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Friendship: Theory and Practice

An interview with Michael Pakaluk, author of the book, “The Company We Keep: True Friendship and Why it Matters.” The book aims to help the reader, as a Christian, learn to be a better friend.

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What would you say is the most important thing about friendship?

The most important thing is that “friendship is not friendship!” In

English, the word “friendship” can be misleading because it usually describes a narrow, intense, emotional relationship between just two people. We should instead be talking about the deeper “social bonds” or “social unities” that form among us as a result of love. As the philosopher Dionysius (“the Areopagite”) wrote, “Love is a unitive and binding force.”

English is at a disadvantage in discussing this concept compared to Romance languages like Spanish. In Spanish, the word for friendship (*amistad*) is a concrete form of the verb to love (*amor*). This principle should shape how we view society: the command to “Love everyone” implies acting with the wish to forge the bond of friendship with them.

What is love like in genuine friendship?

According to St. Thomas, genuine love always has two dimensions that work together. There is "gift love," where you want what is best for the other person, and "need love," where you want that person and the good they bring to your life for yourself.

Can you provide an example of how these two dimensions coexist?

Imagine a newly married couple where the wife goes on a high-profile business trip. The husband naturally feels both dimensions: he wants her to be successful in her work ("gift love"), but he also keenly misses her and wants her back ("need love"). Genuine love includes both.

How has St. Josemaria influenced your thoughts about friendship?

St. Josemaria has influenced my approach to everything in the interior life and my ordinary life as a husband, father, and professional. So

here are two specific ways he corrected my natural assumptions about friendship.

First, I used to think having a few close friends was enough, but St. Josemaria taught that a Christian apostle should have “lots and lots of friends” as part of a general outlook of amiability. Secondly, he taught that charity also encompasses seemingly little things of good manners and thoughtfulness. For instance, charity could extend even to closing a door softly so as not to disturb others. That constant awareness of others as “other selves” is the seedbed of friendship.

What is most important about the friendship between parents and children?

Parents should raise children with a view toward the adults they want them to become—specifically, raising future mothers and fathers who will

one day be their “just about” equals as friends. I say “just about” because a level of parental authority and filial piety will always remain.

Why is it so difficult to make friends today, and how can we form new ones?

Social bonds require nearness and time, but our lives are fragmented, and technology "devours" our time. To form new friendships, we must moderate our dependence on technology and be deliberate about meeting and spending time with others. Spending time with others shouldn't be seen as “wasting time.”

How can we ensure our friendships endure?

Simply staying in touch over the years allows friendships to deepen. Social media can play a helpful supporting role in this. Above all, a commitment to daily prayer for our

friends and their intentions is the most important factor.

What advice do you have for friendship within a marriage?

There is so much to say here. In general, a marriage needs time and effort like the interior life. Daily prayer: daily conversations between the spouses. Monthly day of recollection: monthly date night (at least once a month). Yearly retreat: a yearly marriage get-away. The book describes all this in more detail.

Michael Pakaluk