



Tim Keller - God's Wisdom for Navigating Life

Friendship (June 13-18)

At the beginning of every season it is valuable for you to take your Nextlevel group through the process of remembering what the group is all about. Tim Keller gives 6 valuable principles on Friendship which he finds in the book of proverbs. Use these 6 principles to remember with your group the values that you all committed to when you signed your covenant after LAUNCH.

Method

Week 1: Open your season remembering together what your group is all about: "Growing TOGETHER toward CHRISTLIKENESS"

-Assign that each person read the first 3 (June 13-15) Tim Keller devotionals

Week 2: Go through the first 3 devotionals together:

-READ the passage

-DISCUSS the main point

-APPLY it to your lives: How does this principle apply to our group?

-DEBRIEF the past year: How have we each been doing in this area over the past year?

-Assign that each person read the final 3 (June 16-18) Tim Keller devotionals

Week 3: Go through the final 3 devotionals together:

-READ the passage

-DISCUSS the main point

-APPLY it to your lives: How does this principle apply to our group?

-DEBRIEF the past year: How have we each been doing in this area over the past year?

-Assign that each person read the group covenant for next week's session

Week 4: Review the covenant together

-Have each person share one area of growth that they will focus on for the coming year.

KNOWING OTHERS

Friendship

June 13

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (18:24)

INTENTIONALITY. This says that a friend can be better than a sibling—quite a statement in a culture that was far more family oriented than ours. But how so? Your family may be there for you but they may not really like you or understand you. And there can be long stretches of life in which you have no romantic partner or spouse. A friend, however, may *stick* with you over the years *closer than a brother*.

In the early stage of your life, you were shaped most by your family. But for the rest of your life you will be shaped largely by your friends. You become like the people with whom you spend the most time. As we will see, you can't live without friendship. But remember how deliberate friendship must be. Erotic attraction and family relationships push themselves on you in various ways, but friendship will not. It must be carefully, intentionally cultivated through face-to-face time spent together. And in a busy culture like ours, it is one thing that is often squeezed out.

How have your best friends over the years shaped and influenced you? Who are your best friends now?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you befriended a handful of disciples and through those friendships you changed the world. Help me choose my friends wisely, cultivate them carefully, and learn all I should learn from them so I can grow into the person you've called me to be. Amen.

June 14

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. . . . Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of one who gives gifts. The poor are shunned by all their relatives—how much more do their friends avoid them! . . . Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find? (17:17, 19:6–7, 20:6)

CONSTANCY. What are the marks of a friend? The first we can call constancy. *A friend loves at all times*, through good times and ill. 19:6–7 reminds us of the painful truth that most relationships are transactional. That is, people seek out other people to get economic, social, or emotional benefits from their relationship. When someone becomes poor and loses their social utility, they are shunned and avoided by their so-called friends. "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin" (18:24). And, we see, they were never really friends.

Friends will be there for you when the chips are down, when you have very little to give to them. For a friend, you are not a means to some end but cherished for yourself. And constancy entails availability. Even when it's inconvenient, you can get a friend at all times. However, this means that the best friendships take time, and everyone's time is limited. So while in theory you could have many friends, 20:6 is realistic. Good friends don't grow on trees, nor can you have a large number of them. Give more time to the ones you have.

How can you be more intentional about deepening the friendships you have and giving more time to them?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you set your face to go up to Jerusalem to die. When you got there all hell was let loose upon you, and still you did not shrink but stood your ground—all for me. How can I, then, not be there for my friends in their times of need? Make me a great friend for others as you were for me. Amen.

June 15

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (27:5–6)

TRANSPARENCY. A second requirement for friendship is transparency. The King James Version renders the first part of Proverbs 27:6 as “faithful are the wounds of a friend.” What are “faithful wounds”? The phrase means that real friends do open rebuke, they tell each other things they need to hear even if they are painful. If you are too afraid to say what needs to be said, you are really an enemy of your friend’s soul.

Have you ever listened to a recording of yourself and thought, “I don’t sound like that”? But yes, you do—you can’t hear from within your body what your voice really sounds like outside. And without the perspective of others, we will never know our strengths and weaknesses. If you have a measure of status in the world, or if you have chosen friends poorly, you may be just be surrounded by flatterers (29:5). Transparency is scary, but we need it. And to get courage, look to the one who became so vulnerable for you that he died on the cross. How faithful were the wounds of this friend for you!

How many real friends do you have—friends who will speak the truth in love to you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you became a vulnerable human being to show us the truth about ourselves. You were faithful and constant even to death on the cross. Now, Lord, reproduce in me that same character and let me be a friend to others as you have been a friend to me. Amen.

June 16

Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. . . . If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse. (25:20, 27:14)

SENSITIVITY. A third mark of friendship is sensitivity and tact. Why does someone show inappropriate heartiness when others are just waking up (27:14)? Why do they use humor inappropriately (26:19) or speak lightheartedly to grieving people with a *heavy heart* (25:20)? It is because they are emotionally disconnected and therefore clumsy. They don’t know the other person’s inner topography well enough to know what hurts or helps, what inspires or bores, what stimulates or irritates.

If I can be content when you are sad, I’m not your friend (25:20). Friends voluntarily tie their hearts to one another. They put their happiness *into* their friends’ happiness, so they can’t emotionally flourish unless their friends are flourishing too. Jesus tied his heart to us so that even in his suffering he knew joy because of the salvation he was bringing to us (Hebrews 12:2; cf. Isaiah 53:11). The friendship connection may not be as emotionally intense as that which comes in romance, nor always as enduring as family ties (though remember 18:24 on June 13). All the more reason friendship is so valuable, because such a link is both deliberate and voluntary.

Are you putting in the effort to be a friend?

Prayer: Lord, our sin causes you pain (Genesis 6:6) and our broken hearts draw you to our side (Psalm 34:18). You love us more tenderly and sensitively than a nursing mother does her child (Isaiah 49:15). Let me be so moved by your love for me that it makes me highly sensitive to the needs of those around me. Amen.

June 17

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. (27:17)

COUNSEL. The fourth mark of a true friend is counsel. Friends give "heartfelt advice" (27:9). Friends *sharpen* and challenge one another, being vulnerable and sensitive to one another but also making proposals for how the other should change. Friends regularly have constructive clashes that sharpen each party's understanding of the world and of themselves.

Therapists give you advice, but you don't do it back. A supervisor may offer criticism, but it would not be appropriate to give equal criticism back. The mutuality of the deep counsel that friends can give is rare and something everyone needs. Sometimes it is sweet and pleasant (27:9 on June 18) and sometimes sharp and perhaps painful (27:17). True friendship is both "reassuring and bracing."¹⁴² If you have this kind of exchange and growth in a romantic relationship or in a family relationship, it is because you have incorporated this aspect of friendship into those connections. But you're never going to become the person you need to be, or that you can be, without it. It sharpens you the way nothing else does.

With how many people do you share a relationship in which there is mutual counsel and critique?

Prayer: Lord, today to "friend" something is to "like" rather than dislike. I have not been conditioned to have friends who dislike things about me and tell me so! But my heart knows—and your Word says—that I need them. Lead them to me and give me the willingness to be open to them. Amen.

June 18

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice. (27:9)

DISCOVERY. Friendship is *pleasantness* that means, literally, sweetness. At the time of Proverbs, people could not create sweetness in food, only discover it. Friendship is like that. We can work at it, enhancing constancy, transparency, sensitivity, and counsel. Yet friendship begins with a discovery. We must find persons with common loves and vision. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Where the truthful answer to the question, 'Do you see the same truth?' would be, 'I see nothing and I don't care about the truth; I only want a friend,' no friendship can arise. . . . There would be nothing for the friendship to be about. . . . Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travelers."¹⁴³

Christian faith can create a deep affinity between people who are different in every other way. That is why friendship between believers from diverse racial backgrounds can be so powerfully formative. They are empowered by faith in the ultimate friend of our souls (John 15:13–15), whose constancy, vulnerability, and love cannot be surpassed.

Do you have Christian friendships across racial and national barriers? How could you cultivate new ones and deepen the ones you may have?

Prayer: Lord, your gospel brings down barriers between people of different ethnicities and cultures (Galatians 3:26–28), yet I as-sociate and hang out with my own (racial and social) kind too much. Enrich me and show the world the power of the gospel by helping me grow in cross-racial Christian friendships. Amen.