Investing for Friendship

*2nd in Feb. 2017 Series, “Values that Build Relationships”*

# Key idea: Practicing friendship is Biblical, healthy and rewarding.

# Key Verses Romans 12:9, 10

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.   
Rom 12:9-10 NIV

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.   
Rom 12:9-10 NRSV

9 Love sincerely. Hate evil. Hold on to what is good. 10 Be devoted to each other like a loving family. Excel in showing respect for each other.   
Rom 12:9-10 GOD'S WORD Translation

# The Bible encourages friendship.

## Key Bible words with a message of friendship

There are three different Greek words for love used in Romans 12:9, 10.

### Agape

The first one is Agape, which is translated with the word love at the beginning of verse 9. This Greek word is the usual Bible word for God’s love for us and for the love between a husband and wife. It denotes a love of the will, not just an affection. A person who loves with Agape love has made a conscious decision to love another. Here in Romans 12:10 Apostle Paul is encouraging us to love intentionally and without hypocrisy. In fact, the Greek word translated as genuine (NRSV) has the root letters from which we derive our English word hypocrisy in it.

### Philadelphia

The second Greek word is Philadelphia. In the NRSV it is found translated with the word love at the beginning of Romans 12:10. It means literally “brotherly love.” There are three other passages where both of these words for love appear together. In 1 Thess. 4:9 and 1 Peter 1:22 the two words seem to be used roughly as synonyms. But in 2 Peter 1:7 the additive construction demands that Peter is emphasizing some difference in connotation. The emphasis may be on “brotherly kindness” as the word is sometimes translated.

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.  
2 Peter 1:5-7 NRSV

### Philostorgoi

There is another word for family affection in the Greek of Romans 12:10. Since it would be awkward to use the English word for love twice, the translators usually use some kind of descriptive phrase or expression. Actually, this word is the main verb in verse ten. It means to show the kind of love that you find in a loving family.

When we think of love in the family of God, we are reminded that John wrote that all who “received” Jesus would receive the privilege of become children of God (John 1:12). So in Christ, family affection is even deeper. We are spiritually one family.

I like the way Holman Christian Standard Bible translates Romans 12:10

Show family affection to one another with brotherly love.

So just our noticing of this triple emphasis upon love in Romans 12:9, 10 is enough to help us understand that God encourages friendship.

## Bible helps us avoid friendship pitfalls too

We hardly need to go into how the Bible also leads us away from so many things that kill friendships--harsh words, roots of bitterness, coveting and envy, using people to enrich ourselves. If we school ourselves on biblical values, we will also be learning to avoid many friendship pitfalls.

# Being a friend strengthens relationships.

## Friendship important

Back in my high school teen years there was a song sung by famous duet of Simon and Garfunkel with the key line, “I am a rock, I am an island.” The main idea of the song seemed to be that a person could be like a hermit without connections. But the Bible tells us a different truth.

None of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. Rom 14:7 NIV

The Bible’s point, is that we are in relationships. We are connected in many ways. When we stop to think about it, this truth is obvious. Some are work relationships, some are casual relationships from daily or weekly commerce. Some are family relationships, both close family and extended family. Some are relationships forged through past connections or events. But the question I have for us is this. Are there some of these relationships where friendship is a key part of a dynamic? The reason for the question is that we need friends more than we realize!

## Men and Women different in friendship

We do we need to acknowledge that men and women have a little bit of different perspective about friendship. Men’s friendships tend to be more related to things they do and women’s friendships focus more on communicating thoughts and feelings.

“For the most part, men’s friendships revolve around activities while women’s revolve around sharing” (The Friendship Factor by Alan Loy McGinnis p. 11).

But both sexes need to learn some basic Biblical attitudes and skills in order to be friendly and make friends.

## Benefits of being a friend and having friends

There are key benefits of friendship that we can and should enjoy. In our day and age we need to be reminded of the importance of friendship because it’s so easy to get lost in just doing business. Let me list a few of the benefits of being a friend and having friends.

### Friendship is good for our health.

“The lack of social relationships constitutes a major risk factor for health that rivals in importance the effects of such well-established health factors as cigarette smoking, blood pressure, blood lipids, exercise and obesity.” July 29 1988 issue of Science Journal  
 quoted in The Healing Power of Doing Good p. 31

### Friendship provides support structure

Actually, last week during his testimony Michael Madry gave us a first rate example of one of the great benefits of friendship. Michael testified that during his recovery from his stroke the family of God here has been a great support structure for him and Susan. That is one of the roles of friends in our lives. Friends provide support structure both emotionally and when things go wrong. Friends are the first to come to our aid. Friends pray for us. Friends are the first to suspect when help is needed.

### Friendship skills help us in other relationships

Friendship skills help us much more than we realize in our work.

“Even viewed from a financial perspective, our friendships are our most valuable commodity. Studies at the Carnegie Institute of technology revealed that even in such fields as engineering, about 15% of one’s financial success is due to one’s technical knowledge and about 85% is due to skill and human engineering – to personality and the ability to lead people.

Dr. William Menninger has found that when people are discharged from their jobs in industry, social incompetence accounts for 60 to 80% of the failures. Only 20 to 40% are due to technical incompetence” (The Friendship Factor by Alan Loy McGinnis p. 15).

Friendship skills are a huge factor in the success or lack of success in marriages as well. Dr. Alan Loy McGinnis, a counselor for many years writes:

In research at our clinic, my colleagues and I have discovered that friendship is the springboard to every other love. Friendship spills over onto the other important relationships of life. People with no friends usually have a diminished capacity for sustaining any kind of love. They tend to go through a succession of marriages, be estranged from various family members, and have trouble getting along at work. On the other hand, those who learn how to love their friends tend to make long and fulfilling marriages, get along well with the people at work, and enjoy their children. (The Friendship Factor by Alan Loy McGinnis p. 9).

I always tell couples that friendship is what makes a marriage rich. If you see an older couple whose marriage you admire holding hands after thirty-plus years of marriage, it is likely that friendship was a huge factor in creating that kind of close relationship.

Consider the summary words of the wise man Solomon from the book of Ecclesiastes on the value of friendship.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:  
If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.  
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?  
Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.  
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Eccl 4:9-12

I have noticed as a pastor that some of the most powerful ministries in the churches I have pastored were led by a team of two or three close friends. These ministry leadership teams tended to gather strength and exhibit leadership longevity too. Whereas ministries led by individuals leading alone were sometimes more fragile and exhibited more leadership burn-out. This difference was most evident when a leadership team had been doing well and one leader had to leave the team for some unrelated reason, leaving the remaining leader to struggle on alone. The difference in the strength of the ministry usually was very evident. It is not just the difference of one less leader, it is the difference between the strength of a friendship team versus an individual working alone.

# Practical ways to grow in friendship

## 1. Prioritize people

Think of what Jesus did. He spend his time with people. He didn’t write books. He didn’t hide away in a monastery. He walked and talked with his disciples. Wherever he went, he seemed interested first of all in the needs of people. One of the best examples is in John chapter 4. Jesus noticed someone what everyone else would have ignored, the woman at the well. Think also about the many times Jesus noticed lepers, or blind beggars beside the road, or little children, and the disciples wanted him to get on with seemingly more important business but Jesus stopped to meet their needs. In the words of our text for this morning, “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10). In our closest relationship, our marriage and family relationships, the main way that prioritizing people evidences itself is in spending time. It takes time to be a friend.

## 2. Do acts of kindness

An even more basic attitude of friendship is treating one another with respect and evidencing respect with words and deeds of kindness, both small and not so small.

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.   
1 John 3:18 NRSV

## 3. Bear with and forgive each other

It is pointless to think that we can be friends without figuring out what to do when our humanity gets in the way. We are sometimes grumpy. We can inadvertently offend a coworker. Maybe a friend offends us. If we can only have as friends, those people with whom we have never experienced some kind of break or interruption or difficulty, we will soon have no friends left.

It is a little like gardeners and rose bushes. One doesn’t work around roses long without getting cut by a thorn. But gardeners don’t quit growing roses. They like to see the beautiful blooms and smell the sweet fragrances.

People have thorns too. When you spend time with friends, sometimes it is going to hurt. But we like the blooms that come from friendship. We like to see people grow and bloom so we keep working among the thorns. And one advantage of working with people – often the thorns disappear or become soft as Christ works in their hearts and in ours as love overcomes barriers.

So one of the essential skills of friendship is being able to recover the friendship when there is a tension, a disagreement, a fight. What do we do then? Here the New Testament comes to our aid in a huge way. Consider these two texts.

Eph. 4:31-32 ESV “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Col. 3:12, 13; ESV “ Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

So we

• Focus on gifts, not rough edges. Be affirming not critical whenever possible. Bear with one another.

• Forgive wrongs. Holding grudges or nursing anger will kill a friendship and seriously jeopardize even a marriage. Jesus empowers our ability to forgive.

## 4. Actively listen.

When we stop to truly listen to what the other person is saying and seek to understand their perspective, they feel cared for. I read a story about a very wise Mom who couldn’t afford a fancy doll that did all the tricks that dolls were doing so she bought her daughter a doll she could afford and sold her daughter on it completely by saying simply, “This is a special doll, my dear daughter, this doll listens.” (MA-FR)

There are many lonely people who need a friend to listen. Unfortunately, some of them do not have one simply because whenever they get together with a potential friend they do all the talking. The first requirement for listening seems rather obvious, but I know people who don’t practice it. It is to stop doing all the talking.

The second skill needed is to pay attention to what the other person is saying. Have you ever talked to someone who gave you a chance to talk and when they started talking again, it was just as if they hadn’t? Their new conversation took right off where they had stopped, regardless of anything you had said in the meantime? You felt ignored. That kind of non-listening will not win you friends.

## 5. Strive to speak well of others.

We are reminded by Saint Paul that no unwholesome words, no rotten words, no hurtful words should be coming out of our mouths. Instead we should be striving to fill our conversation with words that build each other up, with grace-giving words (see Eph. 4:29).

The book of Proverbs has much advice for us on this topic.

Pr 16:24 NIV “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

Pr 12:18 “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Pr 10:19, “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

Pr. 10:21. “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.”

# Conclusion

*Prayer: Our Father, forgive us when we think mostly of ourselves and are too busy with our agenda to experience your gift of friendship love. Please continue to teach us to love one another as Jesus did, for our own sake, as well for the sake of his body, in his name we pray, AMEN.*