

6/18/23**The Importance of Having Wise Friends
Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church*****Proverbs 13:20***

Good morning. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am one of the pastors here at Brewster Baptist Church. I would like to welcome you to our services today. Whether you are watching from your home or joining us here in the sanctuary, we are glad you are here with us today.

We are in a series called “Wise Living.” These past five weeks, we have been looking at wise sayings of the Bible. Each week, we have been sharing key passages or verses that provide you with wisdom in the way to live your life. Today, I get to share with you the importance of having wise friends.

One of my favorite things to do is to go for a walk – in Nickerson State Park or on the beautiful beaches of Cape Cod. I love going for walks with my family members or close friends. Walking and talking seems to go naturally together.

What I have learned is that, during these relational walks, it is not about the destination, or how far you go, or even how many steps you take. What is important is having the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings with family members and close friends in a relaxed, unhurried manner – being with the people we want to be with, the people we care most about.

In the Pranga household, when we say, “Let’s go for a walk,” we are using a code language for an invitation into a relational experience. It is a time when we open our hearts in conversation with the other person. Our conversation usually starts with talking about our day. It may lead us to conversations about a struggle or conflict someone is having. Sometimes these conversations lead us to dreams about the future; sometimes they bring us back to memories or stories from the past. These walks have created deep bonds. I believe friendships – with family members and close friends – are very important.

As humans, we are wired for relationships. Each of us wants to have friends in our lives – people who love us, care about us, listen to us, have fun, and just enjoy life with us. There are many great things about having positive and wise friendships with people.

Friendships can also be dangerous when we choose the wrong ones. Each of us has seen the dangers of hanging out with the wrong person or groups of friends. Sometimes the friends people choose can be destructive and lead to painful consequences. Each of us here today has seen a friend go down the wrong path – they usually bring others down with them.

As many of you already know, it is so important to pick wise friends.

I’ll share a couple of popular sayings that I have heard in my lifetime; you may have heard them too:

“Show me your friends and I can show you your future.”

“Your friends will determine the direction and quality of your life.”

Many of us have lived life long enough to have seen and learned that friendships can be both positive and negative. We know the people we surround ourselves with the most will have the

greatest influence in our lives. As parents, it does not matter what age our children are – we want our children to have positive and wise friendships that are pointed in the right direction.

Let me ask you a few questions this morning. I want you to think of your closest friends and the people you surround yourself with. Are they positive influences? Are these friends people who encourage you to do your very best? Do you trust these friends, that they have your best interest in mind? Here is the big one – are these close friends helping you grow closer in your walk with God?

It really does not matter the age you are. It does not matter what stage of life you might find yourself in – if you are 13 years old, 25 years old, 50 years old, or 80 plus – each person here wants friendships that are positive, uplifting, fun, enjoyable, caring, and loving.

Here is the thing about friendships: you choose your closest friends. Our closest friends will be the people we choose. There are times when we need to make a conscious decision and say to ourselves, is this person or group of friends the best for me?

Let me share with you some good news. The book of Proverbs offers us some wise advice about friendships. Proverbs is known as the book of wisdom. Proverbs are just small nuggets of important wisdom, advice about the ways we should live wisely.

Today's verse deals with friendship. It is also one of my favorites. *Proverbs 13:20* says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

Pretty simple verse, right? Walk with the wise and become wise. Hang out with fools and you will suffer harm. These verses seem simple, but friendships are often more complex.

I think it is so important to pick wise friends in life. These friends carry more influence in our lives than we realize. Our closest friends help determine our morals, values, convictions, habits, and goals in our life.

"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm" (*Proverbs 13:20*).

What does it mean to "walk" with the wise?

I believe what Solomon had in mind is that we need to walk with wise people. We need to be around and hang out with wise people. Walking to me means making a daily decision to do the right thing. The idea of walking does not imply a one-time stroll through the park or a one-time decision to hang out with a wise friend; frequency is the key. We should want to connect with wise people who can enrich our lives. The more frequently we hang out with wise people, the better the chance is that we will become wise.

If you want to become a better cook, you want to hang out with people who can cook better than you do. If you want to become a better student in school, you might want to hang out with the top students to learn how they study. If you want to become a master gardener, you may want to hang out with people who love gardening. The people you choose to hang out with are also the people you learn from; there is a good chance you will pick up wise things from them.

Who are these wise people that we should be hanging out with?

Proverbs 2:6, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

All wisdom comes from God. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Wise people understand that all wisdom comes from God. Wise people want to follow God with their whole hearts. They spend time reading the scripture and praying. They honor God through their actions and decisions they make. They are putting God first before themselves.

If we want to grow in our wisdom, we need to find and hang out with wise and mature Christians. They may have been walking with God longer than we have and have experienced both the highs and lows of life. They have characteristics that match the fruit of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

We need to have a wise person, or people, in our closest friendship group. We want to be able to learn from them. We want to be able to ask them questions. We want to be able to pick their brain at times. But we also want them to pour into us – to share with us what they are learning, thinking, and doing.

You may be asking, “Where do I find wise people?”

1. Pray to God

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (*James 1:5*).

I can remember back when I was in college. I attended a state school in Wisconsin. It was very hard to find Christian friends during my freshman year. The ones I met I just did not connect with best. I can remember praying all summer to meet a group of Christian friends that had the same interests and hobbies as I did. The next semester, God brought Christian friends into my life who I could hang out with. It did not happen all at once. Throughout the semester, God brought different people into my life. I needed to make time for them. I had my dorm friends, and I had some good Christian friends, too. The very first thing we need to do is ask God for help; God gives generously to all. For some of us, we may need to ask God to bring a person or group of Christian friends into our lives.

2. Seek out Wise and Godly People

Where do you think you might find some wise friends who fear God and put others first? I might be a little biased, but I believe you might find some wise people at Brewster Baptist Church. I have to put a disclaimer out there – not every one of us here is wise, but it is a great place to start. Other good places to look include: our small group ministry, Sunday School, and ministry teams. I believe we can learn a lot by being around other Christians. When we put ourselves in situations that will help us grow in our faith, we have better chances of meeting

other Christians who are mature and wise. Here is the key thing: it is up to us to make the first move. We must be willing to look for godly and wise people.

3 Roles of Wise Friendship:

This past week, I was thinking of several roles of friendship. As I mentioned before, our friendships with people can have the greatest influence upon us – this can be both positive and negative. Our friends SHAPE us. Our friends SUPPORT us. Our friends can SPEAK TRUTH to us. I want to spend some time on the importance of choosing wise friends.

1. Our Friends SHAPE Us

I think back to how friendships are first formed. Many of our first friendships came about by growing up together in the same neighborhood or town. For some of us, we developed our friendships because we enjoyed the same sport or hobby. We may have been part of a group, such as scouts or youth group. In college, we may live in a dorm or be part of a group on campus. Then many of us went into the workforce. We are constantly around people.

What happens during each of these stages of life? We rub shoulders with the people around us. We learn things from our new friends. They learn things from us.

What typically happens in each of these settings? Whether in high school, college, professional life, or retirement life, we tend to take on good and bad attributes of the people around us.

For example, your language can change depending on the group you are part of. Your values can change, and what you think is important or not important can change, with the people you are hanging out with and working with. Why these changes? The more time you spend with people, the more you pick up their habits – and they pick up your habits, too.

I think in today's day and age, it is crucial to make sure you have at least one wise person in your closest friendship group. We all need wise people who can help us stay on course with our Christian faith. Life is hard. We can get pulled in many different directions. It is easy to lose our focus with so many things going on. Having wise friends we can talk to is so very important.

“The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).

At every stage of life we are in, we need to choose our friends carefully. We need to understand that our friends impact who we are – both for the good and for the bad.

- What happens when you hang out with cheaters in school? The chance of you cheating greatly increases.
- What happens when you hang out with people that are positive, always looking to help other people? I bet you will become positive and helpful.
- What happens when you hang out with negative people all day, people who gossip and complain? I am guessing that, in time, you will start talking negatively as well.

- What happens when start you start hanging out with people who love God and really care about people? I believe you will grow in your faith and care about people too.

I truly believe that the people who you hang out with the most will have the greatest impact and influence over you, whether for good or for bad. I promise you that you will become like the people you hang out with the most.

Questions:

Who are the people you are surrounding yourself with?

Are the people you are surrounding yourself with who you want to become?

Are your friends positive and wise people?

Are your close friends helping you become the person who God wants you to be?

2. Our Friends SUPPORT Us

There have been many songs written about the support that friends have for each other. One of the first songs that comes to my mind is “Lean On Me” by Bill Withers. I think of the refrain:

*“Lean on me, When you’re not strong, And I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on...
For it won’t be long, Till I’m gonna need somebody to lean on.”*

How many of you remember the movie “Toy Story”? The hit song from the movie was called “You’ve Got a Friend in Me.” These songs make us feel good. These songs are very powerful. They express the ways we want our friends to support us through difficult times. We all like, and can relate to, these songs, wanting our friends to be there in tough times – that is what friends are supposed to do.

What often happens in real life when problems arise, and our struggles get to be too much? What often happens to our close friends after a time? Sometimes our closest friends scatter. Life gets busy for them. They may move on from friendship with us.

Wise people know that supporting each other is very important, especially in the tough times that we will go through in life. There is quite a difference between a casual friend and deep friendship with someone. A deep and wise friend loves at all times.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (*Proverbs 17:17*).

As a pastor, I have seen many people go through heartache – people who have lost a spouse, or even a child. I have seen people lose their jobs. I have seen divorces. I have seen people receive a diagnosis of serious illness. There are so many heartaches in life. The fact is that every one of us will go through many difficult circumstances in life.

When you go through a very difficult time, you find out who your true friends are. You find out quickly who your wise friends are – people who you can count on for support and help. You also see what happens to those who you thought were close friends.

Let me ask you this question: what do you do when your friend goes through a difficult situation? Sometimes when that moment happens, we are afraid. We are not sure if we want to step into those moments.

So often we exhibit fear on these occasions:

- What am I going to say?
- What if I say the wrong thing?
- Sometimes we think to ourselves, “I don’t want to infringe upon them.”
- Or we say, “I just want to give them space.”

As a wise friend, sometimes we need to just seize the moment. Some of us just need to move past our fears of not knowing what to say or do. I realize that you may be nervous. People don’t remember what you say most of the time. Sometimes all they need is a simple hug. They are just grateful that you came to have a conversation, that you made a phone call or brought a meal. What they remember is that you were willing to take time out of your schedule and you were willing to help.

We live in a broken world, where there is heartache and terrible circumstances happening to people all the time. Real friendships will cost you something. As a wise friend, there are going to be times when you will need to help carry the burden and pain your friend is going through. You will need to feel their pain and loss. A true friend means we are there to support each other through the tough times. A friend loves at all times, even during adversity. Which leads us to point #3.

3. Our Friends SPEAK TRUTH to Us

As our friendship grows deeper, there is a new level that we can reach – when a friend can speak the truth to us. They care enough about us to tell us the truth. The fact is that every one of us has blind spots – things we cannot see about ourselves. It takes someone who really cares about us to see those things; they can let us know by sharing and speaking truth to us. When they speak truth to us, it should be done in love.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (*Proverbs 27:17*).

Let’s think about the image of iron sharpening iron for a while. When iron rubs against iron, what happens? Sparks begin to fly. It’s the process of sharpening tools to make them sharp.

Every one of us needs people in our lives who can sharpen us and make us better people. We need people who challenge us and bring out the best in us. It’s often difficult to find one person who will be honest with us. We need people to sharpen and speak truth to us.

As I mentioned before, we all have blind spots. We all need people in our lives who can tell us our blind spots, to make us better people. It is often difficult for the person to bring this up to us. They probably have prayed about it. They may have some anxiety over it. They are willing to share it with us because they love us. They want us to be better people. They truly care about us.

How do we handle it when someone speaks truth to us in love?

“Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise” (*Proverbs 19:20*).

There are times when we need to have a soft heart and just listen to what our friend is telling us. Try not to become defensive or try to explain things away. What we need to realize is that our friend is trying to help us to grow in this area. Our friend loves us so much that they are willing to tell us.

I heard this quote once: “If you are not dead, you are not done.” The truth is that everyone who is living is not perfect. There are areas in our lives that we need to work on to become more Christ-like. Instead of brushing it off or trying to explain it away, I would encourage you to listen and think about it more. You might find out that person is right.

Do you have people in your life who can speak the truth to you? If not, I want to invite you to talk with a good friend and ask them to tell you the truth. You might ask, “What is something I need to do a better job in?” I am guessing that they probably could tell you pretty quickly.

In closing, today we have talked about choosing wise friends and about the importance of friendships. We need to remember *Proverbs 13:20*: “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.”

We all need at least one wise friend in our lives. If we don’t have one wise friend, we need to ask God for help. He promises to be generous. Then it is for us to seek out wise friends. For some of us, it means investing in relationships here at church – joining a small group, a Sunday School class, or a ministry team. Lastly, I would remind us of the different roles of friendship – our friends shape us, our friends support us, and our friends speak truth to us.

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. What qualities do you value most in a friend? What qualities do you value most in a wise friend? How are they similar and how are they different?
2. There is a famous saying that goes, “Your friends will determine the direction and quality of your life.” Was that true for you when you were in school or as an adult? Did this hold true for your children?
3. Read *Proverbs 13:20*. What stands out in this verse to you? What is the promise to those who “walk with the wise”? What are the consequences of being a “companion of fools”?
4. In the sermon, we focus on three different roles of friendship: friends that shape us, friends that support us, and friends that speak truth to us. What did we learn from each of these roles of friendship? Why are these roles so important?

5. Often the stages of supporting and speaking truth are most difficult – what makes these stages so difficult? How can you overcome your fears in each stage of friendship?
6. Why is it so important to have friendships with wise and Godly people? How does friendship with wise people help you to grow in your relationship with God?
7. Looking back, who are the wise people who helped you to grow in your relationship with God? Who are the people who speak wisdom into your life and have helped you through difficult times?