

## **Friends**

Proverbs 18:24

March 10, 2019

Sometime ago, I read a funny story about two men hunting for a deer in a northern state of the U.S. Suddenly one of them yelled out and the other looked up and saw a grizzly bear charging at them. The one who yelled out started to put on his running shoes. His friend asked, “What are you doing? You can’t outrun a grizzly bear!” The man responded by saying, “I know. I just have to run faster than you do!”<sup>1</sup>

We all have relationships. Maintaining a proper relationship with people is a key to success in life. According to a report by the American Management Association, an overwhelming majority of the two hundred managers, who participated in a survey, agreed that the most important skill of an executive is the ability to get along with people. In other words, the ability to get along with people is more important than intelligence, decisiveness, knowledge, or job skills.<sup>2</sup> People skills are definitely very important skills to have.

We meet all kinds of people in life. Some will become our friends, some our enemies, and some the people we don’t care very much about– the insignificant people.

Knowing how to distinguish these people and knowing how to relate to them are wisdom and personal skills. Today, I want to focus on friendship.

Our text this morning, Proverbs 18 verse 24, is an interesting passage. The original Hebrew seems to be very difficult to translate. We find various translations interpreting it differently. For example, the New International Version translates the first part of the verse as “A man of many companions may come to ruin.” But the New King James Version translates it as “A man who has friends must himself be friendly.” The New Revised Standard Version, the one that we use in our church translates it, “Some friends play at friendship.” The Good News Bible translates it, “Some friendships do not last.” As you can see, the translators saw things differently. Basically what the verse says is this, “There are friends who do nothing but trouble you.”

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<sup>1</sup> Author Unknown, an illustration from [www.sersmons.com](http://www.sersmons.com) under the title of Friendship.

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Larson, ed., The Best of Ted Engstrom (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1988), 253.

I personally like how the New King James Version interpreted it. It says, “A man who has friends must himself be friendly.” In other words, if you want to have a friend, you must first be a friend. There is a familiar old saying that goes like this:

I went out to find a friend  
but could not find one anywhere;  
I went out to be a friend  
and friends were everywhere.

Being friendly does not necessarily require a certain type of personality, like being cheerful, gregarious, easy to laugh, and dynamic personality. Those personalities can certainly help, but even shy, quiet, and reserved individuals can also be very friendly.

The best way to find a good friend is to be a good friend. It is almost impossible to have no friends if you yourself are friendly. Of course, the opposite is also true.

In his poem, *The Art of Marriage*, Wilfred Peterson says that the art of marriage is not “only marrying the right partner” but also “being the right partner.”<sup>3</sup> In the same way, the art of friendship is not only finding a good friend but also being a good friend.

Psychologists once did a survey to find out about friendship and how people make friends. They asked a group of college students to jot down the initials of the people they didn’t like. Some of the students could think of only one person, others listed as many as fourteen. But the interesting fact that came out of this study was that the people who had a long list of people they didn’t like, were also the people who were most widely disliked by others and vice versa.<sup>4</sup>

If you know of someone who often harms other people’s characters, you will discover that that person is disliked by a large number of people. Who would like such a person? People may like to listen to the gossips; but deep down in their hearts they know they cannot trust the gossip. Naturally the gossips don’t have true friends. If you want to have true friends, learn to honor others’ characters.

Another thing to think about friendship is to be genuinely interested in other people. One of the greatest lessons on how to be a friend comes from Dale

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.etsy.com/listing/643743276/the-art-of-marriage-poem-printable?ref=pla\\_similar\\_listing\\_top-1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/643743276/the-art-of-marriage-poem-printable?ref=pla_similar_listing_top-1)

<sup>4</sup> Bits and Pieces, October 14, 1993.

Carnegie. In his book, How to Win Friends and Influence People, he states, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people, than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” When you put your focus on being interested in others you can easily make friends.

Being a friend is a learned behavior and there are a few things to consider:

One, a smiling face. Did you know that it takes seventy-two muscles to frown, and only fourteen to smile? No wonder we get so tired when we are stressed. Smile often, it encourages conversation and it is good for your health as well.

Two, call people by their names; strangers are just that, strange, but friends are known by their names.

Three, talk to others about their favorite topics, not just yours.

Four, find an occasion to give a word of encouragement, compliment, or show an act of kindness.

Once you establish a friendship, guard that relationship. Two qualities go together in any friendship: honesty and loyalty.

Proverbs 27:6 reminds us, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” A real friend may “wound you” with his words of truth, but he will tell you the truth nonetheless. A real friend may not always tell you what you want to hear, but he will always tell you what you need to hear. In the short run, it may hurt you; but in the long run, it will help you.

If you want to find out whether your friendship with someone is a true friendship or not, ask yourself two questions: 1) Can I trust this person will be totally honest with me? 2) Can I trust this person enough so that I can be totally honest with him or her? Only a true friendship expects, and can survive mutual honesty.

The other quality involved in keeping a friend is loyalty. The second part of Proverbs 18:24, states, “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” The word “stick” refers to how the skin sticks to the bone. It is the picture of something that is inseparable. One cannot function without the other. In true friendship, one thing you should never have to question is your friend’s loyalty. A true friend will always be your defense attorney before he becomes your judge.

Chuck Colson, one of the key persons involved in Watergate scandal, is a dedicated Christian now. He became a Christian while he was in prison. In his book, “Life Sentence,” he tells the story of how he was invited to speak at a university soon after he was released from the prison. There was still much hostility toward the entire group involved in Watergate, especially toward Richard Nixon.

People asked all kinds of questions to Chuck Colson and it was obvious they were very hostile toward him and the rest of the people involved in Watergate. During that time, Henry Kissinger made a very strong criticism against Richard Nixon. One student stood up and referred to Kissinger’s criticism and asked, “Mr. Colson, do you agree with this criticism?” Colson looked at the audience, and he could tell every ear was listening to see what he would say. Here’s what Chuck Colson said:

“We all know Mr. Nixon’s negative qualities. He has been dissected in the press like no one in history. I could tell you his good points, but I don’t believe I could persuade you to accept them. But what it comes down to is, no, I don’t go along with Henry Kissinger’s comments. Mr. Nixon is my friend, and I don’t turn my back on my friends.”<sup>5</sup>

Colson said for a moment he thought the roof would fall in; and in a way it did, but not the way he expected. There was a moment of silence and then a thunderous standing ovation. The reason? Even the hostile students could appreciate loyalty to a friend.

Friendship requires honesty and loyalty. We, as Christians, need to be good and true loyal friends to each other. Christianity is not in understanding the doctrine; it certainly helps. What truly makes us a Christian is living a simple truth to honor God each and every day by honoring, respecting, and loving one another.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles W. Colson, Life Sentence (Lincoln, VA.: Chosen Books, 1979), 79.