

Proverbs 27:9-14

“Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel. Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, Nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, That I may answer him who reproaches me. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished. Take the garment of him who is surety for a stranger, And hold it in pledge when he is surety for a seductress.

He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, It will be counted a curse to him.”

Sweet Friendship

In the frenzy of daily routine and people problems, my mind can capture a picture of peace and serenity by returning to my boyhood days of farm living. I picture myself sitting on the rail fence in southern Ontario watching the cows pasture quietly in the field as a breeze passes over the long grass giving the impression of a gently rolling sea. The closest thing to violent activity is the occasional flick of a tail or twitch of an ear by a cow to chase away flies. Peace prevails.

The shepherds of Israel must have found a similar peace among the flocks of sheep because their word for pasturing grew to represent the best of life's peaceful coexistence among fellow human beings. The idea of sheep or cattle grazing side by side (rah-gah) grew to include the tranquillity of two standing together in peace and harmony (rah-yah), translated companion, friend, neighbour.

To this beautiful expression of human relationship, God adds His own standard of excellence: "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17 NIV). God's call to friendship includes the extension of unconditional love where an "accept me as I am" attitude predominates. The Lord expressed this Himself on calvary where "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV). The call to salvation is not "whosoever is worthy", but "whosoever will", may come! (see John 3:16 and Romans 10:11-13). To the emphasis of unconditional love in acceptance, the Lord adds unconditional love in action: "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24 NIV), "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you--better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away." (Proverbs 27:10 NIV). Here God's call to friendship involves accepting responsibility for a neighbour's needs when hardship comes. In calamity a true friend is there with open arms and open pockets. To this extent, God has promised to help all who call upon Him according to His will and purpose: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me." (Psalms 27:10).

With the Hebrew word for pasturing implying such significance in defining human friendship, and with God's own standard understood from scripture, Psalm 23 becomes very special. It begins: "The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (Psalms 23:1-3).

Two questions become self evident; Is the Lord that kind of shepherd-friend to you, a source of life, peace and contentment? Are you God's kind of friend to others, accepting and acting with unconditional love?

What is my response:
