

Making Friends in an Often Unfriendly World

Romans 5:11 says *So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:18 *"God has restored our relationship with Him through Christ, and He has given us this ministry of restoring relationships." Or as Beck words it, He made us his friends and gave us the work of making friends of enemies*

In Eden God, Adam and Eve had a relationship and then in a moment of time it was destroyed because Adam sinned. But to show you how important relationships are, look at the length God went to provide a way for us to have a relationship and friendship with Him again.
All the way to the cross!!!!

So, if God thinks relationships and friendships are that important and he has given us the job of developing friendships and relationships so we can point others to a relationship and ultimately a friendship with Him through the cross then how do we go about building friendships with people on a human level so that can happen?

Lets think of some suggestions in this direction of relationship building that can lead to bridge building towards the gospel.

I. BE PROACTIVE

Take the initiative in building friendships with people. In other words, don't wait for them to make the first move. Instead, you reach out.

Thought: Everyone wants friends, but very few people know how to make them. Did you ever go to a party with a whole bunch of strangers there, everybody is desperately wanting to talk to somebody else but it seems that everybody's afraid to make the first move?

Because we are called to be a bridge builder to others so that we can one day point them to Christ then we are to take the initiative. If we care, we can dare to step out and try to establish a relationship.

A bumper sticker put it this way: "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." What about one that says, "Friends don't let friends miss heaven." If we really care, we will be proactive and really dare and therefore take the first step in building relationships to people around you.

II. REFUSE TO WEAR A MASK

If we want to build strong relationships with other people we have to be authentic, honest, open, drop our guard and be real. II Corinthians 1:12a says *"We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in all our dealings."*

That's what builds friendships - honesty and sincerity, dropping our mask, being real, or authentic. Everybody already knows we're not perfect so let's get off the pedestal and be real just like everybody else. Refuse to wear a mask and stop covering up.

Remember, you don't have to be perfect to build a bridge to people. In fact, being vulnerable is how you do it. The result of being honest in building a relationship is that your new friend will end up being one who thinks you are a good egg even though you are slightly cracked. The only difference is that although we are not perfect, we can share that we have an open and available avenue to perfect help for our imperfections.

III. IDENTIFY COMMON GROUND

If we want to build a relationship with somebody we have to identify common ground, in other words, discover what we have in common. In trying to help an unbeliever understand God's love, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:22b *"Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him."*

How do we find what we have in common with that person we're wanting to work with? We can start by

Asking a question like, "Tell me about yourself." And then listen. Very few people are listeners. **Thought:** Lend a man your ears and you will immediately open a pathway to his heart.

New York City phone company once did a study and discovered that the number one word people use in conversations on the phone is the word "I". That says, we're not listening, we're just telling about ourselves.

Thought: You will make more friends in two months through getting interested in other people than you will in two years trying to get people interested in you. Once we've identified that common ground, then we need to use it to build that bridge, to strengthen the relationship, to further establish the friendship.

Thought: You could say it this way, you can bank on any friendship where interest is paid. So establish common ground and then use it in the building process.

IV. DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE

In order to build a bridge to people, we have to demonstrate God's love. Ephesians 5:1-2 *Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ,*

Our goal is to be like Jesus and He served in love and we have to do that as well. 1 John 3:17 says *"Let us stop just saying we love people. Let us really love them and show it by our actions."*

Question: How can we do that? We can do it by meeting three of the most essential needs of every individual, acceptance, affirmation, and assistance.

1. We demonstrate God's love when we *accept people just as they are, and where they are.*

This is crucial because if you want to introduce them to Christ so he can clean them up properly then they don't need to be cleaned up before being our friends.

Remember, there is a big difference between acceptance and approval. You can accept someone without approving of everything they do.

Notice our model: The Lord Jesus. Jesus accepted everybody even though He did not approve of what they did. In His day they called Him "the friend of sinners". In this he taught by example, that you can accept people without approving of their lifestyle.

In other words you can accept people without agreeing with everything they're doing. If you're going to build a friendship it starts there. **Thought:** A friend is someone who knows all our faults and still loves us. That's why Jesus is our friend and we should follow his lead in our own outreach to others

2. We demonstrate God's love is by affirming others. Everybody needs emotional support. When you are there for a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker in a crisis, in their illness, in the death in their family, in their big disappointment, in their financial problem, in their conflict, when you are there and you simply just set with them, you are building a bridge.

Galatians 6:2 says *Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*" This is what friendship is all about.

Thought: A friend is somebody who walks in when everybody else walks out. Or it has been said like this, A friend is someone who will see you through when other people see through you.

3. We demonstrate God's love by assisting people. Everybody needs practical love. Sometimes you can build a bridge to a friend, a neighbor, an acquaintance by offering practical assistance.

You can offer to carpool or to baby-sit for them, take them a meal, help them repair something or any practical ways you can think of in demonstrating genuine love. As long as it is not just words.

The Bible says that love is something you do. I Thessalonians 2:8 *"Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's good news with you but even our own lives."*

That's demonstrating God's love. Don't just share the good news but actually share some of your own life's time and energy.

V. GIVE CREDENCE TO THEIR FEELINGS AND THEIR FEARS

We need to realize that when we especially try and share the good news or when we invite somebody to church, and people are resistant or slow about involvement, the number one reason is fear.

Some types of their fear might be

"What if I turn into a religious nut?
What if I become a fanatic?
What if I commit to it and it's not true?
What if it's too hard and I want to back out?
What if I lose all my friends?
What if I stop having fun?"

One or all of these misconceptions are what they may well have in their mind about a relationship to Christ. We need to be understanding of that. Be sympathetic, be honest, and be patient and build the friendship further and keep gently trying.

Be patient with people and give God time to act. **Remember**, we don't argue anybody into heaven. We love them into heaven. That's how we bring people to the love of God.

You first build a relationship with them so you can surround them with the warmth of God's love by loving them, serving them, and sacrificing for them. Be authentic and real about your own problems and say, "I don't have it all together but Jesus Christ is the answer."

VI. EXPECT GOD TO USE YOU.

You say, "If I get serious about building bridges to unbelievers, I won't know what to say." That's okay. You don't really need to know what to say because God will tell you what to say. Jesus promised this to His disciples in

Matthew 10:19-20 *"Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

How does it happen? Well, you make yourself available. You say, "God, use me. I don't know what to say but I'm willing to open my mouth and be used to build a bridge to the people you have put me in contact with."

Observation: Knowing that you've made a friend and that you have helped somebody in this life and that you have helped another person settle their eternal destiny and knowing they will be eternally grateful to you for building a bridge would be a wonderful blessing .

In closing: To be without a friend is a serious form of poverty and the best vitamin for developing friends is B 1.

So the question becomes, If you were another person, would you like to be a friend of yours?

As you go out into the world this week on the God given mission of establishing and nurturing relationship and friendships so others can be won to Christ take this little bit of practical advice,

Always hold your head up but keep your nose at a friendly level.