

Right or Wrong? Friendship

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Jesus called his disciples “friends,” a term we have cheapened, I think. How can we revitalize this multi-layered concept, especially among Christians?

Social media certainly has created a new frame of reference for the word “friends.” A friend is no longer a person with whom one necessarily shares a special bond. A friend simply may be someone who has a common interest. In the world of social media, people can be friends who do not even know each other. Basically, a friend is anyone who accepts a request to be a friend. Of course, some friendships still exist on the level of fond affection to which many are accustomed. Yet the broad contemporary applications of the word have indeed cheapened it on all levels.

Costly friendship

Jesus explained his idea of a friend on the evening when he bid farewell to his own friends. He defined his friends as those who followed his commands (John 15:14), and the command he taught was to love each other (John 15:17). He had entrusted his friends with the truth of this love (John 15:15). Jesus’s notion of friendship is quite different from the less-costly form of friendship achieved by accepting a request via computer.

How can Christians move toward a more Christ-like concept of friend? Hear what Jesus rules out as bases for friendship. Jesus eliminates casual acquaintance, or none at all, as a valid form of friendship. Jesus proposes a kind of friendship that involves a selfless love, the degree of love that brought him to this world for our salvation.

Jesus also strikes out the idea friends are measured by what they can do for us. Haven’t we all had “friends” whom we sensed were more about what

they could get from the relationship rather than what they could give? Christ-like friendships always are about giving.

Jesus further defeats the notion friends are to be counted and valued by how many there are. Given the strictness with which Jesus describes friends, he is much more concerned about depth than quantity.

So how do we understand the word “friend”? A discussion of definitions may help distinguish the contemporary use of the word and Jesus’s use of the word. However, such conversation would not breathe new life into this timeworn word.

People will detect a change

Ultimately, what will revitalize this word is when Christians commit to live as friends of Jesus and friends of others. People will notice when we honor Jesus by treating each other as more than acquaintances. People will detect a change when we seek what we can do for Jesus and for others, instead of what they can do for us. People will sense a renewed value on friendships when the focus is on the relational depth, not the number, of friends.

Perhaps we could demonstrate friendship so others would want to “friend” us, not for social media purposes, but rather because they are attracted to the significance of our relationship with Christ Jesus.

Allen Reasons, senior minister

Fifth Avenue Baptist Church

Huntington, W.Va.

If you have a comment about this column or wish to ask a question for a future column, contact Bill Tillman, consulting ethicist for “Right or Wrong?” at btillman150@gmail.com.