

Seeking Love: Tests of True Friendship

Getting focused

Forming wholesome relationships requires the proper application of wisdom. Critical to receiving the spiritual blessings and benefits from God is our attitude and actions toward others.

The peace of God can only come to those who strive to have peace with mankind. These relationships come by our exercising discretion in whom we choose to confide. Rebellion brings grief, shame, and eventual destruction. The source of this trouble is selfishness.

Proper relationships are formed by those who seek love

Read Proverbs 17

When we display a pleasant, benevolent, sincere personality we produce wonderful relationships. The principles revealed in this text are universal. Verse 9 expresses the foundation for all relationships: seek love. Love is not something we find in a place but is a thing created by effort and desire. We must understand, love is a choice of action, not merely an emotional response.

The Lord examines the heart (v. 3). His word makes known the manner in which He views us. The test of friendship is not in words but in actions (1 John 3:17-18).

How do you respond to:

- Lies and unkind things said about others (v. 4)?
- News of tragedy or trouble experienced by others (v. 5)?
- The mistakes and shortcomings of others (v. 9; Matthew 18)?
- Someone correcting you (vs. 10-11)?

If you constantly find fault with others but see nothing wrong with yourself, you probably have been deceived (v. 20). In contrast, one who has a positive outlook and seeks to bring

“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in **need** and **closes his heart** against him, how does the **love of God** abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in **deed and truth.**”

- 1 John 3:17-18

“He who **restrains** his words has **knowledge**, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a **fool**, when he keeps **silent**, is **considered wise**; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.”

- Proverbs 17:27-28

the best out of others brings happiness to himself, as well as to others (v. 22).

Friendship qualities are developed by:

- Resolving problems before they start (v. 14)
- Keeping a secret (v. 9)
- Being loyal in times of trouble (v. 9, 17)

Two critical aspects in all relationships are maintaining a calm disposition at all times, and thinking things through before you say them (vs. 27-28).

So many friendships are destroyed by unkind words. The illustration of strife being like releasing water can appropriately be applied to the words we speak. Once they are released we cannot put them back.

Self-centered conversation is a reproach to one's character

Read Proverbs 18

As we seek positive relationships and interactions with others, we must first develop the character, temperament, and personality of one who is concerned about others. Isolation is a sign of selfishness. Though we are not to associate with the worldly, we are to show ourselves as people of honor and integrity.

A fundamental quality of being a friend is listening with an understanding ear. Much of our future will be molded by the manner in which we listen.

Verse 1 identifies one's negative response to the wisdom expressed by others. Aggravation and isolation are not appropriate responses. Even at difficult levels of communication, the wise listens to all one has to say before rendering an opinion. “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (v. 13).

A sure road to loneliness is to be quick to express yourself but slow to listen. The “know it all” will find himself viewed by others with contempt and criticism (v. 3), which results in contention (v. 6). The problem of being quick to speak not only interferes with earthly relationships, but his lips are the snare of his soul (v. 7).

Our personal outlook has a substantial effect on our ability to cope with difficulty (v. 14). Whether it be physical infirmity or corrupt people in power, a positive attitude carries many benefits. The principles expressed in vs. 16-23 are considerations for effective communication.

- A practical application of effective communication is to express appreciation for an anticipated desirable response (v. 16).
- Be prepared for a rebuttal when stating your side of some occurrence (v. 17).
- Sometimes the best method of settling a matter is to flip a coin (v. 18).
- Saying the wrong thing can create a wall of resistance (v. 19).
- The art of persuasion is the best approach for the underdog (v. 23).
- To find a life long companion is a good thing (v. 22)!

Fair weather friends will fail us

Read Proverbs 19

Those who befriend us because of material possessions are not true friends. Those kinds of friends will only be there for us as long as we have something they need or want. This chapter explains how it is better to be lonely and have character than to seek relationships with the worldly. Integrity can cause one to suffer loneliness.

Patience in choosing friends is very important to our spiritual future. Though we are to possess a generous spirit, we must exercise discretion so others do not take advantage of us.

There is a clear distinction between those who lack possessions because of moral integrity and those who are poor due to laziness. Laziness is characteristic of one who fails to properly reverence God (compare vs. 15 and 24 with 23).

Wisdom is to be applied to every relationship. We must recognize the relationships established and provided for us by God are to be revered and cherished.

Memorize and meditate

“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

- Proverbs 18:24

- Parents should view their children as God’s gift and a keen sense of responsibility must follow (v. 18). A relationship that must not fail (22:6).
- Children should honor and reverence their parents. These relationships are formed through listening (vs. 26, 27).
- Husbands must view their wives as a provision from God (v. 14b).
- Friendship: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up...Though one be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Questions to consider

1. Make a practical application of Proverbs 17:13. _____

2. Identify at least two aspects of being a good friend. _____

3. How is a merry heart like medicine (17:22), and how does the spirit of a man sustain him in sickness (18:14a)? _____
