



ROCK-SOLID RELATIONSHIPS

7

**Proverbs to
Follow**

LEON FONTAINE

Introduction

Rely on Holy Spirit when making relationship decisions.

It's incredibly frustrating to repeat the same struggles. If you keep having the same fight over and over with your significant other, always seem to end up in a relationship with someone who mistreats you, or just can't seem find good friends, I'm sure you can relate.

Why do we get stuck in these destructive patterns? We tend to point the finger at the people or the circumstances around us, thinking that if we could just fix these things, everything would be okay. The trouble is, the problem is often an **internal, not an external** one. It's often because we've developed misbeliefs, and until we replace these misbeliefs with the truth, chances are we'll just keep putting ourselves into the same frustrating situations.

The book of Proverbs is a great place to look for wisdom for our relationships. We're going to cover a few principles from its pages to help **interrupt these destructive patterns** we can get ourselves into in our relationships.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

As we meditate on God's Word, remember Proverbs 3:5-6, which encourages us to trust in God and rely on Him for direction. You see, as you renew your mind in God's Word, its truth helps you make better decisions. At the same time, Holy Spirit directs your paths by helping you understand and apply what you're reading, and it's life-changing!

Along with reading this eBook, take the time to meditate on these Proverbs, and get ready to go to a whole new level of love and intimacy in your relationships!

Think Before You Trust

There's nothing wrong with reserving your trust for those who have earned it.

Have you ever trusted someone, only to regret it later?

It's happened to us all. We want to believe that people are trustworthy, and all too often we hand over our trust too quickly. Part of the problem is that we confuse love and trust. As believers, we're told to love and accept others unconditionally, but if we package trust in with these two, it gets us in trouble every time.

You see, **trust must always be earned**. It's not something you just give away; it's built over time and is not based on what people say they will do, but on what they actually do.

Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of trouble is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking on a lame foot.

Proverbs 25:19 (NLT)

This verse is a gem. It's saying that **if we rely on people who haven't earned our trust, it's going to cause us pain**. In fact, the thought of it makes me cringe, much like the thought of chewing on a broken tooth or stepping on a broken foot!

You may have these types of people in your life, and as a believer you are still encouraged to extend them love, acceptance and forgiveness. However, in no way should you rely on them. If you do, it's like you're chewing down on that broken tooth; there's going to be pain involved because they're going to let you down.

There's nothing wrong with reserving your trust for those who have earned it. Take your time before you trust. If you require people to build a track record of trustworthy behaviour before you rely on them, that's wisdom!

Choose Your Inner Circle Carefully

Our hearts absorb whatever we expose them to, whether we are conscious of it or not.

To a large degree, the friends you choose determine the direction of your life.

Every person you enter into a relationship with has the power to influence you, which is why Proverbs 12:26 encourages us to choose our friends carefully. We know this is true of kids. We say things like, "Little Johnny got in with the wrong crowd, and now he's in trouble all the time." **As adults, sometimes we think we're immune to the influence of others, but it's not true.**

In reality, we are all impressionable to a certain extent. Our hearts absorb whatever we expose them to, whether we are conscious of it or not.

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 12:26 (NKJV)

Not all friendships bring good things into our lives, which is why we can't become close friends with every person who shows interest in us. Now, I'm not saying that we need to completely avoid people who think or believe differently than we do. In fact, we're called to reach out and to influence the world for Jesus. However, we do have to **be careful when it comes to choosing our close friends.**

When it comes to determining **how much time is too much time** with people who have the potential to negatively influence you, consider this analogy that my dad used to always use. If you're on an iceberg and it's melting, you're okay. But if you're getting cold, it's time to get off. In other words, as long as you're influencing that friend in a positive way, you're okay. But if you start to notice that you're being influenced negatively, it's time to create some distance, and you may even need to move on entirely.

Even Jesus chose His inner circle carefully. Examine your friends' characteristics, because most likely those same attributes will rub off on you.

Refuse to Gossip

Set a boundary by letting people know that you won't tolerate it if they put down your other friends.

Gossip is something we need to watch out for when we're establishing new relationships.

A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; and a gossip separates the best of friends.
Proverbs 16:28 (NLT)

Why is gossip harmful to relationships? As Proverbs 16:28 says, **gossip can separate the best of friends**. You see, some people just love to stir things up. They are quick to focus on others' flaws and they seem to take offence with everything. Because of this, they can create problems in your other relationships.

In fact, sometimes people will gossip and try to find fault with your other friends in order to establish a closer relationship with you. You may not know if this is their intention or not, but you can still deal with the behaviour. **Set a boundary by letting people know that you won't tolerate it if they put down your other friends.**

While gossiping about other coworkers or friends might seem like an easy way to build connection with someone, it's not the way to build strong, trusting relationships. In fact, if you know that someone just loves to get into all the juicy gossip going around, be careful about trusting that person. If they're quick to gossip about others, you never know when they might turn their fault-finding microscope on you.

When you meet someone new and gossip comes up, try casually diverting the conversation away to a different topic. If that doesn't work and it keeps coming up, you may need to address the topic directly in a loving manner that clearly communicates your boundaries.

Refrain from Meddling

Getting involved in others' arguments is risky, and it may do more harm than good.

Before becoming a pastor, I used to work in emergency rescue, and I remember hearing an interesting story that highlights the lesson in Proverbs 26:17 well.

Like a man who seizes a wild dog by the ears, so is anyone who walks by and meddles in someone else's argument.

Proverbs 26:17 (VOICE)

Two rescue workers were called out to respond to a domestic dispute call. Because the police hadn't yet arrived when they got there, they found themselves in a tricky situation. The dispute had become physical, so they had a choice: wait for the police to arrive or stop the fight themselves. Fearing for the wife's safety, they chose to pin the man to the ground, thinking she would be relieved. To their surprise, they got a different response. Both of them received nasty bumps on the head from being hit by a frying pan—by the wife!

This story reminds me of this proverb, which shares another great piece of advice on wisdom for our relationships. It warns against getting involved in others' arguments. I'm not saying that these paramedics were wrong to do what they did, but it's an interesting lesson. **When you put yourself in the middle of an argument, be prepared for anger to come at you from both parties!**

Getting involved in others' arguments is risky, just as it is to grab a stray dog by the ears. You may need to if you suspect that someone is being bullied or abused, but if it's just a disagreement or a personality clash, **getting involved may do more harm than good.** In fact, it may even cost you a friendship. If two of your friends are fighting, it's best to stay out of it if possible.

Let Your Friends Sharpen You

Be willing to get a little vulnerable, and you'll develop friends who sharpen you.

Do your friends challenge you?

Proverbs 27:17 challenges us to be choosy about our friends. It's saying that just as iron sharpens iron, a sharp friend can inspire and challenge you to become sharper.

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.
Proverbs 27:17 (NKJV)

What kind of friends make you sharper? One very important thing to look for in your friendships is the willingness to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). You see, **we all need friends who are willing to tell you the truth, even when they know it's going to hurt.**

Of course, developing a friendship like this is a two-way street. If a friend takes the chance to tell you when they think you're making a mistake and you just get defensive, they may not do so again. But if you invite your friends to share their opinions with you and you resist the urge to just convince them to think your way, **you'll develop friendships that make you sharper.**

The truth isn't always pleasant. Just as a blade being sharpened against a file makes a really annoying sound, words that sharpen can be unpleasant. That doesn't mean they aren't good for you. I'm not saying that you should just put up with someone who does nothing but criticize and find fault with you. I'm talking about building friendships where both parties feel free to speak the truth in love.

Be willing to get a little vulnerable, and you'll develop friends who sharpen you. It may be a little uncomfortable at first, but they'll help you to grow—and they'll challenge you because they believe in you.

Address Your Differences

Embrace moments of truth, because they help you to grow and make better choices in the future.

Proverbs 27:6 talks about “wounds from a sincere friend,” and it’s not talking about holding on to friends who purposefully hurt you. These wounds it speaks of are the little loving corrections we can get from good friends.

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

Proverbs 27:6 (NLT)

You see, we all have blind spots—problems or bad habits that we don’t see or that we’re choosing to ignore. Sometimes we need a good friend to bring up one of these areas to us. A good friend might point out when they notice you’re spending too much time at work and not enough time at home, for example. If you haven’t been taking care of your health, they might give you a hard time when you want to stop for donuts or when you reach for that third or fourth can of soda.

Even though it might get uncomfortable and may even hurt at times, we need to embrace these moments of truth because they help us to grow and make better choices in the future. In fact, according to Proverbs 9:8 (NLT), accepting correction is a sign of wisdom. It says, “Don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you.”

Let’s build strong, healthy relationships by **being willing to talk about touchy issues and work out differences.** Be willing to share your perspective and hear a friend out when their opinion differs from yours. Simply by listening, you take one more step toward being the best you can be.

Speak Honestly in Love

Calm honesty can provide perspective that allows us to grow.

Proverbs 27:9 says that **our souls are sweetened by the wise counsel of a friend**. Sometimes we just want to be our friends' cheerleaders. When they tell us about their problems and conflicts, we are tempted to get upset right along with them. We think that we should always side with our friends, so we agree with them when they point the finger at others. But we have to remember that there are always two sides to every story, and if we stay calm, **we can provide perspective**.

The heart is delighted by the fragrance of oil and sweet perfumes, and in just the same way, the soul is sweetened by the wise counsel of a friend.

Proverbs 27:9 (VOICE)

While everyone certainly does need encouragement, we can't forget that our friends need honesty as well. It's hard to tell a friend the truth sometimes, especially when you know that truth is going to sting. But if you do it with love and compassion, without judgment and with their best interests in mind, that **honesty will often make the friendship grow closer**.

Of course, this practice of *speaking the truth in love* is a two-way street. We need to let our friends speak into our lives too, giving them permission to be honest with us. When we do, we develop solid friendships where we can trust each other to share the kind of wise counsel we need to hear.

Conclusion

Holy Spirit is in YOU, empowering you to make a difference in others' lives.

Proverbs 17:17 encourages us to love unconditionally, regardless of the situation, and share in each other's tough times. **All too often, we are so busy or so focused on getting our own needs met that we miss opportunities to be there for our friends and family.**

A true friend loves regardless of the situation, and a real brother exists to share the tough times.

Proverbs 17:17 (VOICE)

We try to convince ourselves that someone else will do it—someone else will stop in on that friend who's grieving, who just lost their job, who's going through a divorce, or who's battling depression. We may even say, "I'm not really good at that. Someone else should go who's better at it." But the reality is, **Holy Spirit is in YOU, empowering you to make a difference in that person's life.** Besides, when you do take the time to step into someone's mess to encourage and lift them up, it's so rewarding!

I'm not saying that you need to deplete yourself by putting others' needs above your own. That doesn't help anyone long-term. But you can **challenge yourself to look for ways to help and lift up the people around you.**

Has anyone in particular come to mind while you've been reading this? Why not give them a call or send them a message to see how they're doing? Remember, you aren't responsible to meet their every need. **Simply be a friend**, and give them a glimpse of that same unconditional love our Father God continually pours out on each of us.