



Friends Forever

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“Friends Forever” (Part 1)

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I INTRODUCTION

-One of the greatest things about this fellowship is the commitment I see in so many of you to **grow old together**. I remember, as your pastor, saying that statement years ago, and it appears to have been caught by many of you as a heart conviction and a lifestyle message.

I am so grateful for all the friendships that I and my family have been able to make in these years. It has brought a health and a stability to our personal lives, our marriage and our home.

Real friends are rare, and are the real wealth of a person's life! How incredibly valuable each one is!

-Deep down in the heart of every person is a need to be known and to know, to love and be loved in return!

The craving for companionship and fellowship is natural and placed in our hearts by God.

-It was God who said, after all of creation was complete, including Adam, that it was **“not good that man should be alone: I will make for him a helpmate”** (Gen 2:18).

In a very real sense, Adam was not alone.

God Omnipresent was there in the Garden, walking and talking with His creation (3:8).

However, God created in the nature of humanity an ability to know intimacy, to express love and loyalty, to know covenantal commitment, so that man would understand the very nature of God towards His creation.

God placed a desire for “eternity in the heart of mankind” (Eccles 3:11), a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill!

II WHAT IS A FRIEND?

“One attached to another by affection or esteem”

(Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary).

It comes from the French root meaning, “**free to love!**”

It assumes that a friend is not hostile, but a consistent companion, one who shows interest and good will, and shares common interests!

Attachment is a wonderful thing!

To feel the sense of belonging is a great experience.

To know someone out there, cares about you, wants to see you emerge your best, and desires to share with you the important things, making memories.

-The neighbourhood pub may be the closest counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His people!

It’s an imitation, dispensing liquor rather than the new wine of the Spirit, escape rather than grace and reality, but it’s permissive, accepting, and an inclusive fellowship.

It is unshockable. It is democratic, independent, self-ruled.

You can tell others secrets and they usually don't get told. The bar flourishes, not because most people are alcoholics, but because of the human need to be known and know, to be loved and love...

Detachment is a terrible thing.

And unfortunately, tends to be the experience of far too many people.

People shy away from making friends because of the fear of the pain of losing them!

They draw back from commitment (commitment-phobia) because of the anxiety caused by the fear of the loss of reciprocal love or betrayal.

- **Job 19:14- 20 TLB** “My relatives have failed me; my friends have all forsaken me. Those living in my home, even my servants, regard me as a stranger. I am like a foreigner to them. I call my servant, but he doesn't come; I even beg him! My own wife and brothers refuse to recognize me. Even young children despise me. When I stand to speak, they mock. My best friends abhor me. Those I loved have turned against me. I am skin and bones and have escaped death by the skin of my teeth”
- **David** in **Ps 38:9- 11 Niv** “All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away”
Ps 41:9 Niv “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”

-Our society as a whole tends towards short term commitments and friendships.

We are transitory (Temporary) people, moving on every four years.

We have become de-sensitized to much of human need.

Our friendships tend to be very superficial and translucent.

Few of us seem to have the natural skills to make friendships and keep friendships for any length of time.

God's Word talks about this in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 and warns us to stay away from these kinds of last day people:

- **2 Tim 3:1- 5 TBL** "You may as well know this too, Timothy, that in the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money; they will be proud and boastful, sneering at God, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful to them, and thoroughly bad. They will be hardheaded and never give in to others; they will be constant liars and troublemakers and will think nothing of immorality. They will be rough and cruel, and sneer at those who try to be good. They will betray their friends; they will be hotheaded, puffed up with pride, and prefer good times to worshipping God. **They will go to church, yes, but they won't really believe anything they hear.** Don't be taken in by people like that"

III TRUE FRIENDSHIP

An understanding of true friendship starts with a relationship with God.

God wants to be friends with you.

God made you a spiritual being just like Him, so that we could fellowship with Him.

We saw that friendship, in the Garden as Adam walked with God. Even when Adam sinned, God came looking for him: He cared!

We see His pursuit of relationship with **Enoch** “**who walked with God and was not for God took him**” (Gen 5:21-24).

-We again see it in the development of relationship with Abraham:

- **2 Chron 20:7 Niv** “O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?”
- **Isa 41:8 Niv** confirms this: “But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend...”
- **James 2:23 Niv** says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend”

-**Genesis 18:18** does God know **you**, well enough that you are going to take care of business, like Abraham, who in v 19 “commanded his children and the sons of his house after him to keep the way of the Lord and to do what is righteous and just”

Like **Nehemiah 9:7 Niv** “You found (Abraham’s) his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant”

-We see it in His relationship to Moses: see how God spoke to him “as a man speaks to a friend.”

Not everybody liked the way Moses got along with God: challenged by Miriam and Aaron (Ex 33:11).

He was known by name (Ex33:12), found favour in His sight (vs 12). And, that was the old dispensation of grace!

God wants to talk to us face to face, one on one: He wants intimacy!

Israel saw God's acts - what God did, but Moses knew God's ways – why, God did what He did!

-**Numbers 12** reveals God's friendship with Moses, and the characteristics of a friend:

- **verse 7** "faithful in all My house"

Prov 20:6 Niv "Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?" 2 Tim 2:2

Prov 25:19 Niv says, "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble"

- **verse 8** "I speak mouth to mouth."

Mark 4:34 Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds, but He revealed the meaning of the parables to *His disciples, His friends* He spoke to them plainly.

- **Deuteronomy 34:10-12** God knew Moses' face to face (vs 10), and was committed to obedience to the highest degree, and did all that the Father required of him, and had a great reputation.

-We see God's pursuit of friendship in the sending of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world unto the Heavenly Father.

John 15:13- 15 Niv clarifies Christ's attitude towards His disciples who had become more than religion students being mentored by some religious guru: "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. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you"

-God wants to be our Friend too, and He wants to show us some things: secret things belong to Him, and He will only reveal them to His friends.

John 16:13 Niv "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come"

1 Cor 2:9 10 Niv says, "However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him **but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.** The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God"

IV CONCLUSION

Are you, God's friend? You can be!
Are you a friend of God's? Or, more importantly, **does God consider you His friend**, someone that He would share intimate things with? You can't be a friend of the world and a friend of God: each one of us has got to make up his own mind:

James 4:4 Niv says, “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”

-All of the things you ever wanted in a friend you can find in a relationship to God. As a matter of fact, starting there is the best way to understand how to be a good friend. **Get to know God's nature** - *His faithfulness, His loyalty, His willingness to help, His desire to comfort, His laying down of life for you.*

-God is relational - read Ephesians 1!

He loves you as He loved His very only begotten Son, Jesus (Jn 17:23).

The goal of God is for us to enter into fellowship, to create forever friends, people connected for eternity (1 Jn 1:13). Successful churches are church's whose congregations are “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17), where the people are loving one another fervently in the love of God:

- **1 Pet 1:22- 23 TLB** “Now you can have real love for everyone because your souls have been cleansed from selfishness and hatred when you trusted Christ to save you; so see to it that you really do love each other warmly, with all your hearts. For you have a new life. It was not passed on to you from your parents, for the life they gave you will fade away. This new one will last forever, for it comes from Christ, God's ever living Message to men”

-God is desiring a relationship with you.

It can begin today - move from disciple, to servant, to friend!

“Friends Forever” (Part 2)

1 Sam 18:1-4 Niv “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan **made a covenant** with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt”

I INTRODUCTION

Who influences your life the most? Many will be the answers.

The scriptures make it clear that **one kind of person ought to** be the greatest influence on you.

Proverbs 13:20 NASB says, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm”

or as the Message translation puts it: “Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces.” Your life will be significantly affected by the people you hang out with.

-What does the Word of God mean by “**the wise?**”

It means those who “**fear** (or honour) **the Lord and reverence His Word**” (Prov 1:7)

They are always trying to find out what God has to say about whatever they are or they are doing!

The fool is someone who knows the difference between right and wrong, and chooses to do the wrong thing. (Matt 7:21- The Message translation of wise and foolish man’s house).

Mat 7:21-23 Message "Knowing the correct password--saying 'Master, Master,' for instance--isn't going to get you anywhere with me. **What is required is serious obedience**--doing what my Father wills. 22 I can see it now--at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' 23 And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'

Both wise and foolish, have their own special impact on your life. By spending time with wise men your life will change; likewise, by associating with fools, your life will change - you will suffer harm!

- "When God is getting ready to bless you, He will bring a friend into your life; when the enemy of your soul is getting ready to destroy you, He will send a friend into your life."

We need to discern our friends are friendships?

-We have said that God is looking to make friends with us. We have talked about "what kind of friend, God is looking for" - loyal, faithful, committed, obedient!

Now, what kind of friends are you looking for, and more importantly, what kind of friend are you going to be?

"Lord, make me a friend, a good friend" should be our prayer!

II BE A FRIEND - HAVE A FRIEND

The Bible says that if we want friends, we must learn to be friendly. **Prov 18:24 KJV** says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother”

Friendliness is a matter of being something over doing something.

It is the law of echoes: we get in return exactly as we give! It all comes back to us!

We attract the kind of friends that we are!

Tenneyson said, “Our echoes roll from soul to soul and grow forever and forever!”

-A Teacher asked her class, to write down the names, of as many people as they could in thirty seconds, that they disliked - the interesting study produced this result:

- *“Those who disliked the most people were themselves the most widely disliked!”*

-What kind of friend are you?

Like will attract like: if you are faithful,

- you will attract faithful people to you;
- if you are generous, the generous;
- if you are rebellious, then rebels will be in the mix of your friends.

We “**reap what we sow**” (Gal 6:6-9).

Prov 27:17 19 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Example: When Lot was hanging with Abraham, he was a blessed man;

When Lot separated from his godly tutor and trainer in faith and surrounded himself with the heathen, his own value system was corrupted and polluted (Gen 13-15; 2 Pet 2:6-8).

What do you expect from a friend?

Then, expect it from yourself: treat your neighbour as you yourself expect to be treated!

Every individual in your life is a potential forever friend!

True Christians are intensely lovable: there is something attractive about their lives.

-You can be a friend to sinners: Jesus was!

Pharisees and Sadducees called Jesus “a friend of sinners”

Matt 11:19 Niv “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." 'But wisdom is proved right by her actions”

We have been born again and we are not of this world any longer. However, God put us in this world for a reason, to reach people like you and me, sinners saved by grace!

-For revival to break out and have community impact we must be willing to dump our shyness or our self-righteousness, forget about ourselves, learn the names of the people we meet, show genuine interest in their needs (don't treat people as an evangelical object), make opportunities for reciprocal friendship, and be transparent! Learn to be a friend again!

-A good illustration of friendship is the David/Jonathon relationship found in scripture:

- **David** was given **Jonathon** Saul's son, during his most difficult days, one whose friendship for David could not be shaken, loyal and covenanted to the end. **1 Sam 23:16 TBL** "Prince Jonathan now went to find David; he met him at Horesh and encouraged him in his faith in God"

See the **dynamics of friendship expressed** in **1 Sam 18:1- 4 Niv** "After (Kjv *And it came to pass*. After shearing his heart Jonathon received David as a covenant friend) **David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt"**

Friendship dynamics:

- "knit souls" (1 Sam 18:1,3; 20:17) - phileo love, acceptance and common ground
- "God-centered" (1 Sam 20:23) - "May the Lord be between you and me forever" (truth in love) *Accountable to God for the other; the fear of the Lord/ reverence of God.*
- "preferring one another" (1 Sam 18:4; 23:17) - "You shall be king and I shall be second unto you"
- "loyalty and commitment" (1 Sam 20:8,9 - "You have brought your servant into a covenant with the Lord with you...if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself")
- "speak well of each other" (1 Sam 19:4)

III Friends or Fiends?

What kind of friends do you have?

Are they wise (Jonathon's) or fools? If you have friends that are dragging you down, you have two choices:

- **step back** - introduce boundaries.

You conduct the relationship on your terms, not theirs; you set the agenda; you lead the relationship.

You decide the amount of time you spend with them.

You decide where to go and what to do.

It is absolutely essential for your spiritual health that you define the boundaries and make them clear to your friends.

Otherwise, you may have to....

- **step away** - Some relationships can't be fixed.

Even Jesus walked away from a rich young ruler who had a lot going for him. If the pull is downward, and your life is being influenced negatively and drawn into compromise, you must step away from that person.

I can hear **the objections**:

"But what's going to happen to them if I just walk away?

I'm the only Christina that they know!" or

"I can't (won't) do that.

They will consider that I think that I am too good for them!"

The question is this: "What's going to happen if you don't walk away?" Jesus made the terms of discipleship this: "If anyone comes to Me and does not leave (wrong influences)" (Lu 14:26-27).

It also comes with a promise, as He outlined to Peter: "...there is not one who has given up...for My sake and the Gospels, who will not receive a hundredfold..." (Mk 10:28-30).

And history tells us that the rich young ruler later became a Bishop, his life got on track. He dealt with the love of money.

-Jesus must be Lord of your friendships!

A wise person never stays in a relationship just for acceptance or for popularity: a wise person is willing to risk the loss of a relationship in the best interest of being true to a friend.

Proverbs 27:6 Niv says, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses"

-Listen to what God has to say about fools for friends:

- **Prov 23:20- 21 Niv** "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags"
- **Prov 25:19 Niv** "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble"
- **Prov 22:24 25 Niv** "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared"
- **1 Cor 15:33 Niv** "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'"

IV CONCLUSION

-If you are going to live for Christ you may have to give up the, in crowd.

The Golden Rule Mat 7:12-14 message "Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want

people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get. **13** "Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. **14** The way to life--to God!--is vigorous and requires total attention.

The way of the crowd is usually the wrong way!

If you keep God's standards of friendship, and morality you may not be able to keep your friends.

All past, present and future relationships must be seen in the light of eternity and the motive compelling you must be for their highest spiritual and moral good.

You are not a true Christian if you put pleasing people over pleasing God!

-How can you determine if you are crowd pleasing or God pleasing?

- if your standard of morality is the people you hang with and not the standard of Christ Himself (2 Cor 10:12); compromising right for respectability;
- if you never bother to raise the standards of those you are with: the Pharisees called Jesus a devil for trying to raise the standard of righteousness (Matt 5:20);
- if you oppose measures and efforts at reviving the church, and interfere with people from getting fanatical, until revival becomes popular (You're a chameleon) (Matt 3:7-10);

- if your standards are tied to what public opinion enforces, versus what they do not enforce (Lu 18:9-14) - remember: it is the small foxes that spoil the vine;
- if you are intent on making friends on both sides of the fence and straddling the moral fence to have a friend, fearful at times of offending those who are God-haters (“how can you turn off?”);

-Who is willing to say, “We will no longer follow a multitude to do evil, but are determined to do the will of God in all things no matter what the world - our friends - says or thinks about us?” **Jn 12:24-26 message 24** "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. 25 In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal. 26 "If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

-Listen, no one can take away from you what God has given to you - deal with insecurity: eg. if a friend can be stolen from you, they were never your friend in the first place! Don't be afraid of what you might lose to the degree that you draw back from walking uncompromisingly.

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote Youth and Age, at which he reflected over his past and the strength of his earliest years. One of the most moving lines is this: **“Friendship is a sheltering tree...”**

How true that is! When adversity burns its way into our lives, there's nothing quite like a sheltering tree - a true friend - to give us relief in its cool shade. Beneath its branches lie many a sweltering soul:

- **Elijah**, when ready to resign and quit, was given **Elisha** who "ministered to him" (1 K 19:19-21);
- **Paul**, who was given **Barnabas**, when everyone else had deserted him and ran from him (Acts 9:26-27; 11:25-26), and **Silas**, who travelled many a wearying mile (Acts 15:40-41), and **Epaphroditus**. **Phil 2:25- 27 Niv** 25, "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me..."

-A *false friend* is like your shadow.

As long as there is sunshine, he sticks close by (Lu 15, the Prodigal Son - the way to make and lose friends), but the minute you step into the shade, he disappears!

-Beneath whose branches do you find refreshing for your soul? And, may I ask, who finds refreshing beneath yours? The independent may not feel any need for a friend, or say that only the needy or immature need them.

It is that person that I pity the most!

The closing years on earth may be his loneliest!