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continuous conversion

Friends

by Sara Tusek

Notes about living as a Christian

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Last summer Jarda and I set up our own Facebook accounts. The original motivation was to have access to all the photos that our daughter-in-law, Tina, was posting on FB. (By the way, the lovely photo to the right is a FB download!). Soon our "friend" lists began to grow, as we asked people to be our friends and vice-versa. As I thought about what it means to be a friend, FB or otherwise, I made a list of the qualities that define a friend.

5 keys to friendship

1. A friend is not a "black hole." I don't think I'm alone in having had friends who've simply vanished. After months or years of being friends with that person, and communicating as best I could, I was surprised to discover that I was getting no response. I realized (either quickly or over time) that my friend was simply gone. I would call and leave a message—no reply. I'd write—no return letter. I'd send an email—nothing. Not even a Christmas card!

It usually takes me awhile—sometimes years—to give up on such a friend. I reason that he's just going through a bad time, or she is very, very busy. But one day it dawns on me that I've been "unfriended." Sometimes I can make a guess as to why—sometimes I never have any idea why. Even though I may still have positive feelings for that person and wish him or her well, such as person is no longer my friend. You can't be friends with a "black hole."

Although affection, shared memories and common interests are also important aspects of friendship, without communication most friendships either die or turn into museum pieces: pretty representations of how the friendship used to be. Real friends respect each other and the friendship enough to communicate regularly; communication is crucial in a friendship.

2. A friend always has your back. This phrase is quite commonly used to describe a friend, but I'd like to qualify it just a bit. "Having your back" means that your friend will do everything she can to protect you when you're in trouble. She'll watch out for your best interests and defend you. It also means, however, that your friend will tell you when something you're doing will get you into trouble.

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Our granddaughter Amelia



A real friend won't simply stand up for you against criticism, but will help you to consider your behavior—did you (so to speak) “ask for it”? Has your behavior been needlessly offensive? Are you making enemies, perhaps without knowing it? A good friend will stop the knife from going into your back, and then will take the time to help you sort it out why you were attacked in the first place.

3. A friend holds up a mirror in which you can see yourself. If what you see in the mirror is pleasing, then you'll like your friend. But if you see ugliness reflected—selfishness, conceit, self-pity, sin—you're a lot less likely to appreciate your friend's mirror. People bring out different behaviors in others. I may find it easy to be sweet and relaxed with one friend, but another friend just seems to remind me of my failures.

Most often, my friend isn't trying to “bring me down;” it's simply that she is so much more loving than I am, or prettier, or smarter, or more popular, that I feel bad when I look at myself in her mirror. It's not her fault—it's my fault. I'm being petty or jealous when I resent her success because it seems to reflect my failure. If I'm mature, I'll accept what I see and begin to change my attitudes and behavior. My friend has done me a huge favor by helping me see my faults. That's a friend.

4. A friend helps you make necessary changes. Following on point #3, a true friend will help you change. If you are honest enough to admit that what you see in his mirror is rather cruddy, your friend will support you as you change.

Now this is a real friend, mind you—someone who won't use your self-confessed weaknesses against you! Don't try to get someone to be this kind of friend to you until you've seen that he or she has the necessary maturity, compassion and generosity. And if you try to backslide, your friend will speak up and remind you of what you said you'd do. This can be extremely unpleasant (it's

sometimes called “nagging”) but when done by someone with your best interests at heart, this kind of coaching will encourage you to shape up. But remember—a friend who'll do this for you is a solid gold friend.

5. A friend wants you to be the best you can be, but also likes you the way you are. I've known people who wanted to be my friend because they saw potential in me. Some of my boyfriends fell into this category, as did some colleagues at work. In these cases, I didn't really perceive that the person actually liked me! It appeared that my friendship was being sought so that I could be something they needed: a pretty, compliant girlfriend; a mentor to someone who thought I'd help them advance in the workplace; a confidante who is always looking for a new person to spill her heart to, with no real interest in me.

These are not friendships. They may be interesting relationships, useful and productive, but they are not true friendships. Most of them are based on flattery on one side and ego on the other. Friendships thrive on honest communication between people who respect each other as equals.

Friends?

So far on Facebook I have about 90 friends of different ages, political orientations, nationalities, social opinions, educational levels and so on. I enjoy these friends and their lively comments!

Being a friend is time-and-energy-consuming work. Being a real friend is a commitment and an opportunity for personal growth, both for you and your friend. I feel blessed by having had so many wonderful friends in my life, and I appreciate the people in my life who have stuck by me and are my friends today!

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