

Tough Topics—Friendship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 October 2025

Preacher: Gil Balch

[0:00] Time to get started guys. Thank you for being here. The few, the faithful, not more than a few, but the faithful. You guys are good friends. Thank you. We are talking about friendship today. A tough topic. It is interesting that this is a tough topic. I'm just out of observation in my own life and others. You can just think, man, having good friends is hard. It's hard work. It's a lot of thought.

I wonder how many of us really have good friends. I mean, even to start with, we're going to be mainly in Proverbs 18, 24. So if you have a Bible, open it to Proverbs 18, 24. That's where we're going to start in just a few minutes.

Thank you, Kevin. But before we begin, I would like for you to just think about maybe the best friend you've ever had. Just think about their quality, their character, what were they like. And I'd love to hear from you guys. What made this friend such a good friend?

This is an interactive time. What made, just in a word, what made this friend a good friend? If you were just to kind of boil it down to one thing, or a thing, it doesn't have to be the most important. What made friends good friends to you? Always got your back. That's pretty good. What else? What makes a good friend a good friend?

[1:31] You don't have to communicate with them for like a year and you can pick up the right thing. Yes, I love that a good friend. That's right. I love that. Good. What else? What else makes a good friend?

You can talk to them about real things. Yep, we'll be real with them. Talk about real things. They'll tell you the truth. Come on in, guys. Thank you.

We're talking about friendship and asking the question, what makes a good friend? They listen.

They listen. They're grounded and they'll stick with you. They'll stick with you. That's good.

I was going to say forgiveness and they'll stick with you. Even when they're really known. Oh, yeah. Even when you're really known, they're still with you. That's good. That's true, man.

This is helpful. You can correct each other without having hard feelings. Oh, yeah. No hard feelings. Plenty of seats up here, fellas. Picked out just for you.

[2:33] What else makes a good friend? A couple more things. A couple more people. What makes a good friend? Anything else? I thought of honesty. I think of my good friends.

He was honest and sincere. Just a sincere guy. I thought of the word pursues.

A good friend pursues. Yeah. Yeah, they do. They pursue us. Good friends. Seek us out. That's good. Great.

Well, that's a good place to start and just get our bearings. And a lot of these things we're going to be talking about. I think there's... Yeah, there's a lot to talk about in friendship. And we're going to be talking about what makes a good friend, but also what makes not such a good friend.

And talking about friendship, of course, is no mental exercise apart from application. Most of us have had good friends who've made our lives better or had bad friends who've made our lives harder.

[3:39] And sometimes it's the same person. And sometimes it's the same person. Which is really challenging. I got saved when I was 25 years old. I was playing in a band in the bar scene.

And I had a lot of acquaintances, but no real good friends. And this was really nobody that I could share my heart, my dreams, my thoughts with.

I started attending a church after I got saved. And my first close biblical friend was a guy named Phil. And we met at church. He was a few years older than me.

And from what I could tell, he loved the Lord and knew the scriptures. And I finally had a friend that I could share spiritual things with. Could share life with. And a few months in, we talked all the time. We talked about Jesus. We hung out a lot. It was wonderful. A few months in, he started kind of just acting weird. And he asked me for large sums of money, which isn't necessarily bad.

[4:37] But there were some things. And when I talked to him about it, he changed and just let me have it. There were some things going on in his life that I just wasn't aware of.

I was an immature believer. And he painted me up and down, left and right, and every which way. And just told me how it was in his mind. And it ended up he was not a good friend, ultimately.

He wasn't humble. There were some things going on. And he didn't want to talk about. And it was challenging. So I was an immature Christian. I didn't recognize the signs.

And there may have been things I could have done to prevent it. But ultimately, friendships are risky. You know, they're risky.

We want to be wise about choosing friends. But in the end, we entrust the fine china of our lives with someone who knows us in relationship.

[5:35] And what I mean by fine china is like our loves, our desires, our fears, our hopes being known is what some counselors called like fine china. It's like a metaphor.

You think about what china is. You know, the plates in your grandmother's cabinet are not allowed to touch. We don't bring them out. They're delicate. They easily break. They're valuable. They're heirlooms.

And they sit on a shelf. But we should not be like fine china in the way that we just let these things sit on the shelf. We're supposed to bring them out, even at the risk of being broken.

Proverbs 18.1 says, Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

And so let me say of my friend Phil, I really have no regrets with Phil. We had some genuine moments, and the Lord used that time certainly to sanctify me.

[6:34] And it's not as if I was sinfully blind to this guy or made poor decisions with my friends. And we see the same thing in Job, don't we?

His friends are not wise. They're sometimes not good friends. And so the message of Job and these things, these stories, is not that we shouldn't trust people or don't bring out our fine china or don't let people close.

No, that's not the message. C.S. Lewis, I think in the sheet, I have some sheets back there. He says, To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.

If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with your hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements.

Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it'll change. It will not be broken.

[7:36] It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. Takes that to the extreme. I think you get the picture that to be a friend is risky.

And Job teaches us not how to isolate ourselves, but how to be a bad friend in many ways. So the book of Job really assumes that we should let people in.

We should make friends. We should be close with others. But we'll get hurt at times, and it is worth it. It's actually worth it. Isolation is never commanded in Scripture except for a short time to give yourselves to prayer, but to come back and to live in community.

Isolation is selfish, and it harms us. Remember that the first thing in Scriptures that is considered not good was not Adam and Eve's sin, was it?

It was that man was alone. Adam was alone. The Lord God said it's not good that man should be alone. He's going to make a helper. And up until then, everything was good or very good.

[8:41] But God says isolation, aloneness, is not good. So the presence of a friend is God's idea. It's a good thing. God designed it that way. It's

a gift.

So it's not as if we happen to be living in proximity with people, and we might as well make the best of it. That's not how it is. This is the Lord's idea. I think one of my favorite quotes is from J.C. Ryle about friendship.

He says, The world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It's a dark place. It's a lonely place. It's a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam is in a friend.

Friendships have our troubles and double our joys. And so for the next little bit, we're going to be talking about Proverbs 18, 24, and looking at what it means to not be a good friend and to be a good friend.

So what does it mean, number one, to not be a good friend? I think a lot of us can imagine and think and have had the experience of what it actually means to be a bad friend.

[9:47] And so the focus is not so much the wicked, the bad friend, so much as maybe just not ideal, the ideal, not the ideal friend.

So the first of this A, not ideal friend, is the wrong quality. The first thing we notice in Proverbs 18 is that contrast. Just like most of Proverbs, line one and line two contrast one another or complement in some way.

And this seems to be a contrast about casual acquaintances and close friends. But why does it say that many, Proverbs 18, many companions comes to ruin?

Why does he say that? I think in many ways, just like we shouldn't pile up wealth to make us feel more comfortable, we shouldn't pile up acquaintances to make us feel secure.

Again, this is acquaintances, I think he's saying, not friends, not close friends. The Lord's not saying that friendship is bad or that having many friends is bad. It's about who our friends are, the quality of the relationship.

[10:53] And so the danger is because I have, we can think that because I have a lot of friends, that I'm really known. We can think that because I have friends, that I have biblical friends, or that I am a biblical friend.

And with acquaintances, with casual friends, the wrong quality and depth, can be emphasized and we can still keep ourselves guarded.

We're not opening ourselves up. We're not being a good friend. We don't have close friends. I think we can, I think a lot of us can easily crave that everybody like us, but nobody really knows us.

And that's a scary thing. We don't want to be like that. And so one of the things we're trying to do as a church and community groups is cultivate friendships, relationships, so that we can be known and know other people.

Adam and Eve knew each other. They were naked and unashamed, it says. In many ways, a husband and wife can share physical nakedness, but a friend also shares spiritual and emotional nakedness with one another.

[12:05] We're known. So we want to sometimes be like the TV show Cheers, the theme song says, where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came.

But for most of us, we want to have those kind of friends that are just a little more surface. And the epitome of this is social media, right? I think Facebook, sites like Facebook focus on quantity, not quality.

It can be great to reconnect with old friends that you've had from the past, but likely these people don't understand your struggles, your patterns of sin, the idols of our hearts.

And that's what we needed a good friend is depth of relationship. So who really knows you? Who knows you? Who knows the areas of sin that you struggle with?

There's maybe seen a few things that might be displeasing in you. Do you have somebody that if you needed prayer for something that's really personal, really private, that you could go to?

[13:15] I hope so. If not, go get those kind of friends and work to keep them. They're a treasure, they're a gift to you. B, for wrong friends, is wrong values.

I'm just going to spend a second here. The second thing is, you know, just thinking that we're all made for community. We want to fit in. We want to find our place. We want to find our people.

Drew Holcomb has a song that says, When you find your people, then you find yourself. And I think we all want to find our people or find a person. In many ways, this is why gangs and even drugs are so difficult to leave because of this communal aspect.

There's just community being built in these things. They found their people. So there's nothing wrong to share the same interests. But if the interest becomes the main thing in the relationship, then it might be the wrong thing.

So while sports, hobbies, schooling, knitting, and a myriad of other interests can gather us, a good friend is one who moves beyond these things.

[14:26] And especially in the church. It's great to have also affinity groups where you share a common interest. But we want to be a people whose common interest is Christ and the gospel.

That's where we want to be rooted. So it's good to consider how our activities, what our activities, what role do they play in our lives? And as you're building, because it's a great way, sports and things like that, is a great way to get into people's lives.

But if as you're building relationships, the interest becomes the main thing, then you may want to consider while you do the activity. It's possible. Okay, C, wrong ethic.

This is the person who's really actually just a bad friend. And sometimes we can be so consumed with finding a friend that we end up making bad friends, bad choices in friends.

And in many ways, we should not make a close friend out of anyone who does not have Christ as his friend. That's tricky.

[15:37] Not acquaintances and not friends in general, but close friends. That's a hard thing because friendships can blind us.

Because we want to be evangelistic and friendship is not only about us. I think of the oldest son of King David, King Amnon. If you remember his story, he ended up raping his half-sister.

He grieved the Lord. He shamed his family. But the story begins of Amnon with this little phrase, But Amnon had a friend, a very crafty man. That was his friend, a crafty man.

And this crafty man convinced Amnon to do what is wrong. The proverb became true of him. Bad company corrupts good morals, ruins good morals.

And more is, it's, you know, we've heard the saying, more is caught than taught. Well, I think that's true of friends. J.C. Ryle explains this concept further.

[16:36] He says, We're always disposed to catch the way of those with whom we live. And the more we like them, the stronger the disposition grows.

Without our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions. We gradually give up what they dislike, and we take up what they like in order to become more close friends with them. so there's probably a million caveats i'd want to give maybe not a million but a lot of caveats to give here because we want to be thinking of others we want to be evangelistic we want to reach out to others and that requires some form of relationship but a close friend is someone who wants you want christ as their friend biblical friends draw us upward bad friends weigh us down so that's that's the negative aspect so point two what does it mean to be a good friend and so as we look at this list we want to be thinking okay who is this person for me but of course we want to be thinking well how can i be this for other people as well point a is close looking back at at proverbs 18 24 again the second part of that gives a little bit of context first a good friend is close a man of many companions may come to ruin but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother and jesus what jesus say the kingdom of god is at hand it's this close you know friends are close well i think this text speaks of being emotionally or spiritually close physical proximity is also something we we don't always think about when you think about close friends i think physicality is is is a helpful context in ancient times being physical close i think was assumed because people have an opportunity to be close friends with somebody thousands of miles away and that's just not true today you can be close friends with somebody far away and so um physical closeness is important we are embodied people aren't we we're not spirits without a body we're not a soul without a body similarly we aren't our digital selves and so you know showing up at a friend's house when their child dies being physically present speaks volumes it speaks loudly putting an arm around someone's shoulder squeezing their hand to say i know i know that says something that says something loud god didn't just send prophets to tell about his words right he didn't just send priests to mediate his presence the lord didn't just send kings to display his power no jesus christ stepped down god god became flesh dwelt among us

god's physical presence was with us so one of the best ways to incarnate the love of god is to be physically present frodo tells sam i'm going to mordor and sam says i know that well enough mr frodo of course you are and i'm coming with you i think the friends theme song sums it up i'll be there for you when the rain starts to pour i'll be there for you like i've been there before i'll be there for you because you've been there for me too so we want to look to manifest god's physical love uh god's love in physical ways being present being close second b is being candid second a good friend is candid in many ways that it's kind of like just thinking about being honest in a few verses right above um 1824 and 1821 proverbs 1821 says death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruits again that's right above this context of friendship talking about our words because our words have the power to build up friends or to destroy friendship and so we need to be wise with our words a friend knows one when to be quiet and a friend knows two when to speak up and so as you as you let people into your life one of the first things that happens is is you know it runs the risk they you know you they see your warts they get to know us they know our proclivities their unique ways we sin and they see it all and proverbs 19 11 a few verses down says that that um a friend's glory is to overlook an offense and so there may be displeasing so a friend knows when to be quiet essentially and so there may be displeasing faults in your friend that you have to overlook like maybe chew with their mouth open or other other pet peeves that you had maybe particular sins that that aren't patterns that you just have to overlook there may be things that we just have to overlook um but really what separates friends when we need to be quiet is is gossip i will cause it a being a whisper repeating things that were told to you by your friend in confidence or speaking about your friend in negative ways to others these things separate close friends in this way we must not speak aristotle famously said wishing to be friends is quick work but friendship is a slow and ripening fruit friendship takes time to build but it can be destroyed in a moment by speaking the wrong things wrong time and second this friend also knows when to speak up oscar wilde says that a true friend stabs you in the front do you know when to speak up even saying difficult things that might be hurtful and so we need to be close enough relationally to see patterns to earn trust to be concerned enough and to fear god enough to say something james 5 19 through 20 says my brothers if anyone among you wonders from the truth and someone brings him back let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wondering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins and what's in mind here as you bring back somebody from from death it's not preferences we can have disagreement about preferences and have robust discussion but what's in mind is someone in sin and you bringing them back there's restoration is always what's in mind when we go to somebody restoration and so we want to be careful we want to see the log in our own eye we want to recognize we're sinners you you know as well redeemed by the grace of god so we want to approach with gentleness galatians 6 1 says brothers if anyone is caught in any transgression you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness keep watch on yourselves lest you too be tempted we're wrought with temptations as well but confrontation is assumed among close friends friends and so do you do you have friends who can be honest with you do you ever do you ever go to your friend and invite feedback invite feedback or have we ever given our friends reason to not want to come to us i probably have last a friend a good friend is christ-centered all this of course leads to this point a good friend is christ-centered having spiritual depth focusing on the right things friends that have the right ethic friends who pursue one another who are concerned for your spiritual well-being who knows you and is able to overlook things that's all leading to good friends love jesus the best friends in life are those who are friends with jesus and who followed the example of jesus good friends point upward these are not just good friends are not just the ones that you share the same likes or laugh at the same jokes but who challenge you who challenge negative thinking who encourage your faith and we're not looking for a perfect friend but a godward friend i thought about um the book the silver chair in the narnia series there's one character who just seems who's just who's glum all the time he's a pessimistic worldview his name's puddle glum it's it's in the name puddle glum and he doesn't seem like a good friend through most of the book and as puddle glum travels with these two children eustace and jill and trying to find the lost king rillian they have to remember four signs that aslan who represents christ aslan gave him these four signs watch out for him and they had to repeat it over and over again but the journey got so long and so tiresome that they ended up giving up trying to look for or remember the four signs but in their most perilous moment the fourth sign suddenly appeared and they remembered that's the sign but to obey the sign would mean certain death they thought so but puddle glum steps in and he says you see to jill

and to eustace you see aslan didn't tell jill what would happen he only told her what to do that fellow will be the death of us once he's up they had to untie him that was the that was what they had to obey he said that fellow will be the death of us once he's up i shouldn't wonder he's pessimistic still but that doesn't allow it doesn't let us off the hook from following the sign in the end puddle glum was a good friend not because he was always positive or easy to be around but because he had an obedience mentality he loved the lord he desired to follow aslan and it was puddle glum's faith that saved them all so a good friend points you to christ and is willing to sacrifice for you jesus calls his disciples friends and then he showed them what true friendship looked like he willingly hung on the cross bearing the weight of their sin and ours sacrificing himself for us so that we could be eternally forgiven jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother and we must have christ as our friend so as we look around we want those kind of close friends as well that's what we want to look for in friendship we want to be willing to disadvantage ourselves and advantage others and so the the last thing that i want to mention remind ourselves is kind of where i started is that friendship is an immense gift friends are gifts to us friendship is god's idea it's not secular remember the lord determined the times and places in which we and all the people around us live he gave us the gift of friendship and placed friends there for our well-being and for us to be friends to them c.s lewis has this last quote he says in friendship we think we've chosen our peers in reality a few years difference in the dates of our births a few more miles between certain houses the choice of one university instead of another the accident of one topic being raised and not another at the first meeting any of these chances might have kept us apart but for a christian there are strictly speaking no chances a secret master of ceremonies has been at work christ who

[29:09] said the disciples you've not chosen me but i have chosen you can truly say to every group of christian friends you've not chosen one another but i have chosen you for one another the friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste and finding one another out it is the instrument by which god reveals to each of us the beauties of others and it's a wonderful thought you want to look around we look around this room these are the people that god has chosen for us to run with their gifts to us and you're a gift to them so don't neglect neglect the god the gift that god has given you so this week i encourage you to think of one acquaintance one friend that you could invest in it doesn't have to be complex difficult but look for ways to apply these positive principles and what it means to be a good friend a biblical friend let's pray for us oh father we need you a friend sticks closer than a brother and that is you jesus ultimately you suffered alone so that we could not have the wrath of god on us and you've united us to one another in the body help us to be wise about making friends i pray that we would labor hard and we would think of others help us god we need you to not be self-centered lord i pray that you would bring people into our lives today as well who encourage us encourage the men and women in this room lord and help us to encourage others as well help us to see every opportunity that you would give us and i ask that you would be glorified lord draw our hearts to you and give us good friends and help us to be a good friend in christ's name amen amen