

Wisdom in Relationships (Proverbs 27:5-18)

God did not create us to live in isolation. In fact, we need to relate to one another in order to grow in our faith.

As a church we have been thinking about how to live wise lives and have been using the book of proverbs to help us with this. Our theme today involves looking at wisdom in relationships.

The question for us is, what does wisdom in our relationships look like? Who do we surround ourselves with? What friendships do we invest in? Are they relationships that build us up? Are they good for us? How do we choose?

There is a general theme in the verses read out from proverbs today that focus on the importance of building good relationships that help us grow and flourish, that help us to be wiser people, to be the people we have been created to be. That according to proverbs is how we can be wise in relationships.

And We're going to use two verses to help us explore this.

v 17 says: Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another

The concept of "iron sharpening iron" means there is more than one piece of iron. It would be impossible for one bit of iron to become sharper without the presence of the other. Left isolated, both bits of iron would be dull and quite useless.

It is the same with us. We were not created for isolation but for community and relationships. It's from these relationships that we sharpen each other - help prepare each other for the ups and downs of life, smooth out the rough bumpy bits of our character, and help each other navigate life successfully.

As Christians, we believe we were created by God and that our ultimate relationship is with Jesus. A successful navigating of life is knowing His love for us, knowing that he died so that our sins and mistakes would be forgiven and we can enjoy eternal life with God. In knowing Jesus we become part of His family. This means we're not made for isolation but made to belong to Jesus' family. And with Christian friends in God's family we are meant to be an encouragement to each other in journeys of faith.

There are several verses in the New Testament that encourage Christians to help build each other up. That we would become more like Jesus, helping each other develop the characteristics of Jesus' spirit. Those of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In this way as We help encourage each other to grow and flourish in faith we are sharpening each other.

In baptism we are welcomed into God's family. As we welcome people that bring children to baptism we have a responsibility to build relationships with those families, welcoming them into our family of faith. Being there to offer wisdom and advice in teaching them about faith in and relationship with Jesus. In baptism God invites us on a lifelong journey together with all God's people that you may explore the way of Jesus and grow in friendship with God, in love for all people and in serving others. iron sharpening iron.

Jesus longs for each of us to live our fullest lives by knowing Him and following in his ways. If good relationships and friendships help us grow in that way, a wise action is to invest in good friendships.

Good Friendships as we have seen are where the other person has our best interests at heart and wants to see us flourish in life and faith. And we want the same for them. These are the relationships to invest in.

As I was reflecting on iron sharpening iron, I realised that Iron sharpening iron doesn't happen with just one pass, it can be labour intensive - not that I have ever sharpened iron with iron but what I do know is that I have a lot of friends. I invest in my friendships. It takes time. I have a variety of friends and each helps sharpen me in different ways. It is important to invest in good friendships but it does take time building these kinds of relationships. They might be different from down the pub kinds of friendships. Wisdom in relationships involves investing time in friendships that will help us grow in our walk with Jesus.

V6 adds another dimension to choosing good relationships. This is what it says, 'Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy.'

This proverb says that having a good friend might involve them pointing out areas where we need to grow which might cause us wounds. They might point out something in our character or a mistake or sin that could cause us harm. It is saying that honesty from friends which is motivated by our own welfare is more beneficial for us than 'friends' who falsely flatter us, in fact these kinds of friends are really our enemies as they do not really want us to grow. These are relationships that maybe we need to be prepared to put down. Because proverbs is saying that if we are wise we would seek out friends who will correct us because they want us to live lives that don't involve our harm, they don't want us making the same mistakes over and over again, rather than friends that just say what we want to hear because they don't want to lose our friendship.

This is not something that is very easy to do. Either in being the friend that points out something or in being the friend that hears this kind of correction. Because it can cause wounds and it must only be done with the right motive. Love. With our children if they stick their fingers in an electric socket we're going to tell them again and again not to do it. We want to correct their behaviour because it will cause them harm. Good wise relationships involve mutual love and the desire for the other person to flourish and so can involve correction.

I have both been the friend who has challenged something out of a genuine love for my friend and a desire for her to grow in her relationship with God and been the person that has been corrected which involved leaving behind a friendship. When I was challenged to begin with it did hurt but actually I saw the wisdom in the correction and how the friendship I was leaving behind was not one that would build me up and build me up in my relationship with God.

Jesus is the ultimate friend to invest time in, it's the ultimate relationship that we've been made for. So wisdom in our relationships involves choices that surround ourselves with people that want to see us flourish and grow and have an abundant life in Jesus. We want to invest time in the people who are going to sharpen us, be honest with us, and we want to be the same for them all motivated by love.