

Do I Have Broccoli in My Teeth?

Miss Marla VanBaren

Here it is. You were waiting; I know you were (not as much as our esteemed editor, perhaps...). The debut of the women's section has come about. So, what *is* the women's section? Hold that thought (explanation and pitch to come later). More importantly, at least in my eyes, what will the debut, the inaugural column, the beginning be?

This thought haunted me for weeks. What one thing stands out to me: my friends. I'm single, no husband, no children, but I am blessed with some excellent friends (one of whom did suggest I could write about friends—I do have such high quality ones, after all). When I speak of friends, I am not referring to co-workers I enjoy being with, not people I have grabbed something to eat with at school. No, I'm talking about the true friend, the lifelong friend, the friend who lets me know when I have broccoli stuck between my front teeth.

What, is not this the true mark of a friend: making sure we do not embarrass ourselves, keeping us from doing something downright stupid, and perhaps making us laugh? All right, maybe a true friend is one who will just be there when needed. That sounds a bit better, but something is still missing. Although listening, laughing, even giving sound advice from time to time, present admirable friend qualities, a real friend offers more—much more.

I am writing to sisters in Christ. Herein lies the foremost requirement: faith. We can, no, we must offer our Christian love to many for what better way to introduce Christ to others. However, a friend, a confidant must hold Scripture dear and share our faith. We turn to our friends for advice for everything from what shoes to wear to how to deal with a rebellious child. We turn to friends in joy and sorrow. Choosing good, godly friends, therefore, ranks high in importance.

What, then, does Scripture have to say about friendship? The first reference to a friend occurs in Exodus 33:11 where we learn that Jehovah spoke to Moses “as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Jehovah spoke to Moses after the people repented and worshipped Him; He came down into the tabernacle in the form of the cloudy pillar. The Almighty God spoke as a friend.

Later, in 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat prays to God for a victory over Moab who rose up against Israel. Verse 7 reads, “Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?” Amazing, Jehoshaphat comes before the Almighty God asking for victory and bases part of his plea on the friendship of God and Abraham, father of all Israel.

More examples abound, but for now I hope we can agree that friendship is not simply a nice thing or even a blessing, but friendship is godly (as long as it is a godly friendship). So then, whom can we call “friend”?

Turn to the New Testament with me. Friendship puts on a new robe of royal purple, Jesus Christ. “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends,” Christ tells His disciples in John 15:14, 15. Christ: our Lord, our Creator, our Savior, our King—our Friend. Christ determines *we* are friends.

The friendship of Christ with His people goes beyond social feelings of affection and finds its richness in spiritual ties. Jesus calls Lazarus His friend, John 11:11, and refers to John as the disciple He loves, John 21:7. Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples and followers. These two men stand out as examples of Christ choosing His friends and basing the friendship on spiritual connections.

Most obviously, Christ gives us the ultimate example of true friendship: John 15:13 says, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Christ died that we may live forever—as friends.

We may joke that you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. But God, through the blood of Christ, adopted us and made us brothers and sisters in Christ. In and of itself, this truth is astonishing. Christ by revealing Himself through His Word and Spirit makes us more: He calls us friends.

Our first lessons in friendship come from Christ; therefore, we ought to emulate Christ in our friendships. We have been called to have the mind of Christ (Matt. 11:29, Phil. 2:5). We are to follow His holy example: "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

No small thing, then, being a friend. God calls us to follow the example of Christ in all areas of our lives. Practically speaking, how can you and how can I become a friend in Christ? Look to another example of a real friend in the relationship of David and Jonathan. Jonathan put his friendship with David above his relationship with his wicked father Saul. David laments the death of Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:17-27 and in verse 26 asserts that Jonathan's love was wonderful, even "surpassing the love of women." Jonathan put David above himself and died in his service.

What else does Scripture say about friendship? Proverbs, that book of practical wisdom, provides us with a wealth of instruction. Read Proverbs 27 for a lengthy, in-depth discourse on Christian friendship. For now, we will look at some gems found in the Word.

- "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). To have a friend, be friendly but do not choose many friends indiscriminately.
- As all wise words do, Solomon gives warning as well as direction: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov 27:6). A true friend will correct you, but these wounds will heal. Beware, though, of the false, ungodly enemy who speaks sweetly.

- “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel” (Prov. 27:9). A little more direction given here, a friend’s godly counsel can make one’s heart rejoice for it is sweet.
- Later in the same chapter, verse 17, we are instructed that “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Being a friend is not all warm fuzzies, not if one is a true friend in Christ. Here we are reminded that being a real friend means bringing the Word of God, discussing the Word, exploring it, even correcting with it.

The Bible offers much more than we can possibly explore here. So, let’s move on and see how, as women, we can apply what we have read.

As women of the church, how do we carry the Word and practice the love of Christ with our friends? I believe the truest benchmark of Christian friendship is prayer. What infinite comfort to have our closest friends, those who know our struggles best, bring before the heavenly Father our needs. Sometimes we may not understand our needs, but a friend in prayer brings the comfort of the Spirit. Importantly, we must also let each other know that we are praying. In times of duress, grab the hands of your friend and go before the Lord together. This is true friendship, true love.

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17). Say it with me again, “A friend loveth at all times.” Fair weather friendship ignores the instruction of the Bible and the example of Christ who loves us even when we deny Him. A brother, and yes, a sister, too, is born for adversity. Lean on your friends when you can, for I know my friends are a blessing from God, though they may not always be with me. Of course, our “best” friend always walks by our side and has given His Spirit to comfort us here on earth. We never walk alone.

My dear sisters (and brothers) in the Lord, I offer you the hand of friendship and turn to you my friends for “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the

one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Eccl. 4:9-10).

As you were warned in the beginning, I now ask for your help. As the section editor, it is my job to form the purpose and direction of this column. As the reader, you know what you find useful and interesting. Therefore, I ask that you help me define the direction of this section. Please send me any topic suggestions and general ideas on the focus of the column. If you have a story to tell or topic you wish to explore, by all means submit it to me that I may consider it for publication. This section is for you the reader, thus you may as well fill the pages from time to time. You can even send in your criticisms, be gentle please. All correspondence can be sent to marlajovb@yahoo.com.

A New Version Of Psalm 23

by Anna Williams - Copied from *The Revivalist* (January 2002, p. 4)

The TV is my shepherd, I shall not want.
It makes me lie down on the sofa,
It leads me away from the faith,
It destroys my soul.
It leads me in the paths of sex and violence
For the sponsor's sake.
Yea, though I walk in the shadow of my responsibilities
There will be no interruption,
For the TV is with me,
Its cable and remote control
They comfort me.
It prepares a commercial before me
In the presence of my worldliness.
It anoints my head with humanism and consumerism,
My covetousness runneth over.
Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow me
All the days of my life
And I shall dwell in the house
Watching TV for ever.