

# **Friendship**

## **Proverbs 13:20, 15:22, 17:17, 18:24, 25:20, 27:5-6, 27:9, 27:17, 28:23**

Rev. John Pennylegion  
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Good morning. Welcome to CTK. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And friends, it's good to be with you. If you're a guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning and glad that we can join together and come to God's Word and sing to Him. It's good for us to do this. This is true whether you are a first-time visitor or you've been attending CTK from the beginning. It's true whether you're someone exploring the claims of Christ for the first time or you've been walking with the Lord for your, well, you can't remember when you weren't. Whatever you are bringing this morning, whatever burden, whatever history, whatever past, whatever joy or celebration, the truth is that it's good for us to join together because every one of us is in need of the same thing. We are all in need of the grace of our Lord Jesus, that you need it and I need it.

And we didn't just need it when we first believed and we didn't need it shortly thereafter, but we need it today and all the days of our lives. And so that's why we gather. We gather to be reminded of God's grace, our need for Him. We gather so that we would be reminded and encouraged in God's Word and we would know what it means to follow Him and to walk with Him. And so we're doing that this summer by looking at the book of Proverbs. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to the book of Proverbs. We're going to begin this morning in chapter 13, but if you were with us last week, then you remember I said that Proverbs is a little bit different and the way that we're approaching the book of Proverbs is a little bit different than our normal custom. See, normally we just go through a book of the Bible, right? Verse by verse, chapter by chapter. This is what you can expect from us, right? This is what we do, week in and week out. But if we did that in the book of Proverbs, well, it'd be kind of confusing and sermons would be all over the place. Like the outline would just be mayhem because Proverbs goes from one statement about a particular topic to another statement about the complete opposite topic. And it just varies from chapter to chapter.

And so instead of working our way chapter by chapter through the book of Proverbs, we're dealing with different topics in the book. So last week we began with wisdom, right? That's the overarching topic over the entirety of the book. What does it mean to lead a wise life? What does wisdom look like? Well, now this morning we're jumping into the next topic and that is the topic of friendship. Now, since I'm going to be jumping around, you're absolutely welcome to try and, you know, move around in the Bible as I say which chapter we're reading. And, you know, maybe y'all are quick and you can keep up, but it may be easier just to follow along on the screen. So you're welcome to do that as well. But we're going to begin in Proverbs 13:20:

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

15:22: “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed.”

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

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

25:20: “Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like the one who takes off a garment on a cold day and like vinegar on soda.”

27:5-6: "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

27:9: "Oil and perfume make the heart glad and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel."

27:17: "Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another."

28:23: "Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue."

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

*Heavenly Father, we ask that as we come to your word that you would lead us, guide us, and give us wisdom. Father, apart from your spirit, we would be blind to your truth and your grace, and so we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would be present, that you would open our eyes and soften our hearts so that we would behold all the wonders of your goodness. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*

So I know that some of you are familiar with the name Chris McCandless. Some of you are familiar with that name because maybe you had to read *Into the Wild* in the last couple of years if you're a high school student, or maybe you read it when it first came out, or maybe you watched the movie *Into the Wild* based on the book. But Chris McCandless was a young man who had graduated from Emory with honors, and when he graduated, he became very disenchanted with the world that he saw, so much so that he gave away all of his savings, tens of thousands of dollars. He gave away all of his possessions, and he headed west. His goal was to move into the Alaskan wilderness, and there he sought to live free from the constraints of civilization and consumerism. He desired to live an unencumbered life, freed from possessions and from work and from relationships. Well, if you're familiar with his story, then you know that on his way to Alaska, as he was hitchhiking from town to town, city to city, that he came across a variety of people. And in one of these occasions, he was talking to a woman, and he said to her, "You are wrong if you think that the joy of life comes from the joy of human relationships." Okay, do you hear what he's saying? He's saying that he's embracing this ideal. He's embracing this perspective that he needs no one, that he can survive, that he can find life, he can find joy alone.

And this is actually one of the cultural myths that gets promoted in our culture, isn't it? I mean, we hear it in Chris McCandless, but we also hear it in some of the different ideals that are presented, right? Like the rugged romantic wanderer, right? I mean, books are written about that, right? Of men and women who go off on adventure by themselves alone. We hear it in our poetry, like Henry's Invictus. "I am the master of my faith, the captain of my soul." We hear it in our music when Paul Simon sings, "I Am a Rock:" "I have no need for friendship. Friendship causes pain. I have my books and my poetry to protect me. I touch no one, and no one touches me. I am a rock. I need no one." This individualism, this life apart from others, it's not just in our poetry, it's not just in our songs, it's actually encouraged through the very structures that we inhabit. I mean, think about the day in which we live, right? Like, you do not ever have to leave your home again. As long as you have an internet connection, you can sit in your room and do your work, you can have food and groceries ordered to you, you can be entertained as long as you've got Netflix and Apple TV. You can spend the rest of your days having never had a meaningful interaction with another person. Our structures have created this, right? They've encouraged us to actually live apart from others. But is this good?

You know, in 2023, the Surgeon General said that loneliness is a public health crisis on the level of obesity. And in another medical survey that was taken, over 50% of adults felt isolated and lonely. And this isolation, this loneliness, it leads to higher risk of heart disease and stroke and dementia. It's as though our bodies know we were not meant to be alone, that we need and were made for relationships. That's how we've been created, that's how God has made us. But when we hear relationship, I imagine most of us think about romantic or familial relationships, and of course those are important, but the relationships Proverbs is talking about this morning is the relationship of friendship, that friends are what we need. And the truth is, is that many people have no friends. Now, this is where I'm supposed to do the obligatory, like, men are really bad at friendship part. You know, you guys have probably heard pastors, commentators, people say this, right? Like, men are really bad at making friendship, keeping friendship, right? At different stages of life, basically, when they have young kids, and when they have teenagers, when they're retired, and when they're building their career, basically every stage of life except for first grade, men are bad at relationships, right? Friendships, right? That's what I'm supposed to say. And there's actually some truth to it, right? That's why it gets said. There is some truth to it, but the truth also is, is that women are bad at friendships as well. I see it all the time. Yeah, you have coffee, you go for walks from time to time, you pick up the phone, you might text, but are you really known by another person? By a friend? You see, this is a problem not just for men, it's a problem for women, it's a problem for all of us. And yet we're called to have friends. So what is a friend? What does friendship look like?

## **Constancy**

Well, Proverbs actually has a lot to say about it. And the way I'm structuring this is that it's going to fall under two headings. That of friendship is constancy, and friendship is candidness. So friendship is constancy and it's candidness. We see the constancy in chapter 17:17 and 18:24. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." So you hear it, right? All times. All times. When things are good and easy and fun, and when that person is fun to be around, but also when there is difficulty and sadness and pain, and when that person is hard to be around, the friend is there. The friend sticks closer to a brother. That language of "sticks", that's a Hebrew word that means "to cling, to cleave, to keep close, to hold on to." And it's contrasted with the acquaintance, because the acquaintance is someone who may know you, may spend time with you, but when difficulty and pain and sadness come, the acquaintance isn't there. The relationship is close. Proverbs says it's deeper than familial relationships, "closer than a brother." A friend is constant, in the midst of difficulty. You don't need any time of difficulty. Did you hear chapter 25, verse 20? "Whoever's friend is a friend on a cold day, and like vinegar to soda." It's describing the person who went difficult, or the sun will come out, or the every dark cloud has a silver lining. God's working all things together.

But y'all, in the moment, that is singing a song to a heavy heart. It's like singing to them in the cold. But a friend, a friend is with us in our pain, and is sad in our sadness, and hurts with our hurts. And that's what we need, isn't it? It's not just what we need, but it's actually what we all desire. We long for, we have a deep yearning for, that there would be people who would be in our lives, and we would be the kind of people in others' lives, that when darkness comes and difficulty rises, that when they are hard to be around, and we're hard to be around, we cling to them, and them to us. That's a friend. That's what it means to be constant. A friend is one of

constancy, and if we're going to be this, it's going to require at least two things from us, very practically.

It's going to require vulnerability, and it's going to require time. Now, when talking about vulnerability, it's easy to want to be people who other people are vulnerable with, right? Like, I have no problem, I like when I am needed, and I can help someone else. I know y'all like this, right? Like, you are good in trial, you're good in difficulty, you step into it, but do we want to be needed? We want to be the kind of people that people can be vulnerable with, but are we going to be vulnerable? You know, this made me think about the last time I had to go to the dermatologist. So, I go to the dermatologist every year, it's because my wife tells me to, if I'm perfectly honest, right? Because I've become, gotten to that age where like spots and stuff, like they could be a big deal, right? I don't believe it, but they tell me that it could be. So, I go, because my wife says I need to go. So, I go, and I get my skin check once a year, and it's really painless, right? It's not a big deal. You've done a skin, well, some of you probably haven't been to a skin check, and your wife needs to tell you to go to get a skin check, but anyway, if you've been to one, you know it's relatively painless. They like look in between your toes and behind your ear, and they check out, you know, your body, make sure there's no spots, but every once in a while, it becomes very, very vulnerable, and very, very uncomfortable, because the dermatologist pulls out the magnifying glass, and they're scanning your body with this magnifying glass, and I gotta tell you, I don't like parts of my body being looked at that closely. I don't like any part of my body, right? Like my fingers, please, you know, anything, right? Because I'm exposed, and it feels very uncomfortable, and I'm very vulnerable in that moment, but it's good that I am, isn't it? Because maybe the dermatologist is going to see something that I need to know about, and by looking very closely, and very intimately, he's going to discover something that's important for me to know, and you know, that's what a friend does.

Now, they're not examining our skin, right? That would be weird. No, but they know our lives. They're the people who know us, that we're vulnerable with. They know our failings, and our weaknesses, and our imperfections, and they're the people we don't feel the need to be perfect with, and we don't feel the need to put a happy face on, and we don't have to be all cleaned up with. No, they love you, and know you, and stick with you anyway. That's a friend. It's vulnerability. Now, let me just say, as an aside, friendship needs to be vulnerable, but it can't only be vulnerable, okay? Now, I know we rail against small talk, and sports, and weather, and all those sorts of things, because we want to go deep, and there is something to that. We do want to go deep, but if all you do is go deep, and all you talk about is like the depths of my heart, and the darkness of my soul, well, that's exhausting, right? It's so exhausting. Sometimes, in a friendship, we actually need weather, and sports, and movies, and music, and games, because that's what we need. We need to not just be in the deep end. We need to sometimes be in the shallow end, so we can go back in the deep end, right? In fact, C.S. Lewis, in his wonderful book, *The Four Loves*, he has a chapter in there called "Friendship." I would commend it to all of you. It is a wonderful chapter. He likens this to that "you too" moment. A "you too" moment is when you discover, for the first time, someone likes that band that you like, or went to that college you went to, or loves the Cardinals, as all of you should, right? In that moment, you're going "You too? Me too!" and in that moment, that minor connection over something so trivial, so minor, so inconsequential, a friendship begins, that moves into a place of vulnerability.

So, constancy in friendship requires vulnerability, but it also requires time. Now, listen, I know you're busy. You've got work, and you're running your kids around, and you've got

your spouse, and you've got extended families, and you've got commitments, and you've got obligations, and all those sorts of things. You are busy. I'm busy. We are all busy. I get it, but if friendship is something that we need, which the Bible seems to indicate that it is, then it's worth making time for, and so that means that sometimes we're going to have to say no to good things to be a good friend, that we may have to say no to a meal with extended families so we can get a meal with a friend. It means that we might have to say no to that quiet night at the house so we can sit with a friend in their difficulty. It means that we might have to say no to our children, or our parents, or to our spouse at times so we can say yes to another. We'll have to say no to some good things in order to cultivate friendship. Those are good things, but so is friendship.

## **Candidness**

So, if we're going to be constant, if we're going to be good friends, it requires constancy, but it also requires candidness. A number of years ago, I know some of you have heard me share this story before, a number of years ago when I was pastoring in St. Louis, I was in my office one day, and a member of my church, a younger man who I was spending time with, I'd been investing in, I'd been reading the Bible with, praying with, all these sorts of things, he showed up at my office and he wanted to talk to me. And this, you know, this isn't out of the norm for a pastor, right? Like, y'all come and talk to me, you know, you guys do this, and you just show up, and it's wonderful, and it's great. We sit and we talk, and so he did this, but I could see that something was weighing on him. And so he sits in the chair, and I close the door, and I'm sitting there, and he isn't speaking yet, and so I'm taking this moment to think, "Okay, I need wisdom, I need to know how to help my friend in his time of need. He might need grace spoken over him, he might need the truth being reminded to him," right? "Whatever burden he's bearing, I need to be ready. Lord, give me wisdom." And then my friend started speaking, and he didn't share with me anything that he had done or anything he had said. He shared with me what I had done and what I had said. You see, a couple days before that, in my friend's presence, I actually spoke of another man who wasn't there, honestly and truthfully, but not kindly. I didn't lie. There was no hyperbole but I wasn't kind. And my friend didn't need to hear it and he was telling me that. And he was telling me how, in that moment, I hadn't protected that man's reputation, and I hadn't guarded my tongue, and how I'd sinned. And he was right, and he was being a friend.

Because chapter 27, verses 5 -6 say, "better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy." You see, a friend is candid. A friend doesn't ignore sin or give a pass on transgression. No, a friend says, "you're being self-righteous." A friend says, "you're being too critical." A friend says, "your cynicism is hardening your heart and your words aren't honoring the Lord." And when a rebuke comes from a friend, it's coming from love. That's very different how our relationships are often portrayed, right? Because we're told that if you love someone, you never bring it up, right? I love that person too much to tell them how they have sinned, to talk to them about their behavior. But y'all, that's not friendship, that's not love. Now listen, I'm not talking about those like things about our friendships, our friends that are like peculiarities, right? Those weird kind of behavior patterns that we all have, and we all have them, right? One of our favorite things in my family to say is, "we are all weird." Not just that guy, you are too and so am I. We are all weird. So I'm not talking about those like weird kind of idiosyncratic sort of ways that we just gotta kind of deal with, right? They're not in sin, they're nothing wrong, they're just kind of peculiar. I'm not talking about those things.

We ignore those things for the sake of the friendship, but what I'm talking about is sin. When a friend is in sin, when a friend has hurt another, well, to be a friend to love them means that we would talk to them, that we would expose that, that we would bring it to their attention, and God has made us for a community in which that he uses others to show us our sin. Not in a self-righteous or prideful way or not in joy of being right, but as Galatians says, in a spirit of gentleness, a spirit of care, a spirit of love, someone would love us enough to restoratively show us our sin. That's a friend. So we have to ask ourselves, "do we have anyone who will do this for us?" I'm not talking about your spouse, I'm not talking about your child or your parent. I'm talking about a friend who's honest with you because they love you. And if this doesn't give you the free reign to just like point out everybody's sin, okay, so like if you've got like five people in mind right now that you can't wait to talk to after the service, like that's not what I'm talking about.

Because we need to ask ourselves, "do I even know this person? Am I in their life? Have I cultivated a friendship with them? Have I been constant with them?" And if the answer is no, then you might need to hold your tongue. But if the answer is yes, then to be a friend means to go to them and to be candid in love. And y'all, that is hard and it is risky. When that man came to my office, it wasn't easy for him to do it and it didn't feel good for me to hear it. And I didn't like it. And yet it was exactly what he needed to say and what I needed to hear.

He loved me enough to be honest with me, to be candid with me. Right? Proverbs 27:17, he says, "as iron sharpens iron," right? That's what that is doing. As iron sharpens iron, I would have remained dull to my sin had he not been candid. And that's what we need. We need friends who are candid. We need friends who are constant. This is what we were made for. And if you know the story of Chris McCandless, you know that as he went into the Alaskan wilderness that he stayed there until, well, he died alone. And they found a little piece of paper from his journal or a scratch on the wall, I can't remember which, but in his dying moments, we believe, he wrote, "happiness only real when shared." Because he realized what we've heard this morning, that we need others. That we need friends who are candid and constant. That's what we need from others and that's what others need from us.

And yet, even as I'm talking about this, I've been struck this week by how often I desire this kind of friendship, but how often I haven't been this kind of friend. Right? How often I've fallen short of this. How I've been left to myself. How I've pursued isolation. How we only let people in so far. How we haven't been honest and we've responded poorly when people have been honest with us. We're all well aware of our failure at being friends and yet for all of our failures, for all of the ways that we have fallen short at being friends with one another, the good news is that Jesus has been one to us. I mean, we heard in our New Testament reading, didn't we? "Greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my father. I have made known to you. I call you friend."

Isn't that beautiful? I mean, it's easy for us to think of ourselves as lowly servants, right? And to some degree, right? We are servants because he's the king of the universe, the creator of the world. And yet Jesus doesn't call us servant. He calls you friend. What's amazing about this is that Jesus doesn't simply love us, but he likes us. He likes you. He is your friend. He knows your failings and your weaknesses. He knows all the ways you have failed at being friends to others. And he doesn't ignore that sin. No, he's candid and honest with it so much so that he went to the cross for that sin. And he's constant in his friendship because he's

promised he will never leave us nor forsake us. He knows us every hair on your head, every thought in your mind, every deep recess of your heart. He knows you and he still calls you friend. And it's because he does because of the friendship we have with Christ that we can be friends to others because we have been known in this way. We can know others because he has been candid in this way. We can be candid with others because he is constant in this way. We can be constant with one another. Amen. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you that you have not left us alone. You have not left us to ourselves, but instead you have sent your son. You have sent your son, our Lord Jesus, who gave his life and calls us his friend. And so we pray, Father, that the friendship of Christ would be what motivates and empowers us to pursue friendship with one another so that we, Father, would grow in what it means to be candid, to be vulnerable, to be constant, to give of ourselves for others. And so I pray, Lord, open our eyes to the needs of others. Lead us into deeper relationship. Let us hold fast to our friends as you hold fast to us. We pray all this in Christ's name. In God's people said together. Amen.*