

What is True Christian Friendship? Part 1 | the power of influence

I. Influence should be your biggest concern.

- Merriam-Webster: to have an effect on the condition or development of” someone or something.
- II Thessalonians 2:8-12. The word translated “influence” should sound familiar. It’s *energeia*, and it refers to an operative power. Though this is the only time this particular word is translated “influence,” it shows up 7 times in total in the New Testament, and it’s rendered “activity” once, “exertion” once, and “working” 4 times.
- But even though the word “influence” doesn’t appear much in Scripture, the entire cannon deals heavily with the subject.
- All humanity is born into the world dead, blind, and lost. Without the direct influence of God, we would all be separated from Him for all eternity in the Lake of Fire.
- The very Bible itself was given to us to influence us. In addition, the Holy Spirit works in us to convict us — that’s a specific kind of influence. And God’s people are called to be a salty and bright influence in our lives. And it’s all designed to bring us to a place that we recognize our need for a Savior and King.
- But when we submit to the truth we’ve learned and are born again, the influence doesn’t stop there. God leaves us here for an indeterminate amount of time because He has a job for us. And what is that job? That job is for us to *influence* the world for Him as others did for us. And — as was already observed — the sum of that influence includes evangelism and discipleship.
- But God is not merely using us to influence others, we’re still being influenced in order for us to mature in Christ.
- And the really cool thing is that as we submit to the discipling influences in our lives and progress in our sanctification, our influence in others’ lives is to become *more* influential because it’s more and more conformed to the image of Christ!
- So, we can easily say that without proper influence, there is *no* hope for anyone. Therefore, the question of what we will allow to influence our thinking is absolutely paramount in all things.

II. Aside from God, friends are your biggest influencers.

- Regardless of how we define what a friend is, they are the people whose influence we’re more than happy to accept. And even though we all like to believe that our friends represent the *best* influences in our lives, we need to hold our friendships up to the light of God’s Word to see if they are what they should be.
- We all can recognize that there have been people in our lives who we knew were bad influences, and yet we still considered them friends. There have also likely been friends who we thought were good influences, only to find later that they weren’t. And there may have even been people who we thought were bad influences who ended up actually being really good influences.
- The question of what a friend is, who your friends are, and whether or not you’re being a friend to others should be of paramount important to all believers because they represent a massive part of the influences in our lives.

III. The World's understanding of friendship.

- Merriam-Webster:
 - 1. a : one attached to another by affection or esteem b: an acquaintance
 - 2. a : one that is not hostile — such as b : one that is of the same nation, party, or group
 - 3. : one that favors or promotes something (such as a charity)
 - 4. : a favored companion
 - 5. : a member of a Christian sect that stresses Inner Light, rejects sacraments and an ordained ministry, and opposes war — called also *Quaker*
- Generally speaking, most mature people . . .
 - View their friends on a continuum. They don't relate to everyone the same.
 - The closer a friend is, the more we trust and respect them.
 - The closer a friend is, the more time we want to spend with them.
 - Many believe that friendship must be reciprocal.

IV. Your understanding of friendship.

- It's too easy to assume we have the same definitions as God, but when we carefully contrast our working definitions with God's, it's often too easy to see the dangerous differences.
- And it's even easier to do with such a culturally familiar concept. Therefore, it's desperately important for us to be discerning by asking ourselves important questions.
 - Have you actually sat down and meditated on God's definition of friendship?
 - Do you understand that people exist on a relationship continuum?
 - Do you understand that you should interact with people differently depending on how they relate to you?
 - Do you understand the powerful influence your friends exert on your life?
 - How do other people define the word friend?
 - How do your friends define it?
 - Does friendship have to be reciprocal.
 - How many real friends do you have in your life?
- It's important to answer these questions in order to short-circuit that bad habit we all have to simply assume we're looking at a concept the right way. Sometimes it takes hard questions and contrary viewpoints to help us honestly understand the depth or shallow nature of our worldview.
- Psalm 1:1 — Influence is so incredibly important that we not only need to embrace the right kind, we absolutely need to reject the wrong kinds. In addition to that — God's personal blessing is tied to rejecting the wrong kinds of influence.