

CHAPTER 60

ABUSING FRIENDSHIPS

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

I can think of no earthly resource more valuable than a close, abiding friend. Money is a necessary commodity and we couldn't survive for long without it. But the trust and support, the love and loyalty of a true friend is by far the greater asset.

It's a great feeling to know you have a person to whom you can go at any time for any thing — without reluctance. You may need to borrow a tool, use his car to run an errand or even ask him to do it for you, in an emergency. 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. Yes, it's great to have individuals with whom you can confide the innermost secrets of your life — someone you can trust, respect and truly rely on.

To quote an anonymous poet on friendship:

“A friend is a person who is for you always... He wants nothing from you except that you be yourself. He is the one being with whom you can feel safe. With him you can utter your heart, its badness and its goodness. Like the shade of a great tree in the noonday heat is a friend. Like the home port with your country's flag flying after a long journey is a friend. A friend is an impregnable citadel of refuge in the strife of existence...He is the antidote to despair, the elixir of hope, the tonic for depression... Give to him without reluctance.”

Which brings me to the point I want to make: take care that we 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 possible dissolution of a friendship is to make sure that we balance out our receiving with giving. That is, do as much for a friend (or even more) as he does for us. I am not implying that we keep a notebook of good deeds done and return blessing for blessing. I am suggesting that over the long haul we mutually reciprocate services rendered.

Bringing this point down to a more specific application, we all have friends who are big-hearted and eager to do us favors or help us out. They make it so easy for us to call on them for their help. Their affectionate, kind gestures are not wrong. But if we take the service of our friends for granted and fail to give in return, they may eventually regret to hear us call or see us pull into their driveways. 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 single friends, and roommates especially, is the problem of borrowing. Many times we take it for granted that it's O.K. to borrow something without even asking. Or we take undue advantage of one who is always willing to lend whether it be money, clothing, or some other personal item. We must be sure not to take advantage of our friends and be sure that we are at least trying to give as much as we receive. Friendship is a two-way street.

Remember the example Jesus set when He washed the disciples' feet? In this simple act of

humility, He taught us a grand principle of love — that of serving as well as being served. Jesus pointed out to Peter that there are times to be served: *“Peter said unto him, thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I wash thee not, thou has no part with me!”* (John 13:8)

To extend mutual respect, concern and service for others is a principle which, if properly applied, will insure lasting friendships.

In summary, whatever we do ought to be done with fairness and equality so that as Paul wrote, *“For I may 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, and that their abundance may also be a supply for your want: That there be equality!”* (II Cor. 8:13-14).

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