

## **Qualities That Build Friendships**

What are the effects of friendlessness on men and women?

Today people are building fewer friendships and the result is having a destructive effect on many. Before we discuss the specific effects, the following letter addressed to an insurance company illustrates how we need the help of others and why we should not try to function alone. The author is unknown. We will call the letter "Trying to do the job alone."

**Dear Sir:**

**I am writing in response to your request for more information concerning Block #11 on the insurance form which asks for "cause of injuries" wherein I put, "Trying to do the job alone." You said you needed more information so I trust the following will be sufficient.**

**I am a bricklayer by trade and on the date of injuries I was working alone laying brick around the top of a four-story building when I realized that I had about 500 pounds of brick left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to put them into a barrel and lower them by a pulley which was fastened to the top of the building. I secured the end of the rope at ground level and went up to the top of the building and loaded the bricks into the barrel and swung the barrel out with the bricks in it. I then went down and untied the rope, holding it securely to ensure the slow descent of the barrel.**

**As you will note on Block #6 of the insurance form, I weigh 145 pounds. Due to my shock at being jerked off the ground so swiftly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope.**

**Between the second and third floors, I met the barrel coming down. This accounts for the bruises and lacerations on my upper body.**

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Regaining my presence of mind again, I held tightly to the rope and proceeded rapidly up the side of the building, not stopping until my right hand was jammed in the pulley. This accounts for the broken thumb.

Despite the pain, I retained my presence of mind and held tightly to the rope. At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground and the bottom fell out of the barrel.

Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed about 50 pounds. I again refer you to Block #6 and my weight.

As you would guess, I began a rapid descent. In the vicinity of the second floor I met the barrel coming up. This explains the injuries to my legs and lower body.

Slowed only slightly, I continued my descent landing on the pile of bricks. This accounts for my sprained back and internal injuries.

I am sorry to report, however, that at this point, I again lost my presence of mind and let go of the rope, and as you can imagine, the empty barrel crashed down on me. This accounts for my head injuries.

I trust this answers your concern. Please know that I am finished "trying to do the job alone."

This letter is a humorous but graphic way to illustrate why we should not function independently in life.

The individual effects of friendlessness-and its solution-are seen in Ecclesiastes 4:8-12. "There was a man all alone..." v. 8a. The primary effect of friendlessness on individuals in our society is loneliness, a word that describes one of the most desolate conditions known to man. The ache of separation, the dread of isolation is the tragic condition of many in America. Sure, from time to time it's good to get away from others in a self-imposed solitude, to pray and get your head together. But most would agree loneliness is healthy only in moderation.

How lonely are people today? It depends on what segment of the world's population you ask. Americans, for instance, tend to be some of the loneliest people on the planet. In most societies, people do not experience loneliness, at least to the nagging, acute, and painful degree of Americans and many in the Western world. In other cultures people are rarely alone, physically or emotionally. Relatives, neighbors, and even strangers are a normal part of everyone's life. Not so in America!

Lets broaden our discussion on friendship now, and consider the following questions concerning all kinds of friendships, including that between a husband and wife.

### **What effect is loneliness having on us?**

Our emphasis on privacy has been deadly to our emotional well-being. In most cultures the image of a private, independent life is deserving of sadness, of pity. But in America, we tend to envy the freedom that comes with the private life. Bachelors are seen as carefree, but in reality are often lonely and more likely to die sooner than married men. (See *Men Without Friends*, pp. 34-43.)

This isn't just a singles problem, nor should single people be classified as lonely. Loneliness is a problem that apparently isn't being solved either by being married or by being single.

Loneliness is causing devastating problems for all of society. Robert Brain says: "Unlike any other cultures, our acute loneliness must be seriously considered in any search for a solution to nagging contemporary societal problems. Loneliness, and a lack of commitment to others, are factors in our high suicide, divorce, alcoholism, drug, murder, rape, and abortion rates"—*Ibid*, p. 127.

Unfortunately, this problem of friendlessness exists even in our churches. Larry Richards says, "In church we sit together and sing together and greet one another cheerily as we leave at the end of a service. We do all of these things, sometimes for years, without forming any real personal Christian relationships... The church, therefore, becomes a place where Christians live alone together"—*The Friendless American Male*, p. 21.

### Why are people so lonely?

Preliminary reasons for loneliness include:

- **A lack of initiative.** If you listen to some people talk, many will blame others for their loneliness—their lack of help and companionship. This certainly happens in the American church. The cry is: "Why don't people help me out in my time of need?" Many people fail to realize that friendships, even families, that are nurturing must be cultivated, and that they don't automatically appear when calamity strikes.

- **Self-pity.** Many in self-pity will say: "If only others realized how difficult things are for me." Few things will poison a relationship, or a potential relationship, like self-pity.

### What is the solution for loneliness and friendlessness?—Eccl. 4:9-12

We must recognize that companionship is the solution to our feelings of alienation. We really cannot enjoy life to its fullest as loners. People were created to need others—see Gen. 2:7-9,18-23. In Ecclesiastes 4:7-12, Solomon reiterates this truth.

#### First he gives us a cry from a lonely male.

It begins with a description of a man (or a woman) frustrated with life (Eccl. 4:8). "There was a man all alone (no friend/companion); he had neither son nor brother (no male family members). There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content (no contentment) with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment (no enjoyment-only depriving of self)?" This too is meaningless—a miserable business!"

Here's a perfect picture of a man who had become slave to the pursuit of success, working long hours to amass more wealth, yet never having asked himself the obvious questions.

The questions the lonely (successful or "wanna be") need to ask are universal:

- Why am I alone?
- Why am I not content with what I have?
- For whom or what am I doing all this?
- Why doesn't my wealth bring me enjoyment?

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- Why am I not slowing down and enjoying myself along the way?

If they don't ask these questions, they will have the problems of the lonely—Eccl. 4:7-8:

1. **no friend/companion** "...all alone"—v. 8a. As we have seen, this is a common problem, especially for men. He has no friends and apparently no family, either.

2. **no male family members** "... neither son nor brother"—v. 8b. There is no family left—no heir. All the inheritance from his hard work and frugality will not be amassed for a relative.

3. **"... no end to his toil"**—v. 8c. There seems to be no end to what must be done. Can anyone relate? What is the reason for this endless work? The next description is very typical of the surprising reason for compulsive work. Not only is he lonely and the work never ends, there is also:

4. **no contentment with the wealth** "... not content with his wealth"—v. 8d. Accumulation of goods and wealth is not having the expected result—contentment.

Some as a result give up, but many keep working, hoping that endless work will bring contentment. Does it? **No!** People who work compulsively do not do so because of the contentment they receive, but often for reasons alluded to in the next verse: their enjoyment and for the sake of others.

Does enjoyment come from work? If there is no one to work for or with, there is no enjoyment. For the person described here, Solomon says there is:

5. **no enjoyment in toil—only depriving of self**—v. 8e. Solomon makes the point with two

questions:

- "For whom am I toiling?" The answer for the person described in verse 8 is, no one. Sometimes there is someone, but for less-than-best motivations—e.g., to win approval, gain attention, or prove something. Who should we be working for? (Eph 6:5-11; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 5:4)

- "Why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" The answer is, no reason, or it could be the wrong one(s).

**The Conclusion of the Lonely.** For this lonely person, the accumulation of wealth and lack of enjoyment will leave him/her frustrated. The last sentence in verse 8 sums it up: "This too is meaningless—miserable business."

But then something happens to the lonely man described by Solomon.

**Second, for this man (or it could be a woman), there comes a moment of inspiration and insight into friendship—v. 9.**

It might have happened for him when he began to notice the value of a friendship in his life—male or female. "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work." Solomon is not addressing just marriages here, but all kinds of morally responsible companionships. Solomon is telling us it is better to share our lives with other persons than to "go it alone." Having a friend at our side can enable us to survive even our most troublesome days and will make for a greater return. Why is this so?

**Third, we see the reasons two are better than one—vv. 10-12.**

Solomon gives three reasons why friendships of the same sex or the opposite sex are

**so valuable.**

1. **A friend provides encouragement/help in our struggles and failures.** 4:10-"If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" Whenever we struggle or fail, we need a friend who will not walk away but will stay and help us up—v. 10a. We may pretend to be rugged survivors and tough-minded winners. The truth is, we all have weaknesses which call for the strength others can give.

One of my favorite examples is the story of the Garden of Gethsemane. In our Lord's greatest hour of need, did he try to go it alone? No, he called his inner circle of friends (Peter, James and John) to be with Him. Listen to what he said in Matthew 26:36-38. "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' 37} He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38} Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'"

I know what it means to have a friend, to have many friends when falling down under the weight of pressure and stress. This was the case when my soul was overwhelmed with sorrow during my own emotional crisis many years ago. When I stood by my mother's bed while she was comatose for months, I thought I would die under the pressure and the questions we faced about life support systems and feeding tubes, etc., but I had friends to help me. Nancy came to me and asked me to read Psalm 77. Her care and spiritual support was just what I needed.

Jesus had someone to lean on, and I have someone to lean on. But if someone doesn't, then what? Solomon tells us: "But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"—v. 10b. We are dependent creatures, and when we choose not to rely on another, we risk staying down and defeated after we have fallen. But a friend can lift us up, dust us off, and help us get going again.

2. **A friend provides support when the other is vulnerable.** "...if two lie down together, they will keep warm," says Solomon, "but how can one keep warm alone?"—v. 11. This verse could certainly refer to the warmth and life of two joined together in marriage. It is a profound and beautiful experience, each supplying what is needed for the other, whether it be physical, mental, social, or spiritual. What warmth and what joy it is when two people are joined together

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in Christ—a total affinity of body, soul, and spirit.

But this verse refers to more than marriage. It also applies to comforting and supporting a person in an unguarded state, confronting a situation involving potentially threatening elements which will not go away. In our modern world, some examples are the first day at a new job, the beginning week in a new school, abusive treatment. During times like these we need a friend by our side to give us warmth—to offer what is lacking in ourselves and help us draw upon the warmth of our relationship with our God.

The autonomous and self-sufficient man or woman, however, will find it hard to obtain this warmth alone—"But how can one keep warm alone?"—v. 11b.

**3. A friend also provides protection when the other is attacked.** v. 12—"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. . . ." These words assert that the ability of two to ward off physical, spiritual or other assaults is much greater than that of one individual.

What will be the strength of two people praying and acting in the strength their Lord supplies? Two can defend themselves and defeat the obstacles. Two outfitted with the armor of Christ and the sword of the Spirit, and surrounded by prayer, can see much accomplished and much of the enemy's activities defeated—Eph. 6:10-18. But Solomon's statement is not limited strictly to physical and spiritual dangers. A companion can, for instance, help thwart vicious rumors and other verbal abuses launched against us.

Don't misunderstand what I am saying. It could sound as if friendship is all we need. I am saying that all of us here should nurture and develop our friendships to the maximum, because two are better than one. Unless you have received a special calling from God to live in isolation in a monastery, you will need to take seriously this admonition as to whether you are called to marriage or not. A plaque entitled "A Friend" reads, "A friend is one who knows you as you are, understands where you've been, accepts who you've become, and still gently invites you to grow."

But friendship alone isn't the cure-all to life's problems. If two are better than one, what could be better? Three, of course.

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### **A Summary Word on Friendship**

. "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"—v. 12b. This could mean a couple of things:

Certainly this could be a veiled reference to our Lord—that any relationship/friendship in Christ will be not just a two-stranded rope, but one that is entwined with Him. He will provide the strength to keep you strong. He's been there with you in the hard and joyous occasions of your life. Without that third strand, your lives would never achieve their potential.

But in addition, I think Solomon is pointing out another important fact about friendship. He could be pointing out that we should seek to cultivate more than one friendship for our own strength. The more committed companions we have, the less likely we are to suffer the devastating pangs of loneliness.

With this overview of the effects of positive relationships in mind, there is a need for specific teaching on how to build friendships.

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### **What kind of friends can we have?**

Scripture requires we love others, but this love can take on different forms and be expressed in many different ways.

Jesus formed relationships with men and women as well as children, but He related differently to each one.

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- He called Judas his friend—Matt. 26:49-50.
- Jesus was a friend to Lazarus—Jn. 11:11.
- Jesus did develop a closer relationship with His apostles than His followers.
- Jesus had the inner circle—Peter, James and John
- John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved.
- Jesus doesn't call any of us servants, but all of us friends, if we do what He commands—Jn. 15:15-17.

### **We can have at least seven distinct stages or levels of interpersonal relationships:**

- **Convenience friends.** When it's convenient for both and you have the time, these are your friends.
- **Special interest friends.** You have a mutual interest in something; as long as you do that activity or participate in that interest, you are together.
- **Historical friends.** You don't see these folks often, because they live elsewhere geographically, but they have been your friends for years. They don't have the daily nurture and interaction of a friend who lives close, but as soon as you are together, you pick up the conversation as though you had never stopped
- **Crossroads friends** are those who came into your life at a particular time—a crisis, a very important period in both of your lives. You mutually cared for each other in that particular time, but the friendship isn't continuing at the same intensity because the conditions have changed.
- **Receptive/mentor friendships** are discipler to disciple relationships: a person of strength relating to one who has a need, is inexperienced, or needs encouragement.
- **Reciprocal friendships** are characterized by transparency, where both take off layers of their masks and thus know the strengths and weaknesses of each other.

### **But this isn't the highest form of friendship!**

- **A Knitting of souls relationship** is an act of grace in which one is supernaturally joined or knit together to another, as David was with Jonathan-I Samuel 18:1. Knit is a term which means to unite. Jonathan became one in spirit with David, loving him as himself. This relationship seems to have a supernatural quality to it.

With all the potential for friendship, it would seem men would have no problem making friends. The truth is, men are having a difficult time building a relationship with another male. (See [Generation to Generation](#))

. Women, you need to read this as well. It's a good thing for your future mate to have a friend.

This may help with that process.)

### **What are the key factors in building an established friendship—male or female?**

As we look to the writings of Solomon, we will see a great deal about friendship, probably because of the wisdom God gave Solomon and its illustration played out as He heard about, and possibly read of, the friendship between his father David and Jonathan.

Solomon's writing and the example of David and Jonathan places emphasis upon a number of specific **principles of friendship**, basic themes which appear in different examples throughout Scripture. This list will help us see which spiritual and/or personality traits may need to be added to our lives. They will not necessarily be in their order of priority, or in the order in which they should appear.

**1. Friendship must be God-centered**—Prov. 12:26; 13:20; 1 Sam. 20:41-42; 2 Cor. 6:14-16. When two men, two women, or a man and woman share the same core values focused on Christ, they enter into a relationship that can have a supernatural element. The presence of Christ in the friendship enables it to have a profound spiritual impact on each member of the twosome. It is the example and strength of Christ that gives the friendship the direction and resources needed.

If the relationship isn't God-centered, or both are nonbelievers, the outcome is obvious:

Prov. 12:26—"A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."

Prov. 13:20—"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (See 2 Cor. 6:14-16).

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But if the friends are believers, they have the capacity to be instruments of God to each other. For example, in one of the meetings David and Jonathan had, you can see that the most important factor to both of these men was their relationship to the Lord and to each other—1 Sam. 20:41-42.

They had come to the conclusion that David's life was in danger from Jonathan's father, King Saul, and met to discuss it. "After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most." 42] Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.' Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town."

Jonathan was living in order that David might realize God's best in his life, and David reciprocated. This for us is a beautiful picture of the end result of true God-centered friendship, each excited to see God's will fulfilled in the other's life.

Another principle of friendship we see in Solomon's father and Proverbs is:

**2. Friendship includes the formation of a commitment/covenant accompanied by a tangible sign(s) of that commitment** —Prov. 18:24, 14:20, 19:4; 1 Sam. 18:3.

What do we mean by a covenant? It is a promise, a commitment—1 Sam. 18:3. "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself"—1 Sam. 18:3. Fair weather friends are easy to find; in Proverbs we read that wealth adds many friends.

Prov. 14:20—"The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends."

Prov. 19:4—"Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him."

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But a friendship built on mutual commitment/covenant is rare. Prov. 18:24 says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." That's the friend we want!

How do we show evidence of this friendship? Virtually every important relationship or event in our society is acknowledged with ritual and ceremony and witnessed by people; marriage is the best illustration. In America, however, the important relationship of friendship is devoid of any type of ceremony and covenant formation. When people decide to be friends, rarely is there a tangible commitment made. A covenant/commitment should have some tangible signs.

*What could these tangible signs be?*

- **Verbal**—i.e., tell your friend you highly value him/her and your relationship
- **Material**—I've given books, dinners, money, rings, gifts for children; taken friends on trips, etc.
- **Simple**—like remembering important days and anniversaries with cards, calls, and letters.
- **Thoughtful, personal and creative**—1 Sam. 18:3-4; 20:12-17,23. I have a gift a friend gave me almost eight years ago that I use almost every week for up to 15 hours. Every time I use it, I think of the one who gave it to me and that he gave it because he loves me, believes in me, and is committed to me as my friend.

To outwardly show his friendship for David, Jonathan took off his robe, tunic, belt, sword, and bow and gave them all to his dear friend—1 Sam. 18:3-4. David later made the same covenant with Jonathan—1 Sam. 20:12-17,23. Therefore, when we choose to acknowledge our commitment to a friend, we should give a tangible sign or expression. It is vital that friends know we care about them personally. This is what I need to work on. I might do something for someone, but I need to verbalize to them that whatever I do is just a small expression of my care and love for them.

Another principle of friendship we see in Solomon's father and Proverbs is very close to the last. It is really an outgrowth of the commitment that has been made:

1. **Friendship is dependent on faithfulness and love.**

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Prov. 17:17—"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."  
Prov. 27:10—"Do not forsake your friend"  
Prov. 3:3—"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart"  
(Also read Psalm 55:12-14; Prov. 16:28;17:9).

A friend is faithful in hard times, willing to stand with you in adversity. Few things are more irritating than someone who is unpredictable, who cannot be counted on when you really need him. Faithfulness is critical to a close, relationship because we trust and depend upon those close to us.

It is interesting that Christ's circle of closest companions deserted and denied him in His darkest hour. Likewise, David was wounded emotionally more by the treachery of his close friends than by the efforts of his enemies. He pours out his disappointment with his friends in Psalm 55:12-14: "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God."

Prov. 17:17—"A friend loves at all times, even when we offend him."  
Prov. 17:9—"He who covers over an offense promotes love..."

Example: Job 6:14, 12:4, 42:7

A faithful friend also keeps confidences.

Prov. 16:28—"A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends." Prov. 17:9—"... whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."  
Few things destroy a friendship sooner than the one who can't keep a confidence.

There is also vulnerability in friendship, and this is one reason betrayal is so evil and faithfulness so virtuous.

Prov. 27:10—"Do not forsake your friend... "  
Prov. 3:29—"Do not plot harm against your neighbor who lives trustfully near

you."

Another principle of friendship we see in Solomon's father and Proverbs is the expression of love and faithfulness:

### 2. Friends show candor and give counsel.

Prov. 17:10—"A rebuke impresses a man of discernment"

Prov. 27:6—"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses."

Prov. 27:9—"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel."

A true friend will show candor and honesty in his communication with you. The one who will level with you or even rebuke you is far better than one who is insincere, or speaks false words of affection—Prov. 27:6. The biting words of a true friend may hurt your pride and feelings at the moment, but over the long haul you'll be much better off for having heard them.

By contrast, the flattery or neglect of a false friend can bring harm in the long run (see Prov. 29:5—"Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet"). Refusing to speak rebuke can also actually bring harm—1 Kings 1:6 ("His father had never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?' He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom").

The candor of a friend can provide the perspective or point of view needed to help you make wise decisions. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"—Prov. 27:17. We learn and grow when we listen to different ideas.

**Caution:** Remember that candor, in the biblical sense, means you always have the interests and well-being of the other person in mind when you speak. What will keep our candor and rebukes from harming our friends? What is it that will be needed

most of the time in the building of friendships? The next principle sums up what is needed in most of our communication with our friends:

**3. Purity of heart and gracious speech will make friends**—Prov. 22:11. A pure heart implies no manipulation, or no hidden motives, i.e., pure before God. Gracious speech is that filled with grace, grace motivated.

Eph. 4:29—"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Col. 4:6—"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Prov. 22:11—"He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend."

Think about it. What qualities in another person are you attracted to? There are several that come up in survey after survey. We won't take the time to go into them, but there are basic human traits that draw men and women together.

**4. True friendship is reciprocal and displays the following character qualities:**

- nonjudgmental
- accepting
- genuine
- self-disclosing
- trusting
- loving
- caring
- committed
- strong
- firm
- empathic
- willing to listen
- loyal
- able to compromise.

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*Interact:* Which of the above qualities are most important to you? Why?

Scripture speaks of several other qualities that enable and enhance friendship:

- **Friendship is listening to the heart, helping a friend to understand his heart.**

(For extended teaching on this topic, see "[A Word Fitly Spoken: Training for Friend-to-Friend Counseling.](#)")

*Why is it so important in friendship to listen to the heart?* Proverbs 27:9 explains, "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man."

*How do we get to know hearts?*

Prov. 20:5 says, "The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out." This is one of my favorite verses for friendship and for counseling.

*What does it mean to listen to the heart?*

In a nutshell, it means we need a friend who has a bucket. Or, we need to have a bucket, to listen to our friends and draw them out.

Look at the key words of Proverbs 20:5:

*Purposes:* plans, counsel, resolve, deliberation, determination. These are often in the deep waters of our soul, so deep we don't know what is in our heart. What do we need? What should be done with a bucket?

*Draws:* To let down a bucket for drawing out water; figuratively, to deliver and draw out, lift up.

*Understanding:* implies skillfulness in discerning between right and wrong—to be perceptive. It is to know how to use the knowledge one possesses. Therefore if I can't understand myself, I need to get together with an understanding person/a wise friend, one who will help me draw out my heart.

## What is specifically involved when we listen to the heart of a friend?

1. **It is hearing what words were said**—Prov. 18:13,15. 13] "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame. 15] The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out."

2. **It is emphatically listening, not just to what a person is saying, but looking for clues in the tone of voice and nonverbal expressions**. This will give clues to the heart of the person (even when the exterior looks fine)—Prov. 14:30; 14:13. A person could be rotting away from envy, but never talk about it—i.e., Prov. 14:30. I often cover my pain and feelings with laughter. Prov. 14:13 tells us, "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief." For example, people who are mourning don't usually verbalize it, and we don't pick up on their pain after the funeral.

3. **It means speaking with restraint.** Prov. 17:27-28 says, "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. 28] Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue."

4. **It is listening with discernment.** Prov. 15:14—"The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly;" 1 Cor. 12:10—"..to another distinguishing between spirits... [a spiritual gift] Prov. 26:24-26: 24] "A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. 25] Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly." We must discern the disguises and the deception.

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**5. It means we listen with the thought that we will learn from our friend.** It's a two-way street. "Let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance"—Prov. 1:5. "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise."—Prov. 19:20

Think about listening for a moment: How does God comfort us in our need, in our sorrow? Does He comfort only with words and acts of kindness and provision? (I'm indebted to Paul Stevens for some of the following thoughts from a lecture he delivered at Regent College entitled "Developing Spiritual Friendships.")

What does that reveal about God? He is waiting with a compassionate heart for us to speak what is in the depths of our being. Is it possible God speaks with His ears? Is the most eloquent message of God to us His silence?

So friendship is listening to the heart of a friend the same way God listens to us.

Another key factor in building an established friendship is:

**6. Friendship is getting in touch with your friend's unique spirituality, with what God is doing in his life.** God is working in some way in every person's life. Everyone is being sought by God. Every believer is "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

**Friendship in Christ is getting in touch with your friend's unique calling, giftedness, and spirituality, and then blessing, enabling, and nurturing it.**

**7. Friendship is getting in touch with the spiritual questions your friend might be asking at each stage in his/her life.** For example: "Who am I?" "Who will I be with?" "Will I marry?" "What should I be giving myself to vocationally?" "What is the unique calling God has for me?" We need to be with our friends as they answer these questions, staying sensitive to when we should assist and when we should be silent and

## Spiritual Friendships Pt. 1

Written by Bob Stone

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pray.