

## Friendship is a Sheltering Tree

Friendship is a mutual affection with common interests bonded with trust and love. It is a different kind of relationship than one with your family because it is voluntary. You get to choose the kindred spirit, that special someone, your BFF. It's not like your great aunt Irene that you have to hug every time she sees you (even though she smells like cooked cabbage)...or your Uncle Donald who tells the same bad jokes whenever he is around...or your cousins Alice and Pete. Friends are optional!

CS Lewis said that "Friendship is born in that moment when one person says to another 'What?!! You too! I thought I was the only one who'..." Aristotle defined friendship as "a single soul dwelling in two bodies," but the one I love the most is a quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Of Youth and Age" written in 1823. The line is, "Friendship is a Sheltering Tree."

For those of you who don't know me, I am not a member of The Dead Poets Society, reading all kinds of ancient poems. I did see this on a sign in Hobby Lobby and wanted to know who said it. Growing up, I had the tendency to be "in trouble", the mischievous kind, and in the 50's there were all kinds of creative punishments like switches, and yardsticks. By today's standards they would be "borderline abuse." Anyway, the worse consequence or punishment for me was to isolate me and make me be alone. It used to be called being grounded, no friend time.

Friends are something that have always been near and dear to me. I have a best friend from first grade and we are still close. I'm blessed to call many of you that are reading this my friend as well; some older than others. My prayer is that you, too, have long lasting friendships.

Literature, History and Scripture have many examples of what friendship is. Charlotte and Wilbur ... Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson ... Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee ... and Pooh and Piglet ... "We will be friends forever won't we Pooh?" asked Piglet. "Even longer," Pooh replied.

Redemption Church has provided many "sheltering trees" over the years. Deep roots and massive trunks with leafy branches have given security and understanding, as well as places to rest for the weary soul. Proverbs 27:9 says "A sweet friendship refreshes the soul." In 1 Kings 19, Elijah was ready to quit. Depressed and threatened, he was ready to turn in his prophets badge. Instead God gave him rest, good food and a "tree" named Elisha. In the New Testament we learn in Acts that Paul had a veritable forest of sheltering trees from Barnabas (encourager) to Silas, his traveling buddy to Luke and Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila and more. Even our Lord Jesus enjoyed refreshment and sheltering rest with friends like Lazarus, Mary and Martha and his disciples.

And then in 1st and 2nd Kings comes the giant Sequoia, the Mighty Redwood (known for being the largest and sturdiest tree on earth). God gave that human Redwood to David in the form of Jonathan. In teaching these chapters to first graders year after year, I teach one of the most profound and underestimated verses: "David and Jonathan were best friends." Jonathan never wavered, nor shook, nor became uprooted because to quote 1 Samuel 18:1 "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Jonathan was that bosom friend that Anne of Green Gables sought. It was the kind of love and friendship that John 15:13 describes. "Greater love has no one more than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

Dear Women of Redemption, I challenge you with this thought. Beneath whose branches are you seeking shelter and refreshment, encouragement and support? Or better yet ... Who are you sheltering, encouraging and supporting? This month let your sheltering tree know how much they mean to you and be that tree for someone else.

-Mindy Stanley