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Proverbs: Friends and Enemies



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the different types of human relationships in the book of Proverbs, addressing friends, siblings, enemies, and neighbors. The verses caution against choosing companions who lead one into crime, whispering rumors that undermine a friendship, and going surety for a friend. The speaker emphasizes the importance of earning trust and loving enemies, encouraging listeners to do good to their adversaries and leave vengeance to God. Overall, the message stresses the value of maintaining virtuous and intentional relationships.

Transcript

Friends and Siblings All right, as we are looking at different types of human relationships that the book of Proverbs addresses, we come to that of friends and brothers, enemies and neighbors. Those are the remaining categories that we have not looked at yet. We've talked about parent-child relationship, husband-wife relationship, servant-master relationship and ruler-subject relationship.

And all of those are what we call hierarchical relationships. All of those are relationships in which there is somebody who is an authority by definition and somebody who's a subordinate by definition. But not all relationships are that way.

Many relationships are egalitarian relationships where persons stand on equal footing in the sense that no party is expected necessarily to submit to the other or to have authority over the other. They've got to work things out without the benefit of a hierarchy. Now I say the benefit of a hierarchy might seem ironic because in our society we don't consider hierarchy to be even desirable.

We're so independent, we're so into independent human rights and so forth that we find it disgusting actually that anybody should by definition be expected to submit to anybody else. But actually it works things out better so long as both parties are doing what they should because then disputes are easily resolved. If you have one party that is the one to cast the final vote, one party that's the one who makes the decision in the end, even if they consult the other party and are seeking to be very sensitive to the

other parties, finally if there's no agreement then one party can make a decision and things can go forward.

When you don't have a hierarchy as you do not in the relationships we're looking at today, you have an egalitarian situation then it's not always easy to know who is responsible to carry the day as far as their decision if there's not full agreement. On the other hand, with many of these other kinds of relationships there's not that much of an obligation to work together on projects. I mean that may be there may be such things that happen among them but these are just people you have to get along with and fulfill whatever neighborly or brotherly or friendly obligations may be appropriate.

Now not everything that's going to be said on these subjects is going to be profound and much of it is perhaps what we will we would just figure by common sense that that's the way that's the way you know the problems are. They are common sense or maybe you say uncommon sense because some people don't have even the common sense that may be less common than it used to be. But wisdom is really not too different than what people at some times would call common sense.

So you may learn nothing new that you would not have come up with on your own. But on the other hand, we do have these as instructions from scripture maybe that you would already know many of these things. In Proverbs 17 and verse 17 it says a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.

Now friends and brothers relationships. Generally speaking, there's a natural loyalty to family members, though it's not always the case. There's often sibling rivalry or even hostility between people who are your siblings.

The idea of a brother is generally speaking considered to be somebody who is close to you, somebody that you have a loyalty to, somebody that you would, if necessary, stand up alongside to deliver from any kind of adversity. And yet the Proverbs makes it very clear that a lot of times brothers don't have that kind of relationship. Sometimes actually they do.

But other times sometimes a friend who's not related can be closer than a brother if we shall see. But in this case speaks positively about friends and brothers. It's good to have somebody who loves you at all times.

Most people, unless they're very boorish, will be kind and loving and fair to you if you are good to them. But a friend is somebody who puts up with you in your ill moods, too, and the times when you're not lovable. That's essentially the definition of a friend.

And that's how you know who your friends are. You never know who's your friend until they have nothing to gain from you or you're unpleasant for them to be with. But at those times, you find out who really are your friends.

They will love you even at those times. And he says a brother is born for adversity, which doesn't mean a brother is born in order to create adversity, although sometimes that's how it works out. But a brother is born to you so that when you are in adversity, you'll have a partner to stand not alone against adversity.

A brother is born for that day when you need somebody who will stand by your side, who will get your back. And so friends and brothers in this case are treated almost like equal types of relationships. Friends are not always brothers and brothers are not always friends.

But ideally, both are there to stand with you when you're difficult, when you're not pleasant, when no one else would really be loyal to you, but because they are your friend, they'll stick with you even when you're in your bad moods. And your brother is born for the purpose of standing by you in adversity. Now, it doesn't always work out that way, but that's what a brother is born for.

That's why God gives you brothers. It's so that you'll have somebody who is, in a sense, by definition, supposed to be your friend. There are people who are your friends because they choose to be your friends, and there's no reason that they are obligated to do so.

But your brother is supposed to be your friend. Your brother is born for that purpose, to stand with you. When that isn't the case, then, of course, that's a tragic and heartbreaking thing.

But it tells us that if you are a sibling, and this would be true of a sister as well as a brother, if you are a brother or a sister, that you were born, among other things, to stand by your siblings when they are in adversity. And most people have that sense that, well, there's somebody who had offered to donate a very large sum to the Narrow Path, but they said they had been planning to do so. But a relative of theirs came up with a family crisis, a sick child had to be hospitalized and so forth.

And they said, well, obviously, you know, the money we had planned to give will have to be available first, if necessary, to help the family member. Of course, that's a given, as far as I'm concerned. You know, you have an obligation to your family first.

Even the spiritual family, brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul said in Galatians, Chapter 6 and verse 10, as you have opportunity to do good to all men, but especially those of the household of faith, meaning your Christian brothers and sisters. You are to help out people who really anyone who has need that you have the ability to help out. But there's a special obligation to help out your brothers and sisters.

That would be your Christian brothers and sisters as well as your natural siblings. So it would seem. So your brother is born to be a friend to you, your sister is born to be a friend to you.

Your friends who aren't your siblings are not born to that purpose, but they can choose that. And you're fortunate to have both faithful siblings and faithful friends. I know my two middle daughters, they're 23 and 25 now.

They have been best friends since they were little. And they're still they live together. They work in similar jobs in Los Angeles and they write music and sing together.

And it's hard to imagine either of them getting married unless the men want to live together. Because it's almost impossible to imagine my daughter's partying with each other. They belong to each other as best friends.

And actually, that's kind of how we wanted it to be when we raised our kids. One reason we homeschooled is we felt like our kids we bonded to each other more than to people outside the family. They've got a lot of friends, but they really they're inseparable from each other and not from necessarily all their other friends.

So siblings are a good thing. I personally think that, you know, people sometimes say, well, I just want to have one child so we can give it all the attention that a child needs. Well, I don't know that a parent can give all the attention that a child needs.

I mean, parents have other things to do, too. But one of the best gifts that parents can give their child is siblings. Seems to me because then they can get not only parental attention, they can get brotherly and sisterly attention.

They can have partners for life. The parents will die, presumably, before the children do, but they'll still have siblings if they have them. And so siblings are born to help out when you're in adversity.

And therefore, it's good for parents to give siblings to their to their existing children. And of course, the Bible says it's a blessing to have many children, but not if they're not friendly toward each other. Families should, you know, siblings should be recognizing that they have been born in order to help each other out when they're in trouble.

In chapter 18 and verse 24, a man who has friends must himself be friendly. But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Now, this first line, a man who has friends must be friendly himself.

There's a couple of words that are not in the Hebrew. It just says a man friends must himself be friendly. And some translations have rendered it.

If a man wishes to have friends, he must show himself friendly, which might be what is it might be what is Solomon is saying. That if you want to have friends, then be friendly. On the other way, the other way it stands here, a man who has friends must himself be friendly.

Means that if you've got people who have befriended you, then you've got something of an obligation to befriend them back. If people have taken it upon themselves to be kind to you without any personal obligation, they just being friends for whatever reasons, then you really ought to be friendly to them, too. There's an indebtedness.

But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. And that is, of course, pointing out what was said, that brothers and sisters aren't always as friendly to each other as they ought to be. A faithful friend might actually end up being more valuable and more faithful than somebody who was born to your family.

Though that's that would mean that the member of the family is, in a sense, neglecting an obligation. Which sometimes happens. In chapter 27 and verse six, says faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Now, wounds here, I presume, are not references to physical wounds, although if they were, the idea is if your friend wounds you, there must be a positive reason, though you can't understand it. Probably the wounds here would be more like emotional wounds or rebukes or times when a friend may have to do the thing that you really don't want the friend to do. But if it is a true friend that is delivering the wound, it is for your good.

It is faithful. It comes from the friend's loyalty to you that they do so. I can't picture too many situations where a friend would have to physically wound you.

Although I imagine if you were out of control for some reason, if you're drunk or something and about to do harm to yourself or to other people and they couldn't stop you, but by, you know, physically restraining you, even to the point of hurting you, they would do so because they are your friend. If it is a friend delivering such wounds, it is because they are faithful. And it is often the case that a person who is your friend must do the thing that displeases you and say the thing that displeases you, whereas the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Now, a kiss is a sign of affection, of course, but if the person who is kissing you is really your enemy, it would be better to have a wound from a friend than a kiss from an enemy because your enemy really is plotting against you. Of course, we think of Judas Iscariot right away as one who betrayed Jesus with a kiss. And so the idea here is that the quality of the person's commitment to you is something that you need to be looking at more than their outward behavior towards you.

Somebody who does what displeases you might actually be your friend, might be doing what you need to have done. I sometimes have mentioned that my son broke his arm a few years ago and it took a while for the emergency room to get around to looking into it. By the time, several hours later, when they actually did get to see him, his arm had begun to heal, of course, not straight.

And so they were going to have to break it again, which would be very painful. The doctor asked me if he had my permission, because my son was a minor, to break his arm again. My son had been in a lot of pain all those hours and now he's going to have even worse pain if he breaks it again.

It was a very difficult decision to make. And since my son was a teenager, I was able to consult him about it. If he had been like a two-year-old, it would have been very difficult, especially because he wouldn't possibly even be able to understand the reasons for it.

But since he was a mature teenager, we were able to consult and he said that he wanted me to do that. So I did. I allowed the doctor to break his arm.

But if he had been a two-year-old and had no possibility of understanding why I was giving this doctor permission to break his arm when he was already in so much pain, it would have been extremely hard, you know. But it would have been nonetheless out of faithfulness that I would do it because I care about his well-being. I don't want him to have a crooked arm the rest of his life.

And sometimes you have to judge somebody's friendship not by whether they're doing the thing that makes you feel good at the time, but whether it's something that you need, something that would be good for you. And if somebody is kissing up to you, but they're not really a true friend, you need to watch out for them. Although at the moment, it's more pleasant to have somebody kiss you than wound you.

Yet a friend, a friend who wounds you is better than an enemy who's going to kiss you, says Solomon. In the same chapter, chapter 27 and verse 9, it says, Ointment and perfume delight the heart. And the sweetness of a man's friend does so by hearty counsel.

So I'm not sure what hearty counsel means necessarily. It literally in the Hebrew means counsel of the soul. I guess heartfelt counsel is what's involved here.

That when a friend will give you heartfelt counsel, well-considered counsel, not flip off the top of the head kind of counsel, which people often do. But someone who's really given a consideration to your situation says, you know, here's what I really think you ought to do. That is apparently something Solomon says, like ointment and perfume that delights the heart.

It's good to have somebody else, two heads working on a problem, another set of eyes looking at it and saying, you know, here's what I'm seeing. And where when you're facing something where you have to make a hard decision and you need counsel, they have a good friend who gives it serious thought and doesn't just give a rapid off the top of the head answer, but gives counsel from the heart, which must mean that it's been considered seriously and it's heartfelt and so forth. A lot of times people will give counsel

that they think you want to hear.

Because they're your friend, you know. A lot of times women are counseled or men are counseled to leave their marriage because they're so unhappy in it and their friends want to see them happy. So they just counsel just over here.

They're listening to somebody give sort of a recitation of the troubles they have in their marriage and a friend would say, why don't you just get out of that marriage? I mean, that's just a flip answer. It's not necessarily an answer that's been deeply considered and the ramifications of it are far more difficult than one would imagine. If you think about getting out of a marriage, it's always much worse than staying in.

Well, not always, not always, but for the most part, it is. A troubled marriage is not usually as troubled as a troublesome divorce, unless, of course, it's a dangerous marriage and that's another story perhaps. But friends often give flip answers like counsel off the top of the head.

But when a person really gives you counsel that's well thought out, well considered from the heart, that's maybe such a rare and good thing that Solomon says it delights the heart like perfume does. It's a sweet smelling aroma. In the same chapter, chapter 27, verse 17, it says, as iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

I've never known exactly why that expression is used, countenance, except that the word face countenance means face is also a term that can mean the edge of an axe or the edge of a sword. So it's like sharpening the edge of a sword. Or of an axe, sharpening a blade, that your friend can sharpen you, which, of course, if an axe is not sharp or a sword is not sharp, it cannot accomplish what it needs to accomplish.

It's a worthless tool, or it'll be a tool that just isn't efficient, or a weapon that's not efficient. If you want to be an efficient weapon, if you want to be well equipped for every good work, then you need to be sharpened from time to time. And the sharpening is like, just like iron sharpens iron, your friend can sharpen you.

And he doesn't really say how a friend sharpens you, but perhaps he has the same thing in mind that he was talking about in the earlier verses in verse 6 and verse 9. Your friend's counsel, your friend's wounds even, the hard counsel, the hard words they give. It's abrasive, but so is a flint against a knife blade is abrasive. That's the idea.

That's what it takes. People are not necessarily always shaped by easy means. We sometimes get bent and hardened in a certain way from our habits and so forth.

And when someone finally confronts us about it, we've basically become established so much in a wrong way that it's not an easy transition to be fixed, to be sharpened, to be corrected. And so sometimes it takes a rather, it's received as abrasive when somebody is trying to get you to be perfected more by the counsel they give you. It goes against

your grain, it feels abrasive like iron sharpening iron.

When our children were little, we used to have them, even in the cribs, listening to cassette tapes. We didn't have CDs back then. Cassette tapes of someone reading the Proverbs, just reading through the book of Proverbs over and over.

And I never knew how much it took or even how much they understood of it until once when my son, Benjamin, whose name is Ransom now, when he was five years old, he and I were sitting in a restaurant in Santa Cruz waiting for our breakfast, just he and I, and he was sitting across there from me. And he picked up my butter knife and his butter knife, rubbing them together, he said, as iron sharpens iron, so does a man sharpen the countenance of his friend. And I was just stunned because I didn't realize that even hearing that proverb, that he as a five year old would have gotten the picture of sharpening a knife, because I had never explained it to him, but it just kind of stuck in his head.

This verse always reminds me of that event, though that's not a necessary part of teaching it. Just a memory of a father that was kind of quaint. So that's what friends are for.

Friends are to make you not go the wrong way without a fight, to not let you damage yourself without standing in your way. You might damage yourself anyway. You might, in fact, not even count them to be a friend anymore because they're not giving you permission to do what you want to do.

But if they, in order to stop you from doing what is damaging to you or to other parties, if they incur the risk of losing your friendship, they are a true friend. If they're more willing to have you survive or prosper or thrive spiritually or otherwise, then they are interested in keeping you happy with them. Then they're much more a real friend than somebody who will not take that risk and wants to stand your good graces and therefore won't tell you what you need to know.

There are therefore false friends. In chapter 12 and verse 26, Solomon said the righteous should choose his friends carefully for the way of the wicked leads them astray. In the first chapter of Proverbs, Solomon had warned his son against choosing companions that would lead him into a way of crime and told him to stay away from such companions of those.

A friend will lead you astray if he's wicked. That is, he'll lead you into the wrong kind of behavior because you do tend to copy your friends unless you're the alpha wolf in the group. If you're the one who everyone else is copying, that's another story.

But even so, if your friends are all leaning a certain way and you're going to stay friends with them, you're going to have to in some measure compromise or else the friendship

will not continue. That might be the best thing. In fact, it probably is the best thing.

If your friends are wicked, better not to have friends of that sort. Better not to have friends at all than friends of that sort. But if you're feeling the need to stay in good graces with your friends and they're wicked, that will always bend you in their direction in some measure.

So, a righteous person should choose his friends carefully. He should make sure he's not choosing friends that are going to influence him negatively. In another proverb, it says, go from the presence of an angry man lest you learn his ways.

The idea being that you pick up attitudes and you pick up behaviors from the associates you associate with. Therefore, a person who wants to be righteous and follow God had better pay attention to what kinds of friends he's choosing and be careful that he doesn't pick wicked people that will corrupt him. In chapter 14 and verse 20, he says, a poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich has many friends.

Now, what he's saying here is that not all people that we call friends are what we call deep friends. There's a true friend and there's a false friend. The man who is your friend because you're rich, but who despise you if you're poor, isn't really a friend, obviously.

He's somebody who's using the relationship for his own advantage. That's not what friendship is for. So, a false friend is an opportunist.

He'll be your friend if you're rich. A rich man has many friends of that sort. But a poor man doesn't have any friends.

Even his brothers despise him. His own neighbor doesn't even pay attention to him. Why? Because they have nothing to gain from him.

A poor man has nothing to give and therefore nothing is to be gained by befriending him. If you're the type of person who's looking to have friends that enrich you physically or materially. There are people like that.

They're not really good friends, obviously, and that's what's being said. It's a shallow kind of favor they're trying to curry with you for personal advantage. In chapter 19, in verse 4, it's the same thing.

It says, Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friends. That is from a false friend, obviously. A person may feel like they have a friend when they're doing well financially, but as soon as they get poor, as soon as they go broke, their friends are far from them.

And that, of course, shows when you've had false friends rather than real friends. In chapter 19, verses 6 and 7, it says, Many entreat the favor of nobility, and every man is

a friend to one who gives gifts. All the brothers of the poor hate him.

How much more do his friends go far from him? He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him. So, he's saying it's hard to find true friends who will stay with you even when you're poor. Even your brothers will be nicer to you when you've got money.

But when you don't have any money, even your brothers will go far from you. How much more the people who were calling themselves your friends. Obviously, the word friend is used in Proverbs two different ways.

Sometimes, in the first verses we looked at, it was about friends who were true friends. True friends who will stick closer than a brother. True friends who will love you at all times.

But then there's these other so-called friends who leave you as soon as things go bad. When you're riding the crest of popularity, they want to be with you on the surfboard. But as soon as the waves go down and you're in the mud, then they want to find someone else who will be more to their advantage to associate with.

So, there's those kinds of false friends as well as the real ones that Solomon described. Now, there are things that Solomon says can endanger a person's friendships. If you have friends, those friendships have to be maintained.

Remember, he that has friends must be friendly, must be a good friend. If you want people to be a good friend to you, you need to be a good friend to them. And there are things you can do that will endanger a good friendship.

And you need to avoid those things, obviously. In chapter three of Proverbs, I'm sorry, chapter six, verses one through three, he says, My son, if you've become surety for your friend, if you've shaken hands and pledged for a stranger, you are snared by the words of your own mouth, you are taken by the words of your mouth. So do this, my son, and deliver yourself, for you have come into the hand of your friend.

Go and humble yourself and plead with your friend. Now, the idea here is that somebody has counted you a friend to the point where they've asked you to go surety for them, to be a cosigner, to lend your credit to them, basically, to lend your good name to them because they lack the same. That's what being surety means.

It means that they need somebody to trust them, but they don't have the credit or they have not earned the trust. But someone will trust you. So you lend your good credit and your good name to them.

Now, scholars say this is always a bad idea. It's a bad idea for one thing, because you're probably going to end up holding the bill, because the reason they needed you to sign is because they don't have good credit. The reason they don't have good credit is they

don't have good habits.

If they were reliable people, they'd have good credit. They don't like it unless they're just establishing credit for the first time, which, of course, everybody does at some point in their life. It's the beginning of their credit history.

But if somebody has got bad credit or a lender won't trust them because they can't prove that they can pay, well, then maybe the reason they can't prove that they can pay is because they can't. And these lenders actually know something. After all, they do it for a living.

If they think somebody can't be trusted, they probably can't be, not because these lenders are perfect judges of character or of the future of a person's prosperity, but these lenders make money off of borrowers, and therefore they like to lend money. But if they don't want to lend money to somebody, it's probable they don't think that person's a good risk. And if they don't, they're probably right.

If that person's not a good risk and you sign your name to their debt, well, you're probably going to end up paying them. But that might not even be the worst of it. It might not even be so much that you end up being out from money, but there's an awkwardness in the friendship after that.

Someone said, if you never want to see your friend again, lend them money. And a lot of times it's true that when you have, you know, when you've lent somebody money, you've done something to bail them out of a situation that they feel awkward. They know that, you know, they know that they let you down, that they owe you, and they just kind of, it's easier for them to find someone else to hang around with than the person that they know they owe money to, because it's an uncomfortable thing, trying to maintain a relationship when every time they're together they realize, oh yeah, I owe this guy money, you know, I've got this unpaid debt to this person.

So, in other words, Saul is saying, don't have that kind of situation with somebody if you want to be your friend. And if you've gotten into it, he said, get out of it, if you can. Now, obviously you can't always.

He's talking about going and humbling yourself to your friends and saying, listen, I made a mistake, is there some way you can make this, get out of this? And, you know, maybe that's not always going to be possible. But he indicates that you've been trapped by your commitment, and it's better not to make such a commitment in the first place. If you've gotten into it and you can get out, if you can get your friend's permission or whoever's permission to get out of it somehow, then do so, because the friendship is definitely endangered, as well as your finances, when you go shorty for somebody else, even a friend.

In chapter 16 and verse 28, it says, A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. We're talking about what endangers friendships. One thing that endangers friendships is a whisperer, a gossip, somebody who's passing along a story to you about your friend.

Now, the fact that somebody's whispering means that they don't want to stand by their story publicly. They'd say it out loud if it was necessarily something that they wanted to be known for spreading. It's something that's gossipy, it's something that's negative, it's something that they don't want somebody else to know they're telling you.

These kinds of reports are calculated to turn your suspicions upon the person that's being whispered about. The person who's gossiping to you about this is trying to get you to think badly of the person they're gossiping about. And, if that person is your friend, they're trying to put a wedge between you and that friend.

Why would they want to do that? Well, it depends. I mean, no one knows why until we see the case, case by case. But, there's certainly times when people are jealous of a friendship that you have with somebody else and they want to be in that person's position instead.

And so, they do all they can to make that person look bad to you so that you want to be with this new person instead. Now, by the way, even if you were turned against the friend that they're whispering about, why would you want to be friends with the whisperer? Probably because they know that people like to hear gossip. You know, there is a proverb that says, as tasty morsels go down to the belly, so do the words of a tail bearer.

That sometimes it's a tasty morsel to hear gossip about somebody. And, while we all would say we despise gossip, we especially despise it if it's about us or about something we're not interested in. But, if it's about somebody we find interesting, we kind of like it.

I mean, the tabloids managed to sell a lot of papers I assume. They must make a lot of money or else they wouldn't be in business for so long. And, they're all about gossip.

And, so there must be a lot of people who like gossip, who think it's really interesting to hear all the troubles that somebody else is in or all the mistakes they're making or all the sins they're committing. And, the person who's whispering like that is seeking to undermine a relationship between the hearer and the subject of the whispering. And, so this is a warning really, not so much against whispering, but against listening to whispers.

Realizing that a person who's gossiping is probably trying to damage a friendship. And, if the friendship is something you value, then just stop listening. Don't let this person undermine your friendship.

It endangers friendships to listen to gossip. In chapter 17, in verse 9, it says, He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats the matter separates the best of friends. So, covering a transgression means that if your friend has done something that has been offensive and instead of you going out and whispering or gossiping about it, you cover it.

You basically guard their reputation, even though they've done something that could damage their reputation if it were known. Well, you cover them. You've got their back.

You don't let other people know about it. And, you save face for them. That's a friend thing to do.

But, whoever repeats the matter, as whoever goes out and talks about it to someone else, is separating friends. As was the whisperer. In fact, the one who repeats the matter is very possibly whispering.

And, is the same person as that whisperer mentioned before in chapter 16. Now, of course, repeats the matter could be referring to the person who is the transgressor repeating the transgression. That's doing it again.

That is, if somebody has transgressed against you and you've covered it, you've forgiven it. But, then they repeat it. That is, they do it again.

Then, that would be another way of looking at this. But, I think what he's actually talking about is two different ways to react to somebody else's transgression against you. One is to cover it.

The other is to repeat it. That is, to speak it to other people. Then, in chapter 17 and verse 18, it says, A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge and becomes surety for his friend.

Now, that's very similar to what we saw in chapter 6, verses 1 through 3. Going surety for a friend is not a good idea. A man who does that is devoid of understanding. It's bringing a possibility of a wedge in the friendship.

A young man who's a friend of mine and a friend of my parents once asked my parents to co-sign on a loan for him as he wanted to buy a grand piano. He's a piano player and he didn't have a piano in his home and he wanted to buy one. Apparently, he found a good deal on it, but he didn't have credit.

So, he asked my parents to sign for it. My parents didn't. So, he didn't get the grand piano.

But, they're still friends, decades later. If they had co-signed for it, this man has had, I think, 30 jobs in the last 10 years. It must not be hard to get a job.

I guess he gets them through temps. But, it's hard to hold a job, for him, anyway. And, he's always in a financial crisis.

So, probably, if they had co-signed on it, they would have bought him a piano for many thousands of dollars. And, he probably would feel a little more awkward around them than he does. Better that they didn't go through charity.

It's not wise. It's a person who does so lacks understanding. Again, not so much because my parents would have gone broke buying him a piano.

If they had bought the piano, it would have been paid four years ago. They would not be feeling the financial crunch for it now. But, they might still have the problem in the friendship.

Not because they would necessarily be holding it against him, but because he would have this in his conscience. You know, that these people, you know, he made them pay a lot of money for his foolishness. It just makes it hard to look someone in the eye after that.

You know, kind of want to just find someone else to hang around with, rather than look at the people that have done that for you. If you can't make it right yourself. It does separate friends to go surety for them.

In chapter 27, in verse 10, Solomon said, Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. For better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away. Now, it sounds like he's saying there are times when you're in calamity that even your brother will not want to help you out.

He should. He was born for that. He was born for your adversity at times, but that doesn't mean he appreciates his calling, that he will take it seriously.

And therefore, going to a brother who may, in fact, not care for you won't always be the solution. But your friend and your father's friends, in other words, longstanding intergenerational friendships, sometimes can be more reliable than that of mere siblings. If your father was a friend of this person and you've been a friend of that person, then it's got a history, a longstanding history that you can count on certainly more than, in some cases, than your siblings.

Solomon, writing this, may well have had Hiram, the king of Tyre, in mind, who had been a friend of David, Solomon's father. And Hiram had provided a lot of the materials for the building of the temple. And then when David died and Solomon became king, Hiram helped him out by sending a large labor force to help him build the temple and so forth.

This is an intergenerational friendship between them. And so, someone who's been a friend of the family for a long time may actually be better than family in times of

calamity. In the same chapter, verse 14, chapter 27, verse 14, it says, What does that mean? That means if you're blessing your brother in a way that's annoying to him, you're not blessing him.

The idea here is that you're trying to be a blessing to somebody. You're saying, God bless you, with a loud voice early in the morning when the guy would rather be sleeping. You're causing an annoyance by blessing him.

And there might be any number of ways that that same principle would apply. Where you're imposing your blessings, your kindnesses, and your favors on somebody who's really not asking for them, doesn't want them, and it just complicates their life to have your involvement in those areas that you're trying to bless them in. It's counted more as a curse.

The idea being, if you want to bless somebody, sensitivity is as important as good intentions. That's probably a way to summarize this proverb. But sensitivity to what will really be a blessing to them is more important than the fact that you intended to bless them, so you're being annoying.

So, those are things that endanger friendships. Now, besides friendships, there are enmities. I mean, there are enemies.

There's enmity between parties. There are a few things that the proverb says about those relationships. Those are relationships too, by the way.

Enemies are relationships. They're negative relationships. But they are neighbors.

When the Bible says, love your neighbor as you love yourself, Jesus made it clear that some of your neighbors are enemies. And therefore, you need to be able to love your enemies as well, because loving your neighbor is unqualified. And once when Jesus said, you should love your neighbors as yourself, somebody said, well, who's my neighbor? And he was hoping that that would be a rather narrow definition.

But Jesus disappointed him and gave him a rather broad definition. He told him the story of the Good Samaritan, where a Jewish man fell among thieves, and he was helped not by one of his countrymen, but by a Samaritan, somebody that the Jews had very ill feelings toward in general, and very bad relations with. The Samaritan was an enemy.

Not so much a military enemy, because the Jews had not really been fighting wars against them, but they were just, they hated each other. They were like neighbors who just hate each other. And the Samaritan was the one who helped the man who fell among thieves.

And the man who said, well, who is my neighbor, was answered in this way. Jesus answered with a question, he said, which of these three was the neighbor to him who fell

among thieves? And the man said, well, the one who showed mercy to him. And Jesus said, well, then you go and do likewise.

So, love your neighbor includes love your enemy. So, enemies are in our lives for a reason. They are relationships for us to manage.

They are challenging relationships to manage. They might even be people of our own household who have made themselves enemies. You can't really tell who your enemies are going to be in advance, because it's not always the case that you've done something to make enemies of them.

Now, of course, if you have, then you might be able to predict that they'll be your enemy because you've been rotten to them. But sometimes you're not rotten to people, and they still just decide that you're going to be on their list of people they hate. In Proverbs 16, 7, though, it says, When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Now, remember what the Proverbs are and what they're not. They're not guarantees. They're not promises.

They are observations and generalities that people who are your enemies, if you act in a way pleasing to the Lord, you may win them over. The Lord may make them to be at peace with you if you know the ways of reconciliation, if you know the ways of peace. One of the things the Scripture says about the wicked is they don't know the way of peace.

It says that in Romans 3, the way of peace they have not known. There are ways of peace. There are ways to behave that are conciliatory.

There are ways that promote the ministry of reconciliation that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 5. Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus said. They shall be called the sons of God. And when a person is pleasing to the Lord, well, what pleases God? Loving your enemies, among other things, and doing good to those who persecute you and such.

These are things that please the Lord. Also, if you just are a good person in general and you live a life pleasing the Lord, eventually, in many cases, your enemies will feel convicted about hating you because they can see that really, over a period of time, there's nothing really that bad about you. Now, the idea here is you shouldn't be worried about what your enemies are thinking.

You should be worried about what God is thinking. Please the Lord and don't fear your enemies. God can protect you from them.

God can bring about reconciliation between you and them. You should seek such because that is pleasing to the Lord. But the main thing is to just focus on pleasing God.

You don't have to focus on pleasing everybody. You can't please everybody. And sometimes people have been told by their parents, you can't please everybody, so you just please yourself.

That's the wrong answer. You can't please even yourself all the time. And you can't please everybody.

And it's never right to make that your priority. Your priority has got to be to please the Lord. Whether that pleases others or it pleases you or not.

Pleasing God is the right way to go. And many times, this will bring about the reconciliation with your enemies that you could not do otherwise. So don't fear your enemies but fear God.

Please the Lord and let Him take care of your enemies for you. In chapter 27, verse 6, it says, Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. So not only should you not fear your enemies, but you should not trust them.

Sometimes people will say to you with a very hurt tone, you don't trust me. And they're wanting you to affirm that you do trust them. And if you do, then you can affirm that.

But they really are making it sound like you're at fault if you don't. Like if you don't trust them, shame on you. How can you not trust them? Well, you're not obligated to trust people.

The Bible nowhere says that it's a virtue to trust people. In fact, it says, It is woe to him that puts his trust in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put one's trust in princes, the Bible says.

There's lots of times the Bible says that trusting people is simply not a good idea. Obviously, if someone's your friend or your mother or your sibling or something, they would expect you to trust them. And if they really are a friend and they really are honest, then you should trust them because they earn it.

But see, that's just it. Trust is something that must be earned. If you trust somebody who has not earned trust, you're not doing something virtuous.

You're doing something gullible. And gullibility is not one of the things that the Bible recommends. Many people think that Christians, because we have faith, we're just gullible.

No, the Bible actually forbids us to be gullible. The Bible says test all things and only hold fast that which is good. It's told to beware of false prophets and don't believe every spirit.

There's false prophets out there. We're not supposed to be gullible. We're supposed to

not trust everybody.

We're supposed to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. And therefore, trusting an enemy is not a virtuous thing. Now, loving your enemy is a virtuous thing, but love and trust are not the same thing.

Love means that you don't wish them any ill. Love means that you would lay your life down for them if necessary, if that's what was necessary for them. But it doesn't mean you're going to trust them with your back turned to them.

You still have to watch out for them because they are, by definition, an enemy. That's what they are. That's the person we're talking about.

Someone who hates you, don't trust them, even if they kiss you. We were talking about in an earlier lesson the miser who invites you over for dinner. He says, eat and drink, but his heart's not with you.

He's a miser. He's not being generous. He can't be generous.

He's not a generous man. He's got something up his sleeve. Don't trust merely the outward profession of friendship and love because an enemy may have all of those outward expressions, and yet they're still an enemy.

So don't trust an enemy. And also don't despise an enemy. In chapter 24, verses 17 and 18, it says, Do not rejoice when your enemy falls.

Do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. If you have an enemy and you're the good guy and the enemy's the bad guy, God's wrath is toward your enemy. But if he stumbles and you rejoice in it, then God may turn away his wrath from the guy.

In other words, God may stop punishing him just to punish you, because you have the wrong spirit. You're not supposed to rejoice at the calamity, even of an enemy. Now, of course, we can rejoice at being delivered by God.

When the Israelites saw the Egyptian army drowned in the sea, they rejoiced. Not so much out of spite for the Egyptians as out of rejoicing that they were now free for the first time in hundreds of years, that they were now a free people. That's something to celebrate.

The fact that the Egyptians died wasn't a necessary part of their joy. If the Egyptians had just been stuck on the other side of the sea and none of them had followed them into the sea and none of them had drowned, but the Israelites found themselves permanently free, they would have had the same measure of rejoicing, I believe. I don't think it was strictly spite toward the Egyptians, although I'm sure they didn't have much love for the

Egyptians.

The point is what they were rejoicing in was not so much that their enemies suffered as the fact that they themselves were delivered, and sometimes those things happen at the same time. It's okay, certainly, to rejoice that justice has been done and that the righteous have been vindicated and so forth, but to have animosity toward your enemy and despise them and to not see the tragedy in their demise because you hate them is not the attitude that pleases God, obviously. In chapter 25, verses 21 and 22, it says, If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat.

Now, this is your enemy, not your friend, not a stranger. This is somebody who is your established foe. If your enemy is hungry, give him bread.

If he's thirsty, give him water to drink. For so you will heat coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you. Now, this happened when Elisha was in the Sea of Dothan and the Assyrians came to arrest him, and he struck them blind, painlessly, and then he led them to the king who could arrest them.

And the king didn't know what to do, and he saw these blind soldiers of the enemy coming to him. He said, Elijah, what shall we do? Shall we smite them with the sword? Elijah said, no, give them food and drink and send them back to their master. And, you know, these are your enemies.

He said, give them your hospitality and then send them back. And you know, he did, and that was the end of the war. The kindness he showed to these enemy soldiers ended the hostilities, defused them, and the king of Syria withdrew entirely from the battle.

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. Jesus said that. He said, do good to those who persecute you, bless those who curse you, love those who are your enemies.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 and in Luke chapter 6. And in fact, Paul himself quotes these very Proverbs, these very verses in Romans chapter 12. It's not that often that Paul quotes from the book of Proverbs, but he does quote these verses in Romans 12, verses 19 through 21. He says, beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

Now that's a quote from Deuteronomy. But then he quotes this proverb. Therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him.

If he thirsts, give him drink, for in so doing you will heat coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. When somebody is your enemy, they are being evil towards you.

Do not be overcome, that is, don't compromise. Don't allow your own goodness to be compromised and overcome by their evil deed. Instead, overcome their evil by doing

good to them.

That's the advice. Now, what is this heaping coals of fire upon the head? This makes many people uncomfortable to think, well, he's saying to heap coals of fire on the head, that's not a very nice thing. And so, some Christians have done their best to try to make it, turn it into a nice thing.

And they say, well, in those days, they didn't have, you know, fires in their homes. They had community bonfires. And every morning when the women had to bake bread and so forth in their homes, they'd go out and collect coals from the community fire.

And they'd put them in a jar on their heads and carry them home to build their fires and bake their bread. And therefore, heaping coals of fire on somebody's head just means helping them up with it. You know, they've got to, they're going to have to lift these coals on their head anyway, so you're doing it for them.

You're heaping coals of fire on their head, which is a good thing. That's an absurd answer. I mean, if he wanted to say, feed him when he's hungry because you'll be doing a good thing for him.

That's a tautology. I mean, and if he wants, if he wanted to give an illustration, that's like doing a good thing. That's like putting, well, it's like putting a jar of coals on their head, a fire on their head when they want it up there.

Well, can't you think of something more, maybe characteristic of a good deed than helping somebody up with a jar of coals on their head? I mean, which they no doubt could do themselves. I mean, feeding someone when they're hungry and even that is a better example of a kind act than helping somebody up with something on their head. Coals of fire in scripture are an emblem of judgment, God's judgment.

And what he's saying is your enemy is already courting God's judgment. If you retaliate meanly or evilly toward them, then there will be no more judgment due them. God said, vengeance is mine.

Let me repay. Paul said, don't avenge yourself. Give place to wrath.

What does that mean? Give God room to judge them. If you do good to them when they are your enemies and you do good to them, you're amassing the judgment that is yet to fall upon them like the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. Eventually it will fall because they are doing evil to you and you're doing good to them.

That puts God in your debt. That puts God on your side against them. You know, it says in John chapter 3 in verse 36, he who believes in the Son as ever last night, but he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

That person is walking around with the wrath of God hanging over his head, abiding upon him. And so also the enemy of the righteous. If somebody is the enemy of you and you're a righteous person, you're doing good to them.

They've done nothing but evil to you, but you turn around and do good to them. The wrath of God is abiding on them. They are facing a judgment that you are not delivering.

God is going to deliver it. Vengeance is his. He's the one who's going to repay.

You are refusing to avenge yourself so that you can leave room for God to do it. And therefore every kind act you do to somebody who's hostile toward you is increasing their guilt, increasing the measure of wrath that is to come upon them eventually whenever it's released upon them. And heaping coals of fire on their heads is not a positive thing in the sense that it's not a kind thing it's talking about.

And you might think, well then being nice to them is just another way of being mean. No, it's not a way of being mean. It's just a way of leaving up to God to decide how the score should be settled.

Yeah, there is some indication that it will not go well for them when God settles the score. But it is at least leaving it to God to settle the score instead of you. After all, God loves your enemies too.

And it may be that he will settle it much more congenially than you would. It may be that God knows that you would overdo it. You do good to your enemies and then let God take care of the rest.

That's essentially what this is saying. You leave judgment in the hands of God. And that, I think, brings us to the end of our session here.

Yes, it does. So, we'll stop there and take a break. Thank you.