

FRIENDSHIP



Friendship is an undisputed value in our society, with children often spending more time with their friends than with family. It is a key concept in the Christian framework, with Jesus being criticised for being 'the friend of sinners' and eating with those whom society rejected. Sharing a meal with someone is an explicit sign of friendship and the word 'companion' literally means 'one with whom you share bread.' Jesus tells stories of the heavenly banquet to which all are invited. The barriers between people are broken down in a loving community around God and Jesus had stern words to say to those who refused to recognise that all are included in this community of friendship. The Bible has many sayings about friendship: 'A friend loves at all times.' (Proverbs 17:17) Friends are not afraid to tell each other the truth and a friend's loving criticism is worth more than the empty compliments of someone who does not really care for you. 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.' (Proverbs 27:6) The writer of Ecclesiastes puts it very simply: 'if one falls down, a friend can lift him up'. (Ecclesiastes 4:10) The friendship of David and Jonathan is very strongly emphasised in the Bible, Abraham is described as the friend of God (James 2:23) and Jesus explicitly calls his disciples not servants but friends (John 15:14 - 15). Trust, feeling comfortable in each other's company, being able to share joys and sorrows are all features of friendship and these are things of immense value. True friendship enables each person to grow and ensures that the unique individuality of each person is recognised. All this echoes the value placed by God on the preciousness of each person. Hymns like 'What a friend we have in Jesus' point to a relationship that is at the heart of Christian believing. Knowing that God is our friend is to recover something of the acceptance and close companionship that people of all ages need and crave.