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THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE

By Robert J. Tamasy

Quick – name your five best friends. If you cannot name five, name three. Or two. How about one very good friend you have had for a long time?

We all have friends – or at least think we do. Some of our colleagues at work we regard as friends – they can be people in our department or those we collaborate with on various projects. In some instances we also see them socially outside of work, but often our friendship stays within the confines of the workplace.

Typically we also have friends that fill various roles in our lives. They can be our golf or tennis partners, traveling companions, financial advisors, someone we meet occasionally for coffee, or people that live in our neighborhood. The definition of “friend” may differ from one individual to the next, but most of the time, friends are people with whom we share smiles; those whose company we enjoy; individuals we look forward to interacting with, whether by phone, text, email or the old-fashioned way, face to face. For the most part, friends expand horizons of our lives and make each day more enjoyable.

The litmus test of friendship, however, is not when things are going well, when our career is thriving and people around us can share in our successes. Friends show their true colors when our lives turn upside-down. As someone has said, “When you rise in life, *your friends know who you are*. When you fall down, *you know who your friends are*.”

In times of trouble or distress, there are not many more comforting words than hearing a friend sincerely say, “I am here for you,” or “I’ve got your back.” There is a saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” But in terms of friendship, when the going gets tough, true friends go nowhere – they remain alongside, eager to help in any way they can.

The Bible has some interesting things to say about friendship:

True friends are revealed when difficult times come. We all have images of people who are friends that enjoy sharing times of fun and recreation. “We have lots of laughs together,” they might say. But what about when we encounter setbacks – who are our friends then? Who can we count on for help when the “fun” is gone? *“A friend loves for all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).*

Friends should be chosen carefully. There are people who seem to be everyone’s friend. They are highly social, gregarious individuals. Sometimes, however, those relationships are superficial, not the kind we can rely on regardless of our circumstances. So valued friends ought to be selected with discernment. *“A friend of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).*

A true friend can be counted on for sound advice. The best friends are those who care about us deeply and genuinely, to the extent they are willing to tell us the truth, even at those times when we are

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not eager to hear it. "I am telling you this for your own good," they will say, even if what they have to say does not seem good at the time. *"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel"* (Proverbs 27:9).

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Who came to your mind when you were asked to name your best friends? Why do you consider them good friends – what qualities do they exhibit that you value?

2. How would you distinguish between friends that fill a certain role in your life and friends with whom you share a deeper relationship? Do you think there can be an overlap between the two? Explain your answer.

3. What are some other qualities that you consider important in a friendship?

4. Think of a time when you turned to a friend – or friends – for help at a particular time of need. What did that experience tell you about the quality and depth of their friendship?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 24:1-2, 25:17, 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Mark 14:50; Luke 15:6; John 15:13

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