

CELEBRATE LASTING FRIENDSHIPS THEY BRING OUT THE BEST IN OTHERS

[Jesus said,] *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*
John 13:34

In the movie, "Cast Away" a Federal Express executive named Chuck Nolan becomes stranded alone on a deserted island. A volleyball washes up on shore, and Chuck was so lonely and needed a friend so much that he made a friend out of a Wilson volleyball and named it "Wilson." He talked to Wilson, argued with Wilson, slept next to Wilson. And when he lost that "best friend" it almost wrecked him.

You know, we are all like that in a way. We are lonely people. We NEED friendship. Without friends, we kind of lose our heads.

Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, used to keep a picture in his office of a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. He kept it there to remind him of a lesson he had learned years before: "If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he had some help [getting there]." Haley said, "Any time I start thinking, 'Wow, isn't this marvelous what I've done!' I look at that picture and remember how this turtle – me – got up on that post."

We are all like that turtle in a way. We all need someone to lift us up, to add value to our lives. We all have a deep inner need to feel appreciated. We all have a need for someone to affirm us, to value us, to encourage us. Praise God and Celebrate those people who have appreciated and affirmed and valued and blessed us along the way.

I think we've seen that recently during this pandemic. When people find themselves alone at home, many out of work without a sense of feeling needed, it's really hard in that situation to keep the perspective that you're valuable and worthwhile. It's hard not to despair or become depressed.

Those who have experienced a marriage break-up, or lost a significant relationship in your life - it's hard to keep the perspective that you're a valuable person. And there's a huge hole in your heart for someone to lift you up and cherish you.

We need others who will care enough to bring out the best in us, ... and we need to be people who will bring out the best in others. Even in difficult times, praise God for friends who build you up – not once – but consistently and over the long haul. And praise God when you are that type of friend, who brings out the best in others.

Today we're going to look at a couple of Biblical principles on how do you bring out the best in others. I want you to think of one person -- focus on them in your mind – someone whom you want to raise their value.

The Bible says that **love** is the foundation of all relationships. John 13:34 Jesus said, *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*

1. ACCEPT OTHERS' UNIQUENESS

Thank God for friends who accept your uniqueness.

God made everybody different. But it's easier to accept some people than others. It's easier to affirm some than others. The Bible says *"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you."*

How can you tell if you've accepted somebody? The Bible says *"Love does not demand it's own way."* You don't insist that other people be like you, when you accept them.

Parents, you need to understand that God never intended for your children to be a carbon copy of you. He wants kids to be different than their parents. Parents, affirm their uniqueness, encourage their uniqueness, accept their uniqueness, tell them they're not in competition with anybody. They don't have to be like anybody else.

I want you to just look around the room at others. Is there anyone else here exactly like you? NO! In fact, we're ALL kind of goofy looking. We're all different shapes and sizes and hair colors and ages. Our hands and noses and eyes and ears – they're all different!!

Sometimes we get to thinking that I wish I was more like ... somebody else. I wish I looked like them, acted like them, had their job, their house, their family, their ... (whatever). And sometimes we get to believing that God would love me more if only I were different.

The truth is God accepts you in all your uniqueness. He is the God who is greater than the galaxies and the universe, yet the amazing thing is that He still knows you and loves you. He knows every detail of your life – and He still loves you! The Bible says He knit you together in your mother's womb. He made you unique – and God thinks that's GREAT! He accepts you – as unique as you are – and He loves you.

To be a lasting friend, accept other people's uniqueness. Can you thank God for a friend who accepts yours?

2. Lasting Friends **TRUST OTHERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY.**

Whether it's a child or an employee or friend, trust them with responsibility. Nothing builds confidence faster than trusting another person with responsibility. All of us have a need to be trusted, to prove ourselves, to develop competence and skill.

When I was a kid of about 9 or 10 years old, I got the job of mowing the lawn every week. It wasn't a very big lawn, but to me it was a big deal. I got to pick when I'd cut the grass, and I'd get a quarter for mowing the front yard and another quarter for mowing the back (which seemed like a lot of money to me back then). But it wasn't the money that motivated me to do the job. I felt like I would be letting my father and the family down if I didn't do the job and do it well. It felt great to be given (what I saw as) a big responsibility. It made me feel confident.

Jesus has confidence in you and has entrusted you with a huge responsibility. He said, "*As the Father has sent Me, so am I sending you.*" Jesus came to earth to give His life as the complete payment for the forgiveness and hope of the world. Jesus, then, turned the delivery of this forgiveness and the news of heaven over to His disciples. He trusted His disciples. Would you? Would you trust the disciples with the salvation of the world? Jesus did. They were ordinary people and they blossomed when He trusted them with responsibility.

Now that job is yours and mine. We live in a world of people who will be lost to an eternity without Christ and without hope unless they trust in Jesus as the only one who has paid the price God demands for our sin. You and I have been entrusted with this responsibility to bring this wonderful message to them. There is no greater thing!. There is no more important responsibility. There is nothing else on this earth that can make a difference in people's eternity like Jesus can. And God's given us the important responsibility of sharing Jesus. God has no back up plan.

And that raises our confidence, brings out the best in us, that Jesus chose you and me to carry out this responsibility and privilege! Praise God for friends who do that to you! Can you be that kind of a friend who Entrusts others with Responsibility?

3. EXPECT THE BEST.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (Living Bible) "*If you love someone you will always believe in him, and always expect the best of him.*"

In 1968, a Harvard psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, published a study that's now very famous called Pygmalion in the classroom. It studied the impact of teachers' expectations on students. They took a group of kindergartners through fifth grade and gave them an achievement test. After that, they told all the new teachers the next year that five or six of the children were the high achievers based on the tests. The test was rigged and they randomly selected the children whom they said were high achievers. The amazing results, at the end of the year, the students whom the teachers thought had more potential had actually scored far ahead and gained as many as 15- 27 IQ points in one year. Teachers described these children as happier, more curious, more affectionate than average, having a better chance of succeeding later in life. But the only change for the year had been in the attitude of the teachers. Because the teachers had been led to expect more of certain students, those children came to expect more of themselves. The teachers communicated this through tone of voice, facial expressions, touch and posture.

Your attitude toward people can make them or break them, bless them or curse them. 1 Corinthians 13:7 (Living Bible) "*If you love someone you will always believe in him, and always expect the best of him.*"

4. AFFIRM OTHERS' VALUE.

1 Corinthians 13:4 "*Love looks for ways of being constructive.*" Do you do that? The Bible says, "*Encourage one another and build each other up.*"

James Dobson did a study of 10,000 women. They found that the number one cause of depression is low self esteem. People are starving for affirmation. They want to know that they matter, that they count. If you want to bring out the best in people, affirm their value.

Affirm others' value by giving them **Attention**. – time, listen, look

Affirm others' value by giving them **Affection**. – squeeze of hand, hug, gift that says "you matter."

Affirm others' value by giving them **Appreciation**. Every one of you know the meaning of appreciation. During this pandemic, food prices have been going up. Meat, pork, poultry, and eggs all cost more. Appreciation means the value goes up. And every time you appreciate the people in your family, the people at your work, your friends -- every time you appreciate somebody you raise their value.

Isn't it great how friends who stick by you, do that to you?!

St. Paul was a pro at this. In practically every book of the New Testament that Paul wrote, in the beginning he has some good word to say. "You guys are doing a good job.... I thank God every time I remember you.... I appreciate you.... I affirm you.... I believe in you...." Think of creative ways to appreciate the people in your life -- the people you work with, your parents, your children, your husband, your wife. Raise their value.

5. CORRECT WITHOUT CONDEMNING.

Thank God for people who correct without condemning.

In the movie "A Christmas Story" Ralphie finally gets a beebee gun. The last present opened on Christmas Day is an "official Red Ryder, carbine action, 200-shot, range model air rifle, with a compass in the stock." His father coached Ralphie how to pour the beebees into the gun. "Be careful now. Those things can go all over the place." His father didn't condemn him, he encouraged him gently.

We all need people who are patient with us, who don't rip us to shreds because we're imperfect.

But what's the best way to correct without condemning? Ephesians 4:15 "*Speak the truth in...*" anger? Is that what it says? When someone has blown it, someone has made a big mistake at the home or at work, do you blast them as being incompetent? Is that what it says?

Maybe that's happened to you, and you carry the scars from that. But thank God for friends who don't speak the truth in anger, or use put-downs.

The Bible says, "*Speak the truth in love.*" Self esteem is very fragile. When you correct somebody, when you're pointing out their error, you can either protect their self esteem or you can destroy it.

God says we should always correct other people out of love and not out of anger. How many of us have been failures at that? All of us! Yet when you get ticked off, you correct in anger, rather than in love, that's something that we need to CONFESS to God and to the person we've hurt. We need to seek forgiveness. And friends, when you honestly confess your faults to God, He will forgive, and give you a new start to live in a new way empowered by Jesus' love.

Correct without condemning. Ephesians 4:29 "*Don't use harmful words. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up.*" Jesus loves people – all people. He gave His life for them. Use words that share Jesus' love and build them up. Correct without condemning. Thank God for friends who do just that!

6. NEVER GIVE UP ON OTHERS.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (Phillips) "*Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything.*" Never give up on people. Love can outlast anything.

For twelve years the Green Bay Packers were a lousy team and never won more than about 30% of their games. In 1958, they went 1 in 10 -- one win, ten losses. In 1959, a new coach came onto the scene -- Vince Lombardi. Vince Lombardi would not give up on people. He expected the best. During his nine year reign they had nine winning seasons. They beat their opponents 75% of the time, walked away with five NFL championships including the first two Superbowls. What made the difference? He refused to give up on people. He brought out the best instead of the worst.

Jesus doesn't give up on you. God's never given up on you. God is the God of the second chance and the third chance and the fourth chance and the fifth chance... Isn't that good news?

Philippians 1:6 *"He who began a good work in you will continue it on to the day of Jesus Christ."* That means that God's not through with you. He's got a lot more blessing He wants to pour in your life. His plans for you are for good and to prosper you. He wants you to grow in knowing Him and living for Him and with Him. And God isn't through with others either. He won't give up on them.

You know God has every reason to give up on you and me! I can't count how many times I've turned away from Him, how many times I've dishonored Him. We sin and sin and sin – and He should have just given up on us all long ago – if He were fair.

Some people wonder why God permits pain and suffering in our lives. Some people wonder why God allows any human to reject Jesus and end up in hell. Some think God's not being fair. But more and more I wonder why God should show ANY love and goodness to me. I wonder why God would give the gift of heaven to anyone at all. None of us ever deserve or earn God's love or any of His blessings.

But God loves people – loves you – so much that He doesn't give up on them.

Jesus left the comfort and joys of heaven to be born as Mary's son because He wouldn't give up on you.

He lived constantly pressured by sin, but He never gave in, He lived a perfect sinless life because He wasn't going to give up on you.

His close followers betrayed and abandoned Him,

He faced trial all alone,

He was beaten and whipped, and nailed to a cross because He wouldn't ever give up on you.

He gave His life to pay for all your faults and offenses,

He guaranteed your forgiveness by rising to life again on Easter morning,

and He's alive and with you now – because He won't give up on you!

He offers as a free gift to remove the guilt of your past, and in its place give you a hope and future for this life and the next.

WOW! What love! What value! What affirmation Jesus gives -- because He doesn't give up on you, He doesn't give up on people.

You know, we need – we desperately need – the appreciation, the affirmation, the value that Jesus gives. Only Jesus can fully bring out the best in you – in us.

Yet folks, just as you need that affirmation and value that Jesus builds into your life, there are other people in your life who also have a hole in their heart and they desperately need Jesus' affirmation to bring out the best in them.

A few minutes ago I asked you to think of one person in your mind – one person who needs you to raise their value. Is there someone for whom you can **1. Accept their Uniqueness, 2. Trust them with Responsibility, 3. Expect the Best, 4. Affirm their Value, 5. Correct without Condemning, and 6. Never Give Up on them?** And I want to challenge you this week choose 1 specific thing you'll do to love as Jesus loved, and Bring Out the Best in that person. (and then choose 1 specific thing you'll do next week).

You know, if we just stop and think, there are people in our lives who have, over the years, brought out the best in us. We sometimes over look them, but those people are gifts from God. We need them. They make us truly live. Thank God for them. Even in the middle of difficult times, when it looks like everything's going wrong, thank God for what's RIGHT in the world. Celebrate friends who have built you up.

And now it's your turn. God's given every one of us, the privilege of representing Jesus to another person – of sharing His love. And so you now – every one of us – with Jesus' love, bring out the best in others – just as Jesus brings out the best in you. AMEN.