

# Friendships

08/06/17

(Apocrypha) Ben Sira 9:10 -- *Do not abandon old friends, for new ones cannot equal them. A new friend is like new wine; when it has aged, you can drink it with pleasure.*

We've heard the expression, "You can choose your friends but not your family." Family is very important, and it is important that spouses be the best of friends, as well. Yet friendships outside the family can bring much value, new perspectives, and a fresh view of reality.

It also seems that God has friends in mind for us, as demonstrated in the Bible. Jonathan and David were good friends. Jonathan warned David about the dangers he saw in David's father, King Saul. This warning allowed David to take action and avoid harm, and ultimately this act of true friendship enabled David to take the throne, as God intended.

The love between friends is real and honest ... sometimes painfully honest. Proverbs 27:6 teaches us that "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." A true friend will tell you what you need to hear, even if it hurts. A close friend will set us straight because they care for us.

Having said this, some people need to know that friendships take a while to develop. You are making a serious social error to assume you know someone well enough to share criticism of them or to suggest life course corrections. Prior to speaking your mind

regarding someone, there must be a solid foundation of trust, mutual respect, and some shared personal life experience before we move into the category of true friends.

There is a hierarchy of relationships:

- 1) People you choose not to have in your life. Love for these people is the most broad and general: you wish them no harm and would help them from a life threatening situation. This is the Good Samaritan type love.
- 2) People you choose to love from a distance but not have as an integral part of your life. Spending time with them is draining and negative; they weaken your immune system.
- 3) People who are strangers. These are neither negative nor positive influences. There is a broad spectrum of how people respond to strangers: from highly accepting to highly suspicious, and everything in between. Christ encourages us to move toward being more accepting. You never know when you might meet your new best friend.
- 4) Then there are acquaintances: people who we know and recognize, and even like, but we have little face-time with. These people could easily move up this hierarchy if more time were spent together.
- 5) There are associates, who are people we spend time with because of work, or other mutually shared social occasions, but we do not share private, personal, and intimate experiences or information with.
- 6) There are casual friends, people we say 'hi and bye' to but we don't spend a great deal of time with, not because they are

negative influences but just because the proximity is unfavorable or time is an impediment.

Good Samaritan type love applies to all of the above, as well as below. But with closer relationships, more commitment is involved and greater trust, and with it more willingness to extend ourselves on their behalf.

- 7) Then there are good friends: People we seek out to spend time with and share with. We like them and look forward to seeing them on a personal basis. Good friends feed us with positive energy. With good friends we have a growing commitment to their welfare. But still, we are not to the point where serious intimacies are shared. It is not time to disclose our ideas about how we think they are injuring themselves, at least not overtly. We might mention things in passing, but we do not have permission to confront on issues.
- 8) Close friends are those we feel more comfortable with sharing intimacies. There is a foundation of trust, appreciation, and respect, developed through experience and sharing. Close friends can feel safer confiding their concerns, and receiving concerns with each other. These are who I would consider “true friends”. They are forgiving, tolerant, and consider each other valuable, even precious, perhaps indispensable.
- 9) Then there are the best friends. These are the closest of the close friends. There are no secrets, nothing that cannot be shared or forgiven. Nothing is withheld. Some people have one best friend; some have two or more. But rarely is this level of intimacy spread over a large group. It is easier to share with

one person because we don't have to remember what we've already told someone. The details of life are easier to manage.

Studies have been done on friendships and romantic relationships. What they determined was that there are at least two principles that bring people together. One is the Principle of Homophily, which is the tendency for individuals to associate with others like themselves. It is easier and more rewarding for us to interact with people who are similar to us than dissimilar. One study measures the degree of similarity in these qualities: Attractiveness, Intelligence, Popularity, Stress, Academic, Dramatic, Religious, Imaginative, and Spontaneous.

The other principle involved is "The Association Principle": although we are attracted to others by their similar qualities as our, the individual will adapt their own personal characteristics to that of the social network.

For example, a study by Newcomb and Bagwell in 1995 found that most transfer students to their college became friends with those who they thought were most like them. Originally, the friendships developed from their perceived similarities. As the friendships continued, however, actual similarities began to appear and friendships were changed to accommodate those similarities. They concluded that while similarities seem important in establishing a friendship, it is unclear whether they are a catalyst for friendship, a consequence of friendship, or a combination of both.

Although we are attracted to people similar to us, there are times when we have negative relationships in our lives. The term ‘bad friend’ is something of an oxymoron, so perhaps we can’t really have any ‘bad friends’ but we can have bad, negative, and destructive relationships. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says that “*bad company will corrupt someone with good character.*” My Dad once told me that the most important job of a parent is to choose their children’s friends, that is, to monitor and adjust who our children are choosing to associate with.

There is a Spanish expression I read: “Dime con quién andas, y te dire quién eres.” It translates as: Tell me with whom you walk, and I will tell you who you are.

We are told in the Bible to choose our friends carefully, as my Dad did when I was a child. But when we are grown, we must make our own choices. This is not just with people but with our life condition. What are we befriending? In James 4:4 we are warned: “*Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*” When we live through our small self, our ego-based choices and desires, we are cheating God, blocking the love and joy that otherwise awaits us.

Tell me who you walk with, and I will tell you who you are.

When we think of the message of Jesus, and his extreme adeptness at delivering that message, we can’t help but think he could have done it all on his own. But instead, he developed a network of

friends. He hand-picked them and they lived together, prayed together, ate together, celebrated together, and mourned together.

He told them in John 15:12-14: *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

You are my friends if you do as I command. This is the Principles of Homophily and Association. It’s as if Christ is saying, “I have chosen you because we share similarities. Like me, you are Children of God, and because we are loving and willing, we are joined in friendship. And because you are joined to me in friendship you are changing and accepting the other similarities that are growing between us: you are becoming more loving, open, tolerant, more joyous and peaceful. Our friendship and relationship flourishes as you accept these changes in you.”

Christ does not command that we seek out our neighbors to be friends. We can love people that are not our friends. In fact the exact opposite seems true: we are commanded to love even our enemies. Loving people has nothing to do with making friends, but it is a start. To love someone is just the beginning of our Christian journey.

I believe God intends that we meet particular people. Sometimes they enter our lives to be teachers, tormentors, guides, companions, lovers, or spouses. Some are Lighters of the Way; some are friends.

The power of friendship can purify us as we release our ego-selves and serve our friends. Paramahansa Yogananda said, “God’s effort to unite strife-torn humanity manifests itself within your heart as the friendship instinct.”

Although most close friendships are gender-similar, friendship is not gender specific. When we release our awareness of the body and realize we are Children of God, friendships can grow. When we can be a friend to all, scattering love, kindness, and affection on all of Creation, then we are demonstrating God’s Divine Friendship.

Sharing good news with beloved family members and friends increases our joy. Spending time with friends enriches our lives. When challenges arise, sharing our feelings or remembering the brighter side of life with a trusted friend can significantly lighten our heart. Our soul is nourished by our friendships, and our joy increases through the blessings of true kinship and love.

Ultimately, our greatest friend is God, the Holy Spirit, the Christ within us. As we allow Christ’s love to express through us, we draw the perfect friends to us, our old friendships deepen, and we are rich in the abundance of friends.

My prayer is that we open our hearts to the power and significance of the friends in our lives. Here are some of these statements on friendship I offer for your pleasure and consideration: :

- Friendship isn’t about whom you have known the longest; it’s who came and never left your side. ~ Anon
- When I count my blessings, I count you twice.

- Friends show their love in times of trouble, as well as in happiness.
- I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy. Let's face it, friends make life a lot more fun. (Author, Pastor, Educator -Charles R. Swindoll)
- Love is friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad times. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses. (Columnist Ruth Crowley, pen-name: Ann Landers)
- Remember that the most valuable antiques are dear old friends. (Author, H. Jackson Brown, Jr)

Let us pray....