

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 1: The Bible outlines the qualities of a good friend\_12604**

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**LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 1**

## **The Bible outlines the qualities of a good friend**

*Selected Proverbs*

**By John Duncan**

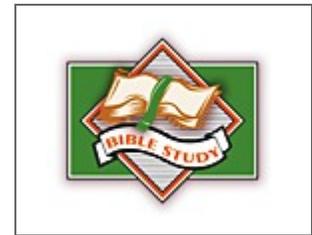
*Lakeside Baptist Church, Granbury*

Poet Elizabeth Jennings called humility the essential ability in a relationship and “pure sharing” the essential quality of friendship. The Romans in antiquity called friendship “amicus,” a circular bond cemented in ties of mutual interest and relationship. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).

The writer of Proverbs says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (17:17). Friendship requires a love that inspires humility and the sacrificial bending of the knee to serve another person. Friendship shares in the anxiety-ridden crises that attack.

## Communication

Scholar J.A. Motyer says, “A true friend is always friendly, not only when the sun is shining, just as a brother is still a brother when things are going badly.” Friendship creates a deep bond of relationship whose ties are strong in the throes of challenges and difficulties. Such a friend sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). Friendship requires trust, truthfulness and a spirit of refreshment whereby friendship refreshes the relationship (Proverbs 14:25; 11:25). Friendship communicates love as well as a spirit of encouragement.



Friendship and love are communicated through words. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). Paul writes to the church at Ephesus announcing that no corrupt communication should come out of a mouth, but only words which build up others (Ephesians 4:29).

The wisdom of James in the New Testament says a friendship can be ruined when the tongue acts like a fire out of control (James 3:6) and can dispense deadly poison (James 3:8). The writer of Proverbs says the tongue can be wielded like a weapon that pierces like a sword (Proverbs 12:18).

In contrast, the tongue that speaks wise words produces health both to the hearers and to the one speaking. Words communicated in love inspire a healthy relationship and produce peace beneficial to both parties.

Communication takes place between two people over dinner, at home, at work, in schools and even in dating and marriage. Communication may well

serve as the key ingredient for a healthy relationship, but reality dictates the human touch in relationships where words deliver pain or create a break in friendship. Anger sparks. Fury rages. Venomous words seldom able to be retrieved fly like arrows in a war of words.

The writer of Proverbs pushes for health: “A soft answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). The writer warns against words that disturb both the speaker and the hearer: “But grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Words wrongfully and angrily chosen create a fierce storm resulting in anger only released through forgiveness. Forgiveness is the answer that turns away wrath. Friendship blossoms through forgiveness.

### **Self-control**

James says, “The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). The goal of wisdom is a God-kind of righteousness. The goal of friendship is a bond anchored in two relationships—one with God, the other with another person. Righteousness arises through the spiritual discipline of knowing God and through the fruit of self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The writer of Proverbs emphasizes two things in a healthy friendship: (1) Fools display anger that in turn stirs strife (Proverbs 14:17; 15:18); and (2) the wise display words and acts of patience that end strife (Proverbs 15:18). Self-control connected to the righteousness of God inspires confidence in the bond of friendship. A lack of control relegates the friendship to a constant swirl of emotion.

Friendships grow in the sunshine of patience, the ability to be slow to pay back a wrong and quick to patience with the people involved (Proverbs 16:32). Friendship radiates only when self is under the control of God, thus developing a tongue where Spirit and peace consider words fitly spoken for appropriate occasions. Proverbs 11:25 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Angry words do not work God's

righteousness, and neither do they fabricate a right relationship. What is necessary, then?

### **Devising good**

The writer of proverbs speaks to the aim of friendship, “to devise good” (Proverbs 14:22). Genuine friendship is good in God's eyes and good for the parties of friendship. Good results through mercy and truth (Proverbs 14:22). A healthy, Christ-centered friendship will act in caring ways and deliver words of mercy.

A healthy, Christ-centered relationship will honor truth and speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Friendship always cares for the other person's needs (mercy) and yearns for God's best in the friend's life (truth). Truth may be painful, but beneficial when Christ, ultimately, is both the model and spiritual bond of genuine friendship.

### **Question for discussion**

◆ What characteristics do you need to develop further to be a better friend?

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