

Neighbours and Friends (Evening Service)

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Date: 12 November 2017

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[0 : 00] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, Amen. Yeah, please, grab a seat. Good evening again. C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Four Loves*, and he explored the different types of love there are, as described in the Bible, and he said there are four basic types of love.

There is family affection, *storge*. There is erotic love, *eros*, these are the Greek words. There is divine love, *agape*, and friendship, *philia*. Family affection, erotic love, divine love, and friendship. And what's really interesting is, in the book, what's really interesting is the value he places on friendship. He says this, friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.

It has no survival value. Rather, it is one of those things that gives value to survival. When he talks about friendship, he describes it in his life as one of the greatest joys of his life, one of the greatest blessings of his whole life.

And he had a pretty solid group of friends, including Tolkien, and they called their group the *Inklings*. And here's another quote from Lewis, describing what it was like being together with all his mates at the local pub that they used to go to.

[1 : 28] And he says this, those are the golden sessions. I don't know, I suspect golden has to do with a beer, actually. It says, those are the golden sessions.

When four or five of us, after a hard day's walking, have come to our inn. When our slippers are on, our feet spread out towards the blaze, and our drinks at our elbows.

When the whole world and something beyond the world opens itself to our minds as we talk. And no one has any claim on or any responsibility for another. But all are free men and equals as if we had first met an hour ago.

While at the same time, an affection mellowed by the years unfolds us. Life, natural life, has no better gift to give.

Who could have deserved it? Isn't that wonderful? Let's read that last line again. At the same time, an affection mellowed by the years unfolds us. Life, natural life, has no better gift to give.

[2 : 32] Who could have deserved it? Doesn't that sound wonderful? He places such a high regard on friendship, C.S. Lewis. What kind of regard do you think our culture...

I'll say it like this. What sort of value does our culture place on friendship, do you think? When you think about those four loves, how do you think it values friendship? I think our culture would value *eros*, erotic love, overall, I think.

I think it tends to. I'll give you a few examples. You think about magazines or BuzzFeed. What are people talking about? It tends to be who's sleeping with who, who's going out with who, who's broken up with who.

There's little interest in friends. And when people write songs, you think about all the songs on the radio. What's most of the songs about? It's about *eros*. It's about romantic love.

I mean, how many songs can you think of about friendship? I thought of one. All week, I could think of one song. Does anyone know the song I'm thinking of?

[3 : 40] No. That's a good one. I was thinking Amy Grant. There's a generation gap right there, right?

Friends are friends forever. Did you hear that song? That's the only one I could think of. Another example. *Lord of the Rings*. I know, I bring it up every week. *Lord of the Rings*. The books.

Trilogy. This much pages, right? Thick. What's it about? It's actually about friendship. It's a book about friendship. When they made the movie, what was a massive theme in the movie?

Romantic love. It's not in the book. It's just in the appendix. But they had to make it sort of part of the major theme of the movie because, you know, friendship's not enough to go on.

It's not a compelling enough narrative in our culture. One more example. I was talking to some folks this week. And I said, tell me about friendship, modern friendship.

[4 : 45] And one person made this comment. They said, it's really hard to have a good friend now. Like a really good friend.

Without others thinking there's something more going on. I think our culture has trained us to sort of sexualize everything.

Okay. Why am I saying all this? Because Proverbs has a lot to say about friendship. And, you know, we heard this passage read this evening. And it just weaves friendship throughout it. Not every verse is about friendship. But it's just weaved throughout this chapter. And throughout the rest of Proverbs. And the basic gist of Proverbs is, here's what it says. The basic gist of it when it talks about friendship is this.

It says, you will not be good at life unless you're good at forging and keeping awesome friendships. You will not be good at life unless you're good at keeping and forging awesome friendships.

[5 : 42] Now, that's the big message. That's the overview. Let's get into the nitty gritty of Proverbs on the matter. And Proverbs identifies four foundations of really great godly friendships.

And they are constancy, candor, tact, and counsel. Constancy, candor, tact, and counsel.

Let's go through them one by one. Let's begin with constancy. Proverbs 18.24 says this. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 17.17. A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Okay. Loves at all times, closer than a brother. It's talking about availability. Constancy.

Availability. A friend is available at all times. Ordinary times. Joyful times. Times of crisis. Basically, the message is you cannot be a good friend without availability.

[6 : 43] And it's something we have to work really hard at in Vancouver. Availability. And constancy. So I talked to Jordan Senna the other day. Jordan Senna was the curate at this church before he went to do his PhD in Scotland in a little town called St. Andrews.

And we were talking the other day. And I said, what's the difference between life in Vancouver and life in St. Andrews where you are? The very first thing he mentioned was this. He said one of the big differences is this.

If I see somebody on the street that I'm kind of acquainted with or make a connection with somebody at a pub or somewhere, and I invite them over for dinner, he said most of the time they're available to come over that night.

Or at the very latest, the next night. They're available that night. Now here in Vancouver, if I book a dinner, I have to book four weeks out.

Like it's ridiculous. We're so busy. And it makes practicing constancy and it makes availability and friendship really hard. It makes friendship hard, but it's foundational.

[7 : 53] We need to sort of work at this. And one of the reasons it's so important, this constancy and availability thing, is because it reflects the nature of God. God is Trinity.

What does this mean? It means God is friend. He is, God is within himself a community that has enjoyed eternal constancy.

And the only time that was broken was on the cross. And it was the worst day in Christ's life. He lost availability to the Father.

This beginningless, awesome, completely amazing, intimate relationship was broken. It's why on the cross, when he's nailed to the cross, when he screams, he's not screaming, my hands, my feet. He's not screaming, I can't breathe. He's saying, my God, my God, you've forsaken me. See, that's his great pain on the cross. It's not physical, it's emotional. For the first time in his existence, his father was not available to him.

[8 : 58] And he went through all of this so that we could have friendship with God. So there is constancy in the greatest relationship in existence. And I think our relationship should reflect that.

Now let's move on. Constancy, candor, tact and counsel. Constancy, candor, tact and counsel. We've talked about constancy. Let's talk about candor. And we're mostly going to be in chapter 27 there if you want to track with us.

Proverbs chapter 27. So what does candor mean? Candor. C-A-N-D-O-R. Candor. It means telling your friends the truth about them.

Verse 5. Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. So open rebuke.

What's that? It's lovingly calling out your friend. It's telling them their behavior or their attitude is not on. It's every day telling your friends to stick with Jesus.

[9 : 58] It's telling that one friend of yours to stick with Jesus when how they're living their life suggests they're doing the opposite. They say this is better, open rebuke, than hidden love.

What do they mean by that? What's the comparison there? What's hidden love? Hidden love is not like a secret crush or anything. It's the opposite of open rebuke. Hidden love is not confronting people when they need it.

It's love that is cowardly. It's love that is self-protecting. It's love that doesn't risk for the benefit of others. You see, the wise person.

The wise person does the difficult thing. The wise person has the awkward conversation. Because it's better for the other person.

It's better for our community. If we step back and we looked at these two great characters of Proverbs, the wise and the fool, how could we summarize them?

[10 : 59] I would say this. The wise person. The wise, the wise, disadvantages themselves for the community.

The wicked, the fool, disadvantages the community for their own self-interest. So the wise person is willing to have the tough, the awkward conversation, the risky conversation.

The fool is not going to have that conversation and they don't have it because of self-interest. I remember in my early 20s, this is a few decades ago, so don't judge me here. But I dated three, maybe four girls in quite quick succession at separate times.

In series, not parallel, right? In series. And, I mean, it was basically, it was bad form. Like, it was, I was a lefari, I don't know if you know that word, if you have that word here, right?

And I had a friend of mine called Julian and he took me for a walk one day and he said, he said, Aaron, what are you doing? What you're doing is wrong. You've got to stop this.

[12 : 10] And so we met every week for about three months. Until, and every week, he asked me tough questions. And we met for three months until he was satisfied that I sort of had my head in the game.

And that I was in a better place. And I'm very grateful for Julian. It was sacrificial, it was a courageous thing to do and it could have backfired. And the conversations hurt.

You know, which is why verse 6 describes these conversations as wounds, they hurt. But they are better than conversations, they're better than friendships, I mean, based on just sort of vacuous compliments.

We just pat each other on the back. We say nice things to each other. That's verse 6, profuse kisses. They're just profuse kisses. Obviously the most iconic kiss being the kiss Judas gave Jesus, right?

Just before we betrayed him. So why do we need candor? We need candor. We need to have these tough conversations because sin deceives us. Social media averts our thinking.

[13 : 15] Advertising distorts us. It changes the way we think about ourselves. We behave. And we need friends to show us our sin.

And we need friends to show us our blind spots. And to speak with brutal honesty into our life. Honesty with compassion. That's how a healthy community works. This is how our community here should function.

We should tell each other the truth. And we should risk that. We should risk those moments. Knowing they could backfire. But we risk it for the glory of God. Because that's how Christian community operates.

And that's what we should always be moving towards. And we are better when we do that. Okay. Constancy. Candor. Tact.

And counsel. We're up to tact now. So as we've just discussed. As you read through Proverbs. There's a lot about truth telling and Proverbs. A lot about truth telling.

[14 : 19] We've just dealt with that truth telling. But what is it? Does that mean that we can say. We should say whatever we want. Whenever we want. Of course not. That's the way we do it in New Zealand.

And this is where tact comes in. Actually as I sort of thought about this today. I thought New Zealand is all candor. No tact. And if you've ever had one of those conversations with me.

I'm sorry. Vancouver. All tact. No candor. So tact. What do we mean by tact? Let's look at a couple of verses here.

Verse 14. This is a great verse. Whoever blesses his neighbor. With a loud voice. Rising early in the morning. Will be counted as cursing. Like why would somebody do that?

Why would somebody yell at you in the morning? Howdy neighbor. Bless you Lord. Amen. Woo. It's a great morning to be alive.

[15:22] Why would somebody do that to you? At six o'clock in the morning. Listen to chapter 26. It's got a great verse here. It says. Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death.

It's the man who deceives his neighbor and says. I'm only joking. I don't know what he said. But it was pretty bad. And he goes. I don't worry about it. It's just a joke. Why would somebody lie to his neighbor. And then just say it was a big joke.

What's wrong with these people? That's what Proverbs is saying. It's saying. What's wrong with these people? Here's what's wrong with them. They're just completely emotionally disconnected. They don't know when a joke is inappropriate. They don't know your morning routine. They don't know when they should talk to you. They just don't know you. Proverbs 25 is another really good example of this.

This is 25 verse 20. Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day or like vinegar on soda. That's the person who sings songs to a heavy heart.

[16:23] It's like you're in a crisis. Something terrible has happened. And they come over and they play you the Bee Gees or some terrible K-pop or something. Like it's just. What's wrong with these people? See a true friend.

A wise friend is emotionally connected to you. They're emotionally sensitive to you. They know what to say. But they also know when to say it. And they know how to say it. And they know that because they're connected to you.

They're emotionally attached to you. I'm very emotionally detached to my children. Which means at home, generally, I'm only as happy as my unhappiest child.

See wise people form friendships like this. They're willing to be vulnerable enough to risk that kind of connection. But today we are so committed to our own happiness.

That we sort of resist taking on other people's problems. And so we become the person who cluelessly sings happy songs to the heavy heart. Folks, we need to be better than that, right?

[17:23] And that's part of the sacrifice that comes with being a good friend. Okay. Constancy. Candor. Tact. Lastly, counsel. Our friendship should help us grow.

We grow through these tough conversations we've talked about, right? But also in our everyday interactions with our friends, when they sort of pass on advice to us. There's verse 9 of 27.

Oil and perfume make glad the heart. So oil and perfume with these luxurious expensive items. Make glad the heart. The sweetness of a friend comes from his counsel. Comes from her counsel. Have you ever had one of those conversations? I'm sure you have. You've had this, you're talking to a friend, but you trust this person. You're just having this conversation. It's a nice conversation. And they're talking about work or relationships or something.

And they just drop this line. They just drop this line. And you have this kind of, ah, this aha moment. When you're like, yes.

[18:30] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm going to, I'm going to totally do that from now on. Those are gold, aren't they? Those are so sweet. Verse 17 describes these conversations as working like this.

Iron sharpens iron. And one man sharpens another. Before I cut meat at home, I've got one of those knife sharpeners.

So I get out my, you know, butcher's knife and I'm going to sharpening up my knife, right? Running it along the edges. So this is what friends do. When you're friends with another godly person, these friendships, they sharpen you.

They sharpen you through the words they say. Hard words. Encouraging words. They help us to live. They help us be more effective tools for Jesus, don't they?

Okay, let me finish up. So, Proverbs has four basic foundations for friendship. Constancy. We're available to each other.

[19:40] That's a real challenge in Vancouver. We should make it work. We should make tough decisions to make that work. Candour. That's about willing to risk the awkward conversation.

Having the tough conversation with the person. Third, tact. That's being emotionally connected to your friends. Willing to be able to do that. So you know not just what to say to them, but when to say to them.

How to say it to them. And lastly, counsel. It's sharing life with other people. Allowing them to speak into your situation. And you into their situation. Folks, the Lord wants you to have good friends.

The Lord wants you to be a good friend. Proverbs tells us this. And if you don't have people like this in your life, find them. If you don't know how to find them, come and talk to me.

I would suggest joining one of our small groups. I would suggest getting involved in volunteering at our church. Not because we need to boost numbers in these things, but because that's where these kind of friendships are forged.

[20 : 55] When you're in the gospel together. When you're praying together. That's when those friendships are forged. And it's those friendships that help you live life better.

Amen.