



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Friendship

Release date: September 8, 2016

CAN WE JUST BE FRIENDS?

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.
1 Timothy 5:1,2

"Dear Dr. Sala," writes a friend of Guidelines, "Every time I try to befriend someone of the opposite sex, they interpret my friendship as a romantic gesture. This really bothers me, and it is not my intention. Can't we just be friends?"

If you were answering that question, what would you say? It's easy to say, the problem is that men and women don't read the signals the same way. What you as a young man intend as an expression of Christian friendship, others interpret as a "come on." Then you end up losing a friend when you have to ask, "Whoa! Can't we just be friends?"

In the first century there was a marked separation between the world of the sexes. A woman generally didn't appear in public apart from the company of a husband, and there wasn't a lot of social interaction between men and women as friends. That, of course, was part of the culture. Yet as you read the New Testament you understand that Jesus was friends with many women--Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene, the woman at the well of Sychar and many others. Women ministered to His needs wherever He traveled, yet there is not the faintest hint that His friendship was interpreted as anything but a gesture of sincere love.

Writing to a young man who was a pastor of a church, Paul gave us some guidelines as to how to develop non-sexual friendships. He said, "...treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1Timothy 5:1-2). Here's how this translates into life today.

Guideline #1: Be genuine and sincere with members of the opposite sex. Get the message across, "I care about you as a person, but my interest in you is as a fellow human being, not as a sexual object or a possible mate."

Guideline #2: Be careful not to send conflicting signals. Sometimes *any* gesture of friendship is misinterpreted. When that happens, you've got to let your friend know that your interest is simply that of a friend, and nothing more. I'm thinking of a young woman who was befriended by an upper classman who helped her work out a class schedule and introduced her as a new student to some of his friends. She "knew" that he was in love with her! Not so. She misinterpreted friendship. It was "like," not "love."

Guideline #3: Realize that a friend compliments someone without smothering that person. Sometimes people are so desperate for a friend that when someone does reach out in genuine friendship, the other person latches on to them the way a drowning person clings to a lifeguard. The other can't take it. Respect the space of the other person without suffocating that person. Simply put: Don't expect to be the only friend the other has. Give them room to keep other friendships as well.

Guideline #4: Take a sincere interest in others. Frankly, everybody loves to talk about himself or herself. A few lead questions like, "Tell me about yourself. We've worked together for several months but I really don't know much about you" may well open the door for better understanding. You can appreciate someone's problems much better if you know where the person is coming from.

Guideline #5: Focus on group interaction as opposed to one-on-one encounters. Lunch as a threesome doesn't send the same signal as spending time as a twosome.

Guideline #6: Follow through on your commitments as a friend. A real friend is someone whom you can count on, who keeps confidences, who is honest, and knows when to speak and when to remain silent.
In answering that question, "Yes, you can just be friends."

Resource reading: John 4