

FRIENDSHIP

Since we are meeting in a new facility and have some new visitors today I thought it appropriate to speak on friendship as a way of introducing ourselves to each other. Many here have been friends in Christ while attending this church over the past several decades. As we start holding regular services in this new facility our hope is that we can become friends with all of you who live here. We want you to feel free to make this church your church home and our family your church family.

There's an old song called "Friendship" written by Cole Porter in 1939 for the musical "DuBarry was a Lady" It was probably made the most famous when it was sung by Ethel Merman and in the musical "Anything Goes". Here are some of the words:

FRIENDSHIP

*If you're ever in a jam, here I am
If you're ever in a mess, S.O.S
If you ever feel so happy you land in jail
I'm your bail*

*It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blend ship
When other friendships have been forgot
Ours will still be hot
A-lottle-dottle-dottle-dig-dig-dig*

*And if you're ever down a well, ring my bell
And if you're ever up a tree just phone to me
A-yes-sir-ee*

If you ever loose your teeth and you're out to dine, borrow mine

*It's friendship, friendship, just a perfect blend ship
When other friendships have been forgate
Gate?
Ours will still be great
A-lottle-dottle-dottle-chuck-chuck-chuck*

(Words by Cole Porter (1939); Published by and Lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.)

This is not exactly the way we would write lyrics today but it does get the point across even 76 years later. Friendship is something to be treasured. Once you find a close friend, or a "bosom friend" as Anne Shirley would say, you would do anything for them. Friendships like these can last for a lifetime even if time and distance separate you for a while.

Like all of you I have had many friendships in my life; some of them good and some not so good. Some have started out strong but turned sour. I have even been betrayed and bullied by those whom I considered friends. But these have been in the minority because I have also been able to maintain friendly relations with many of my friends even though time and distance have kept us separated for years and even decades. Friendships can seem fickle and hard to maintain at times but if you find a close friend and stick with them through thick and thin it can be a very rewarding experience.

For those of us who are or have been married our spouses can become our best friend as long as

honesty and integrity remain central to the relationship. That is why it is especially hard when one spouse goes before the other. When you have lived with your best friend for decades, sometimes 50 years or more, to lose your best friend and constant companion can be difficult to deal with. But the closeness of other lifelong friends can bring some comfort during the transition into singleness.

I have been acquainted with someone for over 47 years. I consider this person my closest friend. We first met in our Junior College Choir but didn't become friends until we both transferred to Hayward State College in 1968. We were even roommates there for a semester. What drew me to him was his humor and his caring personality. He was a believer and I was not. But his choices in life and his compassion towards me as I struggled through life caused me to investigate the God he claimed to serve. It wasn't long before I too came to understand the truth of who God is.

But it wasn't this single fact that has maintained our relationship. There have been many events throughout our lives that have kept us close. Both our families have gone through some difficult times but we have helped each other through them. Even when we lived 350 miles apart for 10 years our friendship did not diminish.

There is, however, once incident in my life that stands out as a cornerstone in our continued relationship. I have spoken of this before so I will try and keep it short for the sake of those who have heard this before. In October of 1976 my mother was in the hospital with a brain aneurism and my wife was preparing to go into the hospital to have a C-section. To make matters worse I was out of work and we were moving out of one rental home into another. I had a 2 year old whom I took to his aunts for the day while I and some friends and relatives cleaned and moved us out of one home and into the other.

On the last day of moving the owners of the first rental home came by and asked for the key. Since we were not done cleaning they requested that I drop the key off when we were done. By the time we left that first house spotless and had cleaned up the yard it was dark and I had no physical energy left. All I could do was drive to Danville from Walnut Creek, pick up my son and drive to Concord to the new home and put us both in bed. In my exhausted state I rationalized that I would deliver the key to the old landlord in the morning on my way back to Danville to drop off my son before going back to both hospitals to visit my mother and my wife.

When I got to my new home I received a call from my old landlord. He wanted the key that night and would not wait until the morning. He asked for directions so he could drive out to my new home that night to get it. He had every right to do so but I found I had no emotional energy left to see him. My mother had been hovering between life and death for days and her surgery was scheduled for tomorrow with little hope for recovery. My wife was also scheduled for her C-section that same day. I just couldn't handle any more drama or stress.

So I called my best friend and told him the situation. He told me he was coming over right away and that he would give the key to the Landlord. He showed up just prior to the landlord and he took the key and handed it him. He told them he was my pastor (which was not a lie - he was and is an ordained minister). He also shared that my mother and wife were both in the hospital and were to be operated on the next day. He was there to help comfort me and take whatever tasks he could off my plate so I could cope with my current situation. The landlord of course was unaware of any of this and expressed his sympathy, then took the key and left. I was never so grateful for anyone in my life. At that point in my life my friend was a lifesaver.

I probably could have “manned up” and done something as simple as give the key to the landlord, but I truly had no emotional energy to do so. I was so grateful to my friend for understanding my situation and my emotional state, for coming and rescuing me from this simple task and for not making me feel stupid or less than a man. He was loving and kind and sympathetic. He did not have to understand or question why I felt like I did. All he needed to know was that I needed help and he was there.

One of the reasons we have been friends for so long is that we do not take advantage of that friendship. The Bible says,

“If you make a sale...to your friend or buy from your friend’s hand, you shall not wrong one another”
(Leviticus 25:14)

We have both borrowed money and tools from one another but have always returned the tool and paid back the loan. We have never used our friendship for personal gain. Maintaining integrity and honesty in a friendship is important because once trust is broken the relationship suffers and is sometimes irreparable. Many people have lost friends over a lack of integrity.

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, chapter 13 verse 6, it states that a friend is as your own soul. Perhaps the two people who were most likely to have experienced this truth were Jonathan and David. The Scriptures say they loved each other like they loved their own lives (1 Samuel 20:17). Though their deep friendship was marred by the personal jealousy of Jonathan’s father King Saul who sought to keep them apart, they did not allow it to be diminished by either time or distance. After Jonathan was killed in battle David said of him,

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more pleasant than the love of women”
(2 Samuel 1:26)

Evidently David was a devoted and trustworthy friend because others who befriended him who were as willing to risk their lives for him as was Jonathan. In 2 Samuel 15:32-37 it says that when King David was forced from Jerusalem by his son Absalom in an attempted coup David’s friend and close advisor Hushai, at the risk of his own life, was willing to stay in the city and pretend loyalty to Absalom in order to provide David with inside information. Jesus said there was no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). Hushai was willing to lay down his life for David.

Scripture tells us many other things about friendship. Here are some examples:

“A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity”
(Proverbs 17:17)

“...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”
(Proverbs 18:24b)

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend”

(Proverbs 27:6a)

Sometimes friends wound us but those who truly care for us do so to make us better not to tear us down. It can be a powerful thing to be reprimanded by someone when it is done out of their deep love for you and their willingness to risk it all in order to make you better. It can also be a very humbling thing to be loved by someone so much that they tell you the truth when no one else will.

But even when two people are very close you have to maintain decorum. Proverbs tells us that *“He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be reckoned a curse to him”* (Proverbs 27:14). If any of you have been awakened by a good friend early in the morning using a loud voice you know this to be true. Unless it is an emergency, it is a curse and not a blessing to be awakened so rudely no matter how much you like your friend. Many a lamp has been broken by pillows thrown by the rudely awakened.

Sometimes friendship is determined by how much or how little one has. In Proverbs 19:4 it says,

“Wealth adds many friends, but a poor man is separated from his friend.”

I found this out the hard way. In our second year of college a couple of high school buddies invited a friend and I to San Francisco for the day. We all took the bus into the city and walked around the town going from tourist attraction to tourist attraction. The day started out well but soon grew frustrating. My friend and I did not have much money but one of our friends did. My rich friend wanted to eat at the top of the Mark Hopkins Hotel and go dancing. Our mutual high school friend thought that would be great. But my other friend and I could not afford to do that and said so. We were immediately ridiculed for our lack of money.

After overlooking many similar insults throughout the day we had had enough. I looked at my friend and asked if she was willing to leave this party of fools and walk back to the Bus Station with me. She said “absolutely”. So we politely excused ourselves and off we went. We passed a Doggie Diner on the way and stopped for dinner laughing about how much cheaper our meal was going to be than theirs. We had a great time and lots of fun seeing the sites as we walked for over two hours back to the bus station and made our way home.

We never saw those friends again. The Scriptures say that *“Bad company corrupts good morals”* (1 Corinthians 15:33) and we believed that to be true. We did not appreciate the way we were being treated and we did not want to be corrupted by their behavior. So we stayed away and we were the wiser for it. and, by the way, they never sought after our friendship again either.

The Scriptures also talk about friends who give advice. Sometimes the advice of friends is good, but sometimes it is just an opinion and can be questionable at best. I don’t know about you but when I seek advice I generally start with my closest friends. Then, if I need advice that is specific to a

certain level of education or experience I will seek out the professional. The ideal combination for me is a friend who is an expert in the field I am seeking advice from.

There are many instances in the Bible where friends gave advice – some good some bad. Here are two examples of friendly advice that was bad and did not bring about the desired result.

In the book of Ester we read of Haman, the enemy of Queen Esther and her people, who despised Ester's uncle Mordecai. He had an exaggerated jealousy over the attention Mordecai was getting and was incensed over Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him as he passed by. So Haman's wife and all his friends advised him to build a gallows and ask the king to have Mordecai hung on it. Haman took their advice and had the gallows built right next to his house (Ester 5:14; 7:9). But Haman's pride and hatred for Esther's people was discovered. And instead of Mordecai it was Haman and all ten of his sons who were hanged on these gallows. Based on the outcome I'm not so sure he should have followed his friend's advice.

Another example of bad counsel comes from the book of Job. Job experienced multiple tragedies in a very short period of time. When his three friends heard of his misfortunes they each made a point of coming see Job, to sympathize with him and to comfort him. For seven days and seven nights no one spoke a word, for they saw that his pain was great. So far so good; But then they started to speak and what started out as a good idea did not end so well for them.

It seems that God's wrath was kindled against these three friends because they had not spoken the things about God that were right. It was not until they offered sacrifices for themselves and Job prayed for them that the Scriptures say God withheld His hand and did not do to them according to their spoken folly (Job 42:17). They barely missed being punished for their sins. But thanks to the prayers of Job they were spared. From this story it would appear that it might be better to keep your advice to yourself than to open your mouth and speak mistruths. Sometimes no advice can be the best advice.

Having friends is a blessing but it some friends make you feel like you're lying in a bed of roses. You know those kinds of friends who produce pretty flowers but are also very prickly with sharp edges. In these types of friendships you have to be aware of the thorns and not just the flowers. You have to handle these relationships with care lest you be hurt in the process. Sometimes the very friends you trust are the ones who will turn on you. Even your closest friends can betray you.

I made a friend right away when I moved to a new school in a new town. His name was Herbert. We ate lunch together every day. I was very grateful to have found a friend so quickly because I was shy, not into sports, and for the first time in my young life was devoid of any friends.

Because I had to ride a bus to school most of the time I would bring my lunch but occasionally I would be given money to buy lunch at school. One of those times my friend Herbert asked me for some money. I gave him part of my lunch money but he wanted it all. When I refused he threatened me. Since he was bigger and stronger than me I gave him all the money I had. In retrospect I should have taken the beating because every time after that he demanded more money from me. So I

determined to always bring my lunch and not to bring any money with me to school. I also decided to find another friend and avoid Herbert altogether, which wasn't hard. Once he found out I no longer had any money he wasn't as interested in me as before. This was the first but not the last friend to disappoint and betray me.

Scripture speaks of friends betraying friends. In Psalm 41:9 we read,

“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

And in Psalm 55:12-14 we read,

“It is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we who walked in the house of God in the throng.”

These words were written centuries before Jesus came and walked the earth yet they speak of what happened to him. After Jesus was arrested and the disciples were fearful of their lives Peter, one of his three closest friends and disciples, denied three times that he ever knew him (Matthew 26:23). And Judas, who was with him for all three years of ministry, betrayed Him to the religious authorities for thirty pieces of silver (Luke 22:21; John 13:17-18). These two who ate bread with Jesus, these two who were his companions and walked with him in the house of God denied him before others and betrayed him. One repented and was granted forgiveness. The other had remorse and hung himself.

Jesus knows betrayal and He has experienced grief. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was

“Despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isaiah 53:3)

Yet Jesus also grants forgiveness. After they had crucified Him by nailing Him to a cross, Jesus said aloud for all to hear, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:33-34). And after He rose from the grave He made sure that Peter was mentioned by name when He instructed one of His angels to say, *“Go tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you’ ”* (Mark 16:7). Jesus had already forgiven Peter and was looking forward to seeing him. Peter, the one who had betrayed Jesus, found forgiveness.

Jesus knew what it felt like to be denied before men. He had experienced that first hand Himself. But He also understood the inherent weakness in each of us. The Scriptures say He is not someone who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but rather He is one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. For that very reason we can draw near to Him with the confidence that we will receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

I have an earthly friend who has been with me through thick and thin, through good times and bad, through poverty and wealth and back again. I have known him for 47 years and he is a great treasure to me. But there is one who is a greater Friend to me and that is Jesus. As much as my earthly friend understands and supports me, Jesus does so even more. He knows me because He created me

(Psalm 139:13-16). And He understands me because He knows my frame and is mindful that I am but dust (Psalm 103:14). No one needs to tell Him what is in me, He himself knows what is in each one of us (John 2:24-25).

Psalm 103 tells us that

“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.”

(Psalm 103:10-13).

That’s why He is able to say to us,

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28-30).

Friendship with Jesus is more than companionship. It involves forgiveness and grace. It involves an acknowledgement and a forsaking of sin. Jesus has no fair weather friends. You are either His or you are not. You either persevere through life with Him or you forsake Him when times get difficult. There is no middle ground with Jesus. It is all or nothing.

Some will say they know Jesus and will claim they are His friends but Jesus knows those who are truly His. To some who claim they know Him He will say, *“I never knew you.”* (Matthew 7:21-23). But to those of us who are truly His friends by faith He will say, *“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34).

This is what friendship with Jesus does for us – it grants us an inheritance. And this is what that friendship with Jesus is all about – forgiveness and grace - not just as a one-time event but spread over a lifetime allowing us to fulfill our purpose.

And how does Jesus become our friend? What happens that allows Him to call us His friend? It occurs when we pay heed to what He has told us and become willing to follow what He tells us to do.

“You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

(JOHN 15:13-15)

Jesus makes us His friend when we make Him our Savior.

My earthly friend and I are similar but not alike. My wife and I are still on a journey to understand each other after more than 43 years of marriage. There are times when even someone I’ve

known for nearly five decades cannot fathom the depth of what I am going through. But Jesus can and does. Some friendships come and go, others can last a lifetime. But a friendship with Jesus lasts for eternity. When Jesus says He will never desert us nor will He ever forsake us he does not limit Himself to this life. He is including the next as well.

We are all products of our past and will soon be products of our future. We have all had some good and some bad friends. Some of these relationships have caused us to shut down, to not let others get close in order to avoid a repeat of vulnerability that leads to hurt. In my life I have felt the sting of betrayal and the pull of making a vow to never trust again. Perhaps some of you have too. But I have also felt the tug of forgiveness and have known the closeness of a God who comforts and heals the wounds of friends; And this allows me to remain open and to persevere even when relationships turn sour or go south.

Through faith we can overcome the effects of our past friendships and we can change the direction of our future friendships if we are willing to let Jesus be our Friend. This saving friendship with Jesus is available to all. For the Scriptures tell us that if we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved (Romans 10:9). And those who are saved are the friends of God. If you are not a friend of Jesus today I invite you to become one. Many of us here can explain to you how to do that. If you are His friend then I invite you to join with me in proclaiming that friendship to others as we sing the classic hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

What a friend we have in Jesus; All our sins and grief's to bear.
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrow's share?
Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge; Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and shield thee; Thou wilt find a solace there.

(Words by Joseph M. Scriven, Music by Charles C. Converse – Public Domain)