

CHAPTER 41

ARE YOU ABUSING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS?

*'A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and
there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother'
(Prov. 18:24).*

There is probably no more valuable resource than a close, abiding friend. In fact the trust, support and loyalty of a true friend is by far a greater asset than money or physical possessions.

It's comforting to know you have someone special you can rely on in an emergency — without a feeling of reluctance or a fear of being rejected. You may need to borrow his jacket or, in a crisis even ask him to run an errand for you. You may need his honest counsel and encouragement when you are feeling down and out. You may even need to call on him during the night when you're ill. Yes, it's great to have a friend with whom you can confide the innermost secrets of your life — someone you can trust, respect and truly rely on.

Which brings me to the point I want to make: take care that you do not abuse the kindness of a friend and take unfair advantage of his willingness to serve. To do so could lead to resentment and contempt.

The key, I believe, in preventing the dissolution of a friendship is to make sure that you balance out your receiving with giving. That is, do as much for him (or even more) as he does for you. I am not implying that you keep a notebook of good deeds and return favor for favor. I am suggesting that over the long haul you reciprocate services rendered.

Bringing this point down to a specific application, we all have friends who are big-hearted and eager to help. Because of their generosity they make it easy for us to call on them. But if we take them for granted and fail to give in return, they may eventually come to resent us or turn a cold shoulder. If a friendship degenerates to the point that one party constantly gets more than he gives — he ceases to be a true friend and becomes a 'parasite.'

Christian love is a matter of give and take — a delicate balance of serving and being served. For example, a common abuse among friends, and roommates especially, is the problem of borrowing. Many times we assume that it's o.k. to borrow without even asking. Or we take undue advantage of one who is always willing to lend whether it's money, clothing or some other personal item. We must exercise every precaution not to abuse those who are closest to us. We must make sure that we are trying to give as much in return as we receive.

To extend respect, concern and service to others is a principle which, if diligently applied, will build mutual, lasting friendships.

In summary, the apostle Paul wrote that in all our daily personal relations, we should do everything with utmost equality and fairness. He said, *'For I mean not that other men be eased and you be burdened! but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality'* (II Cor. 8:13-14).

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