



Called to be Friends

Nurturing Strong Sisterhood – 12 Principles

Understand what makes a good friend. Then, take Beth Ann's Fun Challenge at the end!

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I compiled this information for a retreat in March of 2020 that did not happen due to the lockdowns and the uncertainty of the time. I wrote it for those seeking to break down barriers to community and seeking to bring unity in diversity among the *kedoshim* (God's children).

In this day of differing opinions and observations about the virus and issues we have never faced before, the endeavor to teach about nurturing friendships became more complicated. The division caused by the censorship of information has been deep and often irreconcilable; I hear stories every day. I began this writing before these issues existed, but now they must be considered. So, please take what is beneficial from this information and feel free to leave the rest behind.

The principles are based on Scripture, experience, and research. I would like to offer a word of caution: Avoid heeding counsel void of the Spirit; be led by God. For example, some counselors say, "Let go of people who bring you down, drain your energy, kill your productivity, or complicate your life." This is generally good advice, but it is focused on self rather than servanthood. The question is, "Does God want you to walk alongside a person or let them go?" The answer is up to God. We should not lock God into a bucket of "friendship principles." And we realize we are all on a journey of practicing and learning love.

Also, many sisters are occupied with children, grandchildren, and their existing friendships and will not be able to nurture new relationships. But I feel sure, we all at least want to strengthen the relationships we have. At the same time, if you are content in your family, I would like to encourage you to reach out and include others in your life if it is possible. Often, it doesn't take much additional time to include others. In Virginia McInerney's book *Single Not Separate*, she encourages families to reach out to those who need a family and to bring them into their own. She mentions Psalm 68:6a (NIV), "**God sets the lonely in families.**"

Preface

Connection is an innate human need. Just as water quenches thirst and food satisfies hunger, connection dispels loneliness. True human connection happens when both people feel heard, valued, and respected for their weaknesses as well as their strengths. In essence, each values the other right where they are with no desire to change the other. Although we often fail in our attempts at friendship, we can try, and we can give grace to each other along the way. As one of my favorite quotes reads¹:

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

I have experienced beautiful and lasting friendships that have brought deep joy, contentment, and healing! I have also made loads of mistakes. So, come along with me to explore ways we can be the friend God has called us to be!

How do I increase in being a good friend?

1. Seek God first.

- **Cultivate** intimacy with Him each day. (Matthew 6:33)
- **Believe** you are valuable to God and know who you are in Him.² (Ephesians 1)
- **Understand** that the Holy Spirit must enable healthy friendship. (Jeremiah 32:17-18a)

2. Begin with humility.

- **Allow God to search us.** *Psalms 139:23-24.*
“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way.”
Do not introspect; allow the Lord to examine and highlight areas for change. I have learned never to apologize or say, “I am sorry” if I did nothing wrong. Wait for God to show you, then ask for forgiveness. Apologizing when you were not wrong is false humility. At the same time, it is good to seriously consider the other person’s view before disregarding it.
- **Ask God to expose right and wrong intentions and motives in yourself.** *Hebrews 4:12.*
“For the word of God is living, active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
It is hard to see where the joint ends and the marrow begins, but God’s light reveals the truth about our motives.
- **Lean on His understanding.** *Proverbs 3:5-6.*
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

3. Intentionally cross over differences. If possible, push through barriers of differences in:

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|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| • Personality | • Convictions | • Brokenness | • Season in life – |
| • Denomination | • Callings and passions | • Culture | (Struggling, Suffering, |
| • Race | • Line of work | • Neighborhood | Steady, Healthy, Happy) |
| • Economic status | • Talents and skills | • Age | • Single, married, divorced, |
| • Dress | • Abilities/disabilities | • New moms, empty | widowed |
| • Food preferences | • Childhood influence | nesters, no children | • Can you think of others? |
| • Spiritual gifts | • Opportunities given | | |

4. Be authentic.

- Let go of the need for approval or the need to look good.
- Remain humble and open to reconciling dialogue. In the face of disagreement, be willing to try to see things from another’s perspective, even though you may not agree with them in the end.
- If you are in a relationship of trust, be vulnerable about your weaknesses and your need for prayer. A popular teacher (a man) said, “My heart is fragile and I don’t share it with just anyone.”

5. Do not assume.

- **Clarify** misunderstanding with good conversation.
I had a neighbor who asked me why I was ignoring her. I had no idea this was her perception and had no desire to ignore her. After a good conversation, everything was fine.
- **Give the benefit of the doubt;** assume positive intent.

6. Listen.

- **Think about what they are saying**, not about what you are going to say or how it will affect you. This is difficult if you already have a strong opinion or are currently hurting. To maintain a listening composure: 1. Try to understand. → 2. Try to learn something new. → 3. Affirm or repeat what is said. → 4. Be free to kindly disagree.
- **Immerse** yourself. Do not allow distractions. Give time and conscious effort.
- **Ask** clarifying and probing questions for more information. **Paraphrase** to be sure you understood.
- **Stay on topic**. Do not interrupt. Avoid the temptation that your words must be spoken.
- **Use positive gestures**, expressions, and tone of voice.
- **Do not give advice** unless asked; Value where they are and their need to air their thoughts. If they ask for your advice often and agree with it but never heed it, they are venting at your emotional expense and so should be gently confronted.
- **Value the other's personality** by allowing it to be expressed. Allow sentences to be finished and wide spaces of thought before giving a response so you are sure you have understood.
- **Accept and affirm the other's unique beauty** designed by God. Acceptance nurtures confession and prayer, releasing healing and freedom.

7. Be grateful for any time anyone gives you. None of us deserve God's love or anyone else's time.

8. Have no ulterior motive.

An ulterior motive is a secret reason for doing or saying something.

- **Be interested in the person**, not in what you can get from them. Although we often meet a friend for a specific purpose outside of the friendship, the pattern for meeting is friendship, unless we are hurting or ill.
- **Discern** those who do not have your best interest in mind.

9. Reciprocate.

This principle can be misunderstood and hard to explain. The key is gratitude. Gratitude gives the other person strength. You don't have to be rich, just grateful.

*Michael Card in his book **Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness** writes, "The one who was initially shown hesed [God's indescribable, undeserved love] naturally demonstrates hesed in return. This is not a legal expectation...rather an expectation based on hope. To receive hesed and not return it leaves the party disappointed... Reciprocity is an indication that you have internalized the truth of hesed." Pgs. 64-65*

10. Confront.³

For more about conflict resolution, please see the important endnote.

- A good friend feels comfortable telling us things that we may not want to hear when they know we are doing what is not good for us. This kind of dialogue can only happen when both people have given permission to the other and when a mutual consistent friendship has existed.
 - *Years ago, I had lunch with a friend almost every day at work. She gave a lot of advice which I appreciated, because I enjoy considering and valuing the advice of others, while giving myself room to disagree; however, she was not open to advice or feedback from me. This uneven exchange prevented the friendship from deepening, but I still appreciated her friendship.*
Note: Most conversations should be free from advice.

– *I have a few 40-year-old friendships. We are quite free to correct each other and give advice 😊*

- A good friend verbally sets boundaries in the face of mistreatment as opposed to ghosting. Ghosting is the cowardly practice of ending a relationship by withdrawing from that person without offering an explanation or being willing to dialogue about what went wrong.
- Do not compete, humiliate, shame, or control. Recognize these behaviors and be willing to talk about them since they may be blind spots. If someone is unwilling to talk with you about an unpleasant incident, she is not really interested in a healthy friendship; it is best to move on.

11. Empathize.

Pray for the Lord to increase these abilities in you:

- The ability to respond to other people's emotions appropriately.
- The ability to feel what another person is feeling.
- The ability to understand someone's response to a situation.

12. Don't beat yourself up. If you fail, try again!

Take Beth Ann's Challenge – Get to know each other.

Again, the following points were written as an exercise within a church after a retreat was dispersed. Are you ready to get out of your comfort zone to practice strong sisterhood?!

1. **Invite** someone to your home that you do not know or who is different from you. If it is not possible to invite them to your home, meet them at a coffee shop or a park.
2. **Read through the *Listen* portion** of *Called to Be Friends* (this paper) beforehand for more understanding.
3. **Relax and Remember** – You will make lots of mistakes. Give grace to yourself and others.
4. **Agree to the amount of time you have.** Respect each other by being on time and valuing the time allotted.
5. **Approach the conversation as a time to practice sisterhood together.**
 - **Divide your time** in half or fourths. For example, if you have agreed to meet for one hour. One person can share for 15 minutes, the other for the next 15 minutes, and so on back and forth.
 - **Choose a topic of conversation.** – Some possibilities include:
 - Share whatever is on your mind.
 - Share a time when you were touched by the Lord or how you came to know Him.
 - Share three things that get you excited or three things you hope for.
 - Share what a typical day in your life looks like.
 - Share prayer requests and pray.
 - Share your favorite Scriptures or what Scriptures you may be reading at the time.
 - Share your thoughts on a portion of the *Called to Be Friends* writing.

[See the endnotes on the next page.](#)

¹ Quote by Dinah Maria Mulock Craik from her book *A Life for a Life*

² I created the [Who I Am Journal Art Card Collection](#) to encourage an awareness of our identity in Jesus. You can also read the stories of these Art Cards at [ShaleFragments.com](#)

³ **Practice healthy conflict-resolution** – an addition to the *Confront* portion of this paper. Good news – Our learned patterns of behavior can be transformed by the Holy Spirit! The first three conflict-resolution styles are unhealthy. Let God turn them into an **Assertive** style (No. 4)!

1. **Aggressive** – This person attempts to make people do what they want by manipulation by inducing guilt or intimidation.
2. **Passive** – This person is compliant to avoid conflict and confrontation. They are peacekeepers, not peacemakers. A peacemaker works through conflict. A peacekeeper withdraws from miscommunication or conflict to get relief. This withdrawal never solves the problem.
3. **Passive-aggressive** – This person avoids direct confrontation (passive) but tries to get even through manipulation (aggressive) or through outbursts that happen as a result of the build-up of frustration caused by not confronting.
4. **Assertive** (good) – This person communicates clearly and directly and works to create a solution that is best for both people. An assertive person respects themselves and the other person. They take care of their needs, while not infringing on the needs of others.