

Dear Friends,

I wonder how important friendship is to you. Pundits tells us that friendship affects our mental and physical wellbeing and even our life expectancy. I have spent my working life as an itinerant and so it has not been easy to keep in touch with people I have met along the way.

I recall that when I moved back to Hampshire after many years in North West England, how pleased I was at the first funeral I conducted see someone, who was now a driver-bearer for the Funeral Director, who I had met as a teenager when I attended a boys' camp run by his church. So, imagine my surprise recently when I received an email out of the blue from a boy who had been in the same class as me for 5 years throughout Secondary School. He mentioned the names of some other 'boys' who had been part of the same group. The writer has enjoyed a career with a high street bank and has been busily retired for 6 years. He describes this as 'the best job I have ever had'.

I have reflected on the responsibility of friendship - to have a friend we must be a friend. I realise that over the years I could have made more effort to keep in touch with friends. The Bible has a lot to say about friendship. The remarkable bond between David and Jonathan and the friendship Paul shared with others like Barnabas, Luke, Onesimus and others is well known. So, I wonder what friendship means to you? Maybe words like kindness, reliability and dependability may come to mind. I also wonder how important friendship is to church life. If church is to be a place of warmth and friendship do there need to be any changes, or have we achieved this goal already?

One of the saddest verses in the book of Job says, 'My familiar friends have forgotten me' (19:14). I found it especially touching that my correspondent knows roughly where I have worked over the years & even where I am living now. I take two lessons from this. When we feel we are forgotten there are still people thinking about us and wishing us well. Secondly, instead of wondering what happened to our old friends, how much better to get in touch, and ask them so they can know we have not forgotten them!

God bless you,

Keith.

Rev Keith C. Beckingham