

THE MARVELOUS GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

My plans were to go deeper into Galatians chapter two today, however I cannot simply pass over the first verse without addressing the need of all of us to have friends. Galatians 2:1 says, "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also." Paul is led by the Lord to go to Jerusalem by the revelation of God (Galatians 2:2), but not alone. One of the first comments that God gives us when Adam was the only person on earth is found in Genesis 2:18a: "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone...." Man needs companionship. Man needs a friend.

An English publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. They received these statements. "A friend is one who multiplies joy and divides grief." "A friend is one who understands my silence." "A friend is a volume of sympathy bound in flesh." And this is the one that won the prize: "A friend is one who comes in when everybody else has gone out."

As Paul returned to Jerusalem he did so with a peer (Barnabas) and one whom he was mentoring (Titus). Here are some facts about Barnabas: He is one who lifts you when you are down (Acts 4:36) and he is a wholesome influence (Acts 11: 24, 25). It was during the alignment of Paul and Barnabas together that the word "Christian" is first used.

1. I AM A BETTER MAN BECAUSE OF THE RIGHT FRIENDS.

Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Elizabeth Barret Browning said, "I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you. I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but for what you are making of me. I love you for the part of me that you bring out."

In the life of David, we see that his friendship with Jonathan was of inestimable value (I Samuel 18:1; I Samuel 23:16).

Whoever becomes friend with Jesus always becomes a better person! Matthew 11:19 says, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children."

2. A TRUE FRIEND IS NEVER SEASONAL.

Proverbs 17:17 tells us, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Someone has said, "I'm the kind of friend you can depend on. I'm always around when I need you." And there is a lot of truth in this statement, "If you really want know who your friends are, make a big mistake."

3. A TRUE FRIEND IS A GIVER.

Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." It has been said, "I went out to find a friend, but could not find one there. I went out to be a friend, and friends were everywhere." We observe that our Lord just before going to the cross elevated the value of friendship in John 15:13-15.

4. A TRUE FRIEND LANCES THE WOUND.

Proverbs 27:5,6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

Galatians 4:16

Contrariwise, one who is not a good friend becomes an infecting rather than a healing agent (I Samuel 13:3; James 4:4; I Timothy 6:5). Proverbs 13:20 tells us, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." I Corinthians 15:33 alerts us, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

5. A TRUE FRIEND PROVIDES SOLUTION FOR POLLUTION.

Proverbs 27:9, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."

Proverbs 15:22; 20:18; 11:14

6. A TRUE FRIEND TRANSCENDS THE AGE FACTOR.

Proverbs 27:10 reminds us, "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off." Leviticus 19:32 admonishes us, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD."

In I Kings 12: 6-16 we see the sad story of a kingdom divided because a young man did not make friends with an older and wiser generation.

7. A TRUE FRIEND DOES NOT USE HIS FAMILIARITY AS A LICENSE TO BE OBNOXIOUS.

Proverbs 27:14 apprises us, “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.”

8. A TRUE FRIEND SPEAKS WORDS OF EDIFICATION.

Song of Solomon 5:13 and 16 says, “His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh...His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

Proverbs 16:28 says, “A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

Proverbs 17:9 directs us, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.”

Romans 14:19 Paul encourages us by saying, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

I Thessalonians 5:11 Paul again says, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

In this world in which a simple click of your laptop, iPad or phone can “de-friend” someone, let us be willing to be a friend indeed to those people in need. Allow me to end with simple but powerful maxims:

Great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave and impossible to forget.

True friends say good things behind your back and tell you the truth to your face.

Being honest may not get you a lot of friends, but it will always get you the right ones.

Good friends are like stars – you don’t always see them, but you know they’re always there!

True friendship is like a tree, not measured by how tall it has grown, but by how deep the roots have gone. I might tweak this saying by adding the strength of the Giant Redwoods (the “Mount Everests” of all living things) is the interconnection of their root system.

Happy is the person who has a friend.

Happier is the person who is a friend.

Happiest is the person who is and has a friend.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.