

Time of Grace Ministry
Friends Request: Choose Friends Carefully
Deuteronomy 13:6, Psalm 16:4, Proverbs 12:26, 16:28, 18:8, 18:24, 27:6
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Show me your friends; I'll show you your future. Show me the people that you hang out with and five years down the road, I will show you what you'll probably believe and how you'll probably behave.

Back in the '90s when I was growing up in the church, my pastor used to say this one thing over and over and over. But now, as I think about his wisdom, I realize that what he was teaching us in those formative years was brilliant. In fact, it was so good I wanted to share it with you today. So if you're taking notes in your program, let me have you write down his wisdom. He used to tell us all the time: Show me your friends and I'll show you your future. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future. Show me the people that you hang out with and five years down the road, I will show you what you'll probably believe and how you'll probably behave. Peer pressure, for better or for worse, and so we start to care about the friends because we care about the future.

And I bet as you look on your life, you know that that's true; that some of the best things you've done and some of the worst choices you made you haven't done by yourself; they happened because of friends. You don't have to make a confession in church today but isn't that true? Some of the stuff you regret the most didn't happen in a room by yourself. Some of the stuff in life that you wish you could rewind, it was because there were people you were trying to impress, people who had given you an idea, and were waiting to see how you reacted. It's not that we can't sin as a solo but so often sin happens as a duet, as a quartet, as an ensemble because - my pastor was right - show me your friends and I'll show you your future.

On the other hand, I bet some of the best things that have happened in your life happened because of friends. I know for a fact that some of you are here today, you're hearing about God's grace, you're hearing about Jesus Christ, because of a friend. You found out that there's a God who forgives and a God who declares people perfect despite their imperfections. A God whose mercy is new every morning. A God who doesn't make you live with shame and guilt and regret but instead with freedom and with joy and with happiness. Some of you never knew the joy of generosity; you're kind of living, trying to save and to get and to spend and you never knew that it's more blessed to give than to receive. Until you met those friends who were crazy generous and they were crazy happy about it and they confused you enough that it changed the way that you looked at money, that you looked at life.

How many of us here today said that we would not be the people that we are if it wasn't for some really amazing friends who affected our future? Show me your friends and I'll show you your future. My pastor was right and it's going to be true in the future, too. It's not just good for kids who are in middle school or those formative years of college; it's true for you today. Like how you believe and how you behave will be shaped six months from now and a year from now and

five years from now by the company you keep, for better or worse. I love this quote that a motivational speaker, Jim Rome, says. He says, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." So just think about that for a second. Who are the five people, besides your immediate family, that you spend the most time with? Who are your closest friends and what effect will they have on your future? You know, God, according to Jesus, is a father. And just like I'm a father and I care about the company that my daughters keep, your father cares about the company that you keep. There's this great passage in the Old Testament in Proverbs 12. Let me show you the words of King Solomon. He said, "The righteous choose their friends carefully." To be righteous means to be in a right relationship with God through faith and to want to do the right thing and our heavenly Father says, "If you're a righteous person, choose your friends carefully." And so that's what I want to share with you today. I want to share how exactly you do that according to the Bible. And in particular, I want to walk through four points with you. First of all, two cautions, like two yellow lights that you should really slow down and think about a friendship before it affects your future and then two green lights; two characteristics or qualities in people that if you see them, you should put your foot on the gas and pursue them as fast as you can. Two yellow lights, two green lights, because my pastor was absolutely right; your friends will affect your future.

So if you're taking notes, let's start with that first yellow light, the first caution the Bible says about friendship and here's what it is: You should be very, very cautious with friends who have gods. If your friends don't worship the true God - Father, Son and Spirit - but they have multiple gods, they have a different god, the Bible would say be very, very careful. Here's the passage to prove that from Deuteronomy 13. The prophet Moses said, "If your very own brother or your son or daughter or the wife you love or your closest friend secretly entices you saying, 'Let's go and worship other gods,' gods that either you know your ancestors have known, gods of the people around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other, do not yield to them or listen to them." See, Moses spoke this just before his people crossed the Jordan River into the land called Canaan and two of the most popular gods of the Canaanites were Baal, the rain god, and his female friend named Ashura. Heard those names before? Do you know what church looked like for people who worshipped Baal and Ashura? It was entertaining. See, the Canaanites believed that for Baal, the rain god, to make it rain so their crops could grow and they would survive, it only rained when Baal would have sex with Ashura. And so how were they going to get Baal interested in having sex with his female friend Ashura and the idea they came up with is what if we give him a little something to get his engine running? What if we have sex when we come to church? And so that's what they did. Read the Old Testament and you'll see all these references to "shrine prostitution," where you come and you pay money to worship and you'd have a good time in return.

And you can imagine when the men of Israel got to this new place with these new gods and this new religion, it was a very interesting outreach strategy. Many of them were very interested; like, "Wait, I'm used to praying and repenting and confessing. You do what in church?" And so Moses said, "Be careful. When your friends entice you with immediate, short-term pleasure, be careful. Don't listen to them."

So what does that mean for you? I have a feeling none of your friends worship Baal and your granddaughter's roommate doesn't have an Ashura pole in her dorm room but the truth is

everyone you know, no matter how religious they seem or not, worships something. Because in the Bible a god is not just a statute or an image; a god is the thing that you love more than anything else in life. A god is the thing that you seek with your greatest passion, the best of your time, and the greatest amount of your budget. The thing you can't live without. The thing you need to have peace and happiness and make today a good day, that's your god. Lots of people say these days that they're not into organized religion but everyone is into organized religion. The only question is which one? What are you pursuing and how is it organized and structured? And God says today, think about those five people who you spend the most time with. What do they talk about? If you could see their bank statements, their calendars, if you would have transcripts of all their texts, what themes, what things, are they pursuing?

And so God's question for you today is, what's your friend's religion? They might say they're Christian or they're Buddhist, they're atheist, they're agnostic, they don't even know but everyone's got a religion so what's theirs? And God would say be careful if their religion is anything but Jesus Christ.

Now is God saying you can't be friends with someone who's not a Christian? Or if you came to church today with a buddy who's not a Christian, has this been a little bit of an awkward message? You know, are you saying, Pastor, that we can't hang out anymore? And that's a great question that I'm going to answer next Sunday, okay? So you're going to have to come back to see what Jesus said about Christians and non-Christians being friends. But for today, let me say this: God isn't necessarily giving you a red light saying you can't but a yellow light saying to be cautious; be really careful. And this next passage gives us the reason why. In Psalm 16, which is about peace and joy in God, King David wrote, "Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more." God is called a jealous God because he wants to protect us from the gods who will make us suffer. And so our heavenly Father, in love, he says, "Be careful. I love you. I'm a good father and I don't want you to suffer with your friend's gods so be cautious."

Which brings us to our second yellow light for today. First of all, God says be careful about friends with gods and number two, he says be careful about friends who gossip. Out of all the passages that talk about friendship in the Bible, there's probably no thing that's warned about more than any other than gossip. And the reason why is because gossip is a lot like this picture I'm going to show you today. That's a picture that was taken a few months ago in Thailand. That's me, my bride, Kim, in the back row. In the front row are two really ridiculously amazing missionaries named Micah and Caleb. And each of the couples is holding in our hands a plastic tray of a food so good that you would think Jesus himself created it. It's called mango sticky rice. Well, we got a tray of this mango sticky rice in this back alley in Thailand. As soon as we finished that, I went out for a second order. Then the next day, the hotel we were staying at actually had mango sticky rice on the buffet. So I had three orders as an appetizer and then a couple more after the meal was done. Mango sticky rice is so good that once you have that first bite, it's almost impossible to say no to the second. And obviously, it's not good for you. There's no doctor that says, "You know, you should have more mango sticky rice." But once you try it, man, you can't stop.

And God says that's kind of how gossip is. It's really good; it is really, really interesting. If you taste just the sentence of it, like putting your fork down is going to feel almost impossible. But

God says it's not good for you. Let me prove it. Back in the Proverbs, Proverbs 18, says, "The word of a gossip are like choice morsels." Even God admits that gossip is really attractive, it's really appealing, it's magnetic to our hearts but it hurts people. In fact, Proverbs 16 reminds us in the context of friendship why we can't gossip. It says, "Gossip separates close friends." Some of you may remember, a few weeks ago I told you that the number one thing that brings people together into a friendship is honesty. It's confession. It's when I don't fake it and say I'm fine when I'm not. It's when I open up to you about my sins and my struggles and my idols and my weaknesses. I trust that to you. And if you love gossip, if you idolize being interesting and entertaining among a group of people and you stab me in the back and betray my secret, guess what happens to our friendship? It simply can't survive. And as tempting as it is, Christians have to have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to words of gossip.

I think about the words of Tim Keller; he's a pastor who serves out in New York. And speaking of gossip, he said this: "Gossip can be a head's up about something you should know. It can masquerade as an expression of false compassion for poor so and so. It can even come in the form of a request for prayer. When everyone exchanges exasperated, horrified looks, shakes of the head, eye rolls, sighs and ironic laughter, the damage is done even when little is said."

That's gossip. It happens all the time. When your harsh, demanding boss has problems at home, I guarantee you everyone in the office is going to want to talk. When a famous singer, a famous actress, a famous athlete falls into drama and legal problems, when you see that story in your newsfeed, it's going to feel almost impossible not to click but God says don't. Gossip destroys reputations. People will spend decades working on their good name and one word of gossip that's repeated can chop that tree down even though it took decades to grow. And so your Father says be careful. Be careful with the gods. Be careful with the gossip. And then he turns the corner and he gives us maybe something a little more positive because the Bible also talks about some green lights; some characteristics that we want to pursue and cultivate in ourselves and look for in the people around us. Let me share those two things with you before I say "Amen."

First of all, the Bible says that you should pursue as fast as you can friends who love the law. If you find a person who loves the law of God, hang onto that friendship with everything you have. Now by the law of God, I mean the dos and don'ts of Christian life. I mean the Ten Commandments; what Jesus says he wants us to do. And I want you to circle that word "love" because I'm not saying hold onto friends who accept the law or officially believe the law or check the box and know exactly what this means according to the law. I mean love the law. Someone who loves the law is like the author of Psalm 119. Ever read that in your Bible before? It's famous for being the longest chapter in the entire Bible; 176 verses. And do you know who it was written by? Someone who loved the law. It's almost like if you were an editor, you would have cut it off after verse five because it just says the same thing again and again and again and again; someone who's gushing about the law of God because they actually believe that if God is good, if he's a good, good father and he wants what's best for you, then what he says about money and about forgiveness and about sex and about gender, what he says about marriage and divorce, it's not just officially right, it's good and it's beautiful. And it's beneficial. And if you find someone who's not depressed by the Christian life - like they're so jealous of what those sinners get to do - but they actually believe that they are on the smartest, wisest path to peace and happiness. That is a rare friend to hold onto.

In fact, those kind of friends can do something beautiful for you. Look at the words of Proverbs 27. It says, "The wounds from a friend can be trusted." A friend who loves the law and who loves you will actually wound you. They'll have some pretty hard conversations not because they want to be judgmental or closeminded but because they actually think that you're missing out on the best life possible. That passage is one of the reasons that I love this man; one of my closest friends. His name is Shane. Now when you have a friend like Shane, you can put a goofy picture up on the screen just to kind of embarrass him in front of a whole group of people. Actually, Shane gave me permission to show you this picture. Last Halloween - he has this sort of reddish, ginger beard - he didn't know what to go as for his costume so he hung a bunch of loaves of bread around his neck and he went as the Gingerbread Man. So that's my friend Shane! I hope you have a chance to meet him.

Shane's an amazing man because he loves the law. In fact, after church today, I'm going to do what I do every Sunday night; I'm going to check in with Shane. He's my accountability partner, which means I'm going to tell Shane this past week how many hours of sleep I got, what kind of food I ate, how I'm treating my wife, am I giving generously, how many alcoholic drinks did I have, do I have any bitterness or tension with any of you, are there any secrets that I'm keeping. Like any spiritual thing that could mess with my heart, my ministry, hurt you or our church, I get to tell Shane about it every seven days. Which is one of the reasons why I kind of hate Shane. Do you know what most people do when they think they're being friends? They make sarcastic comments about marriage and women. Do you know what most girlfriends do when they think they're being good girlfriends? They lament about men and how boneheaded they can sometimes be. But that's not friendship. Do you know what a friend does? He wounds you.

So here's my challenge for you today: This week, would you reach out to one friend and ask them to wound you? It's probably the most terrifying homework I've ever given to our church but I'm going to ask you to do it this week. Find someone that you know loves you. I mean, they're not just a critic; they don't just want to blast you to pieces. They actually care about you and your future. And would you just ask them to wound you? Ask them to tell you what they see in your character, in your words, in your attitude. Your relationship with your boss or with your grandkids or with your next door neighbor. Ask them to hold you to a high standard of love because they believe love is actually the best answer. I'll tell you what - you might hate their face, like I sometimes hate Shane. But when all is said and done, you will realize God has given you an incredible gift: An actual friend. Good friends love the law.

Finally, the most important thing I want to tell you today is that second green light. You should pursue with all of your strength friends who give the gospel. Friends who don't just share good advice with you; they share good news with you. They don't tell you just what you need to do; they tell you Jesus and what he did. Let's look at one more passage from the Proverbs. Proverbs 18 says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." There's a friend who sticks even closer than our flesh and blood, even than our best friend. Who is with us always, who has promised to never leave us and never forsake us and his name is Jesus Christ. And the best friends tell their friends about Jesus.

You see, this is the really amazing thing that we get to do inside the church. Our friends who don't follow Jesus, they can sympathize with us and they can say that they're sorry and they can tell us maybe some good tips or a book that they read or an article that they came across. But it is only a Christian who can tell us that we're forgiven. Who can bring us back to the cross of Jesus Christ and deal with that guilt and shame that so often is toxic in our hearts. It's only a Christian friend who can walk into the valley and say to us with a straight face, "You know that God still loves you, right?"

See, that's why I love my friend John. Let me show you one last picture today of my good friend John Martins. These days, he's apparently trying to look like Jesus. He grew out his hair and a pretty sweet beard but I've known him for a lot of years; ever since college. And I have a lot of great memories with John but the one that I remember the most is when he gave me the gospel. See, many years ago, I was really struggling with a sin that I couldn't shake and I prayed and I read Scripture and I came to church and I just kept going back to it. And it made me feel so like worthless and weak and I knew I needed to tell somebody and I was so terrified to do it and I decided to take a deep breath and tell him. I can remember the room where we were. I can remember the night of the week that it happened. It was an orange couch. I was sitting here and John was sitting there and I just - I just blurted it. And do you know what John did? He told me about forgiveness. These days, John looks a lot like Jesus but on that night, he acted a lot like Jesus. And I simply, I cannot tell you how powerful it is to show someone your worst and they give you back God's best. Who don't tell you, "Try harder!" But they say Jesus did everything and it's finished.

See, one of the coolest things that we can do for each other is to preach grace; that it starts right now. God's not waiting for a better version of us to love and accept. That because of what Jesus did on the cross, it's all good with God. The Proverbs says the wounds of a friend can be trusted and you can trust those wounds. That your Savior was pierced on the cross so that you never have to live with guilt or shame or doubt. You would never have to fear if people found out, what would they think? Instead you know that there are 10,000 reasons to praise Jesus because we are holy and righteous and redeemed and beautiful in the sight of God. And so, I pray God gives you a friend like that. But even more today, I pray that you and I can be friends like that because here's the truth I learned long ago: Show me your friends and I'll show you your future. Show me friends who love the law and more importantly, who give you the gospel, and I will show you a future that is full of hope and peace and the glory of God.

May our Lord Jesus Christ give us friends and make us friends just like that.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we adore you. God, I don't want to be judgmental but I have no clue how people do it in other religions. How do you believe in karma and be honest with yourself and sleep at night? I have no clue. But that's why I'm so glad we don't have karma; we have Jesus Christ. Thank you, God, that no matter what baggage we brought into today, into church today, no matter what sin we've been struggling with, no matter what secret we've been keeping from the world, that you know and you still love us. That you don't run in the other direction but you declare that there is

no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. We thank you, God, for unconditional love. We can never repay you and you say we don't have to.

I thank you, God, for good friendships. For all of us who are wiser because we've walked with wise people. For all the consequences that could have happened but instead, you redirected our lives and you - it seemed like a total coincidence - you brought someone beautiful and godly into our path.

And I pray, Father, for the future. I pray for my daughters, I pray for the sons and daughters of this congregation, I pray for our grandkids. I pray for those middle schoolers and high schoolers and kids coming back from college. I pray that you would give them great friendships because if there's one thing we want, God, it's not immediate, short-term pleasure in the present; it's a godly, hopeful future to come.

Thank you, God, for hearing this prayer. Thank you that you promise that because of Jesus, it's powerful and it's effective. We believe that because we know who we are: We are the friends of God. And all of God's friends who agreed, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."



TIME OF GRACE®

Friend Request: Choose Friends Carefully

Study Notes

Summary

One pastor often told his teenage members, “Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.” That wisdom is repeated in the book of Proverbs, a book about making wise choices. Walking with wise friends will make you wise. Hanging out with fools will come with consequences. This message is God’s reminder to choose your friends carefully, since they have an incredible influence on your choices and future.

- Show me your _____, and I’ll show you your _____.
- **Proverbs 12:26:** The righteous choose their friends carefully.
- Two Yellow Lights for Friendship:
 1. Friends with _____.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 13:6-8:** If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, “Let us go and worship other gods” (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to them or listen to them.
 - b. **Psalm 16:4:** Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
 2. Friends who _____.
 - a. **Proverbs 18:8:** The words of a gossip are like choice morsels.
 - b. **Proverbs 16:28:** A gossip separates close friends.
- Two Green Lights for Friendship:
 1. Friends who love the _____.
 - a. **Proverbs 27:6:** Wounds from a friend can be trusted.
 2. Friends who give the _____.
 - a. **Proverbs 18:24:** There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Points to Ponder

1. Evaluate your four closest friendships based on the two “yellow lights” and the two “green lights” from today’s message. What encouragement is the Holy Spirit giving you? What warnings?
2. **Agree/Disagree:** Most Christians are better at loving the law than remembering to give the gospel.
3. Apply the four “lights” from today’s message to Jesus. How is he the perfect friend?

Homework for Next Week

Read John chapter 17.

“Associate yourself with people of good quality, for it is better to be alone than in bad company.”
—Booker T. Washington