

FRIENDSHIP IS LIKE AN INSURANCE POLICY

“A man that hath friends *must shew himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*” [Prov. 18: 24]

“Greater love hath no man than this, *that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth, I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you*” [Jn 15:13-15]

From the time that we became conscious of the world around us, we found ourselves in the midst of people who are said to be our blood relations: parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, etc. We were born into a specific family, place and race over which we had no choice. Then, as we began to mix with peers in the community, and later at school, college, work, business or church, we met and interacted with thousands of other people who are not blood relations. Some of them have become our friends, and we chose them by ourselves. But, if we were asked to make a list of those that we sincerely regard as our friends, the number might not be more than five, or at best ten. What is so special about this breed of people?

A friend is an acquaintance for whom we have mutually shared high regards. A profile of our friends would reveal a variety of backgrounds in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality or profession. Some friends have been there over the long haul, and some came on board only recently. Some friendships are no longer active, while some are “off and on.” Some friends are much closer to us than our blood relations “for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off” [Prov. 27:10]. There must be much more to friendship than meets the eye. For example, of the numerous people of God mentioned in the Bible, Abraham was the only one that God Himself referred to as “My friend” [Is. 41:8] forever [2 Chron. 20:7]. Also, why would Jesus change the status of His disciples [and future followers] from “servant” to “friends” [Jn 15:13-15]?

God has used more friends than blood relations to touch the lives of most of us. Some of us have had the privilege that our best friends are also blood relations [by birth or marriage]. Therefore, there must be something about friendship that we need to understand. A Ghanaian friend of my family’s once put it succinctly when he said, “friendship is like an insurance policy. To keep it valid, you must continue to pay the premiums.” That has set me thinking. What premiums should we pay to keep true friendships alive and well? That is the subject of today’s lesson.

1. What does true friendship entail?

There are many people that we call friends but who are actually not. That is why we hear of such expressions as “fair weather friends,” “betrayals,” etc. So, to understand true friendship, let us first deal with what it is not.

a) *What is not true friendship*

The following would not count as true friendship:

i. Those that lead us to sin

Some friends can lead us to clubs or occasions or practices that offend God. Membership of street gangs, school cults, pools betting or porno clubs can be encouraged by friends who may lead us to believe that they are teaching us the “ways of the world.” That is why James has warned us, “ye adulterers and adulteresses know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” [**Jam. 4:4**].

In search of inner meaning, some friends can lure us away from true worship into transcendental meditation and such like practices which are nothing but idol worship. That is why Moses has also warned us that if “thy friend, *which is as thine own soul*, entice thee secretly, saying, let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers,...thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him” [**Deut. 13: 6b, 8a**].

ii. Those that are false or treacherous

I have just received from a friend in Geneva a power point presentation on “Reflections.” The presentation concluded, “God will not ask you how many friends you had, *but will ask how many people to whom you were a true friend.*” Some people that we believe are wonderful friends may turn out to be false when the occasion affords itself. Prophesying Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, David wrote, ”mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” [**Ps. 41:9 fulfilled in Matt. Matt. 26:48-50**]. Julius Caesar was reported not to have died from the stab wounds of the conspirators but from the betrayal of his best friend, Brutus.

Hushai the Archite was David’s friend. As soon as Absalom rebelled against his father, David, who had to flee for his life, Hushai pledged his loyalty to Absalom, “and Absalom said unto Hushai, is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not with thy friend?” [**2 Sam. 16: 16-17**]

iii. Those that are unfaithful

False friends are those who were never friends but were only waiting for the opportunity to prove it! Unfaithful friends, on the other hand, may have been true friends but temptation or shortsightedness may have led them to be unfaithful. For example, adultery is unfaithfulness by one spouse to the other, and marriage is one form of friendship. A close friend may run into some difficulty and we do not demonstrate support during such a period.

As Job's torment from his Satan-inflicted illness got worse, he lamented, "all my inward [close] friends abhorred me; and they whom I loved are turned against me" [Job 19: 19], but as soon as he was restored, they came back "and the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends; also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" [Job 42:10].

b) *True friendship is a spiritual relationship*

Another e-mail message that I received from a member of our Bible Class who is based in Los Angeles contained the following apt statement, "best friends never tell each other they are best friends; they just know" Therefore, true friendship has a spiritual quality, a form of *agape* love. When David received the sad news of Jonathan's death in battle, he wept thus, "I am distressed for thee, *my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women*" [2 Sam. 1:26].

True friendship has the following essential features:

i. There is spiritual bonding

You meet some people for the first time and it is as if you have known each other for years. As you exchange a few thoughts, you are even amazed at the things you share in common. From that point on, you don't need anybody to tell you that there is an emotional, if not a spiritual bond between both of you.

David was responding to King Saul's questions soon after he had killed the giant Goliath. Jonathan, Saul's son and heir apparent, was listening. "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that *the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul*" [1 Sam. 18:1]. The same might explain why God called out Abram from among his people, and not his brother, Nahor [Gen. 12:1-2]. Moses exhorted his people, "the Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for

ye were the fewest of all people: *but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers*” [Deut. 7:7-8]

ii. The spiritual bond is sealed with a covenant

A covenant is a spiritual agreement between two consenting people. The vow between a husband and wife in marriage is a form of covenant. In Scriptures, God signed several covenants with man, such as those with Adam [Gen. 2: 16-17], Noah [Gen. 9: 1-17], Abraham [Gen. 15:18] and David [Ps. 89:3-4]. The New Covenant promised in the Garden of Eden [Gen. 3:15] was fulfilled in Jesus Christ [Lk 1:68-79]. *However, with respect to friendship, the covenant is sealed by blood.*

In the case of Abraham, God told him to take a heifer, a she goat and a ram each of which should be three years old. In addition, he was to take a turtledove and a young pigeon, and Abraham “divided them in the midst, and laid each piece against another; but the birds he divided not” [Gen. 15:9-10]. The covenant of perpetual ownership of the Promised Land [by Abraham and his descendants] followed later that same day [v.18]. Blood was shed to make this covenant and circumcision has sealed it [Gen. 17:9-14]. You can see why God has called Abraham His friend!

Jonathan did not waste time to make a covenant with David “because he loved him as his own soul” [1 Sam. 18:3]. Later, as it became clearer that his father, Saul, wanted David dead, Jonathan “caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul” [1 Sam. 20:17]. Although it is not indicated what form the swearing took, tradition has established that it was usually in the form of blood exchange. Examine the words of the covenant, “thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David everyone from the face of the earth” [v. 15]. Blood exchange appears obvious!

Jesus shed His blood on Calvary for us. That is why He told His disciples on the eve of that momentous event, “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends [i.e., shed his blood]... Henceforth, I call you not servants... but I have called you friends” [Jn 15:13-15]. In like manner, once we are ready to shed blood for somebody, he/she becomes our true friend.

2. The key features of an insurance policy

Most of us are familiar with insurance policies on our vehicles, homes, health and business. Such policies are intended to provide us with protection that we need in order to minimise the financial burden of any incapacity, such as fire or theft. We may also take out an insurance policy on our lives so that in the event of our death, our loved ones may have some financial cushion. No matter the policy we hold, they all tend to share the following features which are embedded in the contract between the insured [i.e., you] and the risk-bearer [i.e., the insurance company]:

(a) Coverage and Exclusions

The contract spells out the terms and conditions, the duration of the contract, the items covered, and the beneficiaries. God told Abraham, “this is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every man child among you shall be circumcised” [Gen. 17:10]. The one between David and Jonathan also covers their descendants “for ever” [1 Sam. 20:15]. The terms in the friendship contract with Jesus extend only to those who “do whatsoever I command you” [Jn 15:14]. Therefore, it does not cover unbelievers or the disobedient!

(b) Consideration or value

There is an insured value, that is, how much the beneficiary can collect if it becomes necessary. The contract may also spell out how payments are to be made, whether in a lump sum or periodically. As soon as Jonathan and David had signed their friendship contract, “Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle” [1 Sam. 18:4]. As soon as David became king, he said, “is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” [2 Sam. 9:1]. As He was ascending to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” [Matt. 28:19-20].

(c) Premiums

The insured value determines the premium to be paid by the insured person. It may be paid at once or periodically within each given year. *If not paid as and when due, the whole policy lapses.* What premiums are we expected to pay to make our true friendships perpetually valid?

3. Paying the premiums on friendship

Jesus’ instructions to His disciples clearly spell out the premiums, which can be summarised as follows:

(a) *Like-mindedness:*

Another quote from the e-mail from Los Angeles states, “friendship is not a two-way road; it is a one-way road travelled by two people together, hand-in-hand.” David and Jonathan were inseparable because they were one soul in two persons. Jesus told His disciples, “lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” [Matt. 28:20]. In commending Timothy to the Philippians, Paul said, “I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, ...for I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” [Phil. 2:19-20].

(b) *Spiritually minded:*

Since friendship is a spiritual thing, it is obvious that we must approach it from a spiritual perspective. Jesus says we are His friends if we obey whatsoever He commands us [Jn 15:14-15]. He has commanded us to forgive and to love our enemies [Matt. 5:38-48]. Therefore, no matter what offence our friends have against us, we should forgive them. Also, we must be forthright with those we call our friends by offering constructive criticism for “faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” [Prov. 27:6].

(c) *Continued loyalty:*

We should be there at all times for those we call our friends [Prov. 27:10]. Jonathan was there for David even when it was going to cost him his father’s throne. When Jonathan died, David wept for him bitterly and went on to support his crippled son, Mephibosheth [2 Sam. 9:13]. God has not forsaken the seed of Abraham His friend, even when most of them have forsaken Him.

(d) *Willingness to sacrifice:*

Many of us are fair-weather friends. As long as we are benefitting from a relationship, we feature as genuine friends. Once there is need for us to sacrifice, we disappear! Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, came to spend a week with him when they heard of his afflictions [Job 2:11-13]. God gave His only Begotten Son to save the seed of Abraham that we have become by faith [Rom. 4:16]

4. Conclusion

Let me quote the last piece from the e-mail that I received from Los Angeles, a true friend is “someone who believes in you even when you have ceased to believe in yourself.” Jesus is that true friend who has said, “come to Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” [Matt. 11:28]. Therefore, make sure that you pay the premium [i.e., accept Him as your Lord and Saviour] to make your relationship with Him always valid.