

Becoming someone's friend

Since childhood we have been surrounded by communities in various sizes. When people gather and interact, they naturally become friends – such interactions affect one another. One takes the behaviour of one's company. There are two people in the Bible where friends have different influences in their lives.

The first one is Rehoboam, Solomon's son. When he inherited Solomon's reign, the Israelites asked the King to ease their labour – Rehoboam rejected the suggestions of the old men who had been Solomon's counsel in his time, and chose to listen to the foolish ideas from the young men whom Rehoboam grew up with, threatening the Israelites to bear an even heavier burden. This eventually led to the betrayal of the ten tribes and the division of the whole nation.

Another one is Daniel. He and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were exiled to Babylon and were trained for three years to serve in the palace. The four of them asked to be vegetarians and drink water only because of their fear of God. Under the foreign culture and religion, they remained their faith and practices. Daniel's three other friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship the golden statue of Nebuchadnezzar. This ultimately resulted in the king's praise to the Israelite God's salvation and power. Daniel and his friends feared God together, faced challenges and ran away from temptation. Friends can build each other up.

There are different levels of friendships: some could share from the deep down of their hearts and some are only acquaintances. What kind of friends do you make? Do you have any close and deep friends, who would have a real influence on your life?

An authentic friendship is a precious gift given by God in our life. Friends give us a lot of help, especially when we are under stress – they would listen to us and would be willing to share our burdens and encourage us.

However, don't forget to gear up in our lives as we want deep friends when we feel alone. We should prepare ourselves to be friends with people.

1. Build relationships

- a. Learn about the other person: understanding the other person would be a good start to the development of relationships. Everyday life is a wonderful channel to understanding the other person; more observations would lead to your discovery in the other person's preferences and fears etc. Talking to each other is a wonderful communication channel for you to find out about their lifestyles, preferences, and habits. Of course, communications need to be built from the surface to depth; it would be scary to go in great depths at once. Be careful of one-on-one interactions between the two sexes and avoid overly deep interactions in case of any trespasses beyond friendship. Activities such as meals together, exercising, strolling and volunteering together would allow

you to know the other person's preferences and interest better; experience together would deepen friendships.

- b. Look for the best in the other person: nobody is perfect and we all have limitations. It is important for us to see each other with an eye of encouragement; we would enlarge the limitations in that person otherwise. If all we could see are their limitations, we would eventually develop discontentment and even complaints towards this friend. The Bible teaches us to forgive others their trespasses, then your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Everyone has something good inside them; as someone's friend we should carry a positive view towards them and amplify their qualities and potentials. As we appreciate and commend them more, their lives would be encouraged!
- c. Trusting others: trust towards and acceptance of people are the roots of a healthy and proactive relationship between people. Without trust, the 'emotions' are fragile and unstable; they would be prone to be tilted, broken and separated by any external factors and would even obstruct the communication and growth between the two of you! Trust is oppositional to doubt. The more you trust, the less you doubt your friends. Trust brings about safety and sincerity towards your relationship, which would help us to develop a positive view too!

2. Care with sincerity

God has commanded us to first love God, then to love others. Loving God helps us to focus on His words and understand His heart; loving others helps us not to be someone selfish, but to be a giver who cares about others wholeheartedly. As we give out love, you would be aware of all the love being poured out by God and others to your own life.

'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.' (John 15:13) Being willing to lay down oneself is a kind of true love! Everyone needs to be aware that there are some important people in their lives. As their friends, you are one of them. You would be able to let them feel loved and supported when they are down and hurt. You may not be able to solve their problems, but you could care for them. Caring is 'bearing one another's burdens' (Galatians 6:2).

3. Walking together continuously

'A friend loves at all times, but a brother is born for adversity.' (Proverbs 17:17)

'At all times' contains a sense of continuity, which does not stop. If the love between friends is only developed by a spark of feelings, it would be unstable and irregular. This would not count as 'loving at all times'.

The kind of love mentioned by the Bible surpasses feelings. Regardless of your feelings, you would give the best towards the other person. May the Lord teach us to act beyond emotions in this emotionally-focused generation. May we live out love with our actions and follow God's commands to live in love always.