

Building Redemptive Friendships

Relationships is what Christianity is all about!

The result of sin is a broken relationship between God and man. (II Cor. 5:15-21) The death of Christ reestablished a relationship between the heavenly Father and His lost children. Christ is the way to God and as the Friend of sinners His desire is to build people unto Himself. Evangelism is making contact with a person and motivating him to give an honest hearing to the message of the gospel. We build relationships, so, as the soul winner we can take the sinner by the hand and lead him over the threshold into eternal life. (II Cor. 5:19-20; Acts 26:18) Christ, who dwells in the believer, is communicated to the unsaved person in a relationship that we must build.

HOW TO ESTABLISH AND BUILD REDEMPTIVE FRIENDSHIPS:

We need a vision of what can be accomplished! It depends upon vision (Prov. 29:18). There must be a accurate vision of the condition of the unsaved. There must be a vision of what God can do through us. We are commanded; we have the tools to do the work. (Rom. 1:16; II Tim. 1:7) God will do it through us; **we must be available!** (II Tim. 1:9)

We must get a vision of the method: (Acts 1:8) The method is witnessing by sharing Jesus Christ with friends. Being a witness is not optional for Christ said, ***“You shall ... not you should or you may or you might be witnesses.”*** He commanded believers to be witnesses. Therefore, the only choice a believer has is whether he will be a **good witness or a bad one**. Vision is prerequisite to success in establishing redemptive relationships. We need a vision of networking our friends to the Lord. We too often say “I can’t or I quit” before we ever get started. Think: To win the person unknown to us is *“a stranger introducing a stranger to a Stranger.”* We as a person unknown to the lost person are trying to get this stranger to accept a Stranger-- the Lord Jesus.

We must make friends of the unsaved. Build redemptive friendships by learning names, smiling, looking friendly, and showing a sincere interest in others. A person’s name is said to be one of the most pleasant sounds he can hear. The use of the name shows personal interest. Look pleasant! Try to look like the kind of person that a stranger would want to know. Be a good listener. Don’t talk all the time -- tune in to their frequency and listen attentively. Center the conversation around their interest rather than your own. Make every effort to make the new acquaintance feel important. A good way to do that is to seek his advice and/or assistance in some area of his ability or expertise. These simple efforts will show genuine interest in him as a person. Talk about things like job or profession, sports, hobbies, family interest, trips, current news, books, cars, boats, campers, gardening, religious background. etc.

We need to use hospitality as a means to an end. (Rom. 12:13) The warmest climate for building a meaningful friendship may be provided by your own home. Think of every activity that you have an interest in, arrange them in order of your priority, as you get to know the person -- take a mental inventory of his/her interests. Match points of interest.

UNDERSTANDING FRIENDSHIP:

A friend makes you comfortable. (Prov. 17:17a) A true friend is one who not only loves you for yourself, but in spite of yourself. (We must be that kind of friend to the unsaved.) A friend recognizes your imperfection, frailty and weakness and chooses to go on loving you anyway. (We must be that kind of friend.) A friend’s motive is to **give** not to get (II Cor. 12:14). Friends do not wear a mask of pretended perfection. You can relax, and be yourself. (So we must be that kind of friend to the unsaved.)

A friends can always be trusted! (Prov. 27:10) Friends may not always agree on all things, but they can agree to disagree and still remain friends. Do we build that kind of friendship? There are times when a sincere rebuke is essential to friendship. He is no friend at all who allows wrong to continue uncorrected. But such rebukes are no threat to true friendship because true friends can be trusted. (Prov. 27:6) Do we build that kind of friendship?

A friend gives encouragement! A true friend is one who helps you through the trials and tests of life. When the world and the devil attack from the outside and the flesh is undermining your strength

within, a friend will be there to encourage and build you up. (Prov. 27:9, 17) The unsaved need that kind of friend!

A friend will make sacrifices! Friendships are not found, they are established and developed through the investment of time and effort. So, we must do toward the unsaved. A real friendship is an emotionally intimate relationship. It involves caring and sharing in the life of another person. (Rom. 12:15) -- it will include such care and desire. (consider Barnabas.)

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL THROUGH FRIENDSHIPS!

Evangelism is meeting eternal needs of the lost friend! The ultimate reason someone gets saved is because he knows he is lost. He needs salvation through the blood of Christ. But most people do not realize they need the Lord. Some are outwardly good, others live in the dregs of sin; neither feel a need to repent and turn to God.

Evangelism is giving the gospel -- (Rom. 1:14-16) We know the gospel is the glorious message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as He became sin for us, who knew no sin (I Cor. 15:1-4; II Cor. 5:21; I Tim. 1:15). Salvation is that wonderful gift from God (Rom. 6:23) whereby in repentance and faith the accepting, believing person is converted. (Acts 17:30; 20:21) The gospel message is about a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ who came to save the lost soul. (Luke 19:20)

Evangelism is sharing the plan of salvation... giving the message! May every one of us become busy about the Master's business -- the winning of precious souls to Christ. What greater endeavor could you be involved in? Have we allowed ourselves to become indifferent, full of apathy, and disobedient to the Lord. Are we like the son that sleeps in harvest about whom the book of Proverbs teaches: "*A son that sleeps in harvest brings shame to his father!*" ??

RECOGNIZING PEOPLE'S GREAT NEED: (Sharing what they need to understand.)

People are cut off from God. When Satan tempted Adam in the garden, he had the ability to make a moral choice, but fell into sin. Sin cut him off from God. Not only Adam, but everyone from that time forth was cut off from God's presence. (Rom. 3:9-12, 23, 5:6, 8; 5:12; 5:19)

Man is a sinner three ways: First, anything less than God's perfect holiness is sin. Sin is similar to an arrow **falling short** of the target. (Rom. 3:23) Man can't attain to the perfect standard. So every person born into the world does not measure up to God's perfect standard.

Second, **rebellion is sin** -- usually translated "*transgression*." Sin is the breaking of God's law, (I Jh 3:4) either volitionally or ignorantly.

The third way man sins is **by inherent wickedness or moral impurity**. This is described as filthiness or uncleanness, or **iniquity** and is abhorred by God, who is pure and holy. (Psa. 32:1-5; Isa. 53:6) Sin blinds the sinner, (II Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 4:17) Usually man does not recognize that he is a sinner and that he is cut off from God. Therefore a sinner needs the gospel communicated to him, to reveal that he is a sinner.

People become their own point of reference! When Satan promised Eve, "*Ye shall be as gods,*" he somewhat fulfilled that promise, as a result man is his own god. Each person is his own standard of measurement. (Cf. Prov. 14:12, 14) Each person becomes the *focus of the circle* in which he lives. The fall of man has created an upside-down condition. Instead of man placing God on the throne of his life, man sits there in supreme ignorance that he has usurped the place of God.

People suffer alienation and isolation! Sin is not just punishment after death. See Eph. 2:1-3.) People also suffer the consequences of sin in this life. (Gal. 6:7-9) Sin results in isolation or alienation from God. Spiritual death is the ultimate form of isolation from God. (Rom. 5:12, 19) As a result of man's sin, he needs eternal salvation to bring him into fellowship with God. Sin also cuts off people from others in this life. Man is a social person who needs relationships to keep him healthy. A soul winner must give acceptance, not rejection. Not that we are to accept his sin, but we accept his *personhood*. (Rom. 15:7)

People are filled with anxiety! Any life that is separated from authority and purpose is like a boat without an anchor; it is drifting. A person may be anxious because he does not have all the answers to the questions raised by others, or even the questions asked in his heart. Every person has basic needs within his heart. He knows that something is missing but he usually refuses to identify it as God. He looks for answers and does not find any. The vacuum created by God's absence produces anxiety. *"Anxiety" is a state and* is another word for **fear, depression, jealousy**, or any other condition that keeps man in an emotional disequilibrium.

People are searching for meaning! Because man is isolated and affected by sin he usually has a lack of meaning in life. Those who are slaves to drugs know that narcotics do not lead to happiness or meaning in life. The same is true of wealth, fame, or even success. Some people do not know where to go or how to get where they want to go. But they want to go somewhere. They have not found the secret of peace in life. They need God, who gives purpose for which men should live.

People are marching inevitably toward death. Thousands die annually of some form of cancer and that frightens most. We experience the same fear when a friend is killed or we hear of a tragic accident. The threat of death is all about us. Within our decaying bodies we realize death is our enemy. We want to rise above the limitations of the body. Yet we see dimly because our eyes are wearing out. Our arms and backs ache because of arthritis. Even the 30 year old feels the inevitable rising tide of age when a younger man takes his place. Life is but a vapor, a story to be told, like the flower that blooms in the morning and is gone in the evening, like the swift ships at sea, etc.