



P
T O
I
P O N D E R
T
S

2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: October 12th–18th

Sermon: October 11th



October 12

Proverbs 18:24

I pray that yesterday's sermon did a decent job in articulating the reality that Christians need good friends. Scripture shares with us several passages and a few stories about the blessing of solid friendship. This week's devotions will be dedicated to the study of some of my favorite passages in the wisdom literature that deal with the subject of friendship.

Today we are reminded that biblical friendship is characterized by loyalty. The phrase "there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother" is one of the most vivid, and powerful, clauses regarding friendship in all of literature. Many of us know what its like to have faithful, long-term, friends. There is a great blessing and encouragement that comes from knowing that there are good friends in your corner!

I pray that you have a few friendships, but I fear that some of us do not. If not, let me offer you two suggestions as to how to cultivate faithful and strong friendships. First, if you desire to have friends, you must be a friend. Over the years it has occurred to me that many of the reasons people give for lacking friendships are just smoke screens. I have observed numerous individuals over the years that may appear strange or socially awkward who actually have good, solid relationships. Why? Because friendships are not typically cultivated by your "cool" factor. Instead, what separates those with good friendships from those who are lonely is often personal commitment and selflessness. Good friends are those who desire to seek the wellbeing of their associates. This means that I must be selfless and concerned with others if I desire to cultivate friends who stick close to me in all seasons of life. If your perspective on the world around you is centered on you, don't be surprised when friendships are fleeting! Conversely, if you enter relationships thinking about how you might best love and support others, friends will be much easier to identify.

Second, good friendships require time and energy which means that most of us must pick a few! Some people struggle with a lack of close, committed friendships because they spread themselves too thin. Close friendships are formed through time spent together and in conversation. There are only so many hours in a day which means that there are only so many opportunities for the kind of friendship that is described in Proverbs 18. Instead of trying to be "best friends" with everyone, pray that God would lead you to a few folks and attempt to spend time cultivating a solid friendship with them. This does not mean that there is a need to be rude or aloof with the rest of the world but it does mean that there is wisdom in devoting much time to a few in hopes of finding a faithful friend who will stick close to you in all seasons of life!

October 13

Proverbs 17:17

As I sit to write this second devotion, it struck me that I may need to speak with a bit more clarity about what to expect for the rest of the week's Points to Ponder. Typically speaking, these devotions are dedicated to exploring some doctrinal truths that are systematically found throughout the Bible. In a way, these entries will be similar. We certainly want to base our conclusions and study on the Word of God's teaching on the topic of friendship, but I am writing with a desire to plumb the depths of the wisdom literature in order to provide us not only with doctrinal truths but practical insights regarding the topic of friendship. Consequently, these daily devotions will have a bit more of a "pragmatic" bent as we seek to apply what the Bible teaches and exalts as desirable in our lives.

Today I want us to see that friendship shines through in tough times. It is easy to be friendly with someone, and it is even easier to call someone a friend when they have something that benefits you! Nevertheless, biblical friendship is identified and demonstrated in the tough times of life. There is an older country song that's chorus says "you find out who your friends are, somebody's gonna drop everything..." The point of the song is quite insightful! Friendship is demonstrated in times of hardship and suffering.

I write today to admonish us to make sure that we think along these lines. First, if you call someone else your friend, I pray that you have this category in mind. Frankly, I wonder if we don't use the term "friend" too lightly in our society! Sometimes we call people we barely know friends. Perhaps there is another, proper, utilization of the term but in the case of today's verse, it is very clear that friends are those who come alongside and support in times of need. Do you have people like this in your life?

Second, if you call yourself a friend, make sure you are thinking about serving when those moments arise. It seems to me that many get quite bitter when others don't serve them as they deem appropriate. I've heard numerous folks express their animosity towards individuals (and even the church) because "people weren't there for me" or "nobody called". The simple truth is that they aren't wrong in identifying friendship with compassionate concern, but it strikes me that many such people very rarely are there for others. My point is that we can look at friendship like a consumer (what have you done for me?) but that would be to miss the purpose entirely. Friendship will never flourish with a "me first" attitude! Instead, friendships will be strongest when we are constantly concerning ourselves with how to outdo one another in showing love and honor. Those kinds of relationships thrive, and they are cultivated, in part, for times of adversity which are sure to arrive.

October 14

Proverbs 27:9

I have observed that I am more prone to accept advice from some sources than others... how about you? Have you ever considered the fact that two people can tell you the exact same thing all the while your responses are wildly different? What is it that separates your best friend's admonition to knock off an activity from a stranger who says the same thing? The answer, of course, is relationship.

When I know that a person is for me, that they love me and earnestly desire to see me thrive, I am far more willing to heed their advice. Because I know their heart for me, I am very apt to lean in when they offer their advice. This is the idea that is being expressed in Proverbs 27!

Notice the language here as the author attempts to illustrate the appealing nature of friendly advice by utilizing the terms "perfume and incense". These things make the air appealing and draw people. In the opposite way, putrid and unappealing smells drive people away! This means that friendly advice is meant to be understood as that which causes men to lean in, it is an aroma that elicits favorable responses in the minds and hearts of those who hear what is being said.

Do you have friends that you respect and honor so much that you desire to hear their advice, even if it is unfavorable? My suspicion is that those who do have such friends have been saved from many potentially harmful circumstances!

To put the shoe on the other foot, are you such a friend to others? One implication of this passage is that friendship requires that we speak into our friend's lives at times. Many people have claimed to be my friend, but far fewer have had the courage to say the hard things to me. In the same way, I have been guilty before of allowing acquaintances to careen down roads that I knew would lead to their harm without saying a word. Part of friendship is fortitude! We need each other to say the hard things at times. We need brothers and sisters to speak with conviction and to lovingly, but clearly, call out the dangers they see in our lives.

Oh, how the world would be different if we had an abundance of these kinds of friendships! Our congregations would be healthier, our families would be stronger and our society would be wiser if godly men and women took the advice of other faithful individuals and offered their wise insights to those who obviously are in need of good and biblical instruction.

October 15

Proverbs 27:17

This is one of those verses that many have heard without even knowing it is in the Bible! I heard a politician the other day state that “iron sharpens iron” and I wondered if he even knew where his wisdom originated. My assumption is that most of you thought that we would include this passage in a discussion about friendship precisely because there is so much beauty and meat here.

My best friends are those who challenge me to grow in my walk with Christ. I have many faithful friends who are stimulating new thoughts in my mind as they share insights they have gleaned. I have faithful companions who love me enough to call out my sin and challenge me to grow in holiness! The truth is that much of my growth is the product of many of you who inspire me to be better and hold me accountable when I fall short of God’s standard. We have been wired by God to grow in community, and this means that we must identify people who will help us follow in the faith.

Interestingly enough, the Bible exalts the beauty of good friends, and it warns of the danger of foolish, sinful friends. Just as iron sharpens iron so bad company corrupts good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). The biblical assumption is that our relationships are either going to lead us closer to the Lord or they are going to drag us farther away from Him.

I want to end this devotion by reminding you of a principle that we spoke of a few days ago; to have good friends you must be a good friend. This axiom has immense application in our devotion today for the very reason that those who wish to be sharpened need to be busy thinking about how they can sharpen others! Stated differently, I don’t have friendships for my own benefit alone, instead my friendships are opportunities for me to try to help others sharpen as well.

This means that if I desire to be a good friend, I must be looking for ways to encourage and lovingly admonish my friends to grow. I need to be sharing what I’m learning, ready to step in and say the hard thing and look for ways to encourage my companions as they walk after the Lord. Stated differently, a good friend is concerned about being the sharpener all the while trusting that sometimes he will be the “sharpenee” (I realize this is not a word in the English language, but I hope it communicates my heart in this matter)! Let us live for the wellbeing of others and, along the way, we will find that we are being strengthened as well.

October 16

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

I want to spend our final three days looking at this passage of Scripture. The book of Ecclesiastes is full of interesting thoughts. As Solomon chronicles his life and the mistakes that are made, he often veers off into subjects and statements that are evidence of a life spent wandering from the Lord. Nevertheless, there are moments of incredible clarity, and this portion of the book is slam full of very pragmatic truths that we would do well to learn and embrace.

Today I want us to notice that Solomon commends friendship for support. I always think of those LifeAlert commercials when I read this verse! Some of you might remember the famous scenes of elderly folks lying on the ground somewhere exclaiming “Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” The LifeAlert business is predicated on the idea that those who are feeble and live by themselves need some way to seek help!

The truth is that some of us are more able bodied than others but all of us are prone to fall spiritually speaking. We are subject to tripping up along our spiritual way and this means that we need to be thinking in terms of support and assistance prior to our falling. A person who falls on their bathroom floor is not the beneficiary of LifeAlert if he or she did not do the preparation of securing the device and a person who is living his or her life in isolation, away from good friends, will not be the beneficiary of friendship if the work of cultivating relationships has not occurred prior to their moment of need.

Folks, there is going to come a time when you will need someone else. The Bible is clear that God has given us friends for those moments of need... do you have any? If not, I would implore you to consider how you can identify and cultivate relationships with the faith that God’s good design includes good friendships.

In the same way, we need to be thinking about how we can best support those who are our friends in their time of need. Friendship is not only about lighthearted moments and laughing together, friendship is also about laboring and straining to help those we love in their time of need. Are you willing to be the kind of friend that Solomon describes in this passage? I pray that you are! God is good in giving us each other and His design includes our sacrifice and benefit in the tumultuous and unpredictable moments and seasons of life.

October 17

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Today's portion of Ecclesiastes 4 is really an extension of the idea that we began to discuss yesterday. Friendship, according to Solomon, is not only about helping others when they fall, it is also about resourcing them when they have needs. Sometimes we have issues and problems that we simply cannot meet by ourselves.

A few years ago, my family took a tour of an Amish farm in Pennsylvania. The tour guide told us about some of their cultural practices and traditions which included the famous "barn raisings". Barn raisings are events in that part of the world. Essentially whenever a family desires to construct a new barn (a common occurrence in Amish land!), the family does what it can to build the structure and then, on a specified day, they invite friends from the community to come help them lift the structure and get it ready to use.

The barn raising is a cultural tradition because it is a necessary endeavor! Recall that families do not have power tools or tractors, and this meant that they needed manpower from somewhere! Where would they turn? The answer, of course, is their friends.

Solomon's point here is not that friends are specifically for keeping each other warm (although that might be necessary at times!), Solomon's point is that friends are necessary to help assist others in their moments of need. We have been intentionally created by God as limited, finite creatures. This is not a design flaw; our neediness is the point! God does not desire for us to be entirely self-sufficient and, therefore, He created a world that is full of needs that we cannot meet in isolation. He commands us to reach out to Him for help, and He also commends to us the assistance that others can bring.

In closing, I want to provide you with one thing to consider as you think about application of today's lesson. When you are thinking about your life, remember that there is a fine line here between industriousness and pride. It is good and right for you to work hard, and it is very important that you work in such a way that you don't take advantage of others. You should do what you can but understand that you cannot do everything! In those moments that we see our need for help, the God-honoring thing to do is not to deny our need, it is to reach out to the friends God has given us and utilize them. God has blessed us with each other; His desire is for us to utilize our friends for His glory.

October 18

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Today's final devotion deals with what is perhaps the most unfortunate need we have in this fallen world as Solomon shares with us that we need friends for our own protection. We live in a dangerous world. There are many threats that surround us and this means that we have a need to be on the lookout for those who might harm us or our families. It is both wise and necessary for us to acknowledge this truth and live in light of its implications and this means that we ought to embrace friendship as one of God's provisions for our safety.

Over the years I have read numerous stories of friends helping to shield and fend off dangerous attacks. There are undoubtedly many more instances of an enemy being dissuaded from even trying to harm a person because of the community support that is so evident.

Friendship is intended for our protection. While Solomon's language is typically (and correctly) interpreted in a physical sense, it is just as true that we need friends to help guard against spiritual assaults as well. In fact, I would argue that the most dangerous place a Christian can be is away from the flock! It is not altogether uncommon to see a brother or sister stray from the flock only to fall into the hands of the enemy. Satan is quite adept at disorienting and distracting unaware sheep thereby luring them into a false sense of security only to realize harm!

Friends have protected me over the years by calling my attention to that which was obvious to them! They helped me see the danger and even assisted me as I walked through moments whereby, I was tempted to swerve into some pretty alarming circumstances. Over the years, I have learned that I'm not the exception to the rule that sheep can be foolish, and this means that I need good shepherds and faithful members of the flock to help me identify and avoid moments that I am in danger.

Do you have people in your life who will protect you in this way? They may not always tell you what you want to hear, but you can rest in knowing that there is safety in numbers. It is wise to surround yourself with good, faithful people who can help you when the enemy comes knocking and this is part of the reason why we gather on the Lord's Day. I pray that you make worship a priority today, trusting that God's instructions for us to gather is motivated, in part, by His plan for our protection.