

Invitation to Friendship



A. Friendship Defined

- Someone has compiled a list of the most powerful words in English.
 - The most feared word - Death
 - The coldest word - No
 - The bitterest word - Alone
 - The warmest word - Friend
- Christianity is about relationships (with God and with one another). The Bible has much to say about friendship. The Bible offers a lot of practical advice on how to become a good friend (eg. Proverbs) e.g. David & Jonathan, Job and his friends (God's little helpers).
- Definition of a friend:
 - 'A friend is someone who comes in when the whole world has gone out.'*
 - 'A friend is someone who knows all there is to know about you and loves you still the same.'*
 - Bible definition:** *'A friend loves at all times...'* (Prov 17:17); *'But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.'* (Prov 18:24)
- Most amazing truth is that God offers His personal friendship to us.
 - Abraham is called a friend of God. (James 2:23; 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8). C.f. *'Abraham Your friend forever' a.k.a. BFF!* Jesus had a hidden intention in calling the twelve disciples - He was inviting them to very personal friendship with Him! (c.f. John 15:14)
 - Our God is Triune God. It means by nature and at the very core, our God is relational. *'Within Godhead is the society of perfect love.'* That mystery of intimate relationship within the Trinity is offered to us in Jesus Christ.

B. Nature of Friendship

- Friendship is 'rare and valuable'. Most people do not have many real friends. True friendship is exclusive, and we must choose carefully.

'A person of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.' (Prov 18:24, NASB).

 - The Bible is emphatic that having a few close friends is better than having a host of acquaintances.
 - 'The man of too many friends [chosen indiscriminately] will be broken in pieces and come to ruin'* (Prov 18:24 Amplified). If you try to be a friend to everybody, you will tear yourself apart. (a man-pleaser)
 - 'The righteous should choose his friends carefully...'* (Prov 12:26)
- Friendship is always reciprocal (two-way relationship). If friendship is not reciprocated, it cannot continue as a healthy friendship. It will explode. It is true of marriage, friendship, and church.

'Selfish man pursues selfish ends...' (Prov 18:1) C.f. John 5:20, *'For the Father loves ('phileo' – mutual friendship) the Son and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.'*

C. 7 Ingredients to Friendship (with God and with each other)

1. Common Interest (Common Goal)

- 'Can two walk together unless they are agreed?'* (Amos 3:3)
- 'You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.'* (Heb 1:9). You've got to hate the things God hates and love the things He loves. (Heb 1:9). C.f. 'bonding within a gang circle'

2. **Lack of Fear (of being quickly judged) & Freedom of Expression**

a. When you are in the presence of a 'friend', you say what you really think and feel without fear of being judged quickly. When we value 'honesty & transparency' over the 'fear of being judged' our dialogue becomes a meaningful, honest, creative exchange. (1 John 4:18) E.g. Job's friends are quick to 'fix' Job with their theology. Yet, Job defends himself and speaks his mind.

b. One description of prayer: 'Intimate association & freedom of expression.'

Jesus said to the Father, '*Why have You forsaken Me?*' It is NOT a loss of trust, but a cry of honesty.

3. **Sensibility & Sensitivity:** Good friends are both sensible and sensitive.

a. Outstaying our welcome is not sensible. (A friend who drops in too often!) '*Seldom set your foot in your neighbour's house, lest he becomes weary of you and hates you.*' (Prov 25:17) We need to understand 'relational distance'. C.f. low outer wall (for lighter relationship), higher inner wall (for deeper relationship). Walls are put there for self-protection & preservation.

b. Respect your friend's feelings. (Not knowing when a joke is gone too far is insensitive.) '*Like a mad man who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbour and says, 'I was only joking!'*' (Prov 26:18-19)

c. C.f. '*familiarity breeds contempt*' (Albert Einstein). We need to maintain respect for our friends while we are real and entertain no illusion about them. 2 Cor 5:16 – '*Therefore, from now on we recognise no one according to the flesh...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*' [double vision]

4. **Time** – Allow time for friendship to develop.

a. Force no doors open in friendship but like Jesus in the book of Revelation (3:20), stands at the door and knocks at our heart. Only if the door is opened from the inside, can we walk in.

b. Some relationships may never develop into close friendship. So don't expect every relationship to develop into a deep friendship. Don't be frustrated when a 'would-be-friend' is unresponsive to you. Give them time and if the door doesn't open, it is probably not meant to be. But if you are open, friendly, and stay patient, God will guide you and show you where deep friendships are to be developed.

c. **Practical tip:** Develop the ability to listen. Resist the temptation to provide quick-fix answers.

5. **Accountability:** Love your friend enough to confront them when you must.

a. If we don't overcome this hurdle, this is where the friendship stops.

e.g. a serious 'hurt' or 'sin' issue – Most people do not confront but simply withdraw.

Ask yourself this question: '*Am I prepared to lose this friendship in the interest of the truth and well-being of my friend?*' If you can't answer this question with a firm 'Yes', you are not really his friend. You are in it for yourself.

'Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.' (Prov 27:6)

b. God calls us to be accountable.

Contrary to Peter's assertion that he would remain faithful to death, under pressure he disowned Jesus three times. Jesus lovingly brings Peter back to the place of his failure in Galilee, asking '*Peter, do you love me?*' three times. (Luke 22:59-62; John 21:15 – the 3rd time, Jesus asks, 'Do you '*phileo*' me?')

6. **Loyalty (Be Prepared to be Hurt)**

a. No relationship is free from pain on this side of eternity. So do not expect perfection. Your best friend will not be perfect except for Jesus Christ. The only way to have a perfect friend on earth is not to have one. There will be times when your friends give you pain - your words and actions will be misunderstood. But stay with it. That's what friendship is all about. Be loyal to your friend. It is about believing the best for your friend. The more precious the friendship the more costly & enriching it is.

- b. The challenge of developing deep friendships in today's *success-oriented culture*. Everyone wants to share in your success but who wants to be there when you fail? Yet friendship deepens and matures when you share your suffering and failure. C.f. the danger of triumphalism.

Paul's life goal: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.' (Phil 3:10). 'A friend loves at all times (in good and bad times - all-weather friend).' (Prov 17:17)

7. Lack of control

- a. Allow your friend to have other friends also. Don't suffocate your friend by demanding that he/she be satisfied with your friendship only. Give your friend the freedom to explore other relationships, make new contacts, and see new people. You will desecrate friendship if you try to dominate or own your friend. When friendship becomes controlling, it becomes destructive. [Marriage is exclusive!]
- b. *Intimacy in a relationship can only grow in the absence of control.* That is why even the Almighty God refuses to control us. Only in the context of a safe, secure, honest, and vulnerable relationship, true self-discovery and deep relational growth take place.
- c. Every healthy parent-child relationship needs to grow into friendship [2-way reciprocal relationship].
E.g. Father and son are jogging together and the son deliberately slows down to keep company with his aging father. 'Agape' is not replaced by 'Phileo,' but a new layer of 'friendship' is added to agape.

D. Reflection

1. Do I have true friends? What qualities make them great friends?
2. What are the dangers that can spoil or stunt the growth of important friendships in my life?
3. What insights did I gain on how I can be a better friend to someone important in my life?
4. How do I respond to God's invitation to friendship? How can I deepen my friendship with God?