

Friendship As the Basis of Peace by Sam Morris

A Christian retreat I sometimes attend reminds me to “make a friend, be a friend, lead a friend to Christ.” Friendship is a transparent act of allowing ourselves to become open to a stranger so that the stranger is no longer a stranger. The traditional people of the Middle-East understand friendship. A Palestinian friend invited me to come to his home for Ramadan. I had been there before. Looking at the group with me, he added to his invitation by saying: *Please ask a very good friend of yours to come*. Sharing a meal for many traditional people is an act of covenant. It means that you become friends for life. My friend had just told me that he would extend his friendship to my friend based solely on his friendship with me.

Several times, at the close of the first meal in a traditional home, my host would stand with hands open and say: *this is now your home. You always have a place to stay. This is now your family*. It continues to be a very touching experience for me.

On the night when my friend invited me to bring a very good friend, I invited a young missionary to go with me. At the close of the meal, I asked my friend to tell the missionary what just happened. What does the meal mean? He gave a variation on the answer: *It means, if your friendship is ever broken, you have to fix it*.

For me, that is what God did through Jesus. Jesus mended the broken friendship, so that we might be friends with God -- and he did this while, on our part, the friendship was still broken. Could we also say that following Jesus means mending friendships so that the light of God may shine through us?

I believe that mending friendships can begin by “making friends” and then letting God guide us beyond this first step. And I believe that this can be a step toward true peace. Recently, I had the privilege of being with teenagers in Birzeit on the West Bank for a music conservatory camp in preparation for the Christmas Eve Concert in Bethlehem -- which is the climactic presentation of the *Prepare the Way Concert Tour 2007: Peace on Earth, Good Will...* They were typical teens in so many ways. In other ways, they were anything but typical. They worked hard on their music. They enjoyed the camp. And they opened their lives to two strangers (Dr. Robert McBain, the Conductor for the concert taught them at the camp). At a time for questions, one teen asked: *Why did you come to this terrorist nation?* The question reflected their hurt at being branded terrorists just because of where they were born and where they live.

As we finished the camp, Bob said to me: *Sam, this concert is about so much more than music*. Bob and I both grew to love these teenagers and their teachers. Even though we had reached beyond the walls that divide us, they had opened the door and let us in. It was a two way street.

A two way street: This is the way I feel about the concert tour. We are offering our hands in friendship as we travel to Nazareth, Amman, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. A simple act. Yet, even before we followed through with the first step, hands were extended from Bethlehem, Amman, Nazareth and Jerusalem to us.

Friendship As the Basis of Peace by Sam Morris

So, we invite you to join us in Nazareth, Amman, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. And, would you bring a very good friend of yours with you?