

# So You Want Friends?

As a teenager, I lived in the same rustic, mountain community as a young fellow who frequented gang meetings. He seemed to get into trouble at almost every turn. His mind was like an open sewer of filthy jokes and blue streak profanity.

My mother insisted that I not hang around Bill. Happily I listened to her. But another young fellow in the neighborhood, Ronnie, did associate with Bill. Ronnie's mother wanted him to be sociable and have friends. After all, so few boys in the immediate neighborhood were his age.

What happened to Bill and Ronnie? Their lives were wrecked. Bill caroused with the gang. He eventually married but soon got a divorce. And Ronnie? He kept living it up with his so-called friends in the gang. One night he got involved in a fight between his gang and another. Shooting ensued and Ronnie was killed—a sad tragedy that came from a crowd that was not friends after all. Why did this happen. The Bible gives the answer: *"Evil communications corrupt good manners"* (1 Corinthians 15:33). In other words, "Evil company ruins right living."

Ronnie's mother was sure her son's acceptance and popularity hinged on being in with Bill, but this led to gang involvement and its consequences. My mother was certain that too close an association with such people would ruin my life, and she was right. I did have some friends and they helped me rather than hindering me.

Many young people have finally admitted that the people they work so hard to impress are not really their friends. One girl admitted that trying to impress her so-called friends was driving her crazy. She could never completely please them, and when she truly needed help, they would abandon her. They were using her rather than appreciating or helping her.

All of us, of course, want to be "accepted." We want to be liked by others. Yet there are real pitfalls in doing anything people want us to do just so they will "accept" us. They eventually reject us and seek other more "exciting" company.

The Bible teaches us to be friendly and to do good to all. *"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly"* (Proverbs 18:24). Jesus showed himself friendly to all kinds of people, even those like Bill and Ronnie. Yet He did not go along with their wrongdoing. He challenged them to do what was right, and was rejected by many people around Him.

The Bible teaches us to choose friends that will help us and encourage us to be our best. *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow"* (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10). True friends will not pressure us to do what is wrong just to please them. They will understand our needs and challenge us to be better people.

My mother used to say, "Show me the company you keep, and I will show you who you are." There's a mine of truth here. We all tend to copy the people we are around. If we are around those who do what is right and help us, we will want to be like they are. They will be friends who will not make us miserable with cruel expectations. We need to choose true friends with backbone, friends who will stand for what is right. They will help us to be better people. They will not try to force us to do what ruins our lives.

We will find true satisfaction in life and be delivered from misery if we choose friends who truly love God and want to take His way. Such friends will not "drive us crazy." They will be willing to do anything to help us. Jesus said, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). We may not need to literally die to rescue a friend, but we will be willing to sacrifice time and effort to truly help him.

The Bible teaches us to choose right friends, especially friends who love God. *"Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world [wrong people and wrong things] is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

You want friends. Sure you do! But be honest with yourself. Do your friends cause you to do what is right and to square your shoulders and walk a different line than the corrupt society around you? *Will you be that kind of friend to others? "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Proverbs 17:17).