

# ST PETER'S CHURCH. BRACKLEY



**“LOVING GOD,  
LOVING EACH OTHER,  
LOVING BRACKLEY”**



**Revd. Rob Woods writes.....**

## **Valuing Friendship**



September brings the start of a new school year. A few months ago, as part of my curate training, the higher-ups in Peterborough Diocese thought it would be a good idea to make (I use that word deliberately) me do a placement in a school. To be fair, it was indeed a good idea. The thinking is that it helps Curates understand the inner workings of Church of England schools.

I learnt a lot through the placement and was surprised to be reminded of something special. When I wasn't accidentally giving the wrong answers to key stage two maths questions (that was humbling!), I observed just how easy it was for the children to make friends. Friendship was just so natural for them. Those relationships were also really important for them too. Perhaps we can forget how important those relationships are, but from the youngest to the oldest, friendships are vital. However, in our culture, wouldn't you agree that friendship is a neglected aspect of life? I think many see friendship as a secondary concern, especially when compared to the focus given to romantic relationships in our society.

Sadly, I think we can undervalue friendship in the church too. Perhaps the lack of importance attached to friendship is why many have spoken to me over the years about a sense of loneliness that isn't mitigated by going to church, where there can be a danger of a veneer of warmth in our interactions that doesn't seem to permeate into meaningful relationships. Words from the Rich Mullins song Elijah echo what many seem to feel, 'There's people been friendly, but they'd never be your friends. Sometimes this has bent me to the ground'.

Well, thankfully, the Bible does not undervalue friendship. Far from it! Instead, we are encouraged to enjoy these relationships and seek to be a better friend for others. The book of Proverbs, part of the Bible's wisdom literature, provides at least four ways we can be inspired to do that.

### **Be a fearful friend**

***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight*** (Proverbs 9:10).

I wonder, when did you last see an expert at work? The sewer who can thread a needle instantly. The musicians who make what is complex look so natural. Well, the word for wisdom used in Proverbs can carry the meaning of skill. You see, the false dichotomy between knowledge and practice is unknown in the book of Proverbs. Biblical wisdom invites us to become experts who demonstrate our skill in relationships, conversations, and our understanding of the world. In other words, to be wise, biblically speaking, is to become skilful experts at living life. To be wise is to live life well so that we give God glory.

So, where does this skill come from? Well, the very beginning of wisdom, its initial seed that helps it to grow, is the fear of the Lord. To reverence God, to fear dishonouring him, to put him first, that is how we start to live wisely.

To understand the Proverbs concerning friendship—and the Proverbs about other relationships too—we must look at them through the lens of fearing God. When God is first on the throne of our hearts, all our other relationships, be it marriage, friendship, or family bonds, are placed in their right order. When God is first, we can flourish in our other relationships too.

### **Be a loving friend**

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

The scriptures view friendship so highly that they are considered synonymous with kin relations. What is more, a true friend loves at *all* times. Wouldn't we all want those people in our lives? What is exciting is that we're invited to be that person for others. We can seek to be one who loves at all times, through good and bad, through thick and thin. Fairweather friends do not factor into the Bible's presentation of true friendship.

### **Be a loyal friend**

***A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother*** (Proverbs 18:24).

Alongside love, loyalty is a mark of true friendship. This loyalty is so great that in this Proverb, a friend is not just considered on par with kin, but even greater.

Of course, the parallelism in Proverbs sheds light on the sayings meaning. Here, there is a comparison deployed in the parallelism. The comparison is between many companions and a single friend. What's

the point of having many companions and acquaintances? The wise know that one true friend is better than countless companions who won't stick around during tough times. But in comparison to the one with many surface level relationships, there is a friend who sticks closer than even a brother.

Throughout Proverbs, I think it is assumed the potential number of these loving, loyal relationships will be relatively small. Indeed, how can they not be when such commitment is needed? Although potentially few, however, isn't it encouraging to know that the Bible says these kinds of relationships are possible to enjoy? I hope and pray that they will grow and develop more and more for everyone at St Peter's.

### **Be a truthful friend**

***Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy (Proverbs 27:5–6)***

This is a tough saying, isn't it?

A true friend is a truthful friend. Rather than telling someone what they want to hear, in love, we can encourage people to become more and more those who God is calling them to be. I think that implies the depth of honesty and intimacy we can enjoy with other Christians is potentially great. It also means that God should always be the centre of gravity in every relationship. The best friends are those who make us more like Jesus. That would mean they tell us the truth and sincerely challenge us when we need it. If we love our friends, we'd seek to be that type of friend for them.

Proverbs encourages us to be a fearful, loving, loyal, and truthful friend. How do you think you stack up? I certainly miss the mark. None of us will never perfectly live out those proverbs on friendship. However, there is one who has.

### **The ultimate friend**

Jesus is our Lord and King. But how often do you view him as your friend? Amazingly, Jesus offers us his friendship (John 15:14–15). Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) truly lived proverbs out. He is a friend who, according to his humanity, perfectly feared his heavenly Father (Isaiah 11:2), loves us more than we can comprehend (John 13:1), loyally sticks close (Matthew 28:20), and who is the truth (John 14:6). As we seek to grow in imitating Christ, we are given the best reference point imaginable to teach us how to do friendship well.

HARVEST FESTIVAL  
SUNDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER  
10 AM



ALL AGE SERVICE  
FOLLOWED BY COMMUNION

ALL WELCOME

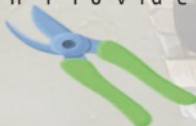
St Peter's Church, Brackley  
7th September 9.30-3 pm  
**MAINTENANCE DAY**

We need your help to  
maintain the churchyard.

There are hedges to be trimmed  
grass to be mown  
General tidying up

Please bring cordless  
hedge trimmers / strimmers etc.  
Tools / Gloves etc.

Tea & Coffee  
and Light Lunch Provided



## Education Sunday

Education Sunday takes place on 8<sup>th</sup> September, as our children return to school after the summer break. It's good opportunity to ask what God thinks of children and how we can reflect this in our schools, churches and families.

### ***Children are valuable to God:***

*'Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'* (Matthew 19:13-14).

Jesus' action shows the importance of children to God. In many cultures around the world, children are often abused, exploited or disregarded. God is committed to caring and protecting them and calls us to do the same.

### ***Children need nurture and guidance:***

*'Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.'* (Proverbs 22:6 ESV). Gardeners will often attach plants to a pole or trellis to guide their growth. Children also need solid structure to keep their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth on track. We can support them in their growth and development, and we can be a godly example to them.

### ***Children need discipline:***

*'Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.'* (Proverbs 29:17). This is not easy and requires the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Discipline is a sign of love, reflecting how God deals with us (Hebrews 12:7). In this way, they'll become adults who fulfil all that the Creator wants them to become.

As Jesus said, *'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me'* (Mark 9:37).

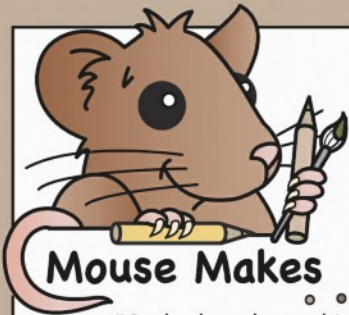


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A small boy asked his mother for a cucumber to take to Junior Church. A slightly puzzled mother complied. Later she asked what it had been used for. "Sorry, mum," he confessed. "I got it wrong.

We were supposed to bring a newcomer."





## HARVEST THANKSGIVING

"May the peoples  
\_\_\_\_\_ you, O God!  
May all the peoples praise you!  
The land yields its harvest;  
God, our God blesses us."

*Psalm 67:5-6 NIV*

### Mouse Makes

"God ... has shown kindness by  
giving you rain from heaven  
and crops in their seasons.

He provides you with  
plenty of \_\_\_\_\_. He fills  
your hearts with joy."

*Acts 14:16-17 NIV*

"Let us fear and respect  
the Lord our God.

He gives us autumn and  
spring \_\_\_\_\_

at the right time.

He makes sure that we  
have the harvest at  
just the right time."

*Jeremiah 5:24 ERV*

"Honour the Lord with your wealth  
and the first part of your harvest."

*Proverbs 3:9 ERV*

O	A	G	A	T	H	E	R	A	I	N	S
S	V	O	G	M	A	U	T	U	M	N	P
O	G	D	O	P	R	O	D	U	C	E	R
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L	A	N	D	H	E	P	R	A	Y	D	N
T	H	A	N	K	S	G	I	V	I	N	G
Y	P	F	E	R	T	I	L	E	E	P	S
B	L	E	S	S	E	D	D	E	L	R	W
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N	T	T	E	N	S	C	R	O	P	S	E
N	Y	H	D	P	R	O	V	I	D	E	R

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 NEED • WATER • SUN • SEASON • AUTUMN • SPRING • YIELD • PRODUCE  
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Find the words from the questions too!

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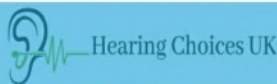


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