

THE FRIEND CONNECTION



4: Conflict in Friendship

[Sermon preached on Sunday 29th April 2018]

Resources needed: Bibles, paper (A4 or A5 and small pieces) & pens

WELCOME

Ice-breaker activity: Tiger, Turtle, Fox and Dove

Ask people to choose one of these animals, as a way of identifying how they tend to behave in conflict situations, and to explain to the group what they meant by choosing that one.

WORSHIP ACTIVITY

Write the following incomplete phrases on small pieces of paper (one phrase per piece). If you have a big group you may need to use the phrases more than once or write more of your own. Have everyone put them in a hat or bowl. Ask each person to take one. Encourage your group to complete their phrase and ask them (but always allow a person to pass) to pray their phrase:

- I love you Lord because . . .
- I need you Lord because . . .
- I praise you Lord because . . .
- I obey you Lord because . . .
- I thank you Lord because . . .
- I hope in you Lord because . . .
- I find joy in you Lord because . . .
- I find peace in you Lord because . . .

When everyone who wants to, has prayed his or her phrase, the leader may pray something like:

“Father God, these are reasons you are our God. You have promised us that no matter how deep the stain of our sins, you can remove it. You can make us as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if we are stained as red as crimson, you can make us as white as wool. You have dealt with our sin, which made us deserving of your anger, and reconciled us to yourself. We have become your friends and not your enemies, through none of our own doing or merit. Lord, many are the reasons we serve you, love you, thank you, need you and find our joy in you. We praise you and give you thanks.” Amen

Taken from Isaiah 1:18-20

BIBLE FOCUS

1. Psalm 41:9, Psalm 55 (esp. vv12-14) and Proverbs 18:19 all talk about the especially painful hurt which a friend can cause. Why is this? What effects can being betrayed by a friend have on someone? What does this tell us about the responsibility of friendship?

2. Conflict in the New Testament Church. The apostle Paul on occasion had conflicts with other leaders:

- With Peter. In Galatians 2 we see him confront Peter about his treatment of Gentile believers and the gospel message. Later (Acts 15:1-11) we see Peter support and defend Paul's point of view at the council in Jerusalem.
- With John Mark and Barnabus. In Acts 15:36-41, we see a sharp disagreement with Barnabus over a judgement call to be made on John Mark's reliability. Later (2 Timothy 4:11; Colossians 4:10; 1 Corinthians 9:6), we see Paul speaking of them both with love and respect.

What do these passages teach us about conflict with other believers?

DISCUSSION

1. What reasons have you observed or experienced for the breakdown of friendships?

2. What might have helped to prevent these things happening?

3. Why is it so difficult to do the things we know will preserve friendships?

4. Can we identify in ourselves any tendencies which damage friendships and show a lack of valuing our friends? e.g. lack of consideration, neglect, sarcasm or hasty speech, being quarrelsome, selfishness, jealousy, insecurity, past hurt and cynicism.

5. We all have an approach to conflict, shaped by our personality, upbringing and experiences. Look at the sheet "5 Ways of Responding to conflict". Where do you sit on this matrix? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each, and what would it help you in future to focus on developing a bit more or less?

6. Al McNicoll talked about 3 principles for resolving conflict well:

- WALK IN THE LIGHT (1 John 1:5-7)- be honest and transparent.
- CHECK YOUR SIGHT (Matt 7:3-5)- look to yourself before correcting others.
- GIVE UP BEING RIGHT (Phil 2:5-11; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 6:1-7)- let go of anger and the need to justify oneself.

Which of these do you find hard and why? How can looking to Jesus help us with these things? See Heb 12:1-4.

7. Have you wronged or been wronged by a friend in the past? Is there anything you would have done differently? How are you doing with forgiveness and/or reconciliation? (Please be sensitive in dealing with this question!)

PRAYER TIME

Friendship Tree

Get the group to draw themselves a simple tree shape like the example and add their friends' names to the branches. Take some time individually to let God speak to you and make a note of:

- things that you are grateful to God for in each friend
- friendships where you need to put something right
- a friendship you may have neglected
- a friendship where there has been a misunderstanding
- a friendship quality which God wants you to grow in
- a friend you might need to forgive

Spend some time praying in twos or threes for these things, for the needs of your friends where known, and for the actions you may need to take in response to what God has shown you tonight.



Five Styles of Responding to Conflict

