The Benefits of Friends

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 / John 15:13-15

3/12/23

Friends are wonderful things to have … AMEN? That’s one of the blessings of growing up in a smaller community. You have friends that you grew up with … friends you went to school with … friends you are relate to, life-long friends. There’s something to be said for having “friends”. This morning, being “FRIEND DAY”, we are going to look at what the Bible says about “The Benefits of a Friend”. We’ll look at a couple of things this morning...” WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A FRIEND?” & “WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A FRIEND?”

There are different types or classifications of friends.

1.- Acquaintances

* People you know (but maybe can’t always remember their name), yet you say “Hi” to them whenever you see them at Wal-Mart or the Post Office or Bank.

2.- Casual Friends

* You see them more often than acquaintances, usually at the same place every time. You have common interests. Maybe you’re in the same class, on the same committee, your kids are friends, or you see them at church.

3.- Close Friends

* You visit them at their house, or they come over to your house. You go hunting or fishing together. You go grab something to eat with them, You sit and talk with them for hours. You enjoy their company and look forward to seeing them often.

4.- Intimate Friends

* Your BEST friend. You can get up-close and personal with them. You can share what’s in your heart … your problems, struggles, goals, joys.

The Bible has several references to “friends” in the Bible.

* Jesus called Judas, “Friend” when Judas came to betray him in the Garden of Gethsemane?” Judas betrayed that “friendship”, but Jesus was still offering His friendship to Judas.
* Remember the paralytic man, who was carried by his 4 friends to the house where Jesus was? They tore a hole in the roof to let him down, so Jesus could heal him. That’s some awesome friends!

So, let’s look this morning 1st at:

**I. WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A FRIEND?**

We find a good lesson of “friendship” in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

*9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

*4:9*

**When friends work together**, you can accomplish twice as much. There was an O.T. Law that forbid the use of an Ox and donkey together in the field.

* Deut. 22:10 – *“You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together.*
  + WHY was that? It has to do with the strength of the animals in question. Yoking two bulls together would not present a problem for a farmer wanting to plow a field. The animals are equal in strength, and can pull heavy loads with ease. But if you replace a bull with a donkey, which is smaller and weaker than a bull, it would likely rebel by kicking the traces holding it in the yoke.
  + The apostle Paul wrote something similar concerning humans. He said: “Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers.” (2 Corinthians 6:14) This shows that interfaith marriage, while common today, is not biblical

.It’s true that some people just don’t click. But it’s awesome to have a friend or friends there to help us accomplish our goals or help carry something that has the 2 little guys on it meaning it’s heavy. When FRIENDS work together, you don’t have tension or division, but unity and much can be accomplished.

* FRIENDS help each other succeed.
* FRIENDS don’t put each other down.
* FRIENDS encourage each other.
* FRIENDS work together.

*4:10*

In John 5 there was in helpless man at the Pool of Bethesda answering Jesus if he’d like to get well. In John 5:7 – “*I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”.* When he needed a “friend”, there was none around.

**FRIENDS are there to pick each other up when they fall.**

* Proverbs 17:17 – A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need. (NKJV - “A friend loveth at all times)
* This verse means that a friend is born for the purpose of being there for you when adversity comes into your life.

*“But someone who falls alone is in real trouble* “(“woe to him that is alone”)

Have you ever known anyone who didn’t have many, or any, friends? That must be a lonely life. A sad one. I can’t imagine not having any real friends. It’s got to be tough to go through life … ALONE … lonely … friendless.

Someone said that you can tell if you’ve been successful in life, if you have enough close friends to act as pallbearers at your funeral! A FRIEND will be there for you when adversity, hard times, and difficulty comes.

*4:11*

It’s no secret that the world is a cold, cruel place! It’s hard to keep warm when you’re alone. As if you’re being out in the cold night, a FRIEND can provide “body heat” to keep you alive for survival. It’s hard to be warm when you’re alone.

* **A friend is an ENCOURAGER**. They give you the “warmth” you need to keep going; making you feel warm inside when the world is cold and freezing. They keep you feeling comfortable and confident. CONTRAST this with someone who always sees the negative, always criticizing, always trying to correct you, set you straight, always finding fault. “With friends like that, who needs enemies?”

*4:12a*

Battles in Bible times were usually fought in hand-to-hand combat. Two would fight side-by-side, back-to-back. No matter where the enemy came from, you could defend yourself **BECAUSE your friend “had your back”.**

Have you got a FRIEND like that? When you’re in a battle, whether financial, emotional, health, mental or even spiritual, you want a friend who will have and GUARD your back...NOT STAB you in the back … AMEN? You want someone you can trust … someone you can count on. One who will go to battle with you...THAT’S a true friend.

* You want someone who will stand up for you when others are putting you down.
* You want a friend won’t stand for GOSSIP and will shut it down instantly.
  + What is GOSSIP? It’s when you say something negative or unkind about someone, whether it’s true or not, and they’re not there.

There will be times in everyone’s life when you will need a partner in battle. A time when you need a FRIEND … to be in your corner … to fight with you … to believe in you and help you to victory.

*4:12b*

It’s nice to have more than 1 friend. It’s awesome when you have a group of friends. It’s easier to break one string, than 3 strings that are woven together into a rope. You can call them a “support group” … or “crazy group” … “group counseling” … whatever. You can’t have too many friends.

SO … WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A FRIEND?

• Working together … equally yoked … helping each other succeed.

• Picking each other up when they fall … when adversity comes.

• Encouraging each other … keeping each other warm.

• Guarding your back … believing in you … fighting for you.

II. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A FRIEND?

**1. They Accept You**

* Proverbs 17:17 – A friend is always loyal (A friend loveth)

It’s been said that “a friend is someone who knows all about you and yet loves you anyway! They accept you as you are, even with your quirks, your faults, your failings, your oddities. Knowing all this, they STILL want to be your friend! There used to be an old show “The Andy Griffith Show” I think of Andy & Barney. Barney could be a real crazy little guyl! He was a little odd … different … quirky … annoying at times. BUT … Andy was always there for him. He ACCEPTED him … as Barney. “A friend loveth at all times.”

**2. They Are Friendly**

* Proverbs 18:24 – “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly:”

Do you know why some people don’t have many FRIENDS? BECAUSE … they aren’t “friendly”. Some people are just NATURALLY friendly. Some people must LEARN to be friendly. The truth is you won’t have many friends if you aren’t FRIENDLY! It’s hard to make friends if you’re critical, negative, or fault-finding. “Friends” … are FRIENDLY!

**3.- They Are Truthful**

* Proverbs 27:6 – “Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.”
* (AMP) Faithful are the wounds of a friend [who corrects out of love and concern],

Someone once said that “A true friend stabs you in the front.” SOMETIMES the truth HURTS. BUT a true friend will be HONEST with you … even if it hurts. That’s also called “Tough Love”.

**You WANT a true friend to be HONEST with you, TRUTHFUL IN LOVE**, even if your feelings get hurt. You don’t want a FRIEND who tells you only what you want to hear, agrees with you even if you’re wrong or even worse, won’t confront you when you’re heading in the wrong direction.

* Proverbs 27:17 says – “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.”
* That’s what a FRIEND does. They should be there to make you a better person … to “sharpen” you.
* If your FRIENDS aren’t making you BETTER … you’d might want to get some new friends. “Choose your friends wisely because truth is you become what they are.”

Look really quick though at the 2nd part of that verse...” kisses from an enemy.”

* Proverbs 27:6 Amplified Bible (AMP)

But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful [because they serve his hidden agenda]

Beware of the “kisses of an enemy”. They might flatter and pander you … BUT … they aren’t true FRIENDS. They only want something from you that serves THEIR agenda!

SO … WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A FRIEND?

* They accept you … warts, smells and all.
* They are friendly … not critical and fault-finding.
* They are honest and truthful … sharpening you … even if it hurts.
* They don’t take advantage of you or mislead you.

Closing:

In closing this morning, we’ve looked at what it takes to be a friend (the expectation, the need, and the requirements of a friend) & we’ve looked at the characteristics (accepting, friendly, truthful, and loving) of a friend. With that knowledge this morning, I want us to be thankful for the friends we have, the ones God has put in our life to help us through this sometimes-insane life...But that said there is One who desires and did everything there was to do to become you’re BEST FRIEND...His name is Jesus.

John 15:13-15 Jesus says,

***13 There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.***

Ladies and gentlemen, truth is think about your best friend in this life and multiple their awesomeness times infinity and that’s the relationship Jesus desires with all of us. You can have no greater friend than Jesus … WHY?

1.- He’s There to Pick You Up

Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

We’ve all FALLEN short of God’s glory. Gal. 5:4 says that we are “fallen from grace.” Only Jesus is able to pick you up. Nobody can get to Heaven by picking themselves up and making it to heaven.

2.- He Accepts You

John 15:13- *There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*

Jesus places a high value on “friendship”. It’s one thing to choose somebody to be your friend, but it’s another thing for somebody to choose YOU as their friend.

There’s a difference. You might choose somebody to be your friend AND they might not want to be your friend. BUT … if they choose you … it’s an HONOR!

* NOTICE what Jesus DOESN’T say. He DOESN’T SAY, “I am YOUR FRIEND, if you do whatever I command you.” HE SAYS, “**YOU ARE MY FRIEND, if you do whatever I command you.”**

Jesus WANTS YOU as a FRIEND. What an honor! Jesus ACCEPTS you, just as you are, warts, smells and all! He gave His LIFE for you so you don’t have to be alone, so you have someone to help you get through the garbage of this life, so you could have “Life, and Life Abundant”, not just get through it...Sin destroyed our chance of ever having a relationship and friendship with God, but Jesus “laid down His life”, took your place on the cross, took your punishment, and restored the opportunity for me to have a relationship with God & spend eternity with Him in Heaven. WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS! … AMEN?

So, in these closing moments, how can you show your “friendship” to Jesus? Look at 15:14. We are to respond to His “friendship”, by being a true FRIEND. We are to live our lives in obedience to what He has tells us or has commanded in His Word. To deliberately disobey Jesus, isn’t being a true FRIEND, it’s called BETRAYAL.

Listen, on the real level this morning, Jesus is the best friend you’ll ever have. **Do you have that friendship with Jesus this morning?** If not, He’s here this morning and has already done His part to become your best friend. He’s already decided you are worth it and a value to be a friend with!

Will you accept his invite to a friendship and relationship this morning and see what a True Friend He really is and see WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS!