

Principles from Proverbs: Friendship

Introduction: Personal friendships rank among some of the most rewarding and beneficial aspects of life. However, not all friendships are positive. Some friendships can be harmful to one's character and spiritual walk. The Proverbs give timeless, inspired advice concerning establishing and maintaining positive friendships.

I. Choose friends carefully.

A. The character of your friends will affect you.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17)

1. The picture presented in this verse is that of a tool being sharpened, perhaps by a file. Close associations inevitably have an influence upon us.
2. Because of inevitable influence, it is vital that our closest friends be those who can sharpen us in areas where we are dull. Your friend may not be superior to you in every way, but he should be superior in some *significant* ways.
3. That which has the potential to sharpen also has the potential to dull. Recognize the fact that influence can have a dulling effect on you. Be careful to stay around people with a sharpening influence.

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.” (Proverbs 13:20)

1. We gain wisdom when we make wise people our companions. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. said, “Skim the cream from every man.”
2. Close association with foolish men always brings destruction. Remember the “fool” in Proverbs is an immoral, characterless, unprincipled man. Dr. Richard V. Clearwaters said, “You can't run with the wolves without learning to howl.”

B. The right friend will seek to improve you.

“Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.” (Proverbs 27:9)

1. We should be encouraged by the sweet counsel of a sincere friend. Real friends do not criticize for the sake of criticism. True, friendly counsel is characterized by sweetness and earnestness.

“Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Proverbs 27:5, 6)

1. If a true friend must rebuke you, his vocalized disapproval is of more value to you than hidden admiration. Admiration fosters pride and discourages growth in the admired individual.
2. If a true friend must wound (hurt your feelings), he does so to help you. He is willing to risk the friendship by hurting you because he really cares. People who only tell you what you want to hear are not your friends—“the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

C. Beware of friends who can do you harm.

1. Good-Time Charlie

“Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” (Proverbs 23:20, 21)

- a. People whose main focus is the satisfaction of the flesh do not make good friends.
- b. People who wear “I Live for Weekends” T-shirts will not only waste your time, but may damage your character.

3. Bitter Bart

“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.” (Proverbs 22:24, 25)

- a. Avoid friendships with men who are characterized by the negative emotion of anger. Good people sometimes get angry, but anger is out of character for them.
- b. The “furious man” is the individual who loses control in anger. He has a bad temper and a short fuse. Do not be caught in his company.
- c. Anger and a hot, short temper are contagious. If you associate closely, you will become infected.

4. Instable Mabel

“My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?” (Proverbs 24:21, 22)