

## **A Friend Indeed**

### Shipwrecked Prayers

A voyaging ship was wrecked during a storm at sea and only two of the men on it were able to swim to a small, desert like island. The two survivors, not knowing what else to do, agreed that they had no other recourse but to pray to God.

However, to find out whose prayer was more powerful, they agreed to divide the territory between them and stay on opposite sides of the island.

The first thing they prayed for was food. The next morning, the first man saw a fruit-bearing tree on his side of the land, and he was able to eat its fruit. The other man's parcel of land remained barren.

After a week, the first man was lonely and he decided to pray for a wife. The next day, another ship was wrecked, and the only survivor was a woman who swam to his side of the land. On the other side of the island, there was nothing.

Soon the first man prayed for a house, clothes and more food. The next day, like magic, all of these were given to him. However, the second man still had nothing.

Finally, the first man prayed for a ship, so that he and his wife would leave the island. In the morning, he found a ship docked at his side of the island.

The first man boarded the ship with his wife and decided to leave the second man on the island. He considered the other man unworthy to receive God's blessings, since none of his prayers had been answered.

As the ship was about to leave, the first man heard a voice from heaven booming, "Why are you leaving your companion on the island?"

"My blessings are mine alone, since I was the one who prayed for them," the first man answered. "His prayers were all unanswered and so he does not deserve anything."

"You are mistaken!" the voice rebuked him. "He had only one prayer, which I answered. If not for that, you would not have received any of my blessings."

"Tell me," the first man asked the voice, "What did he pray for that I should owe him anything?"

"He prayed that all your prayers be answered."

For all we know, our blessings are not the fruits of our prayers alone, but those of another praying for us.

My prayer for you today is that all your prayers are answered.

- Author unknown (I searched for the author of this story, and every reference said "author unknown." If anyone knows the author, please let me know).

## **Friends of God**

God created us for fellowship. We need each other. We need friends. Our best example in any relationship is Jesus. His last days before His crucifixion were spent trying to prepare His friends for His departure. The discourse begins in John 13 but He was especially tender when He addressed His closest friends in the middle of chapter 15. In John 15:9-17, what we hear Jesus saying is "I chose you as My friends and now I am going to die for you. If you love Me, you will obey Me by loving one another." Both verses 12 and 17 put love for our friends in the form of a commandment. Verse 13 says that our friendship is measured by our willingness to sacrifice.

Friends were important to Jesus. He sought friends, dined with friends (was accused of being friends with sinners), visited friends (Mary, Martha and Lazarus) and ultimately died for His friends. If our Lord needed friends, how much more do we need them?

## **Other Biblical Examples of Friendship**

### **Paul and Timothy**

In 2 Timothy, we find Paul's last words to his dear friend Timothy. Although Paul asked Timothy to visit several times in this letter, we have no evidence that he ever saw Timothy again. In fact, Paul seemed to be aware that his death was imminent. Scholars

believe that he died shortly after this letter was written. These were possibly his last written words. Knowing that his time was short, Paul took the time to write to Timothy. He had many things he needed to say. In this letter (as in the previous one), Paul instructed his friend, encouraged him, and let him know how important Timothy was to Paul and to Kingdom work.

Just as Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to counsel and stand alongside of us, Paul demonstrated that those are the characteristics of a true friend. Just observe the tender references that Paul had for Timothy.

- The greeting *to Timothy, my dear son* (1:2)
- *Timothy, I thank God for you* (1:3).
- *I long to see you* (1:4).
- Words of encouragement in 1:5-8.
- Words on instruction in 1:9-12.
- Encouragement to follow Paul's example (2:1-3).
- Warned his friend of danger (3:1)
- Reminded Timothy to remain faithful (3:14)
- Don't be afraid. Finish the work (4:5).
- Come to see me (4:9).
- Asked for a special favor. *Bring my coat, books and papers* (4:13).
- Hurry! (4:21). It's as if Paul said, "I really need you. Hurry!"

Paul's last words were full of praise for other friends as well:

- Onesiphorus (1:16-18)
- Luke (4:11)

- Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus (4:19)
- Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and other brethren (4:20-21)

He also expressed deep sorrow at those who had proven not to be his friends:

- Phygellus, Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, Philetus (1:15, 2:17-18)
- Demas (4:10)
- Alexander the coppersmith (4:14)

### **Other Examples**

We find many other examples of friends in the Bible:

- David and Jonathan: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 20:17
- Daniel and his three companions: Daniel 2:49
- Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Jesus: Luke 10:38-42, John 11:1-46
- Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus: Philippians 2:19, 20, 22, 25
- Paul, Priscilla and Aquila: Romans 16:3, 4
- The apostle John: 3 John is filled with mention of several friends and John's love for them (as well as a sad description of one who was not a friend).
- Many others

### **Questions for reflection:**

- What other Biblical examples of friendship have you noted?
- What have you learned from these examples?
- Are you in a mentoring relationship? Paul taught Timothy many things, but it was also evident that Timothy's friendship brought much value to Paul's life. As

a mother of adult sons, I have learned much from their wisdom. Can you see the value of this special relationship for both the person being mentored and the mentor?

### **Guidelines for Friendships**

- Be God's friend first (James 2:23, 4:4).
- After God, your spouse (if you have one) should be your best friend. Husbands and wives have a very special relationship (Ephesians 5:21-33).
- Ask God whom He wants you to befriend (Matthew 11:19).

Choose wisely, but know that He wants you to befriend both believers and unbelievers. How will unbelievers become believers if we don't love them into the Kingdom of God? One caution in such a relationship is to be strong enough in your Christian walk that the unbeliever cannot influence you to do worldly things. If a relationship tends to bring you down, and you are not able to be strong and help the other person up, then it may be best to dissolve the relationship.

This is true especially among young people who are so easily influenced. There is also a special caution in the dating arena. One youth pastor I know tells his young people, "never date someone whom you would not consider a worthy candidate as a spouse."

However, I think that some Christians err on the other side as well and determine never to become friends with anyone who is not a Christian. That is definitely not a Biblical standard. Your best friends will probably be Christians, but if you have an evangelistic heart, God will lead you to befriend those who need to know Him. Of course, Jesus was a friend of sinners and we should be, too. However, we should recognize the

limitations of that relationship.

*The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray*

(Proverbs 12:26 NLT).

**Questions for reflection:**

- Have you considered the Biblical guidelines for friendship?
- Have you ever had a friendship that was destructive? If you are still in that friendship, what should you do about it?
- How do you think making God your top priority in life affects the relationship you have with your friends?
- In John 13:15, Jesus said that we should follow his example. What does this tell you about your attitude toward your friends?

**Choosing Friends Wisely**

- *Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself* (Proverbs 22:24 NASB). **Choose someone who is not easily angered.**
- *Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies, for as he thinks within himself, so he is* (Proverbs 23:6 NASB). **Choose someone who is not selfish or stingy.**
- *He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm* (Proverbs 13:20 NASB). *Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge* (Proverbs 14:7 NASB). *Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words* (Proverbs 23:9 NASB). **Choose someone who is not foolish.**

- *Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their minds devise violence, and their lips talk of trouble (Proverbs 24:1 NASB). How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers! (Psalms 1:1 NASB). **Choose someone who is not evil.***
- *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB). **Choose someone who is not unruly or disorderly.***
- *He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets. Therefore do not associate with a gossip (Proverbs 20:19 NASB). **Choose someone who is not a gossip.***
- *Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags (Proverbs 23:20-21 NASB). **Choose someone without serious addictions.***
- *It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman. . . . It is better to live in a desert land, than with a contentious and vexing woman (Proverbs 21:9, 19 NASB). **Men (and women), choose your spouse carefully.***
- *This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20 NASB). **Even among Christian brothers, there is a limit.***

- **But be forgiving.** *But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree . . . to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him (2 Corinthians 2:5-11 NASB). For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matthew 6:14 NASB).*
- **Satan will try to divide the people of God.** See 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 5:1-6.

**Questions for reflection:**

- How important is it for you to choose your friends wisely?
- In the verses above, what catches your attention? Are there some principles here that you have not thought of before?

**Special Christian Friendships**

There is a special friendship/kinship among believers, but even in the family of God, you should choose your friends wisely.

- *I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts (Psalm 119:63 NKJV).*
- *Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them, so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name (Malachi 3:16 NKJV).*
- *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers (Acts 2:42 NKJV).*

- *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (Philippians 1:3-5 NKJV).*
- *. . . but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:7 NKJV).*

**Questions for reflection:**

- It has been said that you are known by the company you keep. How do you respond to that statement?
- Are your friends helping you mature in your Christian faith? Do they tend to hold you back?
- Reflect on the Christian friends who have helped you grow in your relationship to God. Does someone stand out?
- Do you allow your Christian friends the opportunity to correct your behavior if needed? Do you have an “accountability partner”?
- Do you remember to thank God for those special friends? In what ways can you show your gratitude?

**Characteristics of A Friend**

1. Loves (Proverbs 17:17; 1 Corinthians 13)
2. Prays (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)
3. Is a giver, not always a receiver (Proverbs 18:24)

*I went out to find a friend. But could not find one there. I went out to be a friend. And friends were everywhere! ~ Author unknown.*

4. Gives godly counsel (Proverbs 27:9)

*A friend is... a push when you're stopped - a word when you're lonely - a guide when you're searching - a smile when you're sad - a song when you're glad!*

~ Author unknown.

5. Is consistent (Proverbs 27:10)
6. Is interested in your growth (Proverbs 27:17)
7. Stays by your side (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). *Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?* (Amos 3:3). The North American Indian describes a friend as "one-who-carries-my-sorrows-on-his-back."

**Questions for reflection:**

- Are these characteristics true of you?
- Can you think of one or more of your friends who embody these characteristics?
- What difference does it make in your life to have a friend like this?

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An English publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend, and among the thousands of answers received were the following:

- "One who multiplies joys, divides grief."
- "One who understands our silence."
- "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth."
- "A watch which beats true for all time and never runs down."
- But here is the best definition that won the prize: "A friend - the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

“Only God Gives a Friend” by Rosalie Carter

I think that God will never send,  
A gift so precious as a friend.  
A friend who always understands,  
And fills each need as it demands.  
Whose loyalty will stand the test.  
When skies are bright or overcast.

Who sees the faults that merit blame,  
But keeps on loving just the same  
Who does far more than creeds could do,  
To make us good, to make us true,  
Earth's gifts a sweet contentment lend,  
But only God can give a friend!

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Describe your best friend. Why is she so special to you?
- Can you recall a time when you made it through a really tough circumstance because of the care of a friend? If so, did you ever say “thank you?”
- Do you have friends that pray faithfully for you?
- Do you pray faithfully for your own friends?
- What are some ways that you can grow as a friend?
- What are some ways that you can let your friends know how valuable they are to you?
- Reflect again on what Jesus had to say to his friends before he died. *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you* (John 15:12-15 NKJV).
- What does it mean to you to be a friend of Jesus? What can you learn from his example as a friend? Have you ever thought of him in this role? John 15:13 tells us how important that role was to Jesus.