

Friendship and the Bible

A true friend is a rare treasure indeed, and such a treasure should never be taken for granted. What does God's word have to say about friendship?

Friendship is an investment – Valuable things do not come cheaply or easily, and that includes friendship. In our busy and harried world it is surprisingly easy to “settle” for little more than casual and shallow relationships with others. However, the example of Jesus demonstrates that there is value in investing in an “inner circle” of friends to the glory of God. Jesus was available and accessible to everyone, but He was especially close to Peter, James and John (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; Mark 13:3; Mark 14:33; John 19:25-27). The treasure of a good friendship must be carefully and diligently cultivated by investing time, energy and effort in that friendship. By so doing, we may be laying up treasure in heaven as well (Matt. 6:19-21).

Good friends can help us grow – “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17). What a blessing to have a friend who is interested in helping us grow in faith. David had Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1), Elijah had Elisha (1 Kings 19:21), Jeremiah had Baruch (Jer. 36:4-8), Naomi had Ruth (Ruth 1:14-17), and Paul had Barnabas (Acts 15:35). Nobody goes to heaven in isolation. Good friendships can serve as tremendous encouragement as we grow in godliness (2 Pet. 3:18). It has been well said: “A friend is someone who knows us and likes us anyway.” Thank God for the friendships that have helped us grow in faith and maturity over the years!

Evil friends can corrupt us – “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Prov. 22:24-25). Friendships need to be evaluated in light of their influence on us for good or evil – there is no such thing as a “neutral” friendship. “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Cor. 15:33). While nobody is perfect, and all sin and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), the biggest question regarding our friendships is whether the friendship encourages both parties in the direction of heaven (Matt. 7:13-14). “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Prov. 12:26).

Jesus is our dearest Friend – He said, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14). The Lord is generous (2 Cor. 8:9), kind (Acts 10:38), patient (1 Cor. 13:4), caring (1 Pet. 5:7), loyal (Matt. 28:20) and wise (John 12:48). His present ministry is to intercede to God on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). He has done more for us than anyone else ever could (John 15:13; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21). Everything Jesus does is intended to bring out the best in us (John 10:10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). As we often sing, “There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one, no not one!”

God wants us to be a friend to others – Everybody wants good friends like the kind described in this article, but curiously, not everyone wants to BE a friend like that to others. “He who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). A true friend walks in when everybody else is walking out: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17; cf. Acts 9:26-27). May God help more of us to be a great friend to others. **--JB**