

6. Friends

November 1, 2009

I have a few quotes about friends that you may have heard. Here they are:

- A true friend is the one who knows about you and still doesn't mind being seen with you in public.
- A true friend is the one who doesn't mind you dropping by without calling in advance.

Friend in the Book of Proverbs can come in at least three different English words – friends, neighbors and companions.

In the NT, we are encouraged to be friends of God in John 15, but it also tells us clearly that we should not be friends of the world in James 4. In Christian fellowship, we need fellow born-again Christian friends to encourage one another and to keep each other accountable from disastrous temptations and sins.

Throughout our lives, we get to have acquaintances, casual friends, close friends and intimate friends. Of course, as you go one step higher, you get to have less people. Someone who was very wise said this about the difference between friend and acquaintance: "The difference between a friend and an acquaintance is that a friend helps; an acquaintance merely advises."

The Bible, especially the Book of Proverbs, gives us a clear definition about what friendship is supposed to be. We will learn about the general rules of friendship. The second one will be the qualities of true friendship. Then the last one, but not the least, the clear understanding of true friendship.

A. THE GENERAL RULES OF FRIENDSHIP

Proverbs 14:20 The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, But the rich has many friends.

Proverbs 19:4 Wealth makes many friends, But the poor is separated from his friend.

Proverbs 19:6-7 Many entreat the favor of the nobility, And every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. 7 All the brothers of the poor hate him; How much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him.

I am sure that you've seen how young children play. They don't have to go through a lengthy introduction to one another like grown-ups before they start to play together. Then one of the kids comes with a fancy toy or a box full of yummy cookies, everyone wants to be his friend.

Note one common thing about these verses – Giving. That is the secret of friendship. Friendship does not start with expecting someone to reach out to you, rather it starts when you give yourself out to others – your time, your resource and most of all your heart.

It is a common thing for people to expect others to reach out to them while they absolutely do nothing to reach out to others. I am sure that you can name a few people in your head who expect you to remember and recognize their birthdays, but they never do yours or choose not to.

Remember what Jesus did for us while we were still sinners? He came to die for our sins so that we may have eternal life. He reached out to us FIRST.

That's right, the most important element of friendship is giving, not receiving. I know that it is an outrageous concept in this selfish, "ME FIRST" world. But we are not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed to the image of Jesus Christ by renewing our mind.

Luke 16:9 And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

I believe that we Christians are supposed to be generous to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are going through difficult times. I am not talking about financial difficulties only, but also we should lend our helping hands and hearts for other occasions.

When you help out those who are going through difficult times financially, you are building a bridge of friendship into their lives. Don't think that you are buying friendship. If that is the case, Jesus wouldn't have us to do it.

I find 3 'musts' of giving within friendship:

1) Love

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Proverbs makes it clear that true friendship is based on love, because only love will endure the tests that friends experience as they go through life together. It's possible to have many companions and no real friend. Friendship is something that has to be cultivated in love and its roots must go deep in love. Because true love produces loyalty.

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

I understand this verse very well. I not only get to be your pastor, but I am privileged to be your friend, but my own older brother in South Korea hates my guts.

No where in the Bible does it say that we should expect someone to love us, but it emphasizes that we should love others – not just our families, friends, neighbors, even enemies because our neighbors and enemies can be the same people.

2) Grace and Kindness

Proverbs 22:11 He who loves purity of heart And has grace on his lips, The king will be his friend.

Proverbs 18:24 A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

People want to be friends with a person who is kind and sincere and extends grace. If you don't have a friend, you might want to have a self-examination to see if you are kind, sincere and extend grace to others. If not, you can not blame others for not wanting to be your friend.

3) Availability

Proverbs 27:10 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.

The best way to lose a friend is not making yourself available when there is a desperate need from your friend. You cannot say to your friend, "You are my best friend," yet not being there when he or she needs you.

On a side note, if you are married, your best friend should be your spouse and you should not have an opposite sex as your best friend under any circumstance. It is not good for your health and survival. Don't tell anyone that I didn't warn you.

B. DON'T DO THIS

Proverbs 12:26 The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.

Proverbs 16:28-29 A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends. 29 A violent man entices his neighbor, And leads him in a way that is not good.

Proverbs 21:10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

Proverbs 22:24 Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go,

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Two men were out hunting in northern Wyoming. Suddenly one yelled and the other looked up to see a brown grizzly bear charging them. The first started to frantically put on his tennis shoes and his friend anxiously asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly bear?" "I don't have to outrun a grizzly. I just have to outrun you!"

God's people must be especially careful in choosing their friends. You hang around with unbelievers because they appeal to your carnal desires, your carnal desires will bring you down to the pit. Some would say, "I am bringing them to Christ through the friendship evangelism method." You might be right, but unless you are well grounded in the Word of God, most likely you will be the one who gets evangelized to satan's temptation.

Psalms 1:1-2 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

C. THE QUALITIES OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP

Please keep in mind these qualities of true friendship if you have a good friend and you want to keep it that way.

1) Keeping a confidence

Proverbs 3:29 Do not devise evil against your neighbor, For he dwells by you for safety's sake.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

Proverbs 24:28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, For would you deceive with your lips?

Proverbs 25:8 Do not go hastily to court; For what will you do in the end, When your neighbor has put you to shame?

Proverbs 25:18 A man who bears false witness against his neighbor Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow.

If you have a disagreement with your friend and it is not a illegal and criminal matter, don't bring another person into the discussion by betraying confidence, because you'll end up losing both your reputation and friendship. It doesn't mean that we sweep wrong things under the rug for the sake of friendship.

2) Confronting in love

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Proverbs 29:5 A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

Ephesians 4:15a but, speaking the truth in love,

The Holy Spirit uses truth and love to build character, while the devil uses lies and flattery to tear things down. Flattery is manipulation, not communication. What honest person would want to manipulate a friend?

We must never take our friends for granted and think that they will immediately forgive our offenses, even though forgiveness is the right thing for Christians. It's strange but true that some of God's people will forgive offenses from unbelievers that they would never forgive if a Christian friend committed them.

If you must rebuke your friend, do it with all the facts according to the principles of the Word of God with gentleness and love. If you are rebuked, avoid an angry response. You may be getting a needed "faithful wound" from your friend. Because a true friend will put a finger on your faults without rubbing them in.

3) Being considerate

Proverbs 27:14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, It will be counted a curse to him.

Proverbs 25:17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, Lest he become weary of you and hate you.

Friends must exercise tact and be sensitive to each other's feelings. If we spend too much time together, we may wear out our welcome. Space comes from privacy and solitude with God. Even husbands and wives must respect each other's privacy and not be constantly together if their love is to mature.

Whenever I am away from my wife Karen or she is away from me due to out-of-town trips, we think about each other and miss each other very much. So when we get back together, we appreciate each other's presence all the more.

If you want to remain a friend of someone, please do not make fun of your friend's weaknesses – whether it is that person's appearance, clothing, or the way he or she talks. You might think that it is funny, but it might hurt that person's feelings deeply.

If we have to make fun of someone for whatever the stupid reason is, make fun of ourselves. Actually it is enlightening, because we don't get to take ourselves so seriously. NEVER, EVER MAKE FUN OF YOUR FRIEND, unless you want to be included that person's enemy list.

Love is sensitive to other people's feelings and needs, and true friends try to say the right thing at the right time in the right way.

4) Do not cosign

Proverbs 6:1-2 My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, 2 You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth.

Proverbs 17:18 A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, And becomes surety for his friend.

"Becoming surety for your friend" means that you become a cosigner and are making a pledge to pay if your friend default the loan. The Bible says, "No." If you have money to loan to your friend, give it without expecting anything back. If your friend cannot pay back because of whatever reason, then you are losing your money and friend. If the friend can pay you back, you gain both.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When you are with people, be aware of their likes and dislikes.
- 2) Remember friend's birthdays and anniversaries and acknowledge them.
- 3) Take interest in and cultivate relationships with your friend's children.
- 4) Be sensitive to your friend's needs.
- 5) Keep in touch by phone, texting, e-mail or better yet, actually send a card.
- 6) Express what you like about your relationship with another person.
- 7) Serve your friends in thoughtful, unexpected ways.

I believe that many of the ladies in our church practice these seven points in their Secret Sisters ministry. I commend you for that. Guys, get a hint.