

5 Reasons We Don't Develop Meaningful Friendships

Last month two close friends of mine, Matt and James, drove several hours from South Carolina and Alabama to pray with me about some important decisions I'm facing. They didn't ask me for money for gas or meals. They didn't charge me a consulting fee. They just wanted to do what friends do—they sacrificed their own time to offer love, counsel and support. They know I'd do the same for them.

I've come to learn that good friends are more valuable than money, fame or career success. Yet many Christians I know struggle in the area of relationships. Many people I've met—even pastors—admit they have no friends. And many churches are full of lonely people who are starving for friends but don't know how to make any.

The modern church does not always place a high value on relationships. While the New Testament commands us to “fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22, NASB), we have developed a cold corporate culture. We are content to herd people into buildings for services and then herd them out. Our main concern is that they occupied a seat and listened to a sermon. But did they connect with each other? Even in churches that try to nurture relationships, only a fraction of the people get involved in small groups.

Personally, I don't believe we will see New Testament revival power or New Testament impact until we reclaim fervent New Testament love. But that realm of love isn't possible without deep healing and serious attitude adjustments. Here are five of the most serious reasons Christians today struggle in the area of relationships:

1. Self-centeredness. Jesus defined love when He said,

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Real friendship is always sacrificial. We tend to want friendship on our terms; we want to be loved and encouraged and comforted. But if we want that kind of love, we should be willing to give it to someone else first. British preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Any man can selfishly desire to have a Jonathan; but he is on the right track who desires to find out a David to whom he can be a Jonathan.”

2. Lack of transparency. Too many people today live with secrets. We are experts at faking it. We hide our private pain behind masks and thick body armor. We go through the motions and we mouth the right words—but church life becomes shallow and superficial without raw honesty. True friends take off their armor, reveal their shame and share their hearts—and they confess their sins to each other (James 5:16). This is the path to true healing.

3. Bitterness. Paul told the Ephesians, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Yet many Christians today have never let go of their resentments. They don’t realize that people who seethe with anger over past hurts poison themselves—and make it impossible to develop close friends. Bitterness will make you unfriendly—and people will avoid you because you are toxic. We must learn to pay close attention to our hearts and purge any grudge the instant it takes root in our souls.

4. Low self-esteem. Jesus told us to love our neighbors as *ourselves* (Mark 12:31). But our love for others is short-circuited when we don’t think we have anything to offer in a relationship. Many people lack the confidence to reach out and make friends because they don’t think they deserve to be loved. Self-hatred can be caused by abuse, lack of parental

affection, bullying or other factors. If you struggle to love yourself, you must be willing to crawl out of your shell and seek help. Reach out to the people around you. God has prepared someone to pray with you!

5. Fear of rejection. I meet people who have given up on church altogether because they were betrayed. Some have even left ministry positions because friends turned their backs on them. Their attitude is “I will never let anyone hurt me like that again.” But is it really worth it to close the door on the possibility of friendship just because of one or two bad experiences? Proverbs 18:24 says, “Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family” (MSG). The loyal friends in my life have more than compensated for any disappointments. Friendship is a risk worth taking.

When Jesus brought heaven’s kingdom on earth, He assembled a group of followers who came to be known as His *friends* (John 15:15). He called them to follow Him as disciples but also to be connected to one another in deep fellowship. Our vertical connection to Christ makes a horizontal connection to our brothers and sisters possible. Don’t let anything stop you from enjoying healthy relationships.

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