow something or to share something with them and when you do there is something lacking there is something missing and that is the spirit of the current generation which permeates the world and the more independent we become the less likely we are to look to others even when we do need others within the church it's a disaster within the church it's a cancer within the church it not only influences the relationship that we have with each other who are part of the church it also impacts upon our relationship to

God and our willingness to trust in God and to share with God the things that we should be sharing with God even though we know that he knows as I've said God for many people is the God of the last resort rather than the God who is the first point of contact the one that you go to with your celebration the one that you go to with your grief and your sadness he tends to be on the periphery of life and then if he is on the periphery of life then where is the reality of your relationship with that God if you think about a friend like that who is your friend you're listing in your mind just know the many friends you have how many of your friends would you go to when you're in a difficult situation there may be wisdom in having a select few and

I think there is wisdom in choosing your friends wisely but we have evidence from the scripture that there were people there who are God's people and mentally when you come across them you associate them with individuals simply because of the nature of their relationship in the Old Testament many of the commentators speak about the relationship of David and Jonathan they were an unlikely couple in a sense one was the son of the king the other was the threat to the throne it didn't seem proper that they should have an alliance of any sort and yet their friendship is recorded and it is meaningful it is deep they share their burdens and they support one another

Jonathan more than David we don't see much of David's affection for Jonathan I don't think not as much in a way Paul and Timothy some people say Ruth and Naomi oh you're saying that's her mother-in-law that's Ruth's mother-in-law is it right for you to be a friend of your mother-in-law maybe you would think not but the relationship that Ruth had with Naomi was a spiritual relationship and it was an honest and earnest sharing of their faith and the friendship was indeed a deep and a meaningful friendship and the statement that she made concerning her own faith your people my people your God my God where you go

[60 : 21] I go what could be more clear than that the nature of friendship can be explored to that degree it is inevitably a two way street because if you think you're a friend of somebody and that somebody doesn't think you're a friend something's not quite right but what we discover is that it is in the very nature of the relationship that if it is fractured if it is breached if it is betrayed if there is a way in which that friendship is spoilt by one or the other then it cannot happen without pain you know the first psalm that we sang there if you go on in that psalm

David tells us something about what the psalm is all about he says this in verse 12 he was he was no foe that me reproached then that endured I could nor hater that did cause me against me boast for him me hide I would but thou man who mine equal guide and mine acquaintance was we joined sweet councils to God's house in company we passed David was speaking there about somebody and they shared most intimately in a whole host of things they even jointly went to God's house to worship God together and that person betrayed him he betrayed his trust and it was as a sword in his side and that tells me that there is something about genuine friendship that is something that is sensitive something that is fragile something that we are commanded to care for perhaps the most obvious the

Bible tells us about this Jesus had twelve disciples but one of them betrayed him one of the twelve betrayed him and there is no sin in the Bible so desperately hurtful than the sin that you have when in the garden Jesus is approached by a group of men soldiers intent on his capture amongst them is one of the disciples who betrays him with a kiss the kiss the sign of intimate friendship but the betrayal nevertheless an intimate friend betraying the Lord and it's so so it tells you something about the sufferings of the Lord that this is part of it you know you go to the cross and you see somebody nailed to the cross and you say they're suffering you see somebody there who's hanging between heaven and earth and a spear is plunged into his side and you're saying there is suffering but the sufferings of

Christ were such that he experienced betrayal by a friend because the sufferings were designed to be the sufferings that we can relate to when we ourselves have to endure such pain when we look at this well we have to I'm sorry for taking so long there one element I suppose that's part of what I've said is honesty honesty you can be honest with your friend can you not you can tell them the truth and because it is you and you're telling them the truth they'll take that truth from you so it would seem the bible tells us that we are required to be truthful with our friends you know

I think one positive thing I would say about friends is if I have a friend and I am able to share an opinion with a friend that friend will receive that opinion even though it's not his own opinion there's no animosity because the opinion is different to the one that they hold there's no feeling of threat there is no anger created because this person has a completely different slant to me on a point of policy or a point of political belief or a point of theology no I had many Christian friends when we were in college and we were very close some of us and to be honest we were on tram lines as far as what we believed were concerned some of the things that one person believed

[66 : 33] I would never believe that as far as I know I've never come to believe but they were my friends the most important things we shared and our disagreement was trivial in regard to a lot of things if you remember later on in the book of Proverbs it talks about this faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful ointment and perfume rejoice the heart so does the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel what what that is telling you is that when we are in this relationship that is the relationship of friends we can afford to direct a person away from a path that they run that we believe to be harmful to them and we do them service when we do that and you know that's not an easy thing to do it's not an easy thing to receive you know if you're the one that's being corrected if you're the one who's being told by your friend look what you're doing is wrong where you're going is wrong the people that you're with are wrong you're not going to take that on the chin but you have to and sometimes you have to go away bite your tongue and go away and think about it well is this said maliciously is this said because this person is not my friend is this said because this person is intent on my injury our instinct may be to reply and

I remember again going back to my college days speaking to a friend and telling them look what you're doing is wrong and he didn't like it but he's no longer living but we were friends until he died but initially the advice given was not well received and it came round to well if you really mean it for the right reasons then I accepted but it was a slow process it wasn't easy it wasn't something that you did without having to bite the bullet as it were and to think about what you're doing and that's the thing Jesus reminds us in his word that the person who is wronging us or the person who is doing wrong needs to be told of the wrong me too

I have to be told and the person who is my friend will tell me what is wrong and they're not doing me any favors they're doing me a disservice if they allow me to go on if your brother trespass against you go and tell him his fault but notice Jesus says between you and him between you and him you're able because he's your friend to go and speak to him tell him that he's doing something wrong tell her they're doing something wrong but he says if they hear you you have gained your brother if they hear you have gained your brother but then if the thing is so bad that you need to challenge it and it's not responded to in the way that you hoped then you bring it back again with a brother or two brothers and you highlight the fault again because you could be wrong if you're highlighting somebody else's wrong you could be wrong but if others have seen this wrong and you want to put right the wrong then you bring them so that you speak to your brother this is something that's being lost to the church because we don't have that honesty we don't have that trust that what we're doing will not do anything but harm well I have to conclude this with these words of

Jesus because I think it speaks to us about Jesus the last part of there is a friend that stick closer than a brother he says there are many elements to friendship we barely touched on the surface because I want you to think about this for yourself I want you to think about the nature of friendship I want to think about your choice of friends I want to think about the implications if you do choose friends that are not good for you and that do not intend good for you but Jesus tells us that the word of God reminds us that there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother that even though our closest friends our best friends our most trusted friends will sometimes fail us and we do fail our friends we do let them down we do not do what we should be doing with regard to them we don't tell them that they're wrong when they should be told that they're wrong we don't accept from them that we're wrong when we are but there is somebody that we can go to and it doesn't speak of there is a friend he says that sticketh closer than a brother doesn't identify who it is but

I cannot think of one friend whose friendship is as enduring or as honest as the friendship of Christ to his people we do have strong friendships we do have trusted friends we have long lasting relationships with them but there is one that he stands out in that he has not failed any who are his friends we can speak to him we can pray to him we can confess our sin to him and it stays with him nobody gets to know about it but he gets to hear about it and he deals with us through his word in a way that defies description whose love never fails he'll never turn us back on us when we do wrong he will never ignore us he will not pretend that he doesn't know us because he does better than most

[74 : 22] Charles Bridges one of the commentators on the book of Proverbs emphasises the imbalance that there is between those who are friends in the world and those who have Jesus Christ as a friend he is a friend to them who have no other friend to those who have been his bitterest enemies a friend who abides when all others have passed away in temptation he opens for us a way of escape in affliction he comforts us with divine comfort and so on and so forth a friend that sticketh closer than a brother in your circle of friends is he one is he the one is this friend the friend that you can rely on more than anyway all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer if you have a friend you go to that friend in time of need there's no better friend than

Jesus Christ the alone saviour of sinners may he stand out before your mind's eye when you reflect on these words I hope you do hope you build on it I hope you read this book for yourself it's not a big book find out for yourself all the things that are said about friends but at the head of that put the Lord Jesus Christ and think of the many ways he can be your friend if he is not already may he bless his word to us let us pray O Lord our God we give thanks that you are indeed such a friend to your people when we think of the darkest hours that you had on earth and you were forsaken by your friends how awful that was and yet you do not permit it to be so in the experience of your people in their darkness you are their light in their aloneness you are their constant companion may we know that to be so pardon our many sins in Jesus name

Amen Our closing psalm is Psalm 122 we're going to sing the whole psalm I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me Jerusalem within thy gates our feet shall standing be Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together and to that place the tribes go up the tribes of God go further psalm psalm 122 the whole psalm to God's praise I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me long he time

Can you serve the society Compactly fill together Unto the place that guides you The stripes of God goes the line To this will shall stay many To God's name thanks to them Our crowns of judgment

In the thrones of divesters this game Read the Jerusalem, we have His unfallest searching Let them not love the earth's blight I'll still prosper redeem That warrior in which that peace is still

[80 : 43] Within thy walls remain And ever may thy heartlessness Prosperity retain Now for my friends and gladness I'll seek His deity I'll stay And for the house of God Lord I'll seek thy good Halloween

And may grace, mercy and peace Peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Rest and abide with you all now and always Amen