

## Friends: Good, Bad and Otherwise

### Proverbs 17:17; 18:24

It was soul legend Bill Withers, who in 1972 hit the number one pop chart with this song (“Lean On Me.”)

Sometimes in our lives  
We all have pain  
We all have sorrow  
But if we are wise  
We know that there's always tomorrow

Lean on me, when you're not strong  
And I'll be your friend  
I'll help you carry on  
For it won't be long  
'Til I'm gonna need  
Somebody to lean on

You just call on me brother, when you need a hand  
We all need somebody to lean on  
I just might have a problem that you'd understand  
We all need somebody to lean on

Please swallow your pride  
If I have things you need to borrow  
For no one can fill those of your needs  
That you won't let show  
(Chorus)

If there is a load you have to bear  
That you can't carry  
I'm right up the road  
I'll share your load  
If you just call me  
(Chorus)  
Call me (if you need a friend)  
Call me (call me)  
Call me (if you need a friend)  
Call me (if you ever need a friend)  
Call me (call me)  
Call me  
Call me (if you need A friend)  
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In 1967 the Beatles sang about how friends can help one another through spurned love “With a Little Help From My Friends.”

In 1971 the number 1 hit song was recorded by James Taylor who sang “You’ve Got a Friend.”

The theme song for the hit show *Golden Girls* was originally recorded by pop star Andrew Gold in 1978. The title of the track was “Thank You for Being a Friend.”

In the 1989 movie *Beaches*, Bette Middler sang a song as a eulogy to a friend. That same year she won a Grammy award for her album which featured the song “Wind Beneath My Wings.”

If you watched the sitcom *Friends* you may remember their theme song recorded by the Rembrandts who sang “I’ll be There for You.”

Grouplove’s song “Tongue Tied” was the #1 song used at graduations across America in 2012.

Rihanna sang of the enduring power of friendship in her 2007 song “Umbrella.”

This morning our two verses among many speak about friends.

### Proverbs 17:17 and 18:24

We’ll see the following about friends:

- The identity of friends
- The influence of friends
- The inappropriateness of friends
- The ingredients of friends
- The irresistible friend

## I. THE IDENTITY OF FRIENDS

God made us to be relational. Genesis 3 speaks about how after God created man and woman and place them in the garden He met with them regularly there to just commune with them. He

made Adam and Eve to be relational so that they would procreate and people the world with others who would be relational with God and with each other.

In 1967 Paul Simon wrote these penetrating words:  
I've built walls,  
a fortress deep and mighty,  
that none may penetrate.  
I have no need of friendship;  
friendship causes pain.

We need friends! They are like a soothing balm on a wound. They are like a cold drink after a long run. They are like a flower blossoming in the middle of the desert.

Defining friends or friendship is as difficult as trying to nail Jello to a wall or carry water on a butter knife. We each have our own ideas about what makes a friend. If we were to go around the room and ask each to define it there would be differences of opinions but certainly some recurring themes. In a survey a number of people were asked to define the word friend. Here are some of their responses. Yours may be similar.

“Someone you can bare your soul to and not be afraid it will get around. Someone who will tell you when your slip is showing. Someone who shares loving concern and tactful truth. (31 yr old woman)

“One who knows you well and loves you anyway.” (66 yr old woman)

“A person who understands you, appreciates your views, loyal. A person who has quite a few common interest with you.” (55 yr old man)

“Someone who enjoys being around you, accepts you for who you are, and is faithful to you when the chips are down.” (24 yr old man)

“Someone who knows me intimately and is committed to my best under all circumstances regardless of the risks to our relationship.” (31 yr old man)

Webster's dictionary defines a friend as “a person whom one knows well and is fond of; an intimate associate; a close acquaintance; a person on the same side in a struggle; one who is not an enemy or foe; an ally; a supporter; helpful; reliable.”

That's a pretty good definition, but since we are looking at ancient wisdom for modern times from Biblical principles and how we can take the principles of Proverbs and apply them to our life in these times let me suggest a definition which focuses on some crucial ingredients of any Christian friendship. Jerry White in his book *Friends and Friendship* provides an excellent definition.

“A friend is a trusted confidant to whom I am mutually drawn as a companion and an ally, whose lover for me is not dependent on my performance, and whose influence draws me to God.”

Think about all the people you know or have known in your life. For some of you that's going to be a long list. Some of those people you probably haven't thought about for a long time. All those people will fall into one of four different categories. Some you would do anything for.

Others might be your neighbors you let borrow your lawn mower or for whom you watch their dog when they're on vacation.

Some you work with or shoot pool with and others are clerks at a store or the teller where you bank.

## A. Acquaintances

Author Rollo May suggests that most people will make between 500 and 2,500 acquaintances in a year. You meet them shopping or at work, if they visit church or at an office party. This is a transient relationship and you may only meet them once and may only know their name.

Now, I want you to please remember this very important piece of information. Every acquaintance is a divine encounter designed by God for some purpose. In such an occasion we ought to ask what the reason God had for bringing us together. This meeting was not by chance.

## B. Casual Friends

From those acquaintances you have made you may decide that some are worth pursuing a friendship with. For the casual friend we get to know a little more information about them. We may initiate a social gathering with them over dinner or a community event. We may also enjoy some level of common interests like gardening, cooking, sports or antique cars. It may be related to work or it may be some hobby we jointly share. They may be part of your social network on facebook or myspace. In conversations we share opinions and goals.

There are many individuals in this category yet, these friendships rarely satisfy our need for a deeper and more intimate relationship with whom we can share our more personal struggles. You can be in a crowd of casual friends and still feel lonely.

## C. Close Friends

These friends surface out of associations from the previous two. We meet someone and we want to have a closer relationship with them. There is something about them that connects us together. It just clicks. They may be co-workers with whom we have a close working relationship. They may be a neighbor that you have lived next to for many years. They may be fellow church members or part of the seniors club that you belong to. You tend to see them regularly in a variety of different settings. They may come over for a cup of coffee or invite you over for a barbeque. You may take your kids or grandkids to the park or spend the day at the zoo.

For kids they may be in your class or the person you share a locker with, eat lunch with or play on the same sports team or participate in band together.

Close friends may even be found in your own family among relatives.

Regardless of the distance or the age they have remained in a constant and close personal relationship.

Another type of close friend is the person we will call a mentor. This person makes a significant contribution to your life. They teach you, challenge you, correct you, counsel you in difficult times. While you appreciate those who are in this category, there is still one level of friend that goes deeper.

## D. Intimate (Best) Friends

### Proverb 17:17

From the group of close friends there are a few with whom you will naturally gravitate to. These are the few trusted individuals with whom you bear your soul in times of trouble or call when you need help. Again from Jerry White he writes “they meet us at our deepest need, and we enjoy and look forward to being with them above all others. These friendships have a lasting quality which develops over months and years.”

Our first President George Washington wrote “Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence. True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.”

It is from this group that we have an intimate relationship. We are honest with each other, reveal blind spots in character, commit to help develop godliness and are transparent. These relationships

don't grow up overnight. They are not weeds that are here today and gone tomorrow. They are mighty oaks. This friendship must be nurtured and cultivated so that its roots will down deep and have branches that spread out wide. Its depth of root is a strong anchor to provide stability in the fiercest storms of life and its branches fan out wide to provide protection from the scorching sun that would at times seek to dry up our soul from despair due to any number of difficult life events.

We all need someone like that. I would suggest that the wise Christian will choose this type of friend carefully. If you are a Christian, this best friend ought himself or herself to be a Christian as well and a mature and growing Christian at that. Out of the scores of friends we have identified it is important to choose such a trusted friend carefully because your friends will have an influence on you.

## II. THE INFLUENCE OF FRIENDS

We will often do with friends what we would not otherwise do on our own. Call it peer pressure or whatever you like, they will ride us to do something that we would have never considered. They can range from an innocent dare to something illegal or immoral.

Imagine with me you are out riding your bike on a hot summer day with your friends. They're the kids you hang out with at school, but it's summer now and you enjoy spending the lazy summer days away from books and lessons on math or science. Someone suggests you ride over to dead man's bluff so you peddle the half mile to the notorious hill that has claimed many a bike through wreckage. Billy is the new kid that joined your circle of friends during the previous school year. He's a little on the nerdy side but he's okay. Everyone has stopped at the top of the hill peering down over the steep trail to the bottom. The chant rises for Billy to show his stuff

by riding down dead man's bluff. He doesn't want to but influential words like "chicken" and "sissy" and "you can't be in our group of friends anymore if you don't" boil inside him. Wanting so desperately to be part of the group he gulps down his fear and bursts over the edge.

Friends can influence us in so many ways.

**Proverbs 12:26 "A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."**

**Proverbs 13:20 "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."**

According to Psalm 1 the wise person avoids associations that will lead astray.

**Why does he grow wise? Why is he righteous?** It is because of the influence of the friends he has chosen who are themselves righteous and wise. The writer of Hebrews states that we influence others to love and good works and to get together regularly for worship. **(10:24-25)**

I would suggest to you that you look around and take note of folks who aren't here and call them this week and tell them they were missed. Check up on them to make sure they are okay. Friends care about each other.

Friends will either make us better or worse people.

**1. They influence us for evil.**

**Proverbs 1:10-19**

**Proverbs 22:24-25 "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."**

**Proverbs 24:1** tells us not to desire the company of wicked men.

**Proverbs 28:7** suggests that by keeping the company of wicked people you become a disgrace to your father. Friends can influence us to do evil.

## 2. They influence us for good.

**Proverbs 27:17** “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Through the intimate relationship of best friends each is able to develop godly character in the other. We mold and shape each other. We challenge to grow spiritually and support and encourage the use and development of spiritual gifts.

Elijah and Elisha

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Barnabas and Paul

Paul and Silas

Paul and Timothy

**With whom today are you sharpening or being sharpened?** Look around and consider that person or persons who need to have a sharp edge OR with whom you can develop a sharp edge and set out to sharpen each other. If you are married your first best friend ought to be your spouse.

We have identified friends.

We have seen the influence of friends.

Consider the inappropriateness of friends.

## III. THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF FRIENDS

These aren't friends that want you to do evil. It's stuff that true friends wouldn't do.

### A. They Can Be Thoughtless

**Proverbs 26:18-19** “Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, ‘I was only joking!’”

Their words or actions can cut as quickly or be as destructive as someone aimlessly shooting arrows in

the air. Arrows lit on fire when shot randomly can set a whole field on fire. They say things and excuse them away like they were only joking and didn't mean it.

### B. They Can Be Annoying

**Proverbs 25:16-17** “If you find honey, eat just enough – too much of it, and you will vomit. Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house – too much of you, and he will hate you.”

The word seldom literally means “make precious” or “make valuable.” Don't become a nuisance by always being in your neighbor's house. She may grow irritated and despise hearing your voice or seeing you in the yard. You may try to avoid the neighbor because they can be annoying.

### C. They Can Be Inconsiderate

**Proverbs 27:14** “If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.”

Too early is inconsiderate and insensitive. **One author noted that “the wrong time for the right action causes it to be received as a curse.”**

### D. They Can Be Gossips

**Proverbs 17:9** “He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”

Gossip is the ugly two headed monster of envy and resentment. Gossip seeks to destroy the reputation of another by spreading rumors. Its intent is always harmful.

If you want to be a friend who is faithful and trustworthy these inappropriate behaviors should not be part of your character.

With that, we need to see the ingredients of friends.



## IV. THE INGREDIENTS OF FRIENDS

Here is our verse:

**Proverbs 17:17 “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”**

Robert Louis Stevenson said that “a friend is a gift we give ourselves.”

They are valuable and when we find a trustworthy friend it is rare and to be well cared for.

Perhaps the best illustration of such deep friendship is found between David and Jonathan. Our verse stresses that true friends love each other all the time. Through thick and thin, no matter what is going on they stick with each other. When David was being hounded by Saul, Jonathan stuck right beside him. He knew David was innocent of any wrong doing and in spite of the fact that David was the heir apparent to the throne having been ordained by God and anointed by Samuel for the position, Jonathan held no bitterness or resentment toward David. The summation of their deep friendship is found in **I Samuel 20:42 “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord saying, ‘The Lord is witness between you and me.’”**

This was an oath they took with each other with God as their witness. It was sacred.

When our verse speaks of adversity, it refers to distress or trouble. It describes personal anguish that one encounters in adverse circumstances such as what David was experiencing.

Although we have much to say against the counsel that Job’s friends gave, that they were true friends who came at the time of severe distress for their friend is evident in Scripture.

**Job 2:11-13**

That is friendship at its core: willing to just sit in silence with you; willing to seek to comfort; willing to join you in your sorrow. They came, they cried, they comforted. And then they criticized, but that’s for another time.

I wonder if it had been around, would Job have been tempted to buy it? This fall designer Si Chan unveiled “the hug me jacket” – touted as a caressing jacket for the cold and lonely. He said that he made the coat to emphasize the desire to make people feel “warm and hugged.” He states further that his fall collection for men makes use of hands to “express love” and depart from loneliness between human beings. Oh, and it only costs \$1,270.

**Do you have such a friend, one who loves you and will be there for you when life seems to be shattered by difficulties? Do you have a Jonathan?**

Samuel Johnson offered this advice in the 1700’s and is still timely for us. “If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself alone. A man should keep his friendships in constant repair.”

Let me suggest eight building blocks of a great friendship. These are the essential ingredients required for intimate friendships to develop and exist.

### 1. A true friend is loyal

**Proverbs 19:4-7 “Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him. Many curry favor with a ruler; and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts. A poor man is shunned by all his relatives – how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.”**

That sounds a lot like the story of the prodigal son. He had quite an inheritance given to him and as

long as he had money he had friends, but as soon as it was gone, they abandoned him to his own misfortune.

The true friend is going to be loyal. It's a sad day when the friends you think you had won't pick up the phone or respond to your texting when they need some help through a tough time. Loyalty means supporting another in both prosperity and poverty. Just as our verse says he loves at all times, even in times of adversity.

Loyalty also means sticking up for your friend when someone else is gossiping about them or slandering them in front of others. Jonathan defended the honor of David before his father, King Saul. This friend is willing to lose other casual friends for the sake of defending their best friend.

## 2. A true friend shares deeply

This could be the ability to share our innermost thoughts, feelings and fears with fear of being judged. You are able to speak freely knowing that your true friend will listen carefully; speak when appropriate, accept and understand the other person.

**James 1:19 "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."**

That is the kind of person I want to have as a true friend with whom I can share deeply, knowing that they will keep those things confidential.

## 3. A true friend is fun to be with

True friends don't just sit around all day talking about the weightier matters of life like philosophy or religion or politics. They have fun together. They enjoy life together. Together they go shopping or hunting or bowling or to the ball game or boating. At times they are spontaneous. Part of the close camaraderie you have are mutual interests.

If your friend doesn't care to fish that much you don't suggest you do it every Saturday rain or shine.

My Mom developed some very close, best friends sitting around a quilting frame with ladies from the Mennonite church. As Mom and one friend became closer and opened up, she found that she grew up in Canada near Toronto in a little town called Markham. Every year Mom tried to go to New York to visit her family and because this friend's home was on the way they would travel together. Come to find out this friend grew up in a church that was founded in the 1700's by our ancestors and is still there today – Wideman Mennonite Church. The point being, have fun together.

## 4. A true friend is stimulating

We are to sharpen one another in practical as well as spiritual matters. Again in **Hebrews 10:24** we are to stimulate to love and good works and gathering together. Stimulation is to arouse or excite to action. Spur each other on to learn something new together. Do things that will challenge the mind to grow. Take a community class together, learn a foreign language together. Inspire and motivate the mind.

## 5. A true friend is encouraging

### I Thessalonians 5:14

In the New Testament there are three Greek words that are used that we translate as encourage. Two are verbs. One means to urge forward or persuade. The other means to give counsel or advice. The noun that is used is sometimes in reference with the Holy Spirit and means to call by the side or to come along side of. The Holy Spirit has been called our comforter. Especially from the writings of Paul we have been exhorted to encourage or comfort one another, to come alongside those who are hurting to encourage. **When does that occur? When do we**

**need encouragement?** We need it when the storms of life assault us.

We need encouragement when a loved one dies.

We need encouragement when we didn't do well on a test or didn't get into the class or school we wanted or lost the big game.

We need encouragement when our car breaks down.

We need encouragement when the doctor visit brought news we weren't expecting.

We need encouragement when we have had a horrible, no good, very bad day.

## 6. A true friend is self-sacrificing

Jesus said **“Greater love has no one that this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13**

Self-sacrificing may be giving up time to help someone complete a project. It may be energy or other resources we give to help them as well.

Self-sacrificing is a way to demonstrate a servant's heart as outlined for us in **Philippians 2:4 “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”**

## 7. A true friend is loving

This is the kind of unconditional agape love spoken of in **I Corinthians 13**. It's demonstrated in both words and actions. Scripture speaks of the deep love that Jonathan and David had for one another. It was a love that was committed to one another no matter what the cost to either. Jonathan was willing to give up the kingdom to David. Jonathan was willing to lay down his life for his friend David.

## 8. A true friend is spiritually challenging

Friends will either drive you to or from God. Your circle of true friends needs to come from those who themselves have a strong Christian life view. You need to be on the same page when it comes to godly living. We talked earlier about the influence friends have on us for good or bad.

**I Corinthians 15:33** is clear **“Do not be misled: ‘bad company corrupts good character.’”**

**As a friend do you encourage others to grow in their walk with Christ?**

All of these essential qualities take both time and effort. There may be a time when you have to say to a friend that you can no longer spend time together because their influence is destructive.

There is one more point I would like to make. It is the crucial point. It is foundational to friendship. I ask this question: **on what is your friendships built?**

The identity of friends

The influence of friends

The inappropriateness of friends

The ingredients of friends

The irresistible friend

## V. THE IRRESISTIBLE FRIEND

Now there can be someone that has an irresistible drawn because of their personality and hopefully their spiritual character, but I am of course speaking of Jesus Christ when I speak of the irresistible friend.

**Proverbs 18:24 “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”**

Solomon uses a play on words in the Hebrew. Two words sound very similar but have entirely different meanings. One means friend, the other means ruin, literally broken to pieces. That is the end result of the person who will not choose this friend, Jesus Christ who sticks closer than anyone else. He is the One who will never leave you or forsake you. He is the One who will always keep His promises to you. He is the One who loves you more deeply than anyone else and He is the One who willingly laid down His life for you.



And He calls us friends if we will do what He commands, that shows our commitment to Him as friend. **(John 15:13)**

When choosing friends we need to make sure that friendship is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Jerry White writes that “a relationship with God gives a new and deeper meaning to friendship. It provides Jesus Christ as our role model, and He gives us instructions on our relationships and on our motivation for friendship. Christians have a different basis than non-Christians for building friendships, because their role model is Jesus Christ and they have His resources to draw on. The first and most fundamental friendship of life is with Jesus Christ.”

He concludes by stating that “When a person’s foundational relationship with Jesus Christ is fulfilling and satisfying, his friendships with others will begin to fall into place.”

Who are your friends?

What are you looking for in friendships?

Are you helping each other grow in Christ?

Is He the foundation of your friendship?

With a friend like Jesus, you won’t ever need the hug me jacket.