

On the Choice of Friends

by J.R. Miller

True friends are those with whom we can trust perfectly, who will not weary of us when they discover our faults, and who will be helpful to us.

Scripture: Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 18:24, Proverbs 27:17, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, John 15:13, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Galatians 6:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, James 4:4

Topics: "Friendship", "Integrity"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the critical importance of choosing friends wisely, as they can either uplift us or lead us astray. He highlights that true friendship is built on trust, integrity, and the ability to accept each other's flaws without judgment. Miller encourages seeking friends who will support us through life's challenges and remain loyal regardless of circumstances. He also stresses the need for friendships that endure beyond this life, advocating for connections with those who share a faith in God. Ultimately, he warns against taking friendships for granted and urges us to cherish and nurture these valuable relationships.

Transcript

Few objects are of such vital importance to young people--as the character of their early friends. Tourists among the Alps climb the mountains tied together with ropes, that they may help each other. But sometimes one falls and drags the others down with him! So the friends to whom the young attach themselves will either help them upward to fairer beauty and sublimer excellence--or drag them down to blemished character, and perhaps to sullied purity.

A friend should be one whom we can trust perfectly. It is the truest test of friendship, that you can utter the most inviolable confidences, living as it were a transparent life in the presence of your friend, without dreading for a moment that he will betray or misuse the privacies you have unveiled to him. Such confidence is impossible without a background of integrity and sterling character.

If you have the least doubt of a man's truth and honor, if you believe him capable of being disloyal even in thought, you cannot take him into the sacred relation of friendship. The familiar story of Alexander and his physician well illustrates the trust that friendship should be able to give. The king was sick, and received a note telling him that his physician intended to give him poison under the guise of medicine. He read the note and put it under his pillow, and when the physician came in--he took the offered cup, and, looking him calmly in the face, drank the draught. He then drew out the note and gave it to his friend. It is impossible to

conceive of any trust more perfect than this. Such confidence could never be exercised in one of whose integrity we could have the faintest suspicion. The first essential qualification in a friend is, therefore, a soul of unblemished truth.

Then a friend must be one who will not weary of us--when he discovers the faults and imperfections that are in us. We meet people in society, and they see us in the glow of distance--which lends enchantment, concealing our unlovely qualities or spreading over them a deceptive coloring. Some faces which look very attractive when veiled--disclose many blemishes when seen uncovered. There are few characters that do not reveal unlovely traits on intimate acquaintance, which were not apparent in the ordinary interaction of social life. We walk before our closest friends--and they oftentimes see much silliness, pride and vanity under the thin veneer of our society manners. Even in the very best of us--there are unlovely features which close intimacy discloses.

In choosing friends we want those who will not be driven away when they learn our faults. True friendship must be armor against all such discoveries. It must take us for better--or for worse. We do not want friends in whose presence we must wear a mask of reserve--but those who, seeing and knowing us as we are, shall love us in spite of the blemishes, seeking wisely, though not meddlesomely, the removal of our faults and the elevation of our character. Nothing but great-heartedness is sufficient for this essential need.

Then we should choose friends who will be helpful to us. Every friendship leaves its impression upon us. There are touches that blight, and there are touches that are blessings. A young and innocent heart is so delicate in its beauty--that a breath of evil leaves it sullied. We cannot afford to take into our life, even for a little time--an impure companionship. It will leave a memory that will give pain--even in the holiest after years.

There is embraced in the thought of friendship, the element of mutual helpfulness. There grows up between two friends, a sort of holy communism. What one has--the other must share--whether it be sorrow or joy. Whatever experience is passing over the chords of one heart--is echoed also from the other. When there is a cup of gladness, two hearts drink of it. When there is a burden, there are two shoulders under it. Friendship knows no limit in giving. Its joy is not in receiving--but in imparting. It is not, therefore, exacting in its demands or quick to complain of seeming neglect. We want unselfish friends, who shall care for us for our own sake. We want those who will never tire of bearing our burdens. We may have sorrow and adversity. We may become a great care in the future, unable to give anything in return save grateful love. He who becomes our friend, takes upon himself many possibilities of sacrifice and unselfish service. It may cost him much. He must be one who will not grow weary of these burdens, should they be imposed. He must be ready to share our infirmities, and not tire of helping us.

There are friendships that do this. The holiest of them all--is the parental. I have seen a child growing up deformed or blind or deaf, or perhaps weak-minded, so as to be always a burden and a care, never a pride or a joy. And yet through the years, the parental hearts clung to it with most tender affection, never wearying of the burden, ministering with almost divine patience and gentleness all the while. Then I have seen invalids who could never be anything but invalids, to be toiled for and to be watched over, year after year; to be carried from room to room and up and down stairs like helpless infants. There was not a shadow of a hope, that they could ever repay the toil they cost, or even lighten the burden they exacted from those who loved them.

Even outside of home and family ties I have seen friendships that never faltered under burdens that were heavy, and could never grow less.

We know not what may befall us in the undisclosed years, and we need friends who will never tire of us, should even the worst come. We want friends in prosperity and wealth, who will cleave to us even more loyally, if misfortune and poverty should strip us bare. Such friends are rare. Only purest unselfishness is equal to such tests.

Then, in choosing friends, we should take those only with whom we can hope to walk with, beyond death. Why should we form close and tender attachments here--to be severed forever at death? Why should we be unequally yoked with unbelievers? Friendship reaches its highest, truest meaning--only when it knits two lives together at every point--not in the lower nature alone--but in the higher as well, and with reference to the eternal future. We should seek for our close friends, therefore, only those who are God's children. Then the web which we weave in our love-years, shall never be rent or torn.

Having chosen a few such friends, we should never let them go out of our lives if we can by any possibility retain them. True friendship is too rare and sacred a treasure, lightly to be thrown away. And yet many people are not careful to retain their friends. Some lose them through inattention, failing to maintain those little amenities, courtesies and kindnesses which cost so little, and yet are hooks of steel to grasp and hold our friends. Some drop old friends for new ones. Some take offence easily at imagined slights or neglects, and ruthlessly cut the most sacred ties. Some become impatient of little faults, and discard even truest friendship.

Some are incapable of any deep or permanent affection, and fly from friendship to friendship like restless birds from bough to bough, making a nest in their hearts in none. Then beautiful friendships are often destroyed, not by any sharp, sudden quarrel--but by slowly and imperceptibly drifting apart until there is a great chasm between two lives that once were woven sacredly together.

There are a great many ways of losing friends. But when we have once taken true souls into the grasp of our hearts, we should cherish them as rarest jewels. There is no wealth in the world like a noble friendship, and nothing should induce us to sacrifice such a treasure. If slights are given--let them be overlooked. If misunderstandings arise--let them quickly be set right. Let not pride or fiery temper or cold selfishness, disdainfully toss away a friendship for any trivial cause. It is not hard to lose a friend--but the loss is utterly irreparable!

Let it never be overlooked, that we as friends must stand ready to be and to do--all that we expect our friends to be and to do. If we set a high standard for them, that standard must be ours also. It will not do to give pebbles--and ask diamonds in return.

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