

Foundations

Early Spring

Being a Friend

How do you build and maintain the friendship with your spouse? Sounds like it should be a fairly easy task, but for many it's not. There are two main reasons: the first is that the couple didn't start out as friends. Arranged marriages don't usually have spouses that started out as friends. Some couples marry quickly after meeting so they have not had time to build a friendship. Then there are those who put other criteria first. Whether it's looks, intelligence, success potential, those couples may not have come into marriage as friends. "The strongest marriages are based on strong friendships," says Dr. John Gottman, who has been researching relationships for over 25 years. So have these couples lost their chance for a strong marriage? Not at all. The door is still open for them to build a friendship to support their marriage.

Getting to Know You

How well do you know your spouse? Do you know their favorite kind of food? Their favorite genre of movie? Their best childhood friend? If you haven't known each other long, then you could have some trivia questions you each try to answer when you are together. The better you know your spouse the easier it will be to cultivate a friendship. My spouse likes football – I don't. I love reading mystery stories. He doesn't. SO we won't try to forge a friendship around either of those things, but knowing them allows me to buy a hat for him with his favorite team logo, while he might pick up a new mystery for me!



Getting to Trust You

As you learn more about your partner and develop an attitude of affection, you should be able to come to trust them. That trust should extend beyond the major issues – they won't cheat on you or abscond with all your money – but to more mundane, everyday things. They will speak up in your defense. They will pick the kids up if they said they would. They will have your back in the chores of everyday life as well as the curve balls life throws at you.

Getting to Like You

It may seem self-evident that you should like your partner, right? But sometimes we just focus on the wrong things! You know there are times when you are upset with a behavior and it colors everything. But one behavior is not the totality of any person. When you can

step back and see it as part of a whole picture of your spouse you may have a better perspective. Are you tired, or hungry, or sad? Maybe that's why you got upset. If you can bring to mind the affection you usually feel for this person it might help. Now this is the "put the red tablecloth in with the white towels" kind of blunder. But even for bigger issues, being able to access the feelings of warmth for your partner can help heal a breach much quicker.

And the road goes on...

Songwriter Dave Mallett has a song entitled "And the Road goes on forever." It addresses the nature of friendship, but in addition it talks about the reality of a life that keeps unfolding in front of us. That is the nature of friendship in marriage too. As we work on it, it continues to unfold.

A Friend in Need

I have often wondered about the expression "A friend in need is a friend in deed." The intended meaning of course, is that a true friend will show their friendship by showing up when you really need help. They are friends not just in word, but in deeds.

Friend – really?

All of us have had the experience of being let down by someone who promised to be there for us and then never showed up. We questioned whether or not they were the friend they claimed to be. We may even have been the friend that didn't show. We forgot or we found it inconvenient and made up an excuse.

A Needy Friend??

When I first heard the expression, I thought it was "A friend in need is a friend indeed." But why would a needy friend be a friend indeed? Needy friends should be avoided. Shouldn't they?

What a lot of us wish for is a rich friend. We want someone who will be there for



us when we need their help. Someone with enough resources (money, tools, information, time) to enable them assist us when we are in need.

No Thought of Repayment

On the other hand, when we befriend another person who needs us and cannot possibly repay us for our help we learn the meaning of true friendship. True friendship is being available

without the thought of repayment. It is helping without an ulterior motive, and in the helping we are enriched. Not by the person we assisted, but by the experience itself.

Responding Out of Love

When my best friend and spouse needs my help he or she is a friend because they call from me the best part of myself. They ask and I respond out of love, not because I owe them but because I love them. Each time I am asked and I respond I am a better person – less selfish, less concerned with repayment and better able to give the next time.

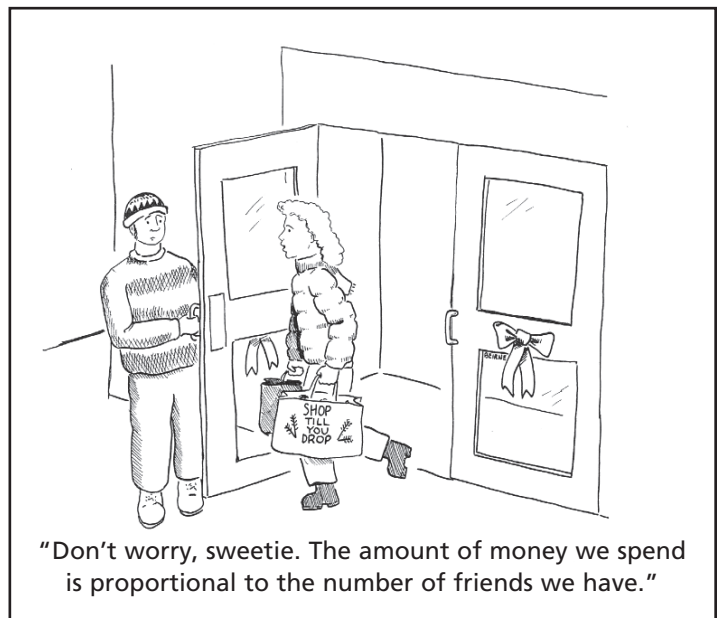
Haven't they paid me a great compliment by implying that I am one of the "rich" ones who has the resources to support them?

What Better Friend

My friend has asked and I have responded and we are both the better. What better friend could I have than one who calls me out of myself and calls me to grow? That person is a friend indeed!

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; if you find one you have found a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price. No sum can balance their worth.

Sirach 6:14-15



Exercise

I know/understand:

- My friends are an important part of my life.
- My friends influence my values and choices.
- My spouse is my best friend.
- We have friends who are friends to our marriage

Agree Disagree Unsure

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I believe:

- It's important to support my spouse in their desire to have friends.
- Friendship is an important part of a good marital relationship.
- My friendships have changed over the years.
- Friendship requires time and effort.

Agree Disagree Unsure

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I will:

- Avoid making fun of or criticizing my spouse's friends.
- Try to balance friend time and spouse time (including internet contacts)
- Develop a common hobby or volunteer opportunity, if we don't already have one, with my spouse

Agree Disagree Unsure

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Listen for the Message

Inside the marital friendship or outside among your larger pool of friends, it is a time in our society when the art of listening is essential to protecting the friendships that are important to you. How do you maintain friendship when you are scared or distraught, distracted or anxious? You may have friends with whom you have substantial disagreements. What tools are available for bridging the divide?

Take a Breath

If you are in a conversation that is upsetting to you, remember to take a breath. Breathe in and count to five and then breathe out while you count to five. Breathing does two things. First, it increases the oxygen in your system, which lowers your blood pressure. It also gives you time to react in a more measured way. Use your breathing to help you respond in a way that will give you a chance to think if there anything in your friend's comment that you can agree with? It's a kind of reframing and it can allow you to take a



different approach to the comments that originally upset you. Especially if it's your spouse who you're in conversation with, you will want to step back from criticism or sarcasm.

Listen to Understand

Make sure you understand what you each mean by the words that your friend is using. Sometimes we have different

interpretations of words. Ask questions if you think there might be different ways of interpreting what's being said. When I am upset or frustrated it becomes harder to listen and harder to make eye contact. So then I miss cues that my friend is giving me.

Try to believe that they are as sincere about their thoughts and opinions as you are about yours.

Fair Play

Try to give your friend the consideration you want them to give you. Don't interrupt. Try to believe that they are as sincere about their thoughts and opinions as you are about yours. Respond with "I" statements and not global ones. "I believe..." or "It's my understanding..." are respectful ways of putting forward your thoughts without making the other person feel defensive. If you don't feel respected in the conversation, you can let them know that you also deserve to be listened to and to have your point of view treated respectfully.

Bottom Line

We all come from different circumstances and have been surrounded by people who have helped form our thoughts, opinions, even personalities, but none of them is the right way for a person to be or think or act. Jesus was the only perfect human (Mary a close second). If you are very far apart in your beliefs, then you may have to put a friendship on hold. If you and your spouse have very different beliefs, consider seeing a professional therapist. After all, there were some significant things that you agreed on for you to have married in the first place. Make a pact to resurrect those connections and build on them.

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Going out with your friends – again?

Some people live in the same community their whole lives. Imagine the number of friends you can accumulate over that time. You have neighborhood friends, school friends, friends that played on a sports team with you, friends from church. Coming into marriage with all these people who are competing for your spare time, when your spouse is also looking to spend time with you, can be stressful. On the other hand, coming from the same community may give you a common set of expectations about what your friendships should look like after marriage.

Then there are the rest of us, who moved away from our home town. We may have needed to build a community around us, and want to keep in touch with those folks after we're married. That is very appropriate, but again calls for an adjustment on the part of our spouse. What if they don't have that need? What if they are perfectly happy to have their socializing time with you?

Here are some suggestions for having that conversation.

1. Find a good time to talk. Like any issue in marriage, don't try to sort things out in the middle of a tense situation. If your spouse says "Going out with your friends – again?" it's not the time to try to figure it out. It's time to apologize that you hadn't let them know that this was scheduled, and to assure them that you really want to talk about it.
2. Explain what having time with your friends means to you. (That might mean figuring it out for yourself first). Whether it's a sense of independence, a chance to talk about things that don't interest her or him, a chance to catch up with the lives of others you care about, it is easier to understand if they know the reason behind your need to be with friends.
3. Then the two of you should set some expectations. You will let your spouse know in advance that you're planning



a friend's night. It will not be more often than X times a month. You will also schedule a friend night with your spouse doing something you both like to do.

People differ in the amount of time they need to spend with friends. In an [article](#) on male friendships, one man said, "I don't need a guy's night out. I have two brothers that I hang out with occasionally. I never had a lot of friends in school so I never was the hang with the guy's type." Another told how his war buddy was the only one he could talk to about what they both went through.

There are good reasons for having and keeping friends, but in doing so you do not want to lose track of your primary relationship. If your friends complain that they don't see enough of you, it's a sign that they value you and let them know you still enjoy your time with them, you just have less to go around now. And remind them it's much more fun to be with them when they are not complaining!

A Time to Talk

by **Robert Frost**

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, What is it?

No, not as there is a time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod: I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.

Spirituality

No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. John 15:15

If we ever had a question about what Jesus had in mind for his relationship with us, this one quote should help us understand his intentions. He meant for us to be friends. And because we are friends, he lets us know that we are on the inside track. He plans to give us all the information that comes from his Father.

Open Doors

So the nature of friendship being a relationship where the doors are open between two people comes directly from scripture. Observing the way people behave, we may see some choosing friends for some advantage to them. Politically, it would be good to be friends with him. Socially, I will be in the right circles if I'm friends with them.

What Motivates the friendship

But Jesus seems to indicate that friendships based on ulterior motives are not true friendships at all. If we are guarded in the things we share, or picking only the most flattering view of ourselves to reveal to the other, then we need to examine the friendship for its genuineness.

Think about how relaxed you are with some people, how easy it is to share, to laugh, to reveal your concerns and doubts. That is part and parcel of friendship in the way Jesus seemed to be describing it.

Sharing with Your Spouse

That is the essence of the friendship called marriage. You should be able to share openly your sadness, fears, doubts, as well as your joys, successes, and insights.



If you find yourself not wanting to hear your partner's negative feelings, think about how Jesus wanted to share ALL his Father had shared with him, which included the pretty bad news that he was going to be killed.

Ears Fully Open

Do you feel that your partner has a tough time listening to you share from a painful place? A reminder from you of how much it means to you to be able to open up may be all they need to turn toward you in true listening mode, fully lover, fully friend.

We live in a fix it and move on world. Creating a safe harbor in your home for the two of you will deepen your friendship and your spirituality as well.

Foundations

A NEWSLETTER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

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