

Friendship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 20, John 15:12-15, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Phil. 2:3-8.*

Memory Text: “A friend loves for all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (*Proverbs 17:17, NIV*).

Many people claim to have lots of friends, though, in reality, they have only superficial links with other people and then only to the degree they find these links personally useful. True friendship, in contrast, does not focus on usefulness but on a personal interest in selected fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we listen, and with whom we share our time and emotions. After all, as we'll see this week, friendship is one of the concepts used to describe what our relationship with the Lord should be; thus, friendship must be based on something more than a superficial need to use someone for our own ends.

“Our affection for one another springs from our common relation to God. We are one family, we love one another as He loved us. When compared with this true, sanctified, disciplined affection, the shallow courtesy of the world, the meaningless expression of effusive friendship, are as chaff to the wheat.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 211.

The Week at a Glance: How is friendship depicted in the Bible? How can friendship become a negative experience? How do friendships reflect our relationship with God? What is the basic principle behind true friendship? What must be experienced in our hearts in order to be a true friend?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 31.*

What Is a Friend? (*1 Samuel 20*).

While it is true we cannot always choose all our relatives, we do have more leeway in choosing our friends. It seems inevitable that for beings who are, essentially, social creatures, we will be in contact with those whom we deem *friends*. Yet, not all friendships are alike. Centuries ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle categorized various kinds of friendships based on the motives that established the relationship between the parties. Since that time, many writers have expounded on this very interesting and, at times, complex phenomenon of *friendship*.

Think about someone whom you consider or had considered a *friend*. What particular qualities identify your relationship with that person? Read Proverbs 18:24. How does that text reflect the qualities that define your experience of friendship, if at all?

It is interesting, too, that the word translated “friend” in the last part of this verse in Proverbs comes from the Hebrew word for “love.” In other contexts, that word could have been translated “lover.” The point seems to be that a friend is indeed someone with whom you have a close bond, different from a mere acquaintance or co-worker.

Read the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David as depicted in 1 Samuel 20. What characteristics emerge from this account that help us understand what a friendship is? How does this story relate to Proverbs 18:24? How do these characteristics compare with what you wrote above? Also, how do Jonathan’s actions fit in with what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:1?

Notice from this story how the Lord formed the center of their friendship. Look especially at *1 Samuel 20:14*, with the phrase “the kindness of the Lord.” We now see, though, in this whole relationship, a reflection of the kindness and mercy of God, manifested in the relationship between these two men.

Looking at the story of David and Jonathan, ask yourself about someone whom you consider a friend. How could you better manifest the traits of friendship as revealed in the biblical account?

Key Text: *Proverbs 17:17.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To recognize the qualities of a true friend.
2. To understand that Jesus is the perfect example of what a true friend should be.
3. To emphasize that some friends exert a bad influence.

Lesson Outline:

I. Good Friends and Bad Friends.

- A. Jesus extends an offer of His divine friendship to us.
- B. David and Jonathan shared true friendship.
- C. Many people make friends in order to satisfy selfish motives.
- D. To have friends, one must be friendly.
- E. True friends love unconditionally.

II. The Mind of Christ.

- A. Jesus knew how to be a true friend.
- B. Jesus put the needs and concerns of others before His own.
- C. Jesus talked to and listened to people, ate with them, and celebrated special events with them.
- D. Jesus met people where they were.
- E. Jesus calls us His friends and not servants.
- F. Knowing God and becoming His friend gives us what we need in order to be true friends to others.

Summary: “Whatever arises to disturb or distress us, we should take it to the Lord in prayer. . . . It is his [Satan’s] studied effort to keep us away from our best and most sympathizing friend. We should make no one our confidant but Jesus. We can safely commune with Him of all that is in our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 776.

COMMENTARY

I. David and Jonathan.

“The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven,” writes Ellen White in *The Faith I Live By* (p. 234). One of the most beautiful examples of this is the brotherly love between David and Jonathan. One of Rembrandt’s most famous paintings depicts them at that critical moment after Jonathan has warned David of Saul’s death threats. They are both about to separate, knowing that they will probably never see each other again. Jonathan is holding David as he rises from his knees, weeping.

Bad Company (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The term *friend*, at least in English, does not have to be of necessity something positive. Who knows how many lives have been ruined because of the negative influence of a *friend*? For instance, many people who struggle with some sort of substance abuse, be it alcohol or drugs, often trace their introduction to the substance: not from a shadowy figure hiding in a dark alley but from their best friend. How ironic and, yet, how common, when best friends turn out to be bad friends.

A young man, somewhat of an outcast in school and coming from a cold, uncaring family, found friends who made him part of their close-knit circle. He soon knew they would put their lives on the line for him, and he felt such a sense of belonging that he would have risked his life for them. Sounds like a great thing, right? Sounds like the beauty of friendship, as depicted in Proverbs 18:24, right? Well, not quite, because we're talking about a young man who joined a youth gang heavily involved in violence, theft, and drug abuse. Thus, like anything, friendship, even what we might call a "good friend," can be a double-edged sword.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Notice the contrasts depicted in the texts. What do they tell us? Though we often apply these verses to marriage, what principles could help us understand the kind of friendships the Lord desires us to have? How should these principles guide our friendships? At the same time, in what ways can we take this admonition too far? How do we balance it, for instance, with Matthew 5:13, 14?

“Paul is telling the Corinthians that they cannot have *compromising* relationships with unbelievers—not that they cannot have relationships whatsoever. Relationships that cut the connection with God are to be completely excluded.”—W. Larry Richards, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier—2 Corinthians* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1998), pp. 148–150.

How can you tell if your friendship with a nonbeliever is hurting you spiritually? If you believe it is, what should you do?

It must have been a heartbreaking moment for these men. We know “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David” (*1 Sam. 18:1, KJV*). In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul echoes this expression. He uses it first to describe how Christians should act together—with hearts “being knit together in love” (*Col. 2:2, KJV*). He then uses the same expression to describe how we, the body, relate to God, the Head—“from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (*vs. 19, KJV*).

The depth of friendship between David and Jonathan had consequences well after Jonathan’s death. When David became king, he gave Jonathan’s crippled son, Mephibosheth, all the property that belonged to Saul. He also provided laborers to care for his lands. “‘I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan,’” David told him “‘and you will always eat at my table’” (*2 Sam. 9:7, NIV*). It’s a beautiful ending to what has been in many ways a tragic story. “And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table, and he was crippled in both feet” (*vs. 13*).

The Mishna, a collection of early oral commentaries of the Scriptures, talks about a type of love that depends on something else. The problem is, when the thing it depends on ceases, so does the love. It gives the example of Amnon’s *love* for Tamar. But there is a better kind of love, that doesn’t rely upon something else and so will last forever. The example it gives for this eternal love is the love of David and Jonathan.—See “Aboth,” in *The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin* (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), vol. 4, p. 70. This love did not depend on anything other than God who fueled the friendship. And it lasted even past the death of Jonathan.

Ellen White says “the name of Jonathan is treasured in heaven, and it stands on earth a witness to the existence and the power of unselfish love.”—*My Life Today*, p. 210.

II. The Wise Man Looks at Friendship.

The book of Proverbs contains much wisdom regarding friendship. The following verses are thought-provoking discussion-starters for Sabbath School classes:

III. Choosing Friends.

“A righteous man is cautious in friendship” (*Prov. 12:26*).

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered” (*Prov. 22:24*).

What criteria should Christians use when choosing friends? Aren’t we supposed to be friends with everyone?

IV. Money and Friends.

“The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends” (*Prov. 14:20, NIV*).

Let This Mind Be in You *(Phil. 2:3-8)*

As human beings, we are by nature selfish and egotistical: Our first inclination is to look out for “number one.” Though some struggle with this problem more than others, it is the default mode for a sinful, fallen race. For any relationship—including friendship between selfish and egotistical people—to survive, these qualities need to be subsumed. In the end, only the sanctifying power of God working on the heart can bring about the kind of changes needed for a true friendship. No wonder, as we saw in Sunday’s section, the Lord was in the center of the relationship between David and Jonathan. What friendship will succeed if it’s based on people looking out only for themselves?

Read Philippians 2:3, 4. What essential principle is shown there, and why is it so crucial for forming a true friendship?

In so many ways, the key to a good friendship is found in the same principles found in a good marriage: the willingness of each member to put the good of the other first. This is seen in the example we have of Jesus, giving Himself for the good of others. Think of the kind of friendships we would have were we to esteem others better than ourselves (and were they to do the same for us) or if we looked not upon just our own things but upon the things of others (and they were to do the same for us). This was, of course, the essence of what Christ did when here in the flesh.

The sad reality is so many friendships are often based on selfish motives (What’s in this for me?); and when someone realizes there’s no benefit for them in the relationship, the friendship cools, if not ends. This is nothing extraordinary; it is simply human nature. Far from putting the needs of others before ourselves, oftentimes we find jealousy and envy ruining a friendship. In his *Confessions*, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote about how, once he became famous, many of his *friends* turned against him. Again, this isn’t anything extraordinary; it’s human nature unsubdued by the power of Christ working in our lives.

Read Philippians 2:5-8. Here is the key to bringing about the kinds of changes in us that can stimulate strong friendships. How are your friendships? Are they defined by the texts for today or by jealousy, expediency, and convenience? Dwell, pray, and meditate on these verses in Philippians.

“Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him” (*Prov. 19:4, NIV*).

“Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts” (*vs. 6, NIV*).

“A poor man is shunned by all his relatives—how much more do his friends avoid him!” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Compare these proverbs with James 2:1-4. *How should Christians of modest means relate to rich people? Does the church tend to favor rich people and, if so, what can we do about it?*

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *2 Samuel 1:26, Proverbs 1:10-19, John 15:15, 1 Corinthians 11:18-22, 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.*

- ① How is it possible to have friendship unmixed with selfish motives? Is not the enjoyment of another’s company itself a selfish motive? Does the Christian concept of *agape* require that we offer only our friendship to people who are unlovable?
- ② How does the concept of friendship in your culture differ from the concept of friendship in the Bible?
- ③ Our choice of friends can have a great effect for good or ill in our lives. How can we determine which friendships are dysfunctional and which are edifying? How is it possible to have friendships with others who do not share our religious beliefs?
- ④ While it is easy to establish friendships with people who come from similar backgrounds, it is more difficult to relate to people who are seemingly quite different from ourselves. How can we relate to those with whom we seem to have little in common? How does Jesus’ example guide us?
- ⑤ How is it possible to effectively witness to someone we actually dislike?
- ⑥ A non-Seventh-day Adventist moved next door to Trudy and Bill, who were Seventh-day Adventists. Trudy and Bill tried to be friends with their neighbor but with no success. So, one day Bill asked their neighbor if they had done anything to offend him. He replied, “All you Adventists want to do is convert everyone you meet, and I’m just not interested.” How should Trudy and Bill respond, and why?
- ⑦ How can Paul’s relationship with Philemon teach us about how to solve problems we might have with a friend (*Philem. 1:8, 9*)?

How Christ Made Friends (*Luke 19:1-10*).

The gospel shows us how Christ made friends. He took time to talk to people and to listen to them. He took time to eat together with others and to celebrate special events with them.

Read the following passages and analyze what each tells us about Christ's skills in interhuman relations and, in particular, in making friends.

John 4:4-26: **Jesus speaks and listens to the Samaritan woman.**

Luke 19:1-10: **Jesus stays with Zacchaeus.**

Luke 14:1-14: **Jesus accepts hospitality from a prominent Pharisee.**

In all these situations, Jesus comes to people where they are and mingles among them as one of them. He doesn't act too good for the Samaritan woman or doesn't feel too low for the chief Pharisee. Jesus shows Himself ready to listen, to get involved, to show a genuine interest in others. If we will reach out to people, listen, show empathy, and give others the sense that they are valued and accepted, we will be able to establish meaningful relationships and even friendships with the most unlikely people.

This is important if we are to reach others with the gospel. How are unchurched, secular people ever going to listen to a sermon? How can they ever be persuaded to read a book about Christ? Many will be intrigued enough to decide they want to know more only if they have seen Christianity in action and actually have met a credible Christian.

Christ, however, didn't make friends just for the sake of making friends. He came in contact with the lost, and He became their friend in order to reach them with eternal life. What about us? What motivates our friendship with nonbelievers? At the same time, if it becomes apparent that they have no interest in our faith, do we then just shake the dust off our feet and walk away? What kind of friendship is that?

V. Bad Friends.

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (*Prov. 16:28, NIV*).

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (*Prov. 17:9, NIV*). “An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment” (*Prov. 18:1, NIV*).

What do class members think are the most important aspects of a friendship? From their experience, what are the most common ways that friendships are destroyed? What is the best way to approach gossips and those who keep recalling past offenses?

VI. Characteristics of Good Friends.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (*Prov. 17:17, NIV*).

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (*Prov. 18:24, NIV*).

Witnessing

At the suggestion of his high officials, the king established the decree. For 30 days no one could pray to any other God or man except to King Darius. Then to his horror, the king realized the decree was a plot to catch Daniel. All day Darius attempted to save his most trusted governor, but once he had signed the petition, he could not change it.

So Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. Darius could not sleep that night, because he was so worried about his friend. He hoped, however, that Daniel’s God could save him.

Early the next morning, the king rushed to the lions’ den. “Daniel!” He cried out. “Has your God saved you?”

“O King, live forever!” came Daniel’s reply. “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions’” (*see Dan. 6:22, NIV*). Immediately Daniel was removed from the den, and King Darius established a new law, honoring Daniel’s God—the God of heaven.

Our true friends will respect our faith in the God we serve. On the other hand, those who would encourage us to do wrong are not friends at all. Daniel’s enemies devised a plot against him “concerning the law of his God” (*Dan. 6:5*). But Daniel was not ashamed of God. He continued to pray three times a day and to worship Him.

Like Daniel, we should not be ashamed of God. Our friends and associates should see Christ in us. They should know by our conduct what kind of God we serve. In this way, we can lead our friends to Christ.

Not Servants but Friends *(John 15:12-15).*

No matter how ideal our friendships, people are people, and we should never lean totally upon them (*Ps. 118:8, 9; Jer. 17:5*) for sooner or later people will fail us, just as we fail others. That's why our Best Friend, the One whom we can trust implicitly, must be the Lord, whom we can know intimately through Jesus Christ (*John 14:9*). However important human friendships are, however much we can learn to trust in the love and dedication of others, we build upon a flimsy foundation when we build our faith upon anything other than the Rock (*Matt. 7:24, 25*).

Read John 15:12-15. What did Jesus call His disciples? What does it mean to say we are “friends” with God, as opposed to servants? What’s the difference? What kind of relationship does He seek with us? What can we learn from our friendship with God that can help us with other friendships? At the same time, what is unique about our friendship with God that we can have with no one else? (*See, for instance, vs. 14.*)

In verse 13, Jesus reveals the essence of true love and true friendship, which again comes back seeking unselfishly the best for others over and above ourselves. This is the highest ideal, and Jesus here points to His own manifestation of that ideal as His words point to the Cross. It's only as we have the kind of assurance, peace, and security that comes from knowing God, from knowing He is our Friend, from knowing we are accepted by Him, that we can give of ourselves and become the kind of friend who truly is a friend, not only with the Lord but with others.

Look at John 15:13. It presents an incredibly high ideal for friendship. How many friends do you have for whom you would be willing to die? Do you have to be willing to die for someone in order to be called his or her friend? If not, what do you think Jesus is telling us with those words? What principle is He teaching?

“He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend” (*Prov. 22:11, NIV*).

Ask the class to reflect on the best friends they have had. Why have they been close friends? What attributes have they most appreciated in these friends?

VII. The Counsel of a Friend.

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (*Prov. 27:6, NIV*).

“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel” (*Prov. 27:9, NIV*).

What weight should we put on the counsel of friends? How can we judge between good and bad advice?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A fifth-grade class includes 14 bald boys. Are they into the latest fad? Are they emulating a punk rock star? Are they skinheads in training? No. One of their classmates who is undergoing chemotherapy faces the prospect of having his hair fall out in clumps. So he had his head shaved. Thirteen of his classmates shaved their heads, so he would not feel out of place.

How far out of your comfort zone are you willing to go to nurture your Christian friendships? Work friendships? Friendships within your community? Friendships with the unlovely and unloved?

Thought Questions:

- 1 Methods for developing friendships are diverse: What methods are suggested in Galatians 6:2, Proverbs 17:17, 18:24, and Matthew 11:19?
- 2 What is missing when a person restricts friendships to one group (for example, one gender, culture, age group, or socio-economic class)?

Application Question:

How are you taking advantage of the methods that Sabbath School offers for nurturing friendships? How are you helping other people who hope to find friendship at Sabbath School become successful in their search by “being there” and being active? How far outside of your comfort zone are you willing to go regarding time of programs, style of programs, and content?

Further Study: “Friendship may be the only form of human social relationship that is sustained primarily by kindness. . . . One continues to function as a parent, spouse, worker, and neighbor, even though kindness may be lacking. . . . With friendship, it is entirely different. Kindness is the glue that binds friends together. If I should humiliate a friend, be insensitive to the feelings of a friend, cause unnecessary harm or hurt to a friend, or in any way treat a friend as an object that I use for my own pleasure and gratification, the friendship dissolves.”—Ray S. Anderson, *Living the Spiritually Balanced Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House Co., 1998), pp. 78, 79.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① **Research indicates that new Seventh-day Adventists tend to lose most of their old friends within approximately seven years of joining the church. Their former circle of friends tends to be replaced by others whom they have met in their new spiritual home. Is that a good thing, or should new members strive to retain their non-Adventist friends of the past? If so, why, and under what circumstances?**
- ② **The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, including even the giving up of one’s life for a friend. How, though, do we balance that out with our other relationships and obligations, such as to our family or to the Lord? What happens when obligations to friends clash with obligations to family or to the Lord?**
- ③ **Euripides wrote that real friendship is shown in times of trouble; prosperity is full of friends. How does this idea compare with what we have studied this week about friendship?**

Summary: The Bible presents some high ideals for friendship, something that does not come naturally to the human heart. Fortunately, through the example and power of Jesus, we can be the kind of friends the Lord would have us to be.