

Friendship - Seminar 1 / The Single's Scene

1) - Levels of Friendship

Goal: To explain the levels of friendship so that we might have reasonable expectations of one another. The various levels of friendship will be examined in light of Jesus' various human relationships.

The capacity for friendship at each level will vary from person to person. Some people can handle many more friends than others and some much less.

People can move up or down the scale according to mutual interest in a more personal relationship.

The Multitudes - the people you do not know but whose life intersects with yours at various points.

- *Jesus ministered to the multitudes in teaching and evangelizing them (Matthew 4:25). He knew their general need and sought to help, but there was not a personal relationship
- *Characteristics: People you have not met before. People you may recognize you have met before, but in either case you do not know anything about them other than what can be discern by immediate observation. Communicate at surface level only.
- *Examples: The people we encounter once or rarely in the course of daily life - sales personnel, office staff, people in public venues, etc.
- *Capacity: Hundreds to thousands per year.

Acquaintance - Someone whom one knows only slightly

- *Jesus met many in the multitudes whom He developed a more personal relationship with them learning their specific needs and ministering to those needs. This would be true of many of the people He healed such as the man born blind (John 9) or the woman at the well (John 4).
- *Characteristics: Learn and know their name. At least some general personal information is known. Able to ask appropriate questions reflecting interest in their lives. Communicate as surface level - but might ask a question about thought and opinion.
- *Examples: People we routinely encounter at stores, offices, etc. we frequent. People we met once but were able to ask personal questions.
- *Capacity: Up to hundreds per year for those who are gregarious and have good memories.

Casual Friend - Better known than an acquaintance with more frequent contact

- *Jesus knew the people in Nazareth because He grew up there, and would have known many of the people in the region of Galilee after living there for several years. People such as Jairus (Matt. 5:22) and Nicodemus (John 3) would have fit this category. This would also include the 70 disciples that He sent out to minister - Luke 10
- *Characteristics: Know their name and both general and specific personal information. Know some of their strong and weak points. Know something of their hopes and desires. There is a level of mutual trust developed so that you can talk about some of your struggles and weaknesses. Communication on thought level and occasionally on emotional level. Prov. 27:9
- *Examples: Co-workers, neighbors, club / social organization associates, classmates, etc.
- *Capacity: 20 to 100+ active depending on the breadth of social contacts and gregariousness.
Note: People can move up and down these levels of friendship over time.

Close Friends. There are several types

Close Associates - Friendships develop through close association in a group such as Bible study, small group, special interest group, hobbies, etc.

Close Personal Friends - Maintained over the years by mutual choice

Mentor Relationships - people who significantly contribute to your life (or you to theirs) by teaching and guiding them - Discipling.

*Jesus had close associates through His family and community as seen in His involvement in the Wedding at Cana (John 2), close personal friends in Lazarus, Mary & Martha (John 11 & 12) and a mentoring relationship with the Twelve apostles (Matthew 10).

*Characteristics: Know specific personal information including their strong and weak points. Know their hopes and desires and will help to achieve them. Regular communication. Have a mutual trust that allows vulnerability and discussion of struggles and weaknesses.

Communication at all levels including thought and emotion. Proverbs 27:17

*Examples: As above -

*Capacity: 10 to 30 active and 30+ inactive. (Inactive are people that are rarely seen / talked with for various reasons, but level of friendship & communication can be picked up and resumed almost instantly when you do see them / talk with them. - old friends, etc.).

Intimate Friends - “Best” friends. People whom we desire to be with above all others. A lasting quality friendship developed over months and years, tested and proven true.

*Jesus: Among the disciples, Peter, James and John formed an inner circle with Jesus. They are listed first and together in the lists of apostles (Matthew 10:2). They appear with Jesus separate from the other apostles at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). The ultimate intimate friendship is the Trinity.

*Characteristics: People we know well including their goals and ambitions, trials and sorrows. We can pour out souls to them and share our deepest feelings and hopes and be safe because they are trustworthy. We find them comforting in sorrow, encouraging in trials, gentle but tenacious when correcting our sin. A partner in developing our character. A defender when attacked by others. Someone that can be counted on when in need. Willing to sacrifice for the other. Proverbs 27:5-6; John 15:13; Ephesians 5:22-31

*Examples: A spouse. A true “best” friend

*Capacity: 1 - 6 with the average being 4.

Why the limit?

*Time is limited

*Emotional capacity can be overwhelmed

Strange but true: Study reports are now coming out that show that the current generation is more alone than previous ones even with the use of social networking software. Why? 1) Level of communication is not deep. 2) Depth of friendship is developed by going through experiences together, and the more difficult the circumstances, the deeper the relationship develops. The chatter on social networking is shallow and the experiences talked about are shallow.

2) Dangers in Isolation or Inundation

The Foolishness of Isolation

Isolation is the condition of having extremely few or no true or close friends. There are many reasons that a person may seek to separate himself from others. A few of them are being legitimate including:

Isolate yourself to pray & commune with the Lord without being interrupted: Mark 1:35 records, *“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.”*

Isolate yourself if you have a contagious disease. The Mosaic Law even required this for certain diseases (Leviticus 13).

Isolate yourself if you are upset and need a little time to calm down and get control of yourself. Proverbs 29:22 warns that *“An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.”* However the time to calm down should be a matter of minutes or hours since Ephesians 4:26-27 warns us to deal with things quickly and not let them fester - *“Be angry, and [yet] do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”*

However, in general, it is foolish to isolate yourself from others. Proverbs 18:1 *“He who separates himself seeks [his own] desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.”* Notice the emphasis - Isolation rises out of seeking your own desire and that is in conflict with sound wisdom. The motivation to separate is selfishness whether it is from self-protection or expediency or just plain pride. Keep in mind that isolation can be either physical or emotional. Many people are good at isolating themselves in the midst of a crowd. They keep people at a distance by keeping the relationships superficial. They may even talk a lot and tell lots of stories, but they will not reveal what they really think or feel. They put on a mask and live a facade before others and so keep them from entering their inner world. All of us are capable of this to one degree or another.

What are some common reasons people seek to isolate themselves

Pain is the most common reason. Isolation is a means of self-protection from being hurt by others. Caution can yield to fear which can reach extreme levels such as in the agoraphobic. It is sad when a person remains single out of fear of being hurt again in a romantic relationship, but it is much more tragic when fear of pain results in isolation so that there are few or no close or intimate friends. Such separation is a quarrel against the wisdom of God’s design for the functioning of the church in which each person is a member of the one body, and all the members are needed for it to properly function (See 1Corinthians 12 & Ephesians 4).

The desire to avoid the pain of conflict is understandable, however, isolation blocks maturity from being developed and can lead to regression into childishness. James 1:2-4 and Romans 5 both make it clear that troubles and trials produce maturity in those willing to trust God and obey Him. We live in a sin cursed world among sinners, so expect to be hurt and be prepared for it. Even believers yield to sin and hurt one another. Keep a friend long enough and at some point they are going to disappoint you and you will disappoint them. Proverbs 20:6 even asks rhetorically, *“Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man.”*

Fear of suffering, hurt and pain are not to control us. God’s plan is for us to deal with those things by casting our cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7), finding peace in laying our petitions at His feet and leaving the matters in His hands (Philippians 4:6,7), and to grow into maturity in the midst of the trials (Romans 5, James 1). Being cautious of pain is wise, for we are not to be masochists, but fear that disengages is an abandonment of all the one another commands and therefore contrary to God’s wisdom. It is in learning to trust God that you overcome fear of the hurt and pain that are part of life, and your confidence in Him increases as you see Him sustain you in any situation and enable you to go through any circumstance as you seek to live life according to His commands and plans.

▣ **Expediency** is another common reason for isolation, but it is a poor one. By this I am referring to placing your own wisdom in pursuing your plans above God's wisdom in His commands. We must learn Proverbs 16:9 that while the mind of a man plans his way, it is the Lord that directs his steps. Using myself as an example, there was a time that I shunned additional friends simply because I was planning to leave the area within a year. An acquaintance challenged me on my thinking which at its root was selfish because I didn't want to put the time or energy into people that I thought I would only know for a short time. I ended up being there for another 10 years and developed many good friends. Don't isolate yourself for the sake of expediency. Follow the principle of Ephesians 5:16 to be wise in "*making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*"

▣ **Pride** is the last reason I will mention today that leads to isolation. Pride causes all sorts of problems. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "*Pride [goes] before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*" That destruction will come from both the natural consequences generated by their pride, but it will also be because of God's opposition to them. Proverbs 16:5 warns, "*Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.*" James 4:6 directly states, "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*"

Humility is a key characteristic of a good friend, but pride destroys friendships. The proud do not want to be friends with those they consider beneath them - however they evaluate that: wealth, social status, intellectual ability, a combination or something else. Such pride foolishly cuts people off from one another and removes them from the wisdom of the humble. Proverbs 11:2 warns, "*When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.*" Pride exists in every wealth class, social strata and education level, but so does godly wisdom in the people whom has God has to Himself. A healthy local church will reflect the diversity within the community it serves, and within the church, friendships develop within the mix of the humble.

Pride causes the pool of friends to become more narrow and focused until it is small. How sad that there are so many people that have fewer friends as they get older instead having more. The progress of time should allow for an increase in both the number of acquaintances and casual friends and the deepening of close friends and intimate friends.

Isolation - not having true godly friends - is contrary to sound wisdom. It is a pursuit born out of selfishness that will be contentious against God's commands and plans. The solution isolation is trusting God to overcome the fear of pain, making the most of your time to be used by God in the lives of other people, and being humble to develop friendships with anyone God places in your path.

▣ **The Danger of Inundation**

Another danger within friendships is the opposite extreme. ▣ Inundation is having so many friends that you are overwhelmed. It is strange, but true, that in a world with as so many means of communication and social networking as now exists, studies have been showing that the current generation is more lonely than previous ones. They have fewer close and personal friends than in previous times and generations. Why? Primarily because the level of communication is not deep. ▣ The exchange of factoids - bits and pieces of information that are often random and without significance - have become the substitute for meaningful friendship. There is much surface knowledge about one another, but little in depth knowledge. People inundate themselves with acquaintances and casual friends which leave no time to develop close and intimate friends. Remember that depth of friendship is developed by going through experiences together, and the more difficult the circumstances, the deeper the relationship develops. The chatter on social networking is shallow.

▣ Proverbs 18:24 gives a warning about this. The Hebrew can be difficult, but the NASB translates it as "*A man of [many] friends [comes] to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a*

brother.” The sense is that a man of many friends will end up getting himself broken, but there is a loving friend that sticks closer than a brother.

This is an especially important warning to the facebook generation. ☐ Unless you are careful, you will be overwhelmed with acquaintances and casual social media friends and be isolated without the close and intimate friendships you actually need to live life successfully before God. Deep friendship takes time and shared experience. How tragic to have a plethora of social media friends, yet few or no one to actually help in a time of need. And worse, no true friend that will walk with you in life to help you develop godliness through both encouragement and admonishment.

Let me quickly add here that you do not develop close friends by being vulnerable on social media. When you post things that should have remained private, you only expose yourself to those who are not friends that will use it against you. Gossip was a bad enough problem without the internet. ☐ Proverbs 20:19 warns, *“He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.”* Proverbs 11:13 points out the characteristic of a friend as opposed to a gossip - *“He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.”* But what can be said when what is posted is self-exposure to the world of what should have remained secret? Do not use social media as your diary for your personal thoughts that should be shared only with your most intimate friend who has earned your trust, and with great caution even then. Do not use your social network as a substitute for developing true friendships lest you find out the truth of Proverbs 18:24 and find yourself broken and in ruin.

Neither isolate yourself nor inundate yourself with friends. Seek to develop true friends whom you can trust. And especially develop your friendship with the only true friend that is closer than a brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no one else that can compare. Jesus proved His love for you on the cross at Calvary when He paid the price of your sins (Roman 5:8). He is always present and always the same (Hebrews 13:5, 8), so He is absolutely trustworthy. He is currently preparing a place for you and making intercession with the Father and will one day return so that you will be with Him forevermore (John 14:2-3, Hebrews 7:25). If you do not know Him yet as an intimate friend, then talk with me later about how that can happen.

Developing Friendships

You need close and intimate friends, so how can you know with whom you should develop such friendships? Potential friendships could be dangerous or a blessing. What are some of the characteristics of someone that would make a great friend? What are some of the danger signs of someone with whom you should be very cautious or even flee?

We will begin with Psalm 1 which contrasts the blessed man and the wicked man in both what influences them, what happens to them in this life, and what will happen to them in eternity.

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” 2 *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.* 3 *And he will be like a tree [firmly] planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.* 4 *The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.* 5 *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.* 6 *For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.*

The Psalmist starts with a negative to express a blessing. You are blessed if you avoid ungodly influences. In this way the Psalmist not only gives reference to the curse upon those who are influenced by the wicked, sinners and scoffers, but it also makes clear that you must avoid the influence of the ungodly in order to be blessed. It is not enough to just have godly influence..

The Psalm shows a progression of influence. It starts with listening to and then following the counsel of the wicked. It progresses to sinners becoming your close and intimate friends so that you

stand with them in what they think, say and do. It concludes with becoming a scoffer like them who advocates and teaches what is contrary to godliness. While it is impossible in this society not to hear the foolish ideas of the wicked because it is proclaimed everywhere through media, educational institutions, government, and even churches by people who hold what should be respectable positions, and by casual friends and acquaintances, that does not mean you need to heed and follow such advice much less defend such foolishness and proclaim it yourself. Do not let the wicked be your close and best friends or you will be influenced by them to follow this downward path in to also becoming ungodly scoffers.

Influencing, not influenced: With that in mind, how then was Jesus able to be a “*friend of tax-gatherers and sinners*” (Matthew 9:10,11; 11:19) without them being friends who influenced him.

While most friendships tend to be mutual and exist at the same level, everyone will also have friendships that are somewhat lopsided in the level of friendship. One person considers the other a close or best friend while that person considers the other just a casual friend. For example, someone trusts you as a best friend so that they pour out their soul to you. At the same time, you recognize their spiritual immaturity and so are more cautious. You consider them to be a close friend with whom you share your thoughts, but not an intimate friend with whom you share your soul.

▣ That is the nature of a mentor relationship. The disciple gains from the teacher and can quickly consider the teacher to be a closer friend than the teacher considers the student. That is how Jesus could be a friend to sinners and have a one way influence them. That is how you as a Christian can and should be a friend to the wicked without walking in their counsel.

Let me expand on this idea of unequal friendships. ▣ Some friendships may never become equal for various reasons. Some friendships will quickly adjust to the same level out of mutual desire. Others can develop to the same level over considerable time, such as when a disciple matures to become a peer with his mentor. It is normal for friendships to develop somewhat unevenly, for unless one of the friends takes the risk to be more open and vulnerable, you can't deepen the level of intimacy and friendship. That is part of the relationship dance between single men and women interested in finding a potential spouse.

▣ Developing a friendship brings the risk of getting hurt when you find out the other person is not as interested in having a deeper friendship as you do. A humble person will still be thankful for the friendship that is there and maintain it and grow in maturity as a result. There may or may not be a hope of the friendship deepening in the future, but what is already present is valuable enough. A proud person will nurse the hurt and end up turning away from the friendship and may even disparage it. If this was a potential romance, then for the proud, there can be a fine line between their supposed love and hate. Such a response only demonstrates their poor character, lack of true love and good reason for not letting a closer friendship develop. If you have a friend turn on you, be sure to continue to walk in godliness and not follow their example. While you suffer the hurt and mourn the loss, be thankful you found out the truth before they became an ungodly influence upon you.

▣ King Solomon's life is an example of the negative influence of ungodly friends. Deuteronomy 17 specifically warned future Jewish kings, “*Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away. . .*”. Solomon did not heed that advice. 1 Kings 11:1-8 recounts his turning away from God for he “*loved many foreign women*” including those from nations God had prohibited them to associate with much less take wives from them. Verse 4 then says, “*when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart way after other gods. . .*” with verse 6 adding, “*and Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.*”

The point here is simple. Be careful about whom you allow to be your close and intimate friends because they will influence your life, and none will be more important than who becomes your spouse. ▣ Succinctly stated, “*you will become like those whom you like.*” Proverbs gives strong warning to keep your distance from people who have one or more of these specific characteristics.

People to Avoid as Close or Intimate Friends

▣ Sinners - Proverbs 1:8-19

This passage is a plea and a warning from a father to his son. 8 *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, And do not forsake your mother's teaching; 9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, And ornaments about your neck. 10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. 11 If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; 12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; 13 We shall find all [kinds] of precious wealth, We shall fill our houses with spoil; 14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse, " 15 My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, 16 For their feet run to evil, And they hasten to shed blood. 17 Indeed, it is useless to spread the net In the eyes of any bird; 18 But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives."*

In the short term, sinner may gain things and live a life of luxury and ease as Asaph observed in Psalm 73. ▣ However, Proverbs 23:17 warns us to not let our heart envy them, for as Proverbs 13:21-22 states, *"adversity pursues sinners"* and the *"wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous."* You do not want to suffer the consequences of sin that will surely befall them in God's judgment. Christians are to reach out to proclaim the gospel to sinners in hope they will repent, but we must exclude them from being friends who influence us.

▣ The Wicked and the Evil - Proverbs 4:14-19

Wickedness and acts of evil go together, and Proverbs 4:14-19 warns us to turn away from those who are marked by such characteristics. ***"Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not proceed in the way of evil men. 15 Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on. 16 For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; And they are robbed of sleep unless they make [someone] stumble. 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence. 18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble."***

▣ Proverbs 6:12-15 gives a further description along with a warning. *"A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a false mouth, 13 Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers; 14 Who [with] perversity in his heart devises evil continually, Who spreads strife. 15 Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken, and there will be no healing."*

▣ The wicked and the evil are further described in various Proverbs as cruel, covetous, disgusting, shameful, worthless, unjust, contemptuous, desirous of evil and without compassion. Stay away from such people! ▣ The mouths of the wicked are described various Proverbs as concealing violence, bringing forth perversion, deceitful, tearing down the city and pouring out evil. *"An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips. . ."* - Proverbs 12:13. Don't listen to such people!

▣ Unless the wicked person repents, he has little temporal hope and no eternal hope. Proverbs 5:22-23 warns, *"His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin. 23 He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray."* Proverbs 3:33 warns, *"The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked."* Proverbs 10:27 says their years will be shortened while Proverbs 24:20 declares their lamp will go out, and Proverbs 10:7 concludes that *the name of the wicked will rot.*

▣ The Immoral Woman - Proverbs 5, 6, 7

We live in a society that now flaunts and advocates sexual immorality while being blind to the destruction it is causing to society, the family, children and the individuals themselves. Proverbs gives many strong warnings about this. Here are a couple of them. Proverbs 5:8 is succinct

concerning the immoral woman, *“Keep your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house.”* Proverbs 7:25-27 warns about her, *“Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. 26 For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.”*

▣ **The fool** - Proverbs 14:7

Proverbs 14:7 warns, *“Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.”* The consequences of having a fool as a friend are not as immediate as having the sinners, the wicked and the evil as friends, but it will easily end up in the same place. ▣ The particular type of fool here is kesil (kes-eel') which is the quality of being dull and obstinate with a proclivity to make wrong choices for they do not like knowledge that goes against what they want to do. Their bent is toward sin and so they mock at it and doing wickedness is like a sport to them (Proverbs 10:23 & 14:9). ▣ If your friendship hinders you from being able to discern wisdom, then you have entered the path of folly and the *“companion of fools will suffer harm”* - Proverbs 13:20.

▣ **The Hot tempered man** - Proverbs 22:24-25

Proverbs 22:24-25 proclaims a similar warning about those given to outbursts of anger. *“Do not associate with a man [given] to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, 25 Lest you learn his ways, And find a snare for yourself.”* Those who are characterized by such behavior are proud and lack self-control. They do not get what they want so they explode in rage. ▣ Such a quick temper exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29). There is actually a double danger in being friends with such a man. ▣ First, you will be the recipient of their wrath at some point and embroiled in their troubles. Proverbs 29:2 - *“An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.”* ▣ Second, you may learn his ways and become ensnared in folly yourself. This is really just the same principle that you will become like those that influence you, so you need to be careful about who are your close and intimate friends.

▣ **The Gossip** - Proverbs 20:19

The gossip and slanderer are the last in this list of people to avoid. Proverbs 20:19 specifically warns, *“He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.”* There are multiple dangers posed by the gossip, the whisperer who says things behind people's backs. First, you may believe their lies and innuendo as Proverbs 26:20 expresses, *“The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.”* This causes harm in our relationships with others as Proverbs 16:28 warns, *“A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.”* Second, they are a constant source of strife according to Proverbs 26:20, *“For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.”* And keep in mind that those that reveal the secrets of others cannot be trusted to keep your confidence as Proverbs 11:13 states, *“He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.”*

▣ **Conclusion**

You do not want people with any of these characteristics influence you lest they entice you to join them in their sin and foolishness. Do allow them to be your close or intimate friends or you are in grave danger of suffering your own ruin. It should be your desire to reach out to these kinds of people with the gospel, so have an acquaintance with them or even a casual friendship, but again, do not allow them into a position in which they will influence you. Reserve your close and intimate friendships to those that have the character qualities that will help you become more like Christ and love Him more. What qualities should you be looking for in a friend? That is next.

Characteristics of Godliness for Close and Intimate Friends

▣ Being a Godly Friend

Godly friendship begins by being more focused on being a friend than having a friend. That is the example our Lord gave us. Jesus had every attribute of what it means to be a godly friend, and it began with a love that sacrificed itself for the best interest of others. Paul points this out in Philippians 2. He wanted them to be a unified church and that could only happen if they would “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not [merely] look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Philippians 2:3-4). ▣ Jesus was the ultimate example of this as Paul continued on to explain in verse 5-8. Jesus is God, and yet He set aside the glory that is due Him to become a man. That in itself is humble beyond our comprehension, but Jesus went further and took the form of a bond-slave instead of the royalty that was His right. Then He went further and died as the substitute payment for our sin. ▣ Paul said in Romans 5:8 that this was the demonstration of God’s love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus said in John 15:13, “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends,*” and that is exactly what Jesus did. He is the ultimate example of humility and selflessness, and He did it for us while we were still His enemies. There can be no better friend.

▣ Jesus is our example and as Christians we are supposed to be striving to be like Him. Everything I will point out from Proverbs about the characteristics of being a good friend are simply steps in following Jesus’ example. For that reason, the advice from Proverbs is not optional for Christians, and it is sound wisdom for all people.

▣ **Humility** is the first attribute I mention because the other characteristics arise out of a proper view of yourself before God. ▣ Humility is the opposite of pride which is the original sin. Satan’s pride caused him to think that he could be like God and he has sought to usurp Him ever since (Isaiah 14). Eve disobeyed God’s command and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in part because she wanted to be like God. Pride leads directly to selfishness in demanding things be your way and seeing others as the means to get what you want. ▣ God is opposed to the proud (James 4:6). Proverbs 3:34 states that God scoffs at the scoffers while giving grace to the afflicted. Proverbs 6:16 states that God hates even the haughty eyes of the proud and finds them to be an abomination.

Humility goes the opposite direction. ▣ A humble person recognizes they are but a creature made by God and so seeks to submit to and honor their Creator. Humble people think rightly about themselves as stated in Romans 12:3 because they seek to understand things from God’s perspective and not man’s. The humble do not think either too highly or too lowly of themselves because they recognize that all they have and all they can do comes from the Lord. All praise must be directed to Him and not to themselves. Because they understand that they are created by God to do His will, ▣ they rely on the Lord to enable them to accomplish that will. A humble person may not think they can accomplish the task, but they will step out in faith and make the attempt. They are more motivated by the desire to obey God than the fear of failure, and so they strive to do their best, but leave the results in God’s hands.

The proud do not like it when they are not in control of a situation or can be assured of the future by their planning. ▣ The proud are very disturbed by Proverbs 20:24, “*Man's steps are [ordained] by the Lord, How then can man understand his way?*” But that truth does not disturb the humble at all, for they are at peace with Proverbs 16:9, “*The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.*” As Isaiah 26:3 puts it, “*You will keep [him] in perfect peace, [Whose] mind [is] stayed [on] [You], Because he trusts in You*” (NKJV). For the humble, part of the adventure of life is the winding pathway the Lord will take them on in reaching their final destination. They look back and

praise the Lord for the journey already taken. They look forward with pleasant anticipation of where the Lord will direct them next even if, perhaps even more so, if it is not as they had planned.

▣ Humility is necessary for wisdom. Proverbs 11:2 states, *“When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.”* Proverbs 22:4 ties humility with the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), *“The reward of humility [and] the fear of the Lord Are riches, honor and life.”* Proverbs 15:33 also link the two, *“The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor [comes] humility.”* As already explained from Proverbs 13:20, wisdom is a necessary characteristic of a good friend because a foolish friend is dangerous and leads to harm.

▣ But humility is also important to friendship because it is the grease that keeps the gears of friendship operating smoothly. Humble people see other people as created by God for His purposes. The unsaved are valued because they are created in God’s image and need to hear the gospel. Christians are to help one another mature in godliness, accomplish God’s will and glorify the Lord together. This leads to selflessness, generosity and love because there is something more important than personal power, glory and comfort.

▣ Humble people are also more aware of their own sin, so they are more forgiving of other people’s sins. Proverbs 19:11 states, *“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”* Proverbs 12:16 gives the contrast in this area between a humble, prudent man and the fool - *“A fool’s vexation is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor.”* It is not that the humble do not get upset or that they ignore the sin of other people, but their humility lays the foundation for them to be slow to anger so that they can properly deal with sin in others, and they do not become vengeful even when it is a personal sin against them. The humble are also quick to work out relationships and seek forgiveness when they have done wrong.

▣ Proverbs 6 gives the scenario of someone who has become indebted to a neighbor, but the principle in verse 3 goes beyond just monetary debt. *“Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor.”* That is a pleading for mercy and forgiveness. Jesus talked about this same principle in Matthew 5:23-24, *“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”* Your ability to properly worship the Lord will be hindered if your relationship with others are not right. As Paul said in Romans 12:18, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”* Humble people can pursue that peace because they will seek forgiveness and grant it. Proud people cannot have that peace. No wonder Proverbs 16:19 says, *“It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.”* Peace and true friendship are much more valuable than wealth.

▣ Are you humble so that you can be this kind of friend to others? If not, then set aside your pride and humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Learn to view life from God’s perspective instead of your sinful, selfish one and humility will flow, for then life will no longer be about you, but the glory of your almighty Creator.

▣ **Love** is another characteristic of a true friend. By love, I am not referring to fond feelings of affection, though those will exist among friends because they enjoy one another’s company. ▣ I am referring to the kind of love embodied in Jesus Christ as explained earlier. It is found in the concept of the Greek word, ἀγάπη / agape. It is a love that sacrifices of itself for the best interest of the other person. ▣ It is selfless in its consideration of others. Proverbs 17:17 states, *“A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.”*

▣ True friendship is not based on what you get, but rather on what you give. For that reason, it continues on in tough circumstances. A friend will gladly come and rescue you at 2 a.m. on a cold, rainy night when your car breaks down. A friend will watch your kids, run your errands and even clean up after you when you are sick. A friend will share with you their last slice of bread though their own cupboards are bare. A true friend will love sacrificially. Whom are you willing to do these kinds of things for? To whom are you a true friend that loves at all times?

Let me emphasize again that the ▣ development of these characteristics are not optional for the Christian. John 13:34-35 records Jesus saying, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* If you are a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you have an obligation to learn to love others in this manner. That may sound difficult to some, and in fact it is impossible for the selfish and the unbelieving, but it is only allowing God to love other people through you. It fits perfectly with the purpose of a Christian’s life, so loving in this manner becomes a joy, not a burden.

▣ **Loyalty** is another aspect of true close and intimate friends. We already examined the first part of Proverbs 18:24, now we need to concentrate on the second part. *“A man of [many] friends [comes] to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”* ▣ A true friend is not fickle. A brother is the natural one that will stick with you regardless of what circumstances you face, yet for various reasons they might not. Distance is one - *“Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away”* (Proverbs 27:10). But other factors such as pride, jealousy, envy and hurt can turn siblings against each other. David’s brothers became jealous and turned away from him resulting in a strengthening of his friendship with Jonathan. Jesus’ siblings rejected Him so that He had to entrust the care of His mother to John instead of a brother.

A true friend will be characterized by loyalty that extends even generationally. ▣ Proverbs 27:10 tells us, *“Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend.”* King Solomon honored the friendship his father, King David, had with Hiram king of Tyre. As a result, the nation was blessed with the supplies needed to build the Temple. Solomon’s son, king Rehoboam, did not follow that example, and in forsaking his father’s friends in favor of the foolish counsel of his contemporaries, he caused the kingdom to split in two.

▣ While loyalty is a prized character of a true friend, Proverbs 20:6 soberly reminds us, *“Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, But who can find a trustworthy man?”* Do not be surprised if even a true friend will fail you on occasion. How often has that happened to you? How often have you failed others? This is why humility and love are so important in friendship for they are what enable you to work through things and bring about reconciliation when there is a failure in loyalty.

▣ **Confidentiality** is related to loyalty and is another character quality of a true friend. ▣ Friends are not gossips that reveal the secrets of friends. Proverbs 11:12-13, *“He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent. 13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.”* It may be tempting to reveal the secret of someone you do not like, and by doing so you may be able to cause them harm, but you will also harm yourself in demonstrating the lack in your own character. Proverbs 25:9 warns, *“Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another, 10 Lest he who hears [it] reproach you, And the evil report about you not pass away.”*

A true friend is not a gossip and will keep a confidence even of those he may not even like. ▣ It is a matter of character. Proverbs 17:9 adds, *“He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.”* Because a true friend is also characterized by love, they not only will keep a confidence, they will also cover a transgression. Proverbs 10:12 adds, *“Hatred*

stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.” The actions of love are contrasted with those who repeat a matter and expose the transgression causing strife and the breaking up of what had been an intimate friendship.

▣ Does this mean that to be a friend you need to hide the sin of other people so that they do not get in trouble? Yes and no. Yes to the extent that you protect them from public shame so that their transgression can be dealt with privately first. No to any extent in which covering their rebellion would be condoning their sin. Being loyal and keeping a confidence does not mean a true friend must take the side of sin or excuse it. In fact, a true friend must stand against sin and bring about the needed rebuke even at the risk of losing the friendship. That brings us to the next character quality of a true friend.

▣ **Honesty** in all things and candor with friends is crucial to true friendship. It is easy to gather friends who will tell you what you want to hear as long as they are getting what they want. That is why a rich man can easily gain many such shallow friends. Proverbs 19:6-7, *“Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts. 7 All the brothers of a poor man hate him; How much more do his friends go far from him! He pursues [them with] words, [but] they are gone.”* ▣ Pity the man that has such friends and not true friends that will tell him the truth.

While love will cover a transgression, it is only so that the rebellion can be dealt with properly in private first. Proverbs 27:6, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”* False friends will flatter in order to gain what they want. Proverbs 29:5 states, *“A man who flatters his neighbor Is spreading a net for his steps.”* Beware of people that give you praise and tell you what you want to hear but will not challenge or rebuke you. Such people are only there as leeches to get what they can out of you. When you are no longer useful to them, their departure is swift. You will see them quickly latch onto the next person they will parasitize, or perhaps will find them stepping on you in their effort to move up higher in the quest to be king of the hill. Their demeanor can also quickly change from flattery to venom. You can commonly find this in any group including politics, work, social clubs and even in churches. Be generous with compliments meant to encourage, but do not be a flatterer.

None of us has or will reach perfection in this life and so we will fail in following the Lord as we should. ▣ For that reason, we need friends who will be honest and frank with us. That is why the wounds received from a true friend are faithful, they are firm and trustworthy. We all enjoy pleasant relationships, but that is not to be the goal of our friendships. We are here to help one another become godly people. The relationship becomes more pleasant only as each walks in greater spiritual maturity. ▣ The process of producing that can be unpleasant. And while we would like the wounds we receive from a friend to be like those of a surgeon operating on us while we are under anesthesia, the reality is that would be the rare exception. Usually there is some bruising and at times the sparks may fly as Proverbs 27:17 explains, *“Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.”*

This same principle also occurs in the New Testament for there are many commands concerning how we are to treat one another. Among them are exhorting one another to live in godliness, admonishing one another when we stray, and reproving and rebuking those that continue in sin. ▣ In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus explained the steps that we are to take in helping one another in our battle against sin. This passage also explains the balance of love covering transgressions and the faithful wounds of a friend. Let's look briefly at these steps.

▣ It begins with Matthew 18:15 *“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”* The goal is repentance, reconciliation and restoration. This is the part that is done in private and equates with love covering a multitude of sins. ▣ Jesus explained in Matthew 7:4 and Paul in Galatians 6:1 that this is to be done with humility, self-

examination and gentleness. There is no air of superiority for you are aware of your own trespasses. You are not a spiritual cop making an arrest or a prosecuting attorney seeking to bring about a judgment of condemnation. You are a friend who is there to help a friend escape the trap of sin into which they have stumbled. ■ If it goes well the second half of Proverbs 9:8 will prove true and the matter will end - *“Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”*

If instead Proverbs 15:12 is displayed - *“A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, He will not go to the wise”* - the matter will escalate for the love of God and love for your friend compels you to break the confidence and bring others with you to help. ■ Matthew 18:16 - *“But if he does not listen [to you,] take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”* At this point you may be accused of all sorts of things including being unloving, a traitor, an enemy or even worse.

You bring two or three witnesses not so much to prove that you are right and your friend is wrong, but to establish the truth. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding. Perhaps you are wrong in your understanding of the scriptures and its application to the situation. The witnesses help with mediation, clearing up misunderstandings, and establishing the truth of what is going on and the application of Scripture to the situation. ■ For that reason, it is not proper to talk to other people about it and even those you are asking to be witnesses should only be told they are needed to help in resolving a conflict lest you prejudice their opinions. Proverbs 18:17 warns, *“The first to plead his case [seems] just, [Until] another comes and examines him.”* If Proverbs 17:10 is displayed - *“A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool”* - then the matter is resolved and ends there.

■ If the one in sin demonstrates themselves to be a scoffer and does not listen to the rebuke, the matter escalates further. Matthew 18:17 *“And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”* There are actually two steps in this verse. First is telling the church so that the rest of the body can be involved in not just exhorting, admonishing, reproofing and rebuking the one in sin as may be needed, but also in finding alternative solutions. When we have had to do that here, I have been amazed at how many will offer to be personally involved to help the one in sin including opening their homes so that temptations will be reduced and accountability will be increased. Again, if the rebukes from the church are heeded, there is repentance, reconciliation and restoration and the matter ends.

■ If not, then the one continuing in sin is removed from the fellowship of the church because they love their sin more than Christ and have become a dangerous cancer to the rest of the body. That is always done with grief and heartache, and yet the goal remains the same that the one in sin would repent. A friend will always long for restoration of fellowship with a friend, but a godly friend cannot compromise holiness and truth and be an offense to God in order to maintain a relationship with another human. That brings us back full circle to the purpose of your life and friendships.

■ Conclusions

The purpose of your existence is to bring glory to your Creator. The specific goal of every true Christian is to do that by becoming like Jesus Christ in character. The purpose of your friendships is to help one another achieve those goals. We want to proclaim Jesus to non-Christians and assist believers to walk in spiritual maturity. For those reasons, the friendships you have with the ungodly are kept at an acquaintance or casual friend level so that you can influence them without them influencing you. Seek out godly people to be your close and intimate friends who will influence you.

Being a true and godly friend takes commitment to pursue maturity. Those that do risk the hurt that comes in all relationships, but still pursue it anyway in order to be a blessing to others, and in turn, be blessed by others. Godly singles take advantage of their singleness to develop such friendships becoming more godly in the process of helping others do the same.

Friendship - Seminar 1 / The Single's Scene

1) - Levels of Friendship

Goal: To explain the levels of friendship so that we might have reasonable expectations of one another. The various levels of friendship will be examined in light of Jesus' various human relationships.

The capacity for friendship at each level will vary from person to person. Some people can handle many more friends than others and some much less.

People can move up or down the scale according to mutual interest in a more personal relationship.

The Multitudes -

Jesus

Characteristics:

Examples:

Capacity:

Acquaintance -

Jesus

Characteristics:

Examples:

Capacity:

Casual Friend - Better known than an acquaintance with more frequent contact

Jesus

Characteristics:

Examples:

Capacity:

Close Friends. There are several types

Close Associates -

Close Personal Friends -

Mentor Relationships -

Jesus

Characteristics:

Examples:

Capacity:

Intimate Friends -

Jesus

Characteristics:

Examples:

Capacity:

Thought Provokers:

List out some friends in each category. Why did you place that friend in that category?

Is it wrong to consider someone to be in a lower category of friendship than they might consider you? (They consider you an intimate friend, but you consider them a close friend, etc.) Explain.

How might you deal with someone who is hurt because your friendship with them is not as deep as they want? What if it was the opposite - they do not want as deep a friendship as you?

Dangers in Isolation or Inundation

The Foolishness of Isolation

Reasons for Isolation:

Pain

Expediency

Pride

The Danger of Inundation

Developing Friendships

Influencing, not influenced

People to Avoid as Close or Intimate Friends

Sinners - Proverbs 1:8-19

The Wicked and the Evil - Proverbs 4:14-19

The Immoral Woman - Proverbs 5, 6, 7

The fool - Proverbs 14:7

The Hot tempered man - Proverbs 22:24-25

The Gossip - Proverbs 20:19

Characteristics of Godliness for Close and Intimate Friends

Being a Godly Friend

Humility

Love

Loyalty

Confidentiality

Honesty

Resources:

Friends & Friendship, by White, Jerry & Mary, NavPress, 1982

https://gracebibleny.org/proverbs_friendship_part_1

https://gracebibleny.org/proverbs_friendship_part_2_selected_scriptures

https://gracebibleny.org/becoming_quality_friend