

FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES

Job 19:14 ... "My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me."

How many friends do you have? When I recently asked myself that question, I found that I had to first define "friend," before I could truthfully answer the question, because I may have a thousand or more acquaintances. Perhaps you will also find it helpful to understand the difference between a friend and an acquaintance.

A friend, according to Proverbs 18:24, "sticks closer than a brother." Most Filipino siblings have very close relationships. Perhaps it is because families often live geographically close to one another throughout their lives. Americans are very mobile and it has become quite rare that family members (parents, children and grandchildren) all live very close to one another, so siblings can become disconnected. So, saying to a Filipino that a friend can be closer than a brother may be unbelievable, because no one is closer to them than their siblings.

Friendship takes on a special spiritual dimension because Christ introduced the possibility of every person becoming a friend of God. There were not many people in the Old Testament with whom God claimed to be friends. In fact, James 2:23 makes special mention of the fact that Abraham "was called the friend of God." If we apply God's definition of friend to the people we consider friends, we might find it necessary to reassign many of those people to acquaintance status. That does not diminish their value as persons, or the love we might have for them. It simply clarifies that when we face a crisis or a severe problem, they might not be among the ones who rally to our side and help carry our burden.

Our verse today is Job mourning the fact that his "friends" forgot him. I think the problem is that Job had no idea who his real friends were. The people he expected to stand by him, were only acquaintances; people we might call blue sky friends who run at the first drop of rain. Our lesson today is important for two reasons: 1) You must be a friend if you want a friend, which means that you will be the one who suffers and cries and helps lift the weight off one of your friend's shoulders when they are going through a difficult period; and 2) you need to have a realistic understanding of friendship so that you will not become discouraged or depressed when the people you thought were your friends, are too busy to rally around you when you need them the most.

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