

Series in Proverbs.

What's a true friend? It isn't always the person who makes you feel good, picks up the tab, or says what you want to hear. Rather, it's someone who selflessly blesses your life by doing what's good.

This is the kind of relationship shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the kind that Christ gives to His own, and the kind that's expressed in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture.

Adam and Eve enjoyed the first marriage, but not the first friendship or relationship. That long preceded them, because love itself began not on earth but in heaven. Love, the bond of all good relationships, began in eternity past within God Himself.

God is one being of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each Person is fully God, and yet, there remains one triune Being. The Trinity has been one of the cardinal beliefs of Christians throughout the ages.

So, what does the Trinity have to do with friendships and love or relationships? Everything, because the Trinity is the basis for these. God is loving, but He's more than just loving—He is love (1 John 4:7). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been expressing the love of friendship to one another back and forth forever.

The Son loves nothing more than doing the will of the Father (John 4:34). There's never a hint of jealousy here, but total submission and unity between them with joy (Hebrews 12:2). It's the same with the Holy Spirit who does the will of the Father and the Son. It delights Him to bring honor and glory to them (John 16:14, 1 Cor 12:3).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy exalting one another. This is what love does. It doesn't use others to exalt oneself, but sacrifices oneself to elevate others (1 Cor 13:4-7). Love is at the core of any good friendship, because love is at the core of those friendships within God Himself.

Relationships didn't evolve from non-relational, non-feeling, non-thinking matter. They have a divine basis in the way the three Persons of the Trinity relate to one another. To the degree that our relationships reflect the love that exists between them, the same kind of joy and delight results.

Proverbs tells us that a friend isn't a flatterer who says what you'd like to hear (Prov 29:5) or a gossip who listens to betray (Prov 18:8). He isn't a liar (Prov 16:28), a schemer (Prov 3:28-29), unmerciful (Prov 21:10), or even belittling when misunderstood (Prov 11:12). All of these are self-seeking. As shown within the Trinity, a friend isn't self-seeking but someone who is self-sacrificing.

John 15:13—"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

Christ gave of Himself even to the point of death. His death became the basis for which sinners could be made right and become friends with a holy God (John 15:13-15).

Proverbs looks at the practical outworking of friendship. If sacrifice is what true friendship is about and it's rooted in God, what does it look like? Proverbs teaches that a friend sticks closer than a brother, confronts when necessary, and covers offenses in love.

CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

Proverbs 18:24—"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

It's not always good to be the life of the party or the most popular person in a room. Pause for a second and consider why *that* person has a following. Why does everyone want to be around him or her? It probably has nothing to do with the person and everything to do with what he or she has to offer.

Riches, beauty, charisma, power, fame, talent—these aren't bad, but they have an allure. They draw a following, and usually for the wrong reasons (Prov 19:6). Mistake the following for true friendship, and it might lead to ruin. This is the danger that Proverbs warns against.

A man of many companions has what others want, and they'll stick with him for a time... "but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." It's someone who doesn't care what you have to offer. Whether having a lot or a little, this person remains. In friendship, there's a selfless desire to give and to serve, to do good for another without any expectations of something in return. Our friendships are meant to reflect on earth the way the Persons of the Trinity have loved and related to one another in heaven.

Proverbs on Friendship

CONFRONTS WHEN NEEDED

Proverbs 27:6—“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

A king once divided his kingdom into three parts to pass onto his three daughters. Unsure who should receive the largest portion, he foolishly asked each daughter to express her love for him. The first two lied and flattered their father, while the third refused to play along. She loved him and spoke truthfully, but he mistook her for an enemy. So, he gave the entire kingdom to the first two daughters who then shamefully mistreated him once it was theirs.

It's the story of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. A friend doesn't always say what we want to hear. He or she might offend you deeply with the truth, but such a person loves you more than the friendship itself.

The people of Israel considered Absalom a friend for listening to their disputes. He showed such heartfelt affection for them while planting doubts in their minds about King David. Having “stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” Absalom took the kingdom from his own father (1 Sam 15). He knew what the people wanted to hear. They mistook him for a friend and then he took what he wanted.

A friend, however, is willing to wound. When King David slept with Bathsheeba and murdered her husband, he lied to keep his sins a secret (2 Sam 11). No one knew but God alone until nine months later when Nathan approached. Knowing the king could end his life, imprison or exile him, Nathan still confronted David. So much was at stake, but Nathan loved God and the king more than his own life.

A friend doesn't confront over petty disagreements, preferences, or personal opinions. He confronts when there's danger. When a loved one goes down a path contrary to God's ways, is it not loving to say something? To say nothing knowing the danger isn't friendship but enmity. In David's case, he had sinned against God. Nathan saw the danger, and nothing could have been more loving than to confront David about it.

COVERS OFFENSES IN LOVE

Proverbs 17:9—“Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.”

The Persons of the Trinity have never confronted one another, but have enjoyed the richness of perfect relationships. For God's people, He says one day that they'll enjoy relationships in a place without mourning, crying, or pain (Rev 21:4). The effects of the Fall will be undone, and our friendships will become all God created them to be.

For now, these negative effects remain, and so, we sin against one another and against God quite often. We need to be confronted at times, and a friend will lovingly do that. A friend will also put the matter to rest once it's been dealt with.

When Peter denied the Lord three times, Jesus dealt with the matter a couple weeks after His Resurrection (John 21). Peter repented, Jesus forgave him, and that was the end of it. The matter wasn't held over Peter's head or revisited down the road. It was done, never to be mentioned again. Jesus actually fixed Peter breakfast that morning and came to him ready to forgive.

Ephesians 4:32—“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Repeating a matter that's been dealt with separates close friends. If you know Christ as your Lord and Savior, God has forgiven your every offense against Him. On the Day of Judgment, will He look at your track record? Will he remind you of some the worst things you ever did on earth? Will He say you need to suffer a bit before He will let you into Heaven? Not at all. If you've turned from your sin and to Christ for salvation, your offenses have been completely dealt with and covered in love.

If this is how God deals with those who have offended Him? How then should we deal with one another?