

5 More Ways to Recognize False Friends

False friends. About a month ago I wrote a column called “5 Ways to Recognize False Friends,” and it struck a nerve—apparently a raw one.

As I shared, the Bible has plenty to say about false friends—and you’ve probably had one or two yourself. Of course, you probably didn’t know they were false when you first befriended them or you wouldn’t have put yourself through the grief!

I’ve had a number of false friends over the years. Some had selfish ambition and thought I could open a door for them. Others had a Judas spirit and walked with me until they didn’t agree with a decision. Still others were subtle manipulators who manifested when I said “no.”

Listen to Jennifer’s podcast on this topic: “5 More Ways to Recognize False Friends.”

Even still, I’ve kept my heart open to everyone. I don’t believe in putting up walls, though boundaries are wisdom. I don’t believe in operating out of suspicion, though discernment is essential. I lean heavily on the Word of God, which points out ways to discern false friends. Here are five more ways:

1. False friends are selfish and self-centered. “For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil *and* vile practices” (James 3:16, AMPC).

With false friends, you can count on plenty of drama. They may be jealous of you and try to tear you down. They may have

selfish ambition in their heart and get upset when you won't give them a leg up. Or they may be self-centered and inconsiderate of everyone else but themselves.

These false friends may simply be immature, or they may be under the influence of a spirit. Either way, when there is consistent unrest, disharmony, rebellion, and other evil and vile practices, you have to question the health of the relationship. True friends help you bear your burdens rather than constantly being one.

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2. False friends manipulate and control. "For such people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites, and through smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" (Rom. 16:18, MEV).

False friends will try to control and manipulate you. They may know exactly what they are doing or they may have no clue. With this false friend type, you'll find yourself caving in and conceding to their pressure even when you don't agree, then getting mad at yourself later. When you finally contest your false friend's control games, they'll turn the table on you and accuse you of being the manipulator.

This is a toxic relationship. True friends don't make false accusations. That's the devil's job.

3. False friends kick you when you are down. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). David experienced this: "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, my peer, my guide, and my acquaintance. We took pleasant counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company" (Ps. 55:12-14).

False friends will kick you when you are down. False friends will see you are suffering and launch their accusations, unearth their offenses and demand discussions even when it's clear you can't take another hit. False friends will push the matter. True friends will suffer long with you, especially when you are under attack, under the weather or otherwise under the gun. True friends will refrain from bringing up issues in the relationship until you are ready to respond in peace.

4. False friends use and abuse you. “Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 26:17, NIV). False friends will take whatever you will give them and these selfish ones will they offer nothing in return. False friends will come with expectations that you will give them what they want when they want it—and pout when you don't.

Jesus warned that there would be those who despitefully use us (Matt. 5:44). The word “use” in that verse means “to insult, to treat abusively, use despitefully, to revile, to accuse falsely, to threaten.” False friends will give you ultimatums, launch false accusations, and make veiled or unveiled threats. Jesus says we're to pray for such ones.

5. False friends break covenants and betray you. The Bible offers many examples of people who made covenants with one another. False friends will make covenants and break them. Jesus called Judas a friend (John 15:15). Judas drank of the covenant of Christ's blood (Matt. 26:28). But Judas that very night betrayed the Son of the living God for a mere 30 pieces of silver.

False friends will say what you want to hear to get in your inner circle. False friends will serve you faithfully until it no longer benefits them—then they will break covenant and betray you. True friends are loyal even when they disagree.

Those are just a few characteristics of false friends. You may

think of others. If you are in an unhealthy relationship, pray. The Lord may want you to restore it, serving as a witness of God's love and longsuffering. But we are not called to be doormats, abused, manipulated, controlled, betrayed and the like. Also, be careful because false friends will offer false repentance—like Ahab—and just continue repeating the same sins against you. You are commended to forgive seven times 70 and beyond but reconciliation is not mandatory.

Break unhealthy soul ties you may have formed with false friends, refuse to give into their emotional tactics, and stand on the Word of God, walking in love and being slow to speak—and pray for them. If you do this, you'll remain blameless in the sight of God and will free the Holy Spirit to bring conviction so they will either repent or exit your life peaceably.