

FRIENDSHIPS

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (17:17)

INTRODUCTION—“*A friend is a gift we give ourselves*” (Robert Louis Stevenson). Friends are valuable and precious, one of the greatest blessings a man has. Even family relationships, if not founded on deep caring and sharing (rather than just the accident of birth), cannot have the depth of quality that a real friendship has (18:24; 27:10c).

Superficial friends are easily gained and lost, but true friends are for a lifetime. Neither time nor miles can separate them (cf. 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:41-42).

I. REAL FRIENDSHIPS

- A. Not Superficial (19:4,6-7; 14:20). These are ‘fair-weather’ friends and are only loyal so long as we are able to hold them by that which attracts them to us (money, common interests, or other things **they** benefit from). A true friend is not a friend for what he can **get** out of it, but what he can **give** into it.
- B. Reciprocal (18:24). Friendships cannot be one-sided.
- C. Proven in Adversity (17:17; 18:24). He comes through for you, not because you beg him to, but because you need him to (27:10b—which may be advising us not to think we deserve help in times of adversity, with a ‘you owe me’ attitude. A real friend will come through not because it is demanded of him, but because he loves).
- D. Refine us (27:5-6,17). Real friends care enough to correct us, and help us grow rather than remain silent about our faults. Don’t respond ‘*I thought you were my friend*’ when receiving constructive criticism—that is exactly the reason why a real friend gives it.
 - 1. We Must Appreciate It (28:23). A man’s character does not develop in a cocoon, but through constant interaction with others (27:17).
- E. Forgive and Forget (17:9).
- F. Are Worth Keeping (27:10). No matter what the cost.

II. NURTURING FRIENDSHIPS

- A. Know When a Joke is Not a Joke (26:18-19). Tackiness and thoughtlessness can be painful to another, and ‘*I was only joking*’ is a lame excuse for such conduct.
- B. Don’t Make a Pest of Yourself (25:17).
- C. Don’t Be Inconsiderate (27:14). You are not doing your friend a favor when it inconveniences him!
- D. Don’t Tell Tales (17:9; 16:28). Friendship thrives on forgiveness, understanding, and love, bearing no grudges and telling no tales (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Friends know how to keep quiet.
- E. Don’t Betray Confidences (25:8-10). The man who tries to score over his neighbor and undermine his neighbor’s good name, will himself end up with a reputation of being disloyal and untrustworthy (25:19).

III. THE POWER OF A FRIEND’S INFLUENCE

- A. Friends Influence us More than Anyone Else (12:26; 13:20). They will make us better or worse people.

1. They Influence us for Evil (1:10-19; 22:24-25; 23:20; 24:1; 28:7; 29:24).
2. They Influence us for Good (27:17).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How would you describe a real friend?*
- 2) *How would you describe a 'fair-weather' friend?*
- 3) *What is the key to the difference?*
- 4) *Are you a real friend to anyone?*
- 5) *Which is better—having many friends or a few real friends? Why?*
- 6) *Is a person's best friend necessarily determined by whom he/she spends the most time with?*
- 7) *Do real friends always agree on everything (cf. 27:17)?*
- 8) *Why do friends conceal each other's mistakes (17:9)?*
- 9) *Why would you refrain from gossiping about a friend and his shortcomings (17:9; 16:28)?*
- 10) *Why is the influence of evil companions emphasized more than the influence of good ones (12:26)?*