

God's Gift of Friendship

by Eric Ellis

Through the years as I have gone through several applications for various ministry positions, a common question is found on each application. It is phrased like this; "What do you think are your greatest strengths?" One can assume that the questioners are desirous to know what the applicant feels are his spiritual gifts and/or abilities. After filling out several applications, writing the answer to this question may become routine and resemble something like this; "I have the spiritual gifts of teaching, helps and administration and I desire to use them in leading this ministry...etc, etc."

Several years ago, while answering such a question, I found myself stopped short. I began to ponder what it was that kept me faithfully pursuing the Lord's work and calling on my life. As important as giftedness and calling are to a being involved in ministry, I felt that to simply state these things wouldn't answer the question completely. After much thought, I wrote the answer this way; "I believe that one of the greatest strengths in fulfilling this ministry are the friendships that God has given to me with like-minded brothers in Christ." I truly believe that if I didn't have the friendships that I have, I would not be an effective minister. To be honest, without my friends, I might not be in ministry.

There are several passages from the Bible that affirm the need of friendship. Here are three:

☞ Proverbs 27:17 — "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

☞ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 and 12 — "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up...And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

☞ Galatians 6:2 — "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

One can also think upon several examples of friendships from the Bible...David and Jonathan, Paul and Barnabus, Peter and John. As they went about the work, being together enhanced their ministry. This isn't to say that difficulties never arose within the friendship, but being together was beneficial to the cause.

As I think about the friendships that I have found over the years, here are some characteristics of these companionships for which I praise the Lord.

Encouragement

Living in a sin-filled world, encouragement to keep walking with God faithfully is something we need. How often has it happened that you have poured your life into a young person, spent time with them and prayed for them only to have them spurn your attempts to see them walk with the Lord? Your heart breaks and you begin to question the worth of your efforts. At just this

moment, the Lord brings a friend to encourage you with a verse of Scripture or a reminder of past ministry blessings. This is just one example of encouragement. It can take many forms and they are all necessary. Encouragement is one of the treasures of God-given friendship.

Perspective

A few years ago, I was going through a difficult time marked by ministry struggles and personal tragedy. I was also disappointed in not getting a ministry position I desired. A friend of mine sought me out to ask me to consider a short-term ministry opportunity. Due to my truncated view of life, I told him that I didn't feel that I had the ability to handle that ministry and then proceeded to explain why in rather animated terms. After my rant, my friend said to me something to this effect, "Eric, slow down and think rationally for a moment. You are too close to the issues and your emotions are controlling your behavior. Your perspective is skewed." He then helped me to see the issues from a different perspective and this was very beneficial. Seeing the circumstances from his perspective showed me that things weren't as bad as I thought. I took on the ministry and was blessed by the time.

But not only in trials is perspective necessary. A friend may be able to see how a ministry may be made more effective simply because he sees what God is doing in a way you hadn't seen. The Gospels are different perspectives on the same event and because we have all of

(Friendship continued from page 1)

them, our view of our Savior's life is as complete as God wants it to be. Similarly, friends can see the same situation we are viewing and see things in ways that we would never consider. Perspective is another treasure of friendship.

Constructive Criticism

This is the one everyone hates and yet it is one of the most necessary. Due to the fact that we are not perfect people and that our sanctification is progressive, constructive criticism is an absolute need. This may take the form of a harsh rebuke... "You were wrong here!" It may take a much gentler tone... "Hey, you did great here, but this may have gone better had you done it this way."

More important than the nature of the criticism is our response to it. A

great passage to keep in mind is Proverbs 17:10; "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool." Our pride may push us to respond to criticism with hostility, but if we desire to follow the Lord, we will push ourselves to respond with humility. How much more so when the criticism comes from a friend who cares about our walk with God? A treasure of a godly friendship is constructive criticism and we should thank God for it when it comes.

Fun and Laughter

How many times can you recall staying up all hours with friends laughing your head off? The further I go into ministry, the more events stack up that are rife with hilarious memories. And if these memories don't involve at least a couple of friends, I am quickly on the phone

telling a friend about them. I treasure those times with friends when we get together to play games or do activities or just to talk and laugh. Fun and laughter is another treasure that God has given to us in our friendships.

At the point that we think we can make it on our own in this Christian life, we are closer to falling on our face than we have ever been before. God knows that we need each other. And He meets that need by giving to us friends to walk this Christian life together. Our friendships are one of our greatest strengths in ministry. Perhaps you should take a moment and thank God for His gift to you of these friends. Perhaps you should take a moment and thank your friends? Remember... "A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

Practical Ministry – Hospital Visitation

By Chris Riser

As the only pastor in a small church, I have had the privilege of more hospital and health care visits than in any of my previous ministries. These visits are a special part of the work I do and are extremely rewarding. However, as with any area of ministry, there never seems to be enough time to "visit" as well as I would like. As I grow in this area, the following procedures have been helpful:

1. If possible, never visit alone. Taking someone with you helps expose them to the work of the ministry and provides a sense of fellowship for the person you are visiting. This also helps others learn the ins and outs of helping those who are hurting. Often times,

people are afraid to visit because they don't know what to say, or are afraid they will respond poorly. Have them watch you, and then talk with them later to answer questions. This keeps the church from thinking that visitation is a "pastoral" job.

2. Make good use of the phone. Call ahead of time to find the room number and status of the person you want to visit. Also, enter the numbers of all the hospitals into your cell phone so that you don't waste time trying to track down a number in an emergency. Finally, use the phone when you can't make a personal visit. Call just before the surgery time and then after the recovery period and pray with the person or a family member. Your congregation (or youth group) knows you can't be everywhere, but they appreciate a call.

3. When you visit a hospital for the first time, take a moment to jot down

some notes on the following: directions, parking and parking costs, location of the information booth, and any special procedures necessary to visit (see the "bummer" in the next newsletter!). There are six hospitals in my area and these details have been a lifesaver.

4. Help one of your retired men gain a heart for visitation. Often you will not be able to spend extended time with family in the waiting room or during pre-op. You may be able to make a short visit at the beginning, pray with the person and their family, and then leave your retired "minister" to sit with the family or wait for the operation to end.

5. Develop a set of resources and take them with you. Such resources might include: 1) appropriate tracts for unbelievers, 2) encouraging, biblical, booklets for those who may be in the hospital several days (avoid things like "Chicken Soup for the

(Visitation continued on page 3)



Book Nook

Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens

By Paul David Tripp

“Teenagers”...“adolescence”...words that strike fear into the hearts of the bravest of parents. Paul David Tripp writes, “Even as they are enjoying the early years of a child’s life, [parents] are looking over their shoulders with dread, expecting the worst, knowing that in a few short years this precious little one will turn into a monster overnight.” (Age of Opportunity p. 13)

As the father of three young girls, I have been warned that difficult days are coming, that my angels will one day become teenagers! While I know the challenges become more complex – from diapers to dating and potty-training to peer-pressure – I do not dread the teenage years, in part because of Paul David Tripp’s book *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*.

As Tripp writes on p. 19, It is time for us to reject the wholesale cynicism of our culture regarding adolescence. Rather than years of undirected and unproductive struggle, these are years of unprecedented opportunity. They are the golden age of parenting, when you begin to reap all the seeds you have sown in their lives, when you can help your teenager to internalize truth, preparing him or her for a productive, God-honoring life as an adult.

These are the years of penetrating questions, the years of wonderful discussions never before possible. These are the years of failure and struggle that put the teen’s true heart on the table. These are the years of daily ministry and great opportunity.

These are not years merely to be survived! They are to be approached with a sense of hope and a sense of mission. Almost every day brings a new opportunity to enter the life of your teen with help, hope, and truth. We should not resign ourselves to an increasingly distant relationship. This is the time to connect with our children as never before. These are years of great opportunity.

That is what parents need to understand. And “that” Tripp writes, “is what this book is about.” (p. 19). In clear, biblical, practical writing, Tripp begins his book by unmasking the deception of our culture regarding adolescents. He then rebuilds a biblical foundation of the family and reorients parents toward the biblical goals in parenting teenagers. He powerfully reminds that parents should not be focusing on surviving these years or on simply keeping their children from sinful behavior. Instead the focus must be on shaping their hearts to love and follow God. He closes his book by giving helpful strategies for parenting teens. Throughout the book Tripp includes insightful examples from his and others’ experience that substantiate these principles.

This book has been a tremendous blessing to me. It has helped shape my ministry to teenagers and has given me a framework for how I can encourage their parents. I give this book to every parent coming into my junior high ministry and to other parents who come to me for counsel related to their teenagers. I encourage you to read it and share it with any who are entering or who are presently in the *Age of Opportunity*.

Review by Jonathan Anderson

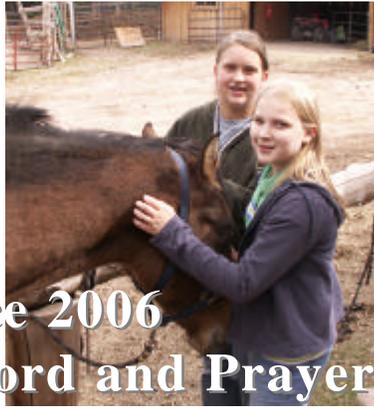
(Visitation continued from page 2)

Hurting Soul” or other such pseudo-biblical material), 3) several books on trusting God through suffering (*Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges is one of the best), 4) good biblical resource material for new parents or those dealing with the death of a loved one. God is powerfully at work during times of great suffering or great joy and it would be unfortunate to miss such an opportunity to bring God’s Word to bear through good resources.

6. Work towards building a “care team” that can visit when you are unavailable. If possible, include the elders on this team. Handling all the visitation yourself sets up an expectation for the congregation and they will feel neglected if you do not come. Help your church body learn to enjoy the visits of other church members. Teach them value your time amid all the ministries you are involved in (particularly the study and preaching of the Word). If you fail to teach the congregation about

what you are trying to accomplish in the area of visitation, you are setting yourself up for improper expectations and an ultimate let down. Try to avoid this problem through training and opportunity.

Visitation is a joyfully rewarding ministry, and it is worth doing in a God-honoring fashion. Next quarter we will look at some of the specifics of what to do, and not do, on a hospital visit.



Conference 2006
Devotion to the Word and Prayer



XMINISTRIES, INC.
P.O. BOX 821831
N. RICHLAND HILLS, TX 76182

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED