

***Question: I seem to have a lot of problems finding and keeping friends. What advice do you think Jesus would give?***

The Proverbs of the Old Testament give some helpful insights on friendship, and Jesus provides us a wonderful model for applying these proverbs to life. For example, the writer of Proverbs says, “A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26 NIV). Although Jesus was friendly to everyone, he was not naive about the evil in some people. The book of John states: “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man” (John 2:23-25). We should always be careful of where we go and what we do with a friend who does not share Christian values. We should not be too quick to pass judgment against someone, but neither should we be gullible in friendship.

In addition, Proverbs advises us that “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Proverbs 18:24 NKJ). Jesus was often surrounded by multitudes of people because he demonstrated friendliness by being more concerned about blessing others than about himself. He came to serve rather than be served (Mark 10:44-45). The advice of Proverbs 18 sounds simple. But it takes more effort for some of us because personality affects how we make friends. Some people are reserved while others are out-going. Although most of us fit somewhere along the spectrum between the two, we should not think that one type is desirable and the other is undesirable. God made each of us different, and these differences contribute to the enrichment of our world. However, greater effort is required for some people to make friends, especially with those who seem different from them.

It is also important to be a friend who can be trusted with confidential information. The wise man of Proverbs tells us: “He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (Proverbs 17:9). Another proverb adds that the person who “loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend” (Proverbs 22:11). Disrespectful and ungracious speech alienates instead of promoting genuine friendships.

Moreover, honesty in relationships requires that we learn to receive a friend's criticism in a spirit of love. Proverbs 28:23 says, "In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery" (NLT). Although our pride may be hurt sometimes, we need friends who will love us enough to tell us what we need to hear. Far better to hear it from a friend who is there to help than from an enemy who will use it to destroy us. This also means that we must not run away when difficult times come. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Jesus put it this way, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

These are not all of the friendship principles that can be found in the biblical Proverbs and in the life of Jesus. If you really want to have good friendships, then follow the advice of the Proverbs and the example of Jesus. I can't guarantee you will never have any disappointments, but you will find the kind of friends who will face them with you.

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