



September 1999

Everybody have a good vacation? Doesn't feel like it, but I guess I'm refreshed and ready to go

for the gold again. By gold I mean the prize of the high calling in Christ. To come right down to it I didn't take any time off work yet. But if the truth be known, rest and refreshment are as much a state of mind as of body. If we're ruled by the peace of God and letting the joy of the Lord be our strength, every day can be a holiday for us!

Red Skelton claimed his wife made such a statement about their marriage, that every day was like a vacation. Then, with great mental effort he recalled her exact words, *She said I was her last resort...*

Life is like that a lot of the time. Is it a bowl of cherries, or just the pits? Is finding yourself ankle deep in horse leavings a cruel trick or does it mean that your pony is hiding around here somewhere? The words of Jesus were, *According to your faith, so be it unto you.*

This month I want to talk a bit about friendship. For a singles group that's always relevant, especially so as Pastor Frank encourages us to be woven together into God's net. What challenging, frustrating words!

Friendship has never come easily for me. People talk about square pegs in round holes, but I suspect that I'm a dodecahedron or something. (That's not bad, just complicated). But that being the case, what I've learned, I can teach and impart. The person who's never struggled has nothing to teach for he just assumes that it should be easy for everyone. It's in the blood sweat and tears of overcoming that ministry is developed.

Friendship is Giving.

The first thing that I should say about friendship is that it's an opportunity to serve, to give, to lay down our life for another person. They may turn around and be our friend, but let me be

honest, that is the exception. That's not bad though, because the blessing is in the giving. To be able to give as we should and not get hurt we need to be plugged deeply into Christ and letting Him love through us.

Some of the biggest snares in life are expectations. We think of a friend as someone who'll love us unconditionally and uncritically all the time but that isn't a friend, it's a dog. I had a black Labrador some years back and I still miss him for that reason, despite the fact that he dined on hundred-dollar cats and had the UPS man for dessert.

After all, in a relationship, only one can love unconditionally at a time, If both did the need and opportunity would simply disappear. The most frustrating thing one can believe is that friendship is a 50/50 proposition. It isn't. It means giving when the need arises and receiving when the opportunity presents itself, but is seldom balanced and never equal.

Friendship is a 100% Gift.

Many preachers do us harm by presenting David and Jonathan as having such a 50/50 friendship. In the picture that gets painted they are two teen-aged boys sharing secrets, swapping clothes, fighting identical battles together, and never letting themselves be separated. But that's not the David and Jonathan one finds in the Bible.

Jonathan had been the king's son and a leader of the army for a long time before David ever showed up. He had to have been right around forty, possibly even in some sort of mid-life crises. The relationship which David memorialized so eloquently was one of mentoring.

There are some strong hints that David's family life, godly line notwithstanding, was not a happy one. Jonathan was the father figure he'd never had, and David was the son Jonathan had not yet had. Jonathan had nothing to gain and everything to lose by what he did. David brought nothing to the relationship but himself.

Although David developed a deep relationship with God being off with the sheep, such time

does nothing for the skills needed to run a kingdom or lead an army. These he learned from Jonathan. And God gave Jonathan a heart to impart these, even when it was plain to see it would cost him everything.

There's some indication that David was a less than perfect friend. In the famous covenant made between them, we see Jonathan display a measure of fear. He recognized that God had rejected his father's dynasty and in David he saw the next king. (1 Sam 20:12-17)

Would David return the kindness shown him when the tables were turned? He did, but it was not his first order of business. In fact, it may have been the start of his own mid-life season that caused David to remember Jonathan and the promise to his old friend.

Staying Out of Trouble

I find that I never get into trouble seeking an opportunity to give something to others. They can take it or leave it, but again, the blessing is in the giving, and sometimes just the intention and willingness to give. That's a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit and should be a normal part of our Christian walk.

Trouble comes when I begin to expect something in return for whatever I may have given. Even with the best of intentions expectations can grow, out of sight, out of mind, and suddenly there's a crop ripe to the harvest of bitter fruit! At such times the line between loving and hating becomes thin. The most dangerous words in our Christian life may be *It's my turn, now*. Our motto should always be, *It's more important to be a friend than have one*.

Only a trip to the altar can keep us on track. Keep a firm grip on that old rugged cross, too. Just a few wrong words at this point may destroy our testimony with this person forever. Only Christ, who knew the ultimate betrayal and carried it meekly unto my salvation can keep me steered right.

We live in a selfish and ungrateful culture, one that's quick to shout *guilt trip* if ever they're reminded that someone has sacrificed for them.

We're also surrounded by those whose *gifts* are not so subtle manipulations that they intend to collect on with interest. (See Prov 23:1-8) But we should follow Jonathan's example, who gave a costly gift freely. Jonathan saw very little of the fruit of what he did but he literally changed history in both Heaven and earth.

A current TV commercial features a fisherman who discovers a silver tray loaded with the most delectable cheese in prime time. But when he puts a piece in his mouth he becomes aware of a hook and a line that tries to pull him down the same hole in the ice he's been fishing through himself. The love we share with others must never contain a hook or a line. Only the power of God can do that.

Events:

Looks like a full month with lots of activities for us. Let's start out with a

Promise Keeper's Alert!

God's Spirit is speaking and it's time to heed the call. When we first started the group in May of 1995 our purpose was to encourage one another in godliness as men. For one reason or another we allowed things to wind down into basically just a monthly dinner. But no more! God is talking!

One thing we all agreed to do in 1995 was buy a copy of the *Seven Promises* book. Bring your notebook from back then or get another. After this month you'll need them to get in. Come on time. No dinner will be served to late birds. And let's plan on giving M- a \$5.00 donation for her wonderful dinners. In time past it was her pleasure to bless us at no charge, but finance is a little tighter for her right now, so let's do our part.

Some of the topics we'll work on will include manners and etiquette, sins of the tongue (did you know it's a *sin* to talk too much?), as well as the usual matters of spiritual growth and development. See you there! (Note: This month only it will be held on the second Friday due to T- and M-'s schedule.

For the Ladies:

On that same Friday the 10th we're putting together a monthly get together for all of you too. This month C- will be hosting it. It will start at 6:30 PM, and C- says a magic word: potluck!

Looks like that's about it. Let's remember to keep one another lifted up in prayer.

Have a great month!

GAH

© 1999 Gary A. Hughes