Today we continue the sermon series for this Summer, “Life Lessons from Proverbs through Disney’s Magic.” These messages leverage inspiring moments from Disney movies to bring life-giving lessons from the Book of Proverbs, such as wisdom, justice, and friendship, among others, into sharper focus. We have covered the themes of wisdom, righteousness, speech, and trust. Today’s topic is True Friendship.

A true friend is a treasure. Do we agree? I believe most people yearn for genuine friendship, for a confidante who knows our strengths and weaknesses yet accepts us without any judgment. Someone who knows the best and worst about us without making us feel like a fool or taking advantage of us. Do you have a friend or friends like that?

However, in today’s world, despite our ability to connect instantly, forging meaningful relationships has become increasingly difficult. Technology has changed the way we live and interact with each other. Still, the need for meaningful friendships remains.

How many of us remember how we made friends when we were kids? “Hey, you want to play tag/ball/hide-and-seek? Yeah, sure!” And that was it. Nowadays is more like, “Do you play Fortnite or Minecraft? Yeah, what’s your username?” Kids used to do that and still do, though in different ways. However, as adults, creating friendships isn’t that simple. (Unless you just say, “Let’s get some tacos.” I know will be your best friend for sure.)

The truth is that as we grow up and experience life, we lose the innocence and simplicity of our childhood. Let’s be honest, it is hard to find and make meaningful relationships as adults. What I am suggesting is that it is both hard to find true friends and be true friends.

So, this is what I am inviting us to consider today: Rather than focusing only on how to make friends, we should also focus on how to be friends.

The Book of Proverbs offers wisdom to explore this. Here is what Proverbs 18:24 says about true friendship, “Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one’s sibling.”

This verse provides profound wisdom on the nature of true friendship. It encourages us to discern between surface-level acquaintances and genuine friendships—both ways. It suggests that while many people may pretend to be friends or be friendly during favorable times, a real friend’s commitment is enduring and deeper than even our closest familial relationships sometimes.

It starts by highlighting that “some friends play at friendship.” It suggests that some people may be friends but are not truly committed to a meaningful friendship. They might be present during times of joy and celebration but become absent during moments of hardship or sorrow. They are not necessarily bad people, but their commitment to us is not what it seems.

But then the text contrasts these superficial friendships with a true friend, one who “sticks closer than one’s sibling.” This is curious, to say the least. One’s siblings or family are expected to be the closest and most reliable sources of support. Nevertheless, this proverb suggests that a true friend is like a family and, sometimes, can even surpass the support and loyalty of the closest family members.

Just this one verse is a powerful reminder that the quantity of our friendships doesn’t matter as much as the quality. It is not about how many friends we have but the depth and strength of the bonds we forge that can even mirror or surpass blood bonds.

In my personal experience, friends make good times sweeter, and difficult times become more bearable. But having true friendship takes time and suffering. Time because it needs nurturing and suffering because it needs to be tested. Amid hardship and suffering, I have witnessed God strengthen and sweeten friendships in my life while also revealing who genuinely cared about me and whom I genuinely cared about. Honestly, suffering has tested my commitment too. It has shown me that I wasn’t as committed to some friends as I believed. There is nothing wrong with that; we have different levels of relationships in our lives, and it is helpful when we understand them. This kind of reflection is what we need to learn and grow on how to be true and good friends with those we care about.

There is a Disney movie that you may know that gives us profound insight into this subject: “Toy Story.” The first movie came out in 1995 and was so well-received and so popular that we are now waiting for Toy Story 5.

What is this movie about? (If you have not seen it, my apologies for spoiling it for you, but it has been almost 30 years since it came out.) “Toy Story” is a movie about toys that come to life when humans aren’t watching. At the heart of the story is the evolving friendship between cowboy Woody and space ranger Buzz Lightyear. Their friendship gets off to a rocky start, marked by jealousy and misunderstandings. But as the movie unfolds, they develop a bond that mirrors the biblical essence of friendship: loyalty, sacrifice, forgiveness, and growth.

Here is a video when Woody and Buzz first met: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ky5OUUurvI&feature=share>

Here is a second video highlighting their journey as friends over the course of several movies: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ky5OUUurvI&feature=share>

What did you notice? True, lasting friendship isn’t always easy. It requires effort, patience, forgiveness, and above all, love. It teaches us that we may have to navigate feelings of jealousy, fear, and misunderstanding. But once we do, we find an unbreakable bond that stands the test of time and adversity. For example, once a Woody competitor, Buzz became the friend who “sticks closer than a brother.” Their unity, friendship, and willingness to stand by each other in moments of danger and doubt ultimately save them in all their challenges throughout the movie series.

Isn’t that a reflection of Proverbs 18:24, a friend who sticks closer than a brother? This is the embodiment of John 15:13, which tells us that “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Back to the invitation I extended at the beginning: Rather than focusing only on how to get friends, we should also focus on how to be friends. How do we do this? Here is practical advice on how to be true friends.

First of all, a true friend is loyal. Godly, biblical friendship is marked by consistency. “A friend,” says Proverbs 17:17, “loves at all times.” In other words, true friendship is not based on success or circumstances. It is not determined by looks, style, money, or possessions. A friend stays through thick and thin, through success or failure, even through offense. Loyalty always undergirds true friendship.

Friendship is also marked by honesty. Proverbs 27:6 says something that may seem rather backward to us at first: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Don’t we receive wounds from enemies and hugs from friends? Don’t friends build us up while only those who dislike us seek to harm us? Not necessarily, says Solomon! Superficial acquaintances might flatter, but a friend goes deeper than shallow pleasantries. Genuine friends are honest and speak the truth in love to point out our harmful behavior. They are willing to confront us with the truth to help us grow and become the best version of ourselves. They don’t want to see us suffering, so they may point out our blind spots—even when it is painful.

Last, a true friend will be not only honest but sensitive as well. Sometimes when speaking truth in love or joking around, we may cause hurt. Being sensitive helps us discern how to speak to someone we care about or how far we can go. We can break a heart with just a word or two, but repairing it may take a lifetime. Also, while some joking and teasing among friends is normal, we must always remain sensitive in our relationships.

I start today and be a good friend to you all by being honest: We will be bad friends from time to time—just like Woody and Buzz. We will fall short in our friendships or find our friends failing us. We will argue, say things we don’t mean, get contentious, and even call each other names. It has happened before and it will happen again. But true friends always find their way back to each other through confession and forgiveness. So even as we assess what kind of friends we are and have, we might find shortcomings based on these principles. And that is just being human.

So, when we falter or when our friends disappoint us, to whom do we turn to be encouraged and learn? We look to Jesus for guidance, of course. His friendship is perfect: He’s always with us, truthfully compassionate, faithful, and keeps his word. He is the ultimate example of true friendship. His love is unconditional, his companionship is unwavering, and his faithfulness is unparalleled. He doesn’t just help us become better; he transforms us completely with his words and example. He is gentle and sensitive; he gets us.

Here is the invitation and good news: As we progress in our relationships, let us embody Christ’s principles of friendship. Let us mirror his love to the world, especially to our friends. Let us aim to guide, comfort, and strengthen each other at all times. Let us not lose friendships to pride, misunderstandings, or hurtful words. And let us never feel forsaken, for we have a friend who was willing to lay his life for each of us despite our sins and failures. He will never forsake us. He is a forever friend.