

A Friendship Manual

What do the Proverbs say about friendships?

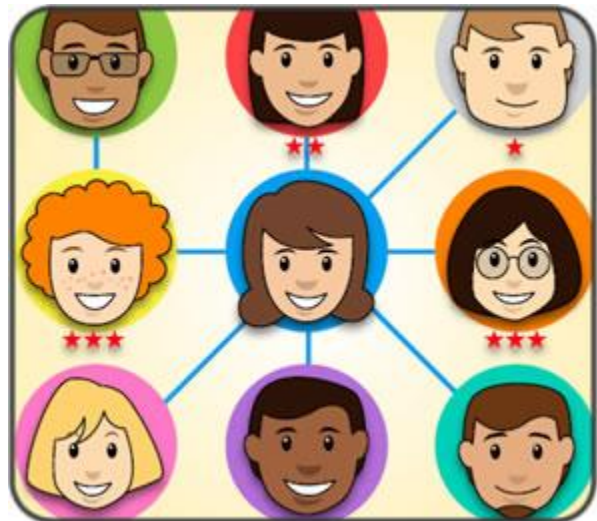
By Dan Dowd

What does it really mean to be a friend to someone today? Much has been written and said about how our technology-driven world can alienate individuals, but when you think about it, many of the innovations in technology are focused on connecting with one another. We see this with IM, Facebook, MySpace, e-mailing jokes to our friends, and in texting and calling each other on cell phones to check up. Friendships are as important as ever.

We want friendships, but how do we make new friends? It can be intimidating to put ourselves out there. What if we are rejected or made fun of? Or even betrayed? How do we find a friend who will be a true friend—someone, as one little boy said, who knows all about you and likes you anyway?

Wouldn't it be great to have a manual, a how-to book on the topic of friendship? Good manuals are great to have when you buy a new item. Manuals show how the product is put together. They show the nuances of how to safely work the item and how to make the most of it.

Go into any bookstore or search online for manuals on relationships, and you will be inundated with possibilities and perspectives. So where can you go for a helpful, basic manual on friendships? How can you learn to be a great friend and to have great friends?



There is such a manual, and it has been around for thousands of years. It's called the Bible. There are whole sections of it that deal with relationships, and one of the best parts of the Bible to read on the how-tos of friendship is the book of Proverbs. Not only does this book speak on different aspects of being a friend and friendship in general, it also discusses the attitudes and perspectives behind being the type of friend people want.

One of the best principles about how to be a good friend is recorded in Proverbs 18:24: "There are 'friends' who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother" (New Living Translation).

What do you bring to a friendship? Being a friend involves care and loyalty. It means being truly interested in the other person and in his or her needs and feelings. This means giving more to the friendship than taking from it. It means being there when needed (27:10), and it means being someone who is dependable (17:17) and accountable. This is all tempered with not being inconsiderate (27:14) and not gossiping (16:28) or passing along something that would hurt your friend in public (17:9; 11:13).

Good friendships include the ability to be completely truthful with each other. One of the main foundations of friendship is the absence of deceit. Such a friendship will attract others (22:11). Because of the trust already developed, a friend can be brutally honest (27:6). Rather than causing hurt, it is understood that what is said is simply to help (27:9) and make all individuals in the friendship even "sharper" (27:17).

A good friend is not all about correction, however, and uses words carefully (17:27). He or she doesn't lash out with angry words but rather gives a "soft answer" and builds others up with what is said (15:1, 4).

The Proverbs also show us the type of people with whom we should *not* make friends. Avoid those who engage in sinful and lawless ways, we're advised (1:10-16), along with those who "sow discord" (6:14) and those who live a lifestyle that will leave them broken (6:12-15).

The most important friendship

As much as physical friendships are important to us, there is another one that is even more important. Each of us needs a very deep and personal relationship—a friendship—with God. This can be hard to grasp in our modern world that doubts whether God even exists, but it is a necessity for our spiritual growth and the basis for knowing how to be a great friend (1:7).

In developing a friendship with God, we are strengthened (3:26; 12:2). In having a pleasing friendship with God, we will even have peace with those who oppose us (16:7). God is the perfect Friend who is there for us at the right time and even promises to protect us (30:5) and direct us (3:5-6).

The same principles that make a physical friendship work also apply if we are to have a friendship with God. Do we take His correction? Are we truthful with Him? Are we accountable and dependable? Do we give back to God the positive aspects of a friendship—listening to Him, talking to Him and building Him up with what we say? The great thing about a friendship with God is that even when we let down on our end of the friendship, He waits for us and receives us back when we repent.

Taking stock

So how do your friendships (and you as a friend) stack up to these attributes? Are you a friend who sticks closer than a brother? Are you a friend who challenges in kindness? Are you a friend people can trust?

Applying these principles may seem difficult. You may feel like you are having to carry the brunt of the relationship, but if you put these points into practice, an interesting thing will begin to happen. People of like mind will begin to gravitate to you.

How do you become a good friend to someone? It's in the manual. *VT*

About the Author

Dan Dowd is a husband, father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Milwaukee, Oshkosh and Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

Comments or Questions

If you have any comments about this article or vertical-thinking questions we can help you answer please send them to info@verticalthought.org.