

MARK MATLOCK

WISDOM ON...

FRIENDS, DATING, AND RELATIONSHIPS



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Wisdom On...Friends, Dating, and Relationships

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: WHY WE NEED FRIENDS	13
CHAPTER 2: GOD IS RELATIONAL....	21
CHAPTER 3: THE FRIENDSHIP TRIANGLE	25
CHAPTER 4: THE QUALITIES OF A TRUE FRIEND.....	31
A TRUE FRIEND IS LOYAL	33
A TRUE FRIEND IS HONEST	36
A TRUE FRIEND IS FORGIVING..	38
A TRUE FRIEND IS REALISTIC ..	40
CHAPTER 5: WHEN LOOKING FOR CLOSE FRIENDS, WATCH OUT FOR.....	45
CHAPTER 6: THE MEASURE OF A FRIEND	57
CHAPTER 7: DEALING WITH LONELINESS	61

**CHAPTER 8: DATING, COURTING,
AND ARRANGED
MARRIAGES 67**

**CHAPTER 9: QUALITIES A GIRL
SHOULD LOOK FOR
IN A GUY 73**

**CHAPTER 10: QUALITIES A GUY
SHOULD LOOK FOR
IN A GIRL..... 79**

**CHAPTER 11: VALUING YOUR
SEXUAL IDENTITY 85**

**CHAPTER 12: FRIENDSHIP CASE
STUDIES AND
QUESTIONS 99**

**I ALREADY HAVE A DATE
ON FRIDAY 100**

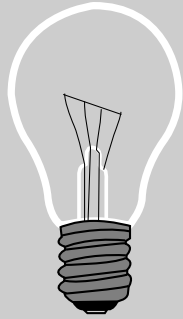
DON'T MIND ME 103

EASILY ANGERED 106

**YOU DIDN'T HEAR IT
FROM ME 109**

OOPS...I DID IT AGAIN	112
IS THAT TRUE?.....	116
DON'T YOU THINK I LOOK HOT?	120
IT WAS LIKE THAT	123
YOU'RE STEALING HIM AWAY FROM ME	127
YOU'RE LIKE A BROTHER TO ME	130

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED



CHAPTER 1

WHY WE NEED FRIENDS



When I was in sixth grade, my mom and dad took a trip to Hawaii and left me with my friend Ian's family, who lived down the street from us. Ian and I had a blast that first night together, so we concocted a plan to keep the good times rolling, even though the next day was a school day.

Just before bedtime I whispered to Ian, "In the morning, let's fake like we're sick."

Ian shook his head. "No, my mom is pretty sharp," he said. "We'd have to prove to her that we're sick."

"What kind of proof would she need?" I asked.

"She'd need to see us throw up or something like that," he replied.

I nodded. "I can do that!"

I told him the story of how my brother, when he was younger, accidentally gargled fingernail polish remover instead of mouthwash. And then to make matters worse, he swallowed it. My mom drove (she practically flew) to the drugstore to get some syrup of ipecac. Within three or four minutes of drinking the stuff, my brother threw up.

As I related the incident to Ian, I couldn't remember the name of the medicine. But I knew it had a really weird name and we had a bottle of it somewhere in our house.

I laid out the plan for Ian: "We'll run down the street to my house. We'll sneak in through the window and search the medicine cabinet for the bottle. Then we'll take the stuff in the morning, we'll throw up, and we won't have to go to school!"

And that's just what we did. Ian and I sneaked out of his house and made our way down the street to my house. We climbed through a window and headed for the medicine cabinet, where I found a bottle that looked vaguely familiar.

"That's it," I said. "That's what my mom gave my brother. All we have to do is take a couple of swallows in the morning, and we'll be throwing up all over the place. Then we can stay home!"

If I'd grabbed the ipecac, that's probably what would have happened. But instead of ipecac, I actually grabbed a bottle of...laxative.

The next morning, we woke up and went downstairs to eat breakfast. On the way back up to his room, Ian whispered, "Do we take it now?"

“We’ll need to take it about five minutes before we want to throw up,” I told him.

He nodded. “All right. Let’s load up.” We each took two big gulps from the bottle. Then we went back downstairs so Ian’s mom could witness our sudden violent illness.

Five minutes later...nothing happened. Our plan had failed. Since we had no proof of sickness, Ian’s mom took us to school. Unfortunately, that’s not the end of the story.

After lunch, I was sitting in class when I felt a strange sensation in my stomach. Incredible rumblings started deep in my digestive system and warned me of bad things to come! I ran to the front of the class and grabbed the bathroom pass. I didn’t even ask the teacher for permission before I sprinted out the door and down the hall to the bath-

room. As I closed the stall door, I heard a disturbing sound next to me.

“AAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!!!”

I recognized that agonized cry. “Ian, is that you?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he moaned. “Hey, Mark, I don’t think that stuff we drank makes you throw up.”

“You’re right,” I agreed. “We got the wrong end.”

Friends can be wonderful, positive influences in our lives. But as Ian discovered the hard way, friends can also lead us down wrong paths!

That’s why choosing the right friends is one of the most important skills we can ever acquire. If we don’t learn to choose our friends wisely, we open the

door for powerful *negative* influences to invade our lives.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

When I was in high school, I hung out with really smart people. I was only an average student, but five of my friends were the valedictorians for our class. They had identical GPAs. And we had to listen to five valedictory speeches during graduation! (Imagine our joy.)

The fact that I was a friend of such high achievers made me a better student. For example, I sat next to a guy named Steven in science class. He was a science whiz, and perfect scores were par for the course for him. I soon found that sitting next to Steven improved my grades. His passion for doing well rubbed off on me, and I cared a little bit more about how I was doing

in class. As his lab partner, I couldn't joke around or goof off because I knew he was a serious student. He wanted to excel, so excelling became important to me when we worked together. Many times, when I couldn't grasp what the teacher was talking about, Steven explained the lesson in a way I could understand.

There's no doubt in my mind that hanging out with Steven made me a better student. And my grades improved a lot...all the way up to a C.

Let's figure out how you can enjoy similar benefits by choosing your friends wisely.