

FRIENDSHIP AND GROWING IN CHRIST

John Vawter

Recent studies tell us many, if not most, male Christian leaders do not have a good friend. When my co-author, Jim Wetherbe, and I told men we were working on “**Achieving High Performance Friendship: A Book for Men**” most responded by telling us they do not have many friends. Now that the book is finished we continue to be told the same.

In a survey we discovered most men say they do not learn from or accept advice from other men unless they trust them. In our honest moments we all will admit we are not as mature in Christ as we should be or want to be. We are all still in the process of becoming “conformed to the image of Christ” (Romans 8:29). As one man said so eloquently, “I have feet of clay all the way up to my eye brows”. So, how do we make sure we are men trustworthy enough so others will listen to us and be willing to open up and share their lives...and how do we make sure we have trustworthy friends in our lives who love us enough to point out the blind spots in our lives?

Twenty-five years ago I was sitting in a restaurant with one of the elders of the church I was pastoring in the suburbs of Minneapolis. I looked over his shoulder and saw a sign in a picture frame that said: “A true friend walks in when the rest of the world walks out”. I interrupted our conversation to discuss the statement with the elder, who was also and remains my friend. That discussion began a quest that culminated in writing the book.

Along the way some principles have become very clear not only in the context of friendship but also in the context of ministering to men and being ministered to by other men.

Jesus is the model for friendships. In the upper room He told the disciples, “I no longer call you My servants but My friends. What the Father has revealed to Me, I will reveal to you”. We learn from this that genuine friends are intimate with one another. Their relationship and conversations are not dominated by “Jesus talk”; but they certainly understand that such friendships are helping them become more conformed to the image of Christ.

Be a trustworthy man. Because we only allow those we trust to minister to and impact our lives, it is incumbent on all of us to make sure we are trustworthy.

Do not triangulate or gossip. Say something to someone’s face or do not say it. I know I do not respect people when I hear them talking about someone who is not present. I always think, “If they will talk this way about ‘Joe’ when he is not here what will they say about me when I am not present?”

Care enough to confront. Confronting does not mean shouting, being angry or being disrespectful. Confronting simply means to speak the truth to the person relative to where they need to grow. We all have blind spots. If people do not love us enough to point out our blind spots then we cannot grow. Conversely, if we do not care enough to confront then our friends will not grow.

Do not confuse absolutes with principles, values and preferences. I am a total abstainer. It is my choice. I do not believe it is a Biblical injunction...it is just how I have decided to live my life (motivated by a high number of alcoholics in my family). But, it would be wrong for me to try to project my value (abstinence) on Christian brothers. On the other hand, James says we are to be “slow to speak and quick to listen”. So, when I see my Christian brother over a period of time interrupting, not listening to the other’s point of view, always having to be right and never learning from others I know this is not simply my conviction but a Biblical truth...he is not obeying an important command in the Bible. Thus, if I care for him I will talk to

him about the issue. It might be a blind spot of which he is completely unaware.

Recognize there is a reason. We have all been tainted by our parents, childhood and society. Dr. Francis Schaeffer said, “The spirit of the age always finds its way into the church”. Just because we are followers of Christ does not mean we do not have blind spots. Something caused that spiritual weakness beyond original sin. A minister with whom I was sharing told me he was often brutally beaten by his drunken father when he would come late after a night of drinking. He explained that abused children develop a set of “antennae” that helps them be alert to any danger. He said the “antennae” are still active even though his father is deceased. This helped me understand why he appeared to be distant (which he was not) and it helped me know how to approach him and help him grow in the future.

Be respectful. Jesus said we are to treat others as we would want to be treated. I do not like people challenging me as though I am stupid, do not know anything, have nothing to offer others and basically am one level above a toad. I like people to help me grow by pointing out my faults in a way that encourages me to listen to them and want to grow. So, following the words of Jesus I need to treat people the same way—as I want to be treated.

Choose friends carefully. There are lots of good men in this world. Many of them are great family men, men of integrity and it is always great to be with them. But, can we be intimate with them? Do they help us grow? Are we closer to Christ because of them? These are important questions if we want friends who are high performance friends.

We all need to grow. The good news is that God puts men in our lives to help us grow. God puts us in people’s lives to help them grow. But, we have to know how to approach people in order to have the trust that will allow them to listen to us. And, being a High Performance Friend opens up many opportunities to help us minister to others and to grow ourselves because of the ministry of our friends in our lives.

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Achieving High Performance Friendship: A Book for Men is available at
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