

Choosing Our Friends

J.R. Miller:

We all need human friends, not only in the days of our gladness and joy “ but still more in the days of our sorrow and suffering. We need a human hand to hold ours, when we are passing through experiences of anguish. We want someone beside us, in the days of our trial. I have read of a patient in one of the hospitals in London who was about to undergo a serious and dangerous operation. The surgeon asked her if she thought she was strong enough to endure it. She answered, after a moment's hesitation, "Yes, if Mrs. Stanley will come and sit beside me." We crave companionship, especially in the time when our burdens are heavy and we are passing through experiences of anguish.

No life can reach its best alone. One log on a fire will not burn brightly “ but if two logs are piled together then the one kindles the other, and the fire burns hotly. Two are better than one. We can do more work “ if we have companionship. We can fight more bravely in life's battles “ if another is fighting beside us. In all of life, companionship strengthens. Not only are two better than one “ but two are better than two. That is, two together are better than two working separately.

Yet not everyone that comes near to us or that might want to come into our life “ is fit to be our friend. One of the most serious responsibilities of life, is the responsibility of choosing friends. This is especially true in the case of young people. Youth is the time when friendships are most easily formed. All of life is new, all of the world is new. The friendships of the youthful days are apt to stay in the life unto the end. Really the choice of friends is in large measure, the settling of a young person's whole future. The kind of friends we take into our life in the early days “ we are apt to keep always.

If we accept and choose those who are godly, refined, and inspiring “ we are setting our life in the direction of whatever things are true, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely. But if, on the other hand, we attach ourselves in friendships in youth to those who are unworthy, whose life is earthly and sinful, who are not true and noble “ we in effect, fix our place and our character in a drift which will be toward things that are not wholesome, that do not tend to honor and beauty of soul.

We grow like those whom we love, in whom we believe, with whom we mingle. If therefore we choose those who are not worthy, whose character is bad, whose influence is unwholesome “ we must be hurt by them. On the other hand, if we choose for our friends those who are godly, those who are pure and true, whose lives are full of inspiration “ we cannot but grow better. Many a person has been lifted up from a commonplace life into nobleness and beauty “ by the influence of a friend.

I know it is hard to make choice of friends. In a certain sense young people's friends are chosen for them by their parents before they are able to think seriously of the matter. In the early childhood days, companionships are formed which almost certainly make life's first friendships. Then Providence brings to us in various ways, through our daily associations, those whom we take into our life as friends. Young people meet others in school, in neighborhood gatherings, in church life, in the associations of work and society. They do not choose in this case “ people are brought to them and set down close beside them. But even in these cases “ we should learn to discriminate between the good and the evil. Good seamen do not let a ship drift on the waters, wherever the winds may blow it or the tides and currents may carry it; good seamen sail the ship even against the winds and the tides. So it should be in life. We should not drift anywhere. God has given us a mind and a will “ and we are to think for ourselves and choose discriminately.

We should want friends also who have sympathy with us. I mean those who can enter into our life. No other people can be true companions to us. Sympathy is important, not only in the days of sorrow “ but also in the days of joy. It is easy enough to have friends who will feel with us in our grief. When trouble falls upon us, those who have been scarcely our friends in the past, will turn to us with kindly feeling and sympathetic heart and word. It is well to have true friends in the hours of adversity. One of the best things about friendship, is not what it does in the ordinary days “ but what we know it will do when the hour of need comes to us. When therefore we are stricken down and are in trouble or in sorrow “ a friend who is a friend indeed, will come to us with true sympathy.

But we also need a friend who will come to us in our times of joy, who will understand our glad days and sympathize with us in our most happy moods. Some people are always envious, of those who are happy and prosperous. More friendships fail at this point than fail in the time of sorrow or need. True sympathy enters with us into every experience of our life.

We also want others who will think of our highest and best good. Too many friends bring no strength into our life. We get no upward aspirations from them. They put no brave thoughts into our mind or heart. They move along comfortably in easy-going ways, with a sort of placid companionship which takes its color from our own experience "and gives to us no help. If we are in trouble, these friends come to us and sympathize with us in a certain way. They pity us and cry with us, saying, "How sorry I am!" But they leave us no stronger. True friendship in such moods, does not pity us too much, does not say too many soft things to us. Coddling is one of the very worst things friendship can do. It is not petting and pampering which we need "such manifestations only make us weaker, and lead us to miserable self-pity. What we want is a friend who will put into our heart thoughts of better things than those we have yet reached, who will ever inspire us toward loftier reaches of life, turning us toward the mountain-tops and bidding us to climb the rugged slopes to the summit. True friendship would inspire us always to do our best.

When true friends come to us in our time of weakness or suffering, instead of pitying us, telling us how sorry they are "they speak brave words to us, heartening us, cheering us, arousing us to nobler efforts. What we want from our friends, is not the lifting away of our burdens "but new strength to help us to bear the burdens manfully and heroically. It is a misfortune when we attach ourselves to a friend who merely pities us, and does not inspire us to anything nobler and truer.

There is another phase of the matter of friendship which is very important. I have spoken thus far of the responsibility of choosing friends, of thinking of their influence upon our own lives. This is the most serious phase of the subject. We are always responsible for what we admit into our life. While God is our keeper "we are to watch continually, that nothing evil may ever be admitted, nothing that would stain or hurt us.

But there is another side. We are responsible also for our own influence upon those who call us friends. We are responsible for every word we speak, for everything we do, for every disposition, for every look which may leave its influence or impression upon any other life. While therefore we carefully guard the doors of our own heart, so as to admit nothing which would harm us "we must guard with equal care and diligence, the influences which we put forth upon the lives of others.

A story is told of Charles Lamb, that once a young person evidently wished to have his friendship and give him confidence and trust. Charles Lamb wrote to the person warning against such confidence, and saying, "I am not fit to be your friend." It was a brave thing to do. But it is something which everyone should do, unless he is sure that he can be true to the person who comes to him, and that every influence of his life may be uplifting, purifying, inspiring and noble.

But of all friends in the world, there is no one who can bring to us so much blessing, as Christ will do. He wants to be our friend. He stands at the door of every life and knocks for admittance, that he may come in and take the inner place in our heart. The friendship of Christ is pure and holy and heavenly. Never in all the history of the world, has anyone been hurt by anything that Jesus has done. Therefore take Christ as your personal friend. Whatever other friends may do for you "he can do more. As sweet as human friendship is, and as rich as it is "it falls far short of meeting the deepest needs of our nature. Christ alone can answer all the heart's cravings, and satisfy all the heart's yearnings. Christ's friendship alone, can give us all the help we need. He is a very present help in every time of need. Human friendship can go but a little way with us. Soon we must part company, even with the holiest of them. One of every two friends must sit by the other's bedside, and hear the last words and feel the last hand-clasp and say the last farewell. But Christ's friendship goes on forever. He loves us with an everlasting love.

His friendship takes us also, in our sinfulness and guilt, in our defilement and defects "and restores us to beauty and brings us at last home to the blessedness of eternal life. Whatever other friendships you may miss "miss not Christ's friendship. Whatever else you may leave out of your life "let no one leave Christ out of his life.