

Week 4 - *The Lure of False Connection*
Proverbs 27:5-10

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. When it comes to your drinking habits, do you favor real sugar (or high-fructose corn syrup) or artificial sweeteners? Why did you make that choice?
2. For years, artificial sweetener has been touted as the healthier option, but evidence is beginning to show that these substitute sugars trigger brain and body responses differently than real sugar. (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/tricking-taste-buds-but-not-the-brain-artificial-sweeteners-change-braine28099s-pleasure-response-to-sweet/>) In short, your brain thinks it's getting the same thing as real sugar, but the body is not able to process it the same way. Put on your scientist hat for a moment. Why might this be a bad thing?
3. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman points out that the community of social media is similarly artificial. "Communities aren't created, and you either have one or you don't. What the social networks can create is a substitute. The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to a community, but a network belongs to you....Social media are very useful, they provide pleasure, but they are a trap." (http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html) In a given day, how do you spend more time, interacting with friends in person or interacting with friends via digital technology?
4. If you didn't have access to social technology (texts, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), would you be more or less motivated to meet with friends in person?
5. Now read Proverbs 27:7. How would you rephrase the point of this proverb in contemporary language?
6. Social media, like artificial sweetener, can make us feel like we're full, so we no longer need, and maybe even loathe, the real honey of true relationships. Take a moment and reflect on your own digital/physical balance of connecting. How would you rate real honey versus artificial sweets?
7. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for the true community that He's placed all around you. Ask Him to help you develop even sweeter connections with those in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. If you suddenly got great news, who would be the first person with whom you'd share it?
9. Who is your "A good friend will help you move, but a true friend will help you move a body" friend?
10. How long did it take to develop that kind of relationship with the person you listed above?

11. Proverbs 27:10 shares an important truth about true connections. Turn there and read it. What comparison does this proverb make between family and such a friend?
12. Are you someone that your friends would turn to if they experienced a disaster? How have you demonstrated that reliability to them?
13. Who is someone that you could reach out to this week and affirm your willingness to be their “friend indeed”?
14. End your FIFTEEN by thanking God that He has provided you with reliable friends or ask Him to help you develop those kinds of sure relationships.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. If you were listening to a speaker and they said something wrong, would you correct them? What about if a friend said something in error?
16. Take two minutes to watch this interesting summary of the Asch experiment: [youtube.com/watch?v=qA-gbpt7Ts8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA-gbpt7Ts8)
What do you think you would do if you had participated in this exercise?
17. Because we are social creatures, designed for community, conformity is a powerful force on us. What impact should this fact have on the kinds of people with whom we surround ourselves?
18. Read Proverbs 26:17-22. What is a common theme between these proverbs?
19. The Bible is clear that we should avoid those who are complaining or negative or gossipy. Have you known someone who always turned a conversation negative? What impact did that have on you or the social environment?
20. Have you ever fallen into that trap yourself? Are there times you have been the negative influence on others?
21. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN in prayer asking God for forgiveness for any times where you have been a part of an unhealthy dynamic. Ask Him to guide you away from those kinds of relationships in the future and ask Him to help you not be that kind of negative person going forward.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Once I was in a fantasy football league and didn't find out about a co-player's new baby until after the season ended! Have you ever been surprised to find out something about someone you thought you knew? What was the situation?

23. It is good to have friendships of different levels: acquaintances, friends and people you trust deeply. However, sometimes relationships get stuck at one level. Who is someone in your life with whom you'd like to be better or more intentional friends?
24. Read Proverbs 27:17. What does this metaphor mean?
25. Have you ever been sharpened because someone invested in you? Who was it?
26. Now read Titus 2:2-6. What kind of intentional relationship does Paul say Christians should have with one another?
27. At St. John, we use 1. 1. 15. 6. to remind us of four parts of the LIFEjourney. The second "1" is to be someONE to another person in an intentional relationship. Who is someone in your life in whom you can invest, deepen your relationship or encourage to be sharpened by the Holy Spirit?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN, pray for this person. Ask God to give you the opportunity to invest in this person in the coming weeks and months.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Name someone with whom you can be vulnerable. How has he or she allowed you to feel comfortable doing so?
30. Comedian John Mulaney shares how hard it is when people know the thing you're secretly sensitive about in this quote: "Thirteen-year-olds are the meanest people in the world. They terrify me to this day, because 8th graders will make fun of you but in an accurate way. They will get to the thing that you don't like about you. They don't even have to look at you for long. They'll just be like, 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, hey, look at that high wasted man. He got feminine hips.' And I'm like, 'No! That's the thing I'm sensitive about.'" What is something about which you're sensitive?
31. To have true connection, we have to be willing to be vulnerable with others. Unfortunately, as Brene Brown says, that's very hard to do: "The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness." Think of a time when someone else was willing to be vulnerable with you. What response did you have to him or her?
32. Generally, vulnerability arouses our sympathy, but it's still hard to be vulnerable with others. Read Proverbs 27:6. In regular language, what do you think this proverb is saying?
33. People like to joke about having a friend who will help "hide a body." But do you have a friend you can trust to tell you that you have food in your teeth? Who is that friend?

34. True relationship requires not just love, but a willingness to be transparent and vulnerable. In what ways would you be willing to take a step toward vulnerability with someone this week?

35. Close your final FIFTEEN in this series in prayer. Ask God to give you the strength to be weak. True connection only lies on the other side of vulnerability.