

Friendship Is...

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

Introduction

Before you conclude that the problems you have are overwhelming, listen to this...

The other day I read about a little blind snail called a Pinna that has a host of enemies. All kinds of creatures are lurking around who would just love to eat the little snail or steal his shell - and he can't even see them coming!

One of the worst enemies of the Pinna is a critter called the Cuttle Fish. No sooner does the Pinna open his bi-valve shell than the Cuttle Fish rushes in and sets up housekeeping. This makes it extremely difficult for the Pinna to get along. Since his shell is basically a one-room affair, with the Cuttle Fish crammed in, there is nothing the Pinna can do but hang out the window, so to speak. The trouble with that is those other enemies - all those other critters who would just love to swim by and dine on some escargot hanging out a window. Sounds kind of miserable, doesn't it?

Fortunately, for the little snail, he has a friend. A tiny crab-like animal that has very keen eyesight is the constant companion of the Pinna. He lives in the shell, but his diminutive size doesn't crowd things too much. Whenever the Pinna is hungry, he opens his valve and sends his little friend scurrying out to find food. If an enemy approaches, the watchful crab dashes back to his blind protector, who quickly closes the valves as soon as his friend is safely inside. On the other hand, when the crab has returned with food, and no foe is nearby, he squeaks gently at the opening of the shell. The snail responds by opening the "door" and the two dine together on the results of the crab's food gathering expedition.

In human circles we call that kind of mutual assistance "friendship." In many ways, just like the little snail and his crabby friend, we depend upon those who are our friends - sometimes for our very lives.

The Bible has some things to say about friendship - and that is what I want to talk to you about. First, it says,

**I. True Friends Are Indispensable.**

We read in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

Many human sayings reflect these sentiments, too. It is said sometimes,

"No man is an island."

"Two heads are better than one."

Among the old Jewish Rabbis, it was put this way:

"Hand cleanses hand, finger cleanses finger."

They even went so far as to say,

"Either friendship or death."

As important as friends and friendship are, though, from time to time I meet people who have no friends. Often it is the result of having been, in the past, hurt by a "friend." Perhaps there has been a double crossing or a betrayal or a bad misunderstanding. That kind of situation really hurts when it happens among friends. It is probably typical human nature to withdraw from close relationships when such things happen. ("Burn me once, shame on you, burn me twice, shame on me!")

While it isn't difficult to understand why a person might have that kind of attitude, we must remember that, though there are inherent risks involved with friendship, to try to make it alone in this world is a perilous road.

Sometimes, too, we just outlive our best friends, and find it difficult to start over making new ones.

If you know someone who has become marooned from friends because of a bad experience, or perhaps they've lost their best friends in death, let me encourage you to reach out to them. Yes, it will take some effort, and there is some risk involved, but their unchecked loneliness can end their life prematurely. Oh, and by the way, if you are one who is lacking friends, you probably need to do something about it. If you've been hurt, you need to take some time, let the wound heal, get over it, then go against those protesting feelings and get about the business of developing some new friends. The same is true if you've outlived your friends. We need friends!

Why? Solomon said in the verses I read that more can be accomplished when two work together.

Try to hang wallpaper by yourself, or, as I did recently, move a heavy, metal desk without someone to help you. It doesn't work very well. Yes, you may get it done, but not without a greatly increased amount of effort, and that wall paper will probably never hang as straight.

Then there is the issue of mutual encouragement.

"Woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up..." Solomon says.

Yes, a person can "go it alone" for awhile - all the while thinking things are going along very well. But what happens when he falls? Who is going to lift him up?

I have a friend who has made two wilderness trips up into British Columbia alone. The only thing he takes with him is what can fit in his canoe. That's dangerous! If he were hurt, no one would know for weeks, maybe even months.

Of course, even more dangerous than that is when a person decides to be a spiritual Lone Ranger. He or she keeps to himself. He goes the hermit route. Satan just loves people who do that, because they are such easy pickings.

"But," someone may protest, "I've tried to make friends, and it hasn't worked. I've just about given up." I'll address that issue in a few moments. First, though, there is another thing that makes friendship indispensable.

I call it greater comfort and warmth.

Solomon says, "if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone."

Those of you who have lost your mates in death know about this one in a very real way. Life without your lifelong partner is a very lonely, cold existence. Some even long for death to come for them, just to relieve the loneliness.

A poem written by Joseph Parry has long challenged me on this issue. Though I am not there yet, I have kept it over the years just in case. Parry wrote,

Make new friends, but keep the old;  
Those are silver, these are gold.  
New made friendships, like new wine,  
Age and mellow and refine.  
Friendships that have stood the test  
Of time and change - are surely best;  
Brow may wrinkle, hair grow gray,

Friendship never knows decay.  
For 'mid old friends, tried and true,  
Once more we our youth renew.  
But old friends, alas! may die  
New friends must their place supply.  
Cherish friendship at your breast -  
New is good, but old is best;  
Make new friends, but keep the old;  
Those are silver, these are gold.

Solomon put it this way in Ecclesiastes 11:6 -

"Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good."

As the years go by, it becomes easier to settle into complacency. Social involvement becomes a chore. Words like, "Let the young people do it, I've made my contribution," begin to creep into our speech.

Remember that Solomon prescribed evening sowing as well as morning.

True friends are indispensable. If you have some, rejoice! You are rich! If you don't, you need to get some.

## **II. True Friends Are Loyal.**

Although the North American Indians had no written vocabulary before the white man came, his language was certainly not primitive. The vocabularies among many of the Indian nations were every bit as large as their French and English exploiters. Our English concept of "friend" was quite eloquently described among some of the Indians as "one-who-carries-my-sorrows-on-his-back." Do you have a friend like that?

Solomon put it this way: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Ecclesiastes 17:17).

How many real friends do you have? Most of us have many acquaintances and just a few real friends. How can you tell the difference?

A real friend is someone who knows all about you yet totally accepts you.

We often stay isolated because we fear that if people really knew us, they wouldn't like us. Acquaintances might be like this, but friends are not.

James Taylor's popular song of the seventies put it this way:

When you're down, and troubled, and you  
need a helping hand,  
And nothing, no nothing is going right.  
Close your eyes and think of me  
and call my name out loud,  
And soon, I'll be knocking upon your door.  
Yeah, just call out my name, and you know  
wherever I am, I'll come running  
To see you again.  
You've got a friend.

That kind of commitment and loyalty doesn't come easy or cheap. When you find it,  
treat it like gold. It's precious.

A true friend will confront you when you need it.

Times of confrontation are the greatest tests of true friendship. Yet, if you have a friend  
who has the courage to tell you the truth about yourself with your best interest at heart,  
prize that friend!

Such a friend, in the confrontation, will always think and expect the very best from you  
and will be tight lipped when it comes to talking to anyone else.

Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..."

A true friend is loyal and he will tell you the truth in confidence, with your best interest at  
heart, even if, momentarily, it hurts.

OK. So what if you lack true friends. What can be done about it? That will be my final  
point.

### **III. True Friends Are Gained By Being A Friend.**

Proverbs 18:24 reads,

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly..."

If a person has no friends, it may not be his fault. The best of friends can suddenly be  
gone. But when a person goes on through life with no friends, there may come a time  
when he or she must consider that it just might be his own fault.

Some folks tend to sit around and complain about things but do little to change them.  
Don't get into the habit of doing that! If you are, then get away from it.

As a minister, I occasionally hear a brother or sister say, "Well, I just don't fit in with the  
fellowship of the church. Nobody cares about me."

Often, upon closer inspection, it is revealed that such a person doesn't care much for anybody else, either. Such a one stays on the outskirts of the fellowship, not participating, not reaching out, not bearing other's burdens, never keeping up with what is going on in other lives than his own, and then complains because no one cares. Couldn't we say to such a person in a nice, but truthful way: "Hey. It's your fault. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly..."

## Conclusion

From childhood, Albrecht Durer wanted to paint. Finally, he left home to study with a great artist. While there he met a friend who had a similar drive to master painting and the two became roommates. Albrecht's friend one day offered to work full time while Albrecht studied. Then, when his paintings began to sell, the friend would have his chance. After much persuasion, Albrecht agreed and studied faithfully while his friend toiled to make a living to support them both.

The day finally came when Albrecht sold his first wood carving and his friend went back to his study of painting, only to find that the years of hard labor had so stiffened and twisted his fingers that he could no longer control his hands with skill. When Albrecht learned about the tragedy it filled him with great sorrow. One day returning home unexpectedly, he heard the voice of his friend and went in to find him with his hands folded, praying. At that point, inspiration for a painting came to him. "I can show the world my appreciation for my friend by painting his hands as I see them now, folded in prayer."

Durer's gratitude for the sacrifice of his friend was captured in his world famous painting that has come to be known simply as the "Praying Hands" that most of you have seen in reproduction form in numerous art and book stores.

Perhaps those hands, the next time you see them, could serve as a reminder to you of what true friendship really is. It is the indispensable quality of loyalty to someone that is even willing to hurt and be hurt in order to be true. If you have a friend like that, or are a friend like that, then you are truly rich!