

RESPECTING THE OPPOSITE SEX



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

There are many kinds of friendship. True friendship is a relationship between two people which is founded on both loving and supporting the good qualities in the other person, not just having a good time together. Cultivating friendships with a variety of members of the opposite sex can give us a fuller idea of what different people are like and how our own qualities interact with these differences. It can also help a young person figure out what kinds of qualities he or she might look for in a future spouse.

As friendships between the sexes develop, the affection shared between them leads them to enjoy being close to each other, to hug and enjoy even more intimate expressions of affection. Physical expressions of affection (“the sense of touch”) are powerful and should be used with wise judgment. The more intimate expressions of affection (“touch”), if engaged in too early in a relationship, can interfere in the process of two people really getting to know each other and developing true friendship.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

What friendship qualities enable us to have true and respectful relationships with members of the opposite sex? What behaviors might harm our relationships?

What Qualities Make for Healthy Friendships?

We have some sort of relationship with every person we meet. We may meet the gaze of a stranger, flash a smile at an acquaintance, exchange a greeting with a teacher or have a heartfelt conversation with a friend. Our closest friendships are with people who love what we love—but we love many things, and some of them are good, while others are not so good. The Heavenly Doctrine gives us a helpful way to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy friendships:

Anyone can...befriend another; but most of all he 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.

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 and what principles guide his or her 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.



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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 (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4804).

Friendships between Men and Women

While it is easy to make friends with people like ourselves, it may be more challenging to make friends with people who are different—many people find this is true of friendships with members of the opposite sex. Respecting and honoring masculine and feminine differences is important if we are to develop healthy relationships with the opposite sex. Swedenborg once had a conversation with wives in heaven about the numerous ways in which their wisdom was different from their husbands. They explained though that this was not a matter of which was superior, as one wife reflected:

We do not glory over you on account of our wisdom (see *Conjugal Love* 208).

Many people find that they can become more familiar with the qualities of men and women by forming friendships with a variety of people.

The book *Conjugal Love* begins with an account of groups of people who were given the opportunity to experience what they thought heaven was like for several days. Their ideas of heaven were quite different—some people expected to eat and drink with famous people, others thought they would have important discussions, and others thought they would sit in gardens all day. Afterwards they met and talked about their experiences. All of them discovered that what they *thought* heaven was like was not accurate at all! In a similar way, our ideas about what men and women or marriage are like might not be accurate either. Getting to know a variety of men or women can help us learn more about the opposite sex. It also helps us get to know the kinds of qualities we deeply care about and that we will eventually look for in the person we marry.

Touch

The sense of touch is an important aspect of most relationships. We shake hands when we meet someone to express our good will and show our acceptance. One of the ways parents love their children is by hugging and holding them. We pat friends on the back to congratulate them and hug them to convey care and concern. The Heavenly Doctrine explains why this sense is so powerful.

"To touch with the hand" means to communicate and transfer to another person what is yours, because the whole power of a person is transferred from the body into the hands. What the mind wants the body to do, the arms and hands actually do.... This power is natural power, and the communication that takes place is by means of the body. But spiritual power is to will the good of another, and to will to convey to another as far as possible what is with oneself (see *Apocalypse Explained* 79).

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When we touch another person, as with all aspects of friendship, we should keep in mind what is best for our friend as well as for ourselves. Progressively deeper sharing of our mind, heart and a commitment to the other's welfare should precede more intimate touch shared with another person. Our most intimate forms of touch are a gift from the Lord. He intends these expressions of love to be symbols of and a blessing for the deep friendship and lasting commitment to the spouse that is a key part of a marriage relationship.

Every love has its own special sense. The special sense of conjugal love is the sense of touch. The love of joining oneself with one's partner, arising from a love of uniting good loves and true ideas in useful activities has the sense of touch because this sense is the common one of all the senses and consequently draws contributions from the rest (see *Conjugal Love* 210).

It can be difficult to know what another person intends—especially whether a person who touches you outside of marriage intends what is good. The Heavenly Doctrine warns us about how hard it can be to know what is behind someone's actions:

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).

Respecting appropriate boundaries of touch in friendship protects our future happiness and the future happiness of our friends and the potential power of the more intimate expressions of affection for their intended use. The key issue is the love underlying the touch. The Heavenly Doctrine uses the word “chaste” to describe attitudes and actions that have a heavenly love behind them and “unchaste” to describe attractions that are primarily external and physical.

OPTIONAL READING

Chastity and unchastity are attributed to matters of marriage because both sexes have conjugal love imprinted on them, from the inmost to the outermost, and a person's thoughts and affections and behavior depend on this. Unchaste people have unchastity in their minds. It can be heard in their tone of voice, and the way they put a lewd interpretation on everything that is said. Their tone of voice is from their affections and what they say from their thoughts. This is a sign that their whole mind, and so everything in their bodies is filled with unchastity. I have heard from angels that unchastity can be detected in hypocrites by listening to them and it can be felt from the sphere coming from them. This is a sign that unchastity lives in the inmost parts of their minds, and so in the inmost parts of their bodies, but this is covered over like a shell painted in various colors. With chaste people, each and every thing in them is chaste. The chastity of conjugal love makes it so (see *Conjugal Love* 140).



Focus Points

1. What are the negative consequences to relationships when there is a lack of respect for members of the opposite sex?
2. What are some of the benefits that can come from experiencing friendships with a variety of people of the opposite sex?
3. Why might an unhealthy friendship with a member of the opposite sex put you in danger? (Think of dangers that could be natural, and dangers that could be spiritual.)
4. Why is the sense of touch so powerful in healthy relationships? Why is it also powerful in a negative way even in unhealthy relationships?
5. What might be happening if a friend, who says he or she has your deeper welfare in mind, tries to talk you into behaving intimately before marriage? Think about how the Heavenly Doctrine describes healthy friendship as you consider your response.
6. Can you tell if a person who wants to touch you intimately really loves you?

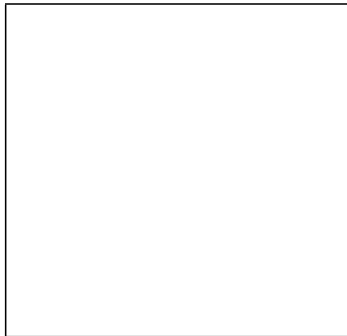
Activity 1

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?



Some people look for a married partner using an online dating service. Complete the following form as if you were going to post it online!

Choose whether to complete this from **your own** perspective or from the perspective of the **partner** you would like to marry. Keep your answers brief. Write so that someone will want to learn more about you!



Photo

Name _____

Alias _____

Make up a name that describes your inner self e.g. lookin4fun, funnygirl, shyguy

Age _____

Gender _____

Religious Views

Who do you value most in your life?

Occupation (future)

Education (future)

Hobbies/Activities

Ideal Partner

Best Date

(fun/exciting/romantic)

What did you learn about yourself by doing this? Discuss what you wrote with your group. What similarities or differences did you notice?



Touch

Each of our senses serves the things we love. For example, seeing things relates to our love of understanding them and influences us in a variety of ways. For example, our sense of sight is delighted when we see beautiful things. The same is true of all of our other senses. The sense that is especially dedicated to marriage is the sense of touch.

The special sense of conjugal love is the sense of touch.

The love of joining oneself with one's partner, arising from a love of uniting goodness and truth, has the sense of touch because this sense is common to all the senses and so draws from the rest (see *Conjugal Love* 210).

With this in mind, look at the following list of ways in which friends touch each other. Put an X on the scale to indicate where you think each type of touch belongs along the continuum of a casual acquaintance and the marriage relationship, assuming that the people touching are a man and a woman.

	Type of Touch	Marriage					Casual Acquaintance				
		10	8	6	4	2	0				
1	Shaking hands										
2	Hugging										
3	Brushing someone's hair										
4	Sitting on someone's lap										
5	Kissing on the mouth										
6	Backrub										
7	Holding hands										
8	Giving a pat on the back										
9	Foot rub										
10	Kissing on the cheek										
11	Linking arms										
12	Dancing close to each other										

(Note: You may intentionally avoid touch that is too intimate. One of these might be touching parts of another's body normally covered by a bathing suit.)

Group option: Share your responses and discuss.

1. Imagine that you have just shaken hands with someone. You cross the room and moments later overhear the same person saying nasty things about you. How might you feel?
2. In what ways might physical intimacy become a negative force in a relationship? The Lord provides a married partner for each person—either in this world, or in the next world. Before the spiritual and legal commitment of marriage to one partner it is unwise to act as though that commitment already exists and the person will be your spouse in good times and bad. Does the idea that a good friend of yours who is a member of the opposite sex may actually be *someone else's* future married partner affect the way you might touch them?

Activity 3

Philosopher's Chair

MODESTY



Process:

1. Read the statements for discussion and decide whether or not you agree with or favor them and why. The Teachings from the Word can help you make up your mind.
2. If you favor a statement, then go to the right side of the room. If you disagree, move to the left side of the room. You must take one side or the other, but you will be allowed to switch sides.
3. On each side of the room is a speaker's chair. Only the person sitting in the chair can speak. Each side takes turns speaking.
4. As speakers make their points, you may change sides any number of times.

Teachings from the Word:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5: 27-28).

Some beautiful wives from heaven, who were forms of heavenly affection said, “Let women love their beauty provided it is for the sake of their husbands and inspired by them” (see *Conjugal Love* 330).

Chastity in marriage comes about through totally rejecting relationships that are based on natural sexual attraction from religions principles. The reason is that chastity is the removal of unchasteness (see *Conjugal Love* 147:7).

No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can conjugal love. But because the Lord primarily regards the intention that is in the will, therefore to the extent that a person has the intention and perseveres in it, to that extent he is introduced into the purity and holiness of this love, and gradually makes progress in it (*Conjugal Love* 71).

Statement for Discussion:

The Lord gives people the freedom to dress or dance any way they want. If you don't like what I wear or how I dance, it's mostly your problem not mine!

If you think that people are responsible for how their clothing or behavior affects others, please go to the right side of the room. If you think that the responsibility lies with people who are *looking* at others, go to the left side.

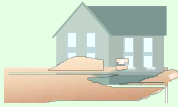
Further Discussion

If you would like to continue the discussion, you could consider one of these statements:

A person is not to blame for thoughts provoked by another person's immodesty.

Dressing immodestly may cause spiritual harm to others.

TAKING IT HOME



Here is an activity that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

Healthy Habit Check

We form habits by repeating actions again and again. It can be easy to fall into habits without thinking about what we are doing. Use this activity to help you reflect on your behavior patterns or habits in just one relationship.

Choose a relationship to focus on—it could be a relationship with a parent, sibling, friend or member of the opposite sex. Circle a number from 1-5 indicating whether you think your relationship is more or less healthy in each area.

Note: Depending on the relationship you choose, some categories may not apply.

Relationship Habit	Less Healthy			More Healthy	
Look person in the eye	1	2	3	4	5
Listen to what he/she is saying	1	2	3	4	5
Follow through with promises	1	2	3	4	5
Respect physical boundaries	1	2	3	4	5
Keep confidences	1	2	3	4	5
Do most of the talking yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Speak well of him/her when they are not present	1	2	3	4	5
Dress with modesty in mind	1	2	3	4	5
Respect his/her opinions	1	2	3	4	5
Feel safe expressing your opinions	1	2	3	4	5
Caring to please him/her more than follow your conscience	1	2	3	4	5
Feel you are listened to	1	2	3	4	5

Next time you are with this person, try to think of a way to make just one small change in your behavior. Listening carefully, asking a question or speaking out for what you think is right may make big changes in your relationship in the long run.

In the human race the face does not indicate unlikeness, but habits.
see Conjugal Love 246

Further Reading

FRIENDSHIP: THE OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF LOVE

A Talk Sermon by the Rev. David R. Simons

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15).

Expressing His infinite love and mercy toward the whole human race, the Lord came on earth and extended the hand of Divine friendship to all people. Infinitely wise and powerful, He accommodated Himself to finite comprehension. So completely was this done, so hidden was the reality that this man, Jesus Christ, was God Himself, that for the most part He was unrecognized, unacclaimed, and unworshipped. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11). Yet the purpose for which He came was so that people might come to see and know Him, and thus be set free from the forces of evil. He came not as a God of command and punishment, anger and vengeance, but as a friend, saying: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends... (John 15:15).

Friendship Involves Giving and Receiving

Friendship is a bond between people that is an outward manifestation of love. It implies reciprocation—the sharing of thoughts and ambitions, ideas and intentions. It involves giving and receiving, confidence and trust, and free cooperation between people. When one person takes without giving, or betrays and violates the confidence and trust and no longer shares or cooperates, the friendship is at an end. And the quality of friendship is determined by the love from which it springs, for love is the inner sustaining force that brings and holds people together. The spiritual heat of love conjoins friend with friend. Yet, like its earthly counterpart, it not only warms, expands, renews, heals, and promotes life; it can also sear and burn, deface and destroy. Love, like fire, can vivify or consume (*Arcana Coelestia* 4906). This is why friendship, which is the outward expression of love, can be the manifestation of the mutual love of heaven or it can be a dangerous tool in selfish hands.

Why Make Friends with People?

But on what basis are we to contract our friendships? What friendships should we foster, and which should we avoid? The Lord Himself answers these questions, both in the New Testament and in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. For although He is in a very real sense the Friend of all people (even addressing the wicked man who came to the feast without a wedding garment “friend” (Matthew 22:12)), He limits His friendship, as it were. He stipulates the requirements of true friendship. “You are My friends,” He says. On what condition? “If you do whatever I command you.” “I have called you friends.” Why? “For all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Evidently, then, the foundation of true friendship is doing good from a knowledge of truth.

In the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord describes every possible type and degree of friendship, from the inmost friendship between conjugal married partners to the seeming friendships

between those who inwardly burn with hatred toward one another. True and useful friendships are always shown to have something of the basic elements taught in the New Testament, while those dangerous and false friendships which should be avoided do not. The universal test of friendship outlined in the Heavenly Doctrine is use. What use does the friendship serve? Friendships between those who are in the same business, profession or situation in life that contribute to a use should be fostered. We are taught that friendships may be formed with any one, “even with the clown who jokes at the table of a nobleman” (*True Christian Religion* 446), for such friendships belong to civil life (*Spiritual Experiences* 4524). The reason for this is that, “no one is able to explore the interiors of the mind of those with whom he associates or deals” (*True Christian Religion* 449). External friendships, including the social obligations which are necessary to maintain them, are good and desirable as long as they are for the sake of uses. For in so far and to the degree that anyone performs uses, he can be befriended, since he is doing the Lord’s commandments.

Friendships Based on Religious Integrity

Yet such friendships have their limitations. They should not be entered into any more deeply than the use demands, since to do so is spiritually dangerous. External friendships can be formed with any person, but we are warned to guard against forming an interior friendship, or what the Heavenly Doctrine calls a “friendship of love” with just anyone (*True Christian Religion* 449). We are not to form interior friendships based on personality which ignore the quality of the person’s religion—his internal standards and ideals. For when the person is loved apart from his internal quality, the good can be linked spiritually to the evil and dragged by them into hell where they suffer terrible things before they can be released and elevated into heaven (*True Christian Religion* 449). Interior friendships must be based on ideas and purposes gained from the Word and a mutual desire to express them in life. Such relationships can be eternal because the uses they serve are eternal.

When one regards a friend from good, that is, from what he does and thinks that is in keeping with Divine truths, then there can be a mutual giving and receiving of good, and thus mutual love. Mutual love, we are told, “regards the good which is in a person, and because it is directed to good, it is directed to him who is in good” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3875:5). Friendship may also be mutual love “when it regards the person from good, or for the sake of good; but when it does not regard him from good or for the sake of good, but for the sake of self, which it calls good, then friendship is not mutual love, but approaches the love of self” (*ibid.*).

Good or Use Is the Neighbor to be Loved

These statements make it clear that good or use is the neighbor that is to be loved and made a friend, and that our friendships must not be formed on merely external grounds. We should look to the quality of affection and thought that make the real person. This does not involve internal judgments, for only the Lord can know the human heart. But it does involve discrimination, not an absolute judgment such as, “You are this way in internals, and therefore you will be saved or condemned,” but a conditional judgment, taught in the Heavenly Doctrine, “If in internals you are such as you appear in externals you will be saved or you will be condemned” (*Conjugial Love* 523:2). These statements make it clear that that we are to form friendships which relate to uses, allowing the depth of the relationship to be determined by the quality of the use. It is on this basis that internal friendships should be cultivated, and maintained.

Today, a new relationship with the Lord is possible, because He has come again in the teachings of the New Church. And from this a new relation among people is also possible.

This new relation is to be based on angelic love to the Lord, of which we learn: “In heaven loving the Lord does not mean loving Him in with respect to His person, but it means loving the good that is from Him...and to love good is to will good and do it from love” (*Heaven and Hell* 15). It is said further: “By loving the Lord is not meant loving Him as a person, for by such love only, a person is not conjoined with heaven, but by love of Divine good and Divine truth, which are the Lord in heaven and in the church” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1099:3). And again: “Loving the Lord as a person and not loving uses is loving the Lord from ones self, which is not loving.” (*Love* xiii).

The reason why the Lord and one’s neighbor must not be loved from person is that everyone who thinks of God or the neighbor only from person or externals, and not from essence, that is, from his qualities, thinks materially; but to think from essence to person, from qualities and attributes concerning the person, is orderly and right (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 611). The truth is, that anyone who thinks of God from person infuses his own ideas into God, and in so doing fashions God in the image of man. Whereas someone who thinks of God from God’s essence, from the qualities and attributes God Himself reveals in His Word, thinks from the truth, and the Lord can form his mind into an image and likeness of that truth.

Friendship with the Lord

It was this formation of the human mind into an image and likeness of Himself that the Lord made possible by coming to humankind and revealing Himself as their Friend. And He did this not only in the New Testament but in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church as well. Indeed, in the Heavenly Doctrine He completely and fully manifests all things of the Divine love. Through the Heavenly Doctrine He shares His inner qualities, purposes, and modes of operation, so that people need no longer be servants of ignorance and sin, but can enter into an intelligent cooperation with Him. As His friends, we are shown the inner workings of the human spirit and the eternal uses which the Lord provides so that a person may, as if of himself, enter into the joy of his Lord.

It was in order to lead people into genuine spiritual relationships with each other that the Lord willed to come again in the Heavenly Doctrine. In this new revelation of spiritual truth, He provides the wisdom necessary for true happiness. When, from Him, we know the importance of friendships built on internal grounds, we can apply this teaching to our own lives. In giving this wisdom, in sharing His thoughts and purposes with us, the Lord acts as our greatest and truest Friend. “You are My friends,” He said in the New Testament, “if you do whatever I command you.” In the Heavenly Doctrine this same Lord Jesus Christ says, “But, my friend, go to the God of the Word, thus to the Word itself and so enter through the door into the sheepfold...” (*True Christian Religion* 177). And in another place, He says, “[T]herefore, my friend, go to the Lord and shun evils as sins and reject faith alone, and then your understanding will be open and you will see wonderful things and be affected by them” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 914).

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 41:1-9; John 15:12-27; *True Christian Religion* 446, 448, 449