



“better THAN PERFECT”

Inventory of Friendship

Text: 1 Samuel 23:14-18

Business Administrator Michael Sullivan

1. See 1 Samuel 23:16. True friends move towards one another when a moment of need arises.
 - a. Can you think of either a positive or negative example when you were in a time of need and your friends either moved toward you or away from you? How did that affect you, positively or negatively?
 - b. Is there someone you know or a group of people in need who you feel in your flesh a desire to move away from? Is there someone you feel an urge to move towards but have been hesitant? Why do you think that is? Is it fear of not knowing what to say or do?
 - c. What did Jesus want from His disciples the night He was betrayed and about to go to the cross? (See Mark 14:32-34).
 - d. How does this free you from the need to have to say or do the “right thing” in the midst of someone’s pain?

2. See 1 Samuel 23:16-17. True friends help others find strength in God by reminding them of God’s promises. Sully mentioned two promises that gave Him strength in a difficult season.
 - a. Read Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28.
 - b. How did Jesus’s perfect life, death on the cross and resurrection for all who believe in Him, and resurrection secure these promises for the believer?
 - c. See Paul’s flow of thought in Romans 8:28-30. What has to be true for someone to be able to claim these promises as applying to them?

3. True friends are willing to sacrifice for the benefit of their friends.
 - a. How is this different from the way friendships are usually formed and lived out?
 - b. Read Study Deeper. What do you find to be a challenge for you in seeking to be the kind of friend Jonathan was to David?

4. Read John 13:1-15, 34-35 and Philippians 2:3-11. How did Jesus exemplify all three qualities of a true friend?

Challenge: Assess the friends that Sully challenged us to write on our list. Where do you need to be intentional to see these friendships grow in a godly way? Is there someone you need to meet in their time of need?

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for Your great love for us and Your deep friendship. That You, the Creator of the universe, would call us friend is mind blowing. I don't understand it, but I thank You for it. I want to be a faithful and loyal friend to You this year.

Lord, I ask for godly friendships. I ask You to help me be a friend who is faithful and true and who lays my life down. If there are those around me who need my friendship, please open my eyes to see where and to whom You would point me.

Please point out to me friendships that draw me away from You, rather than toward You. Help me to influence that friend more than he/she influences me. I ask You to provide godly relationships that encourage my heart and help me love and follow You better.

I also ask You to help me be humble enough to accept words of correction from friends. Please give me friends that would be faithful to point out faults that would lead me astray. And Lord, please help me be brave and loving to do the same for friends who are struggling.

Jesus, show me how to pursue relationships that honor You. I long for friends with whom I can pray and with whom I can rejoice. You created me with a heart that longs for that, so I ask that You help me see where I can cultivate those relationships.

Please help me this year to be a friend that reflects You. Thank You for the friends I have, but I also ask You to please put more godly friends in my life. May we encourage, exhort, and love each other. And through the leading of the Holy Spirit may we be honest and forthright when needed.

To Your glory and the expansion of Your Kingdom!
Amen

STUDY DEEPER

How To Be The Friend You Have Always Wanted

We know in theory that God created friendship as one of life's greatest gifts, but we often find making and deepening friendships complicated and complex. Some of our greatest pains involve wounds from others, or the pang of wondering if we have any friends at all. How do we begin unwrapping the gift of friendship?

In my early 30s I finally discovered what lay at the core of my friendship pains and pangs. I harbored what Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* calls a "wish dream"—an ideal (read: perfect and unattainable) picture of community. Because I held my wish dream as a standard over the heads of women in my life, I was consistently disappointed and even embittered with reality.

My focus was on myself and what others were doing for me. I then began to consider how Jesus models a different focus altogether: He intentionally set his sights on others and how he could serve them. In imitation of Christ, then, we are to be the friend we've always wanted.

But how can we, in our pursuit of friendships, shift our focus toward Christ's example? Here are five practical ways.

1. Release others from your expectations.

So many of our disappointments with others are birthed out of unrealistic—if not idolatrous—expectations that people will love us as only God can. Our value and significance must come only from him. When we demand that others be all-present, all-comforting, all-providing, or all-knowing, we set them up as our Christ, and we set our friendships up for failure.

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Instead of hewing out broken cisterns for ourselves that can't hold water (Jer. 2:13), we must find our heart's contentment in the Lord, our only perfect friend. Only then can we relate to others without destructive expectations. And releasing others from being our Christ actually positions us to receive friendship as a gift from God as he chooses to give it: through imperfect, in-process people.

2. Be a friend 'as unto the Lord.'

According to my wish dream, I love and serve others with the hope I will get something in return. But Jesus said we're his friends if we lay our lives down, looking to serve rather than to be served. In other words, we're to be a friend toward others without expectation of return. We're to do it as an act of worship before the One who has so loved us. Being a committed, self-giving person isn't a friendship guarantee, but it is an invitation. It certainly honors the Lord.

3. Pursue beyond what you can see.

Although it seems obvious—an oversimplification of what friendship requires—moving toward others is perhaps the most overlooked opportunity for friendship. Engaging others begins with believing that all people, regardless of age, life stage, skin color, marital status, or life experience, are made in the image of God and, therefore, are exceedingly interesting. Engaging others is primarily about discovering who they are beyond what we can see. We must be good question-askers and even better listeners—not as busybodies, but as people seeking to honor and value others.

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4. Mourn and celebrate.

One of the most comforting truths about God is his willingness to enter our pain. As the psalmist declares, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted” (Ps. 34:18). God is a friend who isn’t afraid of darkness, depression, sickness, or difficulty; we too must be friends willing to enter the pain of others—not with pithy clichés but with presence, compassion, and a willingness to bear their burdens.

At the same time, let’s be people who celebrate! Our God delights in us, so let’s delight in one another. When a friend wins the day, when her prayer is answered, when a milestone is reached, or when we see God grant her favor, let’s name it out loud (for perhaps our friends can’t see it themselves), throw a party, and brag on our friends. Whether mourning with those who mourn or rejoicing with those who rejoice, let’s do it extravagantly, just as our God extravagantly loves us.

5. Persevere.

Finally, we must persevere. Friendship is born over time, not over one coffee date. It’s born through shared adversity, not just fun game nights. Friendship is deepened through forgiveness and asking for forgiveness, through overlooking offenses and addressing those that need to be addressed, and, above all, through consistent vulnerability. Let’s not easily give up on one another, for Christ will never give up on us.

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The friendship Jesus modeled involves risk. Setting “self” aside and engaging others is risky. Entering another’s difficulty is risky. But I’ve discovered a rich secret: On the other side of risk is the place where we get to unwrap the gift of friendship as God gives it.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-be-friend-youve-always-wanted>