

This Self-Imposed Deception Will Only Sabotage Your Relationships

Joe had an advantage. It emboldened him to join the early morning crowd of walkers and joggers in the Southern California park. No matter if his greasy, heavy coat looked out of place in the summer heat or his unkempt appearance caused others to avoid him. He had the advantage, and he knew it.

He had a box.

Not just any box. Joe had a Quaker Oats box with the gentle Quaker man smiling at him from all sides. The front, the back, the ends—no matter which way he turned the box, there was the Quaker, beaming his benevolent smile, lending a listening ear. A friend—ever constant, ever true.

He'd found the box in a dumpster—a treasure discarded, dug out from the rubbish. The find changed his life.

With the Quaker, there were no misjudgments or miscommunications. No roller-coaster rides of emotions and no rejection—ever. He was the perfect friend.

Joe could open the darkest closets of his life with the Quaker, and there were never any long looks of disgust or shame. No finger-wagging, and no solutions to share. Joe felt safe being vulnerable because the smile never shifted.

The Quaker never asked anything of him, never pressured him to return a favor, never made him question his motives or intent. Plus, he was the perfect sounding board, always agreeable to what Joe was thinking or planning to do.

And Joe worshiped him because the Quaker allowed him to stay

just as he was with no lengthy discussions about the person Joe could become.

As I walked past Joe and his box, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and I realized that Joe was a picture of so many people—myself included—who desire friendship but fear vulnerability.

Who wouldn't love to have an ever-smiling friend to whom we could entrust the totality of who we are—the good, the bad and the ugly—without remorse and without reproof? The reality of our lives is that, fearful of rejection or disapproval, we guard our hearts, and our relationships remain shallow and devoid of the benefits of friendship God intends.

Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

An enemy kisses you and smiles as you barrel headlong into a ditch. A friend speaks (yes, even when it hurts) to help you grow through a situation. They point out the fallacies of your thinking while inspiring you to gain God's perspective.

Will they fail you or say the wrong thing sometimes? Probably.

A friend may not be perfect, but then again, neither are we. We all have growth issues and family problems and crazy ideas that need to be tempered. That's why God gave us each other.

You'll find the friend you've been looking for is close by—if you courageously open your life to those around you. Find someone you can trust, and open your heart to true friendship.
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