

How to Build Godly Friendships

July 5, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Proverbs 17:17; 27:6,17

Session Outline

1. The Wounds of a Friend (Proverbs 27:6)
2. A Brother is Born (Proverbs 17:17)
3. Iron Sharpens Iron (Proverbs 27:17)

Theological Theme

Sincere friends help us learn and grow and show up better for those around us.

Call to Action

Take time to nourish one or more of your close relationships this week by reaching out in connection and encouragement.

How to Build Godly Friendships

Introduction

Sadly, we don't have to look hard to see fake friendship in our world. We find them in real life, on social media, and on the big screens.

In Disney's *Zootopia*, fake friendship plays a big role in the plot. Against all odds, Judy leaves her small farming town to become a big city cop. As a rabbit, though, she's a (literal) small fish in a very big pond (her coworkers are predators like buffalos, cheetahs, rhinoceros, and tigers).

Not only is she small . . . nearly everyone expects her to fail. But then she meets a friend! The mayor's assistant, Bellwether, is a sheep. A rabbit and a sheep in a predator's world are destined to be friends. Bellwether compliments Judy and empathizes with her. She knows what it's like to be small, underappreciated, and underestimated! She encourages and offers Judy help as she researches an important case.

But eventually, Judy and the audience find out the hard way that Bellwether is not a true friend. The case Judy has been researching involves missing mammals and attacks on predators in the animal metropolis of Zootopia. We learn, Bellwether is behind it all, and she's ready to frame Judy for it.¹

This movie is fun fiction, but reflects something true of our fallen world, people aren't always honest. Bellwether betrayed a supposed friend directly and aggressively. But sometimes, we can do damage simply by not being fully truthful to those who count on us. One way we do this is refusing to have hard conversations that can help our friends (and us) grow. This will be the theme of our study today.

- ❓ What distinguishes between surface level friendships and true and lasting friendships?
- ❓ Why do you think we hesitate to have genuine, hard conversations? Why are these important for true relationships?

Session Summary

In friendship, many moments are easy and light, full of joy and fun. But sometimes, we must wade into hard conversations, sharing truths that could be hard to hear. Scripture gives guidance about how to enter conversations like these, and how valuable they are. When delivered by a friend in love, this type of constructive criticism is trustworthy. A true friend shows up, especially when the road gets hard. When we live together this way, we “sharpen” each other, helping one another learn, grow, and show up better for those around them.

1. The Wounds of a Friend (Proverbs 27:6)

- ❓ What counts as “the wounds of a friend” and why are they trustworthy?
- ❓ What do you think the writer means by “kisses of an enemy”? Why would they be “excessive”?

The “wounds” in view here are constructive criticism, delivered by a friend with a sincere heart.

Have you ever been in a situation where you received “wounds” from a friend? It can be painful and hard to hear, but when delivered by a friend with a sincere heart, we can trust something we might need to hear and that our friend’s heart is in the right place.

Conversely, the false flattery of an enemy helps no one. Notice the key elements at play in this dynamic.

First, the “wound” giver is a “sincere friend” (NLT). They have a sincere heart. They have hard conversations because they love you. God often uses these types of friends to deliver some truth you will be better off knowing.

God is the author of truth, so it’s no surprise that Scripture has much to say about the importance of speaking truth:

Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. —Ephesians 4:25

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. —Ephesians 4:15

Notice that in Ephesians, Paul wrote that we shouldn’t just simply not lie—we should also speak truth in love. There are many ways we might be called upon to speak the truth and one of them is in our

Themes of Proverbs 27

Sometimes true love may be hidden in a rebuke just as hatred may be hidden in a kiss. There is no love where there is no fidelity to one’s wife and friends. True friends can improve each other’s character, but nagging only irritates.


relationships. If we are tempted to deliver criticism (even in the name of being constructive), but in our hearts, we are excited to “one-up” or bring another believer down, we should examine our motives and take them to God in prayer before we take them to a friend. When we are called to have hard conversations, we must have them from a position of love.

It is also important that the feedback we give is useful and edifying. Is this something our friend will be better off knowing? When we take advice like this to heart, Scripture calls this wise.


*A fool's way is right in his own eyes,
but whoever listens to counsel is wise.*
—Proverbs 12:15


*Listen to counsel and receive instruction
so that you may be wise later in life.*
—Proverbs 19:20

So when a sincere friend speaks the truth in love, we can trust it. Trust that God is working and then take it to God in prayer. A friend may have had the hard conversation, but now we must undertake the hard work of praying and asking God to show us how to receive and move forward in His wisdom.

 What are some ways to receive loving truth well? What are some ways we might not receive these words well?

2. A Brother is Born (Proverbs 17:17)

 What does this verse tell us about how we should conduct our friendships?


 What does it tell us about the importance of friendships during hard times?

In the first section, we considered being a godly and sincere friend. This verse in Proverbs 17 reiterates the same idea. A true, sincere friend “loves at all times” (v. 17).

It is easy for us to love someone at their best. When it is fun or comfortable to be around someone, it's easy to be a friend. But what happens when the road gets hard? What happens when the diagnosis comes? When divorce is on the horizon? When they are walking through a season of such thick grief that they can't show up for you like they once did? What happens when their spouse is dying and they are a complete wreck? Or when they are dying and need someone to take them to their

appointments? What about when they lash out because you are a safe space when it feels like life is falling apart around them? In these moments, a fake friend withdraws. But a true friend “loves at all times.”

When we do this well, our friendships grow even closer, like that of a brother or sister. A good brother or sister is really there for us, helping us hold together when the road gets dark.

 **When have you had a friend love you in one of your worst moments? How did that impact you?**

Scripture elsewhere records the blessing this type of friend is:

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.

—Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

—Galatians 6:2

There are so many ways we can love as true friends, and if you're facing a situation like this and unsure how to show up, ask the Lord for help! This verse teaches that a true friend shows up, even when it's hard. When we do, friendship has the opportunity to flourish.

3. Iron Sharpens Iron (Proverbs 27:17)

 **What do you think it means to “sharpen” another person?**

 **Why is this needed in our lives and relationships?**

In the previous sections, we've explored some components needed for a flourishing friendship in Christ. This verse speaks of the benefits of a sincere friendship for both parties.

The iron-on-iron language of this verse evokes the imagery of sharpening a tool. The original audience of Proverbs would have used iron knives for food preparation, and iron plowshares (the blade that cuts on the plows) for farming.² A couple of generations before Solomon, Scripture records the Israelites paying the Philistines to sharpen tools like this one (1 Samuel 13:19-22). This would've been familiar imagery. Just like a sharp tool is necessary to farm, “sharpening” in a friendship is necessary for it to flourish. Sharpening in general is necessary for people to flourish!

Have you ever seen the process of a knife being sharpened before? Today, we do this by grinding the edge of the blade at a particular angle to create a sharp edge again. This type of “grinding” in friendship isn’t always comfortable. Hard conversations aren’t easy. Walking with a friend down a challenging road can be exhausting. But the more we encourage, the more we stand by and walk alongside, and the more we wade into the hard moments with love, the more we sharpen each other. We help each other show up better. We learn and grow as a person. And we all flourish for it.

 **How have you been sharpened by other believers in the church?**


Conclusion


We often think and talk about encouraging our friends. We step alongside and remind them we are with them, and, more importantly, so is the Lord. These conversations fill cups and feel good! They are important.


But sometimes, we are called to have the hard conversations, too—the truth we know it might hurt to hear. Sometimes, God picks us to be the one to deliver this truth in love. Proverbs 27 calls these types of “wounds” (truth that can hurt to hear) trustworthy. When a friend is sincere in Christ, we can trust that they have our best interests in mind, and God is working through them and for us.

True friends don’t only show up in hard conversations, they also show up in the hard times. When the road gets dark, a friend who is like a brother or sister sticks with us and walks whatever difficult road stretches before us. When we do this, we help carry one another’s burdens as Paul wrote about in Galatians.

A hard reality about relationships is sometimes, you show up in all the ways, but the relationship fizzles. Maybe you have the hard conversation God asked you to and they resent you for it. Maybe they push you away. Relationships in this life don’t always work out like we might want. The very best we can do is to walk faithfully in the way God calls us to. We can trust Him with the rest.

 **Think about the friendships in your life. Are they positioned for the type of “truth in love” conversations we talked about today? How could we better promote this in Christian friendships?**

 **What have you learned from others about how to show up for friends when they really need it?**

 **How have friends in your life “sharpened” you? How could you do the same for others?**

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the gift of good friends. Thank Him for the friends in our church and your life and what they mean to you. Ask for His help and guidance as you consider how to be a better friend in Christ, even when it means doing something hard. Pray for the friendships in your group and ask for God to bless them and lead them to flourish.

Memory Verse

*A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a difficult time.* —Proverbs 17:17

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* by Daniel Akin and Jonathan Akin
- *Proverbs* by J. Vernon McGee
- *Be Skillful* by Warren Wiersbe



Historical Context of Proverbs

Purpose

Because these proverbs are in the Bible, they do not just entertain; they exhort, encourage, and offer hope. Solomon called readers, especially youth, to pursue wisdom rather than foolishness. He encouraged the inexperienced to become wise rather than mockers, to be teachable rather than incorrigible, to live rather than to die. He predicted that people who pursued wisdom would generally find success and happiness in this life, but he promised that they would absolutely find joy and blessing in eternity.

Author

Solomon is credited with the proverbs in chaps. 1–29 of the book of Proverbs (1:1; 10:1). There is biblical evidence that Solomon was wise and a collector of wise sayings (1Kg 3:5–14; 4:29–34; 5:7, 12; 10:2–3, 23–24; 11:41). Chapters 1–24 may have been written down during his reign, 970–931 BC. The proverbs in chaps. 25–29 were Solomon’s proverbs collected by King Hezekiah, who reigned 716–687 BC (25:1). The last two chapters are credited to Agur and Lemuel (30:1; 31:1), about whom nothing else is known. An editor was inspired to collect the proverbs of Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel into the book we now have.

Setting

The reign of Solomon represented the peak of prosperity for the nation of Israel. The period saw the greatest extent of Israel’s territory, and there was peace and international trade (1Kg 4:20–25; 10:21–29). It is likely Solomon knew about the ancient tradition of wisdom in Egypt (1Kg 3:1), but through inspiration and God’s gift he composed even better sayings (1Kg 3:12; 10:6–7, 23). Solomon addressed his teaching to his son or sons, but these inspired wise sayings are applicable to all people. The book of Proverbs, like the rest of the Bible, contains stories, teaching, and examples. People should make appropriate application of these truths to their own situations (1Co 10:11).

Special Features

What is a proverb? A secular proverb seeks to state a general (not absolute) truth, such as “a fool and his money are soon parted.” It is typically pithy, that is, it is brief but rich in meaning: “No pain, no gain.” A proverb is practical; it gives advice that is useful in the real world: “A stitch in time saves nine.” It should be applied; the reader should consider what changes he should make in his own life in light of the proverb: “Charity begins at home.” A proverb is derived from astute observations about how life usually works; the creator of a proverb shows himself very knowledgeable and perceptive, able to see what is generally true and to draw conclusions from it: “The pen is mightier than the sword.”

Extended Commentary

Proverbs 17:17

The purpose of a brother is to uphold a family member in a difficult time. The Hebrew word can be used generally of relatives (Gn 13:8; 29:15; Jdg 14:3). An unlikely but possible interpretation is that a friend is better because he loves at all times, not just in difficult times.

Proverbs 27:6,17

A friend imparts constructive criticism out of love, but an enemy gives kisses (24:26) with deceit in mind.

27:17 As a file sharpens an ax or a sharpening steel a carving knife, good friends encourage one another to grow in wisdom and godliness, even if it requires painful criticism (v. 6).

References

1. *Zootopia*, directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2016), film.
2. Daniel C. Browning Jr., "Tools," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1607.
3. David K. Stabnow, "Proverbs," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
4. *Ibid.*