# Faithful Wounds of Truth: Biblical Friendship

## Introduction: The Epidemic of Loneliness

The thing that we're going to look at today, the theme that we see in the book of Proverbs, is going to be friendship. What does friendship look like? Not just companionship, but what does deep biblical and spiritual friendship look like in our present day as it's revealed here to us in the scriptures? Now, it would be almost cliche for me to start out talking about a passage like this or a message like this talking about the epidemic of loneliness that we see in our present society. So, I just want to give you three quick anecdotes.

There are now apps that you can download on your phone where you can rent a friend by the hour. Millions of people in a recent poll recently said that their most emotionally supportive relationship is with an AI chatbot. Something that will never disagree with you nor show up at your door. I find myself actually arguing with them more than having them support me.
Third one, the average American man reports having fewer close friends than any time since the study was ever conducted. And when researchers asked why, the number one answer that men gave was, "I just don't know how to have deep friends."

Now, our prayer for this church is that we grow into a place where we can live into deep community together, where we don't just fellowship and have companionship, but we live in deep and real community together. And a big part of what that means is understanding what true friendship means in the scriptures in the way that God invites us into it.

## Defining True Friendship: The Lover of Souls

To start out with, what is a deep friend? What is a real friend? I keep using that word real friend. What does that look like? And we're going to hop around this evening in the Proverbs. Usually in our messages, we sit with one passage, but in the Proverbs series, we're sort of streaming together different themes that we find in the book of Proverbs. So, if you'd like to follow along, I'll jump around to different verses, but I'll read them for you as well.

Proverbs 18:24 gives us a great idea of what a friend looks like. It says this: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." And the word friend there actually means the one who loves. And most commentators would say the weight is more like the one who loves your soul, or the lover of souls. So a man of many companions may come to ruin, but the one who loves the soul of the other who sticks closer than a brother. There is this contrast in this verse here between companions—a person with many companions or friends—and a deep friend. And if we're honest with ourselves as we look about our present-day relationships, most of them look more like companionship than this deep friendship that he's talking about here: the lover of souls.

## The Buckets of Companionship

Historically, these kinds of relationships, these friendships, these companionships usually fall into one of two buckets. Thomas Aquinas called them friendship of utility. These are friends that you meet through work, friends that you hang out with because you have a shared need that you support each other in. Maybe these are parents at the same school that you send your kids to and so you might trade drop off and pickup, or parents of the same sports team, or people that you find yourself naturally in line with in your life because you work together with them or they're in some way useful to you and you're useful to them. These are called friends of utility. And the second big category is friendships of pleasure. These are friendships where you share an interest. You all love to play pickleball, or go out and play soccer, or go skiing together, or go camping in Wyoming together, or study Syriac together and argue about different declensions and what they mean. Those who know, they know. Those are my kind of friends.

Now, companionship is not bad. These kinds of friends are not bad. Friends of utility, friends of pleasure—both of these can be good. And in fact, both of these can be doorways into deep friendships. Studies show that if you have lots of companions, you actually live longer in life. And so, companions can be good. But there's always a limitation with this kind of friend. In companionship of utility or pleasure, two people are essentially facing each other and saying, "What can you do for me? How can you enhance my experience in life? What can I get from you?"

Oftentimes when you hear podcasts or conversations about community or fellowship, they're often oriented at its core about how I can enhance my own life? How can I hack my life to have more friends and community so that I feel better about myself? How can I put people around me so that they validate me and make me feel better about myself?

## The Mark of a True Friend: Transformation

Now again, companions are not bad or wrong. Don't simply write them all off. But the Proverbs again speak to us about a true friend, the one who truly loves your soul. I love CS Lewis here; he has a beautiful work in *The Four Loves*, long essays, long conversations about friendships. But one of his greatest gifts is he distills the work of the church fathers into very simple statements that we can understand.

He says this: "True friends stand side by side together absorbed in a common goal." And I'll just insert here: the goal that we can be absorbed in is growth towards the upward call of God in Christ, the transformation of our souls to be more like who Jesus is. So that's what it means to be a true friend: to love the soul of another to the degree that you stand side by side together with them and you walk forward together in life for the mutual transformation of your souls. Or the way others might have put it is true friends are people that grow in godly virtue, the virtues of Christ, together. That's what a friend is. That's what a true and deep real friend is: the lover of your soul.

## Three Marks of True Friends

What does that look like in our lives? What do real friends do? How do those land in our lives in a real way? I want to give you three marks of true friends that we find here in the book of Proverbs.

**1. A True Friend Endures**

The first one is, "A true friend endures." Proverbs 17:17 says this: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Unlike companions that come and go, a friend is constant. They stay when you're easy to be around. They stay when you're having a bad day. And they even stay when you're having a really tough season and you're hard to love. A true friend endures. A true friend is constant. I heard one pastor say that you find out who your true friends are—or you find out when your true friends are—when you truly cost them something and they still come back the next day. So think about the people that you've cost something and have still showed up. These are what true friends look like. A true friend is a friend throughout all adversity.

**2. A True Friend Wills Your Best (The Kind Wound)**

Secondly, a true friend is a friend that wills your best even when it's uncomfortable. Proverbs chapter 27, verses 5 and 6: "The wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Validating and flattery are always easier ways to interact with your friends than to have a true hard word that you say to them. But a true friend wants your truest good. And sometimes that means saying hard words to your friend. I've grown immensely in this because of kind wounds from a friend. I love how it puts that together: "kind wounds." The desire of the wound is not to wound or to feel self-righteous, but it's actually to lift the other person up.

I remember a couple years ago a friend sitting down with me and saying, "Jesse, I love that you're so future oriented and strategic and you're always talking about what could be, but I feel like you so often miss what is right in front of you right here and right now." It was a wound. It was a brave wound. But it was a loving wound and it helped me and it formed me, and I'm thankful for that friend that would sit with me and say that to me. So a true friend wounds lovingly to help you walk towards Christ and to be transformed into his image.

**3. A True Friend Forms You**

Last one, a third one, a true friend forms you. Proverbs chapter 27, verse 17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." This happens again when two people are walking together with each other, spurring one another on, growing with each other towards godly virtue together of holiness and peace and joy. And their mutual goal is the transformation of each other's soul.

But notice the metaphor here. Iron sharpening iron is never a gentle process. You can't sharpen iron against a pillow. Iron sharpens iron because in some way there's friction that emerges and sometimes there are even sparks that come out. But again, a true friend endures and a true friend is willing to stay in and to help shape the other person. The sharpening happens through confessing together, through grieving together, through celebrating together, through sharing

together, through sometimes pushing back on each other together. Just like iron sharpening iron, a true friend helps to shape the other person's soul. The end result of that is it brings the shape of our souls to be more and more like the very person of Jesus Christ.

## The Perfect Friend: Jesus Christ

Now, here's the problem with everything I just covered. A true friend is a person that truly loves your soul. A true friend is willing to wound in kindness. A true friend is with you no matter what. And a true friend sharpens you to reveal what is underneath the surface. Here's the hard reality: we will never find the perfect friend in this life. And you will never be the perfect friend to someone else in this life. We all drift. We all like to move towards comfort. We all like to avoid hard conversations sometimes because it's just easier to live. We all become self-oriented.

Which brings us back to this old song that some of us might know: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Jesus is the true lover of our souls. The one that knew our souls from before we were born and came into being. Jesus loved our souls. The one that came to die for us and draws us to himself. He loves our souls more than we can ever know. Jesus is the only true lover of our souls and desires to save us and to transform us. Jesus is the one who endures when we're hard to love. I am hard to love a lot of the time. Jesus endures when we are costly, even to the point of the cross. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus endures. He is constant. Even when we cost everything, he loves us.

Jesus wounds in perfect love for our good. As best as we try, we always have sin and internal motivations. We always have specks and planks in our eye. We're not the perfect surgeon in wounding our friends. But Jesus is the perfect surgeon that only wounds for our good. And he calls out what deforms us and how we turn away from him. Jesus calls us out of darkness into light and into life. He perfectly loves us and he's willing to wound us at times only for a season. Lastly, Jesus sharpens us to reveal what he's placed within us by the glory of the Holy Spirit so that we would reveal him to the world.

## Four Practical Steps

We know that the love of Jesus frees us to be the friend that it's hard for us to be on our own because when we are fully loved by him, we can go and love others without needing them to be the friend that we need, because we have the friend that is always with us in Jesus Christ. Well, since this is a wisdom message, I want to end here with four quick ideas for you. Four quick ways, practical steps that you can take and walk this out in your own lives that come from this passage.

**1. Conduct a Kind Audit**
First, do a kind audit of your own relationships. A kind one. Ask honestly, is my relational life a wide crowd of companions that are facing me? Or is anybody standing together with me facing Christ? Now, our circles set our norms. If you're in a circle that has certain behaviors or certain expectations for life, that sets your baseline norms and expectations. Who you spend your time

with very much changes your outlook on life. Do a kind audit. Are my friends companions or do I have deep friends?

**2. Trade Quantity for Depth**
Secondly, trade quantity for depth. Please don't misunderstand me; I'm not asking you to just cut out all relationships in your life. We should very much serve everyone that we can. We should love everyone we can. We should desire to be around people that will be our companions all that we can. But you cannot be a Proverbs 18:24 friend to 50 different people. It's just impossible. We don't have that capacity. So even Jesus had the outer group of disciples; he had the 12 and then he had the three. And one of the three always loves to say, "I am the one who Jesus loved." I just love that. But consider how you can go deep with what your capacity can handle. Again, love everybody. Be friendly. Be a companion to everyone. But trade quantity for depth.

**3. Search Like It Matters**
Number three, search like it matters. Search for this friend. There's a different proverb I didn't put on for length, but it says, "A deep love, who can find?" So this idea of the proverb is that you search for this deep kind of love. So stop waiting for it to spontaneously show up in your life, but embrace this idea of intentionally pursuing this deep kind of friendship. Companions can be a doorway to this. The folks that you like to hang out with can be a doorway. But sometimes the people that are easy to be around are not actually the ones that it's easy to go deep together with. So again, be intentional. Pursue this deep and real friendship. Look for this virtue of friendship in those that you come in contact with.

**4. Be the Friend Others Need**
And lastly, don't wait to find somebody, but be the friend that the Proverbs is talking about to others. Don't just audit those around you, but audit yourself first. This week, make one concrete move. Confess your sins to someone. Show up to someone's life when it costs you something. Be somebody who speaks truth and joy and encouragement into someone's life. Be this friend for others. And watch how that cultivates the opportunity to develop deep friendship together with them.

## Conclusion and Prayer

There's a true and deep friend that we have in our lives that all of us have access to as we come to the table and as we pray, as we walk together with Christ: it is Jesus Christ. As we are transformed into this good kind of friend that the Proverbs talks about, we are transformed into the very nature of Christ as we live into the good and the true and the beautiful in this world. So let us follow his wisdom as we leave here today. Let us be people that seek and pursue good and real friendships.

Let me pray for us. Lord, I ask that you would bless us not just with the knowledge of what a good and deep friend looks like, but that you would empower us by the Holy Spirit to be the kind of friend that you are to us in the life of others. I pray especially also, Lord, for those in this room that are lonely, that feel like they don't have this friend. Visit them by your spirit. Provide them

your comfort. Lord, in your grace, would you provide us all these deep and real friendships so that we can grow in the glory of Christ and your virtue together. We pray all of this in your great and holy name. Amen.