

Friends and Friendship

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[0 : 0 0] Please turn with me to Proverbs chapter 27.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. as we learn from Proverbs 27 about your design for friendship, won't you shape us more and more to be the kind of friends to one another that Jesus has been to us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Proverbs 27.

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips.

[2 : 0 6] A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy. One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet.

like a bird that strays from its nest, is a man who strays from his home. Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend.

And the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Do not forsake your friend, Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity.

Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him who reproaches me.

[3 : 1 6] The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. Take a man's garment when he has put up security for a stranger, and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress.

Whoever blesses his neighbor with the loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing. A continual dripping on a rainy day, and a quarrelsome wife are alike.

To restrain her is to restrain the wind, or to grasp oil in one's right hand. Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored. As in water, face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man. The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.

[4 : 2 6] Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him. Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your hurts.

For riches do not last forever, and does a crown endure to all generations? When the grass is gone, and the new growth appears, and the vegetation of the mountain is gathered, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field.

There will be enough goat's milk for your food, for the food for your household, and maintenance for your growths. This is God's holy and authoritative word. It's particularly appropriate, as we as a church family mourn the loss of a dear friend, that we look at a passage about friendship, what it means to be a true friend.

Because everyone needs friends, but what kind of friends should we seek? How do we make friends?

How do we keep friends? What kind of friends should we be? These are all questions that we have asked ourselves. And the two different Hebrew words for friend, which sometimes translate neighbor in this passage, occur again and again, six times throughout this chapter, to tell us that that's what this chapter is primarily about.

[5 : 56] And it gives us many of God's wise answers to these questions. In verses 1 to 4, it tells us to don't make it about yourself. In verses 5 to 10, it tells us to be forthright and faithful.

Verses 11 to 22, it tells us to choose your friends wisely. And verses 23 to 27, it tells us to make friends for the future. The first lesson about friendship is that we shouldn't make it about ourselves.

We see this in verses 1 to 4. It says, Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. Let another praise you and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips.

The first two verses are joined together by the common word praise, which is translated as boast in verse 1, and praise in verse 2. They forbid self-praise, but invite the praise of strangers.

We are never meant to boast about tomorrow or to praise our tomorrow, our great prospects, our grand plans, for we do not know what a day may bring.

[7 : 07] Tomorrow is not guaranteed to any of us. And that reality should humble us. That reality should humble us before God and keep us from boasting.

James 4, 13 to 15 echoes this wisdom. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

If you are the kind of person like me that likes to make plans long into the future, like to talk about those plans, it could be a sign and evidence of pride.

It's not wrong to make tentative plans and diligent preparations, but we should do so with the understanding that our plans are always contingent on God's plans.

[8 : 32] I think during the pandemic, we recovered a little bit of that humility. And it would serve us to remember that lesson for our entire lives. We don't know how long the virus will be around.

We don't know whether the economy will rebound or not. We don't know whether or not we will keep our jobs, whether or not we will be alive next year or not. It will serve us to remember this and stay humble in our lives.

A person who dwells in the past is despondent. A person who dwells in the future is prideful. Only the person who dwells in the present, in light of eternity, can be faithful.

So we should never praise ourselves. We should never boast about our future. We should never talk up our own potential and prospects. The only praise that is acceptable is the praise that others bestow on us.

Verse 2 says, Let another praise you and not your own mouth. A stranger and not your own lips. I read this week that there is a German proverb that goes like this.

[9 : 42] Self-praise stinks. Friends' praise limps. Strangers' praise rings. Human beings are capable of endless self-deception.

We are also capable of selfish flattery. And for these reasons, it's the praise of another, a stranger. Praise from someone who has nothing to gain from praising you.

That is truly to be valued. This is an important foundation for friendship because no one likes self-absorbed, socially insecure people who make everything, every relationship about themselves.

Verse 3 says this, A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. When we need to weigh things down, to keep from blowing away a sign or something that we put up, for example, in our outdoor services, we use sandbags, stones, because they are heavy.

But a self-absorbed fool's provocation, it says, is heavier than both. The word heavy used here is the same Hebrew word that is sometimes translated honor or glory.

[10 : 54] And the Hebrew word for sand is, it looks and sounds almost identical to the word praise used in verses 1 and 2. So both the heavy stone and weighty sand are reminiscent of the self-absorbing and self-glorifying of the fool.

The self-honoring and self-glorifying of the fool. And that self-absorption and boasting weighs down all of his friendships so that they cannot blossom and flourish.

Verse 4 continues, wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? Just as the fool's provocation is heavier than both stone and sand, so it says jealousy that this fool's self-absorbed, self-centered boasting creates is overwhelming, more overwhelming than cruel wrath and anger.

In common English, we use the words jealousy and envy interchangeably. But if we get technical, jealousy is the longing and zeal that a person feels when something or someone that rightly belongs to him or her is threatened.

That's jealousy. For example, when a woman gets jealous for her husband, when another woman flirts with him, she should feel jealous for him in that instance because her husband rightly belongs to her.

[12 : 22] And jealousy in that instance is a sign of love as opposed to indifference. This is what is meant when Scripture describes God as a jealous God who is jealous for his people.

He is jealous for us when we turn to idols. He is jealous for us because we rightly belong to him. Our allegiance, our affection, belong to him.

On the other hand, envy is the longing that a person feels for something or someone that belongs to another. For example, when we are envious of another person's fortunes, looks, relationships, successes.

Another way to make this distinction is to differentiate between being jealous for something or someone, which is healthy, and being jealous of something or someone, which is envy.

This unhealthy jealousy is more severe and unyielding than even overwhelming cruel anger. And in this climate of self-absorbed boasting and other-absorbed envy, the seeds of friendship cannot grow.

[13 : 39] And so that's the first lesson on friendship from this chapter, that friendship requires mutuality and self-giving. If we make it about ourselves, it doesn't work. The second lesson is this, be forthright and faithful.

We can see this in verses 5 to 10. It says, Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

This striking proverb contrasts open rebuke, which is paradoxical, contrasts it with hidden love. Likewise, it also contrasts friendly wounds, which is paradoxical, with enemy kisses.

A true friend is willing to inflict faithful wounds on his or her friends. When he sees his friend in wrongdoing, he takes the personal risk of confronting him or her and correcting him or her because his love for his friend outweighs his desire for self-preservation.

In contrast, the unfaithful friend hides his love and does not rebuke his friend because he is cowardly and selfish and does not want to risk being rejected.

[14 : 59] Though ostensibly, he may refrain from rebuking his friend out of an interest for his feelings. I don't want to hurt my friend because he's too dear to me. In reality, he's looking out for his own interests.

In this way, the hidden love has more in common, it says according to this poetical comparison, with the profuse kisses of an enemy, like the kiss of Judas that betrayed our Lord Jesus.

It's insincere, deceitful, hypocritical. A good friend is faithful, meaning he is trustworthy and reliable.

If he sees you going down the wrong path, even at the risk of being spurned, he will correct you. So forthrightness and faithfulness are essential elements of true love, true friendship.

And that's why the famous command in Leviticus 19.18, love your neighbor as yourself, is preceded immediately by verse 17, which says, do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart.

[16 : 06] Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. The importance of giving earnest counsel to one's friend is highlighted again in verses 7-10.

Please follow along with me as I read it. One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity.

Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. These verses that I just read have an alternating pattern. So verse 7 is paralleled by verse 9. Verse 8 is paralleled by verse 10.

Verse 7 speaks of sweet honey and verse 9 speaks of the sweetness of a friend who provides earnest counsel. Verse 7 repeats the word soul.

[17 : 09] Literally, it's the soul who's full loathes honey, but to the soul who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. And that word is repeated again in verse 9 where earnest counsel is literally counsel of soul, a soulish counsel.

And these verbal connections between verses 7 and 9 illuminate each other. Because verse 7 at the literal level simply says that if you're a picky eater, it's because you haven't really known hunger.

That's true. As it says in Pinocchio that I'm reading to my daughters right now, hunger is the best sauce. But this verse isn't really about appetite.

It's about friendship as verse 9 makes clear. In other words, if you surround yourself with so-called friends, who are eager to party with you and tell you what you want to hear, if you have your fill of such friends, you're going to loathe even the honey-like sweetness of a friend who gives you earnest counsel.

You're going to be too full of the gossip, the chatter, the flattery, and frivolous talk of unfaithful friends to appreciate the open rebuke and earnest counsel of a faithful friend.

[18 : 29] And Proverbs 18, 24 puts it this way, a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Instead of getting full on many companions who do nothing to prevent us from ruin, we are to find the friend who sticks closer than a brother who is willing to give us the sweetness of earnest counsel.

The flip side of this verse is also true. Verse 7, it says, But to one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet. If you are starved for friendship, if you're lonely and desperate for some kind of affirmation, even that which is bitter is going to taste sweet to you.

Even bitter friends who make your life miserable are going to seem desirable to you. To summarize then, being sated by bad friends will make you despise a good friend, and the lack of good friends will make you pine for bad friends.

Bad friends. In order to avoid these pitfalls, we need to be wise in choosing our friends. We need to befriend those who will give us the honor of open rebuke and earnest counsel.

[19 : 43] Similarly, verse 8 and verse 10 parallel and explain each other. Verse 8 says, Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home. And verse 10 says, Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity.

Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. These verses emphasize the importance of geographic nearness in friendship.

There are benefits in remaining close to your family and friends at home. A bird that strays from its nest is out of its element. It is isolated and vulnerable.

One simple and obvious application from this is that we should think twice before we leave our network of family and friends for school, for a job, or for no other reason than leaving home.

It's easier to get a good education or to find a good job than to make faithful friends or to find a good church. church. Some of you have experienced this during your time in Boston.

[20 : 54] You moved here for one purpose or another and realized that you are a bird that has strayed from its nest, isolated, lonely. Verse 10 continues, like a bird that strays from its nest.

Those who forsake their friend and their father's friend in the day of their calamity and instead seek help from faraway relatives are going to be isolated and vulnerable.

They're going to be disappointed. In our modern digital age of frequent air travel and Zoom, physical distance seems increasingly irrelevant.

But this proverb reminds us of the importance of embodied nearness. A hallmark of a good friend is faithfulness, constancy, dependability.

And a brother who is far away is not going to be able to provide that for you. No matter how loyal or kind he might be, by the simple fact that he's not here, he's not going to always be there for you.

[22 : 03] His attention and his focus are rightfully elsewhere. Do you have friends who are nearby that you can call, that you can go over to their house in your day of calamity?

Do you have such friends? Or are your primary relational investments still in family and friends who are far away?

Especially in a transient city like ours, this proverb offers a helpful corrective. You should lay down roots wherever you end up and make friends with those who are near you, even if you're only there for a year.

Because you don't know what tomorrow may bring. An unforeseen calamity might strike you or you may be there for longer than you know or longer than you imagine.

Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. Wherever you are, you should invest in relationships.

[23 : 15] and as a church in this transient city, we have a wonderful opportunity to be that good neighbor and that faithful friend to all those who come through our doors. And then verses 11 to 22 teach us to choose our friends wisely.

It begins in verses 11 and 12. Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad that I may answer him who reproaches me. The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

These verses anticipate a family adversary who seeks to bring shame to the father. And while this is generally true everywhere, especially in this intensely family-oriented culture that Proverbs was written in, how the child fares is directly affected, it directly affects the way the parent is esteemed.

So here, the father implores his son to be wise and make my heart glad that I may answer him who reproaches me. He wants his son to be prudent and to avoid danger rather than being a simple fool who walks headlong into trouble.

And the primary kind of danger and suffering that the father wants his child to avoid in this context of chapter 27 is the danger of bad companions and the suffering that poorly chosen friends bring.

[24 : 37] As I said earlier in Proverbs 13, 20, whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. This highlights something unique about friendship and that's this, that friendship is entirely elective.

You can't choose your parents. You can't choose your siblings. You can't really even choose your neighbors. but you have chosen all of your friends.

And this is why it's so important to be careful with whom we choose. The Four Loves, a book by C.S. Lewis, describes friendship this way. He says, it is the least natural of loves, the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary.

He's pointing out the fact that friends are some relationships that don't, they're not forced upon you. Rather, they're relationships that you choose. And as much as we like to think in our liberal individualistic culture that we are self-sufficient or that we are self-made people, we are anything but that.

We romanticize the idea of self-determination. I'm my own person, we say. I make my own decisions. I determine my own path. But self-determination is an illusion.

[26 : 07] In fact, we are a product of our cultures and the communities that we surround ourselves with. When we are younger, we are primarily influenced by our family and as we get older, we are primarily influenced by our friends, the community we surround ourselves with.

And this is why choosing our friends wisely is so crucial. And verses 13 to 16 tell us what kinds of friends to avoid. Verse 13, it says, take a man's garment when he has put up security for a stranger and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress.

What's in view here is a man who cosigns loans for strangers. someone who becomes a guarantor of a stranger's debt for someone that he bears no responsibility for.

The word stranger is a key word here because it's also connected to the word adulteress, which literally means foreigner woman, a strange woman, a woman that does not belong to you, someone that is not your wife.

Proverbs repeatedly warns against becoming a surety, a guarantor of someone else's loans because doing so puts us at the mercy of the borrower.

[27 : 25] When we put up security for someone, we think that we are in charge, that we are being benevolent, but in reality, that subjects us to the goodwill of the debtor because if they don't repay the debt, we are bound, we are chained, we are at their mercy.

And because becoming a surety for someone else is foolish, it warns us against supporting, warns us against befriending people who do that. Imagine that you know a fool who puts up security for a stranger and an adulteress and then he comes to you asking to borrow money to bail him out.

He says, I'm your friend. Verse 13 tells us to be wary of such people. He says, don't lend him money in faith just because he's your friend.

Make sure you take collateral because it's a bad risk. Take the man's garment and hold it in pledge because you'll most likely never get your money back.

Verse 14 continues, whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing. Once again, the subject is friendship. The word neighbor is the same word that's translated in many places as friend in verse 9 and 10 for example.

[28 : 50] Even a well-meaning blessing if said with a loud voice early in the morning will be counted as cursing. I think many of you guys are aware of this.

I heard many sighs of relief when we chose the evening time for our service. And some of you guys have seen these coffee mugs that have these lines on it.

And I think like quarter of the way down it says shh. And then halfway down it says almost. And then I think three-fourths of the way down it says now you can speak. So you understand what this is talking about.

It's talking about basic tact and social awareness that good friend is supposed to have. Reminiscent of chapter 25 verses 16 and 17.

If you have found honey it only enough for you lest you have your fill of it and vomit it. Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house lest he have his fill of you and hate you. Just as it's possible to get too much of a good thing like honey so it's possible to have too much of a good thing like friendliness and neighborliness.

[29 : 59] If you want to be a good friend if you want to bless your friend great but you got to know the time and place to do it. You got to not be obnoxious inconsiderate and do it in a manner that actually serves your friend.

Some people struggle with this for one reason or another and if you know that you struggle in this department ask your friends for help. Rely on them. Ask them if there have been times you were tactless and so you can grow from it.

And then verses 15 to 16 warn us about friends to avoid especially in the most intimate of contexts. A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike.

To restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand. This is a picture of a man who takes shelter under the roof of his house in a torrential rain only to be pestered by the continual dripping of water from his leaky roof.

Likewise, a man married to a quarrelsome wife comes home for respite only to be worn down further by the nagging of his wife. To restrain her is to restrain the wind or grasp oil in one's right hand.

[31 : 13] Unlike the friend who gives earnest counsel in verse 9 who is described as compared to the oil and perfume that make the heart glad. The quarrelsome wife is like oil that slips from one's grip that one can never get a hold of.

She's supposed to be a blessing like the oil of this earnest friend, but instead she's elusive, unrestrained. It's because Proverbs often uses the rhetorical device of father addressing his sons that is written from this perspective, but this proverb also applies to the quarrelsome husband.

If your relationship with a man or a woman is fraught and characterized by frequent quarrels, if that relationship rarely offers rest and delight for your soul, then that's probably not the person you should enter into lifelong covenant with of marriage.

I do want to add a caveat here because, and I advise you to seek the earnest counsel of true friends in this matter because it may be in your relationship with the significant other that the core of some person is not him or her but you.

Instead, it says we should choose our friends wisely, people who have godly character that we aspire to because they will shape us. It says in verse 17, this famous verse, iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another.

[32 : 46] If you look at the footnote in ESV at the end of this verse, it tells us that it's literally iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens the face of another. In Hebrew, the edge of the knife is called the face of the knife.

So the expression face of another captures how just as honing steel can be used to sharpen the edge of a blade, we are sharpened and sanctified by our friends so that we more, we better reflect God's character and become more useful for his purposes.

In short, this verse is telling us to choose for ourselves friends who will inflict faithful wounds on us, who will make our hearts glad with sweetness of his earnest counsel.

And verse 17 is related to verse 19 by the word face and by the word man. It says, as in water, face reflects face. So the heart of man reflects the man.

This is another one of those poetic lines that are very difficult to translate. It literally says, as the water, face to face, thus the heart of man to man. It likely means one of two things.

[33 : 58] It could mean that as on the surface of water, one can see the reflection of his own face. So the heart of man reflects the man's true self, who he is. That's one option.

The second option is that just as you see your public image by the reflection in the mirror, so you see your heart in the way it's reflected in your friends around you, by those whose faces that sharpen you.

I think the second option better fits the surrounding context because of the connection, the verbal connections to verse 17. And also because Proverbs speaks often of how every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.

It seems unlikely that this proverb is telling us to look inside our own hearts that we actually don't have access to. If we really want to know what we're made of, if we really want to know what kinds of people we are, we need to look to the earnest counsel of friends, the faces of friends, the edge of their, of the knives, who love us enough to wound us faithfully and to speak the truth, to give us an honest appraisal of our own character.

If you have such friends, I know many of you do, it's painful. It hurts at times. It's not easy.

[35 : 27] But you are blessed. If you have such friends, you should attend to those friends because you will surely reap the rewards multiple times over.

That's what verse 18, sandwiched between these two verses, says, whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit and he who guards his master will be honored. The metaphor of tending to a fig tree is applied particularly to the relationship between the employer and the employee in this context, but it's more broadly applicable to other friendships and relationships as well.

And a fig tree takes several years to grow before it starts producing its highly prized fruit. And so it takes hard work and patient endurance, just like friendship.

But in the end, it's worthwhile. Likewise, faithful, loyal service to one's master, anyone who has power or authority over you, will bring honor to you in due time.

And similarly, friends, true friends, are worth attending to, worth devoting time to, worth counseling earnestly. And anyone who has enjoyed the blessing of true friendship will tell you that the fruit is sweet.

[36 : 43] Figs are one of the sweetest fruits in nature. We have this bag of figs from Costco, and it says, about 20 grams of fig, there's 10 grams of sugar.

That's amazing. It's nature's candy. And earlier in verses 7 to 9, it's described its sweetness, it compared the sweetness of a friend who gives earnest counsel to honey.

Likewise, another sweet food. Because we live in a world full of artificial sweeteners, sweet foods are commonplace, and now we take them for granted.

But in the ancient world, before people learned to crystallize sugar from sugar canes, that was about 4th century AD, sweet foods, like honey and figs, were cherished treats. And likewise, forthright and faithful friends yield delectable fruits, incomparable fruits, that sweeten your life and make it worthwhile.

We should strive to find such friends. Verses 20 to 22 then offer a study in contrast what foolish friends are like and how they can be tested.

[37 : 58] It says, Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied and never satisfied are the eyes of man. The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold and a man is tested by his praise.

Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him. The image of never being satisfied or sated continues the theme of food and eating.

Unlike the wise man who is satisfied by eating the fruit of his labor, by eating the sweetness of friendship, the fool is like Sheol and Abaddon, death and the grave, which are never satisfied.

His eyes are ever greedy for more, for more money, for more social prestige. And here's how we weed out such people. Verse 21 says, the crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold and a man is tested by his praise.

In the same way that silver and gold are refined by the fire of the furnace, so a man is tested by his praise. His praise exposes the man to reveal whether he is just dross that will burn off or true metal that withstands the fire.

[39 : 15] The word praise recalls verses 1 to 2 which told us not to praise ourselves or to boast about our future but to let someone else praise us. A foolish friend to avoid is the kind of person that is eager for the praise of man and can never get enough of it.

That person who, as John 12, 43 says, loves the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Such a person gets bloated and big-headed when lavished with praise, thinking that he deserves all of it and more instead of being humbled by praise, recognizing that all that he has is ultimately from God, knowing how much he is actually indebted to others who have helped him along the way, not knowing how so much of his success was about being in the right place at the right time and that there is very little that separates him from others who are also deserving.

So, such a greedy, selfish, prideful person is rapacious like Sheol and Abaddon, indiscriminately consuming everything in his path, including anyone who will be foolish enough to be their friends.

Verse 22 says, Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him. That kind of deeply ingrained pride and folly cannot be extracted.

Even if the fool were to be crushed as in a mortar with a pestle, the husk of his sinful pride and folly cannot be removed from the grain. And that brings us to the final section of this chapter, verses 23 to 27, which tells us to make friends for the future.

[40 : 58] Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever, and does a crown endure to all generations? When the grass is gone and the new growth appears and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered, the lambs will provide your clothing and the goats the price of a field.

There will be enough goat's milk for your food, for the food of your household, and maintenance for your girls. It uses the imagery of shepherding, but that's not what these verses are about.

It's not giving us shepherding advice. We can see this in the rationale given in verse 24. For riches do not last forever, and does a crown endure to all generations?

What's in view here is a king who rules over his figurative flocks. He currently enjoys riches by the virtue of his royalty, a crown, but both his reign and the riches that accompany his rule will one day come to an end.

That's the reason for the advice of verse 23. Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds. If you use the resources at your disposal for the benefit of your subjects, using the grass and the vegetation to feed your flocks, then when times change and you no longer have access to those resources, the flocks you nourished and shepherded will provide you with food and clothing.

[42 : 26] If you are in positions of leadership, whether it's in your family, church, school, or work, or anywhere else, this proverb commands you to make your position not about yourself relishing the power and privilege that come with it, but rather about serving the people in your charge.

If you do that, when your fortunes take a downturn, those friends you made will fend for you and tend to you. This is very similar to the parable of the shrewd manager that Jesus tells in Luke 16, 1-12.

There, a manager of a rich man's estate receives a termination notice from the owner, and knowing that he's not strong enough to hire himself out for manual labor, but also being too ashamed to beg for money once he is fired, the manager decides to use however many days he has left as the manager in his position to reduce the outstanding debt of all of his master's debtors, so that when he is finally unemployed, these friends he made might receive him into their homes and provide for him.

Using this parable, Jesus tells us in Luke 16, 9, and I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it falls, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

The logic is exactly the same as Proverbs 27, but there Jesus applies this principle to eternity. Our earthly lives are very short relative to eternity, and we can't take any of our money with us.

[44 : 10] So Jesus tells us to use unrighteous wealth, earthly currency, to make friends in preparation for a time when that currency is no longer valid in eternity.

If we use our resources, if we use our station, if we use our influence to make heavenly friends, to tell people about Jesus, to bring them, invite them to the kingdom of God, then when we no longer have all of these resources at our disposal, when we lose all of it in heaven, we will have friends to welcome us.

So then both for the sake of our earthly friends, earthly future, and for the sake of our eternal heavenly future, we need to use our stations and our influence, our resources, to make friends.

If you're like me and you're going through this passage, this fills you with longing. Wouldn't it be amazing to have friends who are forthright and faithful? Friends who are genuinely entrusted in your welfare.

Friends who are always there for us. Friends who love us enough to tell us the truth, and yet simultaneously is considerate and tactful. Friends who use their station, their influence, their resources to serve us rather than only to advance their own agenda.

[45 : 35] And if we're honest with ourselves, not only does this fill us with longing, it also fills us with regret. Because we realize that not only have we failed, have our friends failed us, but we also have failed our friends.

we have not been faithful and forthright friends. We have at times let our friends down. We have been self-centered.

But in spite of this, we have a faithful friend who has never failed us. who will never fail us. Explaining the significance of his impending death on the cross to his disciples, Jesus says in John 15, 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. What Jesus says here reveals that in a sense the entire salvation history can be described as a story of friendship.

[46 : 53] God calls Abraham my friend in Isaiah 41.8. It was said that the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

Psalms 25.14 says the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant.

We had all forsaken God. We had all rejected our covenant relationship with him. We have dishonored him and yet in his mercy God never stopped befriending us.

friends. We were fickle and unfaithful friends. Undependable and self-centered. And as James 4.4 says you adulterous people do not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Even though we chose our friendship with the world we hoard after the idols of this world and yet over and over again the spurned God the rejected God while we were his enemies says reconciled us to himself through the death of his son Jesus Christ.

[48 : 24] Jesus is the faithful friend who demonstrated the greatest love by laying down his life for us. he is the good shepherd who looked out not only for his own interests but he laid down his life to save us.

He had every right to exploit us fleece us use us however he would have wanted. He's the creator he owns us and yet he befriends his creatures.

and it's because Jesus died on the cross for our sins because he was raised from the dead for our sake that we can now be reconciled to him and be called his friends.

Brothers and sisters it's only when we become friends of God when we are transformed by his love when we are sanctified by his friendly wounds that we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Jesus Christ our perfect friend and it is only then that we can be the kinds of friends that Proverbs 27 teaches us to be.

Please take a moment to silently reflect on what kind of friend Jesus has been to you and after some time reflection will respond by praying out loud together.