

## Christ-Centered Friendships

In my time in college, I have become friends with some of the most amazing people I have ever met. You get to experience so many different types of people and you get to learn so much from sitting down and having a conversation with those people. While it is important to get out of your comfort zone to meet new people so that you can grow socially and emotionally, in this article, I want to discuss our close friendships. In college, we tend to spend an exorbitant amount of time with a few select people. And when it comes to friendships, influence is a function of time. This means that the more time you spend with someone, the more they will influence you and you will influence them. The craziest part is we probably can't even see how much the people around us shape our personalities, our opinions, and our mindsets. But they really do. And for that reason, I have just a few tips on how to manage this force called friendship that plays such a huge role in our life.

Everything we have, God gave us for a reason. Our parents, our churches, our education. God did not accidentally plopp us into a place with random circumstances. There is a reason for every person and circumstance in our life. So what is the point of a friendship? It sounds like such a basic, dumb question. But actually, why did God give us these people who have no biological relation to us and yet, we love to open up to and experience? Is it to cure our loneliness? Hopefully that is not why we keep our friends. One answer can be found in Wisdom of Sirach chapter 6: "A faithful friend is a medicine for life and immortality; and those who fear the Lord will find one." God grants us these people so that we can help each other gain immortality. That's it. Our friends are not there for us to cure our loneliness or boredom. Our friends are not there for us just so we can gain some fleeting pleasure out of doing an activity together. Our real friends are there so that we can help each other gain immortality.

So the first tip I have for establishing real friendship is this: make sure both you and your friend have the same goal (that is building your relationships with God) and are willing to help each other get there. In Matthew ch. 20, we find two blind men sitting on the side of the road calling out to Jesus to heal them. When the crowd tried to shut them up, "they cried out all the more, saying, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!'" What a beautiful friendship they must have had. Without hesitation, they both knew what they wanted. They didn't want to fit in. They didn't want to just sit there and enjoy each other's company. They cried out together for the Lord to heal them. Imagine if our friendships were more like that. The focus of their friendship wasn't them; it was Christ. And they could not care less if the entire world thought they were weird for making Christ their aim.

The second tip I have for building a Christ-centered friendship would be to humble yourself before your friends. Sirach 6 says, "If he humbles himself before you and hides himself from your face, you shall have a noble and harmonious friendship." One of the most edifying forms of humility is the ability to accept criticism. If you realize your friends love you and want what is best for you, then you should try and build a friendship where you feel comfortable pointing out each other's flaws **solely** for the sake of building each other up. "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." (Proverbs 27:17) I have seen some toxic friendships where people are always trying to put each other down by pointing out each other's flaws. That is not what I am talking about. But then I have seen other friendships where friends are too scared to criticize each other and so they just stay quiet while they see each other continue down a path that is unrighteous and harmful. If your friendships are based on building

each other up and you can find a way to put down your pride, your friendships can be infinitely more fruitful and enjoyable.

The last piece of advice I would give in your quest to build Christ-centered friendships is to recognize when a friendship is keeping you from building your relationship with Christ and cut it off. Sirach 6 says, "Allow many to be at peace with you, but allow one out of a thousand to be your counselor. If you would obtain a friend, test him before you accept him, and do not trust him readily." True friends are not easy to come by. If you can find one good friend in a thousand, you are lucky. Be at peace with everyone but recognize that some people simply do not want to grow in Christ with you. And it is very possible that your attachment to that person is harming you. One of the realities of being in college is you are growing a lot and growing up often means growing apart.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." (Romans 12:10)