

The Friendships You Can't Keep

Jim Elliff

Yes, friends you have are SO important . . . and your family. But what about the friendships you can't seem to keep?

First, make sure you are not the problem. I once knew a couple who owned a bookstore. You had to walk between them to enter into the stacks of books lying in piles everywhere. They had a great store for good prices and hidden treasures, but passing near them was a challenge to any man with a nose. They hadn't discovered deodorant, or had found a way to do without it. They also could abruptly stop you with some rant about this or that on your pass between them, making you stand in eye-watering stink for a long time. They were as critical as they were smelly. But they professed to be Christians. And not just Christians, but at least one of them, if not both, had higher degrees in seminary.

There are people, Christians even, who are so loud, so opinionated, so critical, so proud, or so . . . you name it . . . that you just don't find being a friend on any tangible level is going to work. A skunk is a loner for a reason.

But loss of friendship with others may be based on something deeper: your true identity with Christ.

When you signed up as a believer, you took on an identity that is calculated to cost you relationship-wise. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Mt 10:34). People who have a deep-seated rejection of Christ will not often enjoy his children even if we are trying to be loving toward them. Our love for His truth and His way of life brings inherent difficulties with others who don't want to go that way.

Jesus loved impeccably. But even Jesus, the embodiment of love, had such enemies that He was eventually put upon a cross. That's the end result of perfect love. Don't expect that you will fare better than Christ, if you have less than perfect love. He told his disciples that they "would be hated by all because of My name" (v 22). It made no difference that their love was sacrificial. It still happened.



During the intimate time Jesus spent with His disciples before the cross, He gave them these arresting words: "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not above his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (Jn 15:20). Loving others may be just like Jesus, but being like Jesus is going to mean that many will decidedly dislike you.

So, What Should We Do?

Love Anyway

Regardless of their spite or repulsion of you, your message, and the Christ you serve, love all people anyway. It's really not an option. Jesus prayed for his enemies and told us to do good for those who abuse us. He also said that loving our enemies proves that we are sons of the God.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Mt 5:43-48

Love in Hope

It is possible that Christ's love in you will penetrate the darkness of the very person who rejects you. It was the love of missionary Darlene Rose while interred in a Japanese prison that won the heart of the abusive captain over the prison to Christ. While your love may be forever rejected, it also may be the means God uses to bring others to Christ. When God is at work, don't underestimate its power. While you're loving, pray like Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Like a magnet, our lives as believers can pull others to us and our Savior, or repel them. We have to leave its effects with God. Therefore, love others regardless and love in hope, and continue to mature in love until the day you die.

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