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"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17).

True Friendship

Lesson Subject: Friendship demands loyalty.

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Topic: Friendship.

"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24).

Blessed is the man who is a friend and has a friend! The word "*friend*" comes from a root which means "to love." He is "a person whom one knows well and is fond of; an intimate associate; a close acquaintance." The Bible word for friend means "loved, dear one." The commitment of love is the basis of friendship.

We know that Jesus is our friend. The Bible says He is an indispensable friend. We would be desolate indeed without Him. This study of friendship should be made with a thought in mind that Jesus is the best friend a person could ever have. Just before He went to die for us on the cross, He said, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. . . . I call you not servants. . . but I have called you friends*" (John 15:13, 15).

Someone has said, "A friend is one who knows all about you, and loves you just the same." That is a practical application of the Bible text which says, "*A friend loveth at all times*" (Proverbs 17:17). The friendship of Jonathan and David illustrates that a true friend seeks your best interest in adversity and in prosperity.

A Christian can show the spirit of Jesus in being a faithful friend.

I. GIVEN OF GOD (Proverbs 16:7)

A true friend is a gift of God. God ministers to us through friends.

A. God gives us peace through our friends. *"When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"* (Proverbs 16:7). Enemies become friends under the blessings of God. The number of friends and the depth of friendships are the gift of God. The presence of our friends contributes to our peace.

B. God comforts us through our friends. Even a great Christian like the apostle Paul needed the ministry of friends. He wrote, *"God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus"* (II Corinthians 7:6). That ministry is needed by missionaries, pastors, evangelists, and every other Christian. Paul wrote of his desire to visit the Christians in Rome, Italy, *"that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me"* (Romans 1:12). You can comfort a friend by your visit with him today.

C. God encourages our spirits through our friends. Three brethren named Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus *"have refreshed my spirit and your's."* Paul wrote in I Corinthians 16:18. The fellowship of Corinthian Christians refreshed Titus (II Corinthians 7:13). Onesiphorus often refreshed Paul (II Timothy 1:16). You can be a source of strength to your friends in Christ.

II. PROTECTS YOUR REPUTATION (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9)

A true friend will protect your reputation.

A. Evil people destroy friendships by spreading gossip (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9). God commands that no Christian is to be a scandalmonger, a "busybody," for such is a disorderly walk (II Thessalonians 3:11). No Christian should be *"a busybody in other men's matters"* (I Peter 4:15). Gossip or talebearing is strictly forbidden of God and is sin (I Timothy 5:13).

B. Good people do not sin against others by their speech. God warns, *"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain"* (James 1:26). That means one's profession of yielding to the lordship of Jesus Christ is empty unless he controls what he says. A rule which all Christians must follow was stated centuries ago: *"Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it"* (Psalm 34:13, 14).

C. Refraining from gossip is a sign of Christian love. If a brother or a sister is guilty of some serious error, what is to be done? The Bible says, *"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends"* (Proverbs 17:9). The Christian principle is to restore the erring brother (Galatians 6:1) in a spirit of sincere Christian love (I Peter 4:8).

III. ALWAYS AVAILABLE (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; 27:10)

A true friend is available to you at all times.

A. A true friend is available because he loves you under all conditions. *"A friend loveth at all times"* (Proverbs 17: 17). He follows the example of Jesus who, having loved His own, loved them to the end in spite of their failures (John 13:1). Here is the way God designed two friends to minister to one another: *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10).

B. A true friend is always available because he is more committed than a blood relative. *"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24). One has no control over who his blood relatives are, but he chooses his friends by an act of the will and under the eye of God. In some instances the bond of friendship is more binding than a bond of blood relationship.

C. A true friend is always available because he will not forsake his friend. That is a divine principle, for God commands, *"Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not"* (Proverbs 27:10). One owes an obligation to a friend who has been faithful. That friend should not be forsaken because he will not forsake. True friendship means constant availability.

IV. CULTIVATES THE FRIENDSHIP (Proverbs 18:24)

A true friend cultivates his friendships.

A. A true friend has a desire to be a friend. *"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly"* (Proverbs 18:24). Friendship is not a one-way street where one receives but does not give. Some lonely people wish they had a friend, but they take no interest in other people in order to

become friends with them. One who wants friends should take the initiative in cultivating friendships.

B. A true friend performs acts of friendliness. Let a lady devote herself to helping those who are in need. She will have many friends who, like Dorcas' friends, will share in her calamities of life (Acts 9:36-41). Those ladies would not have wept over Dorcas if she had not shown her loving concern for them in providing for their needs. Friendship is not just what one feels; it is something one shows by his action. If you would have friends, therefore, show yourself friendly in a spirit of true concern for others.

C. A true friend has the blessing of even more friends. Proverbs 18:2 could teach us, *"He who shows himself friendly will have more and more friends."* There is no reason for your friendship to be limited to one or two people. Include many people in your ministry of love and you will have many friends.

V. SHOWS FORTH JESUS (Proverbs 18:24)

A true friend shows the influence of Jesus in his life.

A. God is a friend of men. He delights when His people come to see Him and to ask His help (II Chronicles 20:4). He who trusts God sincerely is called *"the Friend of God"* (James 2:23). You can come to God knowing you will be received by Him as one who is the friend of sinners as well as saints.

B. Jesus was a true friend during His incarnate ministry on earth. His friendship was based on true love. He was willing to wash the feet of His disciples to show them His loving concern for them (John 13:5). One of His disciples leaned on His breast as they reclined at the table. He is identified only as *"one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved"* (John 13:23). Even personal sorrow did not change Jesus' friendship. *"When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end"* (John 13:1).

C. Jesus is our true friend today. He is our friend, even when we fail; so He is called *"a friend of sinners"* (Luke 7:34; 5:27-32; 15:1, 2). Knowing that we who are sick need a physician, He comes and ministers to us as our friend.

It is right that we sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Whatever our situation in life, Jesus is the friend we need.

VI. DEALS HONESTLY (Proverbs 27:4-6, 9)

A true friend deals honestly with all people.

A. A true friend does not envy your blessings. No one can stand before envy (Proverbs 27:4), so a true friend does not envy. He makes no plans for revenge at another's blessing (Genesis 27:41), neither does he pout at another's elevation (Luke 15:28). His primary concern is not for his own advantage, but for the well-being of the other person. In a body of friends, *"whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it"* (I Corinthians 12:26).

B. A true friend lovingly rebukes errors. *"Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend"* (Proverbs 27:5, 6). A true friend does not overlook faults. He points them out in love that they may be corrected. It is a kindness when a righteous person smites, and an act of healing when he reproves (Psalm 141:5). Paul rebuked Peter very plainly (Galatians 2:11); yet Peter afterward referred to him as *"our beloved brother Paul"* and spoke of *"the wisdom given unto him"* (II Peter 3:15). Thank God for friends who rebuke our errors in order to help us grow in godliness.

C. A true friend wisely counsels your conduct. His counsel encourages the heart like ointment and perfume (Proverbs 27:9). He knows that *"righteousness delivereth from death"* (Proverbs 11 :4) and helps one walk in that way. Thank God for such a friend.

VII. STRENGTHENS HIS PARTNER (Proverbs 27:11, 17, 19)

A true friend gives strength to his partner.

A. A true friend promotes inward joy (Proverbs 27:11). There is a lifting of spirit when a friend comes, even in the midst of the worst of circumstances. The face lightens because the spirit lifts. Friends bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

B. A true friend develops spiritual values (Proverbs 27:12). He has foresight and considers the results before he acts. He passes on his spiritual wisdom to others, who can pass it on to many others (II Timothy 2:2). Like spiritual leaders of old, he teaches others *"how they should fear the LORD"* (II Kings 17:28). It is wise to seek friends who have spiritual values in their lives and can share them with others.

C. A true friend shares a unity of spirit (Proverbs 27:19). Like *"the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"* (I Samuel 18:1), so the heart of a true friend is knit to the

hearts of his friends. That produces a commitment each to the other which nothing can break (I Samuel 20:16, 17). That is the unity which Christians express when they call one another "brother" and "sister." That unity is closer than physical relationship.

Think back to the words of Jesus: "*I call you not servants; . . . but . . . friends.*" (See John 15:12-15.) He is a gift from God, protects our reputation, is always available, cultivates His friendship, deals honestly with us, and strengthens us in the Lord. Indeed, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus!"

QUESTIONS

1. What does Proverbs 18:24 mean to you?
2. How is John 15:13-15 related to this study?
3. What is the meaning of Proverbs 17:17?
4. How have you experienced the truth of Romans 1:12?
5. How does Proverbs 17:9 apply to your life?
6. How does Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10 show the importance of a friend?