

St. John's Presbyterian Church
Medicine Hat, AB
Rev. Heather Carlson
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Scripture: Proverbs 27:1-10, 1 John 4:7-12, 20-21

Friendship

We've got a portion of Proverbs chapter 27 in our continuing series of Walking in Wisdom and a look at the book of Proverbs. Before we dive in, I have to say that we only read 10 verses of Chapter 27, but some of you will really appreciate verse 14: *A loud and cheerful greeting early in the morning will be taken as a curse! 27:14*

I feel like a coffee mug with that kind of a slogan would be popular with many people! And for those that like early mornings, take heed and tone down the enthusiasm to be received well!

It's a light-hearted spin, but also invites us to think about the timing of our words and actions. When I first was being mentored in learning to listen to God, I remember being told that often we will ask for "what" to do, and forget to listen for the when and the how which are just as important. Very much like we've been exploring with Proverbs. It isn't just what is said, but how and when is it to be applied. Wisdom.

And in addition to the wisdom of timing, this chapter has a lot to say about relationships - specifically friendships:

Wide meaning to friendships: As supporting community connections, block parties and block buddies in my role at Town of Drumheller, I learned some people saw "friendship" as a barrier because people thought they needed to be close to every neighbour. Who has time for 20 more friends. But friendship is a continuum, and we all benefit from "social snacking." You don't need to be close friends with all relatives, neighbours, coworkers, classmates, people at church. There is value in the waves, hello's and quick conversations. But there will be some with whom you cultivate friendship more deeply.

Do not forsake your friend....Better is a neighbor who is nearby than kindred who are far away. 27:10 Proximity is important. We can have friends at a distance, and through the wonders of technology there are ways to be in touch, but even with communication tech advances, there is something very dear about being together in person.

This chapter has a lot to say about the refining aspect of friendship:

You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies. 27:6

The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense. 27:9 NLT

Probably the most famous proverb: As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. 27:17

Just as iron tools are refined and made more effective through contact with one another, we are sharpened through meaningful connections—through challenge, encouragement, and honest conversation. Growth doesn't happen in isolation; it happens in community. As Biblical scholar Tremper

Longman writes, “The wisdom enterprise is a community effort.” (Longman 481) God designed us to build each other up, to speak truth in love, and to help one another become more like Christ. This is a call to seek out relationships that stretch us spiritually and to be that kind of friend to others.

This kind of wise relationship is on display in John’s letter to the church. John doesn’t let us escape with lip service: *“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate a brother or sister are liars.”* That’s strong language—but it’s needed. Wisdom in relationships includes accountability. It asks, *Do I treat people—especially those closest to me—with the same grace God extended to me?*

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 27:5

This phrase emphasizes the value of transparency and truthfulness in relationships, aligning with the biblical principle of speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). The concept of open rebuke is also reflected in the teachings of Jesus, who openly corrected the Pharisees and other leaders (Matthew 23). The idea is that such rebuke, though potentially uncomfortable, is ultimately beneficial for spiritual growth and accountability. (Bible Hub Proverbs 27:5 <https://biblehub.com/proverbs/27-5.htm>)

This doesn’t give us license to correct everyone around us! It means that we cultivate firstly, love, and supported with mutuality and honesty in our friendships. There will be a few people we begin to trust to help us become more Christ-like.

Which is the shape of love we are aiming for as followers of Jesus. As our passage from 1 John says, love is ineffective, even false or detrimental if not expressed in action. So too, the value of friendships that help us align our words with our actions are indeed as sweet as perfume!

But it’s not all about correction either: Let another praise you and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips. 27:2

We aren’t only in an endless improvement cycle. There are reasons to celebrate and encourage one another. And that best comes from the mouth of another. True honour comes from God and others, not self-assertion and self-promotion.

It struck me when I was thinking of this proverb that it is a “stranger” or “outsider” who gives this praise. This is such a Biblical theme that we aren’t only invested in the well being of friends, but of those who by the worlds standards may not fit. Those whose favour doesn’t gain us anything. What kind of beauty is shown in a life that even the stranger be moved to praise.

The chapter circles back to praise later in verse 21. Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but a person is tested by being praise.

I remember having to learn when given encouragement or a compliment just to say “thank you.” Learning to let the encouragement sink in without letting pride take over is indeed a mark of wise living.

Friendships depend on strong character. 27:4 Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming (like a flood), but who is able to stand before (withstand) jealousy?

This imagery highlights the potential of anger to cause widespread damage, both physically and relationally. The Bible often warns against unchecked anger, emphasizing the need for self-control and reconciliation. Jealousy often leads to envy and strife, disrupting communities and families. Jealousy is portrayed as even more formidable than wrath or anger. It is an intense emotion that can consume and destroy relationships. (<https://biblehub.com/proverbs/27-4.htm>)

27:19 When you look into water, you see a likeness of your face.
When you look into your heart, you see what you are really like.

Making and maintaining healthy nourishing friendships relies on reflection internally to continue to grow and change.

Proverbs chapter 27 speaks to us about friendships. The way close ones refine us, encourage us, and build our character. May it be so in our lives and in our life together. Amen