

Equipped to be a good friend

How would you define a friend? In the words of a famous saying, “Friends are the family you choose for yourself”. We can’t choose who we are biologically related to, but we can exercise choice when it comes to friendships. Good friendships are very precious and it’s wonderful to find a friend who understands us and sticks by us, no matter what. Jesus was known as a friend of sinners¹ and he calls us his friends if we do what he says.² So, what does it take to be a good friend? Here are some suggestions straight out of the Bible.

A good friend loves at all times.³ What do you think of when you hear the word “love”? Most often we tend to associate it with a positive feeling of warmth or affection towards someone. A few years ago, a Christian band had a song called “Luv is a verb”, which suggests that love is something you *do*. Some of the people you know might be stretching your feelings of love almost to breaking point but, as a good friend, you will love them at all times by your actions. What could you do today for your friends that would show your love for them?

A good friend is loyal. Have you ever come across people who are “fair-weather friends”, hanging out with you when things are going well, but not wanting to know you when things get difficult? Well, these aren’t the marks of a good friend. A good friend is a loyal friend, sometimes more so than members of our own families.⁴ Is there someone who needs you to be a loyal friend to them today? Perhaps they’re going through a particularly difficult experience and to know that you will stick by them through it all is just the encouragement they need to keep going.

A good friend looks out for your best interests. Do you have a friend like this? Or are you that friend to someone? It’s good to know there are people who care enough about us to give us genuine advice - friends who are not phony but will tell it like it is. Sometimes this might involve saying and doing things that could be hurtful, at least in the short term, but the Bible says, “Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy”.⁵ A good friend doesn’t always tell us what we *want* to hear, but they will tell us what we *need* to hear, even if this hurts us for a time. How do you respond when a good friend, whom you know you can trust, wounds you in some way? Do you become defensive and critical of your friend? Do you withdraw from that person and allow the hurt to ruin a perfectly good friendship? Or are you prepared to carefully consider what your friend said and use this to improve your attitude or actions?

A good friend lifts you up. When I was in my early teens, I remember falling off my bike on my way home from a day out. I was by myself and feeling quite miserable sitting at the side of the road until a friend, who just happened to be passing by, stopped and literally lifted me up on my feet again. In reality, this was quite a trivial incident but, at the time, I was grateful she had arrived just at that point. The Bible says, “*If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble*”.⁶ Maybe you know someone who has fallen in some way and could use a helping hand to get back on their feet again. Perhaps you could lift them up by giving encouragement, or practical help, or offering to pray with them. Whatever you do, never underestimate the power of being a good friend!

¹ Luke 7:34

² John 15:14

³ Proverbs 17:17

⁴ Proverbs 18:24

⁵ Proverbs 27:6 (NLT)

⁶ Ecclesiastes 4:10 (CEV)