
Friendships

WITNESSING TO ACQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS

Many people are nervous and self conscious when meeting new people. Everyone knows that first impressions are important, and some people find it hard to make new friends or to overcome their fear of meeting people. It is important for Christians to know how to evangelize and witness without being pushy or obnoxious and without invading a person's privacy.

The first step in solving this problem is to recognize every person we meet as someone God is working with. Every time we meet someone, the Lord has a purpose in the encounter. You know that the Lord is at work in you. It is also true that the Lord has been at work in the person we meet. Thus, with every "divine encounter", two parts of God's "workmanship" are coming in contact with each other.

When we approach people with this outlook, we are able to begin a meaningful friendship, even at the very first meeting, by trying to answer for ourselves the following questions:

- What is the Lord trying to do with this person?
- How far has God progressed? Has the Lord been given freedom to work?
- In what ways has the Lord been hindered in working with this person?
- How can I be used by God to minister to this person?

You can see that the Christian response to personal encounters is far different from the usual response. The wrong response is "I wonder what he thinks of me?" The correct response is "What is God doing in his life; and what can I do to help?"

DEGREES OF FRIENDSHIP

The type of relationship you can have with an individual depends upon the degree of friendship which has been established between you. Bill Gothard, in his *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts*, has identified four "Levels of Friendship". They are (1) **acquaintance**, (2) **casual friend**, (3) **close friend**, and (4) **intimate friend**. Each level has its distinguishing characteristics. Each level has its accompanying responsibilities for the believer. At each level there are appropriate questions and conversational topics which can be followed. These will help you get to the point of having some kind of spiritual witness without being pushy or offensive or invading someone's privacy.

ACQUAINTANCE

An **acquaintance** is a person with whom you have only occasional contact, sometimes it is only a single contact, such as someone you meet while traveling or who comes to your house to fix the plumbing or washing machine. Think of each contact as a "divine encounter". Your goal at this stage is to see an acquaintanceship develop as far as possible in the time you have.

Be alert to each person you meet. Be cheerful and friendly. Learn the person's name and remember it! Then use his name in conversation once in a while. At this level you are free to ask appropriate general questions which reflect your interest and acceptance. You can ask about his work, his place of residence, his opinion on current affairs (if not too volatile a subject).

You should be a good listener and avoid talking about yourself unless you are asked specific questions. Remind yourself that God has an interest in this person and that you are hoping for an opportunity to discuss spiritual matters.

Some people are more open and outgoing than others. With some, an acquaintance will not

develop further in a single encounter. Other people may be quite willing to talk about themselves and even reveal things of a personal nature even though you are virtually a stranger. In this case, your relationship may develop into a Casual Friendship right away.

CASUAL FRIENDSHIP

A “casual friendship” is based on common interests or activities. A casual friend may be a person at work or someone you know at a club, at church, or on a sports team. At this level you are free to ask some kinds of specific questions based on mutual interests. Your responsibility is to try to recognize how far the Lord has progressed in our friend’s life.

Try to discover your friend’s strong points. As much as possible, *ignore his weak points*. In order to avoid invading privacy, it is important to remember that you are not free to correct someone else’s defects until you have been invited to do so. If he shares problems with you, you can show interest and concern; and this may indicate that you are entering into a Close Friendship with him. At this level, you *can* learn about the hopes and desires your friend has for his life. You can reflect interest and trustworthiness in being his friend. Moreover, you can pray for him and his spiritual needs.

CLOSE FRIENDSHIP

Some people in your life will be “close friends”. A close friendship is based on mutual life goals and long-term interests. You and your friend are beginning to see potential achievement in each other’s life. There is freedom to suggest mutual improvement projects, and your goal should be to be creative in helping your friend develop appropriate projects for spiritual advancement.

In a close friendship you will discuss specific goals and will assume a personal responsibility for the development of such goals. You can be creative in designing projects and trying to build your friend’s interest for projects. You

should be alert to portions of the Bible which can encourage or guide your friend.

In a close friendship there will usually be more discussion of personal problems and conflicts. When a person begins to discuss his deficiencies with you, he is opening up private areas of his life. Sometimes (not always) this indicates a call for help. Learn and use Biblical techniques to deal with sensitive issues. Avoid giving advice apart from divine viewpoint.

INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP

You will not have many intimate friends, and any intimate friendship is by its nature quite intense. Some married couples are intimate friends, others are not. An intimate friendship is based on open honesty, discretion, and a commitment to the development of each other’s character and spiritual potential. There is the freedom to discern the basic causes of character deficiencies or sin patterns and to work together for solutions.

You will help your friend through trials and sorrows. You will assume personal responsibility for his reputation. You are sensitive to traits and attitudes which need improvement in both of you. You will work to build interest in correcting deficiencies, and you will search the Scriptures together for solutions. Intimate friends are committed to faithfulness, loyalty, and availability.