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True Friendship

*True friendships are based on love of God
and sharing that love with others.*

Think for a minute what it means to you to know you have someone standing right by you, someone you can trust to be your friend on good days and bad, someone who values you and supports you even when the two of you are apart.

Our most prized friend is Jesus Christ Himself. Is there any greater assurance than His “I will be on your right hand and on your left, . . . and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88)? So often those “angels round about” are our friends.

My message centers on the importance in each of our lives of righteous friendships. In my youth, an inspired patriarch laid his hands on my head and by revelation opened to me an understanding of my potential—for who I really am—and gave a direction for my life, just like a patriarch has done for many of you. I was told that I would not lack for friends and associates, that their friendship would be a special blessing to me both temporally as well as spiritually. I was counseled to select for my closest friends those who were righteous and had a desire to keep the commandments of God.

That passage from my patriarchal blessing has been like a comfort blanket to me throughout my life. At times, especially while living away from home, those words have given me a peace and strength—my friends were standing by, although separated by many miles. And at such times I learned one of life’s most important lessons, that no matter how long I was away, no matter how great the distance, whenever my friends and I met again, it was as if nothing had changed. We picked up our lives where we left off, and it was as if time had stood still.





Choose Good Friends

Why do I emphasize that? Because in today's world so many people willingly trade those friendships for video characters and quick text messages. They spend their time identifying with television personalities who for them are only faces on a screen. Think about it. True friendships are based on love of God and sharing that love with others.

From my earliest days growing up in the Cottonwood Stake in the Salt Lake Valley, friends have been a special blessing to me. The closest friends made in my youth remain my friends to this day. We have always been there for each other. And I have been grateful to make new friends who have been a strength and blessing to me as well.

When I think of friendship, I think of the example of President Thomas S. Monson. Consider this teaching of our beloved prophet. He said:

“Friends help to determine your future. You will tend to be like them and to be found where they choose to go. Remember, the path we follow in this life leads to the path we follow in the next.

“In a survey made in selected wards and stakes of the Church, we learned a most significant fact: Those persons whose friends married in the temple usually married in the temple, while those persons whose friends did not marry in the temple usually did not marry in the temple. This same fact pertained also to full-time missionary service. The influence of one's friends appeared to be a highly dominant factor—even equal to parental urging, classroom instruction, or proximity to a temple.

“The friends you choose will either help or hinder your success.”¹

Those are sobering words.

Who wouldn't choose President Monson as a friend? He gives away his trains at Christmastime, he gives the clothes off his back and the shoes off his feet to people who don't have any, he gives countless hours to those so often forgotten in care centers or struggling for life in hospitals, and he shares his joy for life with all of us when he wiggles his ears. What's not to like? When a group of missionaries was asked to identify one of President Monson's greatest attributes, almost all chose his love for people. One even suggested he wished he could live next door to the prophet because he knew they would then become good friends.



Thomas S. Monson (front row, center) as a youth with members of his Sunday School class, 1941.

Be Good Friends

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of being good friends. Becoming such friends is not always easy. Ralph Waldo Emerson gave great counsel when he observed, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.”² And the old cliché “Birds of a feather flock together” is still true. To have friends who live high standards, who stand for virtue and goodness, who are faithful and true to their covenants, you must be such a person to them.

In this world where there is so much sleaze, permissiveness, and immorality, having good friends will go a long way in ensuring our ability to withstand the evils of this, our day. Having good friends will put you in a position to attract the kind of eternal companion you will hope to find. Such was the case with Sister Rasband. We were first great friends. An invitation for marriage came later.



Jesus Christ Is Our Example

It was the Savior who said to His disciples, “Ye are my friends” (D&C 84:63). It was the Savior who taught, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). It was the Savior who beckoned, “Come unto me” (Matthew 11:28). In friendship, as in every other principle of the gospel, Jesus Christ is our Exemplar.

Now my dear young, new friends, I bear my testimony to you at this time that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. I bear witness that a very important element of your experience in the gospel is the friends you make and the mentors you follow, just as I was promised in my patriarchal blessing at 19 years of age.

I pray that each of us will have the privilege of enjoying righteous friendships and mentoring relationships as we grow together in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **NE**

From a Church Educational System fireside given on March 7, 2010.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “In Harm’s Way,” Apr. 1998 general conference.
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Friendship,” *Essays: First Series* (1841).