

Proverbs: how to choose friends wisely

discussion guide

based on Proverbs (see below) & John 15:13-15

All our Proverbs-related material is being posted at ww.stjamesbythepark.org/proverbs.

Intro: Describe an absent friend and what you value most about their friendship

Read through the list of Proverbs below, and look at some of the questions here.

Defining friendship:

1. Is 'friendship' a different kind of relationship to, say, family, work, marriage, or the relationship between 'brothers and sisters in Christ'? How?
2. Andy said that we live in a culture 'obsessed' with 'couple-ness' and saturated with issues around sexuality. Do you agree? And, if you do, what difficulties do you think it presents to single people?
3. Looking at the list of Proverbs, you can see that some warn of negative aspects of friendship, and some praise the positive aspects. Read through and list those positive aspects. Are our friendships just convenient or comfortable? Should we seek to live out those positive aspects more?

How do friendships happen?

4. Proverbs 12:26 warns us to be careful choosing friends. Did you choose your friends? Did they choose you? Did they 'just happen'? What drew you to them?
5. There is research which suggests that it is harder to make friends with someone from a very different culture. If you moved to a very different culture, what things might you need to bear in mind when you make friends there? (Or, if you have moved to the UK, what have you found hard about 'friendship' in an English setting?)
6. Can you have too many friends?

'Managing' friendships:

7. Most of us have been 'let down' by friends, or disappointed by them - how should we respond? What qualities do we need to ensure such a friendship thrives?
8. Given the warning in Proverbs 12:26, If you were in a friendship that you thought was harming you, who might you turn to?
9. How easy do you find it to speak hard truths to a friend?

Christians and friends:

10. Several verses in Proverbs suggest it is easy to value our friendships by how wealthy, generous, or notable they are! Do you think this sometimes affects your friendship? Can you think of, or remember, an example of a friendship or an act of friendship that crossed boundaries of wealth and status?
11. Can you be good friends with someone who is not a Christian?
12. 'A day without a friend is like a pot without a single drop of honey left inside.' (Winnie the Pooh!) Almost everyone, everywhere, values good friendships - even children playing with teddy-bears! Is that an opportunity for us to reach those who do not know the Lord Jesus as their friend - and saviour?

Finally:

Do you have other questions about friendship, or the talk on Sunday?

Don't close without thanking and praising God for the gift of friendship, and for Christ's humility in being our friends.

Below are Proverbs mentioned on 22 October, all taken from the NIV Bible.

Note that some other versions have many more references to 'friend' in Proverbs, usually because they translate 'companion' or 'neighbour' as friend. Note as well that some nuances that work in Hebrew society and Palestine in the 1st century are hard to translate into English, and Western culture.

Proverbs 12:26

The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 14:20

The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.

Proverbs 16:28

A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

Proverbs 17:9

Whoever would foster love covers over an offence, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 18:24

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 19:4

Wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor person deserts them.

Proverbs 19:6

Many curry favour with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of one who gives gifts.

Proverbs 19:7

The poor are shunned by all their relatives— how much more do their friends avoid them! Though the poor pursue them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

Proverbs 22:11

One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend.

Proverbs 22:24

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.

Proverbs 27:6

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Proverbs 27:9

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.

Proverbs 27:10

Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family, and do not go to your relative's house when disaster strikes you— better a neighbour nearby than a relative far away.