

Enjoying Godly Relationships

The best relationships are the messiest ones. At first glance, it sounds odd, right? How can good friendships be dirty? Because we're fallen, broken people, living well with others requires getting into the muckiness of each others' lives. If you're interested in going beyond the superficial with others, I have some helpful tips to transform your relationships. Let's start here: "It is so hard to make friends at our church."

Born to Isolate

Struggles with building relationally with others are among the more common complaints I hear from church people. It is also a typical response in the counseling office when I appeal to find a friend to help with the person's ongoing challenges. This tension is not strange to me because it is our Adamic tendency. We're born isolationists. Being open and honest does not come easy for anyone. We're all like Adam—men and women hiding behind leaves ([Genesis 3:7](#)).

The sense of shame we carry is a natural inhibitor that keeps us from getting close to others. It takes work to build relationally with other humans. Creator God made Adam from the dust, and we are his offspring ([Genesis 2:7](#)). If you take two dirt clods and rub them together, there will be more dirt. I understand why talking about nothing is more straightforward than talking about something. Before, there was the compelling interest of the Spirit of God inside me, motivating me to build with others, I was content with the shallow waters of relationships because I didn't care for the mess.

Getting deep with others means you'll get into the muck and mire of their lives. You will get dirty. But it's the call from God and the point of the gospel. Christ, the gospel, was all about going to others and getting into their business. It was His job, and we are His children ([Ephesians 5:1](#)). One of the characteristics and "pieces of evidence" for being a Christian is our affection for each other. A person who shows little interest or love in others could be an unbeliever ([1 John 3:14](#); [Hebrews 13:1](#)).

Down and Dirty

If you are interested in taking a relationship to a deeper level, you need to have a way of thinking about them before you begin building with them. And while acquaintances can come quickly and sometimes naturally, they won't stay long if you don't have a biblical understanding of how to build and maintain them. Relationships are not static. They are always moving in one direction or another.

For the believer, our spiritual connections must come under the guidance and influence of the Spirit of God if they will help us mature in Christ. This process will take work, which our shallower relationships do not require. There is minimal difficulty with having a *sports relationship*, but if you want to have a *God-centered one*, you need a biblical game plan.

I will give you a simple game plan for building relationally with others. If you follow this plan, you will find a few people willing to go along with you on this spiritual adventure. I'll lay these steps out in order from one to seventeen. Think through each step reflectively. Then, answer the question at the end of each to assess yourself more carefully.

Section One: Prepare Your Heart

1 – Being Prayerful: Prayer is the presumed starting place, not because it is obvious, but because it is essential. Everything should be a matter of prayer, especially how you think about your involvement with others. Your heart must be ready and actively prepared to love others more than yourself ([Philippians 2:4-5](#)).

- Are you actively praying for a mind motivated to seek the interests of others more than your interests?

2 – Being Repentant: If you actively pray about others, you will be motivated to make personal changes for the sake of others. You won't have quality relationships if you're not open to change. Though Jesus did not have to repent, He had to change for the sake of others ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)).

- Are you prepared to change to build genuinely with others?

3 – Being Inconvenienced: The first thing you will have to deal with regarding changing yourself is the idea of being inconvenienced for the sake of others. Other

people will not meet all your expectations. When Christ decided to build relationally with us, He had to leave His place to come to ours ([Philippians 2:7](#)).

- Are you willing to alter your lifestyle for the sake of others?

4 – Being Sacrificial: Inconvenienced could mean changing your plans, altering your preferences, or not getting your way momentarily. Being sacrificial is pouring out your life with an unsure return on investment. Christ left His home, took on flesh, and lived among us, which was "inconvenient." Then He gave up His life for us ([Philippians 2:8](#)).

- What is the cost of your discipleship?

Section Two: Provide Attitude and Contexts

The first four elements assess your heart regarding your desire and readiness to build relationally with others. With a heart ready to receive friends, you need qualities that will help you connect with them.

5 – Being Relational: Christ could relate to people because He understood them. He knew His audience. He spent time thinking about others and discerning how to relate to them. If He wanted to connect relationally with an individual or a group, He did. ([John 2:24-25](#)).

- Do you understand people and know how to connect with them?

6 – Being Available: When He did choose to connect with others, He made Himself available. It would be best if you had more than good intentions to be friends with dirt clods. You must be available. With a ready heart and focused mind, Christ put Himself in places where others could find Him to receive His help ([John 3:1-2](#)).

- Do you create space in your life to care for others?

7 – Being Hospitable: I had lunch with a man who told me one of the main reasons he bought his house was its layout. He spent time thinking about how to build his life with others. Part of this meant creating functional space in his life so others could come into his world ([John 3:1-2](#)).

- Do people feel invited into your world?

Section Three: Lead Others With Humility

The first section of tips talked about adjusting your heart to build with others. The second section dealt with attitudes and contexts for loving others. This third section covers your leadership role in the lives of those you want to help transform into Christlikeness.

8 – Being Intentional: Building relationally with others is a character trait of leaders. Leaders seek out others, which is the intentional activity of Christians humbled and motivated by the gospel. These leaders have a vision for the task. Followers don't have the foresight or the gumption to exercise this kind of relational leadership.

- Are you on the lookout for others, and how can you invest in their lives?

9 – Being Honest: "I will if you will" is the unspoken mantra among the tentative. Rarely will a person be the first to show honesty about his life. If you want a person to be honest with you, you will have to lead with your honesty. Being honest is being truthful. Not being honest is being fearful. There is a tentative (fear) element that hinders truth-telling.

- How does your example of honesty motivate others toward honesty?

10 – Being Vulnerable: Weakness is strength in God's economy (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Christ was willing to become nothing so He could help us. Your potential friend struggles with sin. Your vulnerability will be essential if you want him to open up about his struggles.

- How vulnerable are you around your friends?

11 – Being Transparent: Adamic tendencies tempt us to cover up whenever possible. Wise and transparent people are rare in our world. Being around someone who does not mind sharing his true self with you is refreshing. One of the remarkable traits of the Savior was His willingness to be real (John 11:36).

Section Four: Motivate Toward Christ

This last section interacts with how to talk to others. If the preceding traits, attitudes, and ideas have changed your heart and mind, what's coming next will be self-evident. Your humility will have opened the door for your friend to get real with you. What you need to do now is motivate him to go to the next level in your relationship.

12 – Being Encouraging: God motivates us primarily by His grace. To hang out with God is to be encouraged by Him ([John 7:46](#)). The most encouraging thing God ever did for us was to send His Son to rescue us from ourselves. He could have punished us, but He chose another course of action. It was through His kindness that our change came ([Romans 2:4](#)).

- After people spend time with you, how are they affected? Are they generally encouraged?

13 – Being Gracious: Interacting with fallen people is challenging at times. Disappointment is certain. Remember, dirt rubbing against dirt will produce more dirt. If you plan to go beyond being superficial and you're in a relationship for the long haul, you're going to be disappointed ([Proverbs 19:11](#)).

- Are you more aware of the grace of God in your friend's life or where they are failing?

14 – Being Discerning: All things will not be as they appear with your new friends. Prepare to be surprised. The doctrine of sin informs us that people are not perfect. Don't over-inflate your expectations; you will be disappointed when you get the whole scoop on your new friends.

- Are your expectations regarding others informed by the Word of God or something else? (You may assess the answer to this question by how disappointed you become in people. How you react to others will reveal your practical theology.)

15 – Being Intrusive: If you have their best interests at heart and you're in the relationship for them rather than for you, you're ready to go deeper. If you practice what I've said thus far, they will—more than likely—let you explore their hearts.

- Are you afraid to explore a person's heart with them?

16 – Being Trustworthy: A biblical friendship is something you must steward. It's a treasure that takes time to cultivate and grow. No one enjoys suffering; most people would like a true friend to share their struggles. If you have poured yourself into a relationship, and they have reciprocated, you are responsible for taking care of their trust.

- Can you be trusted with the precious and secret truths of others?

Section Five: Doing It Right

17 – Being Grateful: You'll know if you've built your relationship on a biblical foundation by how you respond when you think about your friends. Gratitude is the dynamic measurement of the Christ-centered heart. If people wear you down to the point of continual frustration, something is not right with you.

It would be best if you made changes. Sometimes, people will frustrate you, but you should not stay that way for long. Grace overpowers sin, and gratitude characterizes the grace man or grace woman. The opposite of the grateful heart is the grumbling heart. Criticalness, complaints, grumbling, lack of faith, and cynicism are the big culprits of someone with a wrong view of relationships.

Typically these sinful characteristics mean a person's motives off center. Something is amiss in their theology of friendships. There is something desired but not received, which you discern by a lack of gratitude.

- Are you characterized by gratitude when it comes to your relationships?

Call to Action

Here are some thoughts and questions to get the ball rolling with your friends. Be gracious. Be bold. Trust God. I suspect you will be surprised by God if you dare to go this far with your friends.

1. Share with your friend what God is doing in your heart.
2. Ask your friend, "Tell me about your relationship with Jesus Christ?"
3. Share with your friend some of the things you struggle with regarding your walk with Christ.
4. Ask your friend to share one of their struggles.
5. Share with your friend where you see God changing you.
6. Ask your friend where they see God changing them.
7. I asked you seventeen questions, one under each point. Write them down, along with your answers, and take them to your friend and share your thoughts. It's time to get down and dirty with your friend.