

STAYING STRONG: Friendship That Feeds Life in Recovery

God said, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." (Genesis 2:18 MSG)

Some of us slid into destructive and addictive lifestyles out of a desire to belong and have friends and companions. We longed to be known and supported. We longed to matter. We longed to be befriended. We longed to have people around us who would enrich our lives, and, we longed to be that someone who would enrich someone else's life simply by being together with them. Loneliness, or lack of healthy friendships, is one of the greatest tests of our ability to maintain a lifestyle free from addiction. Thankfully, through His word, God gives us instruction on how to live life well, with Him and with one another. **One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.** (Proverbs 18:24 NIV)

Christian friendships are characterized by mutual respect and sharing. We are invited to watch the example of those who live a life of peace and careful ministry and then try and put into practice the things they do. We are invited to pray for each other so God can grow more and more of His character in us and bless us in every set of circumstances.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:13-15 NIV)

Friends trust and rely on each other. They may not always agree but will respect one another's differences. Friends are kind and understanding towards one another. They stand together in times of trouble even when others can't or won't stand with them. Friends celebrate the good times and encourage each other during the bad times. They tell each other the truth -- both the truth one likes to hear as well as the truth one doesn't want to hear but needs to.

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend. (Proverbs 17:17, Job 16:20-21 NIV)

The bottom line of all healthy relationships is that we help each other know and serve God well. We need to pattern our lives after those who, despite difficulties, are successfully living their lives for Christ. It's important to learn from their example and to hold our lives up before them for their counsel. Those who fail to examine themselves in light of God's word, and the advice of good

friends, often end up enslaved by destructive habits and dependencies. Full life, however, can be experienced by trusting Jesus Christ and following his example. Jesus was a good friend to 12 men who became His disciples and He served and taught them well. Jesus also received friendship from these men in return. All through the Bible we read stories of how good friends cared for one another and helped each other draw closer to God and achieve the things God had prepared for them to do. God has given us spiritual friends who will walk our journey with us and show us how to trust and surrender our lives to Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. Their future is eternal destruction. Their god is their appetite. They brag about shameful things and all they think about is this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. (Philippians 3:17-20 NLT)

As Christian friends gather around us they will be supportive witnesses to our new way of life and will provide perspective on our spiritual journey. They will appreciate where we have come from, what we are currently doing, and how we are growing. We need at least one friend who can keep a confidence and listen with empathy when life seems troubled. This person should be someone who will not judge us, but will offer Godly counsel when it is apparent we are living in a way that may injure ourselves or others.

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to everyone else. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

(I Thessalonians 5:14-18 NLT)

God has invited us to the ultimate friendship with Him through His son Jesus Christ. As we respond to his love and caring we will find peace and security. This, in turn, will allow us to live well with Him and help us become a loving and caring friend to others.

Questions For Discussion and Reflection

1. How am I entering into a life of friendship as God intends?
2. What keeps me from a life of friendship as God intends?
3. How do I see balance or imbalance with giving and receiving in my friendships?