

The Bare Necessities of Life: Friends and *Chocolate*



Most of us lead hectic lives. It just seems to be the way the world is spinning these days. And when life gets crazy, we often have difficulty developing and maintaining close friendships.

This is dangerous, ladies. Neglecting our inherent need to socialize could be harmful to our health, almost as damaging as life without chocolate.

Face it, what else makes a woman feel better when she is cycling through her hormones? Chocolate and a good talk with a sweet sister? Which brings me to my point: friends are like chocolate. You can live without them, but who really wants to?

Friends are the chocolate chips in the cookie of life. Like chocolate, friends give us pleasure. They share the good times and the bad. “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend” (Proverbs 27:9). I once heard someone say, “The only thing better than a good friend, is a good friend with chocolate.”

Of course, chocolate doesn’t excite all as much as it does most. You may be a chip gal, or a new-pair-of-shoes lady; however, scientists discovered that phenylethylamine, also known as the “love drug,” is released in our brains when we eat chocolate. This is the very same chemical that gives us that feeling of being in love. And

consuming chocolate takes a lot less effort than a romance, though overindulgence can result in similar mood swings.

Chocolate comes in different flavors: white, dark, and traditional. It is also used to cover nuts and raisins—apply these analogies to your friends however you wish, but don’t blame me if they get upset with you. Regardless of the richness, texture, or hue, all chocolates, like all friendships, serve their purposes in life. From acquaintances to comrades, associates to sidekicks, attendants to benefactors, companions to confidantes, the Lord brings people into our lives to share its times and seasons.

True friendships are among the many wonderful blessings of those who belong to the body of Christ. As believers, we find ourselves filling many different roles in the lives of others, a reciprocal arrangement that benefits our lives, as well. The same friend we celebrated with last week may lend us a shoulder to cry on tomorrow. The person we counseled on a family matter may be the one who has the right advice for our ministry situation. As the old proverb goes, “one hand washes the other.”

Throughout the year my husband battled cancer, my sisters in the Lord came to my rescue. While I was consumed with the demands of attending

him, my church family supported me. They worked out a schedule and brought meals to my home. My laundry washed, my groceries bought, my son diapered, and my daughter’s hair brushed—different women pulled together to pull me through a very difficult season of life. As I served in my church the years prior to the trauma, I never dreamed I would find myself and my family dependent on others in such a dramatic way.

No one knows with certainty the troubles and challenges that lay ahead—which is another good reason to invest in the lives of others. For the joy of relationships, yes, but in addition we cannot anticipate when we may need to make an emergency withdrawal. If no deposits have been made into our friendship accounts, where will we draw from?

I learned the most about true friendship when in desperate personal need others befriended me:

- A real friend knows when to keep her mouth closed and her arms opened (think of Job’s friends).
- A real friend knows when to say “I love you” instead of “You should...”
- And a real friend knows when you need a pat on the back or a swift kick to the backside.

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6). I have needed both pats and kicks, and I have given

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both to others. This is real life, ladies, and we have to be real with each other if we're really going to make it. "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:10, NIV).

Beyond tantalizing our taste buds, chocolate washes endorphins and serotonin over our brains. Endorphins lessen pain and decrease stress while serotonin works as an antidepressant. The relationships God brings into our lives absolutely provide these powerful coping mechanisms. Sharing life with friends lessens pain, decreases stress, and helps shift perspective from selfishness to selflessness—an outlook that fights depression with great results, better than most chemicals on the market, and without negative side effects.

We all go through lonely seasons, sometimes while surrounded by people. If your heart is lonely, I encourage you to take your focus off looking for a friend. Instead, look for a way to serve others, and God will bring friends into your life.

A friend is defined as someone you know and trust, someone for which you have affection and who provides cooperation or assistance. The Latin, Greek, and English histories of the word all go back to the word "love"; to be a friend is *to love*. Applying this to Proverbs 18:24, we could read the verse "A man that hath friends [love] must shew himself friendly [loving]."

Have you ever noticed the Lord used the feminine gender to define

love's attributes? Take a look at the famous love chapter: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

First, try this exercise. Reread the passage, and wherever you see the word "charity," substitute the word "friendship." If you are struggling in a relationship, you could use this as a template for prayer. "Lord, help me love my friend by showing kindness to her, help me believe the best in her, help me not to be easily provoked or oversensitive to her," and so on.

Secondly, did you note the phrase "seeketh not *her* own"? I never caught that in previous readings, but come to think of it, I don't know any men named Charity. Perhaps the Lord assigned the feminine gender because a woman's love can be very emotion driven. God knows we are sensitive to our environments, again like chocolate. According to the atmosphere, chocolate can melt or freeze into brittle bars. But if you let chocolate sit at room temperature awhile, it will come back to its regular solid form.

In the times we feel unloving or unfriendly, we would do well to take those emotions to the Word and let them sit there until they get back to where they need to be. I read somewhere, "I am a woman of many moods, and they all require chocolate." True friendship is to love.

Love covers (Proverbs 17:9). Love gives (John 15:13). A friend is a gift from God, a gift to unwrap and enjoy over time, a gift to share with others. 🍫

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