

Why We Need Sisters

Whether you call it connecting or bonding, women do it remarkably well. Certainly, this has been my experience. A recent shopping trip overwhelmingly confirmed my theory.

“Oooh, that looks lovely on you. You should get it!” my admirer told me. It was 7:30 a.m., and my favorite store was having a knock-down, drag-out sale. Take 80 percent off everything!

Oooh, Mama, I was in my glory! And so were my sisters—women I had never seen before in my life.

“Mmm, it’s pretty, but you looked slimmer in the other outfit.”

“That color is very becoming.”

“You really think so?”

“Oh, yes, but then again, everything you’ve tried on looks good on you.”

As I headed back to my dressing room, I thought to myself, If only women could treat one another this way all the time.

In that crowd there were no masks, no pretenses. We were one, all on the same mission—to secure as many bargains as we could.

Every woman’s coup was to be celebrated. All of us were giggling and twirling in front of the mirror, nurturing one another, pointing out one another’s best assets.

So where does the image we have of catty women come from? From that ole serpent, that’s who. Who else knows better the fact that a house divided against itself will not stand?

The word that came to Eve in the garden—that woman would have

an overwhelming desire toward man—also gave birth to competition among women. Amazingly early we begin to compare notes. Hmm, let's see, who's got prettier hair, prettier eyes, a better figure?

Instead we should protect ourselves and one another. Collectively, we set the standard for how we are to be treated based on the respect we render to one another.

When we exhibit a competitive attitude toward another sister, we are sending powerful messages about ourselves. Rather than giving us any kind of edge, covetousness, envy and jealousy always cause us to lose.

SHUN EVIL COMPARISONS The book of 1 Samuel relates the story of Peninnah and Hannah. They were both married to the same man.

Peninnah had children. Hannah had been barren for quite some time. Peninnah took it upon herself to irritate and provoke Hannah because she was childless.

But Hannah got on her face before God, and she was blessed with a beautiful son, Samuel, whom she dedicated to the Lord. According to Scripture, Hannah's son went on to become a very important person in Israel. But there is no further mention of Peninnah's children.

God honors a heart that is in the right place. It is never wise to celebrate the seeming misfortunes or shortcomings of others.

Envy hardens the heart. Once hardened, it is filled with "every evil thing" (James 3:14-16, NKJV).

These thoughts can lead a woman to seek the emotional or physical harm of anyone who stands between her and what she wants. They are the bridge to sins she once swore she would never commit and things she said she would never do or say.

These things don't occur just in adulterous affairs. They can arise over desire for a particular man's attention or for influence in his life that now seems threatened by someone new.

This was the case with Miriam. She became upset that her brother Moses went and married an Ethiopian woman (see Num. 12:1).

The new wife was an unwelcome influence who had her brother's ear. She was black, different, an outsider.

It seems that Miriam had lost her standing, at least in her mind, and wanted it back badly. Unwilling to give up the reins, she instead began to resent the newcomer. So she talked against Moses and his wife.

God responded by reprimanding her in two ways (see vv. 5-10). First, He reminded her that His relationship with Moses was to be respected. Second, He allowed the envy and strife that was on the inside of her to be manifested in her physical body.

He struck her with leprosy for seven days. During this time, Miriam had the opportunity to see how it felt to be ostracized on the basis of one's skin.

Covetousness and jealousy are nasty and unattractive. In time, what's on the inside will show on the outside.

If these sins aren't dealt with, they cause us to compete rather than embrace one another's gifts. Then we miss valuable opportunities for sharing and fellowship.

SISTERS AND FRIENDS Martha and Mary were two sisters with very different temperaments. Martha was a go-getter, always busy doing something. Mary was a live-in-the-moment type of person.

While Martha was killing herself in the kitchen, Mary was just sitting at the feet of Jesus (see Luke 10:38-39). When Martha

brought this to Jesus' attention, He was quick to rebuke her and point out that Mary had chosen to do the better thing (see vv. 40-42).

Jesus appreciated Martha's service. But what was more important to Him was Mary's taking the time for fellowship, to sit at His feet and learn of Him.

Mary understood that her first priority was worshiping Jesus, that there would be time to serve Him later. Jesus was gently telling Martha that there were a few things she could learn from Mary.

This is a special feminine treasure—the ability of women to learn from one another. When women take the time to nourish one another and exchange their gifts, the fruit that comes from those lives is rich!

When a group of women gather to pray or to comfort a friend who is going through trial or heartbreak, the atmosphere is charged with power and healing. When women laugh together, cry together or simply hold one another, it is an inexpressible wonder.

Men enjoy watching these exchanges between women. They wonder at our ability to nurture and console one another in the same way the angels wonder at our rejoicing over salvation. They haven't got a clue.

Men do not relate like we do, and yet they wish they could. The world they live in is fraught with competition. It causes them to hide and guard themselves closely, even when they are in pain.

But women pull everything out for all to behold. We nurse and rehearse it until we've squeezed the last bit of pain out of it, and then we are liberated to move on.

The instructions are pretty clear on the design of woman-to-

man relationships, but perhaps we need some clarification when it comes to woman-to-woman relationships. What can we learn from observing how we treat one another?

CELEBRATING OUR WOMANHOOD We must remember that we are the manifested heart of God. Our relationships with one another set the standard of treatment for others to follow.

If women refused to talk about one another, sabotage one another, and destroy one another with our looks, words and attitudes, we might see others treating us as they should. People reflect what they see.

Tearing down someone else does not build us up in the sight of others. It simply reveals how low we will go to gain attention.

As women begin to rise up and cover one another with love and respect, I believe a different day will dawn for us. I dare say that others' respect for us will rise to a whole new level.

God requires that we love one another (see 1 John 4:20,21). Now some will try to get literal here and say, "Well, I don't hate her. I just don't like her." But if you don't like her, there is no way you could be thinking good thoughts or praying blessings for her.

I'm talking about being free enough to celebrate another woman's triumphs and weep for her tragedies. That is the kind of sister-love God wants us to have for one another. And it is that kind of love that will help break down the stereotypes about women that have developed over the years.

RESPECT INSPIRES RECONCILIATION "They don't speak to me," my lunch partner told me in hushed tones as a group of young ladies strolled past us in the restaurant. "What do you mean?" I asked, not quite getting it.

Perhaps I'm naive, but I'm one of those Christians who actually believes we should love everybody. I was totally confused. We had just left church, and here were these women snubbing my friend.

For what reason? Jealousy? She was a pretty girl, but they were also attractive. Pretending ignorance, I pulled them into our conversation. I could see that their involvement went against their natural instincts.

But by the time lunch was over, they were surprised to find that they all had things in common and actually liked one another. They had just never taken the time to find this out.

My gracious young friend, who these other women had decided, based on her looks, was a snob, had some tidbits to share with them that were quite helpful. In the end they appreciated the exchange.

How much is missed when we refuse to be open to those around us based on presumptuous assessments of one another! We should be busy helping one another prepare to receive blessings, helping one another look the best we can and exchanging sound advice and encouragement.

It is crucially important for women to affirm one another. We hold the key to one another's wholeness (see Titus 2:3-5). As we purpose to build up another sister to help her step into the fullness of all that awaits her, we will reap our own reward.

Over the years I have rejoiced in rich friendships with women. We have fussed over, encouraged, rebuked, and celebrated one another and come out the better for it.

As a single woman, my good days outweigh my bad days because of the support and encouragement of my sisters. They are determined to see God's best coming to fruition in my life.

This is my prayer for all women, that they will find the beauty in one another and reconcile their differences. Then and only then will we be able to erase popular misconceptions about women and win others by our blameless example.

Women who know their God can lovingly affirm and support one another without competition or fear of loss. Hopefully others will follow our lead.

This is where healing in the body of Christ begins! It begins with us.

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