

A walk with Mr O (39)

Friends

Mr O, can I talk to you about friendship?

Yes, of course. What exactly do you want to know?

Well, the Bible speaks seems to talk about it quite a bit, but what exactly is it?

It's a bond between people who like each other, trust each other, and increasingly understand each other. Its chief characteristic is loyalty. That's why God's Word says that 'a friend loves at all times'. And the aspect of trust is underlined by such statements as 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend'. Friends are open and honest with each other. They can say strong things to each other without breaking the bond.

Are you sure that's completely right, Mr O? After all, in one of Jesus' parables a man who has worked all day gets the same wages as another who has worked only one hour. When he complains, his boss calls him 'Friend'. And when Judas comes with an armed mob to arrest Jesus, the Lord calls him 'Friend' too.

I think that in both those cases the boss and the Lord are simply saying something like this: 'You are treating me as an enemy. But I'm not. I'm actually your friend. So why are you behaving in such an unfriendly way?'

And why didn't the Lord mind being called the friend of tax collectors and sinners? Surely He didn't actually like dishonest and immoral people. He can't have trusted them and felt any sort of loyalty to them, could He?

The point there is that instead of avoiding them, as the self-righteous Pharisees did, He showed them friendship. And they responded by liking Him and trusting Him. Friendship has to start somewhere.

Someone has to take the first step. Friendship has to be conceived before it can be born. And when it's born it will take time for it to develop and mature.

So what does a mature friendship look like?

The classic example, of course, is that of David and Jonathan, or that of Ruth and Naomi. In both cases you see total trust and absolute loyalty, without even a hint of any sexual undertone. Heart speaks to heart; deep calls to deep; two souls are mysteriously united. A holy spirit pervades the relationship. And, as you know, wherever there is a holy spirit it is because of The Holy Spirit.

But most friendships aren't like those two examples, are they?

No, they're not. There are ordinary friendships and deep friendships. All of them are valuable. For myself, I am privileged to have countless friends all over the world. There are hundreds of homes where I could turn up announced and be invited to stay. But when it comes to deep friendships I think I only have a handful.

Does that trouble you?

Not really. Our Lord had twelve disciples whom He called 'friends'. They were closer to Him than the seventy were. But even within the twelve there were three who were especially close. And it seems as if one of the three, John, was even closer than the other two.

Do you feel free to tell me about your closest friends?

Yes, but I shan't tell you their names! These are men to whom I feel I can open up the very depths of my soul. I can tell them anything and everything. We are soul-mates. Our inner lives march in step. We want to know Christ. We want to be friends of God. I sincerely believe that without these friends I would not have survived these last sixty years in the ministry.

Mr O, I would love to have a few friends like that. How can I get them?

Pray that the Lord will give you one or two. You'll recognise them when you meet them. When you are in the company of certain people you will find that you have an overwhelming desire to pray. It happens every time you meet them. They have a holy spirit. This touch of the Holy Spirit on their life draws you both towards them and towards the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the friendships to cultivate. 'A threefold cord is not quickly broken.'

700 words.