

Friends

“I give thanks unto God upon every remembrance of you.” These words of the Apostle Paul from Philippians 1:3 came to mind yesterday after having lunch with a friend of over 30 years. The lunch was at a restaurant overlooking the Black Warrior River in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

I write this column while spending a few days at the home of another friend – a clergyman who lives in 180-year-old plantation house in the Black Belt of Alabama. He too is a friend of over 30 years.

Friends, especially Christian ones, are important. They enrich our lives. Some we may have known for multiple decades, others for a shorter time, and still others may now be a part of that great company who worship God on another shore and in a greater life. All, however, are important and should be occasions of praising and giving thanks to God.

The friend with whom I had lunch is from England and came to this country in the early '80s to go to the University of Alabama. I have known him since 1985 when I was doing a clinical pastoral education program at Bryce State Mental Hospital in Tuscaloosa. During our lunch we figured out that it had been 10 years since we had seen each other.

A lot can happen in 10 years. Now his children are either approaching college age or are in college . . . one is in graduate school. He, meanwhile, has moved from a junior member to a top executive in the Birmingham insurance firm where he has worked for the past 30 years. So, there was a lot to catch up on.

More than that, he has become much more resolute in his Christian faith. When I first knew him, his commitment to Christ was tenuous. Now, he speaks with great boldness and conviction.

The point I wish to make is friendships are important. They are one of the many things for which we should continually give thanks to God. In the words of the hymn writer:

“For the joy of human love, / brother, sister, parent, child, / friends on earth and friends above, /
for all gentle thoughts and mild; /
Lord of all, to thee we raise / this our hymn of grateful praise.”

Let me encourage *you* to take a moment and reflect on the people God has placed in your life, particularly those who have enriched and, in some instances, changed the course of your life. Some of these may be kindly people of your parent's generation; others, contemporaries; still others, people much younger on whose lives you may even now be exerting a positive influence. As you identify these people, whisper Paul's words: "I give thanks unto God upon every remembrance of you" and let them know what they mean to you and how they are an occasion of thanksgiving to God.

O Lord, we offer our unfeigned thanks for all thy mercies; for our being, our reason, and all other endowments and faculties of soul and body; for our health, friends, food, and raiment, and all the other comforts and conveniences of life. Above all, we adore thy mercy in sending thy only Son into the world, to redeem us from sin and eternal death, and in giving us the knowledge and sense of our duty towards thee. We received these thy blessings through the mediation of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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