

You've Got a Friend – September 13, 2020

I have always been intrigued with the language we use. 'Pivot' is a word we hear frequently these days. Everyone is trying to pivot, in an attempt to navigate this period of COVID. Moving forward.

Everyone it seems, is moving forward – “We decided this for now, but moving forward we plan to ...”. The word friend is not a new word by any means but I hear it being used in ways that are foreign to my ears. It is being now a verb! On Facebook and Instagram, two more words fairly new to our vocabulary, someone can now 'friend' someone else. Oh, look at this, Bill just friended me. Sometimes, we get 'friended' by people we hardly know! The definition of friend broadens. It is somewhat akin to the word love. I love you. Dave loves Laura. Jim loves cycling. Scott loves playing guitar. Words take on a life of their own. So the question today is, what does the word friend mean?

Recently I discovered that among theologians, the Theology of Friendship has been born. Based upon Scriptures from both the Old and the New Testament, scholars have examined the concept of friendship and have had much to say about it.

When it comes to friendship, the Bible might not be the first place you look, but let's see.

Beginning with Genesis, we walked with God in friendship. But then we walked away. We were disobedient and did what He explicitly told us not to do. And as early as the Adam and Eve story, we learn that God is a God of persistent love. God refuses to give up on us.

God longs to be in relationship with us and that relationship is based on love and friendship. God has a relentless desire to be our friend.

Not only does God long for us to be friends with him but also with one another. We learn that Noah and Enoch walked with God in their friendship. David and Jonathan are famous for their friendship, as are Ruth and Naomi.

Abraham was explicitly referred to as a friend of God. Moses spoke with God face to face as one friend speaks with another.

When it comes to friendship, Jesus was a great friend of sinners, outcasts, and marginalized people. Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that they lay down their lives for their friends.”

In The Message, Eugene Peterson puts it this way – Jesus says to his disciples, “I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Love one another the way I loved you.” Then he tells them, “I’m no longer calling you servants ... I’ve named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything.”

I’ve let you in on everything! Wow ... that’s a lot. I am not saying for a second that in order to be a true, genuine friend of someone you need to let them in on **everything**. That would be disastrous. It’s not healthy. But most of us have a long way to go in that regard.

After all, how far can a deep, intimate conversation about the weather take us?

You and I have such a rich potential for friendship –with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and with one another. Not the Facebook and Instagram type of friendship, something very different from that!

Right now, I invite you to think about an incredible, wonderful, very important person ... That person is You! Now I want you to add to that, this word ... friend.

What does it mean to **you**, to be a **good friend** to someone else?

Would you say that **you are a good friend to others**?

To whom are you a good friend – your spouse or partner, your children and grandchildren, your siblings, your parents, someone with whom you socialize?

Now, I want you to just take a moment and wonder about who is the person or who are the people, that would say that you are a good friend to them?

Why do you think they would they say that? Friend – it is a rich, powerful, humble honour to be called friend.

Take a moment to consider that.

Jesus is our role model, but He also longs to be our friend. When we live like Him, even for a few moments each day, we end up expressing qualities of love and friendship into the lives of others.

Qualities like patience and compassion and forgiveness and generosity. Personally, I believe these are aspirational qualities for all of us. How would you rate yourself when it comes to patience, compassion, forgiveness, and generosity?

In Matthew 25, speaking with His disciples, Jesus reminds them of when he was cold, hungry and thirsty, naked, sick and in prison – they took care of him. The disciples, those who professed to be his

friends, were confused. They don't remember any of that. Jesus said to them, "Whenever you did even one of these things, to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me."

Friendship. Compassion.

On the night before he was nailed to the cross, Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "You are my friends".

Genuine friendship includes love, compassion, forgiveness and generosity of spirit.

Paul wrote most of the New Testament. He never uses the word friend or friendship, but he often describes the concept.

Paul demonstrates what friendship looks like in his relationship with the Philippians. Paul enjoys a mutual, reciprocal relationship with them that includes great joy, celebration as well as suffering and hardship. Between the Philippians and Paul there is a reciprocity of gifts, both material and immaterial. Paul's friendship with the Philippians is founded on a way of thinking and acting patterned

after Jesus. Loving, Caring, Compassionate. Affectionate concern for one another. Consider these qualities, as you reflect on the friendships in your life and what genuine friendship means for you? Reciprocity of caring, compassion, forgiveness, patience, support, listening. Does that describe your relationship with some other people in your life? People you would call friends? I hope so.

Now I realize that all of our close friendships are not identically reciprocal and mutual. One person might always take the lead in reaching out. One person might always be the first to call or suggest a get together. Patterns develop in relationships and it requires love and patience and compassion and forgiveness to maintain and grow those friendships.

To the Philippians, Paul says, "I hold you in my heart. I yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ". Paul longed to be there with them, furthering their well being. Even when he was in prison, Paul sent Timothy to the Philippians, to learn of their progress in the faith

so that Paul's heart might be encouraged. While in prison, Paul prayed that they might experience the peace of God. The Philippians reciprocate. The Philippians send Epaphroditus to care for Paul, both spiritually and financially – a Christ like way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

God has created us, designed to be in community, in relationship, not to live physically or emotionally in isolation. We are wired that way. We need companions on the journey. Some of us might fight it to some degree. Some of us might not be comfortable with making friends and growing a relationship – it requires some measure of courage and vulnerability ... and that can be frightening.

An acquaintance is one thing and we all have lots of those, and that is wonderful. But true, genuine friendship is different from that and it has absolutely nothing to do with Facebook or Instagram. How are you doing as a friend? Everyone can't be our best friend! But we all need a few genuine, deep friendships.

Jesus had thousands of acquaintances. He had 12 special friends and even with them, there were 3 with whom he was particularly close.

They were his inner circle. So the Theology of Friendship ... what do you make of this? How does anything I have said have anything to do with your friends and you as a friend?

What is it about friendship you are going to take with you for future consideration or maybe conversation with someone who knows you well? How can you be a better friend to everyone? Who are your deep, genuine friends?

Carol King sang, "Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you've got to do is call, and I'll be there, 'cause you've got a friend." Do you have that friend or those friends? Are you that friend to others?

Let's wrap up today with a quick review.

Friendship is a Biblical concept. It is first and foremost the kind of relationship God wants with us. It is a way of living our daily lives that Jesus modeled for us.

There is some form of mutuality and a reciprocity to friendship. If a particular relationship you have does not seem to include that, you might want to examine it a bit.

Friendship includes compassion and kindness and generosity and forgiveness. Is there an expression of these qualities within your relationships of those whom you call friend?

Friendship requires some effort. Otherwise it becomes like an unkept garden.

Most of the time, friendship does not just happen. It requires some degree of intentionality. In my humble opinion, women are much better at developing deep, meaningful friendships than men.

Some think that friendship is a social luxury – that it requires time, money, material possessions. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon says this, “Friendship seems as necessary an element of a comfortable existence in this world as fire or water or even air itself.

A person may drag along a miserable existence in proud solitary

dignity, but their life is scarce life, it is nothing but an existence.”

Don't let that be you.

I want to end today with a few quotes that you might appreciate –

“True friends aren't the ones who make your problems disappear.

They're the ones who won't disappear when problems come.”

“Standby those who stand by you.”

“A true friend is someone who will always love you

- the imperfect you

- the confused you

- the wrong you

Because that is what people are supposed to do.”

“If you're struggling and your people are just sitting there watching you – they're not your people,”

Relationships with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and with one another are virtually bursting with potential. Relationships of genuine,

mutual, reciprocal friendships can make a heart soar. Paul and the people of Philippi went through wonderful times, and times of great struggle, confusion and oppression. Perhaps you have too. I am looking forward to the day when I meet someone who has never had hardship come to their door. I have yet to meet someone who would not love to share moments of great joy and happiness with someone else.

When it comes to friendship, look to the life and example of Jesus Christ.

God bless you on your journey.