

A Study in Friendship

Today at Christchurch we welcome the gifted and inspiring orator, Dr. David Gibbs, Jr. Please know that although Dr. Gibbs has won national awards for his eloquence, his strongest point is that he speaks under the leadership and fullness of God's Holy Spirit. When you hear David Gibbs, you hear truth on fire. Please give him the courteous attention and love that is a trademark of this great church.

In God's good providence, in times past, He has often placed Dr. Gibbs and me together from coast to coast and a lot of places in between. This is done almost always without our counsel, which is one reason that he and I both would agree it is the planning of our Lord. Many years ago a great friendship was birthed. This friendship occurred rather subtly and unplanned on our part. And these many years later I give God praise for its continuance. Ours is truly a friendship that has lasted a lifetime. We rejoice also that it will even last beyond the grave! So, although I love to hear Dr. Gibbs speak, I cherish even more his personal friendship.

In our study of friendship allow me to say first and foremost that of all my friendships, the greatest friendship is with the Lord Jesus Christ. He truly epitomizes "...a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Secondly, I would say in the matter of earthly friendships, my family comes next. And as many of you who know me would be quick to agree that my precious wife, Barbara is the flagship of friendships in my earthly sojourn, for which I am most grateful. Also, in a similar family mode of friendship, the people of Christchurch whom I see in this edifice most regularly are my friends. Although we have a beautiful facility, the true beauty I see is in the people whom we see Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. I would say a big thank you in this public forum for the faithful friendship of Mrs. Lord, our executive secretary for this church.

We all need friendship. Allow me to give biblical insight on the subject of friendship:

1. BE FRIENDS WITH EVERYBODY YOU CAN, BUT ASSOCIATE WISELY.

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go" (Proverbs 22:24). "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Corinthians 15:33). The reasons we find wisdom in associating closely with godly people not given to carnal fits of anger and hostility are many. Allow me to give you three: 1) You will be perpetually frustrated trying to please this person, who cannot be happy with you or even themselves. 2) You will alienate yourself from those who are willing to be true blue friends. 3) Should you associate with this type of person long enough, it will rub off. Notice the next verse from God's book of wisdom: "Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Proverbs 22:25).

2. TRUE FRIENDSHIP ENDURES.

When you are forsaken by those who called you friends, you are not unlike Jesus. Long before our Lord walked on this earth He prophesied through Zechariah, "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). In the personal ministry of Christ, we see this was fulfilled when He came to His own and the so-called Torah or Bible scholars of the day rejected Him. Of course, it was even much more fulfilled by Judas Iscariot, one of the original twelve. Christ was disappointed in the behavior of Peter, who denied knowing Him, but Peter came back - Judas did not. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). A true friend is one who loves you unconditionally. You do not have to perform and jump through proverbial hoops. Just be yourself, and a friend will love you no matter what. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17).

3. A FRIEND HELPS MAKE YOU A BETTER PERSON WITH THEIR FELLOWSHIP.

"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel" (Proverbs 27:9). "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). A friend will put a sharp edge to your life. He will help you, pick you up when fallen and show you a better way when you've blown it. Allow me to clarify something here. There are times when we sin and need a firm rebuke. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." (Proverbs 27:6). However, there are some acquaintances in life that will pretend themselves to be your friends, only to tell you off and bring you down. For instance, they will cloke their anger and envy by a guise of spirituality. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Proverbs 27:4). Sometimes they will call something sin, which is anything but sin, in order to make you feel bad or to diminish your influence in a spirit of jealousy. As a rule, a dedicated Christian can tell when he or she has been counseled by a friend. An enemy wants you to give up. Another name for Satan is "...accuser of our brethren..." (Revelation 12:10). A friend, no matter how plainly they speak to us, will make us want to aright our wrong and continue on for God and for good! "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psalm 132:1, 2). Godly friendship, like the perfumed oil from the Aaronic priesthood, will anoint us, refresh us, and be a testimony of Christ's love to a world in need of redemption.

Please welcome today, my friend and yours, Dr. David Gibbs! I love you all and thank you from the bottom of my heart for being so much more than church members; thank you for being our friends.

- Pastor Pope -