

# Friendship: What kind of friend?

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Do you have good friends? What do you look for in a friend? Who would you regard as a good friend? Is friendship important in your life?

The population of the world is increasing rapidly, there are more and more people around us, and yet many are lonely in this world. We meet many people in our daily life and at times we talk to them at length, yet we recognize that in the most important and deepest areas of our lives, we may not have the freedom to share with them what is in our heart.

I once met a friendly and cheerful person who was popular among friends - many would like to be with her because she would bring "sunshine" to their lives. Yet within her heart, she felt lonely because although she had many friends, she knew that her friends did not understand that within her cheerful outward conduct, there resided a lonely person who also needed the encouragement of others.

What kind of friend would you like to have? Most of us would be glad to have a friend who is pleasant to be with, one who is concerned for our welfare, who understands our needs and aspirations, who is able to help us in our difficulties and who is

trustworthy and reliable. In reality, we know that such a friend is not so easily available. There are many who are pleasant to be with, but they may not understand deeply your needs and aspirations and they may not be able to help you in your more serious difficulties. There are others who may be sympathetic towards you in your difficulties but who may not be deeply concerned for your true well-being. There are others who may be concerned for you, but when their own interests are at stake and when conflicts and stress increase, they cannot be depended upon.

When finally you manage to find a friend who is concerned for your welfare, who understands your needs and aspirations, who is able to help you in your difficulties and who is trustworthy and reliable, you may then discover that such a friend may not always be pleasant to be with. At times he may not seem to be so sympathetic and understanding, as he points out to you where you have failed, where you have been wrong, and you are angry that he is not "standing by me" and instead "siding with" the person who has offended you. However, if you are willing to be honest and humble before God, you may come to realize that this is a genuine friend who cares for your true well-being and who wants you to become a person of quality before God. At the same time, when you have done wrong and you are miserable and feel guilty and condemned, he may assure you that if you are repentant, if you are contrite and willing to change for the better, God will forgive you and He will be with you, to help you grow and improve the quality of your life.

If you want a true friend, who is always reliable and trustworthy and who deeply understands you and is able to help you in your difficulties, then you must learn to develop a deep friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who was criticized for being "a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" (Matthew 11: 19). It was the

Lord Jesus who rescued the persecutor Saul from the path of destruction, and helped him and transformed him to become the apostle Paul, such that he could write with deep gratitude, as he referred to the one who "loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2: 20). If you want to know more about who the Lord Jesus is, you could read Booklet 2 Chapter 3 from *A Journey in Life Part 1*.

If you appreciate the meaningfulness of friendship with the Lord Jesus, then your priority in your choice of a close friend should be one who deeply loves God and who seeks to be like the Lord Jesus in character. Does this mean that you should not be a friend to those who do not have such qualities? No, this is clearly not so. The Lord Jesus is "a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" and we should learn to do likewise. However, there are different categories and different levels of friendship. The subject of different categories of friendship is considered in another article, "Categories of friendship".

As you look for friends and you have your priority and preference, do you realize that others too would be looking for friends with their priorities and preferences? They too would be seeking for a friend "who is concerned for our welfare, who understands our needs and aspirations, who is able to help us in our difficulties and who is trustworthy and reliable". Do you qualify to be such a friend? If you do not, what kind of friend will you find? Who would want to be your close friend? There may be those who truly care for you, but although they are willing to help you, they may not be close to you because you are not the kind of friend that they are looking for. On the other hand, there are many who are willing to be your "friends" if they see that you can benefit them and bring pleasure to them in some way, perhaps

because of your money, perhaps because of your talent, perhaps because of your looks. It is important to recognize that if you want to find a truly good friend who is close to you, you must first learn to be a good friend.