

# Tough Topics—Friendship

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Date: 19 October 2025

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] 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 : 3 1 ] 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 : 3 3 ] 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 the negative aspect. So, point two, what does it mean to be a good friend?

[ 17 : 35 ] 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 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 did 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 don't always think about.

When you think about close friends, I think physicality is a helpful context. In ancient times, being physical close, I think, was assumed because people didn't have an opportunity to be close friends with somebody thousands of miles away.

[ 18 : 37 ] And that's just not true today. You can be close friends with somebody far away. And so, 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, 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 became flesh. Dwelt among us.

- [ 19 : 47 ] 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, God's love in physical ways.
- Being present. Being close. Second, B is being candid. Second, a good friend is candid. In many ways, it's kind of like just thinking about being honest.
- In a few verses right above 1824 and 1821. Proverbs 1821 says, Again, that's right above this context of friendship.
- [ 20 : 58 ] 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 let people into your life, one of the first things that happens is it runs the risk.
- 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 1911, a few verses down, says that 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, they may chew with their mouth open.
- Or other pet peeves that you had. Maybe particular sins that aren't patterns. That you just have to overlook. There may be things that we just have to overlook.
- [ 22 : 08 ] But really, what separates friends, what we need to be quiet, is gossip. The Bible calls it being a whisperer. 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, And what's in mind here, as you bring back somebody from death, is not preferences.
- [ 23 : 34 ] We can have disagreement about preferences, and have robust discussion, but what's in mind is someone in sin, and you're 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 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. And so do you have friends who can be honest with you?

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?

[ 24 : 36 ] 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 follow 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 the book *The Silver Chair* in the Narnia series.

[ 25 : 37 ] There's one character who just seems, who's just, who's glum all the time. He's a pessimistic worldview. His name's Puddleglum. It's in the name, Puddleglum.

And he doesn't seem like a good friend through most of the book. And as Puddleglum 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 them these four signs.

Watch out for them. 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 Puddleglum 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.

[ 26 : 46 ] 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, doesn't let us off the hook from following the sign. In the end, Puddleglum 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 Puddleglum'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.

[ 27 : 58 ] That's what we want to look for in friendship. We want to be willing to disadvantage ourselves and advantage others. And so 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 said to 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.

[ 29 : 22 ] The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others. That is a wonderful thought.

You want to look around. We can look around this room. These are the people that God has chosen for us to run with. They're gifts to us.

And you're a gift to them. So don't 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.

[ 30 : 27 ] 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 would 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, and draw our hearts to you, and give us good friends, and help us to be a good friend in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen.