



Healthy Friendships

Lesson Overview

1. Watch a Video

Watch *What's a Real Friend* online at bit.ly/RealFriend (4min 14sec)

2. Discuss

Discuss qualities of healthy friendships.

3. Read

What do the Writings for the New Church teach about healthy relationships?

4. Activity Choice

Explore internal and external qualities *or* explore where Sue and Bill's relationship struggles started.

New Church Concept Healthy Friendship

Not only does an upright person love what is good and just in another person, but so also does an unprincipled person. When an unprincipled person deals with a good and just person he is not afraid of losing his reputation or his honor. With an unprincipled person, though, the love of good is not the same as love of the neighbor, because he does not really love others, but he only loves them so far as he can use them. See *Arcana Coelestia* 5132

FaithBuilder 1 | Lesson 19 | Conjugal Love

Watch a Video

Watch *What's a Real Friend?* At bit.ly/RealFriend (4min 14sec). (Enter link in web browser bar at the top of your screen.)

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. Do you agree with the ideas of a real friendship in this video?
2. What other qualities of friendship might you add to this list?
3. What do you look for in a friend?
4. Is there such a thing as a “fake” friend?
5. The video discusses the importance of being friends with people who are not like you. Why is this important? If our friends are all like us, are we just loving ourselves?
6. How might having personal friendship “standards” limit friendships? Is this a healthy way to approach friendship?
7. How is “letting you be yourself” an important friendship quality? Why could not feeling you can be yourself a healthy friendship alert?
8. Has working to be a good friend to another person paid off for you?

Read

We have some sort of relationship with every person we meet. Our eyes may connect with a stranger, we may exchange a smile with someone we know, or have a heartfelt conversation with a friend. Our closest friendships are with people who love what we love—but we love many things. Some of them are good; others are not so good. The Writings give a helpful guide for distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy friendships:

Anyone can...befriend another; but most of all a person ought to befriend what is good. *Arcana Coelestia* 4804

Healthy friendships focus on what is good in others, not just the fun you have when you are with them. True friendship is founded on two people wanting what is genuinely good for each other, and making the other's happiness as important as their own happiness.

The more experiences we have with a person, and the more we reflect on those experiences, the more we may get glimpses of what that person is like at heart, of what principles guide their thoughts and actions. Swedenborg once saw communities in the spiritual world where people used friendship as a way to have fun—without thinking of others at all.

During their lifetime they loved whoever they were with, without being interested in whether they were good or evil, as long as they were having fun. People like this take away other people’s feelings of delight, and transfer the delight to themselves. See *Arcana Coelestia* 4804

When spirits like this were near Swedenborg, he felt as if his own joy had been taken away. This passage ends with a warning:

Friendship that pays attention to the person but not to what is good can really harm your spiritual life. *Arcana Coelestia* 4804

Activity Choice: Internal and External Qualities

We find others attractive for many reasons. We may like someone’s sense of humor, passion for what they, or the way they make us feel. Many of the things we love about others are superficial—or *external*. We relate to others on this level when doing things we enjoy—e.g. listening to music or doing a sport. Our religious beliefs are a deeper or more *internal* part of us. We may guard our beliefs more closely than other parts of us because we care deeply about them. We try to protect them from ridicule. They are who we really are at heart.

Using these criteria, decide whether the words in the list below describe *internal* or *external* qualities of a person and write them on the chart.

Internal Qualities	External Qualities

- | | | | |
|-----------|------------|--------------------|-----------|
| energetic | smart | attractive | moral |
| outgoing | honest | loves children | kind |
| faithful | fun-loving | friendly | positive |
| tall | polite | good fashion sense | religious |

Discuss your answers.

Activity Choice: Sue and Bill

Sue and Bill met in college. Sue was pretty, dressed well and always looked sharp. Before college, Sue attended church and taught Sunday School. She loved kids. But away from her family, Sue slept in on Sundays and began to wonder if she really believed in God. Bill was a fun-loving guy. Although he could be a little crude at times, Sue felt she could be herself when she was with him. Sue and Bill started dating. Occasionally Bill’s swearing upset Sue. But if she said anything about it, he made fun of her. His “no worries” attitude made her feel she was being silly. Bill and Sue fell into a steady relationship. They shared many things, but religion never came up. Four years later they married. When they started their family, Sue began to dread Bill’s rude outbursts in front of the children. She had thought his swearing in college was a passing phase. Now she wondered why he hadn’t grown out of it. She began to realize she missed going to church. When she wanted to take their children to church, Bill wouldn’t hear of it. Sue began to wonder what they had in common.

Discussion

1. At what point did Sue realize that she and Bill were different in important ways?
2. What clues could have helped her realize this sooner?
3. Why didn’t Sue recognize how different they were?

On what basis are we to make friends? What friendships should we nurture and which should we avoid? The Lord answers these questions in the New Testament and in the Writings for the New Church. Although He is in a real sense the Friend of all people (even addressing a wicked man who came to the feast without wedding clothing “friend” (Matthew 22:12)), He limits His friendship. He outlines the requirements of true friendship. “You are My friends,” He says, “If you do whatever I command you.” “I have called you friends...For all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” So the foundation of true friendship is doing what is good using truth as a guiding light. The Writings talk about many types of friendship, from deep friendships between married partners to false friendships between people who hate each other. True friendships have qualities taught in the New Testament, while false friendships do not. The test of friendship in the Writings is “use.” What use does the friendship serve? Friendships between business professionals that contribute to a use should be fostered. External friendships, including the social obligations needed to maintain them, are good as long as they are for the sake of us. For to the degree that people do useful service, they are to be befriended, since they are doing the Lord’s commandments. Adapted from a talk by Rev. David Simons.