

## *A True Friend*

#5 in Series – *Proverbs: Wisdom for the Ages and Now*

What makes a true friend? I'm afraid that many in this current culture feel that if they have a lot of friends, or followers on their favorite social media platform – then they have *friends*!

I was curious who may have the “most friends” in social media, so I asked Google...

Nate Garner is a 21 year-old vlogger in Hollywood, CA, who lives alone, with his dog in an apartment – and has 2.5 million followers on Instagram. The Post wrote an article on him where they raised the question – what's missing? The answer – people.

Nate Garner said – “Social media ... has [made] me become a loner [in the real world]”. He says that his seven years of online fame have never mirrored popularity in his offline life, and tweeted in March that he's lost “so many friends” along the way.

President Trump has 64.8 million followers to his Twitter account. I doubt that you could call them all friends... If you are to believe the mainstream news media – he has even have more enemies...

So I ask the question again: What makes a true friend?

Proverbs has a lot to say about friendship – Depending on which translation you check – there are as many as 19 times that the term “friend” is found in this book. Consider just a few of those references:

Pro. 12:26 (NKJV) “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Pro. 17:17 (NASB) “A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.”

Pro. 22:11 (NASB) “He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.”

Pro. 27:6 (NASB) “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

Pro. 27:9 (NASB) “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend.”

Pro. 27:10a (NASB) “Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend...”

Pro. 27:17 (NKJV) “As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

While perusing what the book has to reveal about this subject, I was arrested by what will be our focal passage today:

Pro. 18:24 (NASB) “A man of too many friends comes to ruin (*Lit be broken in pieces*), But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Let’s think through this verse just as it is given...

First, consider the appeal of –

## **1. A Friend to Be**

Pro. 18:24a (NASB) “A man of too many friends comes to ruin (*Lit be broken in pieces*)...”

When you read different English translations of this verse, you will discover that the first part of this will read differently... The reason is – there is some question about which Hebrew manuscript reflects the original meaning of the text. Most scholars agree that how we find it in our text today is the most reliable... However, I still like how the NKJV translates **Proverbs 18:24a** – “A man who has friends must himself be friendly...”

Either way, these are words of wisdom to be followed in how we go about developing friendships with others.

One translation offers a word of warning to avoid the shallowness of superficial friendships that is built upon mere popularity...

The other translation offers a word of encouragement to be proactive in establishing friendly relationships in your life.

“George Eliot” was the pen name of Mary Ann Evans – a 19<sup>th</sup> century English novelist and poet... I read a very interesting description of hers concerning friendship published under her pen name:

“Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.”

Who doesn't need a friend like that?... Who should become a friend like that?...

Now if the message stopped there ... it would not only be short – it could be depressing... Why? Because it would be little more than another guilt-ridden exhortation to go out there and “try harder” at doing life... It would be only a “pep-talk” about how you should do relationships with others...

And there is really nothing wrong with those practical messages that encourage us to “do better” – but if that is all it is – then you will leave here only with guilt that there is something I must DO to make life better...

I believe, however, that there is a deeper appeal in this passage that is truly life-giving and will be liberating in your and my relationships!

It's found in the second part of the verse, and we will think through this under the heading –

## **2. A Friend to Have**

Pro. 18:24b “... there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

There is something we need to acknowledge – before we will see the value of a relationship with a Friend – and that is –

### **➤ We were designed for relationship**

When God created mankind – He created us in His image... One of the things that He did in making us like Him is to give us a desire for relationships.

God is a relational being and He placed that same attribute in us. We see Relationship in the Trinity – we see relationship between God and Adam... As we clearly see that we were created for relationship when you consider why God created Eve...

Genesis 2:18 “And the Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

We are designed by God to have relationships – and friends are one of the relationships that He intended for us to have.

On April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln and his wife were attending a performance in the Ford Theater in Washington, D.C... On that night, John Wilkes Booth approached the president from behind and shot him... The president died the following day... I read that there was found, folded in the President’s pocket a newspaper clipping that contained a rather positive article about him. When examined, it was noted that the president had underlined several of the positive comments made about him in the article. It seemed apparent that Lincoln had carried this article on his person for some time and had opened it several times... It was quite worn... This very clipping is kept today in the National Archives, managed by the Library of Congress. It is still among the effects he had on his person the night he was shot.

The question comes to mind – why would he do that?... Why would Lincoln have carried such a newspaper article around?...

Well – we need to remember a few facts... Abraham Lincoln was elected to the office of the presidency with just under 40% of the popular vote... Which was a smaller percentage margin than what Presidents John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton (both terms), George W. Bush and Donald Trump earned in their elections – all of whom were elected – during my lifetime – with less than 50% of the popular vote...

What does that tell us... President Lincoln was not a very popular president. In fact, we all know it was a very tumultuous time in our nation throughout his term. Not long after his inauguration, President Lincoln was tasked with the responsibility of trying to hold this union together through a civil war... which ended less than a week before his assassination...

Why tell this story?...

President Lincoln had many enemies and he needed some friends... You may have thought that this man – who became one of the most respected and loved of all our presidents – and was perhaps the most vital for what America has become since his time – would not have had a problem getting encouragement... Can you see Abraham Lincoln pulling out this little article and glancing at it from time to time to gain encouragement?

Not only unpopular presidents – but we all need a friend.

Our focal passage states that “**There is a friend...**”

“**There is a friend...**” This points to –

### ➤ **The Reality of this Friend**

Listen friend ... there IS a Friend... There IS a Friend Who goes beyond even the closeness of any biological relationship... There is Only One Person Who fits this profile and His name is Jesus!

### ➤ **The Availability of this Friend**

There IS a Friend Who is available to all those who need a friend...

### ➤ **The Attributes of the Friend**

- **He is a sympathetic friend.**

Heb. 4:15 (NASB) “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

Our text says; “**there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.**”

Brotherhood can be one of the highest forms of earthy friendship... Brothers have a close relationship with each other... They have similar experiences... They played together... They fought together... They cried together... There have been many cases where brothers have given much for each other.

Brothers have died for one another... Brothers have given organs to one another... Brothers have taken the hit for one another... Brothers have gone

to jail for one another... Brothers have rescued one another from dangerous situations...

Yet Jesus – is the Friend Who sticks closer than a brother... He knows you better than any brother does... He loves you more than any brother could!... Jesus is a sympathetic Friend.

○ **He is a committed friend.**

Heb. 13:5b-6 (NASB)

<sup>5</sup>“... for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,” <sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”

Several years ago, a British publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the many answers received were the following:

- “One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is unbreakable.”
- “One who understands our silence.”
- “A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.”

The winning definition read:

“A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.”

(Bits and Pieces, July, 1991)

Pro. 18:24 (NASB) “A man of too many friends comes to ruin (Lit *be broken in pieces*), But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

The first part of this verse, that we will consider in greater detail in a moment, tells us that sometimes friends will disappoint us... In talking with a friend, just this week, I couldn't help but think of this verse and actually laughed out loud when he made the comment – “*Everybody disappoints everybody at some point*”... I think he's right...

How many Christians have left their church because they became disappointed with someone – which is something that happens a lot when the one they become disappointed in is the pastor...

(The reality is – I get disappointed with myself – but I can't leave ... I'm stuck with me...)

Listen – people are mere mortals who are marred by sin. They are finite! But there is One Who is Infinite!... There is a Friend who won't leave you!... Even when you don't know He's there – He's there!... Even when you can't sense His presence – He's there!... Even when you are experiencing some trial that is far bigger than you – He's there!... And you can trust Him!

Jesus is a committed friend...

- **He is a strong friend.**

Proverbs 18:10 (NASB) “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous run into it, and is safe.”

Psalms 28:7a (NASB) “The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped...”

- **He is a close friend.**

Pro. 18:24b (NASB) “... there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother... He's more than a brother!

Listen – this is so good – I borrowed it:

“A brother can cry with you – Jesus can wipe away all your tears.

A brother can pray with you – Jesus can answer your prayer.

A brother can share your storm – Jesus can calm your storms.

A brother can die for you – Jesus rose for you.

A brother can be your lawyer – Jesus can set you free.

A brother can carry your body to a dark grave – Jesus can carry your soul to Bright Glory.

A brother can stand by you – Jesus can stand for you.”

He is a close Friend!

## ➤ The Necessity of this Friend

I want to speak in the most practical terms... You need this Friend!

How does He become your friend?... Just come to Him!

John 6:37 (NASB) “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”

Make no mistake, you and I are not accepted into His friendship because we are good but because of Who He is – and what He has done!

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We will find acceptance into this friendship – when we turn to Him in faith... When we trust Him – He receives us.

John 1:12 (NASB) “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

What happens when we enter into friendship with Jesus?... He changes us!

2 Cor. 5:17 (NKJV) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

And on the most practical level – a “new you” – leads to “new improved” relationships – even with those who are already your friends...

## Questions to consider in Community Group:

- What is a friend?
- What passage in Proverbs about friendship challenges you the most?
- Why is it hard, at times, to be a friend?
- The message centered on the truth that Jesus is the Friend you need. What characteristics or attributes about Jesus most appeal to this truth?
- What does it look like to be a friend with Jesus? How easy is it for you to see Jesus as a friend? What does it look like to be a friend to Him?
- Why do people fail to see Jesus as a friend? How can we help others see that Jesus is the Friend they need?