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Simply Friendship

Matthew 1:18-25; Proverbs 18:24; Matt 2:13; John 15:13; Rev 3:20

Friendship is a complex but wonderful thing. The “Toy Story” trilogy is a great story of the complexity of friendship. The main character, Woody, enjoys being the favourite toy of a boy called Andy. When Buzz Lightyear turns up and supplants Woody in Andy’s affections it leads to a film all about rivals becoming allies becoming friends. Meanwhile the Andy they both craved affection from grows up and leaves their friendship behind.

Our experience is usually similar. Childhood friends don’t make it into adult friends. People we meet in other stage of life can end up as lifelong friends. Where the story begins is not where it ends.

None of us is born in relationship with God, yet each one of us in turn responds to his gift of friendship in different seasons of life.

The Christmas story gives wonderful examples of true friendship:

1) True friendship initiates.

The Christmas story is all about friendship. God makes the first move (friendship always does that). *“For God so loved the world he gave his only son.”*

John 1: *“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.”* Paid professionals will give you ten minutes in their surgery. God however moves into our house to sort out the mess!

2) True friendship includes.

The news of Christ's birth came first to the shepherds on the hillside. The shepherds were generally viewed as bottom of the social pile. Yet they're the first to get invited to the birthday party of Jesus. It's so powerful when you include beyond your social norms.

Reasons we don't include others in our world:

- We feel inadequate (house, hospitality, gifting, capacity etc.) Bethlehem was a pretty poor party experience (a stable with an overwhelmed young family!) - but there was a lot of love as Jesus was there. Christians, we have Christ living with in us - that's enough!
- We feel overwhelmed keeping up with existing friends! We also can feel there's a "standard" of friendship that we must be achieving e.g. commitment, time spent etc. in order to deem it "authentic". However friendship has many levels (E.g. The shepherds didn't become the best friends of Jesus!). Jesus was comfortable to have differing circles of friends - e.g. Peter, James, John, then the 12, then 70. At other times Martha, Mary, Lazarus. Jesus couldn't possibly have attended every wedding and funeral he was invited to, but some he did.

Use everyday tasks to be friendly - e.g. use the same shop/ checkout. Include others from other places and backgrounds. In Matthew 2:13, when Herod started a infanticide, it caused people to flee to Egypt. Someone must have "included them" and helped them on their way - caring for refugees is an act of friendship.

3) True friendship comes at great cost.

Especially when you get let down. Joseph demonstrates 2 excellent friendship qualities:

- Discretion
- Sticking in when he was hurt, confused by Mary's story. He must have refused the "helpful" correct advice of his family. Friendship says "I'm putting my rights second."

Jesus said, "*Greater love has no man than this - he lays down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13)

4) True friendship follows, even at a distance.

- Simeon was an elderly man- he knew what he was looking for and in Luke 2:26 he sees baby Jesus and treats him with wonderful affection.
- In our world today distance often separates friends. What we carry in our heart for

someone matters more than being there all the time. Use social media to follow friends and support them.

- Giving our money displays friendship towards people we don't even yet know. The "parable of the second hand car dealer" in Luke 16:1-13 teaches that we should use our money to befriend people who will thank us in eternity for our efforts. *"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."*

Aspire to be a friend like that. Good and bad friendships are the making/breaking of us. Perfect friendship however is only found in Jesus. He is the ultimate friend.

"One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

Jesus knows how to be a great friend. God's love for you is great:

- He followed your progress even from your mothers womb, even when far away.
- He followed the costliest path to laying his life down for you.
- He included you in his plan to save anyone who calls on his name.
- He initiates right now by sending Jesus and he holds out his hand right now.

Jesus offers friendship that is beyond the quality of anything the world can give.

Human friends let us down. Jesus sticks closer than a brother. Jesus says, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* (Rev 3:20)

Where the story begins is not where it ends. The baby Jesus becomes our lifelong companion "Emmanuel" - God with us. We will never outgrow him and he will never leave us.

Questions

Initiating

Some people are naturally better at initiating friendship. Are you more of an initiator or a receiver? How can we grow in Christlikeness by taking more initiative in friendship?

Including

Can you think of a time when you got "included" by someone and the effect it had on you? What barriers do you find that stop you including others in your friendship circle? What things can we do that include others without over-committing ourselves?

Cost

Friendship can be rewarding but is also costly and sacrificial. What are some of the costs of showing genuine love in friendship? How do we keep going when we don't see reward for our efforts?

Following

What does it look like to show love to people we don't know or don't see much of? Who would be in that category for you/me?

God with us

What things conflict with us knowing God as our closest friend, Emmanuel?



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