

Proverbs 27 – The Best Kind of Friends

The wisdom we find in Proverbs is all about relationships—relationships with God and people. That's because we were made for those relationships. God has designed us to be in relationship with Him and other people. But as we walk in those relationships, we are tempted every day to deviate from that design.

The way we most clearly see that deviation is when feelings and actions in those relationships go wrong. We encounter aggravation (27:3), anger, jealousy (v. 4), betrayal (v. 10), and nagging (v. 15). And certainly God's design is for us to relate to Him and others in love and unity. At the same time, Proverbs 27 emphasizes another aspect of God's relational design that we sometimes overlook or dismiss altogether—we need friends we can trust to give out wisdom and we need to be the kind of friend who can be trusted to do the same.

Because the wise answer is not always clear, and because we do not always choose the wise way, we need friends who will help us. By God's design, those relationships are meant to give us open reprimand when needed (v. 5), speak truth into our lives even when it hurts (v. 6), and "sharpen" us so that we might walk in everlasting wisdom for everyday life (v. 17). This does not automatically occur, though. What occurs more often and most naturally is the foolishness of aggravation, anger, jealousy, betrayal, and nagging. To have the best kind of friends, who seek and apply God's wisdom, we must seek to be that kind of friend.

¹ Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. ² Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips. ³ Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. ⁴ Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? ⁵ Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

Do not boast about tomorrow: It is human nature to be overly confident in what future days hold. It is easy to boast about tomorrow, especially with our modern arrogance of continual progress. **For you do not know what a day may bring forth:** We don't know what tomorrow may hold, so we should have a humble attitude towards the future, as [James 4:13-16](#). The verse is not ruling out wise planning for the future but one's overconfident sense of ability to control the future—and no one can presume to know the future but God.

David in his prosperity said, that he should 'never be moved'; but he soon after found a change: God rejected his confidence. [[Psalms 30:6-7](#)] - *When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken."* ⁷ *Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.*

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth: We should stay away from self-promotion in its many forms. Modern technology gives us many more methods and opportunities to praise ourselves, but we should avoid such self-praise. **A stranger, and not your own lips**: Honor means much more when it comes from an outside source, even a stranger than being the product of self-praise and self-promotion.

A stone is heavy and sand is weighty: Solomon appealed to self-evident truths. It is in the nature of a stone to be heavy and in the nature of sand to be weighty. **But a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them**: When a fool – someone who rejects God's wisdom – expresses their anger and wrath, it is a weighty, dangerous thing. The wrath of any person may have great consequence.

Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent: In all its manifestations, anger is a dangerous and difficult to control expression – like a torrent. The metaphor depicts anger as a spiritual force that is destructive, irrational and violent. **Who is able to stand before jealousy?** Solomon pointed out that there is a power and destructive capability in jealousy that can even go beyond wrath and anger. It can make a bigger torrent of evil. It was envy that motivated the religious leaders to arrange the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:18). Jealousy is a raging emotion that defies reason at times and takes the form of destructive violence, like a consuming fire. Jealousy in the Scriptures is also used in a positive sense; it is *jealousy for* – God's proper jealousy for our love. Yet passages like this also acknowledge that there is a dark side of jealousy, *jealousy of* and not *for*.

Open rebuke is better: Many are hesitant to rebuke others, especially others in God's family. But there is a time and place where rebuke is not only good it is better than the alternative. Rebuke—kindly, considerately, and prayerfully administered—cements friendship rather than weaken it. We do not really like rebuke. We resent it. The fact that we really deserve it, or need it, does not make it pleasant...moreover, our dislike of rebuke leads us to think that those who love us should be silent in the presence of our shortcomings. The genuine open-hearted friend is one who tells you your faults freely but conceals them from all others. **Than love carefully concealed**: Love does little good when it is concealed. The honest love of an open rebuke can be much better than the carefully concealed love.

Love that is hidden is not perfect love in either sense. The highest love must and does express itself. It does so in praise of the loved one.... Love that hides itself, professes not to see, perhaps does not see, and so remains silent, is love on a very low level.

⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. ⁷ One who is full loathes honey from the comb, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet. ⁸ Like a bird that flees its nest is anyone who flees from home.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend: A mark of a true **friend** is that they will be willing to wound us with loving correction. The correction may not feel good – as genuine wounds – but it will be an expression of the love and faithfulness of a friend.

The ‘wounds’ are a metaphor for the painful and plain words that must be spoken in a true friendship in order to heal the beloved and/or to restore a broken relationship. **The kisses of an enemy are deceitful**: This cautions us that not all kisses are the greetings of friends. They may come from an enemy and be deceitful. Example: the kisses of Joab, Judas, Absalom, and Ahithophel.

A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb: When our life is satisfied – either materially or physically – then we find it easy to hate and reject things that would otherwise be greatly desired, such as the honeycomb. The proverb is capable of wider application than eating; it could apply to possessions, experiences, education, etc. Spiritually, this can be understood in a positive sense: “The best way of combating worldliness is by satisfying the heart with something better. The full soul rejects even the honeycomb. Fill your heart with God and His sacred truth, and the things of the world will lose their charm.

To a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet: When a life is truly hungry, they will eat almost everything and consider it sweet. This is true in the physical world, seen in those deprived of food for long periods. It is also seen in the spiritual world, when those who are awakened as truly hungry souls are ravenous for spiritual food. Charles Spurgeon used this proverb as a basis to speak of the sweetness of Jesus and His work for us: “Sweet is liberty to the captive, and when the Son makes you free, you are free indeed; sweet is pardon to the condemned, and proclaims full forgiveness and salvation; sweet is health to the sick, and Jesus is the great physician of souls; sweet is light to those who are in darkness and to eyes that are dim, and Jesus is both sun to our darkness and eyes to our blindness.

Like a bird that wanders from its nest: With just a few words, Solomon painted a heart-touching picture of a bird away from its place of safety and security – the nest where it belongs. This proverb makes us think about those who seem to wander from church to church. Too many are a sort of flying camp, always flying from one place to another – a set of gipsy-Christians, who have no settled abode, and no local habitation. **Is a man who wanders from his place**: We have a place appointed by God, and we can be as out of place as a bird without a nest if we wander from it. We need to take care that we perceive our place not as the one that culture or community may assign to us, but truly the place God has assigned us. Those who wander lack the security of their home and can no longer contribute to their community life. An honest man’s heart is the place where his calling is.

⁹ Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice. ¹⁰ Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family, and do not go to your relative’s house when disaster strikes you—better a neighbor nearby than a relative far away.

Ointment and perfume delight the heart: Solomon stated a self-evident truth. It is in the nature of an ointment or perfume to delight the heart through its pleasant smell. **The**

sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel: Strong, hearty counsel from a friend is sweet and can bring delight – just as it is natural for ointment and perfume to delight the heart. This proverb should make us ask, Is there someone in my life who can give hearty counsel? Can I give hearty counsel to someone else?

The gladdening oil and incense is a metaphor for the agreeable and delightful counsel of a friend. Both the outward fragrances and the wholesome counsel produce a sense of wellbeing.

Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend: We should hold the bonds of friendship as dear and obligating, even beyond generations. Friends should not be forsaken. A well and long tried friend is invaluable. Solomon exemplified his own rule by cultivating friendly links with Hiram, the friend of his father (1 Kings 5:1-10). Contempt of this rule cost Solomon's foolish son his kingdom (1 Kings 12:6-19).

Nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity: We should not assume that our birth brother is the best one to help in the day of calamity, especially if the brother is far away. Better is a lesser resource that is nearby than a better resource that is far away. The 'brother' in Proverbs 27:10 is a close relative, one to whom people naturally turn in difficult times. Normally the close family identity of the Israelites would dictate that one go to a relative for help, and this verse appears to go against custom here.

¹¹ Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart; then I can answer anyone who treats me with contempt. ¹² The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad: Solomon gave a simple encouragement to his son to be wise and therefore bring gladness to his father. **That I may answer him who reproaches me**: A foolish son is a cause of insult and criticism to the parents. In some way, the son who rejects wisdom makes the parents look bad. In other words, his son will either publicly disgrace the father or enable him to stand proudly before even his enemies.

A prudent man foresees evil: Wisdom will lead a man or woman to anticipate danger and to act, such as to hide from the coming evil. This was delivered Proverbs 22:3, and is here repeated to enforce the foregoing encouragement, by representing the great advantage of wisdom. **The simple pass on and are punished**: Those who are naïve and untrained in wisdom are blind to the potential danger around them. They will eventually bear the bad consequence of their blindness and be punished. The verse is a motivation for the naive to be trained; life would be less painful for them if they know how to avoid life's dangers.

¹³ Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; hold it in pledge if it is done for an outsider. ¹⁴ If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it

will be taken as a curse. ¹⁵ A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; ¹⁶ restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand.

Take the garment of him who is surety for a stranger: If someone is a bad credit risk (foolish enough to be surety for a stranger), then we should hold a deposit as security against anything they owe to us (take the garment). **When he is surety for a seductress:** The man is as immoral and foolish to be surety for a seductress, then we should especially regard them as a credit risk. Probably by her enticements and flatteries, she seduced some male to become indebted to her (see Proverbs 5 and Proverbs 7). The proverb instructs the disciple to have nothing to do with these fools.

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice: This is an over-the-top greeting and blessing, meant to flatter and manipulate. It is loud and it starts early in the morning. Something is wrong with such excessive praise. **Blesses his friend with a loud voice:** That extols a man above measure, – as the false prophets did Ahab, and the people Herod, – that praise him to his face. His unnatural voice and timing betrays him as a hypocrite and no good will come of it. Remember the Italian proverb elsewhere quoted: He who praises you more than he was wont to do, has either deceived you, or is about to do it. **It will be counted a curse to him:** Normally a friendly greeting is a blessing. Yet if that blessing is flattery or meant to manipulate it can be counted a curse.

A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike: The scene is in a house with a bad roof, where a rainy day means continual dripping. That dripping shows there is a problem, it brings damage, and annoyance. That is the same effect as a contentious woman in the house. The man takes shelter under the roof of his home expecting to find protection from the storm. Instead, he finds his leaky roof provides him no shelter from the torrential downpour. Likewise, he married with the expectation of finding good, but the wife from whom he expected protection from the rudeness of the world, attacks him at home. **Whoever restrains her restrains the wind:** To correct or reform a contentious woman can be a fool's errand. She can be as difficult to restrain as the wind or as hard to get a hold of as oil in the hand. Instead of trying to change an antagonistic woman, a wise and godly husband loves her as Jesus Christ loves His church (Ephesians 5:25-31) and leaves the changing up to God.

¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. ¹⁸ The one who guards a fig tree will eat its fruit, and whoever protects their master will be honored. ¹⁹ As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart. ²⁰ Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are human eyes. ²¹ The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise.

As iron sharpens iron: A piece of iron can sharpen another piece of iron, but it happens through striking, friction, and with sparks. We think of the iron of a blacksmith's hammer working on a sword to make it sharp. **So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend:** A man can be used to sharpen (improve and develop) his friend, but it may happen through friction and sparks. We shouldn't be afraid of the friction that leads to

godly sharpening. The analogy infers that the friend persists and does not shy away from critical, constructive criticism. Walk together in mutual concern for each other's sicknesses, trials, and temptations.

Whoever keeps the fig tree will eat its fruit: The worker is worthy of his reward. If a man keeps a fig tree, it is appropriate for him to eat its fruit. It is cruel and unfair to keep the fruit of a man's labor from him.

Fig trees were abundant in Canaan, and were more valued and regarded than other trees. The fig tree also needed closer attention than other plants; so the point would include the diligent tending it. **So he who waits on his master will be honored:** The appropriate fruit from properly serving one's master is to be honored. It isn't right to keep honor from the one who has faithful. God promised to reward those who wait upon Him. Do your work diligently and leave promotion and reward up to God.

As in water face reflects face: Smooth and clear water can give a wonderful reflection of a man or woman's face. The Hebrew is very cryptic: literally, 'As the water the face to the face, so the man's heart to the man. **So a man's heart reveals the man:** The feelings and thoughts that come from our heart reveal us as the reflection in smooth water reveals the face. Who we are will eventually be evident to others as our words and actions reveal our heart.

Hell and Destruction are never full: The grave and the world beyond will receive humanity and never become full. They are used here as figures of something that can never be satisfied. The grave devours all the bodies which are put into it, and is always ready to receive and devour more and more without end. **So the eyes of man are never satisfied:** Our longing to look upon things we desire will never be satisfied; it must be controlled and brought under God's dominion. The answer is having the need channeled and satisfied in God and what He provides.

The eyes of man: meaning their lusts, and carnal desires. To seek to satisfy it is an endless piece of business. The lust of the eye led Eve and Adam to breach social boundaries in the first place. As the grave can never be filled up with bodies, nor perdition with souls; so the restless desire, the lust of power, riches, and splendor, is never satisfied. Out of this ever-unsatisfied desire spring all the changing fashions, the varied amusements, and the endless modes of getting money, prevalent in every age, and in every country

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold: There is an appropriate place for silver and gold to be refined. It doesn't happen just anywhere, but in the refining pot. **A man is valued by what others say of him:** We often know a man's value more by what others say of him than by what he thinks of himself. A man's self-estimation can be unreliable.

There are three interpretations of this proverb. First, that you may know what a man is by the way he bears praise. Second, that you may know what a man is by the things he praises. Third, that a man who treats praise as the fining pot treats silver and gold purges it of unworthy substance.

Public praise formed a test between Saul and David (1 Samuel 18:7), David came out the better for it. He who is praised is not only much approved, but much proved. The courting of the praise of our fellow creatures has to do with the world within. Praise is a sharper trial of the strength of principle than is reproach.

²² Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding them like grain with a pestle, you will not remove their folly from them. ²³ Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; ²⁴ for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. ²⁵ When the hay is removed and new growth appears and the grass from the hills is gathered in, ²⁶ the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field. ²⁷ You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family and to nourish your female servants.

Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle: Solomon used a striking and vivid image. Like crushed grain in a mortar and with a pestle, he pictured a fool being ground up. **Yet his foolishness will not depart from him:** Despite the rough treatment mentioned in the previous line, foolishness does not depart from the fool. One of the sad marks of the fool is that he will not learn.

Prisons were made into penitentiaries through the mistaken notion that confinement would bring repentance and effect a cure. Instead, many prisoners become hardened criminals. Divine grace that regenerates the fool is his only hope of being converted into a useful person.

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks: Solomon wrote this with images from the world of agriculture (flocks...herds.... hay...grass...lambs...goats), but the principle applies in many other areas of life. We should work hard (be diligent) to know the state of whatever God has given us management over. If you don't know the condition of something, you can't effectively manage or lead it.

Flocks and herds "are riches and possessions, because they were the chief part of a man's riches. This country scene is not designed to make farmers of everybody, but to show the proper interplay of man's labor and God's nurture. **Attend to your herds:** "Hebrew, Set thy heart to them – that is, be very inquisitive and attentive to their welfare.

For riches are not forever: We should give ourselves to diligent leadership and management because the future is uncertain. If we take good care of what God has given us now, it may provide for us in the future (the lambs will provide your clothing and so forth). If we don't take care of what we have, it won't be able to provide for us in an uncertain future.

People should preserve what income they have because it does not last forever...the poem shows the proper interplay between human labor and divine provision.

Goats the price of a field: We should be careful and creative about our business and work so that we can bring in sufficient resources for our families. Sufficient resources includes food, clothing, housing and have just a little extra.