

#241 "How to Be a Friend"

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Friend is a very loosely used term. For example, one sports announcer always welcomes all of his sportscast viewers by calling them his friends. Facebook calls any old classmate or associate a friend. Friend can mean a lot, or it can mean a little. It can be just some person that we know casually, or friend could carry a much deeper connotation, perhaps even a bond as deep as family. So how does a friendship develop? What makes a friendship last? What are friends supposed to do for one another? The Bible is clear that a friend is more than just a person whose name we know. Being a friend means actually caring for somebody and opening up our lives to them. A friend is more than the world's ideal of a drinking buddy or the person we eat lunch next to at work or school. A friend is a valued relationship, a significant bond, and a gift in life. So let us heed the commands of Scripture so that we can best be a friend to the people whom God has graciously ordained to cross our paths in life.

#1 A friend loves at all times, even when times are tough. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity." When Job experienced his trials and tribulations, he realized that his friends were not what he may have thought they were. Job 6:14 says, "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty." Job's friends rebuked him, wrongly judged him, and sought to gain from his despair. Job 6:27 says, "You would even cast lots for the orphans And barter over your friend." Job recognized that his friends had a contemptuous view of him, thinking of him as a joke (Job 12:4). They had enjoyed and valued his company and association when he was exalted in their community and had the greatest wealth of the entire area. But now that he was pitiful, lying in his own sores and having lost almost everything, they were ready to criticize him because they were interested in making themselves look better. They did not love at all times, and they weren't true friends because Job's adversity exposed their shallow and selfish motives. A real friend does not abandon his friend in time of need, and, in times of prosperity, it is not the prosperity that is the basis of the friendship. As Proverbs 19:4 says, "Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend." People are naturally attracted to relationships through which they can gain some personal advantage such as money, notoriety, the chance to move up in society, etc. But when trouble comes, we get to see who our true friends are. Those who actually and truly care about us will be made known because they will love us even when there is nothing selfish to gain. A friend loves at all times, not just when it is easy or for selfish gain.

#2 A friend is willing to speak the truth even if we don't want to hear it. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." Those who despise us will tickle our ears because they are not interested in our welfare. However, a real friend will tell us when we are in danger or when we are about to make a poor decision. They will confront us when we have sin in our lives, not because they want to make themselves look good but because they care about our well-being. Their exhortations are life-giving, even if they sting initially. Far better is this than being told we are doing well when we are marching to our own destruction. Friends have enough love in their hearts that

they are willing to risk the relationship if it means possibly saving their friend. Jesus didn't stop at eating and drinking with sinners, but He used the opportunity to share about the kingdom of God. He cared enough to say what needed to be said even if it cost Him the relationships. That is a true friend (Matthew 11:19).

#3 A friend is a source of wise and godly counsel. Proverbs 27:9 says, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend." When a person avoids giving us counsel or has a habit of giving bad advice, that person is not much of a friend. Their words might be interesting and their speech entertaining, but if they know not the wisdom of God and the love of God, we need to be discerning when they tell us to chart a certain course of action. A true friend knows God and desires His wisdom before opening his mouth. A true friend is there for us when we need direction or encouragement, and it is soothing and healing to the soul. Without God's Word and wisdom, a friendship and a friend's counsel can only go so deep. But with the common bond of the Scripture and the shared intimacy of the Holy Spirit, godly counsel is one of many benefits of friendship. It is a blessing to hear somebody's advice when we know they love the Lord, know His Word, and have our best interest in mind.

#4 A friend is loyal to the end. Proverbs 27:10a says, "Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend." Trust is something that is built up over time. It is a bridge between people, a lifeline if needed. Some know a lot of people, but in the day of adversity, they all fall away. On the other hand, some are fortunate enough to have a loyal friend, one who will be there to the end, even across generations. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Sometimes family will make us feel like orphans, but sometimes a friend is like family. A friend is no friend if we fear that a knife will be plunged into our back. A friend is a friend who will defend us and protect us until the end. If there is no real trust, is there really a friendship?

#5 A friend in its fullest sense requires friendship first with Christ. John 15:14-15 says, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." Christ is open, transparent, vulnerable, and personal with His disciples because He loves them. He does not keep what the Father has told Him private, but He reveals it to His disciples, His friends. That they are His own, which is proven by their obedience to Him, enables Christ to be intimate with them in terms of sharing with them about the Father. A deep connection can take place because of the shared bond of those who are born again as brothers and sisters of Christ, joint inheritors with Him of the kingdom. We are not some distant business associates with Christ such that we need to keep secrets and hold the ace up our sleeve. Rather, there is a sense of safety, intimacy, and shared confidence in God's redemptive work. This is the basis that underlies friendship in its truest, deepest, and fullest form. Through Christ's love for us and our friendship with Him, we learn how to love, how to be a friend, and how to develop priorities that are right, true, and good and that form the basis of what drives us in life. A friendship can only go so far if its ultimate basis is beer, football, hunting, shopping, bingo, etc. But if Christ is the anchoring point, the ultimate example of a Friend, then we, too, can learn to be friends as we imitate His selfless love, His compassion, His ability to sympathize and understand,

and His complete and total trustworthiness. Without Christ, why should we trust somebody or expect them to be a friend at all times?

There is nothing like going to battle for the Lord knowing that somebody else is in the fight with you, ready to help if you stumble, ready to stand against evil with you, and somebody who has always got your back.