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An example of a true friend is Jesus Christ and cannot be exceeded. He tells us what we need to hear. He does not sugar coat matters, but is plain and forthright. He improves our character through admonition and encouragement. He loves us at all times, though He does not accept us at all times (Rev. 3:19). When we sin, we must repent or forfeit a relationship to Him (1 Jn. 1:7-9; 2 Jn. 9-11). And, truly, He put our well being ahead of His own when He gave Himself to die on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8). "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus."

If Jesus is our friend, we must be a friend to Him. He asks one basic, but challenging, thing from us; to do His will. He said, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). Have you believed and been baptized for the remission of sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38)? If not, then how can you say you are Christ's friend? Do you deny yourself and follow Him even if it cost you much (Lk. 9:23; Matt. 10:34-39)? If not, do you really think you are a friend of Jesus? Be a friend to Him who is a true friend to you.

- Steven F. Deaton

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A Friend

We all want and need friends. Without friends, life is miserable and lonely. How, though, do we get friends? And, who is a true friend?

The wise man said, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Prov. 18:24). If we are not a friend to others, it is unlikely they will be a friend to us. After all, is it not inherent that friendship is a two-way street? Thus, friendship is truly based on character. It cannot be purchased or coerced (Prov. 19:6).

The characteristics of a true friend are relatively few. A true friend will tell you what you need to hear, not necessarily what you want to hear. This means a friend's words may sting at times. We see an example of this in Paul's relationship to the Galatians. He told them they were in sin and asked, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6). Let us be thankful for friends who tell us the truth.

A friend will help us to improve our character, not drag us down. "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17). This may include words of rebuke, but also of admonition and exhortation. A friend will give good advice based on your interest, not his or hers. You will be warned about pitfalls and dangers, or encouraged to press on.

"A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). To love at all times does not mean to tolerate or accept at all times. As we noted above, a true friend will sometimes oppose you because your course of action is self-destructive or harmful to others. The love of a true friend will include sacrifice. The friend will forego his or her contentment, comfort, or desires to help you when needed.

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The Seven Step Plan

The Bible is a truly remarkable, profound, but simple book. Yes, there are “some things hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16). Again, *some*, not all, not most, not a large portion. Consider, after all, that God gave the Bible to all of mankind for all ages. For God to have love, mercy, justice, and righteousness, He had to have made the Bible in such a way that the average man from any nation can understand what is necessary to go to heaven. Thus, God made things simple.

Note that God has made things simple all along. He gave Adam and Eve one, easy to understand command to obey; don’t eat of the tree in the midst of the Garden (Gen. 2:15-17). The fact that Adam and Eve did not keep this command does not mean it was complex or too hard to understand. Many other examples from the Old Testament can be noted, but we will look at just one: Elisha and Naaman.

In 2 Kings 5, the Bible tells us Naaman was a leper in need of healing. His master, the king of Syria, assisted in this by sending him to Israel with a letter. The king of Israel became upset because he could not heal the leprosy and thought it was an attempt to start a fight. Elisha the prophet sent word to send Naaman to him. When Naaman arrived at Elisha’s house, the prophet sent his servant out with a simple message: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean” (2 Kgs. 5:10). Naaman could not believe such a simple seven step plan would do the job and went away furious. His servants, however, talked some sense into him. They told him that if the prophet required “something great” he would have done it, so why not do this simple thing? Naaman relented, dipped seven times, and was restored (2 Kgs. 5:14). How simple that is.

Why is it that people can see the simplicity of God’s command to Naaman, but fail to see it in the gospel? There is a five step plan in the New Testament that will heal men of the spiritual leprosy, sin. God commands men to hear the word and believe (Rom. 10:17; Jn. 8:24). Based on that belief, God says to repent and confess Jesus as the Christ (Acts 3:19; Rom. 10:9-13). Immediately following this, we are to be baptized to have our sins washed away (Acts 8:36-38; 2:38). A simple plan: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. Yet, when many people hear this five step plan, they become furious or incredulous and go away. Many would climb the tallest mountain or cross the widest sea if they were told to do so. So, why will they not simply submit to what they are told?

Further, there are those who believe two, three, or four steps in God’s plan are sufficient for spiritual healing. Some are willing to hear and believe, but deny that anything else is required. Others know that they must not only hear and believe, but also repent and confess Christ. Whether it is the former (two-steppers) or latter (four-steppers) they believe they are saved. Would this mentality have worked with Naaman? Could he have gone to the Jordan and dipped four, five, or six times and had his flesh restored? Obviously not. The same is true with God’s five step plan of salvation. One cannot render partial obedience and expect to receive the blessing attached to the command. One who leaves off repentance, confession, and/or baptism is not healed; he is still leprosy before the Lord.

The Bible is amazing and amazingly simple. Such profound truth is given in such plain language. Let us not make it more difficult than necessary, but accept and submit to the simple truth.

- Steven F. Deaton

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south.
They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in.
Hungry and thirsty, Their soul fainted in them.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He delivered them out of their distresses.
And He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to a city for a dwelling place.
Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness.

- Psa. 107:1-9