

3_ THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

This is the 3rd lesson in our series dealing with the subject of “love.” We focused our attention so far on the romantic love that a man and woman share and the love God intended for us to experience within the family. Today we’ll consider the love shared between friends in a lesson I’m calling “**Forever Friends**”. Let’s begin by reading once again from 1st **Corinthians 13**...

⁴ **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails...”**

As we stressed in past weeks, this is love that can be understood in any language. The love of friends (*Philadelphia*) is a special love that we may share with people who are no relation to us_ but before we go further in this study, I encourage husbands and wives to understand that not only should they be lovers, but when they see each other as family and even friends, their bond is particularly strong. My wife is the mother of my children_ and the best friend I have on earth.

In 1st **Samuel 18** we read that David, the man after God’s own heart and his friend Jonathon had **“became one in spirit”**, and loved each other even as they loved themselves. In 2nd **Samuel 1:26** David said that the love of his friend Jonathan was **“deeper than that of a woman.”** Though some have inferred that David and Jonathan were romantically involved, nothing could be further from the truth. What he was saying is that Jonathan had, unlike David’s wife, been loyal to him. Though there were women with whom he had been romantic with, they had all proven to be shallow relationships_ unable to withstand the test of time and trouble. But, Jonathan had risked life and limb, even intervening to prevent his own father, King Saul, from killing his friend David.

Proverbs 17:17 tells us that though a brother might become an adversary, **“A true friend loves at all times...”** and **Proverbs 18:24** says, **“There are friends who stick closer than a brother.”** Maybe you’ve had at least one such friend. Perhaps you grew close to someone you went to school with, and that bond has continued ever since. Maybe a neighborhood friend whom you played sandlot baseball with or had tea parties with as a child is still particularly close. Perhaps you have formed such friendships on a sports team or through work or even while serving your country. I, for one, have made many friends in the church_ serving God together, and uniting hearts and souls in worship. My experience is that once such friendships are established, little to nothing can break the bonds. Some of my closest friends now live miles away_ so our relationships have not been nourished as they once were. Yet, though distance has kept them from flourishing as much as they could have, we remain friends nonetheless_ and always will.

Take a moment and ask yourself, **“Who are truly my friends?”** I will be honest, I don’t like those posts where people say *“No one ever reads my posts. I’m going to see who my real friends are.” Like and share if you are my friend.* If that’s your criteria, I guess I am not your friend because I do not respond to those at all. Here’s a better guideline: Who do you share your deepest hurts and concerns with? Who do you trust enough to pour out your heart to? Who do you know prays for you when you ask? Who could you call in the middle of the night if you were in trouble? Now, who would think of you if they were asked those questions?

I have met more than one person who says they have no friends. You likely have as well.

They've always felt like an outsider or a 5th wheel. They wonder why no one ever seems to want to be their friend. I want to remind them not to give up who you are just to fit in. **Proverbs 12:26** says: **"The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."** I'd also say rather than look for friends, try to **"be a friend."** I didn't quite fit into the mold of any select group in high school. Due to a wrestling injury in middle school, I wasn't able to participate in contact sports. I had an afterschool job, so I didn't join any clubs. I wasn't very musical, so I wasn't in band or chorus. In addition to that, I was very serious about my faith, so I didn't hang with the party crowd. Yet, somehow I got along with most of my peers and had a few people I'd call friends. Believe it or not, I even had "a girlfriend" or two. How? Well, I decided to befriend people. .

Yet, instead of joining the crowd, I looked for someone who seemed to spend a lot of time alone. I asked to sit with them at school lunch or on the bus or at church. When I got my license, I offered them a ride home from school or to group events. I talked with them_ and I made sure to listen when they talked. When I found myself in the presence of one of the in-crowd, I just struck up a conversation, being myself, but showing an interest in them. In the process, I made friends_ and have managed to do that in nearly every situation I've been in.

Several years ago, a young wife and mother began attending the church that I pastored in Michigan. One day she told me, *"I think you're one of those people who wants to be everyone's friend."* She didn't mean it as a compliment. Her perception was that I wanted to be liked by everybody, so likely would only have surface relationships. Several months later, she broke her leg in a car accident. I went and prayed with her before surgery and hung out with her husband until we got a good report. I visited her a few more times after that_ before she said, *"I want to apologize to you. Remember when I said you want to be everybody's friend?"* I did. She said, *"I was wrong. I understand now that you want to be a friend to everybody."* I have not had communication with this woman for several years now, but feel pretty confident she would say that *"we were friends."*

One of our members here steps up to me every Sunday, puts out his hand and says, *"Hello, my friend."* Another introduced me to his nurse at the hospital this way: *"This is my preacher_ and my dear friend."* One of the elders here told me that when the church called me 11 years ago to serve as pastor, he hoped to get a good preacher, but never expected to get such a good friend. I don't say any of that to boast_ but to offer proof from my own experience, that when you invest yourself in the lives of others, you will likely find more than one friend.

I have friends who do better at keeping connection than I do. A couple close friends call me regularly for advice or counsel from time to time. One friend from Ohio called me on his birthday as a present to himself...which left me speechless. I hadn't even remembered it was his birthday. Another called just to talk. I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop_ thinking he must need something_ but it never did. He just said he missed me, told me he loved me and hung up. I cried...

I have also had some friends who cared enough about me to take risks by telling me the truth even when I didn't want to hear it. In **Proverbs 25** we read: **⁵"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶Wounds from a friend can be trusted... ⁹Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice. ¹⁰Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family...better a neighbor nearby than a relative far away."** A friend once told me that I needed to channel my silly wit into something useful for God. I was insulted...but he was right. Another told me I should be more sensitive to my wife. Though I got defensive at first, she was right, as well.

Another told me I was neglecting my kids. “*Who was he to criticize me?*” I thought. He was my friend_ who cared enough to tell me something that I didn’t want to hear.

I’ve also had those whom I thought were friends to let me down_ even to turn against me. It is heartbreaking when that happens. Others, I believe, were true friends as long as we shared things in common. But I lost touch with most of them over the years. We didn’t fall out, so much as grow apart.

But, of all the friends I’ve known, there is One that I can always count on_ who will always be there, no matter what may happen. Jesus had this to say to His disciples in **John 15: ¹² (I insist on this) – love one another just as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this—that to lay down their life for a friend. You are my friends if you do this. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I call you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have told to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you so that you might go and bear fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. (MOV)**

Think on that a moment. Jesus chose you to be His friend. He was the one who came to sit at your table_ even before inviting you to join you at His. He proved His friendship by living and dying for you. He asks you now, to live and die for Him_ and for others.

I have **no greater friend** than Jesus. He laid down His life for me. He comforts and strengthens me in my weakest moments. He loves me even when others don’t. And one day, He will dry my every tear. He is always with me, and will never forsake me. He is my faithful and forever friend.