

The Marks of a True Friend

Proverbs 17:17

by: Adrian Rogers

Did you know that the deepest need of the human heart is for intimacy? That's just another way of saying friendship. Now, I'm not talking about casual acquaintances or false friends, but true friends. Let me give you three marks of a true friend.

How To Know a True Friend

A true friend sharpens. He will make you a sharper person, a better person. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." A true friendship will put an edge on your life. False friends dull your life, blunt your influence, and drag you down. Anybody who makes it easier for you to do wrong is not a true friend. One of the true tests of any friendship is asking yourself, "Am I a better person for having known this person?"

A true friend sticks. A true friend is steadfast. We read in Proverbs 17:17: "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." If you want to see who your real friends are, just make a mistake and see whether or not they leave you.

Life is like a ship. Some people get on and off board very easily. Some will stay on board as long as everything is sailing smoothly; but let the rough weather come, and they will abandon the ship. A true friend is the one who will stick with you.

A true friend stabs. You say, "I don't want to be stabbed." Well, listen to Proverbs 27:6: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." A friend who really loves you will wound you if it's necessary. That is, he will tell you the truth and won't give you hypocritical kisses when he needs to do a little spiritual surgery on you. Flattery is not true friendship. A true friend cares enough to confront. I'm so grateful that throughout my life I've had those who would put their arms around my shoulders and help me when I've done wrong.

How to Be a True Friend

True friends are built. You don't make them overnight. Friendships are not toadstools; they are oak trees. Jesus said, "...Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Now, that's the principle, but let me give you five secrets that come from it. If you will practice these, you will make you a great friend.

Accept. The Bible says in Ephesians 1:6 that God has "made us accepted in the beloved." We all want people to accept us. Jesus accepted the disciples. He said, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you..." (John 15:16) Jesus did not accept the disciples because they were perfect but because they needed Him.

Acknowledge. Recognize people. Give them your full heart and attention. When you talk to people, listen to them also. Look them in the eye. Understand that people are important. They're a soul for whom Christ died. When we acknowledge others, we're saying, "You're important to me. I acknowledge your presence and your importance."

Appreciate. I got an e-mail from my son recently. It brought tears to my eyes because he said, "Dad, I'm just so grateful for the heritage that I have. Thank you." I could live six months on that. It didn't take him but a few minutes to write that little message, but it meant so much to me. Folks, you're lying if you say you don't want to be appreciated. Tell your husband, your wife, your children, or your friends that they are appreciated.

Affirm. Appreciation is for what people do; affirmation is for who people are. The Lord Jesus affirmed His disciples over and over again. It doesn't mean you approve of everything a person does when you affirm them. The Bible is full of affirmations, and yet it acknowledges the fact that we're sinners and that we fail. But affirmation is important.

Assure. Assure them that you understand. We all want empathy. The apostle Paul said in Romans 12:15: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Find a way to let people know that you're sensitive to what they're up against, what they feel, what they're going through. Assure them that you're there, and that, to your limited ability, you understand or you're trying to understand what they're going through.

True friendship is costly. It's not easy to maintain a friendship. Remember John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." You must be willing to pay the price. But finding a true friend and being one in return is one of the best investments you can ever make.

• Love Worth Finding (*Saturday, April 30, 2005*)