

Friends

John 15:13-15

Big Idea – True friends are priceless.

Illus: A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received were the following:

"One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable."

"One who understands our silence."

"A volume of sympathy bound in cloth."

"A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down."

The winning definition read: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out." Bits and Pieces, July, 1991.

Charles Swindoll has made the observation that, "The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants us to give his church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality – but it is a permissive, accepting and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."

Good example was the television Sitcom "Cheers." The theme song says, "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came; You want to be where you can see, Our troubles are all the same; You want to be where everybody knows your name!" Isn't it sad that was written about a bar instead of the house of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

12 By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Three are even better, because a triple-braided rope isn't easily broken.

1. True friends are committed for life.

Proverbs 17:17 says: "A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity."

A friend is the kind of person if you call them at 2:00 in the morning and tell them you need them. They don't ask, "So what's the problem" and then decide whether or not to come. They simply ask, "Where are you?" as they are getting dressed. That's a friend. How many people do you have like that in your life?

We need help to face circumstances beyond our control, we need to be able to gain emotional strength when we do not have enough of our own. Sometimes it's tough out there, with circumstances where we face a battle of "How am I going to make it through this right now!" That is the time we need a friend to give us emotional strength.

We all know that the reality of life is that we encounter a lot of people who, when we spend time with them, they send our emotional gas gauge all the way over to empty. We leave their presence absolute drained.

But there are other people, and these are our friends, that when we spend time with them, our emotion gas gauge goes all the way over to full. There are two kinds of people in the world encouragers and discouragers, which group characterizes you?

Probably many of those discouraging people have no idea that they are discouragers. But all you need to do is take a look at what you say. If every word out of your mouth is setting someone straight or telling them how they can improve themselves or their performance, you probably have a problem in this area. Why not decide to be an encourager today?

Like Barnabas in the N.T., remember him? His name meant "son of consolation", encourager

2. A true friend will always tell you the truth (in love)

Ephesians 4:15 "...we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ...

Friends never stab you in the back either, in fact, they guard your back. A friend never puts up with gossip about their friends. Let me give you a definition of Gossip. I think you should write this down. (Gossip is when someone says something negative or unkind about someone who is not present, whether it is true or not.)

3. True friends help us improve our lives

Proverbs 27:9 The sweet smell of perfume and oils is pleasant, and so is good advice from a friend.

Proverbs 27:10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, Nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

Illus: During his days as president, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. The very real possibility of death threatened each rider, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch. After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, "Tell me, why did you select the president to ask this favor of?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the president who had helped him. "All I know," he said, "Is that on some of your faces was written the answer 'No,' and on some of them was the answer 'yes.' His was a 'Yes' face."

(C. Swindoll, The Grace Awakening, Word, 1990)

Proverbs 18:24 Some friends may ruin you, but a real friend will be more loyal than a brother.

4. Bad friends drag us down

Psalm 1:1 Blessed, happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

2 But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.

Proverbs 13:20 Spend time with the wise and you will become wise, but the friends of fools will suffer.

-1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be fooled: "Bad friends will ruin good habits."

5. True friends help us grow spiritually

Proverbs 27:17 – "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Next to the friendship of Christ to so many, the friendship between David and Jonathan is probably the tightest, most committed friendship in the entire Bible. David was a young man who had risen in popularity among his fellow countrymen because he had killed a giant who was terrorizing his country. Many of us have heard the story of David and Goliath a hundred times. Because of David's slaying of Goliath, David became more popular than the king of Israel; king Saul.

King Saul grew to hate David and so he set out to kill him. David fled from the country but the king wanted to dispose of David so bad that he pursued David with the intention of killing him. This is where 1 Samuel 23:16 picks up the story.

1 Samuel 23:16 says: "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God."

Here we see a man, Jonathan, who was so committed to his friend, David, that in the deepest, darkest time of his life to that point that he went to find him and when things were tough and looking grim with the sole intention of helping David find his strength in God.

We need to seek out people to establish friendships with whom we know are going to help us find strength in God.

A pastor went to the hospital to visit a man in the church who had just had a heart attack. This man, the one who had the heart attack, had made a commitment to establish life-long, meaningful friendships with others so he joined a small group Bible study at the church. Through this Bible study this man had made some pretty good friends; friends who were honest and who loved and accepted him for who he was. The pastor said that when he arrived at the hospital he could not even get into the man's room because this man's entire small group was there visiting him and praying with him.

Just like Jonathan, these true friends were there in that man's hospital room during one of the most dark and grim periods of his life helping him find strength in God. The pastor telling this story closes it by saying that one of the man's friends came out to him and said, "You can go home if you'd like. We've got this covered." He said that at first he was taken back that someone would say that to him, after all, visiting church members in the hospital was part of his job. But then he realized how great it was that this man had so many genuine friends in the church that were committed to his friendship.

John 15:12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

I close by inviting you to let Jesus be your Best Friend. There are some very important reasons to do so.

1. Jesus deserves to be your best friend because He already knows you better than anyone else.

One definition of a friend is, "someone who knows all about us and likes us anyway." Well, no one better fulfills that qualification than Jesus.

2. Jesus deserves to be your best friend because He had done more for you than anyone else. (John 15:13) "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

3. Jesus deserves to be your best friend because, He will always be there when you need Him. The words of the old hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" says it well,

"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."