

THE FRIENDSHIPS OF YOUTH

"A friend loveth at all times." Proverbs 17:17

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

A friend is a person who is known, respected, esteemed and loved by another. Friendship is the mutual attachment of two persons who are thus known and loved. Friendship is of tremendous value. It is one of the best things in life, because it makes life rich and full, bright and joyous, tender and sweet. In every condition of life friendship is a source of strength and a well-spring of happiness; it enlightens the gloom of our darker hours and gives sunshine to our hours of happiness.

Friendship is a reality. Each of us has friends. Friendships make our lives worth living. We observe that friendships exist between others. History is full of the praise of friendship. Even the heathen writers made much of it. Socrates said, "All people have their different objects of ambition -- horses, dogs, money, honor as the case may be, but for my own part I would rather have a good friend than all these put together." Cicero spoke the truth when he said, "Friendship is the only thing in the world concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed." He also said, "All I can do is to urge on you to regard friendship as the greatest thing in the world, for there is nothing which so fits in with our nature, or is so exactly what we want in prosperity or adversity." Aristotle spoke of friendship as "one soul abiding in two hearts."

In that great branch of literature called biography, we find how great a thing in life is friendship. We have notable examples of friendship in such world-renowned cases as Jonathan and David, Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, Johnson and Boswell, Scott and Lockhart, Tennyson and Hallam, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, and Godkin and Lowell. When Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said to Charles Kingsley, "Tell me the secret of your life that I may make mine beautiful too," he replied, "I have a friend." That made all the difference. Constantius said, "My treasures are my friends." Plautus said, "Nothing is there more friendly to a man than a friend in need."

Every person needs faithful friends. We can do better without things than without friends. Poor indeed is any person who does not have friends. If others are to be happy, they must have friends too. Our Lord wants us to be friends and to have friends. It is human for us to want friends with whom we can share our dreams, joys and sorrows. We desire the approbation, love and affection of friends.

"No one is the whole of himself; his friends are the rest." For that reason it is important that we be very careful in the selection of our friends. Just as the strength or weakness of a tree when it is full grown is often determined by conditions in its early days, so the happiness of a home is often determined by events that have transpired in the lives of the two people years before they have met each other. No greater mistake could be made by either parents or young people

than the idea that the early friendships entered into in school days do not count. Parents are serious sinners along this line at times in joking the young people about these friendships. This joking is a mistake in that it strengthens the feeling already held by many young people that unless they are thinking seriously of wedlock it matters little the type of company they keep or the standards which that company holds.

The friendships made in high school are never matters of indifference and are never unrelated to the happiness of future homes which may be established by the young people. The attitude, which is often taken by young men, that they can keep company with the loose type of girl to have a good time but will choose another kind when they come to marry, is a very dangerous fallacy. No two young people beginning to go together can tell what the result will be. Many a young person has allowed himself, or herself, to enter into what admittedly was an unworthy friendship, simply for purposes of a "jolly good time," only to find that later the friendship developed into an emotion that led to wedlock. Moreover, the ideals of manhood and womanhood that make the foundation for a permanent life attitude are often greatly influenced by these early friendships. Undoubtedly many of the difficulties that ultimately wreck thousands of homes could, if the truth were known, be traced back to distorted conceptions growing out of careless friendships in early youth, exactly as a doctor often traces a fatal sickness in older years to some forgotten accident of childhood.

There are people who live an almost solitary existence. They may have one or two close friends, but in the main they go their way alone. In many such instances it is not because they prefer the solitary way. Many really hunger for friendship, and long to have numerous friends. There are others who, wherever they go, become a center of lively interest. They attract people to themselves. They are scarcely ever alone. People seek them out, and they and their friends have a merry time.

What is the explanation of the pilgrim of the lonely road? Sometimes it is sheer shyness. The person is so self-conscious that he or she cannot rise above it. They make no advances toward anybody, not because they would not like to, but their native timidity forbids it. They live within a shell of painful shyness, and seem unable to break loose. Others are lonely because they suffer from an inferiority complex. They have formed a very low estimate of their qualities and abilities. They fear they would have little to contribute to a conversation, or to the social enjoyment of others, and so they shrink within themselves and are silent. Very often their assumption of inferiority is woefully inaccurate. Extreme individualism is another cause of loneliness.

Such people often complain of the unfriendliness of others. They find those in the home, office and business unfriendly; and as for the church, they think it is a refrigerator. They sit near the back, go out like they had been shot at when the benediction is pronounced, and complain of the unfriendliness of the church. A very wise observer said in the long ago, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly." Don't expect the other person to take the initiative and approach you. If you would learn to love people, to try to help them, to be glad of an opportunity to speak to them, you would find that the seemingly distant

people are not distant at all. Ice makes ice. If you are cold, stiff and formal, you may expect others to be equally so.

You can have friends. If you are lonesome and friendless, you need not be. The making of friends is an art any normal person can cultivate. It is not easily attained. There is no short cut to achieving it. All must pay the same price for it. It cannot be secured at reduced prices, and it is never on sale at the bargain counter.

Friendship is within the reach of more people today than ever before. In no previous generation have people lived so closely together or had as many contacts. Boys and girls are thrown together in a complex social life from the fifth or sixth grade on. Young people do many things together and through them achieve desirable comradeships. It should be remembered, however, that being with people does not guarantee friendship. We touch elbows with many, but hearts with few.

Not all that masquerades under the name of friendship possesses those characteristics which make the relation a true one. In all true friendships there must be mutual trust. It sometimes happens that there is perfect trust on one side, but perfidy on the other.

You may recall an incident of one of the Alexanders of the Russians. His own trusted physician had entered into a conspiracy to take his life. Alexander thoroughly trusted his doctor, and when he entered the room one morning and poured out a potion from a vial and handed it to his monarch to drink, Alexander did so without the slightest hesitation. Then reaching his hand under his pillow he pulled out a communication from an outsider in which there was revealed to the monarch the complete story of the perfidy of his physician. Here was perfect trust on one side, but nothing except treason on the other.

Certain factors are very important in the making of friends. One of them is openness of mind. Emerson said, "There are two elements that go into the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named -- one is truth and the other is tenderness. The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere; before whom I may think aloud." Dr. Carnegie Simpson said, "People cannot be true friends if one is hiding half his life from the other. A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously and continues a friend unchangingly."

A second factor is sincerity. Friendship is to be valued for what there is in it; not for what can be gotten out of it. Many are never able to make friends because they are looking for servants. Those who have true friends do not watch the receiving side, but they are strong on the giving side.

A third factor is friendliness. Others want friends, too; so, if you want a friend, be one. We should learn from Christ that the essential quality in the heart of friendship is not the desire to have friends, but the longing to be a friend; not to get help from others, but to impart blessing to others. In all our dealings with others, we should seek to have in large measure these two elements of friendship, namely

truth and tenderness.

A fourth factor is doing things together. This cements friendship. Even to play together promotes friendship. To work together, to strive together, to sacrifice together and to suffer together makes friends who are inseparable.

In their effort to make friends young people may be grouped into four classes:

First, those who want everything at the least possible cost to themselves. They always look for the easy things to do. They never want to put themselves out. Anyone who is only on the receiving end of life will do little to make life richer for others.

Secondly, those who seek to be clever or who are "smart-alecky." In order to get what they want, they bluff and try to fool others, but in the end they do not fool anybody but themselves. They parade before the crowd. They adopt such anti-social methods as boisterousness, loud laughter, tramping brazenly into a meeting after it has begun or out of it before the end. Their capacity for happiness extends only so far as they continue to have the attention of those whose friendship they desire. Such an attitude is hostile to the concept of true friendship. They casually listen to a qualified and prepared teacher, preacher or speaker, and then in an undertone say, "Is that so?" In their own estimation, they know all there is to know, but in reality could not write a primer. People who are so desperate for attention are to be pitied. It does not pay to show off.

Thirdly, those who get what they want no matter how much others are hurt by it. They will even attempt to ruin the reputation of others to accomplish their own selfish purposes.

Fourthly, those who are intensely interested in others and govern their own actions accordingly. What enriches the lives of others is right; what injures them is wrong. Those in this group are sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. Dr. William Lyon Phelps told this story which he got from an eye-witness. It was at a time in World War I when German and American front-line trenches were so located that talking in one was heard in the other. An American lieutenant looked out of his trench and saw a German soldier caught in the barbed wire with one leg shot off, shrieking with pain. He watched him as long as he could, and then crawled out of the trench and started toward the German lad. When the Germans saw his intent, they stopped firing. He gathered the young fellow in his arms and carried him to the German trench, where he handed him over to his fellows. Starting back, he was called by a German officer, who took an iron cross from his pocket and pinned it on the American's breast. Both soldiers, who a moment before had sought to kill each other, became friends in a human response to personal needs.

Having evaluated ourselves as friends, let us now turn to those relations between boys and girls which are known as "dates." On every hand we see these fine friendships of youth, which mean so much for the development

of personality, the sharpening of social skills and the fostering of wholesome attitudes toward the opposite sex.

What should one expect in a boy or girl friend? The person whom you date should measure up to certain minimum social, intellectual, moral and religious standards. Sensible young people prefer a dating partner with the following characteristics: physical and mental fitness, dependability or trustworthiness, pride in personal appearance and manners, cleanliness of speech and action, pleasant disposition and a sense of humor, and considerateness of others.

Sensible and self-respecting girls admire and like boys who have character, dress appropriately, are neat in appearance, show respect for girls, are thoughtful, have good manners, meet her family gracefully, do not try too hard to make a good impression, do not brag, do not act as if they were conferring a favor on them to date them, do not think they are "big stuff," show reverence in church and other places where it is due, have due regard for the laws of our land, are interested in the things that are worthwhile, have ambition, have a good sense of humor, are good sports and are dependable.

Intelligent, sensible and self-respecting boys like girls who have character, are attractive, dress neatly and appropriately but not expensively, have good manners, have high ideals, act decently, don't giggle and laugh all the time and at nothing, are considerate of others, don't think they know it all, have a lot of friends, are friendly with others regardless of whether or not they have looks or money, are always the same, have a good sense of humor and can take a joke, and who date them for what they are and not because of your family, popularity, money or car.