

Friendship

Friendships are important. Jesus is a friend to all and we can learn much from His example. He gave His life for us, shed His innocent blood, so that we could have the living hope of everlasting life through the forgiveness of our sins, in His name and blood.

The Bible describes some friendships. For example, there is the friendship of Jonathan and David, Mary and Elisabeth, and Paul and Timothy. These friends helped each other as they journeyed toward their goal in heaven.

For this Home and Family feature, we've asked believers to write about what friendship means to them. Their responses are interesting and helpful. We hope that these thoughts encourage all readers to think and visit about this topic. How do you "invest" in your friends?

True Friends Rebuke, Forgive, Share Joys and Sorrows

I once had a plaque that read, "A friend is someone who knows everything about you, and loves you anyway!" A true friend knows another's faults, character flaws and failings, yet overlooks them because the special bond that unites the relationship is stronger than the negatives. These friendships are usually born of a common interest, personality type, or life's circumstances that have brought the friends together. God has placed certain people in our lives for mutual benefit.

There are casual friendships, acquaintances, professional relationships, etc. which we loosely describe as "friends." The word friendship has been redefined in today's society. There are those who claim to have 500+ friends via social media. To some, it has almost become a contest as to who has the most friends. People are quick to become BFFs (best friends forever), yet the meaning has become diluted. These friendships are sometimes shallow relationships that are there for the good times but disappear in times of strife.

True friendships require give and take. We need to give of ourselves emotionally, mentally, and temporally. We need to listen and hear the desires of the other's heart. We also need to speak and share our own feelings. Believers know that a true friend is one who wants us to make it to heaven. They love us enough to rebuke us, forgive us, and share our joys and sorrows. In God's kingdom we certainly have many friends.

It is quite rare that someone would have the same closest friend their entire life. People change, move, and grow apart. Life's circumstances may not allow for the close relationship we once had, even though we still have love and fondness for each other.

The only exception is our dearest friend, Jesus. He knows everything about us and loves us anyway. He has given us His lifeblood. We give Him our hearts. We want to listen to His Word. He listens to our cries and has time for us. He wants us to get to heaven. He has been our closest friend our entire life. He is our true best Friend forever.

Cheryl Simonson

Friends on the Train Ride of Life

Years ago, a friend in Finland sent me a poem titled *Elämän junamatka*. Although the poem was in Finnish, I think I understood most of it. It spoke of life being like a train ride. There are many stations on the train ride of life. At these

stations people get on and people get off. Some people ride in the train car with you for a long time, some people get off at the next stop. The poem was drawing the picture of how we encounter new people all the time. Some people become friends, some good friends, and others just pass through.

When we're younger, our friends are often the people who are in our Sunday school class or class at school. As we grow older and have new experiences, our friends group begins to diversify. I have a number of friends I have not stayed in contact with. It seems it is not always possible to keep all of our friends, even though one would want it so. I am thankful for the friends who have been in my life for many years. These friends have shared many of my joys and also my trials over the years. They understand me differently, perhaps, than friends I have made more recently. Each friend has something different to offer, and I feel I am a better person because of my friends. God gives each of us what we need in life. We can pray that God would help us find friends.

How can one be a friend, have, or find, a friend? Here are some ideas that come to mind: Travel to other congregations to meet new people, be involved with activities and church functions where you have opportunity to work with others, visit with people including ones you wouldn't normally think to visit with, show interest in what other people are interested in, lend a helping hand when you see help is needed, and simply just be friendly.

Sometimes life feels complicated and difficult. The best thing for me during these times is that my good friends are believing and can preach the gospel to me. Without needing to explain, I can just ask to have my sins forgiven, life's burdens are lifted, and everything feels brighter again. God knows our needs and He will never leave us. He is our greatest Friend.

Sarina Siljander

Be a Friend to Others

My good friendS are very much appreciated for the love, kindness, joy, and encouragement they provide in many ways. Good friends have common interests and goals. The most important friends are those who help us keep faith and a clean conscience.

Friendships are nurtured through efforts by every person. To have a friend, you need to be a friend. Invite guests into your home for a visit. Get together with other people and spend time doing things you all enjoy. Help each other.

Friendships with those of all ages are beautiful!

If someone feels he or she has no friends, I would encourage that person to make yourself available to become friends with others. Come to church services and other events as often as possible for two important reasons: to hear the Word of God, and to have precious fellowship. Be approachable. Smile. Say, "hello," to those around you—that's the first step in providing an opportunity to become a friend. And, as in all things, pray to God for His help and guidance.

Mary Hillukka

The Gospel Creates a Special Bond

A good friend is someone who genuinely shares in life's joys and sorrows. A good friend is forgiving and understanding. It's a blessing to have friendships that, even without much contact for some time, can be rekindled quickly. It's special to

have friends where a person can feel at ease and enjoy their company whole-heartedly. Whether it's playing a round of golf or visiting over a cup of coffee, I thank God for my believing friends and the fellowship that comes with these friendships.

Believing friends have been a source of strength in my life. Although I'm timid with my words when it comes to discussing faith matters, and those close to me are somewhat the same, there is a silent accountability and sense of security from these friends when struggles arise or temptations are on the horizon. This has helped me on my journey. Hearing and preaching the gospel has created a special bond with friends that is never forgotten.

Ashley Ylitalo

A Friend in Faith Remembers

Hi Pentti, God's peace,

I was meaning to ask Lori tonight at Bible class if you are still in Germany, but our paths never crossed. Regardless, I wanted to send you a quick note to let you know that you are remembered here, even if you find yourself as a lonely traveler there in Europe! I know from my own experience that it can seem lonely traveling for work, even for 10–12 days, so I'm sure that it is even more the case when you are gone for four-plus weeks. Anyway, be encouraged, dear brother. It will be nice to visit with you upon your return!

This email message was sent to me, just after I returned home from spending one month in Germany, on a work trip. Even though I was already back home, it touched me that a brother in faith had remembered me so far away. Time gets long and lonely when one is away from family and believers for extended times. This message was a comfort and again reminded me that God truly remembers His own.

Pentti Loukusa

Friends beyond Measure

I went for some time when I felt that I didn't have close friends. I didn't understand it and had many doubts. It seemed that I'd always had good friends—as a teenager, a young married, a mother. What happened? I wondered—who even remembers me? Would anyone think to call me? Am I invisible? I battled these thoughts off and on for a long time. My husband would tell me—it's not true, you have many friends! But, I still felt an emptiness and longing. I felt sorry for myself.

I'm thankful that God helped me to see that this message was a message from the enemy. Satan was tempting me with this, and I had believed him. He can still tempt in this way, but sometimes now I tell him—*go away!* I know I have friends, precious escorts in faith. I'm reminded of this countless times—by the love shown when my parents passed away, by a heart-to-heart conversation at church, a visit with an elderly friend, or a visit with a young person in our home. I'm reminded by a visit at a ladies' outing, a Sunday afternoon home visit, a conversation with fellow believers at my work place, or by a message in a Christmas card. I pray that God will always remind me of this, and especially to be thankful for His kingdom, where we all have true friends beyond measure.

Lori Loukusa

Longtime and New Friends—All Priceless Gifts

My friend is one who owns my trust—a trust earned through years of proven love, loyalty, and understanding. Love is demonstrated repeatedly, often in small and unintentional ways. An empathetic smile, a knowing look, or a hand on the shoulder that conveys more than words. I know my friend will still be my friend tomorrow—that has been proven over and over. My friend will never abandon me in difficult times, he draws even closer to ease the weight of trial and grief. Those lifelong friends are always there, even when life's circumstances keep us apart for long periods. When the opportunity arrives that we can be together again, it's as if time has stood still. We can comfortably pick up where we left off.

Some friendships are old, time-tested relationships and others are more recent. I have learned to remain open to new friendships with people of any age. It is a gift that new friends are given throughout life, and are as valuable as those made previously. The relationship is different with newer friends—fresh, new and somewhat exciting, the building of a relationship that is unique from every other. The best friend is always a friend in living faith, often a confessor father or mother, one to share the matters of the way and the journey.

A friend is often taken for granted, but at a time of crisis such as critical illness or loss of a loved one, at a time of celebration and joy, my friends are there to share my uncertainty, my grief, or my happiness. The bond of love and friendship is again recognized and refreshed. True friendship allows me to have the faith that my friend will be available to me for comfort or for companionship. Thanks and praise rise to the Heavenly Father from an overflowing heart.

I feel as blessed to have the chance to be a friend as I am to have one. I know how I value a dear friend and I want to offer at least as much as I receive. Friendship is reciprocal and is something that is built and nurtured, just as any other relationship. My friend likes to know that I value his friendship, so sometimes I tell him. Sometimes I will try in some small way to demonstrate how much the relationship is valued. It can sometimes come as a surprise when someone describes you as their good friend. All I did was pay attention to them and offer my help or some small insignificant act of kindness and caring. I am thankful when I realize that I have unknowingly been gifted with another friend!

My dearest Friend. The One that first loved me and loved me so deeply that He gave His life for me so that I could be freed from sin and could own the hope of everlasting life. This greatest Friend loves me in spite of my sinfulness and weakness. The One that is with me every moment of the day, in joy and in strife, and who will never leave me. This friendship cannot be measured. This is the friendship that I most fervently pray will always be preserved.

Randy Kangas