

How To Be A Good Friend

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "color barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium.

The story goes that while playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered.

Then shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

Have you ever thought, "I wish I had a friend like that", or "I'm glad I have a friend like that." But an even greater challenge to you today is to be able to say, **"I want to BE a friend like that!"**

The question is, How do you become a good friend? How do we make and continue good friendships? The Bible is not silent here. You see the Bible doesn't just talk about Jesus and heaven. It talks about every kind of practical subject you can imagine. And friendship is a very practical thing. We all need to make and maintain good friendships.

Here's one passage from the Bible that gives us some encouragement and direction. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Why not read it because it contains several practical principles for being a good friend

I. HELP YOUR FRIENDS SUCCEED IN LIFE

V 9 *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. When we read these wise words of Solomon we can see right away why we don't always make and maintain good friendships.*

One reason is because we're far too selfish most of the time. Most of us are so absorbed with our own personal success or problems. But in order to be a good friend we must be absorbed with the success of others. The result will be that, what goes around comes around and friendship given, will end up being friendship received.

Selfish people complain when they don't have friends or no body likes them. If that is you, work at being likable instead of worrying because someone doesn't like you. Unselfish people give of themselves and go and make friends instead of waiting for people to come to them and be friendly to them, and in the end they have friends

This is a basic premise of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was always telling stories or parables to illustrate His point. It is through these that

He taught us that service **FOR** others is the highest privilege Mt. 20:28. Earthly kingdoms seek service **FROM** others as evidence of highest honor. The heavenly kingdom works through the freedom of **LOVE**. The kingdoms of earth use **FORCE** to accomplish their goals.

Observation: Now you may be saying people will take advantage of our goodness. Think about this for a minute with me. Service can never become slavery to one who loves. So, if you're really interested in service as an avenue to being and making friends, here are several things I believe you can do to help your friends succeed. First,

A. Pray for their success.

We pray for God to bless us. That's natural. We need to learn to pray for God to bless our friends. Why not try asking God to do for your friends everything you're asking Him to do for you?

When you ask God to bless your family relationships...ask Him to bless your friend's family relationships. When you ask God to help you pay your bills...ask Him to help your friend pay her bills.

B. Encourage them.

In his book ("Encouragement, The Key to Caring") Dr. Larry Crabb recalls an incident in the church he attended as a young man. It was customary in this church that young men were encouraged to participate in the communion services by praying out loud.

Feeling the pressure of expectation, this young man (who had a problem with stuttering) stood to pray. In a terribly confused prayer, he recalls "thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave." When he finished, he vowed he would never again speak or pray out loud in front of a group.

At the end of the service, and not wanting to meet any of the church elders who might feel constrained to correct his theology, Crabb made for the door. Before he could get out, an older man named Jim Dunbar caught him. Having prepared himself for what he was sure was going to be a correction, Crabb instead found himself listening to these words: "Larry, there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand percent."

Crabb reflects in his book: "Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being."

C. Praise them

Someone once noticed that Andrew Carnegie had a lot of millionaires working for him. When asked why this was he replied, "They weren't millionaires when they began working for me. ***When you mine for gold you don't look for the dirt, you look for the gold.***"

Often we think our friends have to be perfect before we praise them. We could learn from Carnegie that we can always find some "gold" to praise our friends about.

II. PICK YOUR FRIENDS UP WHEN THEY FALL

V 10 *"If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"*

Why should we pick up fallen friends? Because we ourselves will eventually fall and need help getting up. Proverbs. 17:17 reminds us *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."*

We think a friend is for the good times, someone with whom we laugh and have fun. Here the Bible tells us a friend is to help us get over the tough times in life. Do any of us want friends SOLELY for the purpose of sharing the good times?

If you are naive enough to believe that, then tell me what you think of a so-called friend when they avoid you when you get in a tight spot? Quite honestly my "best" friends are not the ones who just laughed with me - no, my best friends are the ones who have cried with me!

We should also pick up fallen friends because... **OUR CHILDREN ARE WATCHING OUR EXAMPLE.**

Don't leave a legacy of deserting your friends for others to see. Kids learn by example. Bless your children with a track record of paying the price of standing by your friends. This will be an invaluable lesson for them when they come to the crossroads of life and have to make important decisions about their relationships.

If they have witnessed your loyalty to your friends they will most likely imitate it. If they saw your relationships were more important to you than your material possessions they will follow.

We should also pick up our fallen friends because... Society succeeds or fails on how we treat the weak. It is sickening to witness the applause that goes to the rich and famous in our society, when in many cases, their wealth and fame came at the expense of their relationships.

The current generation of Americans have little value for life because we have trashed life with abortion, mercy killing, and "political correctness". *We place more value on an eagle's egg than a human in its mother's womb.*

And then we begin to question the violence in our schools. We are reaping, as a nation, what we have sowed! *When we do not protect, defend, and guard the rights of the weak and helpless we send a horrible message to future generations.*

Likewise, when we ignore our friends when they need our help, we do the same thing. We send a subtle yet powerful message to our kids that the only people worth our concern are the cosmetically perfect.

Here's a third big principle for being a good friend...

III. BE WARM TO YOUR FRIENDS IN THE COLD TIMES OF LIFE

V 11 - *"Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"*

There are a lot of "cold times" in life when folks need a friend:

- When they are having relationship problems.
- When they are having health problems.
- When they are having financial problems.

Consider these thoughts from Chuck Swindoll: As he wrote in "Leadership", Vol. 4

"An old Marine Corp buddy of mine, to my pleasant surprise, came to know Christ after he was discharged. I say surprise because he cursed loudly, fought hard, chased women, drank heavily, loved war and weapons, and hated chapel services.

A number of months ago, I ran into this fellow, and after we'd talked awhile, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'You know, Chuck, the only thing I still miss is that old fellowship I used to have with all the guys down at the tavern. I remember how we used to sit around and let our hair down. I can't find anything like that for Christians. I no longer have a place to admit my faults and talk about my battles -- where somebody won't preach at me and frown and quote me a verse.'

It wasn't one month later that in my reading I came across this profound paragraph: 'The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality -- but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship.

It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.

With all my heart I believe that Christ wants his church to be unshockable, a fellowship where people can come in and say, 'I'm sunk, I'm beat, I've had it.' Alcoholics Anonymous has this quality -- our churches too often miss it."

- Swindoll continues...

"Now before you take up arms to shoot some wag that would compare your church to the corner bar, stop and ask yourself some tough questions, like I had to do. Make a list of some possible embarrassing situations people may not know how to handle.

A woman discovers her husband is a practicing homosexual. Where in the church can she find help where she's secure with her secret?

Your mate talks about separation or divorce. To whom do you tell it?

Your daughter is pregnant and she's run away -- for the third time. She's no longer listening to you. Who do you tell that to?

You lost your job, and it was your fault. You blew it, so there's shame mixed with unemployment. Who do you tell that to?

Financially, you were unwise, and you're in deep trouble. Or a man's wife is an alcoholic. Or something as horrible as getting back the biopsy from the surgeon, and it reveals cancer, and the prognosis isn't good. Or you had an emotional breakdown. To whom do you tell it?

We're the only outfit I know that shoots its wounded. We can become the most severe, condemning, judgmental, guilt-giving people on the face of the planet Earth, and we claim it's in the name of Jesus Christ. And all the while, we don't even know we're doing it. That's the pathetic part of it all."

IV. STAND UP FOR YOUR FRIENDS

V 12 - *"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken."*

This just goes to show that real friendship is proven by what we do, not just what we say. What do you do when your friend is being attacked by an enemy? He needs you to help him defend himself! And three together makes an even stronger defense than two! Here's one time when "gangs" are good. But just exactly how do you stand up for a friend? First,

A. Make a mutual verbal commitment.

David and Jonathan, two best friends in the Old Testament, did this well. Unlike a lot of men today, Jonathan and David spoke to each other about their commitment.

In I Samuel 20:42 they said. *"We have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord..."*, Let your friends know loud and clear that you are there for them!

B. Be willing to risk what others think.

If you stand up for a friend against his enemies then it naturally follows that they will also become your enemies. That's what keeps a lot of people from being a good friend. ***They are afraid of what others think.***

That doesn't mean defend wrong things our friend has done; But it does mean, defend your friend. There is a difference. What he did was not right but that doesn't mean that he is no longer my friend

C. Don't wait for your friend to ask for your help.

Show some initiative. Make that phone call. Stop and talk with your friend. Press the issue if the situation is serious enough. Do what needs doing for your friend.

Imitate God. He initiated His friendship toward us. He created us in His image. When we sinned and rebelled against Him, He sent His Son Jesus to pay for our sins.

No one has ever been a better friend than Jesus! No one ever followed all of these principles of Solomon better than Jesus!

In closing: I want us to ask ourselves what do I expect of others?

- Do I expect others to be friendly to me?
- Do I expect others to be good to me?
- Do I expect others to lift me up when I am down?
- Do I expect others to encourage me in the tough times in life
- Do I expect others to stand up for me when I mess up?
- Do I expect others to praise me and make me feel good?
- Do I expect others to pray for me?

If, after self evaluation on these questions, you find that you have all of these expectations of others to be friendly to you

Why not practice in your own life what you wish them to practice in theirs towards you and in the end you will find that you will have many more friends than you will sitting and feeling lonely and wondering why no one wants to be your friend.

Another way to look at it would be are my friends in life there, in proportion to the way that I am friendly to others and if so then maybe I need to change.

Question: Based on how you act, would you want to be a friend to yourself? Jesus is our best friend because he simply serves us and takes us as we are. Maybe we should follow in his footsteps in being a friend to someone else.

Maybe you have been reading this and all of a sudden you realized that you have never allowed Jesus to be your friend and you would like to start a friendship with him. It is really quite easy because he really wants to be your friend. To establish this friendship just read the following few lines and by faith do what they say and you will have that friend. A friend that will stand by you through the thick and thin parts of your life's journey.

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God. Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)