

Three Ways to be a Redemptive Friend

Selected Proverbs Sun a.m. 8/30/09 CBC

ENGAGE: Friendship is one of the sweetest joys of life. How important then that we truly empathize and listen to our friends when they come to us weighed down beneath the bitterness of their trial. Let's listen and learn from this humorous video clip on how NOT to be a good friend.

Cf. <http://faithvisuals.com/content/highwayvideo/classic/coffee.html> [Rich drops by seeking advice about a relationship problem. Instead of listening, Terel's only concern is making the perfect cup of coffee. A sensitive look at the nuances of true friendship. 4 min.+]

I believe Rich would agree with **Cassius** in Shakespeare's Julius Casesar, when he said, "A friend should bear a friend's infirmities, But Brutus makes mine greater than they are."

FOCUS: How can you be a true friend to others? Today we will consider three ways to be a redemptive friend—three ways you can bring blessing to those around you, building others up; advancing the cause of Christ in their lives.

SET THE STAGE biblically: We continue our study in the book of Proverbs on Wise Living. Why is seeing and living life from God's perspective so essential for us? The fruits you plant in the early years of your life you often reap in the middle and later years of your life. For example, the man who makes financial success his number one goal may wake up in his 40's to find himself financially secure, but minus wife and children. Or the person who gets in with the wrong friends may find himself wasting many years of his or her life. **The book of Proverbs helps us see the consequences for our choices to motivate us to choose wisely.** Like a new vehicle manual the book of Proverbs helps you and me run on all cylinders and reach the intended goal our Designer has for us.

The Book of Proverbs is the best manual you can find on people skills. Proverbs was given to us by our Creator, our Designer. God instructs you and me in what we need to know about human relationships. In previous weeks God has instructed us through Proverbs about our roles as husbands and wives, and moms and dads. God has instructed us on moral purity and leadership, as well as on how to talk to one another.

Today we continue to consider the wider circle of friends and acquaintances. **Who among us doesn't want to improve our people skills?** If you learn and practice God's wisdom as presented in Proverbs, you'll find yourself improving in people skills and enjoying life much more.

PREVIEW: So let's consider three ways we can be a redemptive friend—a friend that advances the cause of Christ in other people's lives.

ANNOUNCE the passage: Now to remind us of the value of wisdom turn with me in your Bibles for the Scripture reading to Prov 3:13-18 [p. 561]

How can you be a redemptive friend—one who advances the cause of Christ in the lives of others? How can you be a positive influence on your friends? To be a good friend:

Give sincere counsel (Prov 27:9).

Provide selfless, sincere guidance that has your friend's best interests at heart. Provide wise advice to your friends, telling others what they **need** to hear not just what they **want** to hear. Throughout our lives each of us face many major decisions. Decisions such as what will I do when I get out of high school? Will I go to college? Who will I marry? Where will I work? **Is it time to change jobs?** How should we discipline and educate our children? Should we buy a house? Where should we invest our money? What plans do we need to make for and in our retirement years? What church should we attend? Besides these decisions life regularly presents us with lesser, yet still significant decisions. (Cf. Anthony Selvaggio, *A Proverbs Driven Life*, 116).

Part of being a good friend is being willing to offer selfless, sincere guidance that has your friend's best interests in mind. Solomon tells us that such advice, from a trusted friend is **like a pleasant fragrance**. It's welcomed and gladly accepted. Note God's counsel to us in Prov 27:9: "Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man's friend *gives delight* by hearty counsel" (Prov 27:9 NKJV).

What Solomon appears to be telling us is this: "[Just as] ointment and incense bring joy to the heart, [so] the sweetness of one's friend [comes] from his sincere counsel." In other words: "Ointment and incense make the heart rejoice, likewise the sweetness of one's friend from sincere counsel" (Prov 27:9 NET).

ILL: I think here of Jonathan and David's friendship. "David was hunted and haunted by madman Saul. The king's single objective was to witness with his own eyes David's corpse. Between Saul and David stood a sheltering tree named Jonathan, who neither shook nor shed in that precarious place. No matter how hard he tried, Saul could not chop down that tree!" [Cf. Swindoll, *Growing Strong*, 153-54.] Loyal and dependable, at a low point in David's life as he has been fleeing from Saul, Jonathan comes to David and encourages him through God. In **1 Sam 23:16-17** we read: SLIDE "Then Jonathan son of Saul left and went to David at Horesh. He encouraged him through God. ^{23:17} He said to him, "Don't be afraid! For the hand of my father Saul cannot find you. You will rule over Israel, and I will be your second in command. Even my father Saul realizes this" (1 Sam 23:16-17 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] **The glory of friendship** is in the inspiration that comes to you when you discover that **someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you**. [Quote adapted from Ralph Waldo Emerson] Or even better, when someone else reminds and helps you see that **God believes in you and that God will be faithful to you! Be that kind of friend!**

APPL & ILL: Teens listen to the counsel of your parents. God will honor you for that. I think of **Ben Zobrist**, all-star second baseman for the Tampa Bay Rays. Following his graduation from Eureka High School in 2000, Ben believed his competitive baseball career was over. He had no college scholarships for baseball. At a Cracker Barrel Restaurant in June he asked permission from his parents to attend a baseball tryout event in Peoria, IL his coach had recommended that would be attended by college coaches. At the time Ben had thought he would probably attend Calvary Bible College in Kansas City in the fall and his sports would be limited to basketball, and perhaps soccer. When his dad saw that Ben was willing to submit to him and was willing to pay the \$50 entry fee, his dad consented. He ended up getting a scholarship to Olivet Nazarene (an NAIA) school, where he attended for three years before transferring his senior year to

Division I Dallas Baptist. In 2004 the Houston Astros drafted Ben in the sixth round. He was traded in 2006 to the Rays.

One day in early 2008 Ben was in Nashville, where he and his wife live when a swing coach, **Jamie Cevallos**, happened to come by, and was directed back to Ben. “Jamie helped me figure out how I can get my body into my swing without losing any time,” said the switch-hitter. “I am actually able to see the ball a little longer and still get my body into the swing. It enabled me to get more power into a shorter, quicker swing.” After belting just three home runs in 280 at-bats in 2006 and '07, Zobrist has 23 homers thus far this year (8/30/09), and is in the top ten in the American League in on base percentage and slugging percentage.

As Ben reflects on the events that have led him into professional baseball he says, “I believe specifically God had a hand in the way all that went. I don't think anything happens by chance. Those were things out of my hands completely. But it was very clear at the same time this is the direction my life needed to go.”

Teens trust the counsel of your parents! They have your best interests at heart.

Solomon tells us here in Proverbs that wise advice from a friend brings benefit. Giving genuine advice to a friend shows that you care. Such sincere counsel is thoughtful, wise counsel, always in keeping with Scripture.

APPL: This means that if your friends at school are talking about going to parties where drinking or drugs are going to be there you refuse to go along with them. God warns that being led astray by the use of alcohol or drugs is not wise.

Now as we share counsel its important that we think before we speak, that we share sincere counsel after appropriate reflection. **To say the right thing at the right time is useful; to say the right thing at the wrong time is counterproductive.** SLIDE “A person has joy in giving an appropriate answer, and a word at the right time – how good it is!” (Prov 15:23 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] When giving counsel ask yourself, “Is this the right time for this person to hear this?” Timing is crucial.

APPL: When your husband comes home completely drained and tired after a very hard week at work, it's probably not the best time to suggest to him “Honey how about if we get up at 6 tomorrow morning to clean out the garage.” Even when you have good counsel **be wise about the timing** of when you give that advice.

Now as we give counsel to friends, give this counsel with genuine concern for your friend. Spend time in prayer for your friend, so that you have God's concern for your friend. **Such counsel is so rare and valuable that Solomon compares it to perfume and incense, some of the most precious and delightful treasures of the ancient world.**

ILL: At the same time **make sure you give good counsel** to your friends. **Sophie and Shirley**, two elderly widows in a Florida adult community, are curious about the latest arrival in their building—a **quiet, nice looking gentleman** who keeps to himself. **Shirley says, “Sophie, you know I'm shy. Why don't you go over to him at the pool and find out a little about him. He looks SO lonely.”** Sophie agrees, and later that day at the pool, she walks up to him and says, **“Excuse me, mister. I hope I'm not prying, but my friend and I were wondering why you looked so lonely.”** “Of course I'm lonely, he says, “I've spent the past 20 years in prison.” “You're kidding What for?,” Sophie asks. “For killing my third wife, I strangled her.” “Well,

what happened to your second wife?” “I shot her.” Sophie asks only one more question: **“And, if I may ask, your first wife?”** “We had a fight, and she fell off a bridge.”

“Oh my,” says Sophie. **Then, turning to her friend on the other side of the pool, she yells, “YOU’RE NEVER GOING TO BELIEVE THIS, SHIRLEY... HE’S SINGLE!”** 😊 [Give good counsel to your friends!]

APPL: Provide selfless, sincere guidance that has your friend’s best interests at heart. **Be such a friend that is not afraid to be bold in your Christian testimony**, so that those around you can’t one day say to you, **“Why is it that you never told me how I could be forgiven of my sins and have eternal life? I thought you were my friend.”**

Trans: A second way you can be a redemptive friend is this:

Give loving correction (Prov 27:6).

When you lovingly try to help someone see that they are going the wrong way you are being a true friend. And **someone who tries to help us see where we are going the wrong way is a true friend**. Correction becomes necessary when we are already on the wrong path and need to change. So while often the goal of counsel is to prevent something bad, **the goal of correction is to RESTORE something good**.

Solomon contrasts for us how true friends and enemies (posing as friends) respond to us when we are in the wrong. **Look with me in your Bible at Prov 27:6 (NKJV):** *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”* In other words **the wounds from a friend can be trusted**. While correction is not always easy, it is helpful. Be grateful for people who tell you the truth about yourself. As Antisthenes [An TIS the knees], a Cynic Philosopher, once said: “There are only two people who can tell you the truth about yourself—an enemy who has lost his temper and **a friend who loves you dearly.**” [Pause...]

APPL: As a true friend they are times when you may need to help a friend see a blindspot in their lives. At times all of us need correction. God tells us that such a friend that provides this correction is a blessing to us, even though it might hurt at the time to hear it. On the other hand, the kisses of an enemy cannot be trusted, no matter how often they are presented.

We are true friends when we can look at our friend’s life with a biblical, God-centered worldview. If your friend is on a wrong path, being a good friend means you correct or even rebuke your friend. You don’t help your friend if you pretend the situation is not serious. Be a true friend. When your friend makes bad choices help your friend see he or she needs to make some changes.

When you have someone who corrects or rebukes you when you are headed down the wrong path you have a true friend. Like setting a bone or performing surgery to remove a cancer, a friend’s wounds are far better suffered sooner rather than later. These wounds are careful, measured wounds, humbly administered, which can heal a significant illness. Such wounding is an act of redemptive love.

On the other hand the kisses of an enemy cannot be trusted, no matter how often they are presented. Those who simply tell you what you want to hear are not necessarily your true friends. If you want to be a true friend then you must be willing to tell your friends when they are wrong. If you genuinely love your friends then you need to tell them when they are doing wrong.

Look at Prov 27:5. “Open rebuke *is* better than love carefully concealed” (Prov 27:5 NKJV). When you are too timid or afraid, or not trusting enough to give loving correction you are not showing genuine love. You may say you love your friend, but if you don’t give loving correction when they need it, you don’t have your friend’s best interests at heart. You are more concerned about your friend possibly rejecting you, than you are about the best interests of your friend. **If your friend is heading down the wrong path you are better being direct, honest, and frank about what your friend is doing wrong, than to be silent and say nothing** because you are afraid you might hurt their feelings, or how they will respond to you. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (Prov 27:5 NET).

Lovingly correcting your friend when they head down the wrong path ultimately will bring you more favor than telling your friend what they want to hear. [SLIDE] “The one who reproves another will in the end find more favor than the one who flatters with the tongue” (Prov 28:23 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

APPL: Your friend comes over to share with you how terrible her marriage is and how she’s found someone else at work her makes her feel wonderful. She’s contemplating leaving her husband and family to move in with this other man. Your natural tendency may be to tell your friend what she wants to hear. “Yes, you do have it bad. I’m happy you’ve found someone who understands you. I just want you to be happy.” Such a response will be pleasing to your friend for the moment, but you are offering no constructive help like a rebuke would. **Solomon tells us, “Telling your friend what she needs to hear, while not easy in the long run shows that you are a true friend.”** To be able to lovingly tell your friend that God can work a miracle in her life and her husband’s life, that God can restore the romance and the passion and the love in their marriage—to not give up, to get help, and to break off the relationship with this man at work, even to the point of changing jobs if necessary. You might suggest to her and her husband to get and put into practice the book, *His Needs, Her Needs* by William Hurley. **True friends tell their friends what they need to hear, not just what their friends want to hear.** A friend indeed is one who says quietly, but firmly, “What you’re doing friend is sin. It is harmful to you and to others. It is destructive to God’s dream for you.”

If you cannot be truthful to your friend when they are doing wrong, your friendship is more than doubtful; your friendship is utterly paralyzed. “Secret love that does not risk a faithful wound, and spares rebuke, rather than inflict pain, judged by God’s standards is hatred.” [Cf. Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, 505.]

SLIDE: “You must not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely reprove your fellow citizen so that you do not incur sin on account of him” (Lev 19:17 NET). BLANK SLIDE God instructs us, “Reprove a fellow believer who sins and is not repentant lest you also become guilty.”

Trustworthy correction that you give kindly, considerately, and prayerfully helps to bond friendship rather than loosen it. If it doesn’t it only proves that the friendship was not based upon a worthwhile foundation. In other words, if you lovingly correct a friend and they get offended and no longer want to be your friend, it only proves that your friendship was not built on a solid foundation, and it’s better if you don’t continue that friendship.

Correction from a loving friend helps to sharpen us. Constructive criticism sharpens character. SLIDE: “As iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens his friend” (Prov 27:17 NET). BLANK SLIDE When iron is rubbed against another piece of iron it shapes and sharpens it. In

the same way a good friendship helps both of us by our discussions, criticisms, suggestions, and ideas. **Wisdom**, God's goal for us, **comes from interaction**, often in conversations with friends who give comments and opinions that help us analyze or judge our thoughts and actions.

One way God helps to protect us from sin and sinful people is by correction godly people give us. When King David expressed His desire for God to protect him from sin and sinful people he stated: SLIDE: "May the godly strike me in love and correct me! May my head not refuse choice oil!" (Ps 141:5a NET). BLANK SLIDE David compares the constructive criticism of the godly to having refreshing olive oil poured over his head.

ILL: Author and teacher, Dr. Howard Hendricks tells the story of a young man who strayed from the Lord but was finally brought back by the help of a friend who really loved him. When there was full repentance and restoration, Dr. Hendricks asked this Christian how it felt away from the Lord. The young man said it seemed like he was out at sea, in deep water, deep trouble, and all his friends were on the shore hurling biblical accusations at him about justice, penalty, and wrong. **"But, there was one Christian brother who actually swam out to get me and would not let me go. I fought him, but he pushed aside my fighting, grasped me, put a life jacket around me, and took me to shore.** By the grace of God, he was the reason I was restored. He would not let me go."

REIT/TRANS: How can you be a good friend? **A good friend gives SINCERE COUNSEL.** When I am trying to choose a path, a true friend offers sound counsel. And I do the same for others. **A good friend also gives TRUSTWORTHY CORRECTION.** When I am on the wrong path, heading my own way, a true friend offers loving correcting. And third, to be a redemptive friend—a friend that advances the cause of Christ in someone else's life:

Give consistent comfort (Prov 17:17).

Proverbs gives us much counsel in how to be a true friend. A true friend offers comfort and love at all times, even in adversity. **Turn in your Bibles to Prov 17:17 (NKJV):** "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov 17:17 NKJV). Solomon compares the loyalty of a true friend to the loyalty a brother or sister shows to their family during times of calamity. How can you tell if you are a true friend or others are true friends to you? **True friends show the same loyal love in times of greatest need that a brother or sister demonstrates to a family member in need.**

ILL: Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. Breaking baseball's color barrier, he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to ridicule him. **He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered.** Then, shortstop **Pee Wee Reese** came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

A friend is someone who knows all about you and loves you anyway. As **George Eliot** notes: "Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together **knowing** that a faithful hand will take and sift them, **keep** what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness blow the rest away." [Cf. George Eliot, quoted in Today in the Word, July, 1989, p. 28]

Now **how you respond to the faults of others reveals whether or not you have love**. If you harp about the past faults of others, and repeat past failures to others who will tend to break up friendships by your gossip. **Look at Prov 17:9 (NKJV):** “*He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.*” How you respond to the faults of others reveals whether or not you have love. **When you cover, that is, FORGIVE the fault of a friend you promote love because you show you care about the person.** On the other hand, if you pass on gossip you destroy love and trust and you break up friendships.

APPL: As a husband or wife, do you want to promote love in your marriage? Don’t harp about the past. Don’t keep dragging up past failures about your spouse. Harping on past failures destroys many friendships and marriages! Realize how much God has forgiven you and forgive others! Remember what Jesus told us, “Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy” (Matt 5). Be merciful. Giving consistent comfort means we promote love by forgiving the faults of others, rather than passing on gossip.

Solomon also warns us about damaging a friendship by involving the friend without necessity or warrant in someone else’s quarrel. SLIDE: “Do not go out hastily to litigation, or what will you do afterward when your neighbor puts you to shame? ^{25:9} When you argue a case with your neighbor, do not reveal the secret of another person, ^{25:10} lest the one who hears it put you to shame and your infamy will never go away” (Prov 25:8-10 NET). BLANK SLIDE Solomon warns us here then that the one who betrays another person’s confidence will never be able to live down the bad reputation he made as one who betrays secrets.

ILL: The opposite of one who provides consistent comfort and love is one who has a critical spirit. There was a practicing lawyer who loved to attack his opponents through scathing letters printed in newspapers. In 1842 he ridiculed the wrong man. **James Shields** did not take kindly to the anonymous writer who lampooned him in the **Springfield Journal**. Mr. Shields tracked down this attorney who had publicly embarrassed him and challenged him to a duel. The man was a writer, not a fighter but he could not get out of the duel without saving his honor.

He was given the choice of weapons and chose swords in hopes of using his long arms to his advantage. He trained with a West Point graduate as he prepared to fight to the death. On the appointed day he met Mr. Shields on a sandbar in the Mississippi River. At the last minute their seconds intervened and convinced the men to stop the duel. The lawyer returned to his practice as a changed man. Never again did he openly criticize anyone. In fact, years later when he heard his wife criticize the southern people of the Civil War, **President Abraham Lincoln said, “Don’t criticize them; they are just what we would be under similar circumstances.”** [Cf. Dale Carnegie, *How To Win Friends & Influence People*, 9-10.]

ILL: It’s very easy to pass judgment on people, especially if we haven’t passed through their experience. People who have lost a loved one, lost their job through being made redundant or lost a position of responsibility, often go through a valley of bereavement which can’t be understood second-hand. It requires a true friend to stand by them. Giving consistent comfort and love means you remain by the side of those going through the harsh winds of adversity, carrying the other person’s burden (cf. Gal 6:2).

Part of providing consistent comfort and support includes not scorning or neglecting old family friends. Solomon encourages us to retain family relationships but also recognize that a friend who is available is better than a relative who is not. SLIDE: “Do not forsake your friend and

your father's friend, and do not enter your brother's house in the day of your disaster; a neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away" (Prov 27:10 NET). BLANK SLIDE

CONCLUSION:

If you were another person would you like to be a friend of yours? This morning as we've continued to mine the nuggets of God's wisdom in Proverbs on friendships we've considered **three ways we can be a redemptive friend**—a friend that advances the cause of Christ in someone else's life. How can you be a redemptive friend—a friend that advances the cause of Christ in the lives of others? **Give sincere counsel. Provide loving correction. Give consistent comfort.**

You and I have the opportunity to be the best friends of anyone to those around us, because of the love that Jesus Christ showed in purchasing us out of the slave market of sin! Let's be redemptive friends!

Let's help those around us see life from God's perspective. Let's remember that all human friendships we have are secondary, derived from Christ reaching out to us. Let's keep cultivating our relationship with Christ so we can be a redemptive friend. And let's remember that **the greatest gift you and I can give our friends is to introduce them to Jesus Christ.**