

WHAT IS A FRIEND?

“A friend is the person who comes in when everyone else has gone out” or “the one who stays in when everyone else has gone out.”

“A friend is one with whom you dare to be yourself.”

“A friend is one who sets his heart upon us, is happy in us, and delights in us – does for us what we need, is willing and fully engaged to do all he can for us; one who we can fully rely upon in all cases.”

- Channing

“Friendship is the greatest thing in the world. There is no door it will not unlock, no problem it will not solve. It is after all, the only real thing in life in this world.”

- David Grayson

“Friendship has the skill and observation of the best physician; the diligence and vigilance of the best nurse; and the tenderness and patience of the best Mother.”

- Lord Clarendon

“Friend is a word of royal tone –
Friend is a poem all alone.”

- A Persian Poet

“Friendship is love, without either flowers or veil.”

- Byron

“It is chance makes us brothers,
But hearts make us friends.”

Friendship, friend; what glorious words these are. For each of us they paint a different picture – but for all a matchless, priceless, peerless gem of rarity and beautiful splendor. Friends and friendship and the friendliness of those we meet, play so important and so vital a part in our lives that is quite impossible for us to visualize our lives without them. It is our friends who encourage us to better living, to higher endeavor, to attempt the impossible, and to be true to our best selves. It is our friends, or a friend who lifts us up when we falter along the rugged path of our journey through time. True friends rejoice in our successes and weep for our sorrows. We need our friends to help us attain and celebrate our successes – but far more do we need them when we fail or when misfortune lays the chilling hand of disappointment and grief upon

our hearts. “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” - and how barren is that life into which has never come the light of such a friend! The one who sits by our bed in time of sickness; the one who finds ways and words to comfort us when ways and words are impossible to all others. Yes, friends are soul-savers and even life-preservers at times when our very souls sicken and life holds little of challenge or hope for the future. And who does not come to grips with such moments or days or weeks. These are the times when it is the greatest blessing in the world to have a friend, and the greatest privilege to be a friend.

Yes, friendship is a privilege and a responsibility. Too often we stress only the joys of having a friend, and forget the responsibility to be a friend. Sometimes we check over in our minds the qualifications of our acquaintances and wonder if they would pass the tests of friendship – but do we subject ourselves to the same thorough searching analysis in regard to our fitness to be friends. It is truly said, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.” Be a friend!

The Meaning of Friendship

The words “Be a friend!” carry a heavy burden of meaning and offer the greatest possible challenge. “Be a friend.” It sounds so simple and so intriguing that we feel eager to embark at once upon the adventure, and it is an adventure. But like all adventures it entails much that is uncertain and not apparent at the outset.

Truly, if we are to succeed in this vast undertaking, we shall find it necessary to leave behind conceit and self interest. For as Thomas Hughes says, “Blessed is he who has the gift of making friends; for it is one of God’s best gifts. It involves many things, but above all the power of going out of oneself and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another.”

We shall also need to part company with inconstancy, for there is no place in friendship’s garden for the fickle. To be a true friend we must foster the priceless virtue of constancy. So delicate an attribute as friendship needs our constancy on which to grow. We may not indulge in frequent and sudden changes as the weather and still earn the name of “friend”.

Kindness, courtesy and thoughtful consideration will be in continuous demand upon our adventure, and without a liberal and ever-ready supply of these qualities we cannot hope to reach our goal. Our friends expect and enjoy our honest opinions and helpful criticisms; they do not expect us to conform to the same formalities of so-called politeness to which mere acquaintances must conform. However, even between good friends there must be certain reticencies, certain reserves behind which we may not go – nor wish to go. Yes, truthfulness is required of us by our friends, but our honesty must be tempered by kindness and love. Brutal frankness is seldom required between friends; so keen and so vibrant is the tie which binds friends that feelings and meanings are sensed without the need for harsh words. Reproof, however gentle, strains the sensitivity between friends.

In love, we are told, we have the happiness of forgetting everything, but in friendship we have the happiness of understanding everything. Understanding is an ever present need between friends; a staff upon which we shall need to lean often. To acquaintances it is sometimes necessary to make lengthy, even embarrassing explanations, but to friends who know and love us there is understanding and hence contentment. Friends require only a word or a handclasp to clear away doubts and uncertainty.

Selfishness cannot accompany us on our adventure; for unless we are willing to leave it behind we may as well abandon our adventure in friendship. Of course, this is more easily said than done. We may be generous to a friend in innumerable ways – and yet be selfish in desiring to fill his every need; or in endeavoring to deprive others of friendship with him. It is sometimes difficult to enjoy sharing a very special friend with others who wish also to bask in the sunlight of his friendship. Too often, we forget that the same admirable qualities which make him attractive and beloved to us endear him to others as well. We are most likely to show our lack of unselfishness by an unconscious eagerness to consume more than our rightful share of his time and energy. This fault is a serious one - and the more so because it most often is unconscious – for the flame of friendship sometimes smothers for lack of contacts and stimulation from other sources. If I am completely satisfied with only one friend, feeling no need of any other - then there is something wrong with me – I am stagnating – and worse than that – I am woefully lacking in discernment – as well as in consideration for the friend upon whom I lay such a burden. And if I am not content with the friendship of one person, I have no right to expect my friend to be satisfied with me as an only friend. Friendships need sharing; they thrive and grow to abundant fruition only when the smothering weeds of jealousy and selfishness have been uprooted and destroyed.

The Attributes of Friendship

We must be prepared in friendship to trust each other fully, if the bud of our friendship is to come to full flower. Like love, friendship cannot endure where doubt and suspicion abide.

Patience, forbearance and a generous measure of the sense of humor will round out the list of our indispensable companions if we would adventure in friendship.

Time is the seasoner of many things – it heals wounds, it provides perspective, it lends enchantment to the past, and for friendship it is a leveler – a tester. Time is necessary for the growth and maturity of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life – it is necessary, too, for the seasoning and proving of the bonds between friends. We had best not ponder “How long and under what circumstances will my friend remain true and constant and loyal – but instead, each of us must ask of himself – How long and how well can I withstand the storms and trials of friendship with another? How well will I measure up to the standards by which my friends and time will judge me? What have I to offer – and do I make the most of my opportunities for adventuring in friendship?

In Grace Dawson's poem "To a Friend", we read of many who passed by the golden adventure and of the beloved one who embraced the opportunity for friendship. Which of these would you likely be?

TO A FRIEND

You entered my life in a casual way,
And saw at a glance what I needed;
There were others who passed me or met me each day,
But never a one of them heeded.

Perhaps you were thinking of other folks more,
Or chance simply seemed to decree it;
I know there were many such chances before,
But the others – well, they didn't see it.

You said just the thing that I wished you would say,
And you made me believe that you meant it;
I held up my head in the old gallant way,
And resolved that you should never repent it.

There are times when encouragement means such a lot,
And a word is enough to convey it;
There were others who could have as easy as not –
But just the same they didn't see it.

There may have been someone who could have done more,
To help me along, though I doubt it;
What I needed was cheering, and always before
They had let me plod onward without it.

You helped to refashion the dream of my heart,
And made me turn eagerly to it;
There were others who might have (I question that part)
But after all they didn't do it.

- Grace Stricker Dawson

The Kinds of Friends and Friendships

Friendships, I think, are of many kinds, qualities and degrees. Not all are created of the same pattern or material, nor are all designed to fill the same needs. We must have friends of many different types and qualities to satisfy each different need for development within ourselves. Have you ever contemplated the adventure of bringing together all the people you own as friends? If your mental picture is similar to mine, you

are visualizing a varied and heterogeneous group. Could we expect them all to enjoy each other as we enjoy each one of them? I think not – and yet they are all our friends.

Here in my assembly of friends is a dear old lady. She calls herself my Aunt Kathryn because our names are the same. We have little in common as far as age, or mutual friends are concerned. We seldom visit each other – but somehow, many years ago, at our very first meeting, a spark was struck which kindled into lasting friendship. There in the corner by the fireplace you can see her beaming face, laughing eyes and motherly way – she unconsciously invites friendship. If you could be with her for awhile, you would surely feel as I did when I first met her, “Here is a friend”. I met this dear old friend (old in years, but heart-young as I) when I went to Quincy, Illinois, as a bride – far away from home and friends – to a new strange place with no one to call friend. So discerning, so sensitive a soul is my “Aunt Kathryn” that when I left her home that day, she put her arms around me and hugged me thoroughly and spoke words of understanding, of kindness and friendship to me. No words, no gesture could have been more welcome, nor could have so completely bound me to her in friendship.

Look there in the shadow and you’ll see a tiny woman dressed in brown – she is like a trim little wren, I often think. This is the modest unassuming friend whose depth of understanding and whose unselfish, friendly spirit renewed me at a crisis in my college days when everything had been going wrong with dogged persistence. They, she and her equally fine and hospitable husband, gave me a new and happy college home with them – and so much more than just a place to live!

Someone asks, “Who is the attractive young woman whose infectious good humor is charming everyone near her?” I do not need to search the group to identify the friend in question – only one could exactly fit that description – Eileen – who is truly an ideal as a person and a friend. We were brides the same year and the foundation for our many years of warmest friendship was laid in our mutual homemaking adventures. She is a brilliant scholar, but somehow I seldom think of her as such, and I’m sure I should have been as much attracted to her, had she not possessed so keen an intellect. It is her quick wit and her sense of humor which first attract, it is here sincerity, her loyalty and her quite understanding which are most deeply valued through the years, and upon which I have leaned many times.

The young girl who is helping the guests with their wraps is a gem of rare sweetness. Shy she is and self-conscious among the grownups – but she smiles and lends a hand wherever she can. She is undoubtedly the most loyal, steadfast, devoted and unquestioning friend I have. She had paid me the genuine compliment of saving all my letters to her – some dozens of them. Poor as anyone else might consider them, they are cherished by my little friend, and I am deeply touched.

The gray-haired, distinguished-looking man whose eyes crinkle with merriment, and whose speech is so beautifully precise – is one who has shown his friendship as few friendships are revealed. So loyal, so steadfast is he that his word is truly as good as his bond, regardless of the personal sacrifice involved. His sense of humor first

intrigued me, but with the development of our friendship, I have found countless other qualities to admire. Of him it can be truly said, “Not what we gain, but what we give, measures the worth of life we live.”

The sparkling Irish woman in the center of the group took me as an equal when I was a sophomore in high school, and she the wife of my principal. What began as pure devotion on my part because of her friendly, comradely interest in me, and the basis upon which she received me – has developed through more than twenty years, and has grown to mean much to both Mary and me. Though we have never met since my graduation from high school, our correspondence has provided means of growth for that friendship, born so long ago because of her keen understanding of a child’s heart.

There are many others, so many that it will be impossible for you to meet them all this afternoon – but then – you each have your own assembly of friends, which is undoubtedly very much like mine.

We can agree that our friends are of many different types and ages and come to us by varied routes and circumstances – and it is well. For our lives are rounded out by the inherent gifts of other lives, and as the needs of our spirits are many, so we need many kinds of friends to fill these needs. It is also true that just as each of us has a dominant note, something that represents the special gift we make to others, so each of our friends fills for us some special need. One may be a constant reminder of the virtue of unselfishness. Another may possess an artist’s eye through which the world about us becomes a new and delightful discovery. Another – the capacity for understanding people’s hearts and of managing somehow to find the best in us. Still another may embody the soul of kindness, or a resolute spirit, a logical mind, or a rare sense of humor. By each of these friends we are spurred to our best – to a symmetrical growth in spirit and character. We need many friends – only rarely is any one friend sufficient to satisfy all our needs. Many a friendship has been wrecked - too much was expected of it – divinity itself! Knowing so well our own limitations, it is unfair and unwise to expect more from our friends than we are capable of giving.

Degrees of Friendship

We have spoken of the degrees of friendship only in slight detail. It seems to me that the degrees or intensities of our friendships are as numerous as the kinds of friends we have. Not all of those whom we admire and enjoy as friends could possibly attain that rare distinction of bosom friend. That special one who for us embodies all that is our ideal of friendship and a friend. I refer to such a friendship as that which flourished between Jonathan and his friend, David – a supreme tie – stronger than even the bond of blood; that relationship between two hearts which have become one in the mystical union of friendship; which means more than any matter of circumstance, fortune or individual benefit. I refer to the kind of friend William Penn had in mind when he wrote, “A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably. In short, death cannot kill that which never dies, nor can spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same divine principle; the root and record of their friendship. This is the comfort

of friends that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are in the best sense, ever present – because immortal.” Such perfection in friendship is very rare but is ever a model and the hope of all who travel Friendship’s Road.

While few of us may attain the supreme heights of such a friendship, none of us needs lack-worthy and satisfying friendships which will gladden our hearts, lift our burdens and make our lives more complete; for “men and women do not have to be perfect to be loved; all or nearly all are love-worthy if we have it in us to love.”

Rules for Friendship

There are no special rules for finding and making friends – for friendship is free of all bounds of rules. Friendship is like happiness, she flies pursuit, she is shy, and wild and timid and will best be wooed by indirection. Quite unexpectedly, sometimes as we pass in the open road, she puts her hand in ours like a child. Friendship is neither a formality nor a mode. According to David Grayson, it is rather a life. It is not the substance of what we say to one another that makes us friends, nor yet the manner of saying it; nor is it what you do or I do; nor is it what I give to you or you give to me. It is not because we entertain the same views or respond to the same emotions, nor do our social and economic circumstances set us apart or bring us together. All these things may serve to bring us together but no one of them can of itself kindle the fire of friendship.

A friend is one with whom we are fond of being when no business is afoot, nor any entertainment contemplated. David Grayson says, “It is miraculous how with cultivation, one’s capacity for friendship increases. It is a phenomenon worthy of consideration by all hardened disbelievers in that which is miraculous upon the earth – that when a man’s heart really opens to a friend, he finds there room for two; and when he takes a second – behold, the skies lift and the earth grows wider, and he finds there room for ten more.”

The key to friendship’s door is one which we all possess and if we but forget ourselves and use the key – any one of many different shapes and sizes – it will unlock the door for us and we will be surprised to find that no sooner has the door opened than there will be a shadow across the opening – a potential friend approaches. It takes so little to entice a friendly spirit past our doorway. It requires only our own friendly spirit; those who approach are eager for the invitation to enter. A smile, the right bower of friendship is often the only necessary enticement.

Much has been written and said about the beauty and value of a smile, and all the fine things it can accomplish – we really should be more generous with our smiles and wear them for everyday. The fine adventurous thing about wearing our smiles for everyday is that we never know just when an unsuspecting smile may warm a lonely or discouraged heart to smile in return – oh, the help a smile can be in making friends.

If nobody smiled and nobody cheered,
And nobody helped us along,
If each – every minute looked after himself
And the good things went all to the strong,

If nobody cared just a little for you
And nobody thought about me,
And we stood all alone in the battle of life
What a dreary old world it would be.

Life is sweet just because of the friends we have made
And the things which in common we share,
We want to live on, not because of ourselves
But because of the people who care.
It's giving and doing for somebody else –
On that all life's splendor depends;
And the job of the world when it's all added up –
Is found in the making of friends.

for

Friendship is a chain of gold,
Shaped in God's all perfect mold.
Each link a smile, a laugh, a tear,
A grip of the hand, a word of cheer.
As steadfast as the ages roll, binding closer – soul to soul,
No matter how far or how heavy the load –
Sweet is the journey – on Friendship's Road.

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