

35. FRIENDSHIP

Theme: Building a church through Friendship. What sort of friend are you?

Bible reading: Proverbs 27:1-27.

Aim: For us to be the type of friends to others that Jesus Christ is a friend to us.

Introduction:

One of the greatest blessings that God offers us is the gift of His friendship, love and acceptance. "Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends..." John 15:15. If we are to be Christ like, we should show this same friendship of Christ to others.

Question: Why are some people unsuccessful at winning people to Christ?

Answer: One reason may be that they are not willing to be friends to those that they share Christ with. For any church to grow, quality friendships must be shown.

Notice these verses about friendship:

1. To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed from his friend. Job 6:14.
2. Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. Psalms 41:9.
A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs 17:17.
4. A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24.
5. Every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. Proverbs 19:6.
6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Proverbs 27:6.
7. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not. Proverbs 27:10.
8. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Proverbs 27:17.
9. Jesus ... a friend of publicans and sinners. Matthew 11:19.
10. Jesus to Judas at his betrayal: "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Matthew 26:50.
11. Make no friendship with an angry man, lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul. Proverbs 22:24.
12. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. James 2:23.
13. Know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God. James 4:4.
14. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name. Ill John 14.

1. WHAT IS A FRIEND?

A friend is a trusted confidante to whom I am mutually drawn as a companion and ally, whose love for me is not dependent on my performance, and whose influence draws me closer to God.

2. THREE LEVELS OF FRIENDSHIP.

- a) Casual friends or acquaintances. These are people that you know of.
- b) Close personal friends.
- c) Intimate best friends. Those few with whom we share our deepest feelings (maybe 3 or 4 people).

3. EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD FRIEND.

- a) **Loyal:** Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find? Proverbs 20:6.
Loyalty means:

- i) **Defending** my friend, especially in hard times. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me...Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." II Timothy 4:16,17.
- ii) **Supporting** your friend in difficulty and in prosperity.
"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 17:17.

b) **Deep Sharing:** This consists of:

- i) **Listening** "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath." James 1:19. Listening means that we open our ears, and alert our minds to words and meanings. We listen instead of talking.
Too often we listen only to decide when it is our turn to talk. Don't dominate the conversation. We need to listen to:
 - **what is said** (the words),
 - the **message conveyed** (the ideas),
 - **its meaning** (what is behind ideas and thoughts),
 - **the message behind the words** (real or hidden meanings).
 - ii) **Speaking** the right amount in the right way.
"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life." Proverbs 15:4.
"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Proverbs 25:11.
 - iii) **Accepting the other person** just as they are."We are accepted in the Beloved." Eph 1:6
 - iv) **Understanding the other person.** For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. Proverbs 2:6.
If we really care for our friends, we will seek to understand them.
- c) **Fun to be with.** Do things together, such as: Tennis, hiking, holidays, common interests.
- d) **Stimulating.** We should stimulate and encourage our friends to spiritual development and to personal growth. Help them to solve their problems, ask non-threatening questions and propose some new activities.
"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." Hebrews 10:24,25.
- e) **Encouraging.** Share Scriptures, pray together and lift their loads. Encouraging others can keep them from sin.
"But exhort one another daily ... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrews 3:13.
- f) **Self-sacrificing.** "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13.
A true friend gives sacrificially to meet another's needs. Self-sacrifice instead of selfishness measures the depth of friendship.
"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Philippians 2:4.
- g) **Agape Love.** Giving expecting nothing in return. Say: "I love you."
Ask God to give you an honest love for your friends.
- h) **Spiritually Challenging.** Friends drive us toward God, or away from God.

Question: Do you stimulate others to a closer walk with God?

Do you pray together?

Do you share common spiritual concerns?

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Proverbs 13:20.

Note: TIME and EFFORT builds these qualities into a friendship.

4. WHY WE NEED FRIENDS.

Eight Benefits of Close Friends:

eg. David and Jonathan; Paul was a teacher and friend to Timothy.

- a. **Emotional encouragement.** A good friend builds us up by letting us know that he accepts us and loves us.
- b. **Help in trouble.** "A brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 17:17.
- c. **Personal stability.** Friends and family keep us from rash decisions and from self-centred wanderings. Attend church.
- d. **Spiritual help and counsel,** will help us to speak the truth in love.
- e. **Freedom of expression,** to speak openly and freely without fear of being condemned.
- f. **Protection from loneliness and isolation.**
- g. **Love and acceptance.** We need to be loved for who we are.
- h. **Opportunities to give ourselves to others.** We benefit by giving friendship.

5. WHY WE AVOID INITIATING FRIENDSHIPS.

a) **Fear of rejection.** Whenever we attempt to start a friendship that is ignored, we feel wounded and unworthy. Rejection hurts and causes us to build up a defence against trying again. If we hide behind a defensive wall, we deny ourselves the pleasure and joy of future friendships. Continue soul winning. You will be rejected, but you will make many friends.

b) **Shyness** secludes a person from meaningful friendships. **How?**

By avoiding social contacts.

By fearing self-revelation.

Effects of shyness:

- i) Loneliness.
- ii) More doubts about self-worth
- iii) Acute anxiety, and depression.

Two antidotes to shyness:

- i) Realise that God has created everyone with valuable qualities.
- ii) We have a responsibility to God to give our lives to others.

c) **Our prejudices.** We seek friends who are similar to ourselves to associate with and often reject the intrusion of someone different. Notice how Jesus mixed with all sorts of people, such as tax collectors, fishermen and zealots. We gravitate to people of similar:

- age. - intellectual development.
- interests. - spiritual background.

d) **Poor self-image.** Many people are lonely because they feel that no one could be interested in them. Lack of confidence may be due to:

- i) Critical, negative parents.
- ii) Rejection by friends.
- iii) False thinking patterns.
- iv) Unfair comparisons with others.

How to overcome loneliness:

- i) Recognise that God has created each of us as a unique person.
- ii) We do have something valuable to contribute to the life of others.

6. HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS.

a. **Create opportunities** to meet people. Use small talk about the other person to lead to a more meaningful discussion.

- b. **Take the first step.** Make one new acquaintance each week. Friendships need a starting point: a smile, a greeting, a kind word, an interested question.
- c. **Be yourself.** Honestly be ourselves and under the control of Jesus Christ.
- d. **Allow time** for a friendship to ripen.
- e. **Take risks.** To begin a friendship we must risk time, embarrassment, rejection, and social situations.
- f. **Create a sociable environment.** Be willing to invite new people to your home and to social activities. Small gatherings, such as meals, outings, Bible study etc, provide a good climate for new friendships.
- g. **Look for common interests.** Eg: Children, age, jobs. Be a learner and show interest in their interests. Listen and learn. Six rules to help people to like you are:
 - i. Become genuinely **interested** in other people.
 - ii. **Smile.**
 - iii. A **man's name** is the sweetest sound to him.
 - iv. Be a **good listener.** Encourage others to talk about themselves.
 - v. Talk in terms of the **other person's interests.**
 - vi. Make the other person **feel genuinely important.**

For example, welcome them to church and introduce them to others. Matthew 7:12 says:

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

7. HOW TO MAKE LASTING CHRISTIAN FRIENDS.

Key: As both friends draw closer to God, they also grow closer to each other.



- a) **Provoke each other's spiritual growth.**

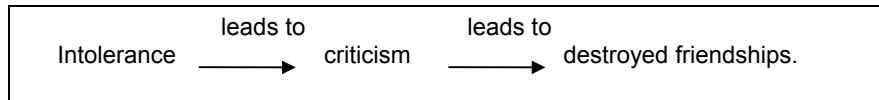
"Provoke one another to love and to good works." Hebrews 10:24,25.
Stir up people's thinking processes by asking questions and by teaching. II Peter 3:1.
- b) **Prayer** lifts us up together into God's presence, and draws us closer to each other.
- c) **Accountability.** A Christian friend has the right to hold us responsible for our actions that may be wrong. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Proverbs 27:6.
- d) **Encouragement or Exhortation.**

Say to people: "I love you"; "I appreciate you"; "You're doing a good job."
Fathers should encourage their children. Pastors and people should encourage each other.
Encouragement can take several forms:
 - i. **Appreciation** for action.
 - ii. **Sympathy** in distress or sorrow.
 - iii. **Support** to accomplish something.
 - iv. **Thanks** for favours.
 - v. **Personal presence** in time of need. "Exhort one another daily." Hebrews 3:13.
Exhortation is a spiritual gift. Romans 12:8.
- e) **Helping and serving.** Be sensitive to your friend's needs.
- f) **Have fun together.** Do things together, go places together.

- g) **Teamwork in the spiritual battle.** Friendships are best maintained in the midst of the spiritual battle. Go soul-winning together. The dependability of a friend must be fostered.

8. HINDRANCES TO FRIENDSHIP.

- a) **Failure to recognise** our need of friendship. We then substitute acquaintances for friends.
- b) **A lifestyle that's too busy.** Do things together, like Bible study and shopping.
- c) **Intolerance** for the habits, activities, personalities and practices of others. Give friends space to be themselves.



- d) **Selfishness** is taking, but friendship is giving.
- e) **Criticism.** Friendship cannot grow in the uncomfortable, depressing atmosphere of criticism. What is criticism? Criticism stems from a poor self image, an angry spirit, faulty comparisons and misunderstandings.
- f) **Insensitivity** to others needs. Some people bypass or ignore signals that reveal if a friend is depressed, tired, troubled, fearful or irritated. "Rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep." Romans 12:15.
- g) **Envy** is wanting what is not rightfully ours. Jealousy is wanting what is rightfully ours. "Who is able to stand before envy?" Proverbs 27:4. Envy reveals a possessive attitude and an unwillingness to share the friendship with anyone else. Envy occurs where:
- i) one friend achieves success, or
 - ii) one friend begins to spend time with another person.
- h) **Unrealistic expectations.** Don't be easily disappointed in friends. No one is perfect.
- i) **Betraying confidences** and **gossiping** destroys trust which friendships are based on.

9. HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE FRIENDSHIP.

- a. **Review the past**, discussing problems that affect you today without defensiveness or criticism. Listen carefully to learn about your spouse and yourself.
- b. **Set aside time to talk.** Have a good free-flowing meaningful conversation every day.
- c. **Renew your lifetime commitment** to each other.
- d. **Do fun things together**, for example, go out for a meal regularly.
- e. **Think of ways** that you can help your spouse reach their personal goals.
- f. **Be the spouse** God wants you to be. Read Ephesians 5:1-33. Fulfil your God-given role in your marriage. Pray daily for and with your spouse.
- g. **Read the Bible** together, and **pray together** daily.
- h. **Guard against divisive influences**, such as selfishness, or too many one-sided decisions, or excluding your spouse from activities. Monitor the daily health of your marriage.
- i. **Remain an interesting person** who is enjoyable to be near.
- j. **Keep respect and courtesy** at the core of your marriage. Be courteous. I Peter 3:8. Refuse to take each other for granted.

- k. **Constantly tell your spouse** "I love you.", etc.

10. HOW TO RESTORE A BROKEN FRIENDSHIP.

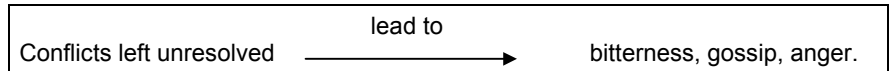
- a) **Determine what is the source of conflict.** Hebrews 12:14-15.

We cannot live in harmony when problems exist.

We need to know where these problems come from:

- Have I spoken harshly or unjustly to a friend?
- Have I neglected contact because of a rushed schedule?
- Do I avoid friends if they are in trouble or sinning?

Key: Too often we are willing to settle for an easy stand off, rather than to press through the painful process of honest confrontation and resolution.



- b) **Initiate restoration.** Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15.
Question: Have you hurt someone, or has someone hurt you?
Answer: You are responsible for restoring the friendship. Peace can come when we confront and heal broken friendships.
- c) **Fix problems quickly.** Restoration of friendship is easiest when the offence is still recent. If hurts accumulate, restoration becomes harder.
- d) **Go in an attitude of humility.**
- i) Discover why the conflict occurred.
 - ii) Find a time to talk privately with your friend without time constraints.
 - iii) Decide beforehand to accept all responsibility for the quarrel that is your fault.
 - iv) Listen to the words and meanings carefully.
 - v) Ask for forgiveness without placing blame.
- e) **Allow time to heal.** It takes time for trust and confidence to rebuild.
- f) **Pray for full recovery** of the relationship, and for your attitudes.

CONCLUSION.

What sort of friend are you?

Only as we are Christlike in our friendships, and as we become closer friends to Christ will a really great church be built for His glory. Are you prepared to pay the price to be a good friend?