

CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

FRIENDSHIP

I Samuel 18:20; Job 19, 29; John 15:9-17

I have called you friends . . . (John 15:15)

It has been said that friendship is the central, all-inclusive problem of life; that, from the point of view of Christ, the supreme artist in living, it is the problem of life itself. Certainly, friendship is not a mere abstraction, a sentimental concept, something one can take or leave and be unaffected by. Friendship is a real fact in human experience. Without it life would be fragmentary, monotonous and half-lived, if one could live at all. Christ would say that he who has learned to love—and only he—has learned to live.

In these days of unprecedented material emphasis (and this has been said of other periods, too), when material pressures envelop our way of life and mold our thoughts and efforts, we need to say again and again that material things are not first. Things are ever secondary; our relation to persons is always primary. Without persons to share life's experiences, the things we have, and what we are, life would have little meaning. What initiative, what inspiration to achieve, what real satisfactions would there be? It is in relation to persons that character is formed, that ideas grow into fruition, that spiritual and moral values develop, and that we become an influence and find happiness. True happiness is not found in the "**abundance of things**" one possesses (Psalm 49; Luke 12:15), but in fellowship and sharing life with God and man—with friends who love at all times (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24).

Where could we find a better example of this than in the story of Job? When the Lord took away his material possessions he worshiped and said, "**The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.**" However, when his friends had no pity on him, dealt deceitfully and persecuted him, when his "**inward friends abhorred**" him and spoke against him, he complained bitterly of their cruelty (Job 6:14, 15; 19:13-22). When his friends scorned him, his eyes poured out tears to God (16:20), and he "**desired death rather than life.**" He longed for the fellowship of his friends with his whole being. Moreover, "**the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before**" (42:10).

Job also had many fair-weather friends, among whom were his brothers and sisters, and a host of acquaintances from all walks of life, for he was a wealthy, wise and friendly man (29; 30:1-14; see also Proverbs 19:4, 7). Job said, “**When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil . . . I . . . sat as chief.**” Then all men were his friends (Job 29). When adversity came they deserted him, but when his fortune was restored they hurried back to assure him of their friendship, to “**eat bread with him in his house,**” and to talk sympathetically of “hard times” (42:11). Most of Job’s friends had the quality of the tropical hogfish whose frequent and marked color changes attract considerable attention in the Shedd Aquarium.

It was in the crucible of adversity that Job learned who his real friends were. He learned the difference between an acquaintance, companion, associate or comrade, and a friend. Most of us learn, sooner or later, that a person may have many acquaintances but few friends who will sit down with us among the ashes of a devastated life. When we need them most they are not with us (Psalm 38:10, 11; Proverbs 19:7), nor do they defend our name and reputation, or that of our family, when it is in jeopardy. We have confided in them and they have not kept our secrets, or been loyal to us (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9). “**With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak**” (Psalm 12:1, 2). They give the kiss of friendship as Judas did to his Friend, and then are silent when we are maligned. Who has not heard someone say, bewildered and deeply hurt, “And I thought she was my friend”?

The world is full of disillusioned people who have grown suspicious and lonely because of the treacherous or callous treatment of one who was thought to be a friend. Cynically they query, “Is there such a person as a true friend?” Perhaps Shakespeare was right when he said, in *As You Like It*, “Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly.” Yet, all feel the need of someone who will accept them as they are, with all their foibles and failings, and be loyal just the same. This was expressed poetically by another Englishman, when he said, “He gained from Heav’n (‘twas all he wish’d) a friend.”

David struggled with these same problems of friendship. He expected hate and evil design from his enemies, but when his “**own familiar friend,**” whom he trusted with his secret confidences, who had accepted his hospitality, and with whom he had “**walked into the house of God in company,**” turned against him, he was overwhelmed. His friendship problems were a burden which he brought to the Lord (Psalms 41:9, 10; 55:12-22) with fears and tears and trembling. Can anything hurt more than a wound in the house of a friend? (Zechariah 13:6) How is a king to know who, among his many acquaintances, is his friend?

He who has a thousand friends has not a friend to spare,
And he who has one enemy shall meet him everywhere.

— Emerson

Both to have and to be a loyal friend we need to know the meaning, the basis and the prerequisites of true friendship. We need to know how to establish friendship—that deep, quiet, sincere, uplifting and enduring relationship which we need to make life, not a “**byword of the people**” as Job said, (17:6), but a “**tabret.**”

The basic law of friendship is the law of love. We cannot think of friendship, in its real meaning, apart from love. Abraham was called the friend of God because he loved God (II Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8-10; James 2:23). In the New Testament to be friends of God meant to be loved by Him; Jesus called those His friends whom He loved and who loved Him (John 15:9-17). The term friends also meant the mutual love of the Christian community (Acts 27:3; III John 14). In I Corinthians 13 where Paul presents what we may call a summary of the friendly life, it is clearly evident that love is at the heart of friendship. And no one has described more adequately the essentials of friendship than Jesus has in the beatitudes, and when Jesus said, **“Henceforth I call you friends,”** He brought the quality of eternity into friendship, for **“love never faileth.”** **“Ye are my friends”** if you continue in my love (which is self-sacrificing and self-giving) in your relationships with others (John 15:9-17).

The way to make a friend is to be a friend—the kind of friend that Jesus was, who loved us first, and gave Himself to us fully and sincerely (John 15:13; I John 4:19). There can be no selfish or ulterior motives in true friendship, only the sincere purpose and simple intention of being a good friend. There must be respect and esteem and appreciation of the worth of the other, but friendship cannot last that has any other design than the giving of self—and it should be the best self that one can give.

Friendship must be sympathetic and understanding, but also interesting and stimulating, to be of lasting value to a friend. This idea that a friend is one who knows all your faults and loves you just the same is slightly ambiguous, unless earnest and continuous effort is made to be of worth. Few of us have such native gifts that we can afford to neglect to broaden our interests and develop our abilities if we want to be a friend worth knowing. Friendship can be a truly uplifting, growing, deepening relationship that lifts us above the conventional and commonplace only if we give our best selves to each other.

Friendship is always mutual; it cannot be one-sided. Our most intimate friendship will grow stale if we share only a corner of our life and interests, or if one confides and gives freely and the other does not. There must be a mutual revelation of self, mutual self-giving, a mutual sharing of confidences and answering trust.

One may have friendly feelings toward another, even toward those who are not his friends, but friendship is a deep, quiet, enduring affection, founded upon mutual respect and esteem. Emerson defined a friend as “a person with whom I may be sincere . . . before him I may think aloud.” Pretense hurts everywhere, and thinking aloud must be mutual or there is no ground for trust.

Jesus, who proffers perfect friendship, said, **“I call you friends.”** Why? **“For all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”** (John 15:15). “There’s not a Friend like the lowly Jesus, No not one!” However, friendship with the Friend of friends is all a pretense, unless we open our hearts to Him, confide in Him, and give our best self to the Master.

Considering the nature and intimacy of friendship, it should be at its best in the family.

Family friendship may sound dull and ordinary to some, but it can be rich in meaning. Here friendship does not depend on age, or hinge on wealth, influence or temporary circumstances. Here we have natural ties of relationship, a community of interests, and are knit together by the same family experiences. Why should anyone in a family ever have to say, “I feel so alone”?

Friendship in the family should be three directional, that is, between parents, among children, and between parents and children. It is a tragic fact that two persons can live side by side in apparent calm for years, yet have, in deep reality, no real friendship. Ideal home life is impossible without it. Therefore, each should ask, “What is there in me that will make life not only bearable, but uplifting to those with whom I am most intimately linked? What characteristics are mine that shall deserve and gain respect? Am I disappointing to my husband (or wife), and why? Do I have depth of personality or only surface, pretense or worth? Would I like my children to be what I am?”

How many people, in the effort to make a living, cultivate a life that is interesting, stimulating and ennobling?

We all need the spurs of one another’s personalities and loyal affection, and God has so constituted the family to provide especially for these needs. Brothers and sisters were made for friendship and helpfulness, not for envy, and hate, and destruction, “**as Cain, who . . . slew his brother**” (I John 3:11, 12; 4:21). Brotherhood is life-long, as is truest friendship, and provides unparalleled opportunity of expression.

Parents and children develop and grow side by side, and have every reason and opportunity for friendship. However, there can be no real friendship if children sit interminably before television or spend all their leisure time away from home, while parents consistently shut their children out of their personal life and the thinking and planning that goes into the making of a home. Too many parents are mere autocrats, and an autocrat is never close to the people he rules.

A parent’s best friend can be his child, but friendly relations cannot be left to chance; they require nurture, respect for personality, sharing of interests, and a genuine attempt to give the best self one possibly can to others, with the unselfish purpose of being a friend.

However, the Christian family is not to build a wall around their home and friendship. Jesus pointed to this fact when He said, “**Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them that sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother**” (Mark 3:33-35).

Friendship must extend outward from the home to those with whom we can find a common interest.

First, we have the wonderful privilege to bring into the home friends, men and women, who will be an inspiration to our children. Few parents realize that casual visitors, relatives, or close friends often play a major role in molding their children’s basic attitudes for life —sometimes for good, but also for bad—and in determining their intellectual interests.

On an adult a guest may not make much of an imprint, but to a child a guest is not merely a person, but a revelation, for he brings, into the closed world of home, another point of view. Children watch, judge, learn and imitate, and the impact grows as they grow older. A guest may also become a yardstick by which children measure the sincerity, consistency and worth of their parents. Children will unconsciously judge, from the kind of friends that parents have and the way they entertain them, what kind of friends and fellowship they will be expected to enjoy.

The door should always swing in for the friends our children bring home with them. It is a sad thing when children cannot bring their friends home because of a fastidious mother or critical father. There may come a time when anxious parents do not like one, or another of the children's friends—especially during the “best friend” period in a young person's life—because of the factor of permanent relations which may follow.

All a parent may properly ask of a child's friendships is that they will be good for the child, for his developing interests, and growing personality. If there has been a good understanding about friendships, and the parents have set up a high standard for their own social relationships, they have little to fear. Drawn by a need, a mutual interest or inspiration, a friend is often found “**who sticketh closer than a brother**” (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24).

David found such a friend in Jonathan. Their friendship ranks among the world's noblest and best.

They were of different social backgrounds but there was no polite exclusiveness on the part of Jonathan. He did not say, “I am better than you are . . . I am a prince, you are only a shepherd's son; I am from the big city, you are from the hill country.” There was nothing subservient or fawning on the part of David. Each brought his own disposition, temperament, education, abilities, and problems into a friendly relationship.

The admiration which Jonathan felt for David, first as a musician, and later as a warrior and national hero, grew into a beautiful, sublime and lasting friendship. And it was mutual, for “**The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David**” (I Samuel 18:1; II Samuel 1:17-27). David trusted Jonathan with his life, when he had every reason to fear; Jonathan trusted David with the care of his precious son, and in unselfish and loyal devotion gave up his right to the throne of his father, King Saul (I Samuel 20:11-17; 23:16-18).

The basis of their friendship was the law of love (I Samuel 18:1-4; 20:17).

Jonathan died an early and tragic death, but the story of a “**friend that sticketh closer than a brother**” lives on to inspire men and women of all ages. We can be sure that its sequence is being told in eternity, where David and Jonathan walk together in the jasper light of the beautiful city; where they banquet, without fear, with the King of the Nations; and talk “**face to face**” with the Friend who laid down his life for them both.

“**Henceforth I call you friends . . . you and your children . . . if you abide in my love.**”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How necessary are friends?
2. What do we know about Job's friends?
3. What do these passages tell us about friendship: Exodus 33:11; Job 6:14, 15; Proverbs 14:20; 16:28; 17:9, 17; 27:6-17?
4. Is the old proverb, A friend in need is a friend indeed—which is found in some way in nearly every language—a good test of friendship? Why, or why not?
5. What is an acquaintance, an associate, a companion?
6. What is the meaning of friendship?
7. What is the basis of friendship, and why?
8. What other elements must be found in friendship to make it last?
9. What do we know about David's friendship problems? (Psalms 41 and 55)
10. What is the meaning of Proverbs 18:24? What makes David's friendship with Jonathan such an inspiration?
11. What marks of a true friend can you find in I Corinthians 13:4-7?
12. What are the qualities of a true friend, as seen by Christ in the Beatitudes, and in John 15:9-17?
13. Do you think that the average family today enjoys family friend-ship? What is family friendship?
14. Discuss a parent's obligation to his children in regard to friendship.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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