

## Lesson 6: Friendship and Solidarity

### PURPOSE

To motivate students to pursue friendship of excellence in their daily lives.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Understand and explain the three types of friendship as described by Aristotle.
2. Identify William Wilberforce and The Clapham Circle as a historical example of friendship of excellence.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Three Types of Friendship
- William Wilberforce [Documentary](#)
- The Clapham Circle Discussion Guide
- Amazing Grace [movie](#)

### VOCABULARY

- Friendship of excellence: a bond of mutual affection between people who pursue excellence for themselves and others

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall the definitions of creativity and art, as well as their power to communicate the transcendent, intangible dimensions of reality. Highlight the examples of Picasso's [painting](#) "Mother and Child" as well as the Shawshank Redemption opera [scene](#), and how they both communicate the deep meaning of compassion and the power to go beyond one's present situation.

Ask the students if they have completed the [Interim Quiz 1](#). Ask them if some of the questions were difficult and help clarify the answers.

**Step 2:** Introduce the topic of friendship. Ask the students what they think distinguishes excellent and non-excellent friendships? Write their ideas on the board.

Introduce Aristotle's types of friendship and their defining traits:

**Friendship based on utility:** being friends with someone to gain an advantage from them (e.g. someone is popular in school, so I want to become friends with them to become popular myself, etc.). Friendship of utility is the lowest type of friendship, disagreements happen easily and it is very unstable – it lasts only as long as the utility lasts.

**Friendship based on pleasure:** being friends with someone because they make us laugh, feel good or because we like being in their company. Friendship based on pleasure is a higher type of friendship than that based on utility and there is less discord in it, but it is still unstable since it ceases to exist when the other person stops being funny, charming, or fun to be around, or if someone else becomes more pleasant to us. It is more similar to true friendship, but still not identical to it.

**Friendship of excellence:** being friends with someone because we want to pursue excellence with them. In a friendship of excellence, we always respect the dignity of the other, and don't merely use them for our advantage or pleasure. It is more lasting – we stay friends even if we meet someone funnier or more charming. We support the other person even if we do not get any advantage from it. We love a person because of who they are, not because of something they can give us. Although friendship of excellence is enjoyable, the enjoyment itself is not the main motive--the pursuit of excellence is. Friendship of excellence is true friendship.

Give the students the [Three Types of Friendship](#) handout and ask if they can give some examples for each type of friendship. Obviously, in real-world friendships, more than one ideal type can exist.

Ask the students to describe how the person is treated in each type of friendship, using the language of the subject-object distinction. Highlight that in a friendship of utility and friendship of pleasure, the friend is treated as an object for personal advantage or pleasure. In friendship of excellence, the other person is treated as a subject since our final goal is always the good of that person. For friendship of excellence, pleasure or utility can be a part of the friendship, but they are not the main motives.

**Step 3:** Introduce the story of William Wilberforce and his circle of friends as an example of friendship of excellence.

William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833) was a British politician, philanthropist, and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He headed the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty years until the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. Wilberforce championed causes and campaigns such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice, British missionary work in India, the creation of a free colony in Sierra Leone, the foundation of the Church Mission Society, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In later years, Wilberforce supported the campaign for the complete abolition of slavery, and continued his involvement after 1826, when he resigned from Parliament because of his failing health. That campaign led to the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which abolished slavery in most of the British Empire. Wilberforce died just three days after hearing that the passage of the Act through Parliament was assured.

But Wilberforce was not alone in his struggle against slavery. He was surrounded by a circle of friends called “The Clapham Circle” or “The Clapham Sect”, named after the village of Clapham where they were meeting. It is believed that the Circle started coming into being when Wilberforce and his friend and banker John Thornton purchased an estate in Clapham and other friends started joining them there for discussions, strategizing, planning, and prayer (they were all Christians). Some even moved to Clapham with their families. A part of the circle was one of Wilberforce’s best friends William Pitt, who later became the Prime Minister of Britain. They and a dozen other politicians, bankers, scholars and clergymen formed a circle inspired by Christian faith which aimed to promote and support different social causes.

Surrounded by such a group of friends, William Wilberforce was able to lead the parliamentary campaign against the slave trade, a crusade which he gave his whole life to. Although the abolition of slavery was the central Clapham concern and demanded the bulk of their energies, the Circle also engaged in a variety of other social and philanthropic concerns. Their public philanthropic efforts were many, including relieving the suffering of the manufacturing poor as well as French refugees and foreigners in distress. Wilberforce and the circle made major financial contributions to at least seventy philanthropic societies. History records Wilberforce as an active member of numerous reform movements, including reform in hospital care, fever institutions, asylums, infirmaries, refugees and penitentiaries. He supported religious publications and education, especially the schools of Hannah More, a close friend and leading reformer of British education.

One historian wrote on the strength of friendship of the Clapham circle:

“It was a remarkable fraternity – remarkable above all else, perhaps, in its closeness, its affinity. It not only lived for the most part in one little village; it had one character, one mind, one way of life. They were mostly rich, living in large roomy houses; but they all were generous givers to the poor. Thornton indeed gave away as much as six-sevenths of his income till he married, and after that at least a third of it. They could mostly have been of leisure; but they all devoted their lives to public service.”<sup>12</sup>

Before forming the Clapham circle, another friend of Wilberforce had a great influence on him. That was John Newton, the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”. Newton had been the captain of a slave ship and engaged in slave trading for many years before changing his views dramatically, renouncing slavery as an inhuman practice. He became a clergyman and wrote “Amazing Grace” as an expression of grief over his past life as a slave trader. Wilberforce himself thought of becoming a priest at a certain point in his life, and sought the advice of Newton, who encouraged him to remain a layman and to fight for the abolition of slavery in Parliament.

Show students the William Wilberforce [Documentary](#) to learn more about Wilberforce, his friends, and their common fight against slavery in the British Empire.

**Step 4:** After watching the video, divide the students into groups and ask them to discuss questions from [The Clapham Circle Discussion Guide](#).

After groups finish discussing, ask them to share their conclusions with the rest of the class.

Conclude by writing the definition of friendship of excellence on the board:

Friendship of excellence: a bond of mutual affection between people who pursue excellence for themselves and others

<sup>12</sup> Os Hillman: William Wilberforce - Joining a Network Was Vital to His Success, available at <https://www.christianpost.com/news/william-wilberforce-joining-a-network-was-vital-to-his-success.html> (last visited Dec 2, 2022).

Elaborate on the definition of friendship of excellence by highlighting the following:

It is hard to achieve, only people who strive to be excellent can practice it.  
It brings a much deeper fulfillment than any other type of friendship  
It is necessary to lead a happy and fulfilled life  
Those who possess it become better people through it  
It helps people achieve great things together

**Step 5:** Summarize. Review once more the three types of friendships according to Aristotle and their defining traits. Recall William Wilberforce and the Clapham circle as an example of friendship of excellence. Finish by emphasizing the importance of developing friendships of excellence in our daily lives.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

Inform the students that there is a [movie](#) called Amazing Grace which features the life of William Wilberforce and his striving to end slavery in Britain. Consider organizing a movie session with the students to watch the movie together as a class.

### Three Types of Friendship

	Friendship of utility	Friendship of pleasure	Friendship of excellence
<b>What we value in a friend</b>	Usefulness and benefits the friend can provide us	Pleasure or enjoyment the friend brings us	Human dignity and friend's habits of excellence
<b>Motive or purpose of friendship</b>	To get some advantage or benefit	To enjoy	To strive for excellence
<b>Durability</b>	Not lasting, easily dissolved when the friend is no longer useful to us	More lasting than friendship of utility, less than friendship of excellence – dissolves when pleasure lessens	Very durable, does not break easily
<b>Disagreements</b>	Can arise easily	Arise less than in friendship of utility, more than in friendship of excellence	Can happen, but friends work to overcome them
<b>Problem</b>	Treating persons as objects for our advantage	Treating persons as objects for our pleasure	It is hard to achieve
<b>Quality of friendship</b>	Lowest type of friendship	Higher than friendship of utility; similar to true friendship, but still not identical to it	True friendship
<b>Number of friends</b>	Possible to have as many such friends as needed, they come and go	Possible to have many such friends, friendships develop quickly	Not possible to have many such friends, it takes time to build close friendship
<b>Who can establish such friendship</b>	Person who doesn't strive for excellence can establish them, but they can use you for bad things	Person who doesn't strive for excellence can establish them, but this likely leads to problems	Only people who strive for excellence
<b>Examples</b>	<p>Being friends with someone because he is popular or has money;</p> <p>Being friends with someone to get to someone else;</p> <p>Being friends with someone to get a promotion in the workplace</p>	<p>Being friends with someone because he makes jokes all the time;</p> <p>Being friends with someone because we both like partying;</p> <p>Being friends with someone because they flatter us</p>	<p>Studying hard with a friend;</p> <p>Friends who challenge each other to be better;</p> <p>Friends who make excellent projects together;</p> <p>Friends who really take care of each other</p>

**The Clapham Circle Discussion Guide****AFTER WATCHING THE DOCUMENTARY, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN GROUPS:**

What role did friends play in Wilberforce's life? Could he achieve what he did without them? Give examples.

Why was the friendship of the Clapham Circle friendship of excellence?

Do you know of some other examples of friendship for excellence in history or in your surroundings?

Do you practice friendship for excellence in your relationships with others? If not, why not? If yes, describe how you practice it.

**Answer Key for the teacher**

- 1. What role did friends play in Wilberforce's life? Could he achieve what he did without them? Give examples.** Friends played an extraordinary role in Wilberforce's life and were essential to his achievement of ending the slave trade in the Commonwealth. Wilberforce's story is the story of a man with good friends who encouraged him to work for the good throughout his life. William Pitt was his life-long friend and later, Prime Minister. Wilberforce had no greater friend in fighting the slave trade. Pitt urged Wilberforce to remain in politics after his great "change", which was a religious conversion that he had during his career. Another friend of his was John Newton, a former slave trader who later became a pastor. Newton had great experience and wisdom - Wilberforce came to him for advice on how to proceed with his life. Newton supported Wilberforce in his religious conversion and challenged him to fight against the slave trade in Parliament and in public life. When Wilberforce returned to political life at the urging of his friends, Thomas Clarkson encouraged Wilberforce to take political action against the slave trade. After that, he brought a bill to Parliament proposing the abolition of the slave trade and after 20 years of hard work, along with the support of his friend John Wesley, the bill was passed.
- 2. Why was the friendship of the Clapham Circle friendship of excellence? Do you know of some other examples of friendship for excellence in history or in your surroundings?** The friendship of the Clapham Circle was truly a friendship for excellence because each of them supported one another in the pursuit of excellence and of working for different social causes. William Pitt, John Newton, Thomas Clarkson, and John Wesley supported Wilberforce in his pursuit of the good. While the abolition of slavery was the central Clapham concern and demanded the bulk of their energies, they engaged in many other causes as well, such as working for the relief of the working poor, French refugees, and foreigners in distress. Wilberforce and his circle made major financial contributions to at least seventy such societies.