

# Finding Friendship

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[ 0 : 01 ] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles and we are going to read together this morning in the book of Proverbs. Paul is going to be looking at Proverbs this week and next week.

And today he's focusing really on two or three verses, particularly at the end of Proverbs chapter 12. But we're going to read together the whole of Proverbs 12. You'll find it on page 535 if you have one of the church visitor's Bibles.

After the book of Psalms and at chapter 12. And let's try and absorb these Proverbs as we read them together.

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge. But he who hates reproof is stupid. A good man obtains favor from the Lord.

But a man of evil devices he condemns. No one is established by wickedness. But the root of the righteous will never be moved.

[ 1 : 14 ] An excellent wife is the crown of her husband. But she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. The thoughts of the righteous are just.

The counsels of the wicked are deceitful. The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood. But the mouth of the upright delivers them. The wicked are overthrown and are no more.

But the house of the righteous will stand. Ultimately of course that means. A man is commended according to his good sense.

But one of twisted mind is despised. Better to be lowly and have a servant than to play the great man and lack bread. Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast.

But the mercy of the wicked is cruel. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread. But he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

[ 2 : 22 ] Whoever is wicked covets the spoil of evildoers. But the root of the righteous bears fruit. An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips.

But the righteous escapes from trouble. From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good. And the work of a man's hands comes back to him.

The way of the fool is right in his own eyes. But a wise man listens to advice. The vexation of a fool is known at once.

But the prudent ignores an insult. Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence. But a false witness utters deceit.

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts. But the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever.

[ 3 : 26 ] But the lying tongue is but for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil. But those who plan peace have joy.

No ill befalls the righteous. But the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. But those who act faithfully are his delight.

A prudent man conceals knowledge. But the heart of the fool proclaims folly. The hand of the diligent will rule.

While the slothful will be put to forced labor. Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down. But a good word makes him glad. One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor.

Or you'll see the footnote. The righteous. An alternative way of reading it is chooses his friends wisely. Carefully. But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

[ 4 : 36 ] Whoever is slothful will not roast his game. But the diligent man will get precious wealth. In the path of righteousness is life.

And in its pathway there is no death. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

And through it impart his wisdom. Well please do you have Proverbs chapter 12 open in front of you there.

Please. Page 536. Let me just read again those final handful of verses there.

I'll read from verse 26. One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor.

[ 5 : 39 ] Or as Willie pointed out the footnote there. The righteous chooses his friends carefully. But the way of the wicked leads them astray. Whoever is slothful will not roast his game.

But the diligent man will get precious wealth. In the path of righteousness is life. And in its pathway there is no death.

Friendship is a powerful thing. Our relationships, our friendships. They can be, can't they, the greatest source of joy in this life.

And of course, they can also be the greatest source of sorrow too. Friendship can pull us up towards righteousness and following the Lord with all of our hearts.

Or can drag us down into folly. Just consider the very sorry tale towards the end of last year of Prince Andrew.

[ 6 : 43 ] And the fallout of his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein. That friendship dragged him into major trouble. It clouded his judgment.

Cost him his job. Led to a very public fall from grace. That was a friendship that I suppose Prince Andrew, that he never thought would lead to where it led.

It was a poorly chosen friendship. Friendship is a powerful thing for good, but also for ill. Let me take you to the very midst of the Second World War.

And to the prof and the PM. It's all about the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and his very good friend, Professor Frederick Lindemann. It was perhaps not a friendship you would have seen coming.

Lindemann was a physicist with a great mind. He was a contemporary of Einstein. And he was something of an eccentric. I guess he had that in common with Winston Churchill.

[ 7 : 50 ] But Lindemann was a vegetarian. He was a teetotaler. Non-smoking. And somehow he was best friends with Winston Churchill. The complete opposite of all those things. He was not a vegetarian.

He was not a teetotaler. And he certainly smoked. But why such a friendship? Well, who knows? But they were very close friends.

Lindemann wielded huge influence. He was part of Churchill's war cabinet. And through the course of the war, he would write Churchill over 2,000 memos offering advice on a whole range of matters to do with the war.

The two of them would often travel to conferences together. They would chat deep into the night about all sorts of matters. They were very close friends. He was one of Churchill's most close advisors.

He was something of a dominant Cummings of the day, I suppose, in terms of the influence on the PM. And in 1942, an issue arose about strategic bombing.

[ 8 : 59 ] What was going to be the best use of the RAF? Was it to target military locations or to pursue what they called strategic bombing?

In other words, they would aim their bombs at German suburbs. They would aim at civilians in order to lower morale. Bomb the suburbs, destroy the lives of millions of German citizens, and the morale would come crashing down.

So what to do? Well, Churchill turns to his good friend Lindemann. And Lindemann drafted his memo. And his conclusion was that the way to go was to pursue strategic bombing.

And so Churchill goes with Lindemann. They reject the targeting and military locations, and they go with strategic bombing. But now with the archives open, historians will be able to look back and see what Lindemann wrote.

And his reasoning, it seems, was faulty. His reports fudged the statistics. There were clear errors in his line of arguments. And strategic bombing proved to be, in the end, disastrous.

[ 10 : 13 ] 160,000 RAF men lost their lives. Many more civilians were killed. And some historians would argue that the war could have been ended almost a year earlier if this tactic had not been pursued.

If they'd gone for targeting military locations instead. Churchill was so loyal, so committed to his friendship with Lindemann, that he didn't really question his conclusion.

It was often said that the prof and the PM have decided. They were that tight. Now, I came across this story on a podcast. And the guy who was presenting the podcast commented at the end, his conclusion was that friendship is powerful.

And that's right, isn't it? Friendship is powerful for good, or in this particular case, for ill. Friendship can cause us to make serious errors of judgment.

We can make bad decisions. We stumble and fall, perhaps because of a friendship. And our friendships, our relationships here on earth, they have huge implications, not just for how life will go for us here, but they can have eternal implications.

[11:21] They can impact on our relationship with the Lord himself. And that is why the book of Proverbs has so much to say about friendship and about relationships.

Proverbs is packed full of it. We could have picked any chapter probably and dove into one verse there, but chapter 12 is where we're focusing this morning. So much to say. And our earthly friendships, they don't exist in a sort of hermetically sealed bubble with no impact on any other relationship.

They don't exist that way. They do have an impact. Our relationships here on the horizontal level, they do impact our relationship with the Lord, our creator, our Lord. And Proverbs is full of relational wisdom.

Because it's a book that comes to us from the lips of our creator, the covenant Lord, the one who is in a relationship within the Trinity himself, but also created us to also be in relation with each other and with him.

He is a relational God. And he's speaking to relational people, people like you and me, people like everyone else who's ever existed on this earth. We are all relational.

[12:35] And Proverbs contains his wisdom. And it sets out the realities of how life works in the world that is under his sovereignty, the world that he made.

And so we would do well to listen to it, to listen to him, to submit to it, especially when it comes to the whole area of friendship and relationship.

Because, as I said, our relationships with each other, they do impact and shape our relationship with the Lord. How things happen here on the horizontal level do impact the vertical.

They do impact our righteousness, our right relationship with the Lord. And you'll know that. If you are a follower of Jesus here this morning, then one key reason for that will be other people.

People who, from a human point of view, helped you along in your journey of faith. People who pointed you, who set an example, who helped you. Certainly that was true for me as a 19-year-old.

[13:42] It was other Christians, other people. They are instrumental, aren't they, in how we relate to the Lord. And so God's wisdom is profoundly relational.

And we need wisdom in this area if we're to live well, and in a way which honors the Lord who made us. Now it's not just an Old Testament concern, is it?

It's not just something that Proverbs talks about. The New Testament speaks of the importance of friendship too, of relationship, of wisdom. What is the Apostle Paul saying in Colossians 3?

He says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. So we are to relate as a Christian body.

We are to relate, to build each other up, says Paul, in all wisdom. Now there's lots to say, but we're going to focus in and chew over just one aspect of what Proverbs says about friendship.

[14:47] And it's essentially this. Given that friendships are so powerful, choose your friends with great care. Choose your friends with great care.

Look again at that verse, which was read earlier, Proverbs 12, 26. One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor. But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Perhaps another way of translating that, as Bruce Warke put it, would be this. A righteous man searches out his confidential friend. In other words, as the ESV footnote has it, the righteous chooses his friends carefully.

The righteous chooses his friends carefully. Now we need, don't we, to heed the warning from Proverbs, to be careful. Heed that warning, but also hear the positive exhortation.

Choose wisely. Be careful. Choose wisely. Given that friendships are so powerful, given they can have a huge positive influence or negative one, think about your friendships.

[15:59] And not merely in terms of how things work out for us in this world. Don't miss verse 28. Look down there. Eternity is in view. In the path of righteousness, says verse 28, in the path of

righteousness is life.

And in its pathway, there is no death. All the way through this chapter, eternity is in view. Flick back to chapter, verse 3, second half of verse 3.

The root of the righteous will never be moved. Again, verse 19. Truthful lips endure forever. Eternity is in view. Life, in the majority of Proverbs, refers to abundant life in fellowship with God, a living relationship that is never envisioned as ending in clinical death, but one which goes on and on.

In its pathway, there is no death. That is real life. That is life, as Proverbs sets it out. The psalmist, likewise, understands the destiny of the believer is never ending in this life.

[17:18] Proverbs, Psalm 23, it finishes this way, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So, follow the logic here at the end of Psalm of Proverbs 12.

In the path of righteousness is life, verse 28, the righteous chooses his friends carefully, verse 26. In other words, the one who is righteous, the one who is in right standing before the Lord, not perfect, not without faults, but rather one whose general direction in life is towards the Lord alone. In other words, the man or woman of faith, the righteous, those who live by faith, are those who, amongst other things, choose their friends carefully.

A righteous person chooses their friends carefully. So, given, given that a friendship or a relationship may lead us on in the Christian life or drag us away, given that friendship is powerful, there is a necessary implication.

A big question arises in our minds, doesn't it? So, you think about that. Given that friendship is powerful, how can I be skillful in relationships?

[18:37] How can I be skillful in friendship such that I find and make good friends? Friends who will lead me in a positive direction and not a negative one.

How can I distinguish between a friend and a fool? How do you find good friends? Poorly chosen friends will lead to trouble, to corruption, perhaps even eternal trouble.

And I've seen that. I've seen folk dragged away from the faith through a poorly chosen friend, through a poorly chosen and pursued romantic interest.

If you fail to heed that warning, it may come at a far greater cost than you ever anticipated. That is the warning of Proverbs of the whole Bible.

Choose your friends carefully. So be warned, but also the positive teaching is that in general in this life a good friend, a good friend, a good husband or wife will lead you on towards the Lord, will help you on in the life of faith.

[19:54] So how do you find good friends? That's the question this morning. How to find good friends? Well, three things. be deliberate, be discerning, seek the diligence.

So first, be deliberate. Be deliberate because friendships don't just happen. Sometimes you'll get someone complaining they don't have any friends.

Quite often it's just not true. You might reel off a list of people they know well and spend time with and the light dawns. I do have friends. But perhaps you do feel a lack of good friends.

Perhaps you are thinking, I would love good friends in my life. Now I don't know if making friends is harder than it used to be.

In some ways with travel and technology it's easier than it's ever been. But there are still a number of factors that mitigate against genuine friendship today, I think. It is hard. We are extremely mobile.

[20:56] We move from place to place. We rarely settle down in one spot for very long. Particularly in a city like Glasgow and a church like this there's a lot of turnover. People come for a year or two or four and then they move on.

We are a mobile generation. Perhaps we're consumed by family life. Pouring almost all of our spare time into our children and what's left over onto our spouse with nothing left for friends.

Perhaps we're deceived by email and Facebook and our mobile phones imagining we have hundreds of spectacular friendships and relationships when actually we have lots of well wishes and acquaintances but few flesh and blood friends.

Maybe it's because we're entranced by one way relationships expending emotional energy as we bond with our favourite actor or sports star or strictly come dancing contestants.

It's not a personal illustration. It's just something I've observed in others. But whatever it is you have that real dependency it's on our screen. It's not a real relationship.

[ 22 : 10 ] friendship. All these things make friendship difficult. Perhaps they are harder to make and sustain in this day than in previous but the answer is not to expect friends to suddenly fall into our lap.

The way to have good friends is to be a good friend. You have to work at it. Look at verse 27. Whoever is slothful will not reap his grain but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

Now it's not specifically talking about friendship is it? But the principle is clear. Be diligent not slothful. If you want to eat be diligent work for it don't be slothful.

If you want friends be diligent not slothful. And that means being deliberate. It means being intentional. So look around you.

Get to know the people who are in your life at the moment. Don't imagine there's some sort of imaginary friend out there somewhere. Start with the people in front of you. The people you rub shoulders with already.

[ 23 : 22 ] Look there. Look around this room. Who do you respect? Who would you like to be more like? Or pursue friendship with them.

Start to invest in those here in the church. If you're not yet a member become a member. Come next Sunday for that lunch hear more about what membership is about here in the church.

And by doing that you are demonstrating to everyone that I'm committing. I'm investing in this church and in its people. And that commitment you make will invite others to reciprocate won't it? If somebody remains on the fringe of church life for years and years and years well I'm going to invest in a friendship with someone who is committed. Who is going to stick around and invest in the church?

Are you regular and committed to your growth group? Are you in a growth group? If you're not then you're missing a superb avenue of building good friendships as you meet week by week studying the word.

[ 24 : 26 ] Friendship is not the key purpose of growth groups but it's a great thing that goes along with it. It's a great avenue to pursue and foster friendship. So get to know people.

Be interested in them. Ask thoughtful questions. Ask difficult questions. My wife's been on at me for a decade to be better at asking questions because that's how you get to know people.

She's good at it. Have a chat with her. But look look for people look for genuine people. Those who are prepared to say hard things.

Proverbs 27 verse 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse the kisses of an enemy. So beware those who kiss you a lot.

You want someone who's going to be able to tell you hard truths. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. So find people like that. People who are prepared to say the difficult thing.

[ 25 : 33 ] And as well as that be open yourself. Be willing to be known. That's the only way you're going to establish trust and build real friendships. And that building of trust takes time doesn't it?

It's not going to happen overnight. It takes time. And we live don't we in the internet age where trust is low. And despite being more connected than ever friendships I don't think are any deeper.

I've got over 700 friends on Facebook. But I really know and would call friends a tiny tiny proportion of that number. Real friends I can count on two hands.

Real friends close friends. Trust is not built on Facebook or Instagram or whatever it might be. Trust is built face to face and it needs to be a deliberate thing.

We do need to work hard to build good friendships. It requires deliberate effort. We can't just expect friends to fall into our laps. We first need to be deliberate to offer friendship to others.

[ 26 : 44 ] And by being good friends ourselves we'll find that friendship will start to develop. And that requires wisdom doesn't it? It requires wisdom to be a good friend.

Ask the Lord to give you wisdom in that regard. And heed the warning of one of my favourite Proverbs chapter 27 verse 14 Whoever blesses his neighbour with a loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing.

So don't call me before half nine in the morning. So that's wisdom. It requires wisdom to be a good friend and don't be calling me in the morning with a loud voice.

So it's going to take time. Be deliberate. You can't expect to build friendships in another way.

So be deliberate. Secondly, second key thing this morning, be discerning. Be discerning because friendships are not neutral. Look again at our verse 26 there.

[ 27 : 54 ] One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbour but the way of the wicked leads them astray. Two sorts of people in view here. Two very different paths.

The way of the righteous, the way of the wicked which leads someone being astray. There's no middle way, is there? There's no sort of neutral option. Friendships are not neutral.

They will not leave you unchanged. They will either pull you in a direction of wisdom and righteousness or they will drag you down towards wickedness and foolishness.

As I've mentioned already, our verse here can be translated as it is in the footnotes, the righteous chooses or searches out his friends carefully. And that word chooses or searches out, it contains within it the image of careful, diligent examination in order to find out what is concealed.

So when you're thinking about friends, choose, search out, examine, look what's there, what's hiding, what's concealed. Take care, be discerning.

[ 29 : 15 ] Think about the care you take purchasing an inanimate object like a car or a new Hoover. How many hours of research do you undertake?

How much careful, diligent thought and examination do you undertake? Probably a fair bit. And that's for a thing, for an object. It's good to do that, you're spending money, be wise, but think about how much time you spend on that, on a tool that will hopefully serve you well for many years, but will in the end stop working and be scrapped.

I think we can be far more cavalier about our friendships, about our relationships, than we are about buying an object. You perhaps spend more time analysing the finance package for your car than you do thinking about what friendship you're going to invest in.

Thinking about your current friends. So think about, think about each friendship that you have. They will either help or they will hinder your relationship with the Lord.

Now I'm not saying for a moment, that you ought not to have friendships with those outside the community of faith. Of course not. But what we're talking about here are your closest friendships.

[ 30 : 36 ] The two or three or four or five people you would call your closest friends. What sorts of friends are they? Your very closest. It's good to have a range of friendships, that's unavoidable.

In fact, you need to be realistic about that. Not everyone can be exactly the same sort of friend to you. It takes wisdom to know who's a close friend and who's not. But our closest friendships should be with those who share our highest goals and help us to live up to them.

Each one of your closest friends is an influencer. Not in an Instagram sense of influencer, but all of us, all of us are influencers.

We perhaps don't feel like it, but we do influence our friends and our friends influence us. And so you need to discern what influence are my closest friends having on me.

They are having an influence. What is it? What sort of influence are they having? Is it good? Is it helpful and healthy or not? If you're in a relationship and not yet married, what influence is your boyfriend or girlfriend having on you?

[ 31 : 56 ] What's the direction of travel here? Is it towards godliness and growth and Christ-likeness, growth and generosity and service towards others? Or is it pulling me in an ever more exclusive relationship which doesn't really care about anyone else?

Is it pulling me into doing things I really know I ought not to do? If those around you in church really knew what was going on, what do you think they would say? If you fear what others might say or think, well it may just be an indication that this is a friendship or relationship that needs to be got out of.

Get away. Hear the warning of Proverbs 25 verse 19. Trusting a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips.

Don't trust a treacherous man. Don't be in a bad friendship or relationship. It will not help you in the time of trouble. You are going to be influenced by someone.

That's the reality. So the question is who are going to be your greatest influencers? Now that's a sort of negative aspect of it.

[ 33 : 18 ] More positively, it must make us think about the influence that we have on others. If you're a mature Christian here this morning, you do have a responsibility to influence those around you for good.

Your friends, those here in the church, you have great power and influence over others. Use it well. Use it in good and healthy ways.

It's a wonderful opportunity to help other people, isn't it? I think about my own story and the great influence two men, ten years older than me, had on me. Now they probably had no idea at all at the time of the influence they had, but the influence was huge just by going about their daily Christian lives.

So think about the influence you have. Use it well. You are an influencer. C.S. Lewis put it this way, friendship can be a school of virtue, but also a school of vice.

It makes good men better and bad men worse. So be discerning. Are your friendships part of a school of virtue or vice?

[ 34 : 36 ] Well, that's the negative but necessary warning. more positively, here's our final point. Thirdly, pursue the diligence. Pursue the diligence because friendships need to be prioritized.

You need to think about who are going to be your closest friends. You need to think about who you're going to pursue as a potential future wife or husband. You need to decide, you need to prioritize.

Out of all the people I know, who am I really going to pursue for friendship? Out of all the people I'm in contact with, which of the relationships I'm really going to invest in?

You've got to make a decision. And the clear message of the book of Proverbs, the sort of person you ought to seek out and pursue for friendship is one who is diligent. Look at verse 27 again.

Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth. The contrast between the slothful and the diligent is stark, isn't it?

[ 35 : 45 ] The slothful, it seems here, has all that he needs. He has his game, but he's too lazy to roast it. The diligent, however, enjoys the fruits of his labors.

Now, it may not be the most exciting of criteria when it comes to thinking about friends, but pursuing a friendship with someone who's diligent, that is a wise thing to do. That sort of person, the diligent person, will prove to be a huge blessing to you in the long term.

So find somebody who takes responsibility. Proverbs is full of encouragement to people to take responsibility. So seek someone like that.

the wise man or woman will be a diligent man or woman. So think about the folk that you know. Think about all your different contacts.

Who is diligent? Who's diligent in their studies? Who is diligent with their finances? Who is diligent with their church commitments?

[ 36 : 54 ] Who is diligent with their work? Who's diligent disciplining their children? But also observe and work out who is the sluggard.

Who does the absolute minimum possible to get by in life? Who does the absolute minimum at university? Who does the absolute minimum in terms of work and life?

That is not someone, I suggest, who you ought to seek and prioritize as a potential best friend or potential future spouse. Don't think that by walking up you're going to suddenly transform their life. They're going to turn around from being a slugger to being diligent. That's not likely to happen. It may. Of course it may. In God's grace, lives can be turned around. People do change. But don't ignore, don't turn away from past performance.

It's a pretty good gauge of what lies ahead. So pursue the diligence. C.S. Lewis in a short essay called *The Inner Ring*, all about friendship, he boils it down to this at the end.

[ 38 : 05 ] His conclusion is this, work hard and pursue real friendships. Work hard and pursue real friendships.

Or to reverse it, be a good friend and pursue those who work hard. So those are the key things just from these few verses and proverbs.

Be deliberate, be discerning, pursue the diligence. And remember, friendship is powerful. It will influence you in one of two directions.

It's not neutral. No friendship is neutral. And that can be a wonderful thing. A friendship can build you up, can help you grow, become more mature as you follow Christ.

So enjoy the fruits of a good friendship. But the opposite can also be true. So we do need wisdom, don't we? We need wisdom. We need the Lord's help to be deliberate, to be discerning, to pursue the diligence.

[ 39 : 15 ] Well, let's close and pray together, shall we? And let me read. As we do that, some words from the Lord Jesus himself, from John's gospel. It's what the Lord Jesus says.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, will love one another. So father, we do ask that you would help us.

[ 40 : 27 ] Please help us to love one another. Help us to be good friends to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Help us to love each other, to be a good friend.

And above all, Lord, help us to find the true source, the only source of real friendship in this life.

That we would seek friendship with you through the Lord Jesus Christ, so that eternal life, the everlasting friendship can be ours.

So help us this morning, each one of us, as we think about our own friendships. Give us wisdom, for we need it, we ask.

In Jesus' name, amen. Mary Loue Dougherri Fridays verse Shh. Ha ha ha ha. Kings■■■, coeur i h