

Cultivating Friendship

By Bill Scheidler

What is a friend?

The dictionary defines a friend as “one who cherishes kind regard for another person; an intimate and trustworthy companion.”

There are other definitions that have been put forward for a friend.

1. A friend is someone with whom you dare to be yourself (C. Raymond Beran).
2. A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you today just the way you are (Unknown).
3. A friend is one who knows all about you and likes you just the same (Elbert Hubbard).
4. A friend is a person with whom I may think out loud (Ralph Waldo Emerson).
5. A real friend is one who warms you by his presence, trusts you with his secrets, and remembers you in his prayers (Unknown).

What are the various levels of friendship?

There are at least four levels of friendship or relationship:

1. Acquaintance

An acquaintance is someone that you see occasionally, that you know on a very surface or public level and that you can identify by name and some general information.

2. Casual Friends

The word “casual” means “occurring at irregular intervals, accidentally or by chance.”

A casual friend is someone with whom you share common interests and with whom you participate in common activities. You bump into them occasionally, more by chance than by design. You may know very little about them except for those commonly shared areas or experiences.

3. Close Friends

A close friend is someone with whom you share common life goals, mutual projects and personal conversations relative to family, values and beliefs. A close friend is someone that you trust and toward whom you feel a strong level of personal commitment.

4. Intimate Friends

An intimate friend is reserved for only the very closest of friends and is based on covenant relationship. This includes a mutual commitment to build each other up, to love in spite of weaknesses and to sharpen character through personal accountability.

This is the relationship that David had with Jonathan (I Sam. 18:1-4).

Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

What is the purpose of friendship?

The Bible makes it clear that a person who has friends is blessed (Eccl. 4:9-12).

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

This verse teaches that:

1. A person who has friends has someone to share in his or her labor.
2. A person who has friends has someone to lift him up when he or she falls.
3. A person who has friends has someone to bring warmth to his or her life.
4. A person who has friends has someone to help him or her overcome obstacles.

What are some of the characteristics of a friend?

1. A true friend stands with you in times of trouble (Pro. 17:17).

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

He that is a friend loveth at all times: and a brother is proved in distress. –Darby

2. A true friend will tell you what you need to hear not what you want to hear (Pro. 27:5-6).

An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. –NLT

3. A true friend will clash with you at times for your personal improvement (Pro. 27:17).

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

4. A true friend is loyal at all times (Pro. 11:13; 17:17; 18:24, NLT).

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret. Proverbs 11:13, NIV

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

There are “friends” who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24, NLT

5. A true friendship can be destroyed by slander, whispering and not keeping confidences (Pro.16:28; 17:9).

A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. Proverbs 16:28

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.
Proverbs 17:9

How do friendships happen?

1. Friendships must be desired.

You will never have close friends unless you desire them. And you can only be a close friend to those who desire to be one with you. You cannot force someone to want you as a friend. Deep friendships must be equal and mutual.

2. Friendships must be pursued.

They do not just happen. Casual friendships happen by chance. Deep friendships require regular contact. You must take initiative and not expect the other person to make the first move. This means that having friends must be a priority to you above some of the other things in your life.

3. Friendships have to be built.

That means that we have to invest in them and put in the kind of things that will contribute to their success. This means a certain amount of work. Take advantage of common interests such as hobbies, exercise regimen, activities to spend time building the relationship.

4. Friendships take time to build.

Friendships move gradually through the various stages. Not all friendships will reach the “intimate” friendship level. Before friendships can reach that level, both parties must be committed to that level.

5. Friendships will be tested.

Everyone will disappoint you or let you down at some point. People are still people. It is important to understand from the beginning that if perfection is required for being your friend, Jesus is the only friend that you will have until you get to heaven.

6. Friendships must be maintained.

We cannot take them for granted. The same things that build a relationship maintain a relationship.

7. Friendships are to be enjoyed.

How can I be a Friend?

Being a friend means:

1. Acknowledging the person as your friend.
2. Attending to the person's physical and emotional needs.
3. Providing a listening ear when the person wants to vent.
4. Putting up with the person when they are moody.
5. Being cautious in criticism willing to overlook some of the person's imperfections.
6. Encouraging the person when they are down.
7. Being ready to assist the person financially.
8. Providing a shoulder for the person to cry on.
9. Praising them for the person's positive actions and accomplishments.
10. Rejoicing with the person success (and their new car).
11. Praying for the person when they need it.
12. Helping them solve the problems of the person's life.
13. Surprising the person with thoughtful gifts and remembrances.
14. Staying true to the person when they disappoint you.
15. Giving the person the benefit of the doubt when unexpected things come up and things do not work out as planned.
16. Relaxing, slipping off your shoes, loosening your tie, kicking back on the couch and just "hanging out" with the person.

Note how all of these can apply to the marriage relationship.

Do all friendships last forever?

No! In a perfect world, all relationships would last forever. Some of the friends that you have, you will have for life. In other cases they may have a shorter life span because of things that change. In addition, one person can only nurture a limited number of close relationships without neglecting others.

1. Sometimes relationships change due to conflict. We should not just accept the termination of such a relationship easily. We should work to see it restored.
2. Sometimes relationships change due to the change of life's seasons.
 1. Marriage. Sometimes when single people get married it changes their relationships in favor of other married couples.
 2. Children. Sometimes when people have children it affects their relationship with people who are not in the same phase of life.
 3. Relocation. Sometimes when one relocates a long ways away it is difficult to maintain the same intimacy levels.
 4. Spiritual Shift. Sometimes the relationship that began at the same level changes as one person moves on or falls back.
3. Sometimes relationships change due to other factors.
 1. Breach of Trust. A good friend will be very cautious about what was said to them in confidence. It only takes one careless conversation to undo months of relationship building.
 2. Clinging Jealousy. A good friend will allow for other friendship in the person's life of which they are not a part.
 3. Smothering. A good friend will not dominate a relationship but will allow space for other activities of life.

Good friends are worth fighting for, because they are the things that make our life rich and full.