

August 6, 2017 - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - “The Characteristics of true Friendship”

Introduction:

I am pleased that you could be with us on this “Friends Sunday.” In honor of this occasion I would like to speak to you for a few moments on the subject “The Characteristics of true Friendship.” One of God's most precious gifts to us is a friend or friends who encourage us and lovingly challenge us to “keep on going.” Friends can make a great difference as Solomon wrote in this wonderful passage of scripture that we will examine shortly.

Good friends are one of life’s greatest treasures.” With good friends, you are never alone. They are attentive to your needs and gladly share life’s joys and burdens.

There have been some great friendships that are good examples of these principles. I think of the relationship between Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo. That friendship deepened into one of the best friendships in the history of sports. What about the friendships of Bobby Richardson, Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford and Tony Kubek? That spawned the Yankees championships dynasty from 1955 to 1964. They were teammates on the field but friends off the field. None was a better friend to most than Bobby Richardson who as a Christian sought his friends to make a decision for Christ. In the Bible there are wonderful examples of faithful and genuine friends too. The greatest of these human friendships was that of Jonathan and David. He was fortunate to have Jonathan as a true friend. (1 Sam. 20:17)

Although David was chosen by God to be the next King of Israel he spent years waiting for God's Word to come to pass in his life. As he waited a paranoid, egocentric king occupied the throne that had been promised to him. David spent his time hiding in caves and living among his enemies waiting upon God's promise. He certainly understood what it meant to become discouraged. Times of waiting on the Lord can be most difficult and a godly friend can make the wait bearable. Jonathan loved his friend David, and he encouraged him to follow God's will, even though it meant Jonathan would forfeit his own claim to the throne.

Friendship is built by working on a lasting relationship. We are all created for relationships... The first Characteristic of true friendship is to understand...

I. Friends are a Blessing (vv.9 / Proverbs 18:24)

1. The writer of Ecclesiastes wants us to understand that Friendship is a good investment (v. 9). When the author says in verse nine, **“Two are better than one, because they have good reward for their labor”** the words “good reward” can also be translated “good return” for it means - dividends paid on a wise investment. The very best investment you will ever make in life will not be a financial one, but rather the investment made in relationships. Let me tell you right now that the greatest relationship you can have is with Jesus Christ. – John 14:6

We will get the best return on that investment over any other investment that we will ever make. As we go through life there are two kinds of things we can give ourselves to. Some people try to accumulate possessions but it is better to focus on building relationships in

making friends and to being a friend. The first half of Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man who has friends must himself be friendly”. The second Characteristic of true friendship is...

II. Friends Helps You When You're Down. (v.10)

1. Now you may have a lot of people in your life you could call acquaintances. But you may only have a very few that you could call “true friends.” Someone once said, “We have been successful in life if we have enough close friends to act as pall bearers at our funeral.

2. “How can you tell the difference between acquaintances and friends?” That’s easy, apply verse 10. The people that are still around when you have “fallen” are your real friends, there may not be as many left as you would have thought. A friend is still there when you fall.

3. A friend is the kind of person if you call them when in trouble they simply ask, “Where are you?” What can I do to help? That’s a friend... How many people do you have like that in your life? Jesus is that kind of a friend. Proverbs (17:17a) says, “A friend loves at all times”. God loves you and Christ died for you. The third characteristic of true friendship is...

III. Friends Supports You. (v. 11)

1. Sometimes we have a tendency to take a passage so literally that we miss the point of the whole idea. This is more than just about keeping each other physically warm. In Bible times this was important to save you from freezing to death and there have been some in similar circumstances. I think of my dad at the Battle of the Bulge they fought in well-below-freezing temperatures with no gloves for their hands and their feet wrapped in gunnysacks. The soldiers would have frozen to death if they did not huddle up to stay warm. But more than a cold spot...

2. Sometimes it’s cold out there in the world. We need help to face circumstances beyond our control we need to be able to gain emotional strength when we do not have enough of our own. These are circumstances where we are facing a battle and we wonder, “How am I going to make it through this right now!” That is the time we need a friend to give us emotional strength. True friends encourage us in the cold dark times. Decide today to be an encourager? Jesus left us a wonderful encourager; the Holy Spirit. The fourth Characteristic of true friendship is...

IV. Friends Protects Your Reputation (v. 12)

“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.”

1. When these words were written they were based on the military strategy of the ancient world. Almost all combat, was hand to hand combat. Soldiers went into battle with a partner, someone that could be counted and trusted implicitly. The soldiers stood back to back of one another, and they always keep their backs in contact and fought whatever enemy came from any side. Friends never stab you in the back, they guard your back. A friend never puts up with gossip about their friends. They defend you and your reputation. Last true friendship...

Illustration: Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon together when all of a sudden both sides were filled with Indian warriors on horses, dressed for battle. The Lone Ranger turned to his good friend Tonto and asked, "What are we going to do?" Tonto replied, "What you mean 'we, Whiteman?" Sadly, sometimes that is the behavior we see and experience in friendships.

V. Friends watch for your Spiritual well-being. (Proverbs 27:17)

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

1. According to the Scriptures, a friend is one who challenges you to become all that God intends. The mark of a good friend is that their friendship draws you closer to Christ. They "sharpen" you and motivate you to do what is right. True friends want to see us continue to grow. The writer of Proverbs has said that friends help to sharpen us, to become sharp spiritually. He compares this type of friendship to fine tuning of metal on the anvil. Think of a blacksmith who makes swords. He takes a hammer and takes out a piece of metal and works on it slowly and continuously until it takes the shape and sharpness of a sword. Friends are always challenging us and even pushing us to be all that God wants for us to be.

2. True friends tell you the truth and even risk hurting your feelings because they love you and have your best interests at heart (Prov. 27:6---Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend). The greatest gift you can give someone is the gift of an invitation, an invitation to make a decision for Jesus Christ and a relationship with God. Some of you are here today because your friend invited you. You may even think that your friend is a little bit on the fanatical side when it comes to "religion" or God, because they keep talking about it.

Well I want to tell you that they are a true friend because they are letting you know of the greatest gift anyone could ever get and that is a personal relationship with God, forgiveness for your sin and a place in heaven forever. If you have not accepted Christ personally into your life I want to invite you to make the greatest decision you can ever make.

Conclusion:

You may be saying to yourself, "I wish I had a friend like that!" Well I am so glad you asked! The second half of Proverbs 18:24 says, "**But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.**"

For those of you who cannot honestly say today that you have experienced a relationship with Jesus Christ I want to extend an invitation for you to do so today. Jesus Christ is your greatest friend. One definition of a friend is someone who knows all about you and likes you anyway. Well, no one fulfills that qualification better than Jesus Christ. He is your best friend because He has done more for you than anyone else. (John 15:13) "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." So let me close by inviting you to let Jesus be your best friend. --- Gospel