

I have called you friends

¹⁴You are my friends, if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I no longer call you slaves, because a slave doesn't know what his master is about; but I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:14-15)

The word translated “friend” in the CJB is the Greek word *philos* (Strong’s 5384) which means: ‘dear, i.e. a friend; actively, fond, i.e. friendly (still as a noun, an associate or neighbor).’ To find the corresponding Hebrew word, we consider James 2:23: “*And to his account as righteousness. He was even called God’s friend.*” (e.g., “*You, our God, drove out those living in the land ahead of your people Isra’el and gave it forever to the descendants of Avraham your friend.*” 2 Chro. 20:7). The expression “Friend of God” is also found in Isaiah 41:8: “*But you, Isra’el, my servant; Ya’akov, whom I have chosen, descendants of Avraham my friend.*” The Hebrew word translated “my friend (i.e., God’s friend)” is Strong’s *ahab* or *ohab* which is a primitive verb root; meaning to have affection for (sexually or otherwise). What a privilege to be able to make and have friends!

When we were teens (as those that are will testify) having friends meant everything. We delighted ourselves in having many friends and we felt like those friends would be with us forever. I had many, many friends in High School but I do not remember even their names today. When I look at my HS yearbook I often remind myself: “that was you and those were your friends...” Really? How come I do not remember any of them? What happened? Is it that I am ‘losing it’ or is my brain fried? But, I haven’t remembered them since I was 18 in college-certainly I was in my prime then...

The answer, of course, is one that comes with white hair and age. Were they really my friends? Yes they were, but they were at a lower level of friendship. Realizing that friendship is arranged in levels was a total surprise to me. Being the passionate individual that I am (and I have lots of company in *Kol Simcha*) when I gave myself to a friend, I did it with all my energy! Discovering that not everyone will ultimately be a close or an intimate friend was a total surprise.

Are we really *Yeshua*’s (and therefore God’s) friends? Scripture says we are. At what level will we be pleased with our friendship with Him? Can we discern these levels and strive to become: “אַבְרָהָם אֱהָבָהּ לְעוֹלָם” that is, ‘*Abraham ohabcha b’Elohim Leolam*’-Abraham, a friend of God forever (cf 2 Chro. 20:7). Are we also one another’s friends, striving together to grow in friendship and love? I believe so. Thus let us today consider our friendships (among other things), those we have with one another, with our family members, and with God.

“When you’re down and troubled, and you need (a helping hand) some loving care. And nothing, nothing is going right. Close your eyes and think of me, and soon I will be there to brighten up even your darkest night.

You just call out my name, and you know wherever I am I’ll come running to see you again. Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call and I’ll be there. You’ve got a friend

If the sky above you grows dark and full of clouds, and that old north wind begins to blow. Keep your head together and call my name out loud. Soon you’ll hear me knocking at your door.

Ain’t it good to know that you’ve got a friend, when people can be so cold. They’ll hurt you, and desert you and take your soul if you let them. Oh, but don’t you let them.” (Carole King, sung by James Taylor, 1971)

Principles of Lasting Relations-Developing Genuine Friendships

Knowing how to detect and terminate unwholesome friendships and learning how to develop genuine friendships are two of the most important skills we must acquire for lasting happiness. Many fail to achieve meaningful friendships because they do not have a clear understanding of the existence of levels in friendships. There are specific freedoms and responsibilities at each level. As we consider this topic, let me remind us that ‘OUR CHILDREN ARE CONTROLLED BY WHOEVER PRAISES THEM!’ Thus, we should praise our children everyday. I wonder if the same principle applies to other types of children (that is, not our own flesh and blood), e.g., our spiritual children. If so, when was the last time we reminded one another how much our friendship means and gave each other an ‘AT A BOY.’ Have you praised a friend lately?

The following chart summarizes accepted levels of friendship. For our purposes, in our retrospection, this arrangement is sufficient and leaves room for other more extensive classifications.

LEVELS OF FRIENDSHIP	FREEDOMS AND DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS	ACCOMPANYING RESPONSIBILITIES
1. Acquaintance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on occasional contact Freedom to ask general questions: Public information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> View each acquaintance as a ‘divine appointment or encounter’ Design appropriate general questions for new acquaintances-for children, youth, adults, etc.
2. Casual Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on common interests, activities and concerns. Freedom to ask specific questions: Opinions, ideas, wishes and goals 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Learn to identify and praise positive qualities. Design appropriate specific questions for children, youth, and adults.
3. Close Friendship and Fellowship (oneness in Spirit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on common and mutual life goals Freedom to suggest and become involved in mutual projects toward reaching life goals (Heb. 10:24) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Visualize achievement in each other’s life. Can you view what they might become in God. Design projects to help a person accomplish the goals they have
4. Intimate Friendship and Fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on commitment to the development of each other’s character Freedom to correct each other and to point out and discuss blind spots 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Open honesty with discretion Discern basic causes of character deficiencies and suggest solutions. This is giving POSITIVE directions.

1. Viewing Acquaintances as ‘Divine Appointments’

Whomever we meet we can be confident that God created them and loves them. In order to have the right attitudes toward each one we meet, it is important to have the following questions in the back of our mind: (1) What are God’s purposes in their life? (What responsibilities and opportunities has God given to them?); (2) How far has he come? (Has he achieved what he could have?); (3) What has hindered God? (We should discern root causes of bitterness, moral impurity or greed/temporal values); (4) How can I cooperate with God? (Can I visualize achievement for him and assist in removing root problems); and (5) What can I learn from him?

Many friendships are built or destroyed in the first meeting. A possible reason is that each person is very aware of the attitudes the other one is projecting. Here are some wrong attitudes: (1) Fear: Will he

accept me? And (2) Selfishness: How can I gain from this friendship? Here are some right attitudes: (1) Worth: He is important to God and (2) Acceptance: I want to help him reach God's potential for his life

2. Designing Appropriate General Questions

Questions are to friendship what food is to living. It is practical and advisable that we take time to design good questions ahead of time. By doing this we gain a greater measure of self-confidence and are able to listen more carefully to what the other person is saying. Examples of public information include.

- Family: How many brothers and sisters do you have? Are you the first born? What type of work does your father do? Do you know the meaning of your name? Have you always lived in Florida? Do you know much about your family heritage?
- School: What school do you attend? What is your major? What is your favorite subject?
- Congregation: What church do you attend? Does your whole family attend? How long?
- Interests: What sports do you enjoy? What are your hobbies? Do you play a musical instrument? What are some of the organizations you belong to?

3. Identifying Positive Qualities

One of the most important purposes of a friendship is to assist one another in developing *Yeshua*-like character qualities. In order to do this we must be able to know and distinguish between specific qualities. There are at least seven character qualities associated with every one of the seven spiritual gifts described in Romans 12. Here is a list of them:

1. Truthfulness vs. Deception (Prophet)
2. Obedience vs. Willfulness (Prophet)
3. Sincerity vs. Hypocrisy (Prophet)
4. Virtue vs. Defilement (Prophet)
5. Boldness vs. Fearfulness (Prophet)
6. Forgiveness vs. Rejection (Prophet)
7. Persuasiveness vs. Unreasonableness (Prophet)
8. Alertness vs. Unawareness (Server)
9. Hospitality vs. Loneliness (Server)
10. Generosity vs. Stinginess (Server)
11. Joyfulness vs. Withdrawal (Server)
12. Flexibility vs. Resistance (Server)
13. Availability vs. Dominance (Server)
14. Endurance vs. Giving Up (Server)
15. Accuracy vs. Carelessness (Teacher)
16. Reverence vs. Disrespect (Teacher)
17. Diligence vs. Slothfulness (Teacher)
18. Thoroughness vs. Incompleteness (Teacher)
19. Dependability vs. Inconsistency (Teacher)
20. Security vs. Anxiety (Teacher)
21. Patience vs. Restlessness (Teacher)
22. Wisdom vs. Natural Inclinations (Exhorter)
23. Discernment vs. Un-perceptiveness (Exhorter)
24. Faith vs. Presumption (Exhorter)
25. Discretion vs. Simple-mindedness (Exhorter)
26. Self-control vs. Self-gratification (Exhorter)
27. Creativity vs. Underachievement (Exhorter)
28. Enthusiasm vs. Apathy (Exhorter)
29. Resourcefulness vs. Wastefulness (Giver)
30. Thriftiness vs. Extravagance (Giver)
31. Contentment vs. Covetousness (Giver)
32. Punctuality vs. Tardiness (Giver)
33. Tolerance vs. Prejudice (Giver)
34. Cautiousness vs. Impulsiveness (Giver)
35. Gratefulness vs. Pride (Giver)
36. Neatness vs. Disorganization (Ruler)
37. Initiative vs. Unresponsiveness (Ruler)
38. Responsibility vs. Irresponsibility (Ruler)
39. Courage vs. Cowardice (Ruler)
40. Decisiveness vs. Double-mindedness (Ruler)
41. Determination vs. Faintheartedness (Ruler)
42. Loyalty vs. Unfaithfulness (Ruler)
43. Attentiveness vs. Un-approachableness (Mercy)
44. Sensitivity vs. Callousness (Mercy)
45. Fairness vs. Partiality (Mercy)
46. Compassion vs. Indifference (Mercy)
47. Gentleness vs. Harshness (Mercy)
48. Deference vs. Rudeness (Mercy)
49. Meekness vs. Anger (Mercy)

4. Design Appropriate Specific Questions

After getting acquainted with a person and asking general questions, we can determine by his openness in responding to the questions whether we are free to go to the next level of friendship and ask specific questions. Here is a sample set.

- Family: What is your happiest childhood memory? What is the most important factor to have a happy family (or marriage)? Did your parents have any special wishes for your life? What were the childhood goals of your parents for their own lives? How did you parents choose your name?
- Future: What are your goals for life? What is the most important thing in life? How did you get involved in this activity (work, etc.)? If you could have one wish, what would it be?
- Faith: What do you think God’s purpose was in making you? How did you become a believer? What is your spiritual gift? Have you ever dedicated your life (your body) to Yeshua? What is the greatest difficulty you have in your walk with God?

5. Visualizing Character Development

If we are to progress in friendships, we must develop the ability to visualize character achievement for our friends and then design practical projects to reach those goals with them. Areas to consider are:

- Overcome fear of failure: When we ask things about the future often fear manifests itself.
- Visualizing vocational direction: someone has in the past expressed a blossoming expectation about you.
- Instill a sense of destiny: God has a set spiritual destiny for all of us, we often need reminding...
- Visualize character achievement: One way to do this is to know the character meaning of names. For example: Marilyn comes from Myriam (from the Hebrew murrh, tears when broken used for perfume): one who radiates the fragrance of Yeshua as they respond correctly to hurts. Cynthia means “reflector of light.”

6. Designing Character Projects

Hebrew 10:24 tells us to consider and provoke one another into good works. Thus we must design projects which are firstly practical, measurable and achievable. They should be designed to strengthen character qualities. These projects become the basis for growth. A meaningful passage to memorize (together!) is 1 Cor. 13 which emphasizes genuine love, or Romans 6, which emphasizes moral purity.

7. Correcting Blind Spots

Every one of us has blind spots, and it is essential that we have various intimate friends who have the freedom to tell us what they are. Proverbs 27:17 states: *“Just as iron sharpens iron, a person sharpens the character of his friend.”*

8. Learn to give direction without judging

At what point does a sincere concern for another person become a judgment for him? How does judgment (see Ro. 2:1-3) differ from discernment (see 1 Cor. 12:10)?

Some Insights

Be alert to new people	Discover strong points	See potential achievement	Comfort in trials/sorrows
Smile	Learn his hopes & desires	Discover goals	Respect for his reputation
Learn & remember names	Show interest & concern	Discern conflict/root problems	Discern root causes
Be a good listener	Talk to God about them	Be creative in projects	Ask him for blind spots