

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

**GOD'S WONDERFUL WAY OF LIFE
COMPILATION
BOOK 1**

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INTRODUCTION

Jerry and Mary White at the beginning of their book “Friends and Friendship” write:

Loneliness...Pain...Crying...all are vestiges of broken friendships. Yet no-one can have a meaningful existence without love and friendship. They are the substance of our emotional life (Friends and Friendship, p.10).

In the Church of God we talk a lot about the subject of love but in my experience we look at it in a rather superficial way. Over the years I have read many excellent books that cover friendship and relationship skills in great detail. One thing that I still find in the church today is the lack of good, detailed material on relationship skills in sermons and church literature.

When you look through the material on christian living in the average christian bookstore on subjects like how to build and maintain friendships, communication skills, marriage and how to raise children in great detail, counselling skills and helping those who need help in life you begin to comprehend the superficiality that is there in what the church provides on christian living that I hope can be reversed in time.

I have embarked on writing this book as a means of collating the very best material that I have come across on these subjects that I hope one day can be more readily available in the church to help complement the good material that the church already provides in this area.

In this volume “Love and Friendship”, we will look in detail at the subject of what real love and friendship is all about. We will look at such things as how to build and maintain friendships, the qualities of good friends, how to heal wounded friendships, loneliness and shyness, communication skills, right and wrong motives for building friendships, the various levels of friendships, friendship obstacles, how to be a giver and not a taker and how to be a good conversationalist.

As this book is meant to only be a compilation of the best material that I have run across on these subjects, I will be quoting at length from a number of excellent books on this subject of friendship.

To continue this introduction to the subject of love and friendship I would like to continue to quote from Jerry and Mary White’s excellent book “Friends and Friendship”. They write the following:

We desperately need and want deep relationships, but all too often find it difficult to develop that ideal friendship. We all experience brief tastes of deepening friendship, and know more is possible, yet the process of actually developing and deepening those friendships is frustrated by lack of time and mutual interest. When they do develop, we puzzle over how to maintain them, and how to overcome the discord which inevitably occurs in regular interaction...

Many people are lonely. Many are insulated from in-depth interaction of any kind, either by choice or by exclusion. We wish we could say that Christians don't experience this frustration in friendship but we can't. People are lonely in the church as well as in the world...Defining a friend is like trying to define beauty: It's often in the eyes of the beholder...As difficult as [it may be to define] we must attempt to define it in order to talk about it. In a study we developed to aid in this task, we took written surveys of more than 300 married and single men and women...Each were asked to write "a brief definition of a friend." Here are some characteristic replies:

"Someone you can bare your soul to and not be afraid it will get around. Someone who will tell you when your slip is showing. Someone who shares loving concern and tactful truth." (woman, age 31)

"One who knows you well and loves you anyway." (woman, age 66)

"Loyal in hard times, fun to be with and have common interests." (man, age 26)

"A person who understands you, appreciates your views, loyal. A person who has quite a few common interests with you." (man, age 52)

"Someone to share experiences with." (man, age 55)

"Someone who enjoys being around you, accepts you for who you are, and is faithful to you when the chips are down." (man, age 24)

"One who I can share my heart with no matter what is on it and still be accepted for who I am, and vice versa. One who I can be honest with for good or bad. One who I love being with and sharing things with. One who is a good listener." (woman, age 29)

"A friend is someone in whom you can have unlimited trust; they will share with you deeply and honestly. The things shared between you will go beyond opinions and observations." (woman, under 30)

"One who I can share my deepest thoughts, desires and feelings with in confidence. Available 24 hours a day and a faithful warrior." (man, age 29)

"Someone who knows me intimately and is committed to my best under all circumstances regardless of the risks to our relationship." (man, age 31)

"A person I enjoy spending time with and can share my feelings, thoughts and experiences with. The best friends listen and accept me, but will also confront me so I can grow." (woman, age 22)

"Someone you can relate to and trust with what you share." (man, age 23)...

Certain phrases and words appear frequently in the responses revealing the qualities people want most in friendship. Those qualities include loyalty, sharing deeply, keeping

confidences, friendship in spite of faults, mutual interests and common activities...[A good summation of the above qualities to describe a true friend would be the following]:

A friend is a trusted confidant to who I am mutually drawn as a companion and an ally, whose love for me is not dependent on my performance, and whose influence draws me closer to God”(p.11-14).

Josh McDowell opens his wonderful book "The Secret of Loving" with the following story:

Working late one night my concentration was broken by the insistent ring of the telephone.

"Mr McDowell?" An obviously depressed young woman hardly waited for me to respond.

"Mr McDowell, during the last 5 nights I have been to bed with 5 different men. Tonight I just sat alone on the bed after it was over and said to myself, "Is that all there is to it?" Her voice breaking, she concluded, "Please tell me there is something more."

"There is," I replied. "It's called intimacy."

Maybe like that young woman you are asking yourself right now, "Is that all there is?" You thought you were getting a relationship and discovered your date was looking for a night out. You are married and you long for a candlelight dinner, and the best you can get out of your mate is a few grunts as he watches the football game. Maybe you are already separated or divorced and as you look back you ask, "Is that all there is?"

If that is the question you are asking, you are not alone. The search for true love is the theme of most hit songs and runs as an undercurrent through almost every movie. It is the lifeblood of thousands of pop novels consumed by millions of people. Megadollars fuel advertising campaigns built solely on our desire for intimacy. The soaps and sitcoms both reflect and rekindle our dreams...True love remains elusive at best. The best-selling columnist and author, Dr Leo Buscaglia writes:

"We've gone full circle. We've gone into leaving the family, leaving the moral values, leaving all things that are good, the things we call platitudes. We've tried everything - sexual promiscuity, multi-marriages. But we find that all those things have just left us feeling alone and empty. So now we're beginning to look again at those old-fashioned values and to recognise that perhaps there is some truth in them."

You and I know that one of those old-fashioned values is intimacy. Ann Landers had an incredible response when she asked, "Would you prefer snuggles instead of sex?" More than 64 000 out of 90 000 who responded affirmed, "A warm hug or gentle touch is much more important than intercourse." Though I am not convinced that those who responded truly preferred one over the other, those who responded clearly expressed a craving for intimacy in a sexual relationship.

Had a hug today? Then you will agree with Dr Jerome Sherman when he said, "Being human, we do want the warmth, the closeness. It's a basic human desire. Sex in and of

itself is mechanical." Yet is that really true of men as well? Aren't men supposed to be mainly interested in sexual activity?

"The results are accurate," acknowledges Dr Joyce Brothers, nationally recognised psychologist, speaking of the results of Ann Landers' question. "For a long, long time - back to the Victorian era - men and women have had sex in order to get the touching or cuddling. We have a touch hunger and sex is the coin that people pay for affection."

We really know very little about love and sex, don't we? The national divorce rate is but one indicator that we have a long way to go before we unlock the mysteries. Even the specialists in the field acknowledge that.

"Research has hardly even begun to dabble in the problems of love and love affairs," confesses Dr John Money of Johns Hopkins University, a recognised sex and gender specialist. "It's just much easier to talk about sex. But what human beings are really concerned with is love and the human relationship"(p13-16).

Alan Loy McGinnis in his book "The Friendship Factor" makes the following observations about how we prioritise friendship:

As I've watched those who are deeply loved, I've noticed they all believe that people are the basic source of happiness. Their companions are very important to them, and no matter how busy their schedule, they have developed a lifestyle and a way of dispensing their time that allows them to have several profound relationships with people.

On the other hand, in talking with lonely people I often discover that, though they lament their lack of close companions, they actually place little emphasis on the cultivation of friends...

Deep friendship requires cultivation over the years - evenings before the fire, long walks together, and lots of time for talk. It requires keeping the television off so that the two of you can log in with each other...

Why do we seldom relate at such a deep level? Why is there such a shortage of friendship? One simple reason: We do not devote ourselves sufficiently to it. If our relationships are the most valuable commodity we can own in this world, one would expect that everyone everywhere would assign friendship highest priority. But for many, it does not even figure in their list of goals. They apparently assume that love will "just happen".

But of course few of the valuable things in life "just happen". When they happen it is because we recognise their importance and devote ourselves to them. You can have almost anything you want if you want it badly enough. If you want to run the Boston Marathon badly enough you probably can do it. And if you want love you can have that too. It is simply a matter of priorities. Significant relationships come to those who assign them enough importance to cultivate them. So...Assign top priority to your relationships" (p21-22, 24-25).

WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

How would you define friendship? The word friend gets tossed around so much in our world that it's lost a lot of its meaning. It has become a cliché to a fair degree. Friendship in the popular sense is a relationship where there is mutual giving and receiving even if the motive is to gain something in return.

True friendship, on the other hand, is a relationship where there is mutual giving and receiving and the giving is done purely for the good of the friend - NOT to gain something in return.

The secret to happiness is best summed up in the old saying - to love and to be loved. When we have a cause in our life, when we are devoted to something that is bigger than ourselves that is good, such as God's calling of supporting His work and giving and making people happy, we will not want for happiness in our life. Christ said it is more blessed to give than to receive and it's only through living the way of give that we will be truly happy.

Also, we need to be loved - to have good friends who aren't just fair-weather friends. We all yearn for a sense of belonging - to have friends who make us feel like we belong. We all want a wide variety of casual friends and acquaintances of both sexes and different age groups as well as a number of friends who we can spend regular time with and who also seek our company even when the chips are down. Being loved more often than not is a direct by-product of loving others.

Whenever we lack in any of these areas - of loving others or being loved through friendship there will be a certain emptiness there. There is a lot of loneliness out there, even in the church, and we have a responsibility as Christians to extend our hands in friendship to those we can help and do our little bit in adding to their sense of belonging. We really can be like a strong family in the church but it's up to all of us to individually as a committee of one do our part in adding to that sense of community in the church.

WHAT IS LOVE?

We've tried to define friendship; now let's try and define love. If someone who had had a pretty mixed up life started to come along to church for the first time and they asked you the question "What is Love?" how would you answer them? How would you convey the meaning of probably the most important fruit of God's spirit to him or her in a way that they could easily understand?

When I first started receiving literature from the church as a teenager I had a very foggy idea of what love was. The two things which answered this question best to me at the time, was first of all, an explanation of the three Greek words that are translated into the English word love - which most of you know are eros (romantic or erotic love), philia (brotherly love) and agape (the totally committed love of God).

The second thing that helped me to understand what love was a definition that Mr Herbert Armstrong used to use for the word love. To this day, it is still the best definition that I have run across for the word love. He defined love as **AN UNSELFISH,**

OUTGOING CONCERN FOR OTHERS. Now I'd like to break down that definition and have a look at the three aspects of it so we can gain a deeper understanding of this most important fruit of God's spirit.

The first point is that LOVE IS UNSELFISH. It must have unselfish motives. Some people pursue friendships out of selfish motives and take rather than give. Some psychologists maintain that no one ever acts from purely altruistic motives, because we rarely give to a relationship without receiving something in return. We do, however, have control in consciously establishing our motives for friendship.

Love doesn't give in order to get back. It gives purely out of concern to serve the other person. We can put ourselves to the test. Analyze your motives when you give to others your time in friendship, conversation, service and physical things. You may be surprised if you are honest, as I still am at times, just how much we're motivated to do things out of our own interests whether it's being with the people we want to be with or getting physical rewards, friendship or whatever in return back.

Do we give in order to get back favours, friendship, popularity or anything MORE than wanting to give to the other person? If we are, then it's not unselfish. It's what psychologists call need-love as opposed to unconditional love where there are no strings attached. As soon as the need is no longer there, then neither is the person who only gives need-love.

In the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 we read in verse 4 that love does not seek its own. Selfishness is the root of perhaps all improper motives. When we look after our own needs in a friendship, we become selfish and self-centred, focusing on what we alone derive from the relationship. The question we can all ask ourselves is "Am I a giver or am I a taker?"

The second point of Mr Armstrong's definition is that LOVE IS OUTGOING. It must manifest itself in a pattern of good works and not just be good intentions.

In Proverbs 27:5 we read: "Open love is better than love carefully concealed." It's better to actually rebuke someone in a proper spirit when it's needed than to have love and concern that is merely in your heart. Our love can't merely be good intentions. Love can't just be inside our hearts – it has to be outgoing!

In 1 Timothy 6:18 we read the following. Breaking into Paul's commands to Timothy for the physically rich he says "Let them do good, that they may be RICH in good works, ready to give, willing to share." Now what about us? Are we RICH in good works? If I were to ask you to write a list down of all the good works that you had done in the last couple of weeks how many things could you come up with? Could you come up with more than a couple of items?

In Luke 6:32 Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount tells us the following, "But if you love those that love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same."

Here is a real litmus test for a christian. We can ask ourselves some hard questions – Is our love merely limited to our own small circle of friends? Is it limited to giving only when it is convenient to us? If it is, then Christ quite bluntly says here that our conversion really is no better than that of the pagans and sinners of the world.

If we have true outgoing love we'll extend ourself beyond our own personal comfort zone and give to those we wouldn't naturally associate with, as well as those who are closest to us.

A friend of mine down south has bemoaned to me a few times that singles down his way never get asked out to Friday night dinners or weekend activities in his church area. As a single, I can relate to that but there are other people who can easily be left out unwittingly like widows, widowers, single parents and so on. Many of us have limitations on what we can do to give to others but what we can do to help create a sense of belonging we should do by welcoming visitors, the elderly, children, new members and looking after anyone else who might be lonely and in need in our midst.

It's perfectly natural for people to associate in smaller groups with people who have similar interests to us. Such smaller groups are needed to get to know others on a more personal level. It's only when these groups become exclusive cliques does it become wrong.

I've heard a lot of people talking about how friendly or cliquey various church areas are over the years and I have made a couple of observations about the friendliness of people and church areas. The first is that friendliness is not a black and white issue. There are varying degrees of friendliness or how deep is your love to paraphrase the Bee Gees. The second observation that I have made is that there are two distinct components to friendliness.

Those two components are the breadth of a person's friendliness (How widely they mix) and the second is the depth of one's friendliness (How deeply you build your friendships as opposed to only taking a rather superficial interest in others). I would encourage all of us, if we want greater unity in the church, to be aware of what we can do to help create a sense of belonging for everyone and do what we can.

We read in Acts 2:44 about the early New Testament church that "all who believed were together and had all things in common". We see that they had a burning desire to spend as much time together as possible and look out for one another's needs. Is that true of us?

I have met a lot of wonderful people in the church who were givers and have learned the lesson that true christians extend their giving beyond their own personal comfort zone.

On the other hand, in my personal contact with people in the church over the years and from what we've seen with the breakup and scattering of God's people, I would say that the majority of people haven't understood this lesson and the reason why they haven't goes back to point one – the love and friendship that they gave was based only on what they could get out of it. It gets

back to motive. They gave only when it was convenient to them. We have to be careful that we don't fall into the same trap.

We all have a certain emptiness in our hearts that longs to be filled. So many have fallen into the trap of pursuing every doctrinal novelty and self-interest under the sun in order to fill that void when it is only the love of God **APPLIED** in our lives that will fill that emptiness. In fact, there is great pleasure in planning and acting on doing good things and being kind to others.

In a sermon on the subject of doing random acts of kindness many years ago the minister mentioned an act of kindness that sort of doubles as a practical joke which I've always wanted to try out. I remember the first time I tried it out. I was coming back from Redcliffe and I got to the toll gate of the Gateway Bridge, pulled out \$4 and said to the toll attendant that I'm paying for myself and the guy behind me. I drove off with my eyes glued to the rear view mirror just waiting to see the reaction. Talk about confusion! It took ages before the driver behind me finally accepted it and drove off.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:2 that we are to walk in love. Someone I know recently made the comment that the word walk here could be better translated "lifestyle". Our lifestyle should be that of outgoing acts of love.

Now, the third and final part of Mr Armstrong's definition is that LOVE IS ALSO BEING CONCERNED. What do we mean concern? Our concerns or cares are those things we think about. Are our minds focused just on our daily pursuits and having fun or do we think a lot about others?

I remember fondly the times when I was a teenager when I used to visit our elder, Jack Clune's sister, Isabel Weight, while she was still alive. I was just new to the church and looking for anyone who liked to talk about the things of God and she was a real friend at the time. Even though she suffered terribly from emphysema I would be absolutely amazed me by how she'd be constantly be thinking about others and how they were doing compared to the carnal teenager that I was at the time.

We read in Matthew 15:19-20 about how what comes out of the heart defiles a man referring to all sorts of wrong attitudes which lead to sinful actions. The process works for good also. If we think about giving to others a lot more then we are more likely to act on those thoughts. As I said before, planning good things to brighten up people's day or helping out others can give great pleasure and be a lot of fun at times.

Mr Armstrong used to describe the two broad ways of life in the Bible very simply as the way of give and the way of get. Are we just living for ourselves or is giving to God and to others a big part of what drives us in our life?

In an article that was written under the name of Joseph Tkach during the days in which he pushed the concept that we are one family in the church, the following was written about what love is:

"From a kind word, an encouraging note, a thoughtful gesture, an ear to listen, or an expression of appreciation, to a sacrifice of time, energy or convenience, love is a way of life. And it is a way of life that is not out for recognition. It does

what it does because it feels it. And it feels it because it believes in it, and is led by God's spirit that comes from the God who is love."

THE QUALITIES OF A TRUE FRIEND

What are the qualities of a true friend? In the definitions that people gave before in the survey on friendship a number of common qualities were brought out. I'd like to cover in detail seven of those qualities. No one is perfect and yours truly is certainly no exception to that. The best we can do is do our best to live up to each of these seven qualities and use them to gauge how much we give in friendship from time to time. So let's have a look at them.

1) LOYALTY. The first quality of a good friend that we'll look at is loyalty. It's that quality where someone will stick to their friends through thick and thin, good times and bad. Jerry and Mary White make these comments about loyalty:

We all want friends who are loyal to us, friends we can trust and rely on. No one wants a fair weather friend who disappears at the first sign of trouble or personal inconvenience...

Few things destroy a friendship more quickly than a broken confidence. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city"(Prov.18:19). The scriptures teach that true loyalty is not common. "Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?"(Prov.20:6)

A mainstay of loyalty is unbroken confidences. We must not violate what others tell us. Open sharing needs the security of private communication..."If you argue your case with a neighbour, do not betray another man's confidence, or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation"(Prov.25:-9-10). "If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost"(1 Cor. 13:7, The Living Bible) (Friends and Friendship, p.14-16).

Alan Loy McGuinnis in his book "The Friendship Factor" makes this comment about keeping confidences:

The cardinal rule for every person who desires deeper relationships is: Learn to zipper your lip. Nothing causes people to clam up and to abandon your friendship more quickly than to discover that you have revealed a private matter(p.114).

I'd like to quote again from "Friends and Friendship" for Jerry and Mary White for more of their comments about loyalty:

Loyalty means defending your friend. When someone hurts, criticises or gossips about your friend, what do you do? One of the loneliest remarks the apostle Paul made is found in 2 Timothy 4:16. "At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me." We all need a spokesman and defender - not one who abandons the truth in our defence, but one who speaks the truth in love...

Loyalty means supporting a friend in difficulty as well as prosperity. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov.17:17). We need friends desperately at times of problems and difficulty...Adversity reveals the depth of friendship. [Who's had the situation where you've gone through a trial and nobody has been there to support you through it?]

Adversity is not just those catastrophic happenings of life and death when many rally around, but also those deep waters that only a few know we are passing through. Friendship really deepens when we pass through those difficulties together (Friends and Friendship, p16-17).

2) SHARES DEEPLY. The next quality of a good friend is deeply sharing one's life with another. It involves openly sharing one's life with another and spending plenty of quality time with another. Jerry and Mary White write the following about the quality of being open and deeply sharing one's life with another:

What does it mean to share deeply? Each individual has his own understanding of what constitutes deep sharing. To some it means revealing our innermost thoughts, feelings and fears. As one woman said, "The conversations can be made up of statements about personal feelings that you aren't sure of and need reassurance about, even if they sound totally nonsensical." To others, it is primarily mental - the sharing of philosophical issues. To still others it is venting anger and feelings and frustrations not normally accepted in public.

True open sharing does not spring up overnight. It must be developed through time and experience. Although each individual reveals his inner self in various degrees according to his personality and background, certain fundamentals of the sharing process are common. These are listening, speaking, accepting and understanding - the four key ingredients of intimate and honest communication.

[A] LISTENING. Listening is essential to communication between friends. "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (Jam.1:19)...We [should] open our ears and alert our minds to both words and meaning. We listen instead of talk. It's been said, "God gave us two ears and one mouth, so we can listen twice as much as we talk." That's good advice.

Listening is hard work. It takes concentration and patience. Too often we listen only enough to figure out when our turn will come to talk. Our nervous "uh-huhs" and shifting eyes reveal our impatience. We've all experienced this disinterest from someone "listening" to us, and can painfully recall the sense of rejection we felt. Yet, we do it to others. We need to listen to what is said(the words), the message conveyed (the ideas or thought), it's meaning (what is behind the ideas or thoughts) and the message behind the words (listening between the lines) (Friends and Friendship, p17-18).

Alan Loy McGuinnis in his book "The Friendship Factor makes these comments about the quality of listening:

The surest way to be interesting is to be interested, and the intensity of your interest can be measured by the way your body talks. Eye contact is one of the

surest indicators. If you are staring at the wall or glancing at other people, the speaker gets a strong impression of how little you care about the conversation. On the other hand, if you look a man directly in the eye as he speaks, you will be amazed at how quickly he gets the compliment.

After a visit with Gordon Cosby, the eminently successful pastor of the Church of the Saviour in Washington D.C., someone said: "It's amazing the way that man listens to you. When you talk to him he looks you squarely in the eye. He seems to shut out all other interests and hang on every word you utter. It is flattering to have a man give you that much of his attention" (p112).

Not only do good listeners listen with their eyes and body language but they also dispense advice sparingly. Sometimes in our overzealous desire to help someone we offer too much advice, and I've been guilty here, when all the person really wants is to get something off their chest and have someone really listen and be encouraging. By listening you help them get the problem outside themselves and on the table and the issues become clear and they are able to arrive at their own conclusion.

Another point about listening I'd like to mention is that good listeners complete the loop. I quote again from Alan Loy McGuinnis' book "The Friendship Factor" for his comments on being a good listener:

Here is an example of an uncompleted loop. Husband and wife are driving along the beach. She says:

"What a beautiful sunset."

His response? Silence. Absolute quiet. What would she make of that?

[Though there is certainly a time for silence], silence can be described as negative feedback. Like a failed monitoring system on a moon rocket, it tells you something is wrong, but it doesn't go very far toward telling you what.

So we need to get into the habit of completing the loop. [We do this by consistently acknowledging what is said to us rather than just being silent towards the person who is speaking to us]...

To listen attentively to another is to pay the highest compliment. You are showing that you value what the person is thinking.

A young woman was taken to dinner one night by William E. Gladstone, the distinguished British statesman, and the following night by his equally distinguished opponent. Asked later what impression these two celebrated men had made on her, she replied thoughtfully: "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But after sitting next to Mr Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England"(p.115-116).

For the second key ingredient of open and honest communication I quote again from "Friends and Friendship" by Jerry and Mary White:

[B] SPEAKING is important too, but it should be done in moderation, with thought and concern. "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame" (Prov.18:13). Proverbs 25:11 tells us that "a word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

Our friends do want to know what we think of their sharing, but we need to respond wisely. Even if the friendship is strong, we still are not free to say just anything. We bear a heavy responsibility for how we speak - "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit"(Prov. 15:4). We need to be both wise and honest in what we say.

Don't be afraid to speak, but don't be afraid of silence either. We don't need a constant flow of chatter to make someone feel like a friend. Sometimes we don't hear our friends because we are speaking too much...There is a time for speaking and a time for listening. Wisdom is knowing when to do which. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen"(Eph.4:29) (p18-19).

Alan Loy McGuinnis makes the following comments about be open in our friendships with others:

People with deep and lasting friendships may be introverts, extroverts, young, old, dull, intelligent, homely, good-looking; but the one characteristic they always have in common is openness. They have a certain transparency, allowing people to see what is in their hearts...

When Betty Ford became America's first lady, she soon became noted for her candour. When asked by pushy reporters her views on various topics, she gave them forthrightly. Once, when a newsman even went so far as to ask how often she slept with her husband, she replied, "As often as I can" ...

In his book *The Transparent Self*, psychologist Sidney Jourard relates some illuminating studies about the subject of self-disclosure. His major finding is that the human personality has a natural, built-in inclination to reveal itself. When that inclination is blocked and we close ourselves to others, we get into emotional difficulties...

Why, then, do we so often hide behind masks? We vacillate between the impulse to reveal ourselves and the impulse to protect ourselves with a blanket of privacy. We long to be both known and remain hidden...

A [common] reason for our masks is our fear of rejection. To take the step of self-disclosure and then have a friend walk away can be devastating. Many of us have constructed elaborate facades because we are convinced that if people ever saw us as we see ourselves, the sight would repel them...[More often than not], self-disclosure has the opposite effect. When people take off their masks, others are drawn to them.

Some of us go to great lengths to hide our humble origins when honesty about them would disarm those around us and pull them into a more intimate connection with us (*The Friendship Factor*, p27-30).

On the other hand most of us flee from persons who tell us their entire life-stories with intimate details in the first hour of acquaintance. Try to keep a balance. Gauge how much you open up by their response and be sensitive to others when you can see they want to share something. I like to talk a lot myself but I try to train myself to watch the other person's mouth and body movements and take a break from speaking when I can sense the other person wants to share something. It's very easy to interrupt someone when they're speaking and I've seen it done countless times so strive not to interrupt others.

Be sensitive to knowing when your friends have something they want to share with you or get off their chest and let them explain it fully and completely without interruption, except where appropriate in the conversation.

Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments about how open a person Jesus was when He was on earth:

One of the most...distinctive aspects of the life of Jesus was his remarkable transparency. Unlike most gurus who have remained aloof from their disciples, he lived out his life squarely in their midst. Breaking bread with them, praying with them, weeping with them, helping them resolve their quarrels, he was intensely involved in their common life.

Again and again he opened himself to them, and when they did not understand him, he was grieved. To be sure that the disciples understood this deliberate self-disclosure, he told them: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you"(John 15:15) (The Friendship Factor, p37-38).

For the third ingredient of open and honest communication I quote again from "Friends and Friendship":

[C. ACCEPTANCE] Fostering deep sharing requires large doses of accepting the other person. We communicate our lack of acceptance with our eyes, our posture, our facial expressions and our tone of voice. Do you remember the last time you spoke to someone who made you feel like you had bad breath? It's such an uncomfortable feeling that we want to get away as quickly as possible (Friends and Friendship, p19).

Acceptance is a willingness to associate with others - a willingness to be friendly no matter what. When we accept someone we, through our words and body language, show that we really are genuinely interested in that person. We can ask ourselves, "Do I have the christian quality of liking and being interested in ALL people?"

Acceptance is not approval, nor is it agreement with everything someone does or says. Though there is a time for appropriate confrontation, we should be tolerant of others and allow them to make their own choices without trying to co-erce them to do what we want. To try and force them to do what we want shows we don't accept

someone just as they are. We can gently give advice but we shouldn't try and force people to see or do things the way we want them but let them be their own unique person as much as we can. We can accept people without condoning their sins by realizing our own need for mercy for our own sins. We can slam the door on intimate sharing if we don't extend this kind of acceptance.

For the fourth ingredient of open and honest communication I quote again from "Friends and Friendship":

[D. UNDERSTANDING] Speaking and accepting will fail, however, without a root of understanding. Hearing the words and even the message must be understood. It has been said that "Loneliness is not in being alone, for then ministering spirits come to soothe and bless - loneliness is to endure the presence of one who does not understand."

If you have a godly concern for your friends you will receive insight from God. We need this insight to be a true friend. We may not be able to share every feeling and hurt that friends have, but we can accept them and try to understand. This forms a foundation for a strong, sharing friendship (p20-21).

3) FUN TO BE WITH. The third quality of a good friend is being fun to be with. Jerry and Mary White make the following comments about good friends being fun to be with:

Although having fun is somewhat lighter than the two weighty characteristics of loyalty and deep sharing, it is important. Deep friends do not sit around all day defending one another, sharing deep emotional feelings and engaging in philosophical discourse. They have fun together. They laugh, kid and enjoy doing things together. What a dreary relationship it would be if fun were not a part of the friendship!

Do you have friends who will call on the spur of the moment and say, "Come on over and go to the park with us for a picnic lunch?" Not only are you not upset because they didn't give you two days notice, but you drop everything and go - and have a great time. You enjoy being with them. We rarely consider the requests of good friends an imposition on our time. And they don't get offended if we can't respond to their invitations.

As you develop a friendship, look for common interests - tennis, reading, sewing, hiking, decorating, cars, gardening. Think of creative things to do together - plays, sports, a picnic at the lake, a two-day vacation with another family [and so on. The list is endless of things you can do together with others] (Friends and Friendship, p21)

I once gave a speech at a speech club entitled "The Kingdom of God is a Party" based on a wonderful book by Tony Campolo where I described how to make life fun for others which I'd like to quote:

"Picture yourself in Jerusalem amongst the thousands of feastgoers going up to Mount Zion. Once a year all the people of Israel were to bring a tenth of all their earnings to Jerusalem. Imagine it, a tenth of the whole country's income! And it wasn't to be used

for mission work or for charity or even for the Temple. It was to be used for a GIGANTIC PARTY! - [a wonderful celebration every year called the Feast of Tabernacles.]

The celebration on Mount Zion was anything but a bore. There was lots of food and plenty to drink. There was dancing, singing and exuberant celebration everywhere...No wonder David when he was young could sing, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let's go up to the house of the Lord.'" What kid wouldn't be thrilled to go to a gigantic party? Not even a spoiled brat would have said, "I don't want to go! Church is boring!"

Everyone was invited to the party from widows who hadn't had a fun night out for a year to poor kids who couldn't have come up with the ticket for whatever might have been the ancient equivalent of Disneyland (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p25-27).

If you're wondering what all this partying was about - this annual party, which we still keep each year in the church, is all about the Kingdom of God or to use Mr Armstrong's words, the Wonderful World Tomorrow. It has been planned by God to be a foretaste of what he has in store for all of us when His kingdom comes in all of its fullness.

I use the term "party" loosely in describing the Kingdom of God. The reason I use term party is because it springs to mind an immediate image to our minds, doesn't it? When we think of a good clean party we think of fun, excitement, good times and something to be really looked forward to and that's one of the many things God's kingdom will be.

The church as Mr Armstrong used to say is the Kingdom of God in embryo so the way we live now should be a foretaste and reflective of the way of life of the Wonderful World Tomorrow.

With that as background I want to illustrate a very simple but wonderful principle, an attitude of life, that when we live by it will greatly enhance our quality of life, and not only ours, but all those who we come in contact with - and that simple principle is to **MAKE LIFE FUN FOR OTHERS!**

Now I don't want to promote the misconception that we should be smiling and happy all the time but I do want to show us how we can all help make life fun for others in our families, at work and in our lives in general.

The way we live now is a powerful witness to the people of the world as to what God's way of life is all about. The way they view God's way can be either dull and boring or fun and fulfilling by the way we live our lives.

To start off with, let's look at the family. One of the purposes of the family is to provide each other's emotional needs and not only to share each other's burdens but also to share each other's joy and fun times. Though sadly, too many are not, the family should be a haven in a heartless world.

In a world where people live on tiptoe as they play roles that require them to please people who may not like them, the family is supposed to be a setting in which they can relax and be themselves (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p88).

The joy of a family should be first above everything else in a family. The family should eat together if at all possible. Meal time should be an unhurried time of sharing together and learning from each other. I remember reading a story about a family in which each family member had an obligation to share something funny that happened during that day. When they got together at meal time they knew they were in for a good time. Meal time was party time at their house. Every family member was made to feel that their contribution was important (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p93).

Telling and re-telling the cute and funny things that have happened creates a sense of belonging and a sense of shared history. It is part of what makes people feel their importance in the family fun (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p98).

One minister I know once asked the dads in the church when he gave a sermon on family unity the question, "Fathers, are you fun to be with?" The more your kids enjoy being with you, the closer the bond you'll create with your kids and the more willing they'll be willing to follow your example.

The book of Proverbs says, "The sweetness of lips increases learning." We can say the same basic things to people and have two different results based purely on the way we package what we say. When we talk to others in our conversation or when we're teaching others, including our kids, we should try and make what we're saying as enjoyable as possible. If we make what we say interesting and fun to listen to people will enjoy it and learn from it more.

One thing I feel parents should do with their kids and we all should do with each other more is to dream together and talk more about the things we're looking forward to most about the World Tomorrow. I feel that if a lot more young people in the church thought about it more and it was a lot more real to them and they were really excited and looking forward to it then they'd value what they have in the church more. If they realize it's not automatic that they're going to be a resurrected God being with God's powers when the Kingdom comes soon then they'd probably make a lot more effort living God's way to the fullest and not just half-heartedly.

Caring and commitment are the pillars of every good marriage but the main reason why romance is so popular and talked about is because it's the fun part of marriage. Just like any of the ways to make life fun for others, to romance your fiancée, husband or wife takes thoughtfulness to find out what they like and consider fun and some creativity to come up with those ideas and follow through with them. All those little fun things that are special between two people can really help bond them much closer together.

When I use the term fun I don't just mean humour. Humour is a big part of it but fun can mean anything from light-hearted conversation to deep, meaningful conversation to talents we can share with others that they can enjoy.

A classic example of this fun loving attitude toward work is the example of a former president of one of America's top colleges. Each summer John Coleman would take a job as a garbage collector in a town where he was unknown. He brought something special to the job. He brought a colourful array of stories to tell his co-workers, he taught them how to sing on the job and he taught them clever ways of stirring those uppish people who treat garbage collectors like trash. This college president-come-garbage collector taught his new friends how to make their work day into a party(The Kingdom of God is a Party, p108).

Even when imprisoned the early apostles were able to create a party atmosphere to the bafflement of their wardens and fellow prisoners when they prayed and sang praises to God...Undoubtedly this celebrative lifestyle was part of what made early Christianity so infectious...Whatever the church may have gained or lost since then the loss of that joyful spontaneity and the loss of that first love can be ill afforded. It is a big part of providing what Jesus called "the abundant life"(The Kingdom of God is a Party, p113-114).

After the blessings and victories which God had given Israel David led the people in a dance that may well have been a combination of break dancing, the jive and the bunny hop. 2 Samuel 6:16 talks about "King David leaping and dancing before the Lord"(The Kingdom of God is a Party, p65-66).

To put it in the vernacular David really got down and this is probably one of the reasons why God called him a man after my own heart.

This energizing joy that comes from God as one of the fruits of the spirit makes us into people who can't help share our laughter and fun. I remember reading about a couple of practical jokes one man likes to play on people in busy elevators. Both involve turning around and facing the people instead of the door as we're conditioned to do. When the elevator doors would close he'd say "Now I suppose you're all wondering why I called you here today" just to break the ice and another time he mentions where he got into one of those express elevators at the World Trade Centre in New York with a whole bunch of sombre businessmen he smiled and said to them "We're going to be travelling together for quite a while you know. What do you say we all sing?" The reaction he got was wonderful. By the time they got to the 50th floor they were all laughing and singing "You are my sunshine." That was his way of giving them something and making their day(The Kingdom of God is a Party, p118-119).

A misconception that one can get from talking about the idea that the Kingdom of God is a party is that we should be smiling and happy all the time. There can be some who suggest we have no right to be sorrowful which is rubbish. There's a balance to be found in everything. Christians are allowed to cry. Indeed the sensitivities that come from caring for others make us prone to tears and feeling the hurts of others. What is different about our sorrow is it doesn't lead us to despair as those who don't have hope. We should empathise for what others go through but also we should be positive and help others enjoy life to the max and make the most of it (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p125-127).

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish existentialist philosopher, understood well the notion that the joyfulness and celebration that go with a good party are usually traits inherent in the partygoers own personality. Partying, as Kiekergaard points out, can be an

attitude toward life that one carries into the work place and which transforms that setting into something that tastes of the Kingdom of God.

In describing what an ideal Christian is like, he presents a person whom he calls "The Knight of Faith". This man, says Kiekergaard, looks like a "tax collector". There is nothing special about him. As he comes home from work, he thinks of the cherry pie his wife has baked for him and how much he will enjoy it. With deep appreciation he breathes the air. He experiences everything that an ordinary person might experience, but he does so in an extraordinary way. The Knight of Faith is resigned to whatever life might bring. With childlike anticipation, he smiles benevolently at the world and accepts its wonder. He lives with a sense of gratitude and this makes him a man to be envied (The Kingdom of God is a Party, p107).

There is a time to be sober and a time to have fun and there is a time to work and a time to play but wherever we are, if we take on the attitude of making life fun for others we point beyond these limited signs of the Kingdom to the great party that is on the way.

4) STIMULATING. The fourth quality of being a good friend is being stimulating to our friends emotionally and mentally. Jerry and Mary White make these comments about this quality:

Each individual is unique. Because we are not alike, we stimulate each other mentally and emotionally. As iron sharpens irons, so one man sharpens another"(Prov.27:17). A friend should stimulate us to new ways of thinking, to personal growth, and to spiritual development. Have you ever noticed that some relationships drag you down and depress you?

We should stimulate others to their best in life, so they can look back and say that they were enriched by our friendship, rather than bored and mentally dried up by it.

Often, such a vitalising friendship begins out of some practical or particular need such as a problem, a mutual interest or a common objective or activity. To continue a relationship, it then must grow through mutual stimulation. Consequently, people of similar intellectual ability, social status or employment often develop friendships(Friends and Friendship, p22).

We should have a broad range of interests so we have more to share in conversation with others and a wholehearted love of learning. The more we know about life and the wonderful world around us the more of a variety of interesting things we have to share and enjoy in conversation with others. I find it a real buzz being with people who have lots of knowledge and experiences to share. I get a real kick out of being sharpened up like that.

Being in God's church we should be excited about talking about spiritual things. Do we still have our first love or has the world and it's affairs dulled us so much that we rarely talk about those things? Are we excited about talking about God's way of life in practical terms, what's happening in the Work, what's taught in sermons and our spiritual battles? Do we open up to each other about overcoming and growing and our

battles against sin? Do we let our imaginations go wild and talk to each other about all those wonderful little things that we're looking to in the World Tomorrow and beyond that when we take on the whole universe? Let's stimulate each other mentally and stir each other up to love and good works(Heb.10:24).

5) ENCOURAGING. Quality number five is to be encouraging. Jerry and Mary White make these comments about this godly quality:

We need encouragement when we're discouraged, when we're under stress, when we've done a job well - in short, all the time. Encouragement gives strength, approval, reinforcement and courage. It can enable us to do things we never thought possible.

Encouragement can take several forms: appreciation for personal characteristics[or a job well done], sympathy in times of distress or sorrow, [a compliment, a thank you card], support to accomplish something difficult or personal presence in time of need.

God considers this quality so vital in human relationships that He established it as one of the spiritual gifts. "If it is encouraging, let him encourage..."(Rom.12:8). He also commands us in Hebrews 3:13 to "encourage one another daily" (Friends and Friendship, p80).

On the quality of encouragement Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments:

[Dale] Carnegie capsulizes it this way: "Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise" ... Affirmation merely for the sake of making another person happy can be a most pleasant activity...(p96)

Compliments cost nothing, yet there are those around us who would do anything to be praised for something. The pioneer American psychologist William James said: "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Note his choice of words. He did not speak of the "hope" or "desire". He said "craving".

Dale Carnegie says of the desire for praise: "The rare individual who honestly satisfies this heart-hunger will hold people in the palm of his hand and even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies."

Gandhi inspired millions of people to go beyond their native limits and to accomplish unheard-of feats. Louis Fischer, one of Gandhi's most important biographers, gives a clue to the Indian leader's genius for inspiring people: "He refused to see the bad in people. He often changed human beings by regarding them not as what they were but as though they were what they wished to be, and as though the good in them was all of them" (The Friendship Factor, p99-100).

In choosing to give or withhold affirmation, we have an amazing amount of control over another person's self-esteem. On this point McGuinnis says the following:

[In describing her marriage to Charles Lindbergh, Anne Morrow, one of America's most popular authors] gives a clue to the success of her career. Her husband believed in her

to an extraordinary degree. She says: "To be deeply in love is, of course, a great liberating experience that frees...Ideally, both members of a couple in love free each other to new and different worlds. I was no exception to the general rule. The sheer fact of finding myself loved was unbelievable and changed my world, my feelings about life and myself. I was given confidence, strength and almost a new character. The man I was to marry believed in me and what I could do, and consequently I found I could do more than I realised"(The Friendship Factor, p100-101).

In his book "The Healing Art of Encouragement", David Alcock says the following things about encouragement:

"Encouragement encompasses all the behaviours in these illustrations. It's the forgiving attitude of the prodigal son's father and the pat on the head by Ward Cleaver that demonstrates acceptance and helps us develop and grow. It's the stimulation to action by General Joshua and the urging and inspiring of Paul and the athletic coach to produce our potential. It's the nurturing and discipline loving mothers use to point us in the right direction. And it's the building of confidence by Jesus who helps us to recognise our strengths instead of focusing on weaknesses. It is not blind acceptance of any behaviour, or phony compliments for every action, or a patronising pat on the back without regard for a person's real feelings.

When others encourage us, we feel good about ourselves. We feel good about the encourager. We are willing to try new things and our confidence increases. Encouraged people are effective people. They have positive self-esteem and expect success in the tasks they undertake. They tend to have positive relationships with others and can concentrate on helping others rather than on their own personal inadequacies. Furthermore, encouraged people are the best encouragers of others(The Healing Art of Encouragement, p23).

If one can cut through the initial awkwardness and is able to compliment and encourage others on a regular basis it can be a very rewarding experience for both the giver and recipient. It is so easy to be critical and find fault in others and it is a rare person indeed who gives more encouragement than criticism.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 we read, "Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

When we've gone through certain trials and tribulations in our life and have been encouraged by God we can more deeply understand and encourage those who have go through similar trials. This is part of the reason He allows those in the church to go through lots of difficult trials – so there's members of God's family who can relate to virtually every kind of problem when all who have ever lived are resurrected and given their chance for salvation.

On the quality of empathy David Alcock makes the following comments:

Empathy is a tall order. Empathising is feeling with another person. It is entering [their] world and sharing [their] experiences. We may share excitement or distress, but we understand what [they go] through. It is easiest to empathise with someone undergoing an event that we have already experienced. But sometimes we must relate to people whose lives are very different from our own. Sometimes we must empathise with someone undergoing an experience we will never have personally. Such is the case with any husband who tries to understand the feelings of his pregnant wife. And sometimes we will fail miserably at our attempts to empathise. But this doesn't excuse us from trying...

Paul tells us..."Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"(Rom.12:15). Paul advises encouragers to recognise the emotional states of others and join with them in both their positive and negative emotional experiences. He also suggests that we should be willing to share in the life conditions of others to show our acceptance of them. This is perhaps a hard saying, but one that demonstrates empathy to those who are struggling...

Empathy is best communicated through active listening. The most effective way to demonstrate that we really understand is by reflecting to the speaker the feelings and issues we have heard him communicate. Reflection is simply capsulizing the speaker's message in a brief statement. These empathic responses should rephrase the speaker's communications in the most sincere and concise manner possible...As you're listening to a person sharing [their] emotions, be careful to refrain from telling [them] how [they] should feel. There are no shoulds or shouldn'ts with feelings, they just are. You may not understand another's emotions, but don't deny or ignore them...(p49-52)

Proverbs 25:11 states: "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Compliments certainly fit this description. They make us feel valued and appreciated. They motivate us. They are encouraging. Jesus was quite a complimenter. He was especially fond of recognising the faith displayed by others. [To the Roman centurion who asked him to only say the word rather than come back to his place to heal his servant Jesus said] "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel"(Luke 7:9)...

Researchers have found that we are most likely to compliment the performance of others or their appearance. However, the most valued and meaningful compliments are those few which tell us something nice about our personality. Encouraging remarks about who we are as individuals are very gratifying because they reassure us that we're OK because of who we are, not what we do. Unfortunately, these are the rarest type of compliments given in our society(The Healing Art of Encouragement, p57-58).

Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments on the art of affirmation:

The art of affirmation is enhanced if we learn to praise when it is not expected...Sir Henry Taylor in his...book "The Statesman" ...[wrote] "Applaud a man's speech at the moment when he sits down and he will take your compliment as exacted by the demands of common civility; but let some space intervene, and then show him that the merits of his speech have dwelt with you when you might have been expected to have forgotten them, and he will remember your compliment for a much longer time than you have remembered his speech"(The Friendship Factor, p98).

In conclusion, quality five of being a good friend is to learn to be liberal with your praise of others and be encouraging in every way.

6) SELF-SACRIFICING. The sixth quality being a good friend is to be self-sacrificing – to put the needs of others ahead of your own. This is what love is all about. Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments on how this quality affects our friendships:

Frederick Speakman once wrote a book entitled "Love Is Something You Do". The title is apt, for when we think of love we tend to think of spectacular emotions and heroic acts for the beloved. But little of life is passed in moments of intensity, important as they are. The best relationships are built up, like a fine lacquer finish, with the accumulated layers of many acts of kindness...

The experts at love realise that emotions ebb and flow, and they look for gestures of love even when emotions are on the wane. What's more, they are never content with telling the beloved they care - they show it in small expressions of affection. Mark Twain once said, "Love seems the swiftest, but it is the slowest of all growths" ...

[Rituals are] one of the most universally important ingredients in good relationships. When we stop to think about it, husbands and wives cement their love with many ceremonies: kissing good-night, celebrating anniversaries, giving jewellery, telephoning when they are apart, bringing each other breakfast in bed, taking an evening walk together.

The person sensitive to the deepening of friendship will be on the lookout for similar rituals. A weekly lunch together, a regular golf date or a yearly fishing trip can be important events. Handshakes, hugs, joking and roughhousing - all these gestures put love in the bank and gain interest for the future(The Friendship Factor, p51-54).

Jerry and Mary White add these comments on how this sacrificial attitude impacts our friendships:

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"(John 15:13). A true friend gives sacrificially to meet the pressing needs of another person. Though we may not be asked to give up our lives for our friends, we [should be willing to] expend [our] energy, time and personal resources... regardless of the cost to us.

A striking, biblical example of sacrificial friendship is that of David and Jonathan. As Saul's son, Jonathan was the rightful heir to the throne of Israel. He knew David would be king one day, but he sacrificed his own future by protecting and defending his friend David. He gave up his own chance for the kingdom out of his love for David.

The test of sacrificial friendship is our response to a call for help. Would you...

- set aside personal interest to help?
- cancel a [holiday] to meet a pressing need?
- give money to help even though you have little money yourself?
- spend exhausting time in prayer for a friend?...(p25)

Develop a sensitivity to the needs of your friends. Watch for clues. Perhaps they have mentioned something specific. That often happens in normal conversation - not a

request for help, but just a mention of some need. Maybe the need can be fulfilled by more prayer, or by a special gift or by practical help... (p81)

Self-sacrifice instead of selfishness is the measure of our depth of friendship. "Each of you should look not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others"(Phil.2:4) (Friends and Friendship, p25).

What are your good works? Can you point to them? Can you sit down and make a list of them and get past one or two small items?

An important test of a person's character and depth of love(especially a potential spouse) is whether they are willing to put the needs and desires of someone else ahead of their own when it's inconvenient to them or there is a clash of interests. This willingness to defer to others is a real test of a person's love for others and shows just how much of a friend they really are.

7) SPIRITUALLY CHALLENGING. The final quality of a good friend that I'd like to look at is being spiritually challenging. It's the quality of being a good influence on another spiritually and helping them become more and more like God. Jerry and Mary White make these comments on the importance of being spiritually challenging:

Friends drive you to or from God. Therefore it is vital that many of your friends share a strong view of the Christian life...As a friend, do you stimulate others to a closer walk with God? Do you converse easily on spiritual issues? Do you share common spiritual concerns? The principle of Proverbs 13:20 applies here. "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers." We also read in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."

Our friendships deeply influence our spiritual life. Does this mean that we eliminate new friendships with non-christians? Certainly not. Such friendships are essential. But it does mean that our primary friendships must have a strong spiritual dimension (Friends and Friendship, p26-27).

THE LEVELS OF FRIENDSHIP

Now that we've looked at the qualities that make a good friend let's look at the various levels of friendship. With their comments I quote again from Jerry and Mary White and their book "Friends and Friendship":

Author Rollo May has suggested that most people make five hundred to twenty-five hundred acquaintances each year, but have fewer than seven personal friends. Most of us make a large number of acquaintances in such contexts as shopping, working and church whom we never intend to pursue as friends. We usually accept these people as simply passing through transient relationships with us in the normal course of daily living.

Level One: CASUAL FRIENDS. Out of this fishing pool of acquaintances emerge a number of people whom we begin to draw into another type of relationship. We call this first level of friendship casual friends.

This group consists of people we see regularly in the normal course of living. We know them by their first names and occasionally initiate social contact with them. They include church friends, some co-workers, neighbours, club associates, former classmates and many others. They may number from twenty to a hundred or more depending on the breadth of our social contacts and our aggressiveness in getting to know people. These friends may last for a few months or a lifetime. The more we move and meet new acquaintances the more people we include in this list. The casual friends category may also include a number of relatives with whom we maintain only limited contact...

Casual friends are important [but of themselves]...they rarely satisfy our personal hunger for close and meaningful friendship. A person can be lonely in a crowd of casual friends. We want and need more from our relationships with others.

Level Two: CLOSE FRIENDS...[Often as we associate with others there are people we know who start off as casual friends but due to mutual desire to spend more time with each other become close friends. These friendships only grow where there's mutual effort on the part of both parties to spend time with other.] We each have friends that we see or talk to frequently who fit the category of close, personal friends. These people tend to remain close for many years regardless of age and distance. We continue a regular relationship with them by mutual choice...

The number of friends in this level...[may include many active close friends while a number of other] can be inactive due to distance. The initial close friendships still remain and revive with little effort when opportunity arises.

Level Three: INTIMATE FRIENDS. Even in the category of close friends, however, there are always a few whom we'll want to draw into the inner circle of our lives. [These we call intimate or best friends]...These friends are the few people to whom we pour out our souls, sharing our deepest feelings and hopes. They meet us at our point of deepest need, and we enjoy and look forward to being with them above all others.

These friendships have a lasting quality which develops over months and years. Obviously, we cannot maintain many [intimate] friendships. The respondents to our survey had an average of about four current and active intimate friends; some had only one and others may have as many as six (p33-37).

IMPROPER MOTIVES

Why do we form friendships? Emotionally we long for the intimacy that good friendships provide. The two-way flow of conversation and support we experience in friendships contributes to making life enjoyable for each of us. Our friendships give us the opportunity to learn and live by God's way of give as opposed to the way of get. Sadly though, many people don't learn this lesson in their friendships and have the wrong motives in pursuing friendships with others. Jerry and Mary White make the following comments on this subject:

Not every friendship has pure motives. Some people pursue a friendship from selfish motives and take rather than give. Some psychologists maintain that no one ever acts from purely altruistic motives, because we rarely give to relationship without receiving something in return. We do, however, have control in consciously establishing our motives for friendship. Here are a few of the wrong ones which will poison a friendship...

TO USE POWER...Some people pursue a friendship with another only because he or she is well placed in society or the church..."It's who you know, not what you know." This remark refers to people who can do something to advance our goals. Under the control of this motive, we cultivate friendships with people of power or influence in order to use them at some future time. The pursuit of such relationships is common to the world of business and politics, but no one wants to be used...

At any level, we must guard our motives for associating with people of position. "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited"(Rom. 12:16)...

TO GET MONEY. Money causes people to do many strange things. The Bible speaks much about its use and its dangers. "The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends"(Prov. 14:20). Money acts like a magnet, and it often taints motives. A true friend does not exploit another for financial gain...

SELFISHNESS. Selfishness is the root of perhaps all improper motives. When we look after our own needs in a friendship, we become selfish and self-centred, focusing on what we alone derive from the relationship (Friends and Friendship, p47-49).

The question we can all ask ourselves is "Am I a giver or am I a user?" Do we return the hospitality that others extend to us or are we happy to just be on the receiving end? It's something we've probably all been guilty of at some time and something worth meditating on to see where we can improve in our lives. Are we generous with what we have or do we just settle with being on the receiving end?

MAKING FRIENDS

How do we go about building new friendships? Many of us are shy and have difficulty initiating contact with others. Others of us aren't quite so shy but wish that we had more friends and would like to know how to expand our circle of both casual and close friends.

For their comments on how to start new friendships I quote again from Jerry and Mary White's book "Friends and Friendship":

There are hermit souls that live withdrawn,
in the peace of their self-content.
There are souls like stars that dwell apart,
in a fellowless firmament.
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
where highways never ran.

But let me live in a house by the side of the road
and be a friend to man.
("The House by the Side of the Road", Home Book of Quotations)

This poem reflects a willingness to develop lasting, meaningful relationships as well as an openness to befriending others. New friendships demand a first move from someone. They don't erupt spontaneously, nor do they grow without words and communication. New friendships depend upon one person's willingness to step out and approach another.

But most people do not naturally feel [at ease initiating]...new friendships. Meeting new people, starting conversations and revealing oneself takes effort and can be emotionally draining. Most of us find it easier to wait for someone else to make the first move...

Initiating friendships requires effort and time, but these new friendships pay great dividends. Old friends, like old shoes, keep us comfortable. But we may become too comfortable with old friends, and withdraw from new relationships. If we start falling into this pattern, we should ask ourselves two pertinent questions: "What personal growth and development am I missing by not developing new friendships?" and, "Do others need my friendship even though I may not need theirs?"

As you answer these questions, remember that new friends can keep us growing. They will stimulate us in ways that old friends can't. And others need us; they're lonely and need someone to fill that void. For the same reasons we need friends at various times in our lives, others need friends now. We must never lock others out of our current friendships. Leave the gate open. Welcome others into your life...

We must all face changes in life. And with life's changes comes the necessity - and opportunity - to develop new friendships. These changes and moves start early in life and continue through old age. We enter school, then move on to college or a job, career changes, [we get married as well as our friends and then we have]...geographical relocations...Without the skill to initiate friendships, these changes can bring loneliness and alienation...(p.51-55) [How do we make friends? Here are a few practical suggestions that can help.]

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES. In our busy society, most people seem to be caught up in a whirl of activity and approaching them may seem futile. But many people stay busy to cover their loneliness. Look for opportunities to meet people and develop an acquaintance that may mature into friendship...

You could...attend social events associated with your work and your neighbourhood or sporting clubs. Sometimes Christians avoid such pursuits, but it is on just such occasions that we can broaden our circle of friends to include Christians and non-Christians alike...(p61)

[In 2 Corinthians 6:14 it says] "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."...The word picture is one of mixing in an inseparable fashion. Permanent, inseparable relationships such as marriage fit this scripture not friendship or social interaction. [Such friendships help us keep our balance and in touch with the general concerns and interests of our non-Christians friends and the non-Christian world around us]...(p.167-168)

Make friendly overtures to those around you. Learn to feel comfortable with small talk, or as some have called it, cliché conversation. This is valuable for opening conversation. Discussions about such topics as your name and hometown, [your jobs], the weather, local events or government doings ease the initial clumsy moments of meeting. They can pave the way into a more meaningful discussion or allow the conversation to be dropped without any strain on the part of either person (p61).

In order to get to the deep end you often have to go through the shallow end first when it comes to friendships. Always keep that in mind if you get bored of small talk. Try to find a common interest as quickly as possible to lead into something more interesting or meaningful. Because it's easy to get bored with it, I like to spice up small talk and make it as interesting as possible. This is usually best done with humour.

You can do all sorts of weird and wonderful things to the usual small talk with humour if you put your mind to it. Also, particularly with your closer friends, be honest with your small talk. If someone asks you how you're going don't always say I'm doing good when you're really not. This can lead to an opportunity to get something off your chest when you need it. Continuing on with "Friends and Friendship":

TAKE THE FIRST STEP...Small gestures of interest and concern may result in solid friendship, but someone must make the first move. Friendship needs a starting point - a smile, a greeting, a kind word, an interested question...In the beginning of every relationship someone takes a risk. Even in the best circumstances and with the most congenial people, we take risks as we reach out and extend ourselves. We risk time, embarrassment and rejection. But it is worth the risk if we open doors to friendships.

We also take risks in social situations. A non-skier hazards the slopes and the possibility of spending half his time lying in the snow to be with friends. Others endure fifteen gutter balls to bowl with friends. Some attend classical music concerts even though they know nothing of music, because it is an evening with a friend.

Learn to take relational risks as well as social risks. Don't allow first impressions to prevent you from pursuing further contact. Some people who are not immediately or naturally drawn to each other can be the best of friends(p.62-65).

Be the first to speak. Shake their hand and say "Hello". We show we're friendly (Prov.18:24, KJV) by speaking first. Radiate warmth and positive friendship. Be cheerful even though you may have to work at it. Show a genuine interest in others. Get them talking about themselves and their interests. Believe the best about how others will feel about you and assume they'll like you. They usually will if you show a genuine interest in what they talk about themselves or their interests. If you expect the best you'll have the confidence to make the first move.

If you remember at a party or other social occasions most people are often just as shy and insecure as you are that realization is often all it takes to make you feel more confident and go up and talk to someone. Expect a positive response from others you feel like going up and talking to.

We communicate our interest in others in many ways non-verbally, as well as verbally. The sort of positive feedback that I find encourages me to keep talking are things like someone smiling a lot when I'm talking, laughing when my jokes aren't too bad, good eye contact, the other person having fun and kidding along with me and also asking questions about what I'm talking about. Also, the more that other people give in conversation the more I've got to work with in discussing things related to it. In other words, we feed off each other.

CREATE A SOCIABLE ENVIRONMENT...Small gatherings...such as a meal at home, dessert after church or a bible study are informal social environments which provide a good climate for new relationships to grow. Some people are naturally adept at creating such environments. All of us can do it to some degree. Identify the kind of environment in which you respond well to others, and use it to foster new friendships. Be willing to invite new people to your home and to social activities(p.65).

Make the most of inviting people to you home for dinner. Giving of hospitality in your home is a great way to get to know people and to get them to open up in a way they wouldn't usually open up at a church service. Invite friends out to lunch or catch up after work over a beer or two, or invite them to a football match. Ask if you can drop into their place for a cup of coffee or whatever. The list of social opportunities you can create and spend time with others is endless so make the most of them.

LOOK FOR COMMON INTERESTS. People are often attracted to each other around common interests and activities. As you interact with people reach for the common denominators - children,...hobbies, jobs, [sports], neighbourhood or recreation. When you find them [most the most of them in your conversation with them.]...Branch out to other things as they come up. Be a learner and express interest in their interests. Everyone likes to talk about themselves. Listen and learn...(Friends and Friendship, p.65-66)

[DON'T FORCE FRIENDSHIPS.] Be sensitive to responses. If you perceive hesitancy or withdrawing, hold back and don't strain to make the friendship progress. Everyone needs time and breathing space to feel his way into a new relationship (Friends and Friendship, p64)

It's easy to push yourself on others so be aware of it and try to gauge the pace of the friendship by their response. This is particularly true with someone of the opposite sex you're attracted to. Unintentionally you can be too eager and force the relationship and do some pretty silly things in the process.

Most of us have been there and done that so be careful at all times with this one. Avoid having too high expectations. Don't expect too much too soon. Close friendships take time to develop so adjust your expectations according

RECEPTIVE BODY LANGUAGE

Important in the building of new friendships and helpful to the development of existing friendships is to having positive, receptive body language. For his comments on this subject I quote from Don Gabor's book "How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends":

One of our most important conversational skills doesn't come from our tongue, but from our body. Research has shown that over 70 percent of communication is nonverbal. "Body language," as it is called, often communicates our feelings and attitudes before we speak, and it projects our level of receptivity to others.

Most poor conversationalists don't realize that their non-receptive body language (closed posture, little eye contact, and no smiling) is often the cause of short and unsustainable conversations. We are judged quickly by the first signals we give off, and if the first impressions are not positive and friendly, it's going to be difficult to maintain a good conversation. The following "softening" techniques can make your first impressions work for you, not against you.

S-O-F-T-E-N

A "softener" is a nonverbal gesture that will make people more responsive and receptive to you. Since your body language speaks before you do, it is important to project a positive and friendly image. When you use positive body language, you are already sending the signal: "I'm friendly and willing to communicate, if you are." Each letter in S-O-F-T-E-N represents a specific nonverbal technique for encouraging others to talk with you.

S = Smile

A pleasant smile is a strong indication of a friendly and open attitude and a willingness to communicate. It is a positive, nonverbal signal sent with the hope that the other person will smile back. When you smile, you demonstrate that you have noticed the person in a positive manner. The other person considers it a compliment and will usually feel good. The result? The other person will usually smile back.

Smiling does not mean that you have to put on a phony face or pretend that you are happy all of the time. But when you see someone you know, or would like to make contact with, do smile. By smiling, you are demonstrating an open attitude to conversation.

The human face sends out an enormous number of verbal and nonverbal signals. If you send out friendly messages, you're going to get friendly messages back. When you couple a warm smile with a friendly hello, you'll be pleasantly surprised by positive responses. It's the easiest way to show someone that you've noticed him in a positive way. A smile indicates a general approval toward the other person, and this will usually make the other person feel more receptive and friendly toward you.

O = Open Posture

The letter O in S-O-F-T-E-N stands for open posture. You might not realize that closed posture is the cause of many conversational problems. Typical closed posture is sitting with your arms and legs crossed, and your hand covering your mouth or chin. This is

often called the "thinking pose," but just ask yourself this question: Are you going to interrupt someone who appears to be deep in thought? Not only does this posture give off "stay away" signals to others, but it also prevents your main "signal sender" (your mouth) from being seen by others looking for receptive conversational signals. Without these receptive signals, another person will most likely avoid you and look for someone who appears to be more available for contact. Closed posture discourages others from talking with you, and from approaching you in the first place. Closed posture can spell doom for a conversation already in progress.

To overcome this habitual way of standing or sitting, start by keeping your hands away from your mouth, and keep your arms uncrossed. Crossed arms tend to indicate a defensive frame of mind, and thus one not particularly favorable to outside contact. They can also indicate impatience, displeasure, or judgment—any of which would discourage people from opening up.

Open posture is most effective when you place yourself within communicating distance of the other person—that is, within about five feet. Take care, however, not to violate someone's "personal space" by getting too close, too soon. Of course, if the situation calls for it, the closer, the better! However, be sensitive to the other person's body language, and the verbal and nonverbal signals she sends you. And remember too, there are cultural differences as to defining a comfortable distance for talking between strangers.

Some people will argue that just because they have "closed posture" doesn't mean they're defensive, uptight, or unreceptive to outside contact. They might say: "I stand this way because I am comfortable!" Whether you are really receptive or not, others can only interpret what they see. That's why people with closed posture tend to be seen as unreceptive to conversation. Open posture sends out the clear signals of openness and receptivity. It says: "I'm available for contact—come over and talk to me!"

F = Forward Lean

The letter F in S-O-F-T-E-N means forward lean, another element of open posture. Leaning forward slightly while a person is talking to you indicates interest on your part, and shows you are listening to what the person is saying. This is usually taken as a compliment by the other person, and will encourage him to continue talking.

Often people will lean back with their hands over their mouth, chin, or behind their head in the "thinking" pose. This posture gives off signals of judgment, scepticism, and boredom from the listener. Since most people do not feel comfortable when they think they are being judged, this leaning-back posture tends to inhibit the speaker from continuing.

It's far better to lean forward slightly in a casual and natural way. By doing this, you are saying: "I hear what you're saying, and I'm interested—keep talking!" This usually lets the other person feel that what he is saying is interesting, and encourages him to continue speaking.

T = Touch

The letter T in S-O-F-T-E-N stands for touch. In our culture, the most acceptable form of first contact between two people who are just meeting is a warm handshake. This is true when meeting members of the same or opposite sex—and not just in business, but in social situations, too.

In nearly every situation, a warm and firm handshake is a safe and positive way of showing an open and friendly attitude toward the people you meet.

Be the first to extend your hand in greeting. Couple this with a friendly "Hi," a nice smile, and your name, and you have made the first step to open the channels of communication between you and the other person.

Some men don't feel right in offering their hand to a woman first. They would feel stupid if the woman didn't shake their hand. Emily Post states in the revised edition of her book of etiquette that it is perfectly acceptable for a man to offer a handshake to a woman, and that it would be quite rude for either man or woman to ignore or refuse this friendly gesture.

Some women, on the other hand, feel that they are being too forward if they offer a handshake to a man. They think the man might get the "wrong idea" if they extend their hand first in greeting. The problem is that there are two people who are afraid to shake hands. Of all the people I've polled on the subject in my class, there is nearly unanimous agreement: no matter who makes the first move, nearly everyone likes this form of physical contact. It's safe and nonthreatening for both parties. This keeps personal defenses down and creates an atmosphere of equality and receptivity between the people. More personal forms of touch should be exercised with sensitivity to the other person's body language, and in a warm, nonaggressive manner.

It is also important to end your conversations with a warm and friendly handshake, in business as well as social situations. Couple it with a bright smile and a friendly statement like, "I've really enjoyed talking with you!" or "Let's get together again soon!" This is an excellent way to end a conversation. You and the other person both feel good about the exchange.

E = Eye Contact

The letter E in S-O-F-T-E-N represents eye contact. The strongest of the nonverbal gestures are sent through the eyes. Direct eye contact indicates that you are listening to the other person, and that you want to know about her. Couple eye contact with a friendly smile, and you'll send this unmistakable message: "I'd like to talk to you, and maybe get to know you better."

Eye contact should be natural and not forced or overdone. It is perfectly okay to have brief periods of eye contact while you observe other parts of the person's face—particularly the mouth. When the person smiles, be sure to smile back. But always make an effort to return your gaze to the person's eyes as she speaks. It is common to look up, down and all around when speaking to others, and it's acceptable not to have eye contact at all times.

Too much eye contact, especially if it is forced, can be counterproductive. If you stare at a person, or leer in a suspicious manner, the other person may feel uncomfortable and even suspicious about your intentions. A fixed stare can appear as aggressive behavior if it takes the form of a challenge as to who will look away first. It is not wise to employ eye contact as a "power trip," and will usually result in a negative, defensive response from the other person.

If you have a problem maintaining normal eye contact, try these suggestions. Start with short periods of eye contact—maybe only a few seconds. Look into the pupils of the other person's eyes, and smile. Then let your gaze travel over the features of her face,

hair, nose, lips, and even earlobes! There is a six-inch diameter around the eyes that can provide a visual pathway. Remember, after a few moments, go back to looking the person right in the eyes. You can look back and forth between both eyes while increasing the amount of time that you experience direct eye contact as the conversation continues.

Avoiding eye contact can make both parties feel anxious and uncomfortable, and can give the impression that you are uninterested, dishonest, or bored with the conversation and the company. The result will usually be a short and unfulfilling conversation. So be sure to look into the eyes of the people you talk with, and send this message: "I hear what you're saying—go on!"

N= Nod

The letter N in S-O-F-T-E-N stands for nod. A nod of the head indicates that you are listening and that you understand what is being said. It signals approval and encourages the other person to continue talking. A nod of the head, coupled with a smile and a friendly hello, is an excellent way of greeting people on the street, or anywhere else. Like all the other softening gestures, it sends the same message: "I'm friendly and willing to communicate."

Caution: Remember that these nonverbal softening gestures alone do not replace verbal communication. Moreover, if you only see isolated gestures, rather than clusters of gestures, your perception of receptivity may be incorrect. However, when you look for and use clusters of these softening gestures together with good conversational techniques, you will create an impression of openness and availability for contact and conversation.

With practice and a greater awareness of body language, you will be able to send and receive receptive signals, and encourage others to approach you and feel comfortable. Begin to notice other people's body language as well as your own. This will help you to identify softening techniques and recognize levels of receptivity in others, thus minimizing the chance of being rejected. Look for people who display receptive body language and project receptive body language by using softening techniques—they really work!!

Dear Gabby,

I'm at a cocktail party, and I don't know anyone. It seems like everybody knows everybody else, except me. How do I go up to someone and start a conversation?

Thank you,
Shy

Starting conversations at a party is easy if you remember to look for receptive faces among the crowd. Use plenty of eye contact, smile, and above all, keep your arms uncrossed and your hands away from your face. Begin to circulate around the room, checking out the people as you travel to the food table, bar, or dance area. Keep your eyes open for familiar and friendly faces.

When you spot someone who looks open to contact (you are reading body language and looking for open posture), then casually stroll over to the person and say, "Hi, how you doing?" or "Hello, how are you?" You can introduce yourself right then and there if you wish, or make a comment about the food, music, environment, or anything else you can

focus on in the situation. You can also give the person a sincere compliment, and then follow it with a ritual question based on the situation. It might go something like this: "I couldn't help noticing what an attractive outfit you have on. I just wanted to come over and tell you how nice I think you look. Are you with one of the companies or here as an independent representative?"(p.17-28)

HOW TO BE A GOOD CONVERSATIONALIST

Many people struggle to make conversation with others. Being able to be a good conversationalist is an art that can be learned if we follow a number of simple points. It takes time and effort to learn that art but anyone willing to learn it can develop into a good conversationalist in time. For his advice on this subject I'd like to quote again from Don Gabor's book "How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends":

So now that you're tuned in to the conversational channel of body language, how do you actually start a conversation? How do you break the ice?

There are five basic steps in starting conversations, which don't always occur in this order. Establish eye contact and smile, then follow this simple procedure.

1. Risk versus rejection. Be the first to say hello.
2. Ritual questions. Ask easy-to-answer questions about the situation, the other person, or yourself.
3. Active listening. Know what to say next by listening carefully for free information.
4. Seek information. Ask information-seeking follow-up questions based on free information you've just heard.
5. Self-disclosure. Reveal plenty of your free information while asking questions that may interest you personally.

Risk Versus Rejection

It takes a certain amount of risk to begin a conversation with a stranger. Most shy people don't start conversations because of the fear of being rejected. Of course, this prevents them from reaching out to others. Remember that risk taking and rejection are part of life, and to be overly sensitive is counterproductive. And, anyway, what's so bad about being rejected by someone you don't even know?

Change from Passive to Active

Most shy people take the passive role when it comes to starting conversations. They wait and wait and wait, hoping someone will come along and start a conversation with them. If there are two shy people together, they're both waiting, both taking the passive role. If someone else by chance does start talking, the shy person is often so surprised, she doesn't know what to say.

To get out of this "Catch-22," simply change from the passive to the active role. Be the first to say hello and take the initiative to begin the conversation. Introduce yourself to people regularly and begin to share your ideas, feelings, opinions and experiences. Look for familiar faces, and after saying hello, seek out other people's thoughts, views, interests, and knowledge.

By initiating conversations, you'll get more positive responses and your fear of rejection will lessen. In this way your risk taking can pay off in making new contacts and having more meaningful conversations,

Another advantage of being the first to say hello is that it gives you the opportunity to guide the direction of the conversation and gives the other person the impression that you are friendly and open. You are also complimenting the other person by showing interest in a positive way.

Minimize Rejections— Look for Receptivity

The more you start conversations, the more positive responses you will get. But, of course, there are going to be some rejections too. No one receives unanimous approval, so when you do get rejected, don't dwell on it. Instead, use it as a lesson and plan a different approach next time.

The most important way to minimize rejection is to look for receptivity in those you approach. Try to be sensitive to where others are at. Look for an open posture, eye contact, and a smile. Look for people who are sending receptive signals through their body language, and when you feel the time is right, approach them in a friendly and direct way.

For example, if you are at a party or dance, and would like to ask someone for a dance, then look to those who either are dancing or look like they want to dance. Wait for the moment when the person seems most receptive, and then take the risk. Move closer to the person and establish eye contact, smile, and ask the person for a dance. Chances are the other person may feel flattered that you have noticed [them], and hopefully will respond positively. If, however, the answer is no, then accept it gracefully with a smile (like water off a duck's back), and ask someone else. Keep asking and you're bound to get a positive response. The more you ask, the better you'll get at picking out people who will respond positively to you...

2. Ask Easy-to-Answer Ritual Questions

Ritual questions are easy-to-answer requests for information. Although basically requests for personal background or general information, their real purpose is to convey this message: "I'm interested in getting to know you better."

Breaking the Ice—A Compliment Followed by a Ritual Question

Ritual questions can be used to break the ice with someone you don't know and wish to speak to. The easiest way to start a conversation with a stranger is to employ one of the three following ways. First, notice something positive about the person you wish to speak with and in a friendly and sincere manner, offer a compliment about what she is doing, wearing, or saying. Quickly follow the compliment with a ritual question that is directly related to the compliment you just gave. The "opening line" might be: "That's a beautiful ring you're wearing! What kind of stone is it?" or "Say, you're a terrific skater! How did you learn to do all those tricks?"

A second way to break the ice is to notice something that the person is carrying—maybe a book, musical instrument, or a piece of sporting equipment. After establishing eye contact and smiling, ask a ritual question based on the object. For example, if you see someone with a tennis racket, you could say something like "Say, could you recommend a good place to take tennis lessons?" or "Do you know a good place to play

without having to wait for a court?" or "I notice you have a racket like the one I'm interested in buying. How do you like it?" or "I see you're a tennis player. I want to start playing. Can you recommend a good racket for a beginner?"

If you see someone carrying a book, you can ask how he likes it. If a person has a musical instrument, you can ask him what kind of music he plays, where he plays or studies, how long he has been playing, or how you might get involved. If you see someone with a camera, you could ask him if he has taken any good pictures, about the type of camera he has, or if he is a professional or amateur photographer. These questions can be applied to almost any object a person is carrying. It is a safe and positive way of showing someone you've noticed him, while breaking the ice and starting a conversation at the same time.

A third way to break the ice and start a conversation is to make a comment, or ask a question based on the situation. This can be a request for information like: "Say, excuse me, but I'm looking for an apartment in the neighborhood. Do you happen to know of any places that might be for rent?" Or another common question might be: "I'm looking for a good place to eat nearby. Can you recommend a restaurant in the neighborhood?" If you see someone who looks like she needs some assistance, then offering help is an excellent way to start a conversation. You might say: "You look a little lost. Are you looking for someplace in particular? I live in the neighborhood—maybe I can help you"...

It is best to focus on the positive things you see rather than complaining about the negative. This way you can let others in on the way you see the world and not get caught in a conversation of "Ain't it a shame!" If you happen to be standing in a movie line, you can comment on other films, or the most recent book you've read if you are browsing in a bookstore. Another comment you can make that is very direct is: "I've seen you here before. Do you live or work around here?"

Ritual questions are good for breaking the ice and starting a conversation. By looking for what people are involved in, you can easily focus on a topic of interest to the other person. Remember, in addition to finding out about the other person, you are sending this signal: "You seem interesting to me, and I'd like to get to know you better!"

Closed and Open Ritual Questions

You might find yourself asking ritual question after ritual question, and only getting one or two-word answers. This is probably because you are asking "closed-ended" ritual questions instead of "open-ended" ritual questions.

Closed-ended ritual questions usually require only a yes or a no, or just a one or two-word answer. These are useful for breaking the ice, but they should be followed with an open-ended question. Open-ended ritual questions usually require more than a brief answer, and they encourage the other person to elaborate on his answer. In addition, they provide an opportunity to reveal facts, opinions, feelings and most important, plenty of free information. Closed-ended questions often begin with words like: Are? Do? Who? Where? and Which? Open-ended ritual questions commonly start with How? Why? In what way? How did you get involved? How can I get involved? "What" can be used as both an open and closed-ended question.

Here are some common examples of closed-ended ritual questions.

Do you live around here? Do you like the food? What time is it? Are you going to the park? When did you get here? Where are you from? Are you enjoying your stay here?

Here are some examples of open-ended ritual questions.

How did you find your apartment? In what ways do you think this country has changed? How did you get involved in that line of work? Why did you decide to move there? What brings you to New York? What do you like to do on your days off?

These are just a few examples of closed and open-ended ritual questions. Remember to follow closed questions with open-ended questions. In this way you can fish for topics of interest and then seek further information by asking open-ended questions.

It is very important to be able to answer ritual questions, too. Make your questions easy and straightforward. Most people are far more comfortable answering expected, easy-to-answer questions when they first meet a person, rather than difficult or complicated questions that put them on the spot.

Some people think that they may offend the other person if they ask ritual questions. They say they don't want to be too personal or pry. In most cases, the opposite is true. Most people feel flattered when someone notices them in a positive way and shows a genuine interest. This usually encourages the person to talk.

Free Information

When we communicate with one another, we reveal much more than we realize. The information that we volunteer is called free information. When you ask or answer a ritual question, be aware of the free information that accompanies the answer. Focus on this, and use it as conversational fuel for follow-up questions. By focusing on the free information we can explore each other's experiences and interests in a natural and free-flowing manner...

Many people who don't like to tell others what they do are also anxious about other types of ritual questions. They feel small talk is dull and boring, and should be avoided. Instead, they say they want to talk about something important.

While there isn't a particular order as to how conversations should proceed, most conversations that do not go through the "ritual" phases rarely proceed to deeper and more meaningful levels. Small talk is a very important element in conversations and in establishing friendships and relationships...

Ritual questioning prepares you to introduce yourself to the other person. Usually, the sooner the better. When there is a pause in the conversation, this is a good time to say: "By the way, my name is. What's yours?" The other person will almost certainly respond in kind. If your hand is free, offer a handshake, a friendly smile, and say: "Nice to meet you!" Use the person's name right away, and as often as you can without overdoing it. This will help you to remember his name, and using a person's name is one of the easiest and most meaningful compliments you can give. If you do forget a person's name, it's perfectly okay to say: "Excuse me, but what's your name again?"

If you employ these ritual question techniques for breaking the ice with the people you meet, you'll discover they really do work. Being the first to say hello won't be a problem any longer...

To enter a conversation in progress, you must be within listening and speaking range. Move close to the people speaking and show interest in what is being said. Use plenty of eye contact, nodding, and smiling to send the signal to the speaker that you want to hear more. Often, when a speaker sees you are interested in what he is saying, he will begin to include you as a listener.

When there is a pause, or the speaker says something you can respond to, then interject your comment or question into the conversation. If you use easy-to-answer information questions, the answers will be directed to you specifically. Say something like, "What did you do then?" or "How did you arrive at that conclusion?" or "That's a truly incredible story! How long ago did this happen?"

You may be saying to yourself that this is an intrusion into a private conversation. If you have listened and carefully observed the people, you will quickly be able to determine whether the situation is open or closed. In many cases, especially at parties, the speaker is searching for others to interact with, and a new person who shows interest in participating is usually welcome.

Caution: Be careful not to play devil's advocate—that is, to take an opposition position for the sake of argument. This usually leads to a tense and competitive conversation, with a winner and a loser. You won't be considered a welcome addition to a conversation with a group of strangers if you make them look stupid in front of their friends...

3. Know What to Say by Listening (Active Listening)

Okay, so you ask a few ritual questions, then what do you say? You always seem to run out of things to talk about in less than a minute! You can never think of what to say next!

Don't Think—Listen!

Know what to say next by listening carefully for key words, facts, opinions, feelings, and most of all, free information. Don't think about what you are going to say next, because while you are thinking, you're not listening! Most shy people are usually so preoccupied with—"Oh no, it's going to be my turn to talk soon, and I won't know what to say!"—that they don't hear what the other person is saying.

The solution to this problem is to use active listening skills while the other person is speaking. These include using good body language, especially eye contact, smiling, and nodding in response. Active listening encourages people to continue speaking, and it shows that your attention is focused on the conversation. By asking quick information-seeking questions, you can keep the details of the conversation close at hand. When you understand the point the person is making, restate it in another way by saying: "Do you mean to say...?" or "Now if I understand you correctly..."

Improve Your Listening Skills

Conversation problems include poor listening, memory, and concentration skills. There is usually enough time for your mind to wander while you are being spoken to, and many people speak slowly and with lengthy pauses between thoughts. The result is that your mind may wander. You can lose your concentration and even the main idea of the conversation...

Merge Old Knowledge with New Information

Your listening, concentration, and memory will improve considerably if your mind is active and alert, and if you are participating in the conversation. Be sure to interject your thoughts into the conversation, while linking the new information with previously known information. This synthesis of prior knowledge and new information will provide you with a framework for remembering the details you hear and a basis for asking follow-up questions.

Use Examples

Ask for and think of examples that support or question what is being said. If you are not sure what the other person is saying, or you don't understand what she is talking about, ask for an example to make the point clear for you.

Anticipate

A good listener is actively involved in the conversation, and can often anticipate what the speaker is going to say next. This involvement shows concern and interest, and will usually reinforce facts and details. Take care not to complete sentences for people you are talking with if they pause for a moment to construct their words. If you anticipated the speaker correctly, then you know you are probably on the same wave length. If your anticipations were not correct, this can be a warning signal that you and your partner are not tuned in to each other, and that a misunderstanding may be developing...

Listen for "Iceberg" Statements

An "iceberg" statement is a comment or a piece of free information where 90 percent is under the surface, waiting to be asked about. Iceberg statements usually come in the form of one or two words that accompany answers to ritual questions. These statements are hints about topics that the person really wants to talk about if she thinks you might be interested. When you hear an iceberg statement like, "You'll never believe what happened to me..." or "Guess what I've been doing?", quickly ask a related follow-up question or say: "What happened?" or "You don't say! Tell me, how was it?" Other "continuers" are: "Why do you say that?" "In what ways?" and "How so?" ...

4. Seek More Information Based on Free Information

After you have broken the ice, asked a few ritual questions, and used active listening, then seek further information based on the free information you have learned. By taking advantage of free information, you can control the direction of the conversation. Ask open-ended questions that refer to the free information either you or your conversation partner has revealed.

Free information is communicated by a person's clothing, physical features, body language, personal behavior, and activities, as well as by her words. Sometimes free information will consist of a general impression. Then you can say something like: "You seem to know a lot about...", "Are you involved with...?" or "You sound like an expert. Do you teach a class on that subject?" or "Are you a professional?"

Always try to follow closed-ended ritual questions with an open-ended ritual question, to give your partner a chance to elaborate on the topic. Pay close attention to facts, details, and especially more free information, with the idea of directing the conversation into areas of mutual interest...

Asking Personal Questions

Asking personal questions always requires a particular sensitivity to the other person's feelings, and especially his level of receptivity to you. It is usually best to preface personal questions with a softener like, "Excuse me for asking, but..." or "I'd love to know, if you don't mind telling me...?" or "I hope I'm not being too personal, but...?" or "Please feel free not to answer, but...?" or "If you don't mind my asking...?"

If you ask a personal question in such a way that the other person does not have to answer, often he will respond in some form. It may not be the direct answer you are looking for, because many people have trouble saying what they really mean, especially if it's personal. However, if you listen carefully for free information and look for receptive body language, you can get an idea about whether the person is ready to reveal some personal information to you...

5. Disclose Free Information

Self-disclosure completes the conversational cycle of taking risks, asking ritual questions, active listening, and seeking information.

It's a Way to Let Others Get to Know You

Self-disclosure lets others get to know you on your own terms. The information you share with the people you meet determines how they get to know you. Be positive (without boasting) when you share your personal interests and the "big" events in your life, including your hopes, goals, and most rewarding experiences. You can tell others what you do for employment, your background, goals, and most importantly, your availability for future contact...

Self-Disclosure—Four Levels

There are four levels of self-disclosure that we use daily. The first is called "cliche" greeting. These are very general disclosures and are responses to ritual greetings such as: "How are you?" "How are you doing?" "How have you been?" or "How's the family?" Though these questions evoke responses such as "Fine!" or "Just great, couldn't be better," they provide an excellent opportunity to reveal free information. These low-level disclosures tell the other person that your attitude is open and friendly, and if the situation permits, that you are available for conversation.

After people exchange greetings, they usually exchange basic personal facts. Tell others what you do, where you are from, what you like to do for fun, or some current project or activity that you are involved in. This second level of self-disclosure provides a background of experiences and information for conversational partners to compare and explore. It is at this point that people begin to get to know one another.

The third level of self-disclosure is revealing personal opinions and preferences on different subjects. At this level you can reveal your attitudes, values, and concerns. You can tell others what you honestly think and feel about the world around us. Express your ideas in an open manner and encourage others to share their ideas on varied topics. Remember, people have differing views. Good conversation is not a debate; with a winner and a loser but an exchange of views and ideas. Open-minded discussion, not arguing, is an excellent means of sustaining a conversation, while letting the participants know more about one another on a more meaningful level.

The final level of self-disclosure is your personal feelings —especially about the people you know and wish to become closer to. These are the most difficult disclosures to make because they require revealing our emotions. Though it can be difficult (and risky) to reveal your feelings, it will give your partners a more meaningful sense of who you are, and what you are sensitive to. When you disclose your hopes, dreams, loves, joys, and sorrows, people will be able to identify with you, because we all share these basic emotional experiences. When you disclose your feelings, use the words "I" and "feel" to describe how you feel and think. Many people make the common mistake of using the word "you" when they mean "I". When this happens, the partner doesn't know whom you are talking about.

Helpful Self-Disclosure Hints

Be Careful About How Much You Disclose

Don't go to the opposite extreme of "telling all". We've all had the experience of someone telling us [their] life story—and we know how uncomfortable this can be. It's better to reveal your background and ideas a little at a time and within the context of the conversation.

Be Realistic About Yourself

If you exaggerate your good qualities and hide your faults people will soon realize that you are not being real. It's important to be yourself. Sometimes people won't believe what you tell them, so disclose specific details including names, dates, and places. Balance the picture of yourself that you present. Let the discussion continue along with your self-disclosures so that you're certain your partner is taking you seriously.

Reveal Your Goals

Reveal your goals and struggles. You'll be surprised to learn that most people empathise with you and will usually be encouraging. The person you are talking with may be able to assist you in some way. By the same token, you may be able to assist your partner with his goals. If you can help someone else, you're certain to make a friend right away!

Let Someone Get to Know You

Don't be afraid of boring the other person. Most people are interested in making new friends, and it's essential to let others know who you are and if you have mutual interests. You don't have to entertain the people you meet, but be as upbeat as possible. Most people value personal contact. When you share aspects of your life with another person, you are making this all-important contact with her...

Look Outward—Not Inward

Many poor conversationalists tend to look and think inward rather than focusing on surrounding people and events. They think about how they look, what others might think about them, and whether they are liked. They wonder if people will think they are intelligent or stupid, attractive or ugly, and so on. These "self-cantered" thoughts will make you feel self-conscious and almost totally unaware of what is occurring around you. As a result, all that conversational fuel right in front of your eyes, ears, and nose is lost. Once you begin to look outward with your senses, you become aware of the vast details that can become elements of conversation. In addition, when you think and look outward, you'll be less self-conscious and uncomfortable. Your self-confidence will

increase, fear and self-doubt will diminish, and your conversations will become more natural and sustained...

Hot Buttons

Dale Carnegie in *How To Win Friends and Influence People* said if you find the really big events in a person's life, conversation won't be a problem. "Hot buttons" are areas which are of keen interest to and create enthusiasm in people you talk with and in yourself. These are subjects that you or your conversational partner can really "get into" and talk about for an extended period of time. Hot buttons can be work, a new job, a hobby, a career goal, an upcoming trip, a sporting activity, a personal dedication to a social cause, and even sex! Hot buttons are subjects or activities that really interest people. A hot button can be a lifelong interest, a passing fancy, or a current fascination—whatever turns you on! What do you like to do for fun or profit?

It's important to find other people's hot buttons as soon as possible because these strong interests are extremely fertile areas for sustained conversations. The sooner you find the other person's hot buttons and reveal your own the more energetic and stimulating conversations you'll have—and you might discover that you share some strong personal interests.

One goal of asking ritual questions is to discover the other person's hot buttons. When you know someone's hot button, you know how to turn him on and you also find out what he considers important. You discover where he puts his time, money, and effort—that is, what he values. This is bountiful fuel for conversation, and it tells you about the person you're speaking with.

In addition to finding out what turns a person on, search for common goals, experiences, and ideas. People often have many topics they're interested in and willing to talk about. Since we all share common interests, it's important to fish for hot buttons in others. When you find someone with hot buttons similar to yours, you'll be able to find out if he would like to share those activities and interests with you. This is where friendships begin to develop.

How to Find Someone Else's Hot Buttons

When you walk into a room full of strangers, do you say to yourself: "I don't have anything in common with the people here"? Many people think their interests are unique and that others could care less. The opposite is usually true. Because of our accessibility to many different activities and interests, many people share common interests, goals, and life experiences. The trick is to find out about others, and discover which ones you have in common.

When seeking someone's hot buttons, fish around subject areas with ritual questions. When you receive a response that indicates your partner can "get into it," express interest in the subject. This doesn't mean you must have a strong interest in that subject, but it helps if you can generate a medium or slight curiosity in the subject. This allows the other person an opportunity to share some important aspects of her life with you, and will create positive feelings towards you. Your partner will feel that you care about her, and hopefully, she will express a similar interest in you.

Often people wear or carry items that are hot button indicators. Look for buttons, tennis rackets, books, jewelry, clothing, or anything that might provide a clue to the person's

hot button. People participate in activities that are hot buttons. Focus on these activities by asking open-ended ritual questions, and sustaining conversations will be easy. Look for people having fun and striving for self-improvement or personal gain, and you'll be closer to finding a person's hot button.

Often people reveal their hot buttons through iceberg statements—that is, they make a statement that reveals the tip of the conversational iceberg, and they're just waiting to be asked the particulars of an activity or project they are involved in. Listen carefully for free information and ask open-ended follow-up questions to encourage people to talk about what they're into. You can say: "That's something I've always been curious about. How did you get involved?"

If there are few visual or verbal clues to a person's hot buttons, I suggest fishing with ritual questions and then asking something like: "What do you like to do on your days off?" or "What do you like to do for fun?" or "What do you like to do when you're not working?" These comments signal the other person that you're willing to listen and are interested in finding out more about what's important to them.

How You Can Reveal Our Hot Buttons to Others

It's not enough to find the other person's hot buttons. Remember, a good conversation is balanced, so be ready to reveal your hot buttons, too. By letting others know what's important to you, you are giving them an opportunity to get to know you on your terms and in a way that is usually considered positive.

When you are invited to a party or social event, it can be helpful to think about what you're excited about and be willing to share this excitement with those you meet. Take a personal inventory of your hot buttons—projects, future plans, or world events—and present them enthusiastically to those around you.

Share Your Hot Buttons

When you share your hot buttons, be as specific as possible about your involvement. Employ plenty of facts, examples, dates, and places so your conversational partner has lots of free information to question you about. Your partner may not know much about the topic, but your enthusiasm will be contagious and will provide plenty of fuel for your partner to ask follow-up questions. Avoid talking about your own hot buttons too much; it's a common pitfall.

Take care not to use jargon or technical terms when discussing topics with people who aren't familiar with your hot button. Give them an inside look at what excites you about the topic, rather than overly specific details. Be sensitive to how much time you devote to your hot button without hearing again from the other person. It's all right to let someone know what turns you on, but be aware that the other person may not necessarily want to hear everything you have to say about that topic. If you get go-ahead signals (like several follow-up questions), then continue until you sense that the conversation should return to the other person.

Seek Common Interests

Many people are pleasantly surprised to find that people they meet share common interests. Through active conversation, you get closer to particular goals associated with that subject. Of course, the more interests you have and are able to discuss, the more fulfilling your conversations will

Remember that conversation is a means of experiencing many things that you have yet to experience directly, like traveling to far-off places or jumping out of airplanes. When you share these experiences, both participants will profit from the exchange. So keep Dale Carnegie's advice in mind: find out the really big things in people's lives and encourage them to talk about them. Seek someone else's hot buttons and be sure to reveal your own, too, and sustaining conversations will be easy...

Good Conversation Is a Balance of Talking and Listening

For a conversation to be stimulating and sustained the participants must be active talkers as well as active listeners. Be sure to do both in conversation. Make a point of throwing the conversational ball to the other person after you have presented your ideas in an abridged form. Some people feel they have to give long-winded explanations of their views. This is usually unnecessary, confusing and even boring to your partner. It's better to paint the big picture first, and if your partner wants to know more, you can always fill in with details. Keep your comments and questions focused on big ideas rather than extraneous details, and you'll keep to the point. This way you won't confuse or bore your listener...

Discuss Topics That Are Important to You

It's essential to let other know what you consider important and meaningful. The best way to reveal your values and attitudes to others is to discuss topics of concern and interest to you. These could be religion, politics, or current events, but whatever the topic, take the initiative and disclose some of your feelings and values.

When you talk about events that are important to you, the other person gets an idea of your personality, and it also provides an enormous well of conversational material.

What makes you tick? Why do you feel the way that you do about things? What are your concerns? What is your vision for the future? What are your likes and preferences? The answers to these questions tell others how you relate to the world around you.

Small talk is not just meaningless and shallow. You must realize that ritual questions and self-disclosure provide an environment for revealing more personal thoughts and feelings and also give more credibility and consistency to your views.

While expressing your ideas, you may hear yourself say things you have never said before. For many, conversation is when their ideas are formulated and developed into orderly concepts for the first time. When you discuss different ideas, it's important to do it in such a way that the other participant knows he is entitled to his opinion, too—even if it differs from yours. Be receptive to your partner's point of view and listen carefully to what he has to say. When it's your turn to give your opinion, your partner will be more receptive and open to your ideas.

A few words of caution: when telling someone what's important to you, be careful not to "spill your guts" or "tell all." Don't complain mercilessly about things you or your listeners can't do anything about. Leave very personal secrets out of your conversation, especially in the early stages. There is a time to tell friends things about yourself that are more personal. Wait until the time is right, and you've established trust. By disclosing what's important in a natural way you will let others in on what's important in your life...

"I'm Boring"

Some people take the easy way out and don't participate in conversations. They think that they have nothing interesting to say. This is a cop-out and self-imposed putdown. Copping out is an avoidance technique for not facing people, situations, and problems. Those who adopt this attitude are afraid of boring others or they don't want to make the effort required to carry on a conversation.

Don't Put Yourself Down

Don't be overcritical of yourself. If you think, "I don't know anything. I don't do anything. I live in a vacuum—I don't have anything interesting to say," this negative attitude suggests low self-esteem. Of course, others will quickly sense this attitude, and they will have the same idea about you.

Focus on the Positive Events in Your Life—And Talk about Them

Focus on the positive events in your life—events or experiences that you're excited about—and your enthusiasm will project to others. It's beneficial to talk about things that are important to you, and to express your ideas, opinions, and feelings. It tells others who you are and what's important to you, and it helps you understand yourself better. Don't cop out, and you won't be boring...

Making Friends Is Not Always Easy

Making friends takes time, effort, commitment, give-and-take, and a lot of tolerance for the many human frailties we all have. Although most people are open to new friendships, life pursuits such as careers and family tend to become a higher priority. Some people feel it takes too much time and effort to develop friendships...

Keep an Inventory of Facts and Details About the Person

When you talk to someone and recall information he gave you in a previous conversation, he will be surprised and flattered. Comments like, "How's the job hunting going?" or "Have you had any luck at the track lately?" will show the other person that you were actually listening and that you care about what's happening in his life. This makes the person feel good—and important.

Be sure to concentrate fully on details that someone discloses to you, and make a point to remember key words and free information he provides. You'll be able to draw on this reservoir of information to sustain and direct later conversations.

Making the Other Person Feel Important

When you remember names and details of people you meet, you will make them feel special. Your attention demonstrates your interest and curiosity, and encourages them to talk and reveal more information. When people begin to open up, it shows they are gaining trust in you and are comfortable with you...

Show the Other Person You Like [Them]

When you want to make friends with someone, let [them] know [that] you like [them] and want to get to know [them] better.

Make it a point to stop and chat when the opportunity presents itself. You will be reinforcing a friendly, positive attitude. When you show a person that you like [them they] will usually respond in a friendly manner.

Caution: Take care not to come on too strong to someone you have recently met. Be casual, informal, and comfortable. Take it slow and easy, and don't get too intense...

Maintain Contact with People You Like

Once you've made contact with someone you like and find activities that you enjoy doing together then continue to maintain contact so the friendship can grow. As time goes on you and your friend can contact each other anytime you want companionship, assistance, or advice.

When you are asked to join an activity by someone make an all-out effort to accept the invitation. This reinforces the other person's feelings of friendship towards you, and encourages [them to share [their] experiences and activities. When you hear yourself say, "I really don't feel like it," this translates as disinterest. This doesn't mean you should do things you don't want to do, but be aware of the cop-out nature of this statement.

Be Open to New Experiences and Turn-ons from Others

Let your friends turn you on to new places, people, food, or anything else they want to share. This projects openness and receptivity to your friends' ideas, and allows them to feel good for turning you on to something they enjoy. This attitude creates a positive feeling toward you and your friends will become more receptive to the ideas and activities you suggest...

"The Only Way to Have a Friend Is to Be One" -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

It has been said that a friend knows all about you but likes you anyway. For people to remain friends and friendships to grow requires flexibility and tolerance. Accept your friends as unique individuals with all the problems, hangups, and inconsistencies that all humans possess. If you accept your friends on these conditions, you will be much more likely to keep them. Do what you can for your friends and when you are asked for a favor, then do it if you possibly can. It all comes back to you in friendship. If you are a good friend, you'll have good friends.

Friends Grow Together

When people find common interests they can develop individually as well as together, sharing these interests can enrich their lives and experiences. Developing and learning together is one of the most gratifying aspects of a relationship. In the best friendships, developing and learning never stops(p.29-123).

It's helpful to think of good conversation as a gift that we give to other people. It's one of the many ways in which we serve other people and give them a little piece of enjoyment in life.

The one thing that I've found most helpful in developing my conversational skills is developing the habit of remembering anything that I run across that I

can use for future conversations, whether it be stories, jokes, observations or all the many things that I read, watch or write about and try to remember as much detail as I can about them. It doesn't take long after you apply yourself to doing that before you have plenty of things stored away that you can use for future conversations.

It also helps to develop more of a child-like wonder and enthusiasm to share the things that you remember for future conversations, not to mention having a strong natural curiosity to know all you can about people you meet without being too forward.

FRIENDSHIP OBSTACLES

Now that we've looked at how to build and develop friendships what are some of the obstacles or hindrances that block our capacity to give and receive friendship? For their comments I'd like to quote again from Jerry and Mary White:

We can't be friends with everyone. No one has the emotional capacity or the time to develop deep friendships with everyone they meet and because of differences in personality we will be drawn to certain people for close friendships.

But we should be attractive enough so that many people want to be our friend. Such idealism usually falls short of reality. There are often situations and circumstances that erect barriers against developing and maintaining quality friendships. Identifying these problems is the first step in hurdling them. What are some of the hindrances to strong, lasting friendships?...

A LIFESTYLE THAT'S TOO BUSY. It's been said that "We are all as busy as we care to be." And that probably means "too busy". Caught in a hectic rush of scheduled activities and programs, we can find ourselves too frantic to make space for the extended leisurely times required to build deep friendships.

You may be caught in circumstances beyond your personal control. Perhaps you have a demanding job, [college or uni course]...or are burdened with excessive family requirements. Or you may even fear making time for them. But friendships are worth the adjustments it takes to spend time together. Everyone can find unproductive activities to eliminate or ways to simplify living.

A good way to include friends in your life is to do things together. Instead of planning additional activities for an already crowded schedule, include friends in your essential daily activities or join them in theirs. For example, you could jog together, picnic together, shop together...or repair cars together.

Friends don't need preparations and plans to be together. Spontaneity is one of the great joys of a strong friendship. When busy schedules crowd out friends, simply draw friends into those schedules.

INTOLERANCE... Friendship requires that we give friends space to be themselves and to act according to their own feelings and conscience. When we become irritated and intolerant of people around us, we become difficult to be around and even more difficult to like. Intolerance leads to criticism, which in turn destroys friendships.

Jesus showed an amazing tolerance for people of all backgrounds and peculiarities. When the religious leaders attempted to scorn him, they only revealed a strong point of Jesus' character by saying, "He is...a friend of tax collectors and sinners"(Matt. 11:19). It shocked the leaders that Jesus saw value in and claimed friendship with those who had chosen a life different from theirs. In the life of a christian, genuine tolerance combined with the love of Jesus Christ will open a wide range of friendship possibilities. It will allow you to cross racial lines, social barriers, age differences and physical limitations. You will accept personality quirks and failings. A tolerant christian sees every individual from God's viewpoint - as worthwhile and valuable.

SELFISHNESS...[Our culture is making more of a pronounced swing to] personal gratification and away from giving and serving. Even christians can be drawn into this devastating way of thinking. The very word friend implies giving. The root of our word friend is the Old English freon, which means "to love". Loving in the biblical sense means to give fully by concentrating on the needs, desires and pleasures of the one loved. If either friend concentrates only on himself, the friendship will weaken and die. One person cannot bear the entire responsibility for the loving maintenance of a friendship.

Little children who are blatantly selfish endure pointed rejection from other children. The same thing happens on an adult scale, only with more subtlety. If a person persists in hoarding his time, his possessions and the conversations and attention of others, he will find himself friendless (Friends and Friendship, p89-92).

Proverbs 25:17 says "Seldom set foot in your neighbour's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you." Be careful not to impose yourself on others which often happens if we need to be needed. When people came before kings in the Bible they brought a gift with them which is a good principle for us today to be willing to contribute something to your host when you're able to enjoy their hospitality. Returning again to "Friends and Friendship":

CRITICISM...Friendship cannot grow or expand in the uncomfortable, depressing atmosphere of criticism. An occasional helpful suggestion, lovingly given is not criticism. But constant fault finding does reveal a critical attitude and it will ruin any relationship.

Criticism stems from a variety of roots - a poor self-image, an angry spirit, faulty comparisons or a misunderstanding of God's direction in our lives. Often criticism is just a habit picked up from the way the world complains. Jesus provided the perfect solution for critical people - love...The apostle Paul reinforced Jesus' teaching when he said, "Love keeps no record of wrongs"(1 Cor. 13:5). Therefore, one who loves does not remember things to criticise.

INSENSITIVITY. Some people seem oblivious to the needs of others. They bypass signals that reveal if a friend is depressed, fatigue, troubled, fearful or irritated. On the other hand, they may be nonchalant when a friend experiences joy, achievements or success...Insensitivity is behaving towards friends with indifference, unconcern, a lack of feeling in our response and calloused attitudes. Perhaps it was to people with these characteristics that the apostle Paul offered the advice, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15). God wants us to be alert and caring about our friends and tuned in to their feelings and their needs.

When people meet with indifference in their friends, they rarely stop to analyze what might have caused the indifference. They usually interpret the action as rudeness or dislike and tend to avoid the relationship. Then the friendship breaks down.

A good friend always strives to make friends feel special, to be alert during their time together and to be thinking about them during their time apart. A friend needs to feel he is one chosen among many.

JEALOUSY. "Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?"(Prov. 27:4). No friendship can continue in a climate of jealousy. Jealousy destroys trusts, affection and freedom between friends. Jealousy reveals a possessive envy and an unwillingness to share the joy of the friendship with anyone else...

Jealousy in friendship can erupt in several situations: when one friend achieves success or recognition, begins to spend time with another person or sees the friendship decreasing and tries to hold on...Jealousy threatens budding friendships and ruins existing ones. Protect your valued friendships from the invasion of this destructive force.

FREQUENT MOVES. Careers or circumstances that require frequent moves may hinder the formation and growth of friendships. One businessman commented on this problem, "Well, I've got the solution. I just don't make friends anymore." But of course that merely avoids a solution. Don't get trapped into thinking that forming friendship isn't worth the brief benefit, or that the pain of separation is too uncomfortable to experience again...

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS. You may be a perfectionist by nature, easily annoyed by the failings and flaws you observe in people. You would rather avoid friendships than to put up with imperfect friends or you may have found a friend you admired but he failed to meet your expectations and disappointed.

Acceptance is a necessary part of friendship. Every human being is flawed in some way and will fail to meet a perfect standard. Only Jesus was perfect. But even He did not meet the expectations of all of the people around him. As much as we love our friends and as highly as we regard them, we must allow them room to fail and to show their weaknesses. If we enter friendships realistically, we will spare ourselves disappointment. Be ready also for shifts in your friendships as circumstances change and they grow. Healthy relationships maintain an elasticity to respond to these shifts.

BETRAYING CONFIDENCES AND GOSSIP. Gossiping about one friend to another is a blow from which few friendships recover. We identified loyalty as a key to friendship. Betrayal is the opposite of loyalty. Telling something shared in confidence devastates the trust established between friends. Without that trust and confidence, communication can only be superficial and the friendship dies. And it's usually an abrupt and painful break. Rather than allowing the friendship to die slowly, the betrayed friend angrily severs the friendship...Gossip takes two forms: telling lies about another person or repeating a confidence to a third party. Both of these actions are sin and crush a friendship(Friends and Friendship, p88-97).

DOMINEERING. Many people are bossy and demanding from employers to their employees, husbands to their wives and vice versa, older brothers to their younger brothers and even ministers who act like sheriffs rather than shepherds. Being bossy and demanding is the surest way to provoke people and discourage them from

wanting to be with you and be their friend. We need to show respect to everyone and not expect others to do things we won't do ourselves. Are you too forceful in trying to get others to do things your way or do you ask and try to persuade them, respectful of their desires and feelings? Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments on being domineering:

[Do you have to be in charge of everything?] Do we usually end up going to the restaurant or movie I prefer? Do I enjoy correcting factual errors in other's people's conversation? Do I use humour to put others down? Do I have to know more about a topic than others to feel uncomfortable discussing it?...The best friendships do not require that anyone keep the upper hand. Rather there is mutuality in which either party is free to be weak at times without fearing that the other will get "one up". [If you are secure, you never have to jockey for control or lord it over your friends] (The Friendship Factor, p63-64).

In a church also there are a number of dilemmas or hindrances in church friendship. Let's look at a few of them:

TRUE NEIGHBOURHOODS TODAY ARE EITHER FEW OR NONE. There are few neighbourhood churches due to the amount of distance between members. Unlike one's schools days where all your mates lived only a few streets away and you could pop in and play cricket or whatever regularly, distance becomes a problem, often leading to little contact between members during the week. It takes more than catching up and saying a few words at church to build friendships. Members should be encouraged to not just be a Sabbath church but to organise activities and intermingle freely during the week as well.

THE CHURCH IS A MELTING POT OF PEOPLE. It draws together men and women from every social and cultural background. They differ in secular profession, financial income, race, family background, spiritual growth, age, family make-up and cultural heritage. In our idealistic view of the [church], we believe that labourer and doctor, educated and uneducated ought to relate harmoniously in fellowship. And they can and do. But seldom do they become close friends. In deeper relationships the church often segments and divides. People seek out those with common backgrounds or interests. Crossing cultural lines is not easy. This great diversity, though positive in the...church, [inhibits the]...easy development of friendships. Real frustration can set in when a person feels guilty about not developing relationships with many and focusing on a few who share common interests or age. But that is the reality of church today.

CONFLICTS OFTEN ARISE OVER PETTY ISSUES. In almost every church some level of conflict usually exists. And the longer a person is in [the] church, the more likely that some conflict will strike him personally...Soon these chip away at the fabric of friendships. Gossip spreads the infection and people polarize, often not even knowing why. These conflicts over unimportant issues disturb the spirit of relationships like static on a radio broadcast. Soon people turn it off and back away from the fellowship (Friends and Friendship, p146-147).

Nobody likes attending church and feeling as if you have to avoid a particular person or two but often it happens, even through no fault of your own, because of how a person may act towards you. Sometimes members are woefully inept at solving problems between themselves and allow animosity to simmer for long periods of time. A church is much like a large family or a small town ripe for gossip and controversy at times.

THE CHURCH HAS BEEN WEAKENED AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL INPUT FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY. Television, radio and [the media]...provide a menu of spiritual feeding that often overshadows the church. Though most of these influences intend to supplement, not replace, the church, they do decrease our dependence on the church (Friends and Friendship, p147).

These influences more often than not have a negative influence on members in the church. People who just absorb their information through TV and videos often will be shallow thinkers because they find themselves thinking little for themselves and just flow with what everyone else is doing in the media and real life.

This world is very superficial and doesn't encourage people to develop their minds and as a result, conversation quite often at church centres only on the trivial rather than the spiritual which it should if we're to honour God's sabbath as we should. Not only does the media engender superficiality, this is still Satan's world and if members are fed on a large diet of this world's selfishness, violence, lust and greed through the media that will surely affect our relationships with other members and is something we need to be on our guard against.

Those are some of the main hindrances to friendship we will encounter as we develop relationships with people and when we work on building and fostering those relationships in the church we need to consider them and for knowing how they affect us will help us to overcome them.

CLIQUEYNESS

When you have a large number of people in a church area it's natural for people to associate in smaller groups with people who have similar interests to you. Such smaller groups are needed to get to know others more personally. It's only when these groups become exclusive cliques does it become wrong. A topic that gets tossed around a lot is how friendly or cliquey various groups or church areas might be. The term friendly gets tossed around so much that it's lost a lot of its meaning.

Friendliness is not a black and white issue. You can't easily say one area is friendly while another is not. It's a matter of how friendly. There are degrees of friendliness. Not only that, there are two distinct components to friendliness. Those two components are the breadth of your friendliness (How widely you mix) and the depth of your friendliness (How involved you get in other people's lives).

Let's look at breadth.

Do you hang around just your close friends or do you mix widely with others?

How often do you approach others or your close friends or do they have to approach you most of the time?

When was the last time you noticed someone who was lonely or elderly and made the effort to approach them and have a chat with them?

If you're a single man, how many girls have you dated or made the effort to get to know in your own area?

If you're a single lady, how many guys do you approach and have a chat to now and then or do you always wait for them to talk to you? Dating may be the guys responsibility in a church area but guys don't have a sole responsibility in taking the lead in general fellowship at church.

If you're an older single how often do you speak to the younger singles and if you're a teenager how often do you speak to singles in their 20's and 30's or do you just stick to your own age group all the time?

If you're married how often do you associate with the singles in the church and vice versa, if you're single how often do you associate with those who're married?

Now there's the other component of friendliness - the depth of our friendliness.

How involved do you get in other people's lives granted they are receptive to your friendliness?

Do you approach others or do you let them come up to you all the time?

Are you distant or aloof when you're with others or are you pleasantly interested in others and what they have to say?

Do you show deep interest in only a few people you speak with or do you show that kind of interest with everybody?

Is your interest in other people's lives just limited to chatting to them at church or do you keep in touch by phone, email or letter if there's distance between you's?

Do you get involved in spending time with people during the week or do you only ever see them on the sabbath?

Do you just invite your close friends to activities or do you open your invitations to activities to other people as well?

Do you take the effort to find out what's happening in your friend's lives and give them the chance to talk about what's heavy on their heart or are we just content sticking to small talk without getting to know people personally?

Do you make an effort to keep aware of where we might be able to brighten up other's day or help them out in some way or just give them a bit of fun?

The list of questions could go on but I think you get the drift. Often I hear people complaining about how cliquy or unfriendly an area is when they unknowingly are contributing to the problem themselves. Collectively we have a responsibility which starts with ourselves to help create a sense of belonging for everyone. We can't do it for everyone but we should be aware of our little bit that we can do and do it.

Personally I don't mind having to make the effort to go up to different groups. It's when you make the effort and no-one in the group doesn't do anything positive to make you feel welcome that annoys me and unfortunately it's not that uncommon in the church. It's great when people make the effort to actively go out of their way to make others feel welcome and included in their group or activities and I hope it can be done a lot more often in quite literally treating and being interested in our brethren in the church as we would in a close family. If you can't do that then at least make the conscious effort to show interest, and I would like to add enthusiasm, consistently when others approach your group. At least acknowledge their presence and give them a cheery greeting so they feel they've at least been noticed. It's not really all that hard a thing to do but it's something that could be picked up a bit in the church.

Another point in relation to cliquyness that I've noticed in the church is the tendency when it comes to weekend activities for all the singles to split off and do their own thing. Often there seems to be little unity when it comes to weekend activities. I'd certainly like to see the singles, and people of all age groups for that matter, have more flexibility and for the sake of fellowshiping widely be willing to do more things together. Show some willingness to invite people of other groups into your activities or join up with other little groups.

Also when you're asking people out for group activities be willing to ask those people who don't get asked out all that often and make them feel included in the activity where you can. Those who are lonely amongst us really appreciate it when others help them out that way and make them feel welcome. There's certainly many practical things we can do to show love to our friends in the church. Sometimes it's hard and tough but hopefully you can see some of the above suggestions are quite easy and would go a long way to promote unity if we all made the conscious effort to apply them.

In our conversation and fellowship we all should have a strong natural curiosity to find out how our friends, both casual and close, are doing and what they've been up to rather than just being wrapped up in our own activities and our own concerns and problems.

Let's not take any of our friends, both casual and close, for granted and be committed to them, showing loyalty to them by only not just being friendly when they approach us, but regularly seek out their company as well.

BECOMING ONE FAMILY IN THE CHURCH

On the theme of unity in the church I'd like to quote from an article from the Worldwide News that appeared under the name of Joseph Tkach during the time that he pushed the excellent theme "We are Family" in the church:

This world is full of iniquity. Consequently, as Jesus warned in this end-time society, the love of many does wax cold - even in the church (Matt. 24:12). Relationships become shallow, only skin deep. The Bible calls the church a family (Eph. 3:15) for we are the very begotten sons and daughters of God (Heb. 2:10)! We are a family in the church but do we treat each other as family - I mean with the same kind of deep love that we treat our own physical families? Do we think of our brethren as one of the family? We can never fully achieve it but it should our goal as much as is possible within our means and time.

This concept of family, which is conceived in the mind, has to be developed into maturity in the heart and flow into actions. Righteous actions, like sinful ones begin in the mind. But thoughts do not become actions unless they are entertained with emotions, feelings, desire and passion. Jesus cried out in Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" We see here Christ's deep emotional love for His people.

The love Christ has for His people comes from the profound depths of His heart (Isa. 49:14-16). That kind of love is far more than just good intentions or good thoughts. For the concept of being one family in the church to become more real, members must be bound to one another in the bonds of their hearts, not just in their passing thoughts!

God wants us in the church to be united, not as a team where members get dropped if they don't perform well enough, but as a family. Ultimately we've got to stoop down and help and serve and bring into eternal life every human being who's ever lived from pagan kings to starving kids on the streets of Calcutta in the World Tomorrow. In order to learn the lessons of dealing with people in all different circumstances in that time God has called us into the church with people from all walks of life.

In a family, even when there's transgression, real love covers a multitude of sins - both real and imagined. Love that comes from the heart overcomes all obstacles. A concept of the family becomes reality and not just a family by name when the family members love from the heart and forgive from the heart.

We must stir up the spirit of God that lies dormant within us to lead us to have the deep emotions and feelings and move righteous thoughts and ideas into righteous action and living. We must give place to such thoughts to be entertained at length, to dwell on them, to meditate on them until they become part of us in wise, sound and mature action! In this way the mental concept of one family will become living reality!

Such thinking, led by God's spirit will lead us to take care in what we say about one another, to be sure that our statements are made in love. It will lead us to consider our actions, whether they are done in love or for selfish reasons. It will lead us to consider whether we have truly done all that is reasonable for us to do

to help a brother or sister in need. It will lead us to make Christianity a way of life, not just a system of beliefs or a dearly held creed.

Such thinking leaves no room for prejudice, whether racial, national, regional, lingual or according to gender, social status, accent or occupation. A family that has no prejudice has no limits.

Jesus told His disciples, "A new command I give you that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know you are my disciples if you love another" (John 13:34-35). This kind of love is not just a show. It is not just works of charity. It is love that comes from the depths of the mind and heart. It is love that is motivated deep in the recesses of mature and sound feeling, emotion and reason led by the spirit of God. No platitudes of "be ye warm and filled" here. Rather, it is the true love of God generated from the Holy Spirit of power, love and a sound mind and put into action.

From a kind word, an encouraging note, a thoughtful gesture, an ear to listen, or an expression of appreciation, to a sacrifice of time, energy or convenience, love is a way of life. And it is a way of life that is not out for recognition. It does what it does because it feels it. And it feels it because it believes in it, and is led by God's spirit that comes from the God who is love.

It is not foolish or frivolous. It is not unwise, unsound or unbalanced. It does not impose itself upon others. It does not look down on others or make others feel inferior. It carefully considers the feelings, needs and privacy of others. In short, it cares and it shares. Indeed, love is light in a dark world.

Christ also said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). His commandments guide us in the way of love. They show us how He, who is love, views life and relationships. To meditate on His commandments is to meditate on how to put love into action. In John 15:13 He spoke of the ultimate in love, "Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Jesus himself did that in both life and death.

Paul urges all christians to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), in effect, to lay down our lives in service to one another. The family of God is not just a passing thought, a mere concept or an empty slogan. We can't just talk the talk. We have to walk the walk. Let's have that deep love for ALL of our brethren in God's church and truly become one family in the church.

LONELINESS AND SHYNESS

Jerry and Mary White write:

Shyness has two basic manifestations. Some people steer away from social contact with others, even on a friendly basis. They're comfortable with only a few limited relationships, and their shyness prevents a wide range of acquaintances and friends.

The other side of shyness is a refusal to let others into one's life - a basic fear of letting anyone view the inner self. The shy person experiences anxiety at the thought of allowing others to see him as he really is, fearing he does not have enough to offer.

Both aspects of shyness - avoiding social contacts and fearing self-revelation - seclude the shy person from meaningful friendships. The expression painfully shy is no mere figure of speech. Shyness produces loneliness which hurts and it aggravates doubts about self-worth, which causes acute anxiety(Friends and Friendship, p 58).

Shyness is a feeling of social fear around others. Loneliness is the feeling of feeling alone - an emptiness from lack of meaningful social contact.

Some of the contributing causes of shyness and loneliness include kids being left to themselves as they grow up, the peer pressure which says if we're not part of their group that we're no-bodies, changes of environment such as moving a lot and friends pairing off with the opposite sex, excessive criticism which erodes our self-confidence, pressures of life that reduce our time, guilt and a lack of confidence making us hesitant to approach and meet others. Overcoming shyness often is a long and slow process with many trials and joys along the way.

When I first started attending church when I was 16 I was chronically shy and had little confidence in approaching people at church and making friends. To make matters worse, not many of the young people my age in my church area helped me out much in coming out of my shell. The loneliness cut very deep at times and it was something that I absolutely hated. That hatred of it spurred my determination to break out of it.

One sabbath our minister at the time gave a fantastic sermon on faith and one of the excellent scriptures he focused on was Hebrews 13:5-6 where God promises that He will never leave us or forsake us under any circumstance if we strive to follow Him and that we can come before His throne of grace boldly. I decided to take God up on that promise. I knew I had to do my part as much as I was able to but I also decided to trust in God that He would back me up and give me the extra help and confidence that I needed to beat my shyness. In certain respects I considered my shyness as a sin because it held me back from giving to others and so that became an extra spur to beat it.

About a couple of years after I started attending church when I was 18 I started to date girls in the church. As I was studying at a T.A.F.E. college across the river from town it gave me an ideal opportunity to ask a girl out for lunch from time to time, starting off with the girls I was most comfortable with and then moving onto getting to know the girls I was less comfortable with. The confidence boost that dating provided was fantastic. As approaching the opposite sex is generally harder to do, successfully approaching and having a good conversation with a young lady, especially for an hour or so on a date, gives more of a sense of achievement than catching up with a mate.

It's so important to look for the little successes to help build up your confidence. Often it's three steps forward, two steps back but keep at it if you're battling with shyness. I kept a couple of things in mind when I used to feel very lonely and I was struggling really bad. I always tried to have the big picture.

No matter how painful things were now, if I stay in the church and grow and overcome, one day I'll be in God's kingdom with perfect confidence and capacity to give in good conversation and that I would have as many friends as I could handle.

The other thing I used to keep in mind was that as slowly as I was going at developing socially if I kept on inching my way a bit at a time eventually I would get there.

Though I still have occasional relapses of shyness those points as well as those in the following list helped me overcome my shyness in just a few short years and lifted what was a very heavy burden at the time. Here are a few other points that can help you overcome shyness :-

- Strive to look and be cheerful and have an open rather than closed posture so others will be more inclined to approach you and want to have a conversation with you.

- Focus all your attention on the other person when you are talking to them. In explaining how this works in creating romance one lady put it this way, "I just turn up the energy level. And I just focus on him. I forget about how I may be coming across to him. In fact, I stop thinking about myself altogether, and I concentrate all my attention on him. Maybe it shows in the way I'm looking at him or the way I'm talking - I don't know. All I know is that it works."

If you're pre-occupied with giving the person you're with your full attention and interest it takes your mind off feeling self-conscious and how you're coming across which helps ease your nerves.

- **Have a positive expectation that people will like you when you approach them because more often than not people will be interested when you approach them.**

- Avoid isolation and drugs, drunkenness and wrong relationships which you can easily slip into when you're depressed with loneliness.

- Use the confidence you can gain through having a conversation with people you're most comfortable with to soon after go on to meet others who you're not as comfortable with.

- **At all times when you are with people, even when you struggle to make conversation at least give consistent, positive feedback. We communicate our interest in others in many ways non-verbally, as well as verbally. The sort of positive feedback that I find encourages me to keep talking are things like someone smiling a lot when I'm talking, laughing when my jokes aren't too bad, good eye contact, the other person having fun and kidding along with me and also asking questions about what I'm talking about.**

- If you see a friend with someone new you'd like to meet take advantage of those opportunities and go up to them and get to meet the person they're with.

- Try to help others who might be lonely. If we want friends we've got to strive to be a true friend to others - listening to them, helping them where we can and showing genuine interest in others.

- **Last but not least, develop depth in your conversation by deepening your knowledge about a wide range of subjects. Learn as much as you can about the world around you and the things that interest other people. The more things you**

learn about and the more knowledge you accumulate, the more confidence you'll have to keep a conversation going with others. With this confidence you'll be more at ease in approaching others.

HOW WE VIEW THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Nobody is exactly the same and so we are all going to have differences of opinion and perceive things differently. How do we ensure that this doesn't work against us in our friendships? The following is a sermon summary of a sermon given by John McLean in Sydney in April 1991:

Perception is the way we view things. We all look at life and events from different angles. Just because someone sees something differently from us or has different ideas or tastes to us doesn't mean they are wrong. That is something fundamental we all need to remember if we are to get along with others.

Our perception of things controls our thinking. Our perception of a whole series of events can change by a single piece of information. Have you ever noticed that? You've made up your mind about something or how someone is acting because all the evidence seems to be pointing in one direction and then you find something out or they explain something to you which completely turns it around.

There are two things that form our perception - our motivation and our perceptive or mind set. Our motivation deals with how we hope the outcome to be - what we want for ourself out of a given situation. Selective listening often is the result because we hear only what we want to hear.

Our perceptive or mind set is our expectations and conditioning. Because of how we've been brought up or conditioned we have all kinds of mind sets or biases. This can lead to all sorts of partiality and discrimination such as sexism and racism. God is not a respecter of persons(Jam.2:1). We need to be fair in all we do and say and also not be a respecter of persons.

Two people can view the same thing in two different ways. When someone disagrees with us on the same thing we shouldn't assume that they are wrong. What we should do is seek to understand why they have that opinion. There are a lot of benefits we can enjoy from learning things from other people's different perspectives. As the French say "Viva la difference". When we seek to understand why others believe and perceive the things they do we can help break down barriers between us and solve relationship problems. We all have different sensitive areas so we have to be aware of those things and try not to offend(Rom.15:1).

A fool is someone who doesn't try and understand why others think differently(Prov.18:2). He thinks he knows it all. We shouldn't be know it alls. "He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is a folly and shame to him"(Prov.18:13). Try not to answer a matter before you hear all sides fully. Don't judge before you've got all the facts.

There are three sides to a story - yours, theirs and the truth and generally the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

When we focus on looking for the positive in others we will usually find it and if we look for faults we'll find them and overlook or filter out the positive we don't want to hear. We've got to be willing to always give credit where credit is due and be willing to hear and seek all the facts and change our actions and our opinions if they are shown up wrong. Perception is also what we pay attention to. We can easily see the flaws in others but it's not so easy to see the same flaws in ourselves which makes it easy to be judgmental(Matt.7:1-6). Humility is realising our fallibility. Repentance is correcting ourselves before we correct others and others correct us.

Getting counsel from a multitude of others (Prov.15:22) means expanding your store of facts and getting a multitude of perceptions. When God calls us our perceptions of the things of life completely change. What used to be important becomes as rubbish and what was rubbish to us becomes precious (Phil.3:8).

We all need to be aware that all people have different perceptions and we all have different tastes in all kinds of things - music, entertainment, sports, hobbies, food and everything under the sun. With that awareness we should make the most of the variety of perceptions and interests and learn from and enjoy them and strive to adjust and work with them to prevent and solve problems between us. Viva la difference!

HEALING WOUNDED FRIENDSHIPS

Conflict is virtually inevitable in our friendships due to the fact we're all still human. How do we go about healing our wounded friendships. In looking at this subject I'd like to quote, first of all, from "Friends and Friendship":

Friendships are fragile. They do break. It seems unfair that a friendship made at a great cost of time and emotional energy should crack and split in a moment, but it happens. A harsh statement, an unfair criticism or a thoughtless action can create a chasm of hostility and hurt feelings which results in separated friends. Then comes the uphill task of closing the gap and restoring the friendship. Reconciliation can be difficult, since hurt friends often tend to withdraw emotionally. King Solomon recognised the difficulty of mending friendships when he wrote, "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel"(Prov. 18:19)...

We are not talking about those friendships that die a natural death. Usually, those are casual friendships which fade for a variety of valid reasons, such as geographical separations or new circumstances - marriage, a new community, or a new job. They disappear without rancour or hard feelings when situations change...The most obvious changes come as young people leave high school or college and move into a new phase of life. For a time they make periodic efforts to keep in touch with old friends, but after a few years pass, they rarely see more than one or two friends from their previous situation.

When we speak of broken or wounded friendships...we are referring to those that result from disputes and discord. These friendships need healing and mending. Bitter words cannot be forgotten without forgiveness. Quarrels do not mend themselves. Restoration requires initiation by one person and co-operation from both friends.

Conflicts can build for a long time, or they can erupt suddenly in a furious quarrel. Have you ever had a pleasant conversation with a friend, talking of inconsequential things, when abruptly you inwardly took exception to some statement? Suddenly, all of our senses were alert as you planned a rebuttal. In surprise, your friend listened to your attack. He really didn't have a strong basis for his statement, but since you challenged him, he felt obligated to defend his careless remark. After all, it can be humiliating to have to back down and admit error.

Proverbs pictures the cascading effect of a quarrel. "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out"(Prov. 17:14). Further in the same chapter Solomon spares no words on defining the seriousness of quarrels. "He who loves a quarrel loves sin"(Prov.17:19) (p101-103).

Josh McDowell makes the following comments on the subject of conflict in our relationships:

It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than dissolve a relationship. Of course, it is much easier just to walk away than to put forth the effort to resolve a conflict. But the reward of staying is that every time you resolve a conflict you come out a better person - better able to deal with the inevitable conflicts the future will bring...

Have you ever felt good after resolving a conflict? If so, you will agree that there are positive benefits from conflict...I have become more sensitive to the hurts and feelings of other people as a result of conflict...

We often make a variety of negative responses to conflict. By examining several of these I think we can each better recognise how to handle conflict and its effect on our relationships.

FAILING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM or the conflict is the first negative response. I call it the "everything is great" syndrome. The person or subject of the conflict is ignored and the conflict simply goes unresolved.

WITHDRAWAL is another response. You give the conflict "the silent treatment". You don't talk about it and hide by staying away from the person or source of the conflict. Interestingly enough, this was the response of Adam and Eve to God in the Garden of Eden. The Bible says, "They hid themselves". They withdrew and God had to go looking for them. I have found that the more I talk to a person who has chosen "the silent treatment", the more silent that person becomes. And raising my voice to evoke some kind of response often backfires and turns the confrontation toward more violent expressions.

IGNORING THE CONFLICT'S SIGNIFICANCE is [another] response. "It doesn't matter" becomes our slogan. In this situation the offended person imagines, "It doesn't matter because he or she won't listen to me anyway" or "It doesn't matter because he or she won't change" or even "It'll blow over". Dealing with the conflict superficially and flippantly doesn't remove it. Instead it gives it an ideal chance to grow into a much larger eruption...

KEEPING SCORE is [another] response. Conflicts and feelings of anger and resentment become bottled up inside. An explosion is inevitable. Philippians 3:13 exhorts us instead

to use the spiritual fire extinguisher of "forgetting the past". I think all marriage partners should have a policy that nothing can be brought up in an argument that happened more than three months earlier. One man went to a marriage counselor and complained, "Every time I get into a fight with my wife, she gets historical!" The counselor interrupted, "Don't you mean hysterical?" "No, I mean historical!" the man replied. "She always brings up the past!" That's scorekeeping.

ATTACKING THE PERSON INSTEAD OF THE PROBLEM is...often used as a negative response. [Instead of dealing with the issue and resolving it many people attack the person which only causes more and more hurt feelings]...

BLAMING SOMEONE ELSE is [another] way people deal with conflicts. This usually indicates an inability on the part of the person doing the blaming to acknowledge his or her own failures. Adam and Eve's example is a perfect example. God asked, "What did you do?"

Adam answered, "The woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit." First Adam blamed God and then the woman. Eve's response was, "The serpent deceived me." Both were blaming someone else.

DESIRING TO WIN NO MATTER WHAT THE COST and **GIVING IN JUST TO AVOID THE CONFLICT** are two more negative responses. Neither of these postures resolve anything. In both cases only one of the parties goes away with the feeling that something was accomplished. Furthermore both of these tactics always create resentment.

BUYING A SPECIAL GIFT FOR THE OTHER PERSON is [the last of our poor responses] to conflict. This is an especially favourite ploy of husbands. Instead of dealing with the conflict, these people try to buy their way of it (The Secret of Loving, p103-107).

I would like to cover now the four different scenarios we can have in relation to solving problems and see how we can heal wounded friendships as we look at each of them.

1) WHEN WE'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG TO SOMEONE ELSE. Offences do come as Christ said they would (Matt. 18:7). We aren't perfect yet and as a result we do thoughtless and carnal things that can cause emotional and physical hurt to others.

Jerry and Mary White make the following comments on what to do when we've wronged someone else:

In order to determine what caused a conflict, we should check ourselves with the following questions:

- Have I knowingly spoken harshly or unjustly to a friend?
- Have I neglected contact because of a rushed schedule?
- Does my friend have problems about which I am indifferent?
- Do I ignore a friend when someone more interesting comes along?
- Have I failed to defend my friend when I have heard him or her attacked?
- Do I avoid friends if they are in trouble, in sorrow or sinning in a noticeable way?
- [Do I do things or have personal habits or idiosyncrasies that hurt or grate on others?]

All of these attitudes and actions can wound a relationship. When you sense or observe a friendship in conflict, you can be sure that healing is needed. Too often we are willing to settle for an uneasy stand-off rather than press through the painful process of honest confrontation and resolution.

The first move, then, must be to determine the source of the conflict. This is essential in order to restore peace and growth to a friendship. Conflict left unresolved escalates into bitterness, gossip, or anger and inevitably draws others into the dissension as well...

Have you offended a friend? Has he or she hurt and offended you? Remember, you bear the responsibility for restoring the relationship. Whether you are at fault or your friend is at fault, be willing to risk a further breach in the friendship by trying to settle the issue. Be willing to make peace, even if it means humiliation or rejection. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God"(Matt. 5:9).

Jesus knew the inevitability of conflict, but he promised blessing to those who were willing to work towards peace and harmony. In biblical terms, peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to confront and heal broken friendships, however difficult and lengthy that process might be...

Restoration is easiest while the offence is still recent. If grievances accumulate, restoration becomes more difficult and sometimes impossible (Friends and Friendship, p105-107).

Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, "If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave the gift there at the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift". We don't bring gifts to the altar today. But it is easy to see the principle. Let's not fool ourselves - we can't carry a right relationship with God and ignore the fact that we have caused offence and hurt to someone else.

Christ instruction implies that we should do something about the problem as soon as we're able to - make a phone call, write a note, pay a visit - get it straightened out. If we tell the one we have offended that we are sorry and try to relieve the tension between two friends, then God will be eager to accept us both.

The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:26, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath" or as the Phillips translation renders it, "Never go to bed angry." Paul encourages us to solve our conflicts as quickly as it is possible and not talk ourselves out of being reconciled.

We need humility to be willing to admit our mistakes and apologise(Eph.4:1-3). Then we're to make sure we don't repeat those mistakes which often can be hard and sometimes we'll fall down on.

Most conflict is generated by two people. One seldom is all wrong and the other is all right. Conflict resolution begins with each of us personally understanding our individual parts in causing the conflict. I remember a minister who once said, "If there is a conflict and the other person is 99% wrong and you are only 1% wrong you still have to repent of that 1%."

To admit wrong or guilt is one of the hardest things we humans do. But if you want to have peaceful relationships and get along with others, if you want to solve the problems while they are small ones you will have to see what part you played in the problem. Why should it be so hard to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

"An apology is a friendship preserver, an antidote for hatred, never a sign of weakness; it costs nothing but one's pride, always saves more than it costs, and is a device needed in every home" (Reader's Digest, April 1979, p56).

2) WHEN SOMEONE WRONGS OR HURTS US. There are always times when others will wrong us that we need to confront them about the problem. Jesus spoke about these occasions in Matthew 18:15-17 when He said, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church."

We need to show tact and gentleness in order to handle the confrontation properly. Jesus tells us we should go to our brother first and always do it in private. Some people mix up the order and go the minister first whereas the wisdom of scripture, in order to not offend your offender, is to minimise the number of people who are involved and only bring in others if it's absolutely necessary.

Once you've discovered why the conflict occurred find a time to talk privately with your friend. Sometimes it may be too difficult to confront face to face so sometimes a written note will be much more easier and enable one to convey what you mean better. If you do confront face-to-face then it should be in a comfortable setting, as free from interruptions as possible, and without time constraints.

One of my favourite verses in the book of Proverbs is Proverbs 15:1 which says, "A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger." A gentle, courteous and humble approach is necessary to have the best chance of persuading the other person to change their actions and not cause future offence to you. If you speak harshly to the other person and badger them about the problem you're likely to stir up more antagonism but if you point it out gently they're more likely to initiate restoration.

Jesus showed many times in His ministry one of the most vital christian principles is forgiveness (Matt.6:12). Rather than continuing to be angry at someone we should be willing to overlook the fault and treat our friend with kindness as if he never committed the fault in the first place.

If anyone is entitled to bear a few grudges, Jesus Christ is. Our sins put Him to death - our horrible sins as well as hurting others caused Him to undergo a horrible mutilating death. How is it that God can overlook great offences without bearing grudges or seeking revenge and yet we cannot?

We all make mistakes and most of us have done some pretty horrible sins in our time. When we realise that with proper godly humility we will be more inclined to forgive.

How often must you forgive each other? "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven," Jesus said (Matt.18:22). In some relationships like marriage you might reach the magic 490 times. Then what? Well, what Jesus meant is that there is no end to forgiveness.

3) WHEN TWO PEOPLE ARE ARGUING AND HAVE A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS.

Sometimes we have a conflict of interests with other people over something which may not be hurtful to either party eg. a husband and a wife arguing about buying something or a parent and child arguing about if a child can go somewhere.

Abraham's example in Genesis 13 teaches us about how to tactfully handle such situations. Tact is the ability to get along with others and not offend - a delicate perception of the right thing to say. Abraham said in verse 8, "Let us avoid strife and live in peace for we are brethren." He appealed to their desire for peace when Lot coveted some of the territory they were to share. Rather than insisting on his own way and getting into a large argument over a matter that wasn't too important Abraham was unselfish and willing to give and yield.

One of the peaceable fruits of godly wisdom is being willing to yield or easy to be entreated as it says in some versions. If we put others needs and desires above our own (Phil.2:1-4) and become more unselfish we will develop this flexible quality. If we have that flexible approach to others, without necessarily yielding to everything when it may not be right to, we will find we can reduce the number of arguments we have with others.

4) WHEN THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS. Prevention is better than cure as the old saying goes. There are many things we can do to prevent arguments and keep peace between people. The first major point in preventing problems is not to be oversensitive (Eph. 4:1-2). Though there is a time to point out people's faults courteously, learn to bear with them more rather than complaining too much about others' problems. Solomon spoke of how annoying a contentious or nagging woman is who is always picking at other's problems (Prov .21:19, 25:24). Forbear means "to tolerate", "put up with" and "be patient with". Rather than reacting by complaining we should strive within reason to overlook the things that others do that annoy us.

Love is not easily provoked or touchy (1 Cor. 13:5). It gives a lot of room for mistakes. Love is flexible, not stubborn. One way to reduce the friction level with others is to be generous and friendly and give lots of praise and encouragement (1 Pet. 4:8-9). Love is not demanding and doesn't insist on its own way in order to prevent arguments. Love is patient and caring when others aren't in a good mood. Rather than being touchy we should give a little more room for mistakes and help them through that bad mood. Try not to be offended by little things but have a long fuse.

The other major point in preventing problems is striving not to do anything that offends others (1 Cor. 10:32). Be willing to co-operate with the other person's ways (Phil. 2:1-4) and be willing to change, looking for ways to improve all the time - imitating the good and not the bad (2 John 11). To avoid problems we need to treat each other with love, compassion, courtesy and humility. Think twice about your comments before you speak so you don't offend others, especially when it comes to sensitive things.

Remember be sensitive to other's values and treat everyone with the respect they deserve as a potential son or daughter of God.

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred" the Bible says in Proverbs 15:17. One of the greatest blessings is interpersonal peace. Even if you have riches life can be a misery when you have hatred and conflict. Love and peace can make life a joy no matter what position you're in. God tells us to actively seek peace by doing those things which reduce friction and showing love to others (Ps. 34:14, Rom. 12:18, 14:19).

Mr Armstrong's very favourite Psalm was number 133 where the Psalmist rejoiced at the blessing of when people live together in peace. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing - life for evermore."

THE ART OF HANDLING CONFLICT AND GIVING CRITICISM

Criticising others is something that feels so easy to do, yet it is something which can do a lot of emotional damage just as easily. It takes our mind off our own faults and by knocking someone down in our own eyes it elevates us and makes us feel superior. Knowing this fatal inclination in our human nature Jesus warned us in several scriptures about how we criticise others.

Offering criticism is a delicate art because of this and one which the world gives little or no training in, yet it is absolutely critical in our relationships. I've seen people make some pretty damaging mistakes in this area and I've made some pretty woeful ones myself. I'd like to offer a few points on it that I have picked up through my reading and ones that I have learnt through painful trial and error that would be beneficial to review next time you feel you might need to confront someone over an issue.

1) IS IT NEEDED? Do you have to confront someone over what they've done or how they are handling something? Some people love fault-finding and pointing out other's real or perceived errors. Alan Loy McGuinnis makes the following comments on this point:

Some people get a feeling of well-being and superiority from criticising their friends. If you are afflicted with that plague, divest yourself of the infection as soon as possible. Alice Miller's rule of thumb is a good one: "If it is very painful to criticise your friends, you are safe in doing it. But if you take the slightest pleasure in it, that is the time to hold your tongue."

One of the most remarkable things about Jesus was that he was so different from the reformers who devoted themselves to telling people how they should change and shape up. The Pharisees were the self-appointed critics of Christ's day. Possessing what Mark Twain would have labeled a "vinegar piety", they made people nervous. But the common people were drawn to Jesus, in part because His gentleness enabled Him to understand the reasons for their mistakes. He recognised that they knew all too well

what sinners they were. It wasn't necessary to remind them of that. What they needed was not more feelings of guilt, but salvation...

When all is said and done, a large part of our success at love will depend on our ability to accept human nature as it is. The judgmental temperament never generates much affection. To put it another way we need to strive for as much understanding of others as we grant ourselves. The Sioux Indians had this rule: "I will not judge my brother until I have walked two weeks in his moccasins." The experts at love are always trying to put themselves in the place of their loved ones. In short, they possess tolerance(The Friendship Factor, p68-70).

There comes a time when a confrontation or some criticism is necessary but keep it to a minimum. Sometimes it's very hard to gauge. After many painful mistakes in this area my rule of thumb is, if in doubt don't, or put another way, err on the side of too little criticism rather than too much.

Before you do, find out what you can to determine if it is the right time to confront them. Are they going through enough problems as it is without being loaded with more? Is their self-esteem low that they need encouragement rather than criticism? Are they aware of the problem and are they trying their best to work on it already? These are some of the questions we need to answer before we confront someone over an issue.

2) STICK TO THE FACTS. Before we confront someone or criticise them we need to make absolutely sure we've got all the facts. We must be aware that sometimes even one extra fact can completely change the whole perception of a problem. Are our facts accurate? Are we interpreting the facts correctly? We need to be careful we criticise someone fairly as much as possible and not on false assumptions or facts. Also stick to one topic at a time. The resolution of one problem at a time is difficult enough without pulling in old grievances.

3) CRITICISE THE PROBLEM AND NEVER ATTACK SOMEONE PERSONALLY. It's so easy to call people names and attack someone personally rather than the issue at hand.

One of God's principles is love the sinner but hate the sin. We need to remember that every time you feel the desire to criticise someone, and focus on the issue at hand rather than attacking the person. If at all possible, talk about your feelings and not your friend's faults.

It doesn't hurt to employ a little ingenuity in your negative expressions. The woman who says, "You're not very thoughtful to get up every night after dinner and march off to watch TV" isn't going to improve her relationship with her husband. She might put it this way: "I miss having you with me when I'm clearing the table. I'd love it if you'd keep me company until I finish." Few husbands can say no to that kind of invitation (The Friendship Factor, p.141-142).

4) ALLOW YOUR FRIEND TO RESPOND.

People who walk out during an argument are dirty fighters. If you are angry with your friend, you have a responsibility to stay and hear the other side. Then there's an opportunity for resolution or compromise. But be careful not to talk for an extended period without allowing your partner's response, and do not use the old door-slaming technique as a punctuation mark (The Friendship Factor, p141-143).

5) PRAY. A very important tool in resolving conflict is prayer. Pray for the wisdom to tactfully offer the criticism in the most caring way possible. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally without reproach, and it will be given to him" (Jam.1:5).

Pray for full recovery of the relationship. Pray for your personal attitudes, and for your friend to have the right attitudes. Pray against a repeat episode. Trust God to work in and strengthen the friendship and thank God when the friendship has been healed (Friends and Friendship, p109).

6) BE HUMBLE. A person will be much more willing to listen to criticism if they are not made to feel inferior. If you criticise calmly and show you're no better than them by telling them how you've done badly in similar ways and you're been working on it also they'll be more willing to listen. Avoid talking down to them at all costs. Alan Loy McGuinnis makes these comments on this point:

One of the best-known Protestant evangelists, D.L.Moody was known as a tolerant, understanding man who rarely criticised. One of his famous sayings was, "Right now I'm having so much trouble with D.L.Moody that I don't have time to fault with the other fellow." [It's nice to be around people who see your shortcomings but let you be when they know you're working on them.] "People have a way of becoming what you encourage them to be - not what you tell them to be," someone [once] said...

Of all the Americans who possessed this quality, Lincoln is our finest model...One of his favourite quotations was, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." During the Civil War, when Mrs Lincoln spoke harshly of Southern people, Lincoln replied: "Don't criticise them, Mary; they are just what we would be under similar circumstances."...Beethoven said, "We all make mistakes, but everyone makes different mistakes," and Goethe said, "One only has to grow older to become more tolerant, I see no fault that I might not have committed myself"(The Friendship Factor, p69-70).

7) BALANCE CRITICISM WITH PRAISE. I call this approach the sandwich effect. A classic example of this are the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. Jesus started off by praising them and telling them some of their good points. Then he offered the constructive criticism that they needed to be in His kingdom before He finished off with giving them a fantastic incentive to apply the criticism - "to he who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne". It's like a sandwich in that

you start off with something positive then offer the criticism then cap it off with something positive again.

You can get away with many expressions of anger if you balance them with lots of expressions of love. When someone does something wrong when their conscience is working, it's always going to hurt their self-esteem temporarily. Offering praise helps soften the blow and giving an incentive to apply the criticism will help get their mind off their faults and focused on how good things will be when they've straightened things out.

I've lost count how many times I've seen people criticise harshly without adding anything positive to help soften the blow and I've done it numerous times myself but I try my best not to do it. Criticism is a delicate art and we should swift to hear and slow to criticise. If we offer criticism not only must we speak the truth in doing so but we must speak the truth in love(Eph.4:15).

GIVE AND IT WILL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU

One of my all-time favourite sermons was a sermon that Carn Catherwood gave in 1986 on the subject of giving. The following is a summary of that sermon:

God gives us so many things and He has a measuring stick that He employs in many of those decisions. He has to make from time to time when things are to be given to us. In Luke 6:38 it simply says "GIVE" - You, the subject, give the verb. You give - and what happens if you do - "and it shall be given unto you". There's a marvellous cycle here. You give and God gives to you. Notice how much he gives to you - a "GOOD MEASURE". In other words He's not stingy. How good is this good measure? Notice - "PRESSED DOWN AND SHAKEN". Ever open up a box of cereal and you find it's only half full because when you press it down and shake it and open it almost half of it isn't there. Well God does more than that. When God gives you a blessing He presses it down, then shakes it then there's some area left you see. Then, what does He do? He fills it up again so that it's "RUNNING OVER". The point is here is that God gives generously but He only gives to those who give to Him and to others.

You always remember the givers, don't you? The interesting thing is God also remembers the givers. Are you a giver? Does God remember you? Do you have his attention? Another point is that the example of the givers is in what creates in many ways the greatest impression on those who are new and they remember the givers. You offer food, you offer conversation, you offer the warmth of your home to somebody and it builds a bond. It binds us together and us to God because God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and wants us to become givers. God is very sensitive to giving and He responds in dramatic ways.

Mr Armstrong used to describe the two broad ways of life in the Bible very simply as the way of give and the way of get. How do we move from the way of get to the way of give?

Point one is to ask God to place in you "goodness" or generosity - the specific fruit of God's spirit (Gal. 5:22) that will eliminate the get motive and desire to be open-hearted, giving and serving.

Point two is to plan your giving. That is sit down and make an active plan for giving - opportunities, occasions and situations where you intend to live the way of give. Put some pressure on yourself! Plan it! Don't sort of stumble haphazardly into giving. You can't and you won't! Plan it, organise it, think about it and set it in motion consciously. Isaiah 32:8 says, "The generous devise generous things and by generous things do they stand." Yeah, you have to have a plan.

Plan regular opportunities to give hospitality. They're giving experiences that we need. Maybe once a month, maybe more often. Plan things in your prayer time, especially plenty of intercessory prayer for others. When you ask God to bless someone who is sick, who is weak, who is depressed you have given them time. It's a reflection of the way of give.

Plan to see those who are sick or elderly. Plan to talk to new members, visitors or those who need someone to talk to or someone who you haven't talked to for a while. If you're a single man have an active plan for giving in dating. Plan to use your resources - your money or whatever to give to others. Finally plan your offerings which you add on to your tithes in advance. Plan to increase your Holy Day offerings as time goes by.

In Psalm 37:21 David wrote, "The righteous shows mercy and gives." Is that a description of you? "(Your name) shows mercy and gives." Let's determine to give as we've never given before. To give our lives to God in submission to His will first and foremost so that He can place in us those spiritual gifts and fruits that enable us to give and to give even more than we ever have before and God's blessing will be upon us and the work of God as a result.

CONCLUSION

The all-time classic passage of scripture that describes what a true dedicated friend is like is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Let's take a different look at this wonderful passage and we'll do that by substituting the word love with "friend":

A friend is patient, a friend is kind, a friend does not envy nor is vain or puffed up, a friend does not behave rudely, a friend is not selfish or easily provoked, a friend thinks no evil, a friend does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth and a friend bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.

It's a high ideal to give true friendship consistently and to conclude this chapter on what true friendship is all about I'd like to offer my ten commandments or suggestions of friendship:-

MY TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FRIENDSHIP

- 1) Make your friendships top priority.**
- 2) Be open about yourself and your feelings.**
- 3) Be liberal with your praise and encouragement.**

- 4) Be generous with your acts of kindness and giving.**
- 5) Make regular time for interesting conversation and activities with your friends.**
- 6) Give people the space they need in your friendship.**
- 7) Show enthusiasm in what your friends are interested in.**
- 8) Be a genuine listener to what your friends have to say.**
- 9) Be expressive of your affection of others through kind words and physical affection when appropriate.**
- 10) Be loyal to your friends by never breaking a confidence and regularly seeking their company through good times and bad.**