

**No 2 Wise about Friendship Chapter 6:16 to 19, 13:20, 17:17, 18:24, 27:5 & 6**

Proverbs isn’t a book you can treat chapter by chapter. Its wisdom is scattered through many chapters and the author slips from one topic to another then picks it up again later. Hence the many verses on the topic of friendship – the ones quoted above are still only a selection. So, we have to look at as many as we can and establish the principles that the author is trying to communicate

The fact that the author writes about human relationships means that they were as important in ancient times as they are today. It emphasises that we are meant to live in a community in which relationships develop. But Proverbs reminds us that we are to be both open to relationships but cautious if we see things in a person which lead us away from wise behaviour. (Remember the purpose of the whole book is the development of wisdom in all our ways and that includes the deep relationships we develop).

1. Share a little about the friendships that have meant a lot to you and have been a real help in developing wise and godly ways of living.

If you feel able, you may like to share about friendships that have let you down or led you astray.

***6:16 appears strange at first reading. Numerical sayings are found in many ancient cultures and their precise function is unknown. The best explanation is probably numbering a list that evokes a sense of order and likens it to the order of creation. The list then has a sense of completeness of what God thinks of as godly character.***

The seven things listed as detestable to Yahweh suggest that the character of a person is vital in the forming of deep friendships. They are amongst a whole series of ‘abominations’ that Proverbs lists. Others include ‘evil thoughts’ (15:26), being ‘arrogant’ (16:5) and ‘scoffing’ (24:9). Clearly God is saying that such people should be approached with caution.

1. Does this mean that the kind of people listed in v17 to 19 should be avoided at all cost?

Should we not long to help such people change their ways?

Should we befriend them in order to help them or should we remain cautiously distant?

The essence of the argument here is that we should not allow people described in v17 to 19 to have power or influence over us. All of these negative characteristics will make us forget the pursuit of righteousness and obedience to God. They lead us away from ‘wisdom’.

1. Which of the list of seven do we see most commonly in 21st century life?

Which do the most damage to lasting friendships?

Whoever we hang out with will influence our behaviour – seems obvious, but too easily we can see it too late. 13:20 makes it clear

***‘He who walks with the wise grows wise***

***But a companion of fools suffers harm’***

This implies that there is a choice to be made - the right choice will bless us, the wrong choice will do us great harm. We all long for friendship – that’s how God made us. We are relational beings.

1. How do we make sure that we make wise friend choices?

What do we do if our choice appears to have been misguided? Do we just dump them?

If we have children or grandchildren, what should we do if we see them making bad choices?

In Hebrew ‘one who loves at all times’ (17:17) comes first and is followed by the word for ‘friend’. In this verse we also have the word ‘distress’. This suggests that friends can do what is expected of family members. This does not negate the role of the family in times of crisis but suggests that a friend is one who can be trusted to support you when times are tough.

1. Can we expect too much of our friends?

Do 21st century values suggest that friends are only there to help us have ‘a good time’?

What happens when true friendship is not reciprocated – i.e. you give a lot of time and care to a friend but get nothing in return?

The desire to have many friends is a modern as well as an ancient problem (e.g the number of Facebook friends you have). The contrast in 18:24 is between ‘many friends’ and ‘the one who loves’. A faithful friend is one who clings on for dear life and most of us probably don’t have too many who will always be there for us.

1. Does the phrase ‘Facebook friends’ imply a contradiction?

Can a face on your phone really be described as ‘one who sticks closer than a brother’

Talk about some examples from your own life where people have stuck with you in hard times.

27:5 & 6 brings another dimension to friendship. A healthy relationship includes ‘tough love’. But what good is ‘hidden love’ – surely love that is hidden is of no value to the recipient. But hiddenness can be a sign of wisdom when one does not blurt every thought. Endless ‘kisses’ implies that all the person says is ‘I love you’ when what is needed is something that may hurt (‘wound’) but would produce greater wisdom.

1. Are we sometimes too reluctant to say something that needs saying to a friend when we see them veering away from godly ways?

Are we sometimes to keen to wade in with our critical analysis when loving support is what’s needed?

How do we determine the right course of action?

**There are other verses in Proverbs about friendship. You may like to read them**

* **25:20**
* **27:9**
* **27:14**
* **27:27**