

to be evident in all of our various relationships. As I see it, friendship is the foundation in our relationships with people at church, in the neighborhood, and at work. This same foundation is important in our relationships with our parents, siblings, spouses, and children.

Of course, the depth of our friendships vary in some degree, as revealed in the difference between our relationship with our spouse and ours with an acquaintance we know only in passing. To understand this, think of friendship as having three levels:

- *Acquaintances* - we “know of” these people but do not really know their inner person.
- *“Seasonal” friends* - we know these people on a personal level but only for a short period.
- *Intimate friends* - we are deeply connected at heart with these people.

God intends friendship to be one avenue in which He richly blesses your life. It is one of His ways to keep your focus on Him and the path of

righteousness. To enjoy this blessing, you must first make friends, which requires that you first be a friend. You can accomplish this by applying each of the five characteristics outlined above. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to someone who could use your friendship, and see what He develops in the relationship. As children of God we are to be reflections of His character to each and every person with whom we interact. Friendship is a way we can let others see Jesus in us.

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# Faithful Friends



## *A Biblical Guide for Friendship*

*by Richard Maas*

When some of us hear the word friend... we have fond memories of very special times—times of being at the beach, playing a sport or game, working on a project together, or simply having a heart-to-heart talk. For others, their minds draw a blank when they hear the word friend.

Fearing the judgment and criticism of others has been a reality ever since sin entered into the human race. We all fear rejection. It is this fear that keeps us from being in and even attempting to make close personal friendships. In Scripture, we see God interact with His children in four ways, one of which is friendship. Abraham, for example, is called God's friend in 2 Chronicles 20:7. Glenn Martin and Dian Ginter write in their book *Drawing Closer of "Intimate Friend"* as being the deepest level of relationship we can have with God. But, what exactly characterizes friendship? We can find some answers to this question by examining a few biblical characters.

### **Intimacy and Loyalty**

Jonathan and David's friendship was the most

intimate recorded in the Bible. You might ask, "intimacy in friendship?" It is possible, but men and women alike often fear this level of intimacy in our homophobic and rugged, individualist society. Jonathan and David's friendship demonstrates intimacy because of their willingness to look out for the best interest of the other and to share openly. This expression of love and tenderness in a friendship is a biblical principle we see in John 13:34-35 and in many passages in 1 John. Intimate friendship is marked by openness, trust, and acceptance.

We also see beginning in 1 Sam. 18, that Jonathan and David's friendship is an example of loyalty in friendship. Although their first loyalty was to God, they did not let anything come between them, not even family or career problems. Their friendship grew as it was tested.

### **Commitment**

We see this in Ruth's words to Naomi: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Commitment is not approving of everything your friend does, but it captures the

principle of steadfastness (James 3:17 KJV). Commitment is also expressed in holding one another accountable to the truths found in Scripture. When we are committed to our friends, we say, "no matter what, I am here for you." This requires effort and often conflicts with our lifestyles in this fast-pace culture. However, at some point in our friendships we are faced with the decision to remain committed or quit the friendship. We may be missing a tremendous opportunity for growth when we abandon our commitment to friendship too soon.

### **Meeting Needs and Mentoring**

In 1 King 19, we have the example of how God meets our need of friendship and how friendship mentors us in the faith. Despite the great miracle God provided him on Mt. Carmel, Elijah was afraid. Queen Jezebel sent out a threat to kill him. Elijah ran when he heard this. Nonetheless, God was so faithful to minister to him and be patient with him. Elijah's words were, "I am the only one left, . . ." This led God to reveal Himself to Elijah, which led Elijah to befriend

Elisha. It says in 19:21 that Elisha "set out to follow Elijah and become his attendant." God gave him a friend in Elisha and someone to mentor in the faith. God loves us so much that He sees and seeks to provide our needs. In this occasion, He provided the very friend Elijah needed.

### **Encouragement**

Barnabas modeled this characteristic (Acts 4:36). One of our common relationship needs is praise and encouragement. We all need to be lifted up in our life, which Barnabas did for Paul in Acts 11:23-26 and for John Mark in Acts 15:39.

### **Support**

The story found in Matt. 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, and Luke 5:17-26 of 4 friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus is an example of this characteristic. These friends worked together in a selfless and self-giving way to support their friend. We accomplish this when we give up something we want in order to provide a genuine need of our friend.

Ideally, these five characteristics of friendship are