

## TRUE FRIENDSHIP

By Marjorie F. Eddington

Last month, we focused on understanding how God is our Parent and Best Friend. This month we'll examine how to improve our friendships with others.

What's important to you in friendships? What makes a good friend? What kind of friends do you want to have?

The best way to have the kind of friends you want is to be that kind of friend. Trying to change another person won't work. But you can change your thinking and your behavior. So, the most effective use of your energy and time is to learn how to be a good friend to yourself and others. Be the person with whom you want to be. And then watch how it affects your friendships with others!

So, how do we become this friend? A lawyer once asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered with one of the best examples of how to be a friend, a neighbor, in his parable of the ["Good Samaritan,"](#) which you can read.

The summary is this: a Jewish man was robbed, hurt, and left for half dead. Two Jews, a priest and a Levite, who, because of their respectable religious professions should have been examples of compassion and kindness, walked right by the wounded man without doing anything for him. A Samaritan, though, stopped and helped the wounded man far beyond what anyone would expect.

Let's look at how the Samaritan was a friend to the wounded man, how he showed compassion to him:

- He noticed him.
- "His heart went out to him" (**The Message** Luke 10:33).
- He stopped what he was doing to take care of the man.
- He bandaged his wounds - attended to his immediate needs.
- He took him to an inn where he could rest and be comfortable.
- He paid for the man's stay at the inn and gave the innkeeper the equivalent of at least two day's wages.
- He told the innkeeper that if there were any more costs for the man's care, he would pay for them when he returned.

When Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" (Luke 10:36), the answer was pretty clear: "He that shewed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). A neighbor is one who is kind, considerate, loving -- a true friend. And for individuals living at that time, a neighbor was considered to be as close as a brother or sister.

This seems rather basic to us. But Jesus' story must have shocked his audience. The Jews defined "neighbor" in a very narrow way. To them, their neighbors were fellow Jews. Anyone else was not considered a neighbor. Samaritans, who lived right next door, were not neighbors, but enemies. The Jews felt superior to the Samaritans; they despised them; and they avoided dealing with them at all costs. In effect, the Jews were prejudiced.

In this simple and profound story, Jesus condemns both prejudice and elitism and affirms two very important facts:

- everyone is worthy of love, and
- everyone is capable of loving anyone.

Jesus put no racial, religious, or gender stipulations on these facts. Indeed, the man who showed the most love was the Samaritan whom they considered inferior and whom they treated disrespectfully. But the Samaritan rose above hatred and prejudice and reached out to help this Jewish man.

Jesus' parable really answers two questions:

**Question 1:** Who is my neighbor?

**Answer:** My neighbor is "one who is in need, regardless of what ethnic origin or physical condition" (Kee 480). My neighbor, my friend, is anyone I can help by loving.

**Question 2:** How can I act neighborly or be a neighbor or friend?

**Answer:** I can be a friend by helping those in need. "Those in need" does not refer to those only in my specific group of friends.

We must love ourselves, strangers, friends, and even those who make life difficult for us. How do we do that? We certainly don't approve of mean, critical, or abusive behavior. Rather, we separate the behavior from the person, even from ourselves. We see and acknowledge the good in others, and in ourselves. When we see the "good," we see individuals as God has made them. This makes them feel loved, accepted, and appreciated -- which is what so many people want and need. Love gives us the ability to see ourselves and others more gently, more compassionately. Appreciating and accepting others just the way they are without trying to change them is acting as a true friend. That is the best thing we can do for others and for ourselves. For love has the power to transform individuals, situations, and lives.

## **PRACTICAL TIPS**

We can be a true friend to ourselves. We can fulfill the second greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt 22:39). How do we do that?

- We rid ourselves of biased, egotistical, prideful beliefs that actually hurt us more than they hurt others.
- We treat ourselves well. We don't wrongly criticize, condemn, justify, or hurt ourselves. That does not mean that we don't acknowledge our weaknesses and work to improve them. But it means that we deal compassionately with ourselves, that we are gentle with ourselves -- as gentle as the Samaritan was with the wounded man binding up his wounds. We can bind up any of our own wounds.

We can be true friends to others. A true friend is one who:

- treats others -- everyone -- with kindness;
- meets the needs of others with compassion.

We can be more like the Samaritan.

- The Samaritan disregarded the race or religion of the wounded man. We can wipe away prejudicial barriers. This includes reaching out and being friendly to people who are not in our little group or "clique." We may find wonderful friendships we may have otherwise missed.
- We can keep our eyes open to see who around us needs help. It may be physical, emotional, social, or academic help that is needed. People are crying out for help in so many different ways. Our smile, our hello, our compassion may give someone a reason to live. We may never know what people are struggling with or thinking.
- We can be kind to someone who has treated us poorly. We can start the healing process because, as Jesus said, "If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that" (**The Message** Matt. 5:46).

And, continuing from last month, we can see God as our Best Friend. Getting our relationship right with God will bless all of our other relationships. Let's be the friend we want to have. Let's be "Good Samaritans."