

Series: Making Life Work in a Screwed Up World

Sunday October 16, 2011
FOES, FOOLS AND FRIENDS
Proverbs 25:21-22, 9:6-9, 18:24
Speaker: Ken Davis

1. How many of you remember your **first best friend**? It's a pretty vivid memory for me. I was 8 years old—and we had just moved from a small town to dreary inner city neighbourhood. I tried to make friends as school—and got beaten up. Then one Sunday after church, we were invited to the home of Wilson and Mary Shore—and I met their son, Steve. That day I discovered a whole new dimension of life—**best friends!**

-For the next 8 years, Steve and I did **all kinds** of things together. We tried to make rockets from old ink pens, raided a boat graveyard together, fished and hunted together, went camping, double-dated--sometimes liked the same girl. Well, we moved, Steve went to university—got married—and we gradually lost touch. But I will **never** forget Steve—even though I have almost no pictures of us together.

 - a. I have this hunch that **every** person longs to be deeply connected with others. Someone to laugh with us, cry with us—someone who will accept us even when we feel unacceptable—and stay when others leave. Know why we feel that way? Because we were made in the image of a relational God.

-The main barrier I face in experiencing that connection with others—is **fear**. Maybe you're like me. See, I've been hurt—betrayed. Sometimes I think, "What if I open my heart and life up to someone—and they **laugh!** What if I get rejected?" See, you **can** get hurt.

Has anyone here ever been burnt by a friend? You know, something happened—and **they stopped being your friend!** Has anyone here ever been **used**? Someone pretended to **want** or—or be your friend—until they got what they wanted? Most of us have been hurt—and we become suspicious. Cynical. We walk by people and ignore them. We pretend, "I'm too cool, too successful, too important to actually **need** friends!"

-Sometimes in a transient culture like ours—we get so tired of saying "good-bye"—that we just stop saying hello.
 - c. The question is--is close friendship **worth** the pain it sometimes causes? I think it is—in fact, I think it's **necessary** for us to live the way God intended for us to live. Remember—God is love—love is about **others**—and we were made in His image! And there's something better than avoiding friendship to avoid pain. It's **wisdom!** And the Book of Proverbs is **amazing** when it comes, not just in **choosing** good friends—but **being** a good friend.
2. I think one of the **biggest** issues when it comes to our relational worlds is--how to deal with **people who can't stand you!** Now, I know this is **very** difficult to believe,

because you're all such amazing, lovable people—like me—but there are people in your life and mine who don't carry your picture in their wallet. They would be called...*jerks?* No—*enemies!* Want to know the *strangest* fact of all? Most enemies start out as friends. Let's define the word *enemy*: An enemy is someone who hopes that nothing good will come your way. What they *really* want—is for something *bad* to happen. Does this come as a shock to anyone?

- a. One of the *major* points Proverbs makes when it comes to dealing with enemies is to *try* to live at peace with them. If there's a fire—don't throw gas. **Don't escalate the conflict.**

A gentle answer defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire. (Proverbs 15:1 MSG)

-And that's exactly what Jesus said, isn't it? Love your enemies—pray for those who make your life miserable! Now, Jesus wasn't telling us to be doormats. He was telling us that the *best* way to keep conflict out of the nuclear warfare stage is to just ignore insults, slaps in the face, and slurs. When someone insults you—what's the temptation? To answer with your *temper*. This says—think, answer with your *mind*, not your *emotions*.

-Based on the best book on the human personality that has ever existed--and based on the best authority on human nature who has ever lived--Jesus, I want to just say something. If you have got to get the last shot, if you've got to win, if you've got to pay people back for every scratch on your car, every dent in your ego, you will spend half of your life in conflict. Drop it! Return angry words with gentle responses.

- b. Proverbs gives another strange answer when it comes to enemies. *Kill them—* with *kindness*. Look for a practical way to say, *I refuse to hate you in return!*

If you see your enemy hungry, go buy him lunch; if he's thirsty, bring him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness and God will look after you. (Proverbs 25:21-22 MSG)

-So, why would anyone do something that seems so counter-intuitive? Let me use an illustration to answer: What happens if you take the fuel away from a fire? The *fire goes out!* Kindness is like shock therapy; it *totally steals* a person's excuse for hating you and making your life miserable.

- c. Proverbs makes another practical suggestion in dealing with enemies: Forgive them. And it tells us to be *very* careful about our attitude toward them:

Don't laugh when your enemy falls; don't crow over his collapse. God might see and become very provoked and then take pity on his plight. (Proverbs 24:17-18 MSG)

-We've talked a lot about this before, but let me just say it again: Unforgiveness is worse for your health than smoking cigarettes and eating fat and sugar.

Forgiveness starts with a choice that, for **your** sake—you are going to let go of your grudge and your hatred. If you want some information on forgiveness—look online; I did a whole series on it 2 years ago.

- d. So, what is God saying through this wisdom? Is He telling us to just open our hearts up to people who hate us? “**Go ahead—hit me again!**” No—this is actually balanced against other advice.

Your enemy shakes hands and greets you like an old friend, all the while conniving against you. When he speaks warmly to you, don't believe him for a minute; he's just waiting for the chance to rip you off. No matter how cunningly he conceals his malice, eventually his evil will be exposed in public. (Proverbs 26:24-26 MSG)

-I hear Jesus' words in this when he sent out his disciples—knowing they'd face opposition: **Be wise as serpents...harmless as doves!**

-Now—close your eyes—and think of someone in your life who **probably** sees you as an enemy. What would you really like more than anything else? Some of you are thinking, “An **apology! I want to see them grovel!**” I'd say—**forget it!** How about peace. De-escalate the conflict. Pull the fangs on the pain. How many of you would like that? Here's my challenge: Why not do what the wisdom of both Proverbs and Jesus says? At least give it a shot!

3. Well, there's another group of people we need to talk about when it comes to friendship. Proverbs identifies two groups of people who are, literally, **bad for your health!** Does anyone know who they are? **Fools...and angry people.** I did a whole message on fools entitled, **The Hard Way**—and you can get it online if you want.

-Fools are not the same as enemies. In fact, they make like you. **A lot!** In general, Proverbs describes a fool as someone who is a know-it-all, who won't take advice from anyone and keeps making the same stupid mistakes over and over. To some extent, they pretty much see people as tools to get what they want—or pathways to get where they want to go. Proverbs says:

Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces. (Proverbs 13:20 MSG)

Escape quickly from the company of fools; they're a waste of your time, a waste of your words. (Proverbs 14:7 MSG)

I think the advice is pretty clear. Stay away from fools! Don't get involved in disputes with them. Don't take advice from them. Don't try to help them understand wisdom--because they really don't want wisdom.

-There's another kind of person that Proverbs says to be cautious with. It's the angry person who **becomes** a fool.

**Don't hang out with angry people; don't keep company with hotheads.
Bad temper is contagious--don't get infected. (Proverbs 22:24-25 MSG)**

-A couple of days ago I read a story about a guy in the Bronx who was bitten by his pet cobra. **[pic]** The guy he bought it from told him that the poison sacs had been removed—and he believed him—until he started having seizures and almost died. Remember when someone's pet cobra got loose in an apartment building in downtown Toronto a few years ago? Messing with cobras—petting them, kissing them on the lips is **not** a good idea!

-Now, it's really interesting. Proverbs doesn't tell us to try to fix fools and angry people; it simply says—**stay away from them!** Why? Well, God wants to spare us some pain. Fools and angry people are really good at inflicting pain on others. So, don't marry one, don't work for one, don't get into a business relationship with one—and try not to raise one!

-There's another reason why I believe God tells us to stay away from angry people and fools. He knows that they will not just kinda drift into change. Proverbs says that fools and angry people only learn...**the hard way!** Sometimes people don't actually **see** themselves until all they have is the dead silence of an empty apartment! Even God can't help a fool unless they'll listen to his still small voice.

4. Years ago, the Toronto Star ran a story about a man who noticed, on his way to work, that everyone on the subway was gagging, holding their noses and running for the restrooms. He didn't think too much about it until he noticed that in two minutes flat, he was the only person in his office. He knew something was wrong, and thought it might be related to the black kitty cat he encountered near his apartment. He had two strikes against him; he'd never seen a skunk before—and had lost his sense of smell in an accident. His wife came home and found him naked in the garage, rubbing his body with tomatoes from the garden! **[pic]** Skunks make good friend repellent.

-Now, I want to get real practical for just a minute. We all want friends--true friends. And sometimes we wonder **why** we have trouble building strong friendships. The truth is, some of us may be using **FRIEND REPELLENT**. So, I would like to net out what I believe might be the top ten friend repellents described in Proverbs.

- 1.) One we've already talked about. If you're **a quarrelsome, argumentative person**, you're probably spraying friend repellent.

**Angry people stir up a lot of discord; the intemperate stir up trouble.
(Proverbs 29:22 MSG)**

-If you like to argue and stir things up—know how that affects others? They get stomach aches, cramps and diarrhea! I can't think of anyone in their right mind who **likes** that—you know, being with someone who's always right—which makes everyone else? Always **wrong!**

- 2.) If **you talk a lot**, that's friend repellent, too.

A gadabout gossip can't be trusted with a secret, but someone of integrity won't violate a confidence. (Proverbs 11:13 MSG)

Gossips can't keep secrets, so never confide in blabbermouths. (Proverbs 20:19 MSG)

See, friendship involves trust. People who like to talk—a **lot**--will usually talk about everything they know and a whole bunch they don't. Most people are usually smart enough to know that if you talk about others behind their backs—you probably talk about **them** when **they're** not around.

- 3.) **Bragging** also drive friends away. When you talk about your accomplishments—and how cool, smart, radical, wild, sexy, desirable you are—people will eventually walk wide circles around you. Proverbs says:

Don't work yourself into the spotlight; don't push your way into a place of prominence. It is better to be promoted to a place of honour than face the humiliation of being demoted. (Proverbs 25:6-7 MSG)

-People want **friends**; braggarts want **fans**—they're very different!

- 4.) **Nagging or whining** is friend repellent, too. Now, please understand what I'm saying. Good friends need to be able to tell each other what's bothering them. But if your life is one continuous complaint about how tough you have it and how unfair others are—it will drive people away. Proverbs says that sharing a house with someone who does this is like Chinese water torture!

Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse. (Proverbs 25:24 MSG)

A nagging spouse is like the drip, drip, drip of a leaky faucet; you can't turn it off and you can't get away from it! (Proverbs 27:15-16 MSG)

- 5.) Number 5: **Smothering**. I learned this the hard way with my friend Steve. He once said to me, "It's not that I don't want to be good friends with you—I just want **other** friends, too!" It was like he asked for a divorce! But I learned a lesson; that I can smother a friendship to death by not giving the other person room to breathe--room to have other friendships. Jealousy, possessiveness, neediness **kills** friendships. Proverbs says:

When you're given a bag of candy, don't gulp it all down; eat too much chocolate and you'll make yourself sick; and when you find a friend, don't outwear your welcome; show up at all hours and he'll soon get fed up. (Proverbs 25:16-17 MSG)

-Friendships happen best in the context of freedom.

- 6.) Number 6 friend repellent: **Stinginess**. If your money and things are really, **really** important to you--people aren't stupid; they know when your stuff is more important to you than they are. Your stuff might be the only friend you have in the end!

Don't eat with people who are stingy; don't desire their delicacies. They are always thinking about how much it costs. "Eat and drink," they say, but they don't mean it. You will throw up what little you've eaten, and your compliments will be wasted. (Proverbs 23:6-8 NLT)

- 7.) Something else that drives people away is **insensitivity**.

If you wake your friend in the early morning by shouting, "Rise and shine!" it will sound to him more like a curse than a blessing. (Proverbs 27:14 MSG)

-It's possible to be a social monotone. You may have met one. They assume that if **they're** morning persons or neat freaks—**everyone** should be! Good friends take the time to know, understand and appreciate the differences of others.

- 8.) Friend repellent #8: **hypersensitivity**. This is the eggshell person--you tiptoe around because you never know whether you're going to find them yodeling and swinging from the chandelier, or sitting in the basement sucking their thumb. They just wear you down. Hypersensitive people are usually magnificent grudge-holders.

Overlook an offense, bond a friendship; fasten on to a slight--goodbye friend! (Proverbs 17:9 MSG)

- 9.) Friend repellent #9: **Negativity. Judgmentalism**. A critical spirit.

Don't imagine yourself to be quite presentable when you haven't had a bath in weeks. Don't be stuck-up and think you're better than everyone else. (Proverbs 30:12-13 MSG)

-Jesus said that if you judge people—**you** will have judgment measured to you with the same scoop! If you tend to be a critical, judgmental person—have you ever asked yourself why see other people's flaws so clearly? Is that how you want people to treat you?

- 10.) And finally, one of the best all-time friend repellents: **Insecurity**--and it's faithful sidekick, **jealousy**.

We're blasted by anger and swamped by rage, but who can survive jealousy? (Proverbs 27:4 MSG)

-Do you get what this is saying? If someone gets **really** angry with you—it's usually because of something you've done...or **haven't** done. Jealousy,

however, has to do with **who you are**—not what you've done. How do you deal with someone who can't be your friend unless you're less successful or less **something** than they are? If you're a jealous person—you make it almost impossible for people to be your friend.

Here's my point: **You don't have to be perfect to have good friends; you just have to go easy on the friend repellent!**

*Friendship is not finding someone to take care of you, nurture you and listen to you whine about life

*Friendship is not finding someone who has a life and hooking onto them because you haven't gotten around to having one yet.

*It's not latching onto a rising star to advance yourself

*It's not pretending to care for someone so that they'll join your church or buy your stuff.

5. What is a friend? Erma Bombeck says that a friend is somebody who won't go on a diet when you're fat. I love this one:

Friend: Someone who multiplies your joy and divides your grief. It's someone who will walk into your house when the whole world has just walked out.

-Jesus gave the best recipe for filling the loneliness of your life: **treat other people how you want to be treated.** **Be** the kind of friend **you** want to have. And it takes time—because, see, friendships are built on **trust**. And it just takes time to trust and be trusted.

-Think about it for a minute: What are some of the qualities **you** look for in a friend? Let's write them down.

- a. I'd say **loyalty** would be right near the top of the list. And proverbs talks about that:

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family. (Proverbs 18:24 MSG)

Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in times of trouble. (Proverbs 17:17 MSG)

If you want friends to stick by you—**you** have to stick by them. It's **that simple!** In his book, **Life Sentence**, Charles Colson talks about speaking at Berkeley—right after he'd gotten out of prison for his role in Watergate. Anyone her familiar with Berkeley? Nixon was absolutely **hated** there—especially after Watergate. Well, that evening the questions got increasingly hostile. One student stood up and referred to a vicious criticism Henry Kissinger had levelled at Nixon, and asked, "Mr. Colson, do you agree with this criticism?"

-After making some brief comments on how Nixon had been dissected by the press, Colson ended by saying: "...**But what it comes down to is, no, I don't go along with Henry Kissinger's comments. Mr. Nixon is my friend, and I don't turn my back on my friends.**"

-Dead silence filled the room; Chuck Colson had no idea *what* would happen. The silence was followed by a thunderous, standing ovation. Even angry university students who despised Richard Nixon understood the value of loyalty. Remember the definition of a friend?

A friend is someone who walks into your home when the world has just walked out.

-Come to think of it, God is a friend like that. Even when we play the fool and everyone else has walked away—God won't. See, God is the kind of Friend who remains faithful when we *aren't!*

- b. There's another quality we cherish in friendships--**generosity.**

Do a favour and win a friend forever; nothing can untie that bond. (Proverbs 18:19 MSG)

-See, there's this thing between really good friends. Almost nothing is off-limits. There's this passing back and forth of favours and expressions of generosity. But what's neat is that *no one is keeping score.* As I thought about this, I remembered my brother who took a day off, stepped in, took charge—and helped me make my first move when I was almost immobilized by the task. I thought about a good friend, Jim, who took time off work and drove his truck clear up to Toronto to help me pick up some furniture Lori inherited.

-Here's the deal; you can't have close friends and clenched fists. Generosity is powerful. God's like that, isn't He? Generous with His time and attention—and someone who pours good things into the laps of people who refuse to thank Him or love Him.

- c. There's another friendship quality that seems to come up frequently in Proverbs—honesty—and genuineness. Being a loyal friend means caring enough to tell the truth.

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6 NLT)

An honest answer is like a kiss of friendship. (Proverbs 24:26 NLT)

-Notice what this says; the **wounds from a sincere friend.** When you have earned a person's trust because you are loyal—*there* for them—you have the right to speak truth in love. I was once leading a retreat and had a good friend took me aside and whispered, "Uh, Ken, you've got something hanging out of your nose!" A *true friend* doesn't let you embarrass yourself for a whole day!

-See, **real** friendship goes deeper than talking about golf and sports and shopping. ***That's why it's scary.*** But to develop true friendship—you have to get past the fear of letting others get close. And true friends don't ever take advantage of the fact that they **are** close by trying to manipulate you.

-And Proverbs doesn't pretend that this is fun. It says:

**You use steel to sharpen steel, and one friend sharpens another.
(Proverbs 27:17 MSG)**

Have you ever watched a butcher sharpening his knife? There's a lot of ***scraping*** and ***grinding***. If you're looking for a wonderful friendship—without pain—then you've joined the wrong species! However, nothing worthwhile in this world—including building a life or having kids--is pain free!

-By the way, God is the kind of friend who knows the ***perfect*** balance between truth and grace. I mean, think about it. If you're about to do something you will ***always*** regret—you ***want*** Him to tell you the truth, don't you? ***Don't you?*** God loves us too much to ***not*** be honest!

- d. And real briefly, one more quality we look for in friends--***integrity***. True friends keep their promises—even when it hasn't been notarized.

Reliable friends who do what they say are like cool drinks in sweltering heat--refreshing. Like billowing clouds that bring no rain is the person who talks big but never produces. (Proverbs 25:13-14 MSG)

-Know what our temptation is? To have people ***think*** that we're generous and caring and attentive without the hard work of actually being that kind of person.

-But God is a friend who keeps His promises. ***Count on it!*** He's promised that whenever we come to Him for forgiveness--He'll completely forgive. God has promised us strength to face whatever comes in life--and that's exactly what He gives. You can trust him!

Q & A

6. I want to ask you a question this morning. ***Do you know who your real friends are?*** Do you? Have you ever really sat down and thought about it? It could be that you're off running after people you know—because they seem cool and fun—but you're missing someone who's been a good friend your whole life—your parents, your spouse, a neighbour, a childhood friend. They've been loyal; they've been generous, they've been honest—they've kept their promises. If you're looking for friends—why would you trade off the friendships you will need ***long*** after your other friends are gone?

-But you need to know about Someone Else who offers you their friendship this morning. And that's God. Want to know the truth about something in life? There's this itch inside that we just can't quite get at.

-This is the problem; a lot of us think this ache deep in our chest can be cured by falling in love—or finding great friends. Some of you are trying to do that even as I talk--through a string of relationships with men or women. Some of you are trying to satisfy a need in your heart by making your friends a kind of false god—little 'g'—you will serve where you will defy God and hurt others to do what **they** want you to do!

-You need to know that the longing—the ache you feel inside **can not** and **will not** be filled by any human friendship. It's shaped like God—and a relationship with God is the only way this space can be filled. Jesus made that friendship with God possible by paying for the sin that has alienated us from Him.

-And this morning, He extends his hand of friendship and love to you. And if you will turn your back on your old life, and trust Him for forgiveness and new life--and take His hand--you can experience a love that will not let you go—and a love that will permeate all the relationships in your life. God's hand is extended to you—will you take it?

In these past weeks, we've been talking about life from a **very** different perspective; sometimes it defies what most people think--but it's a life that **works!** So, what do **you** think? Is it true...or false? If it's true, if God is a friend who loves you—then you have every reason do trust Him. See, here's the deal; he's **your** friend—that's clear. Are you **His** friend—and is that clear by your loyalty, honesty, generosity, and integrity?