

Greetings!

If you counted every friend you have, how many would that be, under 20, maybe over 1,000? Friends are one thing, but a true friendship is something else all together! I hope this week we'll begin to understand who our true friends are.

Facebook Friends

Oh nuts! I caved into social networking, and now I'm hooked. I have to check my PC before going to bed to see what's been said that I may have missed and make sure that no one is looking for me to "be their friend". I was told that everyone is doing it and if I'm not a part of it, well then, I'm just not keeping up with the world we live in today. So, I joined Facebook and, in the blink of an eye (or is that the click of a mouse), I had a friend! Okay, it was just my daughter, but that's a start, isn't it?

It's been over six months now and I'm proud to tell you that I have 28 friends! Okay, 6 of them are family members, but that's *IS* a start, isn't it? A couple of "my friends" I don't even know, a few I barely know, and some - well let's just say I know them. I'm one of those folks who can't turn down a friend request. Tell me, who would do such a thing?

I heard someone say they had to "de-friend" a person on their Facebook. I cringed - how could they? I mean, who would walk up to someone and say, "I de-friend you!" I think I see a new tee shirt or bumper sticker here.

I'll confess to you now. When it comes to Facebook friends, I'm not into sending a "friend request". Something just seems odd for me to say, "Will you be my friend?" It reminds me of third grade and Jane . . . never mind. I know I'm going to catch it from all the young folks here, but understand, I was cut from a different cloth. Maybe I'm afraid of the rejection I'll experience if they say "no" to my friend request, and only heaven knows what'd happen if I were to be "de-friended" by someone!

Between my three kids, they have 419 "friends". Truth be told I'm not sure that I even know 419 people up close and personal. One of my Facebook friends has over 600 "friends". How can that be? Who ever heard of such a thing! I saw one person with over 2,000 friends! Can you imagine doing their Christmas cards?

I like having friends. I find that it's a lot better than having enemies. (Maybe they should start an "Enemies List" on Facebook. Wonder how that'd work out.) Friends are people you can count on. They stand by your side when you need them the most, and if you're hanging on your cross, you can look down and see who they are. Jesus did, and he saw only Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas and John standing with His mother in the crowd. I wonder how he felt?

Over the years, good friends have come and gone. Relocating up the east coast, I left some behind in Florida and Virginia, but new ones eventually took their place. Over the past months, we've begun reconnecting with some of our old friends, and it's been a sweet experience to

laugh and cry with them. "I remember when . . ." becomes the most common phrase, usually ending with "I miss you guys", and a teary eye.

I think that as we grow older, our "best friend" category narrows down to include only those with whom we share our closest feelings. They become more than friends. They are partners with us in our journey through life's changes. They have our back and we have theirs to the very end. Proverbs says, ". . . there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Having many friends is a good thing, if they're true friends. However, real friendship is like a fine gift that occasionally requires your personal attention. You buff out the tarnish, remove dirt from the crevices and polish it until it shines again. That's how real friendships work.

Today I called my best friend to say hello and see how he was doing. We had an "I remember when . . ." moment that ended with a hard laugh. I was the subject of the joke, but it didn't bother me. Best friends are like that; they're not easily offended with each other. We talked for awhile until other things pulled at us to end the call, but not without first expressing our friendship toward each other.

Maybe by next year I'll have 100 Facebook friends, but if not, having one really true friend is a good thing to have.

And that's just a thought . . .

My Final Word

I thank God for the many wonderful friends over the years, and for the times they were there for me when I needed them most. I'm like the kid who, when told by his mother to go to bed said, "But the room is dark." To which his mother replied, "God will be with you." Then a little trembling voice said, "I know, but right now I need someone with flesh on them." A good friend is a little like that, they're God in the flesh when we need to feel someone up close.

My friend, Mark, is one of the best. I met Mark at a pastor's function, and it didn't take long for us to connect. We've encouraged each other, prayed together and yes we've even had a falling out, but true friendship overcomes the obstacles.

I'll never forget the night he pulled a hunting rifle out of the closet and handed it to me to inspect. He informed me that it had belonged to his father before his death and he had brought it home. When asked what I thought of it, I told him I liked it and then he said that it was mine to keep. Today, my son uses it occasionally for deer hunting and we both treasure the thought behind the gift from a great friend.

Jesus said that there was no greater love than a man who would lay down his life for his friends. We understand the implication of this as it relates to Jesus and his disciples, but I believe that the truth stands even now for us. I'm not sure what a Facebook friend would do if I needed them to lay down their life for me, but I have no doubt what Mark would do, and I for him. This type of relationship does not come easily and, for this reason alone, many people will not

pursue a committed friendship.

Too many relationships are built only on what someone likes about the other person, or what they will receive from the friendship. These types of superficial relationships in a society weaken the very fabric of the community, and I'm concerned that we are quickly approaching that point today.

I hope that you'll look closer at who you call your "friends" and ask yourself this question, would you lay down your life for them, and they for you?

A friend in your time of need is a friend indeed!

Chris

