

Friendship

I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.
-John 15:15

Thank you all! Today, I am going to talk about what being a friend is.

I think there is a tendency to define what a friend *is* by what a friend *does*. Now, I think there is a time and a place for this, but I also think there is a danger of we don't realize when we are doing it. <next slide please> Take, for example, these three statements of friendship. I don't intend this list to be all encompassing; millions of other examples could be added to this is, but I chose these three specifically. And I also want to point out what I hope is obvious with a little thought; that just because a friend *should* do these things, it does not mean that *only* a friend can do these things. You can have a quite time with a book, you can enjoy a concert with strangers and you can get help from someone who doesn't even like you. But there is something special about a friend that normally makes these experiences better, and I think that helps us ask the question: what is it about a friend that makes it so? So, let us turn these statements into questions. <next slide please> We could spend some time working through these, but I think that ultimately all the answers would come down to the fact that there is a special bonding between you and a friend that doesn't exist otherwise. And I would like to propose that this is not just any bond, but a bond formed by Love. <next slide please>

For me, Love is a force to combine, unify, join or otherwise unite. Yes, Star Wars fans; the force is indeed strong in some cases and quite weak in others. Traditionally, Love comes in four distinct flavors. <next slide please> I am sure many of you have heard of the four loves before, but I think I will bring up new ways for you to think about them before I am done.

I will begin with the Love that unifies through strong, common interests. This is what is commonly called "brotherly love," and what the Greeks called "philia." I propose that this is where true friendship comes from, and will be the main focus of this talk. But I also want to briefly touch on the others so we can compare and contrast them.

The next love I will talk about unifies through familiarity. It is commonly described as "affection" and is what the Greeks called "storge."

After that, we have the love that unifies through emotion and sensation. It is commonly looked at in a sexual context, but *any* form of passion qualifies as long as it unifies. The Greeks called this "eros."

And last, but certainly not least, we have the unifying force of charity. I like to think of it as loving the unlovable, and the Greeks called it "agape." Now, don't think that what I mean here is that the beloved of agape has no redeeming values. It means the beloved is incapable of returning anything of value to the lover, even if it is only momentarily. As the beloved is incapable of returning value, this Love cannot be learned through reason. It must be learned. And while this is not the time or place to get into why this is so, it *is* agape that is most often identified in the Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity.

<next slide please> Please note that I deliberately chose my earlier statements to match the three other loves. I would suggest that the very nature of friendship being a Love is what makes it so easy confused *with* the other Loves. When two people have interests they both feel deeply and strongly about, we find very fertile ground for the other Loves to grow:

Because of our common interests, we are likely to spend a lot of time together, and therefore storge can be found. Through our familiarity and affection, we feel comfortable with the other person.

By having deep and strong interests, we already have a certain passion in them. When we see that same passion in someone else, we open the door to eros.

And when we find someone to share our interests with, their welfare becomes a new interest for us as well. By sharing an interest in the common welfare for each other, we learn agape.

I hope this helps to show that we don't live in a world of extremes, as I just showed a single example of how all four loves interconnect. I would like to compare this to a cake: while it is a mixture of different ingredients, it is very helpful to know which ingredient is which when making one. <next slide please>

So, we can now define friendship as a unifying force based on having common interests. Furthermore, since friendship is of philia and not agape, we also know that friendship means that there is something lovable, or valuable, in us. But what does all of this mean?

First of all, friendship is a unifying force. Unification does not divide, so Love is not about separating. True friendship will not cause you to give up other, healthy Loves.

Next, since friendship is based on common interests, it is by definition reciprocal. The lover is also the beloved. In fact, it is the *only* form of love that must, by necessity, be reciprocal. You can't be a true friend to someone who doesn't want to be a friend in return. Naturally, you can still act friendly, but remember that acting is not the same as being.

My third point builds on the last one. "Common interest" is rather broad in scope, is it not? *Any* number of people can theoretically join in this love. In fact, friendship is the only love that is actively missionary. It is the only love that seeks more beloveds.

Now that we have properly defined friendship and know what to look for, I would like to propose some observations about philia in practice. Since it does require the beloved to be lovable, it can fall apart when the common interests are gone, unless something else replaces it. This is why so many friendships end with High School, as the school was the strongest common interest. However, while philia can go away, it tends to be quite strong and consistent because it tends to be a love easily made. You will certainly lose many friends when you leave High School, but if you go to the reunions, I think you will be surprised. That old common interest might lead you to spending hours talking to a former classmate you hardly knew when still in school.

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