

Vital Relationships: Would you like you as a friend?

Sermon for Sunday, February 18, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; 27:6; Ephesians 4:15; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4

Magazines often have articles which describe what to look for in a potential husband or wife, or a friend. For instance, you want someone who is fun to be with, but who also has a serious side. You want someone who shares your interests, but who is different from you.

What if we turned the tables around on this? What if, instead of asking, "What should I look for in a friend?", what if we asked, "What kind of a friend am I? Am I someone that I would want for a friend?"

Let's see what the Bible says about friends, about the qualities of real friendship, and for some of the examples of famous Bible friendships.

1) How faithful are you as a friend?

Proverbs 17:17, New Living Translation:

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.

Proverbs 18:24, The Message:

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.

A friend is faithful to you, even when others have stopped caring.

In 1947 the Brooklyn Dodgers made baseball history by being the first major league team to have a black person on the team. Jackie Robinson was that player, and Mickey Mantle said that Robinson "without a doubt suffered more abuse and more taunts and more hatred than any player in the history of the game."

He faced jeering crowds in every stadium. In one game in his own home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered.

Then "Pee Wee" Reese, who played shortstop and was captain of the team came over and stood next to him. Reese put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

How faithful are you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Low High

2) How genuine are you as a friend?

Proverbs 27:6, New American Standard Bible:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

Ephesians 4:15, Contemporary English Version:

Love should always make us tell the truth. Then we will grow in every way and be more like Christ.

Friend tell each other the truth, even though it may hurt.

A husband and wife are talking. The wife says, "Darling, why don't you play golf with Harry any more?" The husband replies, "Would you play with a sneak who puts down the wrong score and moves his ball when you aren't looking?" "Certainly not," she answers. The husband replies, "Well, neither will Harry."

Here's a better example of friends being honest with each other. Bill White tells of a couple of men in his church who partnered together to help each other grow in their faith, and being honest with each other was part of that.

Paul had a habit of swearing, and wanted to clean up his language. Here's the plan they arranged: each Sunday they would meet in the parking lot before the worship service began. Paul would tell William how many times he swore during the past week, and he would put \$5 in the offering plate for each time. William's job was to witness this, and to hold him accountable.

The first week cost Paul \$100. The next week was less, but the third and fourth weeks showed little improvement. Paul wasn't achieving the change in his life he desired, and he was losing a lot of hard-earned money.

After the fourth week, Williams told Paul that he was changing the rules, but he wouldn't say how. Paul wanted to know, but all William would say was, "Trust me. It will cost you both less and more."

The following Sunday, Paul was looking discouraged, obviously having failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, this will cost you both less and more. It's called grace." Then William took out of his pocket a check made out to the church, dated and signed by William. Only the amount was blank. William said to Paul, "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the amount. Next week there will be more grace."

That first week of grace cost William \$55, but the second only cost him \$20. The third cheque never got filled in. It hurt Paul too much to see his friend paying for his sin, so he quit swearing.

How genuine are you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Low High

3) How helpful are you as a friend?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, New Century Version:

Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together. If one falls down, the other can help him up. But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls, because no one is there to help. If two lie down together, they will be warm, but a person alone will not be warm. An enemy might defeat one person, but two people together can defend themselves; a rope that is woven of three strings is hard to break.

When the going gets tough, it's a friend is there to help.

Although I grew up in Saskatchewan in the middle of the prairies, I was born long after the pioneer days were finished. In those early days, the Canadian government had surveyors mark out the land in 1 mile squares, called sections. The government offered to give quarter-sections—160 acres—of land for free to anyone who would homestead there. The only requirements were that they had to cultivate at least 15 acres of land and live there for three years. People from cities in the east, and from across the ocean, came by the thousands to start a new life as farmers.

Upon arriving at their piece of land, one of the first tasks was to build a sod hut to live in. Most people built their home in the middle of their property, so that it would be easier to manage it. It also gave them a feeling of pride, being able to see their land spread out all around them.

Strange things started happening, though. These people, living on their own, far from the nearest town, and half a mile from their nearest neighbour, often grew desperately lonely. The long, cold winters intensified the isolation. Many of them just walked away, leaving everything behind them. Others went insane.

The smart ones moved their homes. They put up a new sod house in a corner of their property. The three settlers who were their neighbours also moved their homes to the adjoining corners. Living close together, the four people or families became a little community of friends, sharing their joys and sorrows, life and death together, helping one another with tasks which were too much for one person working alone. These people often persevered through the hardship, became successful farmers, and made the prairies famous as the “breadbasket of the world.”

Friends help one another.

How helpful are you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Low High

4) How close are you as a friend?

Perhaps the greatest story of friends in the Bible is David and Jonathan. This passage sums up their relationship.

1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4, New American Standard Bible:

The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. ... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, including his sword and his bow and his belt.

Jonathan was the king's son, and David was a poor shepherd boy, with old clothes and no weapon. Jonathan gave him his own things. They loved each other like brothers.

Years ago, when Elvis Presley died, people all over the world were shocked at the passing of one they called “the King.”

Following his death, there a number of young men who told about how they had idolized Elvis and sought to imitate him. One of these was a young man by the name of Dennis Wise, who actually had his face surgically altered and his hair contoured so he'd look exactly like Elvis. He had learned to play the guitar and had even made a few dollars by appearing as a Presley look-alike.

When he was interviewed by one of the newspapers about his passion to be like Elvis Presley, this is what he said:

Yes, sir, Presley has been an idol of mine ever since I was five years old.

I have every record he ever made, and I have pictures in the thousands. It was embarrassing to me when I was in school for the kids were always teasing me. When Elvis was wearing white boots I went out and bought white boots. The kids called them “fruit boots.”

But I never got to meet Elvis Presley. I saw him on the stage four times. Once I tried to run up to the stage, but he had so many people around him that I could never get close to him.

The most tragic part of Dennis Wise' story are the words, “I could never get close to him.”

How close are you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Low High

So, what kind of a friend are you? Would you like to have you as a friend?

One final thought. Even between the dearest of friends, there will be some distance, a wall the other is not allowed inside. You'll never have that problem with Jesus.