

Question: As a young unmarried person I have been hurt and very disappointed lately by some of my friends. Is there anything I can do to find genuine and lasting friendships and love?

I believe that lasting love and friendships are possible in spite of the challenges today's world presents. We do not need to assume that heartbreak is inevitable. There are numerous places in the Bible from which we can learn about true friendship and love, but space will not permit as full a discussion of this as we might like. Therefore, for the present I propose that we reflect on some of Paul's practical instructions to the Christians in Rome. By a careful reading of Romans 12:9-21, it is possible to identify at least four principles that can help us build healthy, lasting friendships.

Begin by being more concerned about loving than about being loved. This may sound strange; but when we concentrate on loving someone, love is more likely to be returned. Paul wrote: "Love must be sincere . . . Honor one another above yourselves . . . Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:9-12). Any attempt to buy, force or manipulate a friend into loving us will only bring resentment. Genuine love is not something that can be forced. We must allow it to come to us naturally. This is more likely to happen to a loving and giving person. It is in the giving that we receive.

We must also be seriously committed to maintaining lasting relationships. Paul wrote: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. . . Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor" (Romans 12:10-11). When the commitment is present, we will not easily give up in times of difficulty. With God's help, we will find ways to overcome problems in our relationships. This kind of committed relationship is more likely to come to a person who is committed to giving that kind of loving friendship to others.

In addition, we should attempt to associate primarily with people who have demonstrated a commitment to building lasting relationships, people who can serve as good role models and mentors in the art of friendship and love. Those who have experienced the love of Jesus should have a better understanding of what lasting love looks like. They have a foundation on which to build lasting friendships. Where Jesus has not been an influence, selfishness tends to dominate. Committed Christians should make the best candidates for lasting

relationships.

Finally, treat everyone you meet with appropriate respect as an equal. Examine your heart and life to be sure you do not arrogantly look down on anyone as unworthy of your friendship. Lasting relationships may come in a package very different from what you expect. Paul said it this way: “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (Romans 12:16 NIV). Strive to love like God loves. Love others not for what they are but because you are a loving person.

These principles provide a good beginning point in the search for lasting friendships and love. Along with the above counsel, we need to spend time daily in prayer and study of God’s written word, the Bible. By doing so, we can find more principles that can help us live great and meaningful lives. We can also build a relationship with the Lord whose love and friendship will never disappoint.

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