

more to be

THE TRUTH ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

including the friendship pyramid

Knowing what true friendship looks like, discerning how to pick your closest friends, and figuring what to do with the difficult ones are skills worth learning.

So let's turn to the Word along with some super simple concepts to see if we can figure out how to experience emotionally healthy and spiritually rich friendships.

Can you really pick your friends?

Yes and no.

Friends are people you get to choose -- most of the time -- whereas your family is chosen for you.

You're bound to parents, siblings, and extended family through generational ties, whether those happen to be traceable in your DNA or through adoption. (Of course, in the case of adoption for older children, there is the opportunity to say "yes" to family. That's kind of neat, when you think of it!)

Family relationships can certainly be the place where the greatest of friendships are formed, but just because you're family doesn't mean you'll like each other very much. Proverbs 17:17 explains that "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." It's natural to have conflict with your siblings, and to find that a friend loves more deeply day-in- and-day-out, but when push comes to shove (sometimes literally) your family will often have your back. So as we consider friendships, remember that friends don't replace family, but they will make your life fuller with relationships built by choice.

How do you choose your friends?

Sometimes a school situation or being in a missionary or military family may make the possibility of choosing and keeping friends impossible, but the fact is that you can choose your friends, even if the quantity and quality seems slim. The number of people you allow yourself to get close to, and how deep those relationships will go, is really up to you. Learning how to decide on who gets access to your heart (a best friend) versus who gets to simply hang out with you (close friends) comes down to understanding the different types of friendships that happen in the various stages of life.

What is true friendship?

Have you ever stopped to really consider what it means to have a truly authentic friendship? Really, if you had to define true friendship, what would you say?

True friendship is

Did you come up with something or leave it blank? I think when I was a teen, I'd probably say true friendship happens with someone who keeps your secrets, calls to ask you to hang out on the weekend, and remembers your birthday even without a Sweet 16 invitation. I still think those things are important, but my list has grown. I've come to see that a true friend is someone who will tell me when I'm going off course and be willing to forgive me when I accidentally hurt them. My closest friends also share my values and priorities, and they are my cheerleaders as I pursue my passions and dreams.

Having a friend is truly a gift and being a friend is surely a privilege, but few people will ever become your best friend and only a dozen may make it into your inner circle.

Finding true friends is a life-long endeavor, whether it starts on the playground swapping BFF charm necklaces or marks every day of high school trying to figure out where you belong. Wait until it is time to pick college roommates and decide on bridesmaids to see who really carries the title of true friend. When you finally have that group of friends-like-sisters surrounding you, your life turns in a new direction -- sometimes traveling the world or working crazy long hours, and other times back on the playground as a mom of toddlers still looking for a bestie!

The Friendship Pyramid

Would you like to know how to figure out if who you think is your friend is truly your friend? Consider these character traits and circumstances that define your relationship in order to gain a better understanding of the type of friendships you really have.

friendships change

Keep in mind that you may have thousands of acquaintances and hundreds of people within your community, but only a dozen truly close friends and maybe only one best friend throughout your lifetime. In the same way seasons change, friendships also change. A close friend may become an acquaintance five years from now whereas an acquaintance may become your best friend in the future.

“A friend loves at all times...”

Proverbs 17:17 NJV

friendships grow

As you look at this pyramid, notice that the quality of your friendships will grow from bottom up and the quantity of your friendships will decrease as you climb to the top of the pyramid. Your closest friendships form over time through experiencing life together, sharing similar values, and discovering certain character traits, such as loyalty, dependability, and trustworthiness, which are essential ingredients of a good and growing friendship.



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“A friend to all is a friend to none.”

Aristotle

apply with grace

As you think about the people in your life and attempt to fit them into a category, remember that this isn't about creating laws or rules. The hope is to use this "Friendship Pyramid" as a tool for learning how to have healthy friendships. Some people will always have lots of friends and others may have only a few. Rather than comparing yourself to others, seek to be a quality friend and treasure the people God has brought into your life.

Different Types of Friends

Even though you may know hundreds (or thousands) of people over your lifetime, they can't all be categorized as closest your friends.

Rather, you can think of the people you know as falling into four categories: Best Friend, Closest Friends, Community Friends, and Acquaintances/Former Friends.

Who they are and how many you have really depends on your life circumstances and personality, along with the type of people that you get to do life with each day.

If you look at ***The Friendship Pyramid***, you'll see how all the people you know can be categorized into different types of relationships. As you go up the pyramid, you'll see that the quality of those relationships will increase while the quantity of those relationships decreases. We can't be close friends with everyone, nor should we. Proverbs 18:24 ESV teaches that a person of many companions (or friends) may come to ruin. Those we are closest with should be few.

a valuable lesson

There was a point in my life when I was going through a really difficult time. I decided that I wanted to share my heavy heart with my friends and I sat down to type out an email to them, since some lived far away. When I finally had everyone's email included, I realized there were nearly two dozen friends I wanted to tell. I had this little check in my spirit thinking, "That's too many close friends!" But I went ahead and sent out the email, believing that I was really blessed to have that many friends I could trust with my heart.

In the weeks to come, as God answered my prayer and my circumstances changed, I wanted to update my friends as I saw them in person, but I forgot who I had told. I had to go back check the original email list. How awful is that...to bump into a friend and not remember if she "really knew" what was going on with me because I couldn't remember all the names of the friends I emailed.

It was then that I realized my definition of friendship needed to be re-evaluated. I had to become selective on those who were indeed my closest friends -- keeping it to a number I could remember! It didn't mean I loved anyone any less or that I'd stop considering them a good friend, but rather I shifted my thinking to consider my inner "heart circle friends" with a little bit more discernment.

Think About Personalities

One of the reasons I have a tendency toward many friendships is really because I am a super social Sanguine. I like to have lots of friends and have often fallen into the trap of believing I've met my best friend instantly. That's a Sanguine problem, whereas sensitive Melancholies may have only a few dozen friends who they get to know on a deep level over many years.

The many different ways God has created our personalities truly does influence our friendship style, and the quality and quantity of our friendships.

To get a better sense of how your personality influences your friendships, download "[Wired Up](#)" from [moretobe.com](#).

Think in Seasons

Life happens in seasons, such as middle school, high school, college, 20s, marriage, motherhood, etc. Your friendships will change through the seasons of your life, especially as you change schools, jobs, and communities. Making new friends and keeping the old ones can be challenging. You may feel like you're betraying your old bestie for a new one. Don't shy away from making new friends. Rather thank God for the past while investing your time into the present. As Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote in one of his poems...

*'Tis better to have loved and lost
than to have never loved at all.*

What makes for a good friendship?

A good friendship is like a recipe for a yummy batch of chocolate chip cookies. There are the basic ingredients that must be mixed together in just the right measurements and baked at the perfect temperature to make a delicious cookie. One missed step can accidentally wreck the batch. In the same way, friendships have essential ingredients, like the ones listed below, which come together in order to create great relationships. Like a bad batch of cookies, however, sometimes even the best ingredients in a friendship can not promise a great friendship.

Shared Faith

A deep friendship will be built around shared faith, especially for Christians.

We need friendships with others who will hold us accountable to live for God and will call us into account when we go off course.

That's what Proverbs 27:17 is talking about when it says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." We need friends who we seek advice from, knowing that they will give us the truth from Scripture in return.

Common Interests & Priorities

It is impossible to have a good friendship without some thread of common interest.

While you may really like someone who is opposite from you, having a deep friendship with them may not happen if you can't find a common interest or priority.

For example, if one wants to hike a trail and the other wants to go shopping, every time together will be a compromise. Or in terms of priorities, if one wants to study while the other wants to party, each friend's core values will bring frustration to the other one. Close friends need to be able to share some common interests and priorities.

Balanced Time

In order to develop a friendship, you need to spend time together, usually doing things you both enjoy or sharing something in common, like school or church.

But too much time together can ruin a friendship.

Proverbs 25:17 says to "Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—too much of you, and they will hate you." Nothing could be more true about a friendship. We get on each other's nerves, no matter how much we like each other. Space and time apart will make every friendship better.

Sensitivity & Compassion

A good friend needs to demonstrate a decent amount of sensitivity and compassion toward you.

A good friend will think of where you're at emotionally, looking for ways to encourage you when you're down.

Proverbs 25:20 says, "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day...is one who sings songs to a heavy heart." In other

words, a good friend doesn't celebrate her role as lead in the play while you've just been cut from the musical production. She won't go on and on about her new crush, while you've just shared with her that your parents had a huge fight last night.

Honesty & Trustworthiness

A friend is someone who will speak the truth in a loving way, and not avoid conflict with you just to keep the peace. She will be someone you can trust with your heart, and not expect it to be served up the next day in the cafeteria for others to pick apart.

If you could rank the quality of a true friendship, the degree of honesty and trustworthiness ranks highest.

Proverbs 27:5 frames it this way, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love." If you love a friend, tell them the truth. If they love you, they'll guard your heart and life, and not gossip behind your back. Proverbs 11:13, "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret."

How to handle a difficult friend...

Cultivating good friendships takes time and effort. Once you've surrounded yourself with friends that are dependable, trustworthy, loving, and fun to be with, maintaining those friendships requires careful attention and a whole lot of grace.

Friendships are messy. We can either work toward cleaning them up or moving away from them!

Hurt feelings and unforgiveness can end a friendship that was once fabulous. Betrayal, gossip, and forgetfulness can sabotage any relationship. Controlling and contrary friends will wear a person down and bring a friendship to ruin. So what should you do with a difficult friend? Let's consider these possibilities as we look at the types of friends that may be filling up your community and closest friend group:

The Controlling Friend

Some personality types are bent toward being in charge and leading in a rather intimidating way. These friends are also very loyal and exciting to follow, as they tend to get things done. However, when they start telling you what to do, who to be friends with, and how to spend your time, the friendship moves from a place of mutual respect into the controlling zone.

The best way to deal with a controlling friend is by approaching them with your honest feelings, while praising them for their strengths and how much they mean to you as a friend.

Using questions instead of accusations can diffuse their defensiveness and actually bring you closer together. However, if a controlling friend isn't getting the message over weeks or months, it may be time to minimize the amount of time you spend together and work on creating new friendships instead. For ideas on how manage conflict in relationships, download "[Conquering Conflict](#)" from [moretobe.com](#).

The Complaining & Contrary Friend

The complaining friend is like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. The glass is always half empty, the clouds are always moving in, and their demeanor is often down and out. But with their blue personality also comes a super sensitive and loyal side. She'll be the first to respond to your sadness. She'll stick with you to the end of time and never betray your confidence.

So as you decide whether your complaining and contrary friend is worth keeping, think about what life would be like without her support.

"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand."

Henri Nouwen

You may be able to turn Miss Blue around through praising her talents and giving her an opportunity to express herself as you listen to her formulate her thoughts and opinions (often slowly). The greatest thing you can do for this type of friend is pray for her and be the first to express to her your gratefulness for your friendship.

The Codependent Friend

She needs you, right. And at times it feels good. Like you're doing a service for a noble cause. But then her dependence on you feels smothering and restrictive.

A codependent friend usually happens by accident, and even though the motives may have been pure in the beginning, the end result is unhealthy.

As you consider how to adjust your friendship, look for ways to remove yourself from her dependence either by changing up

your routine or limiting your time together. Guard yourself against solving her problems and serving as a counselor, but encourage her to seek the Lord for answers and to turn to her parents or trusted adults for guidance.

The Chatty & Clueless Friend

Chances are you'll have at least one or two Chatty Cathy and Clueless Claire type of friends.

It isn't that chatty girls mean to talk without taking a breath or that clueless girls miss the social cues that they should to pay attention to someone else.

For the most part, chatty girls are simply looking for a way to connect. Words are their default means for bonding with others and seeking approval. The best thing you can do for a chatty friend is mirror back to her what you hear her saying. Literally, repeat a few words and include some sort of

encouragement. When a chatty girl feels heard, she'll pause for a breath.

Clueless friends may be unaware of social cues, either because they are so intelligent they miss out on noticing important details or because they've been raised in an environment that doesn't emphasize relationship skills. A clueless friend needs an extra measure of grace and compassion. Instead of growing frustrated, remind yourself of what you like about your friend. And when the time feels right, you can go ahead and point out an overstepping of social cues or affirm a surprising positive contribution

to the friendship.

Friendship is a Gift!

Friendship is truly a gift from God. Each friendship offers dimension to your life and is a necessary part of what God intended for us. The Scriptures tell us that we are the body of Christ, each one serving as a different part (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Our friendships are not only good for us, but they are designed by God to be a blessing and much needed support system. Like every gift, however, we need to decide how we'll handle it. So will you put in time to cultivating great friendships and appreciating the deep ones you already have? It's worth the effort!

For more resources that will help you cultivate good friendships, visit [moretobe.com](#) and click on the FREE Downloads link at the top of the page.