

## Friendship

As time progresses, so does our perspective. One of the very valuable boons to life is a good friend. In youth, we often take friends for granted. Mom and Dad are looking out for us, we are surrounded by siblings, cousins and acquaintances from church. Then as we progress through school and college our friends share common activities i.e., band, choir, athletics and clubs. We begin to get serious with one certain member of the opposite sex and we marry. Then among acquaintances at church and work we form alliances with other couples. We share the common bond of getting our kids grown, educated and on the right road spiritually. Before we know it, our kids are grown, married and on their own. One of the surprises in life is that after our kids marry and move out, they were not beating down our door to be back in the house and wanting to hang out with us. The Bible is certainly true when it says, *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24). We knew this was true, but we probably did not realize how pronounced the leaving would be after the cleaving.

Now I see friendships differently than I originally perceived. We are not just comrades in a mission to get our kids matured or someone we sit next to in the Sunday School class we attend. I always recognized these people as friends, but I understand better now that which constitutes a friend. The etymology of our word friend has “to love” as its root shared by “free.” Together the literal meaning bears the definition of “to love free.” A friend is a person you have things in common with, someone who is on the same side with you, someone who loves you with no strings attached. A friend is someone who loves you freely. The best understanding of friendship will be found in the Bible.

### **1. To have a friend, you must be a friend.**

I remember many years ago there was a man who said our church was not friendly. The odd thing about his statement is that less than a week earlier another man had just told me that he believed our church was the friendliest church he had ever attended in his whole life. I noticed the man who complained about the unfriendliness arrived at church just before it started and was the first one out. I gave this verse to the man, *“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”*

(Proverbs 18:24). I then suggested that he stay after the services for just a couple of minutes, long enough for people to speak to him. He tried it and found the kind membership inundated him with fellowship. After three weeks, he was ready to categorize our church as the friendliest church ever. The people did not change; he did. He showed himself friendly.

### **2. A friend is not fickle.**

A friend does not qualify his or her kindness to you based on popularity, looks, what you have or do not have. Their kindness toward you is unconditional. During one the greatest crisis in the American Revolution, when it seemed we might not win our cause, Tom Paine was deeply concerned about our esprit de corps. of the "summer soldiers" were farmers who would join up with the army when their crops were planted, fight with them during the summer, and go back home to help with the harvest. Others would stay with the army through the harvest, but sneak off in the middle of the night once the weather got cold. Meanwhile, the people who supported the patriots when the revolution was going well - but not otherwise - were called "sunshine patriots." These are the exact words of Paine: *“The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country.”*

America won because of God’s divine providence. One of the main weapons providence smiled upon was the loyal soldier who stayed through thick and thin. A friend is one who has “got your back.” God says, *“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”* (Proverbs 17:17).

### **3. A friend makes us better at being ourselves.**

*“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”* (Proverbs 27:17). A friend does not try to re-invent you. A friend accepts you as you are. It has been said, “A friend is someone who walks in when the world walks out.” As a rule, countenance refers to facial expression. In other words, a friend puts a smile on another’s face. Oh how great to be that kind of friend! It is so frustrating when you are not accepted for who you are. If you go down the road of living in the fear of man, i.e. to please other people, you are going to be in misery. A friend finds the real you, likes the real you and his or her companionship brings out the best in you. *“Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel”* (Proverbs 27:9).

#### **4. A friend will be honest with you.**

You don’t want to be surrounded by people who “put on airs.” A friend will tell you when you are off key, out of bounds or over the top. Everything a friend tells you may not be pleasant, but if it helps and yields good results, it is worth it. The Bible says, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful”* (Proverbs 27:6).

A man and wife should be best of friends. When I met my wife, I was a young preacher. I like what the late Dr. Tom Malone said about young preachers, “They are like wasps; they are bigger when they are first born than at any other time in their life.” I had a favorite suit, a favorite shirt, a favorite tie and a favorite pair of shoes. I was so proud of these three items that I wore them together often when we dated. Before I tell you the outfit, please keep in mind this was the early 70s. The suit was gray, the shirt was purple and the tie was purple and the shoes were brown and beige saddle oxfords. You are probably laughing. My sweet girlfriend didn’t say anything. However, in the first week of our marriage, I discovered I had a friend. She loved me enough to tell me I looked like a clown in that outfit.

#### **5. Make Jesus your best friend!**

Our Lord graciously said, *“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (John 15:15). Christ desires to move us beyond servitude and into intimacy with Him. It was said of the great patriarch, *“...Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God”* (James 2:23).

The Lord has personally promised, *“...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). He is *“...a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”* (Proverbs 18:24). In this life people will disappoint you, but you can be certain, God will never. So remember when you are alone, you are never really alone. The Psalmist said it so succinctly, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up”* (Psalm 27:10). God will lift you up when the closet in the world will let you down. What a friend we have in Jesus!

- Pastor Pope -

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