Engaging Friendships

Henry Drummond once said, "It is when a man has no one to love him that he commits

suicide.  So long as he has friends, those who love him and whom he loves, he will live, because

to live is to love.”  Tragic as it may it seem, most people traveling through life never find a true

friend. I can remember as a teenager always looking for that perfect friend. Sadly, very few

people ever measured up to my high expectations. So what was I looking for in a good friend?

Top on my list was a common faith. A good friend for me would have also had to have been

loyal, giving, fun, inspiring, interesting, caring, and encouraging. Was that too much to ask for?

It must have been because as a youth I had a hard time finding even one true friend.

 Managing Our Friendships:

Hopefully, your young adult years were not as bleak as mine, but I’ve found friends often

represent the kind of person we become. The old cliché of ‘”Tell me who your friends are and

I’ll tell you who you are”, often rings true. People typically develop friendships around common

interests, sports, or systems of belief. At times, you might meet a person and sense that they are

really fun or exciting. You might even sense a strong affinity and look for ways to plan and

build a friendship. Still other types of people often convey a genuine and caring manner that

might look like someone you could be vulnerable with. We must always be wise and

discerning when choosing our friends. Proverbs 27:6 warns, “Wounds of a friend can be trusted,

but an enemy multiples kisses.”

Just as there are potential friends we might be attracted to, there are also what I call

“Friendship Drainers” who with their emotional dependence can bleed you dry. We’ve all

encountered these types of needy people who have been deprived or disadvantaged and must

have our sympathetic ears. They always seem to need one more counseling session with us so

that we can better understand their issue. Instead of accepting our clear practical spiritual

counsel that require growth steps on their part, they spurn the truth we offer and continue to

want to drag us into their emotional black holes. At some point in our, “helping” the person

we have to ask if we have become a codependent with them and are making ourselves

unhealthy. Wisdom and insight are needed to evaluate if this is someone in whom we should be

investing large portions of our time.

Fortunately for me at this stage in my life, I have finally secured a few true blue friends.

Not fair weather friends but people who when you need a smile, hug, word of encouragement, or

a helping hand are always there with support. These are the people I call “Refreshing Friends.”

They are stimulating and energizing. Times with them are inspiring, bringing fresh new

concepts, validation, and encouragement. Often we may see each other only in passing, but

these relationships are Spirit to Spirit; and when I walk away, I always feel strengthened and

appreciated. I can already hear what some of you might be saying. Where can I find genuine

people like this?

 Cultivating Friendships

My gregarious wife has always been a wonder to me. For many years, I would watch how she

would always be the last one to leave a room. If there was only one person left in a room to talk

with, Cindy would be there engaged in what seemed like to me to be a never ending string of

conversation. Quite honestly it hasn’t always been a wonder, but more often had been an

irritation. How could she go on and on talking about what seemed like trivial matters?

Simple. She was being patient, kind, not acting in a self seeking manner, rejoicing in the truth

and always protecting, trusting, hoping and persevering. Ouch! She was living out 1 Corinthians

13 right in front of me and everyone else. How could I be critical of that?

I had heard Proverbs 17:17 since I was a kid, “A friend loves at all times and a brother is born

for adversity.” The part that always stuck with me is about a brother born for adversity, which

he is but? What about the first part? A true friend loves at all times, not just when they feel

like listening. Friends can and should invest heavy amounts of their time into listening and caring

for others. George Washington once said, “True friendship is a plant of slow growth. “ We have

to take time to nurture and cultivate friendships and soon we will have many.

Vision for Ministry

One huge impediment for building strong friendships is busyness. All of us only have 24 hours

in a day, and the demands of life are ever-increasing. In his article entitled, “Friends Who

Stick”, Adam Holz portrays the apostle Paul as one of the busiest people in his day. After all, he

was responsible for writing the majority of the New Testament and making sure the world wide

Christian Church got off the ground. But in Colossians 2:2, Paul writes, “My purpose is that

they may be encouraged in heart, united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete

understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God.” What was the solution to

Paul’s busyness? Holz points out that Paul saw taking extended periods of time to support others

as his purpose in ministry. A similar challenge can be extended to each of us. Why not

purposefully plan on plenty of extra time to share with those you mentor, encourage, or befriend?

Try using your call to ministry as a platform to reinforce and fortify friendships.

 Confrontation – It doesn’t have to be a dirty word!

There is an old expression, “You can pick your friends, you can pick your nose, but you can’t

pick your friends nose.” Back in the day, that may have been so, but I’d like to think that in our

modern enlightened age, we have learned to approach sensitive issues with a little tact and

understanding.

Jim and I had been Christian friends for a number of years, shared many good talks, and laughs.

We had even been in a men’s small group together, and each of us had counseled Jim regarding

his upcoming marriage. A few years down the line he and his wife began having problems, and

Jim had walked out on his wife and moved in with the new girlfriend. Each of the guys in our

group knew Jim had to be confronted even though our small group had since been disbanded.

The former leader, Ray prayed for clear words of wisdom during the impending confrontation.

Ray began the conversation by pointing out the character strengths that he had observed in

Jim over the years, and sincerely and humbly complimented him on these. Ray

maintained this same sense of humility as he shared his concerns. His goal wasn’t to make Jim

feel guilty. Ray was quick to point out that as Romans 8:1 tells us, “There is now no

condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” He knew that Jim understood the

principles of God, and that abandoning his wife was a sin. However, Ray also

believed that the Holy Spirit was fully able to convict Jim of this sin. Ray shared candidly

about his own struggles with lust and failures in that area and reminded Jim that he was not

passing judgment on him. After asking for feedback from Jim, the two men prayed together. I’d

like to say that Jim repented of his sin and complete restoration occurred. It did not. However,

these two men are still close friends today, and I’m sure that when Jim needs help or a listening

ear, Ray will still be there.

 Friend of God:

In 2 Chronicles 20:7, we find that Abraham is referred to as a friend of God. Many times in our

church we have sung the chorus, “I Am A Friend Of God.,” Since each of us as Christians are

also descendents of Abraham, all the blessings that came to him are ours to claim. What a truly

awesome thought to imagine that God calls us his friend! What a joy and a privilege to be

friends with the King and Lord of the universe. It is so great to know that everything I need has

already been provided. We can find assurance of eternal life with Him. How cool is that? He

gives me confidence in knowing I’ll never again have to be alone. I can only reiterate the lyrics

of the Psalmist, “What a Friend we have In Jesus!”

Then just the other day, a friend had been sharing her excitement over the passionate way that

God has loved her. Flipping the question she asked, what kind of friend had she been to God?

Suddenly fear and shame gripped my heart. I too had been a pitiful friend to God. I certainly

hadn’t given Him the things I had selfishly sought for in my friends. I hadn’t been loyal, self

sacrificing, sensitive, willing to take on His interests, or even spend quality time together. In

short I had been unloving to the one whose full essence is love.

Then I remembered a quote I had once heard from Henry Ward Beecher, “Every man should

keep a fair-sized cemetery in with to bury the faults of his friends.” Then I remembered that

Jesus has paid the price for all of our sins and has promised to place them as far as the east is to

the west. Truly, What A Friend We Have In Jesus! Can we be less than an engaging friend to

others?