

## The Best Kind of Friends

In **Acts 4**, Peter and John were imprisoned and then taken before the Jewish council because they had healed a man and then taught in the name of Jesus. The council warned and threatened them not to teach in Jesus' name again. However, they did not give further punishment at that time. What really grabs my attention in this story is not what the council did. It is what Peter and John did when they were released.

**Acts 4:23** says, "When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them." Peter and John went to their friends. What a natural place to go? Don't we also turn to our friends when we are stressed or troubled? When something major has happened in our lives, don't we turn to our friends for support, encouragement, help, advice? Peter and John did the exact same thing.

But notice what kind of friends they had. In **Acts 4:24**, "And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said..." When Peter and John's friends heard about the threats of the council, they prayed. That was the kind of friends Peter and John had. Isn't it interesting that the text doesn't say they went to the brethren; it says they went to friends. Some translations say "companions" or "own company." The folks in the church were more than just fellow church members. They were more than just brethren. They were friends.

The word translated "friends" means "pertaining to one's self, one's own, belonging to one's self." It is the word used to claim that Jesus went to His own city in **Matthew 9:1**. It talked about the master's own servants in **Matthew 25:14**. Or the ability that belonged to each of those servants in **Matthew 25:15**. In other words, these weren't just brethren. In fact, they weren't just friends. They were Peter and John's own people. That is, they were the community with which Peter and John found their identity.

What an amazing key to glorifying God and walking the path to heaven we find in this example. When Peter and John got in trouble, they had people to turn to for help. But what kind of people were they? They were people who prayed. They were people who knew where to point Peter and John for real support.

What if Peter and John had their brethren, but then had their own people that weren't brethren? What if the people they turned to for support in times of trouble weren't people who pointed them to God? Where would that have led Peter and John? No doubt, they might have maintained their own faithfulness, but it would have been in spite of their friends—not because of them.

This example is not telling us we can never have any friends who are in the world. It is not telling us we are not allowed to ever have friends who are unbelievers. But what it is encouraging us to do is make sure our own people, the people with whom we identify, the people who are our friends to whom we turn for support in the face of trouble, are people who will turn us to God. The fact is if our best friends are unbelievers, we'll not do well at passing on the gospel because we'll always be afraid that the gospel will cost us our support system. But when our best friends are those who gain their strength from the gospel and will always point us to God, then we'll be much more successful in standing up for God and glorifying Him no matter what anyone else does to us about it.

Who are your people? Who are your best friends? In times of trouble, are they people who will pray with you, pointing to God for your real support? I am not offering this to you as some kind of arbitrary rule to stifle your life. This is God's way which works. Friends who won't point you to God will always hinder your walk with Him, even if they are not violently opposed to God. But friends who point you to God will be a help on the path to heaven. Pick your own people wisely; they can make or break your eternity.

--*Edwin L. Crozier*