

HOW TO
AND NEVER
MAINTAIN
DESTROY THEM
FRIENDSHIPS

WRITTEN BY
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A PRACTICAL GUIDE

HOW TO MAINTAIN FRIENDSHIPS

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HOW TO MAINTAIN FRIENDSHIPS

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“In prosperity, our friends know us; in adversity, we know our friends.”

~ John Churton Collins

Friendships are immensely important to me.

I like the way George Eliot defines friendship: “Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with the person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words.”

Eliot also wrote, “A friend is one to whom one may pour out the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that gentle hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.”

Jesus talked about friendship when He said to His disciples in John 15:15, “I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Three Kinds of Friendships

The philosopher Aristotle talked about three kinds of friendships. And I've found these to be true in my own life.

According to Aristotle, there are friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good. I've re-framed these three kinds of friendships into the following:

1. Friendships of Usefulness. I have friends I never hear from except when they need something. Usually it's once a year. Maybe they are coming out with a new book, and they want me to endorse it. And that's about as deep as it goes.

These are friends of usefulness. And I'll shamelessly admit that because I am an extrovert, I sometimes find these requests a bit irritating. Namely, that the only time I hear from them is when they need something.

However, I'm fine with it. I am fine with it because by nature I'm a generous person, and if someone has a need and I can meet it, I want to do what I can. I believe this echoes the Lord's heart where Jesus said, “If someone asks you for something, give it to them.”

Consequently, we ought to always tilt towards saying *yes* if we can. Of course, there are times when we cannot say yes because saying yes to one request means saying no to others.

But that's another discussion. Business partners, coworkers, classmates, etc. often fit into this category. These are all friends of usefulness.

2. Friendships of Mutual Interest. In this kind of friendship, the glue that holds the friendship together is a shared enjoyment. Think about fishing buddies or workout buddies or golf buddies. You and your friend share a common interest or pleasure, and that's where your friendship is rooted.

The interesting thing here is that if you stop fishing or playing golf, the friendship dissolves because it was based on that common interest.

3. Friendships of Virtue. This is the highest type of friendship. The glue that holds this kind of friendship together is mutual respect and fondness. And that fondness can rise to admiration.

Essentially, you value your friend for who they are. You enjoy their company, and you genuinely care for them. You are not in the friendship because of a common interest or how your friend can benefit you.

You are in it because you genuinely like them, and they like you. I would call this third kind of friendship a *close* friendship. And the people who are part of it would consider you to be their close friend.

To go deeper, I would characterize a close friend as follows:

Close Friends

1) A close friend rejoices in your joys and sorrows over your pains. They are both sympathetic and empathetic. Whatever happens to you, they feel it happens to them in some measure and vice versa.

When you're successful, they aren't jealous. Rather, they are happy for you. They stand with and support you. By the same token, when things are difficult in your life, they don't bail out. In fact, real friendship is measured by dependability in times of difficulty and adversity.

2) A close friend won't de-friend you if you disagree with them on an issue. Any time there is a disagreement between friends, the friendship is tested. When the friendship is shallow, or one of your friends is self-absorbed, then a disagreement can cause the friendship to dissolve.

Close friends can correct one another without any hard feelings. Shallow friendships cannot endure such correction. A close friend will not de-friend you if you happen to disagree with them. The friendship will remain intact.

3) A close friend stays in regular contact with you. If you only hear from someone once or twice a year, I wouldn't characterize that as a *close* friend. There is more communication between close friends than that.

4) A close friend is someone you trust implicitly, and they've earned that trust. You don't doubt for a second that your close friend will have your back. Close friendships also bring disclosure. Jesus said as much in John 15:15.

5) A close friend will stand by you, defend you, and even take a bullet for you when you are under attack. Close friends will act as though the attack were aimed at them or their family members.

To wax a bit personal here, let me repeat that friendships are incredibly important to me. Someone once said, “Wherever you are, it's your friends who make your world.” I can resonate.

7 Ways to Lose a Friend

What I've written so far is the foundation for building a strong friendship. Here are seven ways to destroy one.

1) *Take unnecessary offense at your friend.* An offended friend is harder to win back than a walled city (that's a paraphrase of one of the Proverbs). I have watched friendships deteriorate because one person took unnecessary offense at the other person. Usually it's over a disagreement or because their friend corrected them in love and the other friend took offense.

I remember many years ago sitting in a coffee shop with two of my friends. All three of us were mutual friends, and one of my friends (Jack) had a heart-to-heart with our other friend (Randy). We were all very close, so Jack *wasn't* speaking out of school when he pointed out something in Randy's life that he felt was a problem. I happened to agree with him on the matter.

We tend to be blind to our own flaws, so Jack was pointing out a blind spot in Randy's life. Jack did it in a loving and gracious way, but Randy was ultra defensive. Randy took offense and cut off his friendship with Jack.

This happened more than twenty years ago, but I've seen it repeat itself many times since. What happened was simple. Randy's ego was too large to sustain the friendship, so he took unnecessary offense.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about this. I've made the statement that Christians in general are the most offendable people on the planet. That's a spiritual oxymoron and irony because Christians should be the least offendable people in the world.

Jesus was clear when He said, “Blessed is he who is not offended in me.” If you have thin skin and are easily offended, then there's an awful lot of flesh that's not died in your life. And you will have a hard time sustaining friendships.

If you are someone who is in a leadership role, or you are in ministry, or you have influence on others, you cannot afford to be offended at other people.

Proverbs says, “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook an offense.” Nothing reveals a person's character more than when their expectations aren't met, when they have a disagreement, or when they are corrected.

Those things will expose the spiritual stature of any individual.

In [God's Favorite Place on Earth](#), there's a section where I deal with this issue extensively. It's called “the forgotten beatitude.” In short, taking unnecessary offense at your friend will cause you to lose them in your life.

2) Impute evil motives to the heart of your friend. In other words, second guess their intentions and cast aspersions on their hearts. You as a mere mortal cannot read another person's heart. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has that ability. I would say that 95% of the time when you impute a bad motive to someone else's heart, you are simply revealing what's in your own.

We project onto others what's inside of us. Consequently, never judge another person's motives. If you don't know why someone is doing something or you question it, simply ask them. Just say to them, "Why did you do XYZ?" And be open to their answer, just as you would want them to be open to yours if the situation were reversed. Always think the best of others, especially your friends. That's *Following Jesus 101*.

3) Criticize or complain about your friend in their absence. You certainly wouldn't want your friend to do this to you. You'd want them to go straight to you and list their gripes. When you complain about another person or criticize them behind their back, you are engaging in gossip. And Proverbs has a lot to say about how gossip destroys friendships.

Give your friend the same courtesy you want given to you. If you have an issue with them, go to them directly. It's the height of cowardliness to go behind their back and complain and criticize. Be an adult and go to them in person or via phone. Because if you don't, there's an excellent chance you will lose their friendship. And for good reason.

4) Never initiate contact with your friend, but always leave it to them to do the initiating. I have known people throughout my life who emphasized the importance of friendship, but they would never flesh out what they wanted others to do toward them. They always left the ball in the other person's court. They never rolled it themselves.

If you want to maintain a friendship, you need to do some of the initiating. You cannot leave it to your friend to always initiate. Share the responsibility of the friendship. Friendships do not thrive without each party doing their part.

5) Fail to return emails, texts, and phone calls. If you ignore the emails, texts, or calls from your friends, they will stop reaching out. And you will have no one to blame but yourself for losing their friendship.

6) Keep bringing up a painful event in your friend's life. This is a sure way to destroy a friendship. I saw this happen about 20 years ago. I had a friend (Tom) who had been through a traumatic experience in his past.

He just forged a new friendship with another friend of mine (Joe) who wasn't the most sensitive person on the block. As Joe was getting to know Tom, Joe brought up Tom's traumatic experience.

I guess Joe had heard about it from someone else, and Tom was not really interested in opening up an old wound. Because they were friends, Tom went ahead and gave a short answer and left it at that. Unfortunately, Joe kept bringing it up from time to time,

asking more questions and probing the nerve. Eventually, Tom got so tired of it that he stopped talking to Joe.

The point here is to be sensitive. If you have a friend who has gone through some kind of painful experience in their past, have the good sense not to bring it up. No good comes out of that. All you're doing is causing your friend to relive an acute event that's dead in the past and has no bearing on the present.

When it comes to my friends, I'm mainly interested in the present and the future. If they want to share a painful event from their past, that's fine. But I'm not going to probe that nerve. It's really none of my business.

7) *Remain silent when your friend is under attack.* Martin Luther King Jr. said it best: "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

If you are impacting people for good, you will attract haters. Some of them will fabricate vile lies about you and spread them. Usually, this is due to jealousy or because they took offense at something you said or did.

So it's really about control. As one person put it, "When a toxic person can no longer control you, they will try to control how others see you." But the people who launch the attacks end up falling on their own swords.

At the very least, refuse to befriend a person who is attacking one of your friends. For instance, how would you feel if someone was attacking you and your family, and one of your friends remained connected with that person on social media? It sends the wrong message, doesn't it?

I've unfriended people on Facebook because they were slandering one of my friends. That's what a true friend does. So that's yet another way to destroy a friendship.

Review

The seven ways to lose a friend are:

1. Take unnecessary offense.
2. Impute bad motives.
3. Criticize or complain about them in their absence.
4. Never initiate contact; always leave it to them.
5. Don't return their emails, texts, or calls.
6. Bring up painful events from their past.
7. Remain silent when they are under attack or unjustly criticized.

All seven are summed up in a text that I have quoted more times than any other passage in the Bible.

“Treat others the same way you want to be treated. Do unto others that which you want done unto you.” ~ Matthew 7:12.

Not only is this the Lord's definition of love, which fulfills all the commandments of God, but it's the secret to making and keeping friends.

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