

A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

FOUNDATIONS FOR BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS

BY: Josiah Rios, CPYU Research Fellow and Associate Pastor of Middle School Ministry at Old North Church, Canfield, OH

We know friendship to be fundamental to our lives, but one of the biggest problems for students today is loneliness. Although there are countless causes, such as technology, social media, and a consumer and individualistic culture, how can we come alongside our kids and what do we encourage them towards? The Bible is full of wisdom for our friendships and relationships, but this prompt will focus on insights from the book of Proverbs.



WORLD

What is Happening?

In a world post-pandemic, where isolation was heightened at all levels, friendships and connection have increased in importance. Yet not all friendships are created equal.

Dr. Jonathan Holmes simplifies these substitute relationships into three categories¹:

- **Specialized Friendships** – At its core, these can be a part of many of our friendships. We can have countless valuable similarities with others in sports, hobbies, stage of life, school, and even our neighborhood. If we like the same things, then that gives us value together. It gives us something to center around.
- **Social Media Friendships** – These relationships exist primarily in the online world, whether on the newest social media platform or video game chatroom. Through advances in technology, like AI, or the newest social media, we can curate who we appear to be and what people we want to connect with. When conflict arises, we can hide behind a safety net of distance and artificial behavior.
- **Selfish Friendships** – This type catches the other friendships and overlaps with the above categories. The revealed mindset behind these is the seeking of self-benefit. Does that person make me feel good about myself? What do they help me gain? If I stay connected with them then they can help me ___ (you fill in the blank). Who doesn't want relationships that help them live their best life?





WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

Although friendships can come in many shapes and sizes, what consistent marks should show up in every biblical friendship? In the book of Proverbs, we find at least four characteristics.²

Constancy – True, biblical friendships are constant and abiding. Rather than changing when our likes and dislikes do, biblical friendships linger because they are deeper. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Family was everything in this ancient Near East culture. Can a friend be closer than a biological brother? Yes! Just because someone is connected to you by blood does not guarantee their faithfulness (Proverbs 20:6).

Candor – Speaking the truth in love for their good must show up in our biblical friendships. Proverbs 27:5-6 says, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” In biblical friendships, this expression of love remains exposed amidst the efforts of convenience and false sense of peace. Honesty of our sin, struggles, and suffering provides valuable sunlight and water for solid, biblical friendships to grow (Proverbs 28:23).

Carefulness – This offers the balance to candor's courageous speaking. Carefulness involves consideration and care rather than timidity and caution. Proverbs 25:20 reminds us of the importance of the content of our encouragement when it says, “Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.” We need to be careful in what we say, when we say it, and how we handle what has been said (Proverbs 11:13).

Counsel – A critical identifier of biblical relationships is faithful guidance into God's Word. Proverbs 27:9 compares good counsel from friends to sweet smells that gladden the heart. Rather than pursuing our own comfort and happiness, biblical friendships surround each other for sweet encouragement in God's Word (Proverbs 15:22).





Conversation Starters and Questions:

As much as our results-oriented brains may want, biblical friendship isn't forged overnight. However, there are several areas of our lives that we can consider to develop these marks of biblical friendship.

- **Our Example** – Parents set the example in biblical friendship. Is the friend I am to others the friend I want my kids to be? What explicit and implicit messages am I sending about how we are to befriend others?
- **Our Time** – We need to invest our time wisely. Time is a resource that is limited and unreturnable. Who are we spending time with most often? Who should we pursue?
- **Our Conversations** – At least 3 of the 4 marks of biblical friendship require words to be exchanged. Does our conversation stop at small talk? Or do we wade into the rough waters to open up sanctifying discussion and encouragement? Shared activities are valuable tools but weak destinations. The shared activity, whether a shared meal, church event, sport, exercise, celebration, or entertainment, provides rich soil for the fruit of redemptive conversation. View your conversations as one opportunity to display the marks of friendship. Ask and discuss things like this: How can I pray for you? Where are you struggling? How have you experienced God's grace in your struggle? What is bringing joy to your heart? Where do you see me growing spiritually?
- **Our Biblical Community** – In the end, biblical friendships are forged in the fire of biblical community. Augustine in his Letters writes, "There can be no full and true agreement about human things among friends who disagree about divine things, for it necessarily follows that one who despises divine things esteems human things more than he ought, and that whoever does not love God who made man, has not learned to love man rightly." Shared faith in Christ creates the bedrock of biblical friendships (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

¹Holmes, Jonathan. *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*.

²Ibid.

³Augustine, *Letters*, 258.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

(John 17:20-21)



Phone: (717) 361-8429
E-Mail: CPYU@CPYU.ORG
Web: WWW.CPYU.ORG

Mail: PO BOX 414,
ELIZABETHTOWN
PA 17022, USA