

Friendship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 20, John 15:12-15, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Phil. 2:3-8.*

Memory Text: “A friend loves for all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (*Proverbs 17:17, NIV*).

Many people claim to have lots of friends, though, in reality, they have only superficial links with other people and then only to the degree they find these links personally useful. True friendship, in contrast, does not focus on usefulness but on a personal interest in selected fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we listen, and with whom we share our time and emotions. After all, as we'll see this week, friendship is one of the concepts used to describe what our relationship with the Lord should be; thus, friendship must be based on something more than a superficial need to use someone for our own ends.

“Our affection for one another springs from our common relation to God. We are one family, we love one another as He loved us. When compared with this true, sanctified, disciplined affection, the shallow courtesy of the world, the meaningless expression of effusive friendship, are as chaff to the wheat.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 211.

The Week at a Glance: How is friendship depicted in the Bible? How can friendship become a negative experience? How do friendships reflect our relationship with God? What is the basic principle behind true friendship? What must be experienced in our hearts in order to be a true friend?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 31.*

What Is a Friend? (*1 Samuel 20*).

While it is true we cannot always choose all our relatives, we do have more leeway in choosing our friends. It seems inevitable that for beings who are, essentially, social creatures, we will be in contact with those whom we deem *friends*. Yet, not all friendships are alike. Centuries ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle categorized various kinds of friendships based on the motives that established the relationship between the parties. Since that time, many writers have expounded on this very interesting and, at times, complex phenomenon of *friendship*.

Think about someone whom you consider or had considered a *friend*. What particular qualities identify your relationship with that person? Read Proverbs 18:24. How does that text reflect the qualities that define your experience of friendship, if at all?

It is interesting, too, that the word translated “friend” in the last part of this verse in Proverbs comes from the Hebrew word for “love.” In other contexts, that word could have been translated “lover.” The point seems to be that a friend is indeed someone with whom you have a close bond, different from a mere acquaintance or co-worker.

Read the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David as depicted in *1 Samuel 20*. What characteristics emerge from this account that help us understand what a friendship is? How does this story relate to Proverbs 18:24? How do these characteristics compare with what you wrote above? Also, how do Jonathan’s actions fit in with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:1?

Notice from this story how the Lord formed the center of their friendship. Look especially at *1 Samuel 20:14*, with the phrase “the kindness of the Lord.” We now see, though, in this whole relationship, a reflection of the kindness and mercy of God, manifested in the relationship between these two men.

Looking at the story of David and Jonathan, ask yourself about someone whom you consider a friend. How could you better manifest the traits of friendship as revealed in the biblical account?

Bad Company (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The term *friend*, at least in English, does not have to be of necessity something positive. Who knows how many lives have been ruined because of the negative influence of a *friend*? For instance, many people who struggle with some sort of substance abuse, be it alcohol or drugs, often trace their introduction to the substance: not from a shadowy figure hiding in a dark alley but from their best friend. How ironic and, yet, how common, when best friends turn out to be bad friends.

A young man, somewhat of an outcast in school and coming from a cold, uncaring family, found friends who made him part of their close-knit circle. He soon knew they would put their lives on the line for him, and he felt such a sense of belonging that he would have risked his life for them. Sounds like a great thing, right? Sounds like the beauty of friendship, as depicted in Proverbs 18:24, right? Well, not quite, because we're talking about a young man who joined a youth gang heavily involved in violence, theft, and drug abuse. Thus, like anything, friendship, even what we might call a "good friend," can be a double-edged sword.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Notice the contrasts depicted in the texts. What do they tell us? Though we often apply these verses to marriage, what principles could help us understand the kind of friendships the Lord desires us to have? How should these principles guide our friendships? At the same time, in what ways can we take this admonition too far? How do we balance it, for instance, with Matthew 5:13, 14?

"Paul is telling the Corinthians that they cannot have *compromising* relationships with unbelievers—not that they cannot have relationships whatsoever. Relationships that cut the connection with God are to be completely excluded."—W. Larry Richards, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—2 Corinthians* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 148–150.

How can you tell if your friendship with a nonbeliever is hurting you spiritually? If you believe it is, what should you do?

Let This Mind Be in You (*Phil. 2:3-8*).

As human beings, we are by nature selfish and egotistical: Our first inclination is to look out for “number one.” Though some struggle with this problem more than others, it is the default mode for a sinful, fallen race. For any relationship—including friendship between selfish and egotistical people—to survive, these qualities need to be subdued. In the end, only the sanctifying power of God working on the heart can bring about the kind of changes needed for a true friendship. No wonder, as we saw in Sunday’s section, the Lord was in the center of the relationship between David and Jonathan. What friendship will succeed if it’s based on people looking out only for themselves?

Read *Philippians 2:3,4*. What essential principle is shown there, and why is it so crucial for forming a true friendship?

In so many ways, the key to a good friendship is found in the same principles found in a good marriage: the willingness of each member to put the good of the other first. This is seen in the example we have of Jesus, giving Himself for the good of others. Think of the kind of friendships we would have were we to esteem others better than ourselves (and were they to do the same for us) or if we looked not upon just our own things but upon the things of others (and they were to do the same for us). This was, of course, the essence of what Christ did when here in the flesh.

The sad reality is so many friendships are often based on selfish motives (What’s in this for me?); and when someone realizes there’s no benefit for them in the relationship, the friendship cools, if not ends. This is nothing extraordinary; it is simply human nature. Far from putting the needs of others before ourselves, oftentimes we find jealousy and envy ruining a friendship. In his *Confessions*, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote about how, once he became famous, many of his *friends* turned against him. Again, this isn’t anything extraordinary; it’s human nature unsubdued by the power of Christ working in our lives.

Read *Philippians 2:5-8*. Here is the key to bringing about the kinds of changes in us that can stimulate strong friendships. How are your friendships? Are they defined by the texts for today or by jealousy, expediency, and convenience? Dwell, pray, and meditate on these verses in *Philippians*.

How Christ Made Friends (*Luke 19:1-10*).

The gospel shows us how Christ made friends. He took time to talk to people and to listen to them. He took time to eat together with others and to celebrate special events with them.

Read the following passages and analyze what each tells us about Christ's skills in interhuman relations and, in particular, in making friends.

John 4:4-26: Jesus speaks and listens to the Samaritan woman.

Luke 19:1-10: Jesus stays with Zacchaeus.

Luke 14:1-14: Jesus accepts hospitality from a prominent Pharisee.

In all these situations, Jesus comes to people where they are and mingles among them as one of them. He doesn't act too good for the Samaritan woman or doesn't feel too low for the chief Pharisee. Jesus shows Himself ready to listen, to get involved, to show a genuine interest in others. If we will reach out to people, listen, show empathy, and give others the sense that they are valued and accepted, we will be able to establish meaningful relationships and even friendships with the most unlikely people.

This is important if we are to reach others with the gospel. How are unchurched, secular people ever going to listen to a sermon? How can they ever be persuaded to read a book about Christ? Many will be intrigued enough to decide they want to know more only if they have seen Christianity in action and actually have met a credible Christian.

Christ, however, didn't make friends just for the sake of making friends. He came in contact with the lost, and He became their friend in order to reach them with eternal life. What about us? What motivates our friendship with nonbelievers? At the same time, if it becomes apparent that they have no interest in our faith, do we then just shake the dust off our feet and walk away? What kind of friendship is that?

Not Servants but Friends *(John 15:12-15)*.

No matter how ideal our friendships, people are people, and we should never lean totally upon them (*Jer. 17:5; Ps. 118:8, 9*), for sooner or later people will fail us, just as we fail others. That's why our Best Friend, the One whom we can trust implicitly, must be the Lord, whom we can know intimately through Jesus Christ (*John 14:9*). However important human friendships are, however much we can learn to trust in the love and dedication of others, we build upon a flimsy foundation when we build our faith upon anything other than the Rock (*Matt. 7:24, 25*).

Read John 15:12-15. What did Jesus call His disciples? What does it mean to say we are “friends” with God, as opposed to servants? What’s the difference? What kind of relationship does He seek with us? What can we learn from our friendship with God that can help us with other friendships? At the same time, what is unique about our friendship with God that we can have with no one else? (*See, for instance, vs. 14.*)

In verse 13, Jesus reveals the essence of true love and true friendship, which again comes back seeking unselfishly the best for others over and above ourselves. This is the highest ideal, and Jesus here points to His own manifestation of that ideal as His words point to the Cross. It's only as we have the kind of assurance, peace, and security that comes from knowing God, from knowing He is our Friend, from knowing we are accepted by Him, that we can give of ourselves and become the kind of friend who truly is a friend, not only with the Lord but with others.

Look at John 15:13. It presents an incredibly high ideal for friendship. How many friends do you have for whom you would be willing to die? Do you have to be willing to die for someone in order to be called his or her friend? If not, what do you think Jesus is telling us with those words? What principle is He teaching?

Further Study: “Friendship may be the only form of human social relationship that is sustained primarily by kindness. . . . One continues to function as a parent, spouse, worker, and neighbor, even though kindness may be lacking. . . . With friendship, it is entirely different. Kindness is the glue that binds friends together. If I should humiliate a friend, be insensitive to the feelings of a friend, cause unnecessary harm or hurt to a friend, or in any way treat a friend as an object that I use for my own pleasure and gratification, the friendship dissolves.”—Ray S. Anderson, *Living the Spiritually Balanced Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House Co., 1998), pp. 78, 79.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1** Research indicates that new Seventh-day Adventists tend to lose most of their old friends within approximately seven years of joining the church. Their former circle of friends tends to be replaced by others whom they have met in their new spiritual home. Is that a good thing, or should new members strive to retain their non-Adventist friends of the past? If so, why, and under what circumstances?
- 2** The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, including even the giving up of one’s life for a friend. How, though, do we balance that out with our other relationships and obligations, such as to our family or to the Lord? What happens when obligations to friends clash with obligations to family or to the Lord?
- 3** Euripides wrote that real friendship is shown in times of trouble; prosperity is full of friends. How does this idea compare with what we have studied this week about friendship?

Summary: The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, something that does not come naturally to the human heart. Fortunately, through the example and power of Jesus, we can be the kind of friends the Lord would have us to be.

Flee Into His Arms:

Part 2 *by* CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Maryam was desperate to get out of her abusive marriage, but with no money, no passport, no friends, she could see no way to escape. Then she met Samaan. He was kind and seemed to care what happened to her. He offered to help her escape, but she hesitated to trust him. One day her husband found Maryam talking with Samaan and threatened to kill them if he caught them together again. Maryam had no choice. It was better to risk death by fleeing than to face a slow death at the hands of her husband.

She and Samaan fled their homeland and took refuge in Europe, where Maryam hoped her husband would never find her. They applied for asylum and waited for word of their fate. Maryam knew that if they were sent back to their homeland, they both would be killed.

Maryam suffered frequent nightmares and depression from her years of abuse and her uncertain future. Samaan tried to comfort her and protect her, but often nothing helped.

One day Maryam and a friend were walking in a store when a young man approached them and spoke in their native language. His simple message stunned Maryam. “Jesus loves you,” he smiled as he gave the woman a pamphlet. Maryam listened as her friend peppered the young man with questions about God.

“Can you come to my house and tell me more?” her friend asked the young man. He agreed. Maryam decided to join her friend as they learned more about God. For several weeks the two women and young man spent hours together talking about God. And little by little Maryam began to hope that maybe there is a God who cares after all.

Maryam shared what she was learning with Samaan, and together the two accepted Jesus into their lives. Samaan wanted to marry Maryam, but she could not obtain a divorce without risking their lives. At last they found a way, and Maryam and Samaan were married.

“I still have problems,” Maryam says, “but now I know that Jesus loves me and will never leave me. Samaan loves me too. Samaan’s love helps me understand God’s love. At last I have found a sense of worth, of value in life.

“I can never return to my homeland, never see my mother or brothers again. But God is showing me that I have a huge family around the world. And even better, I have hope of eternity. I may never have a home on this earth, so all I can hope for is a home in God’s mansion forever.”

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