

# **FRIENDSHIPS: GOOD, UNFULFILLING, AND NONEXISTENT**

Would you like to be physically healthier,  
especially as you grow older?  
Would you like to live longer?  
Would you like to enjoy life more  
and feel better emotionally?  
Would you like to keep your brain sharp  
and your memories intact as long as possible?

There's a way you can do this.  
All of this.  
Create and maintain good friendships.

That's what the research shows.  
Our health is better,  
our brains are better,  
life is better,  
we are better  
if we have a few truly good, supportive relationships  
with other people.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development  
followed the lives of 724 boys and young men  
over a period of 75 years.  
During that period the men regularly  
completed questionnaires,  
were interviewed in their homes, and  
had their medicals records reviewed.  
And the study concluded

## **1. Men with good relationships are healthier and happier and they live longer.**

Men who are lonely live shorter lives and their health begins to deteriorate earlier.

A sad fact, one in five Americans reports being lonely even if he or she is married.

## **2. The quality of our relationships matters.**

The study discovered that men with the most supportive relationships at age 50 were the most likely to be physically healthy and happy at age 80.

More important than the level of their cholesterol in predicting future health was the quality of their relationships.

Good relationships helped men overcome heart disease, cancer and the death of a spouse.

And when in pain,

those with supportive relationships continued

to be happy and emotionally stable,

whereas those without those relationships reported

that their physical pain was magnified.

## **3. Good relationships protect our mental health.**

Men with good, close relationships

lost mental sharpness and developed memory loss and dementia

later in life than did men without healthy relationships.

So, good relationships are good for our health and our happiness.

The Harvard report did not talk about the spiritual benefits of good relationships.

But I want to mention that for just a moment.

## **The right kind of relationships help us grow in our relationship with God.**

The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone.

Nowhere in the Scriptures do you get the impression

that a man's relationship with God will thrive if it's just

God, me and my Bible.

There is a profound appreciation in the Scriptures

that we need each other,

that we need deep, supportive relationships with other believers

if we are going to overcome the troubles of life

and the temptations of the world,

and be faithful to God.

We are all impacted by the people we are around.  
They rub off on us.

Our relationships will either inspire us to  
live on a higher level,  
grow closer to God, and  
do more for his kingdom.

Or our relationships will  
bring temptation into our lives,  
give us permission to coast in our relationship with God, and  
live for self rather than for Christ.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians

**1 Corinthians 15.33:** Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.

Do not be misled.  
Don't be fooled,  
don't think this doesn't apply to you.  
You will become like those you are the closest to and  
spend the most time with.

You'll begin to see the world the way your close friends do.  
You'll start to value what they value.  
And you will be influenced to live the way they live  
and if they are not men of integrity,  
your character will be corrupted.

**Proverbs 13.20:** Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools  
and watch your life fall to pieces.

Of course, you can have nonchristian friends.  
Who's going to bring them to Christ  
if everybody who knows Jesus says, "I can't hang out with you."

But there are people who influence us.  
And if they are living for the values of the world,  
they will rub off on us.

One of you even wrote:

My old friends have bad habits so I have had to move on.  
Now I don't have any.

That's painful,

but if the choice is old friends or a new life in Christ,  
saying good-bye is worth the sacrifice because  
if you fill your life with men  
who live for themselves,  
who possess the values of the world, and  
who have no higher purpose than  
making more money,  
acquiring more stuff, and  
fulfilling the lusts of their flesh,  
you will end up disappointing  
yourself,  
your family, and  
your God.

But there's a positive in Proverbs 13.20.

You will also be influenced by the relationships you have  
with persons of character and faith.

Proverbs 13.20 begins: "Become wise by walking with the wise."

Spend time with people who are wise enough to make decisions  
based on their faith;  
open your heart to people who are trying to follow Christ;  
surround yourself with men who are  
devoted to their wives,  
invested in their children,  
and living as servants –  
and they will influence you and inspire you  
to do and be more for Jesus.

That's why I say that the right kinds of relationships  
will help you grow spiritually.

To sum up what we have said so far:

Physically, emotionally, mentally AND spiritually,  
 there's no question that having people in our lives  
 that we feel close to,  
 that we feel like we can count on, and  
 that are trying to live for Christ  
 makes a huge difference in the quality of our lives.

Today is our last session of Quest for the semester.  
 And we're looking at your responses to the question:  
 What is your biggest complaint with your friendships –  
 or the lack thereof?

Here's some good news.

Many of you reported on the survey that you have several good friends.

Some of you wrote:

I have quite a few good friendships and several great friendships.  
 No complaints. I have good friends and we are there for each other.  
 I'm very fortunate to have a circle of very close friends  
 and a broader circle of good friends that share my faith.  
 I thank God for my friends every day.  
 Super friends! Super Quest table! Blessed in every way!

But more of you,  
 many more of you, reported something different.

Some of you simply responded that you didn't really have any friends.

I have acquaintances through work, neighbors and parents we know  
 from the kids growing up. But no close friends.  
 I don't have any very close friends.  
 Lol ... what friends.  
 I don't have close friendships where they know me and I feel safe enough  
 to discuss my failings and get support and grace.  
 No true friends. Lots of acquaintances but no one to truly lean on.

That leads to a second group of complaints.  
You have men you would call friends,  
    but your relationships don't go very deep.  
A partial sampling of what you wrote:

Too superficial.  
Surface relationships.  
Lots of superficial friends  
    but not many deep friendships.  
No deep friendships.  
I have casual friendships, but no in-depth friendship.  
    We all seem too busy.  
I don't have any friends who will take the chance of telling me what I need  
    to hear but don't want to hear. I need that.  
Superficial, hard to find real Christian men that want to talk about real  
    things.  
Have several friends who just want to talk politics all the time.  
    I have started to limit my exposure to them.

And several of you wrote  
    that the friendships you have  
        require you to do all the initiating.  
You don't feel like they are reciprocal.

Some of you have great friendships  
    and feel very thankful.  
Many of you do not  
    and you wish you did.

There are some common patterns when it comes to adult friendships.  
It won't surprise you that  
    the patterns for men are different than the patterns for women.

Studies show that in their late 20s and 30s,  
    women have a harder time staying in touch with old friends.  
Those are the years when many women are busy  
    starting careers and raising children.  
But around age 40, women start reconnecting.

They usually have more discretionary time at that point,  
but researchers have discovered this middle-aged focus on friendship  
is one way that women plan the next chapter of their lives.  
They turn to friends for guidance and empathy.

Men tend to build friendships until about age 30,  
but there's often a drop off after that.  
One reason is that their friendships are often impacted by  
by geographical moves and differences in career trajectories.  
Some men try to fill the void by connecting  
with buddies they knew when they were younger.  
Social media is making this easier.  
But often, men simply go without.

Another difference is that women tend to have face-to-face relationships.  
They talk, they cry together, and they share feelings and secrets.

Men' friendships are more typically side-by-side relationships.  
We bond by doing things together.  
We play golf, go to ballgames, go hunting, etc.  
That's very often how we create and maintain relationships.  
Even when guys are together by themselves,  
they're not as likely to share feelings or  
tell each other what's going on in our lives.

Dr. Geoffrey Greif makes this point his book Buddy System.

He writes that

Men put less emphasis on frequent contact with their friends  
and show less physical and emotional affection than women.

And women are more likely to be supportive of their friends by listening to  
their feelings.

Men give support by – giving advice.

Well known author and WSJ columnist Jeffrey Zaslow  
wrote an article comparing men's and women's relationships.

In it he said that a woman from Wisconsin had written him saying she and her friends effortlessly share intimate information and feelings with each other.

And she was completely baffled by her husband after he came home from a fishing trip to Canada with four longtime friends.

She wondered what they had talked about the whole week. She knew that one man was having trouble at work. Another's daughter was getting married. And a third man was dealing with some health problems.

When she enquired about each of these, her husband's reply to each one was simply: It didn't come up. She couldn't believe it.

She told him: Two female strangers in a public restroom would share more personal information in five minutes than you guys talked about in a week.

Men and women tend to do relationships differently. Women, in general, are more verbal by nature than men. Women, in general, are more in touch with their emotions than men. Women, in general, and this starts as soon as we come out of the womb, need and make more eye contact than men do.

Here's a scene from City Slickers that illustrates a lot the way men communicate and support each other.

Clip: City Slickers

What did we see about men and relationships?



Men often bond by doing things together.  
The guys go on a trail ride.  
Doing that leads to good, substantive conversations.

Billy Crystal – best day of his life:  
going to a game with his father,  
learning something from him,  
doing something together.

Both of those – the trail ride and the ballgame,  
they're side by side events,  
not face to face.

Men aren't quick to talk about emotional events in their lives.  
The cancer scare for Crystal and his wife –  
he doesn't tell his friends.

Dad's blessing at the wedding.  
Not verbal,  
but a wink that says I see you, I'm proud of you.

They call each other on their stuff –  
you're a half empty kind of a guy;  
how does your wife stand you?

And they can only stand so much emotional closeness,  
until one of them has to make a joke.  
Worst day of my life –  
every day since I got married.

Men and women do relationships differently.  
And that's ok.  
I don't think we need to do relationships the way women do.  
But, I do think we need to do relationships better than men usually do.

And so do you.  
Those of you who have relationships  
that are open and honest and supportive,  
know you have something special.

And you are grateful.  
And those of you who don't,  
    you know something important is missing.  
That's what your answers on the survey showed.  
You don't have real friendships with other men.  
Or if you do,  
    they don't go very deep.

They stay side-by-side,  
    focused on what you're doing together  
        instead of opening up so that someone knows you  
        and you know him,  
and you feel connected to another guy on a deeper level  
    than you both like golf or football or hunting or poker.

So we need good, deep relationships if we are going to thrive  
    physically, emotionally and spiritually.  
And most of us want those relationships.  
We just don't know how to create those relationships.

I have spoken to you several times on friendships  
    over the 18 years that Quest has been meeting.  
I like the way I normally handle the topic.

I show you that the Apostle Paul,  
    who was incredibly strong and driven,  
        knew that he needed friends and  
        reached out for others to support him.

And we see that even Jesus,  
    God incarnate,  
        knew he needed the support of his friends  
        to be faithful in the most difficult moments of his life  
        and asked for their help.  
And then I tell you the characteristics to look for in a friend.

But rather than do what I normally do,  
    I am going to let your complaints set the agenda  
        and try to speak to your responses on the survey.

The first is this.

### **1. I wish I had more close friends.**

That's what many of you said.

So, the question is,  
 how do we create friendships –  
 close friendships that have a real sense of connectedness,  
 where we do not feel lonely or alone,  
 but understood and supported.

Probably not by walking up to another guy and saying,  
 Do you want to be my friend?  
 Do you want to hear my deepest darkest secrets  
 and do you want to tell me yours?  
 I'm guessing that will not work with most guys,  
 and the guys it will work on –  
 you probably don't want as friends.  
 I'm thinking that approach is how your head ends up  
 inside of Jeffrey Dahmer's refrigerator.

So, let's accept the fact that we are men  
 and we don't usually begin our friendships  
 by deciding that we are going to start meeting  
 with someone we don't know  
 to share our feelings and reveal our insecurities.

And let's accept the fact that men don't do well  
 in relationships when the other person,  
 male or female is overly needy.

Dr. Geoffrey Greif is a professor  
 at the University of Maryland's School of Social Work,  
 He has studied how 386 men made, kept and nurtured friendships.

In his research, Dr. Greif found that men generally resist high-maintenance relationships, whether with spouses, girlfriends or male pals. Greif states that when picking friends, "men don't want someone who is too needy."

Men,  
and I know plenty in this church,  
can be incredibly sensitive to someone who is hurting  
and very supportive emotionally and verbally.  
But that usually comes after we have become friends;  
it's not the basis for a friendship.

So, how do we usually make friends?  
We've already said it.

We do things together.  
Some interest,  
some project,  
some hobby brings us together.  
We spend time together doing something we enjoy  
or something we think is important –  
and we discover that we have something in common  
and we enjoy talking to each other.

Here's where the church,  
especially a church like ours,  
can be an incredible resource.

Guys in our church have become real friends  
because they went on a mission trip together.  
They spent several days working together,  
bragging on each other,  
making fun of each other,  
serving Jesus and the poor together, and  
hearing a little bit about each other's story.

They come back here,  
and they introduce their wives,

and they find a reason to hang out.  
 The four guys who you heard a year ago talk about their work  
 in Piliguin, Honduras –  
 that's how they got to know each other.  
 And now, they won't tell you that they're friends;  
 they'll tell you that they are brothers, and  
 they are.

You don't have to go on a mission trip for this to happen  
 There are so many ways to serve right here  
 without having to go somewhere far off.

Habitat for Humanity.  
 Marriage ministry.  
 Lay caring ministry.  
 Music ministry.  
 Children's Sunday School.  
 Special needs ministry.  
 Prison ministry.  
 Work an Emmaus Walk.

All of these will help you connect with other people  
 as you do God's work.

Other people have connected here through  
 the camera club,  
 our adult recreation ministry,  
 various trips that our senior citizens and singles go on often, and  
 by participating in our marriage ministry Re-Engage.

Let's accept the fact that we're men.  
 We are going to connect very often  
 through the things we do.

So, find something you care about  
 that will get you involved with other people.  
 And chances are,  
 you'll find someone you can become friends with.

Another complaint was

## **2. My relationships tend to be superficial.**

One of you wrote:

I don't spend enough time cultivating deep relationships.

Another:

It's hard to find real Christian men who want to talk about real things.

Another:

It is difficult to cultivate authentic and deep friendships with other men.

Most men tend to be guarded with their true selves and stick to surface level topics.

One more:

It seems men don't really form deep friendships.

Again, our relationships are going to be different  
than the relationships that women have with each other.

And our pride and our need to be respected  
often keep us from opening up,  
admitting our needs and our insecurities, and  
allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with other men.

But,

many of you said you want real friends  
with relationships that are deeper than the ones you have now.

The best thing I know to tell you is to get into a small group.

**Here's a screen shot** of the small groups we offer for men.

These are meeting presently.

Most of them are open to new guys joining.

I'm not going to tell you that all of them

are completely transparent and ready to handle the deepest emotions.

But many of them are.

And in just about all of them,

men feel supported,

they have friends,

they have other guys who are praying for them, and

they know they are not alone.  
Go onto our website,  
look and see which one might work for you,  
and email me and I'll help you plug in.

If you're in a small group,  
take a little time,  
and think through if your group is making space  
for guys to share what's really going on with them.

When I talk with small groups,  
I often ask them to tell me the most difficult time of their lives.  
What was it,  
how did they get through it,  
what did they learn?

And often in that one session,  
guys learn more about each other than they have ever known.

That might be something you do.  
Give each guy a week to tell his story,  
especially the biggest struggle he's ever had.  
And how he handled it –  
the good, the bad and the ugly –  
and what he learned.  
And if he's in the middle of something challenging,  
ask how you can support him.

Just because I love you guys,  
and because I believe in this,  
I'm going to lead a small group  
for guys who wants to be a part of it.  
It'll be on Tuesday mornings,  
from 6:45 – 7:45.  
We'll go through my book,  
A Way through the Wilderness.  
You can sign up by emailing me.  
The number will be limited,  
so first come first served.  
It will not be superficial,

I promise you that.  
 We'll start on Nov. 19  
 It'll go on for four or five weeks,  
 and then I hope one of you will take over and lead the group in the future.

Another option.  
 Get involved in a small group with your wife  
 if you're married.  
 I met with a group a couple of weeks ago.  
 Fourteen folks, I think.  
 And it was beautiful.  
 The way they cared for each other,  
 the way they prayed and supported each other.  
 That doesn't just happen;  
 it doesn't happen immediately;  
 but it happens.  
 And there is a real richness that comes into our lives  
 when we're in a group like that.

Another option,  
 if you haven't been on a Walk to Emmaus,  
 go on that.  
 You will immediately be connected to other guys  
 who have had the same powerful spiritual experience as yourself.

Two more.

Turn your Quest table into a small group.  
 Explain

Last one.

Some of you said that you have friends –  
 but they're not spiritual friends.  
 Do something about that.

Invite them to be in a small group with you.  
 There's a great first book called The Man in the Mirror  
 that will work for you.



Email me and I'll help you be successful.

All you have to say is,

Guys, I really enjoy our friendship.

I respect y'all so much,

I think my life would be better if we had a time where I could learn  
from y'all and we could all learn from each other.

What do you think about meeting for the next six weeks?

Here's a book that might work.

Lots of options there

if you really want some deeper friendships.

Last thought for tonight and for the series.

Before our lives are over we're going to be hurt  
and/or were going to mess up.

We are going to suffer and we are going to fail.

Some of us will experience deep disappointments at work.

Others will go without a job for a long period of time.

Some of us will suffer incredible pain because of our children.

We will feel confused and helpless.

We will feel guilt and shame.

I hate to say it, but some of us will divorce.

Some of us will care for our wives as they struggle  
with cancer or dementia.

Some of us will bury our wives.

Some of us will bury our children.

I know this because this is what life does to us.

Some of us will make tragic moral mistakes.

And when it happens,

whatever it is,

you will feel like a failure;

you will feel weak and ashamed.  
Or you'll feel so angry  
that you don't want to talk to or be around anyone.

When these things happen in our lives,  
we tend to shut down emotionally and withdraw from others.  
Or we get angry at the world and at God,  
and our spirits become hard and bitter.

That's what life does to people.  
It takes us to a dark place.  
And some men never come out.  
And in that darkness they die emotionally and spiritually.

Do you know what you'll need then?  
You'll need someone who knows you and loves you enough  
to find you in that dark place,  
and love in that dark place,  
and drag you out of the darkness back into the light.  
You will need a friend.

And that kind of relationship is created  
before you go into your cave and hide.

It's a sign of courage to take on the world and its problems.  
But to take on the world and its problems alone –  
that's a sign of foolishness.

Life is not good alone.  
It's not healthy;  
it's not happy; and  
we don't end up more like Jesu if we live it alone.

Once you're grown,  
friendships – good friendships –  
rarely just happen.  
But we need them  
to be the men God created us to be.