

*What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies- Aristotle*

I believe we have a soul. In chapter 8, I talked at length about our soul. What affects it? Can it be ruined? Where is it? Within friendship, I feel that a soul finds its resting place. They say that we should find our rest in God. If God made our soul, then maybe it yearns to return to the maker. On earth, I believe that our soul yearns to rest within another soul. I think Aristotle was right.

Our soul is touched and changed by another soul. That's are what friends are for. With family it's different. It's personal somehow. I have often wondered why family can be strained. Is it soul related? With friends it's different. We become friends because of mutual interests. Mutual admiration for the things that we both love. We are not forced to be friends. I think that is it. We are individuals, and choose to blend our souls with another. In a family it's constrained and forced. Two souls bumping into each other. With a friend relationship, it's a choice.

Do friends become one? I think there is such a thing as a blood bond. It's a family affair. I'm not sure how or why but family is blood connected. At one point, my step daughter gave me the "you're not my father" line. We are in a family, but we're not family. I'm not blood. With friends, I feel it's the bonding of two kindred souls. That word fits so well. It means to be allied, affiliated with, or akin to another. Two kindred spirits. Soulmates. That's free and a choice. However, with family is not that way. It's all in the blood.

*For good times and bad times, I'll be on your side forever more, that's what friends are for- Dionne Warwick*

It's like Winnie the Pooh:

“Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

"Pooh!" he whispered.

"Yes, Piglet?"

"Nothing," said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. "I just wanted to be sure of you."

It makes me warm all over. They had the best friendship. A great relationship. Then there were the other relationships in the 100-acre wood. Tigger was misunderstood. Christopher Robin was the overseer or boss of the 100-acre woods. Rabbit was rabbit. Yet, Pooh and Piglet were best friends. They were simple animals that never questioned each other. There had many adventures together. One cared about his home and another for his honey. When the storm came, these two friends saved each other. That's what friends are for.

*Seinfeld- George Costanza: What kind of a person are you?*

*Jerry: I think I'm pretty much like you, only successful.*

I have never watched the TV show called *Friends*. I have also never watch *Seinfeld*. These were “friend” shows. A group of people living in the same community or apartment. Both shows had an element of diverse characters. Yet, they found a way to co-exist because they were friends. I have seen quotes and clips over the years. People either really hated these shows or adored them. I have appreciated and adored the friendship quotes from these two shows.

These type of TV sitcoms are famous for a reason. I think they depict real life. Friendship is stronger than blood if you ask me. We give up family to have friends. Rarely is it the other way around. Kids get in more hot water trying to have certain friends. Even at the risk of alienating themselves from their parents. Those two shows drew together such opposites in friends. The relationship they had was a strong bond of admiration, love, and companionship. Family just can't duplicate the freedom of choosing a kindred spirit.

At some point we venture out from our birth family. All our lives we have been forced to be friends with our parents and siblings. Suddenly it's our choice. If we fail to pick good friends it's on our heads. Even with the threat of picking a disaster hanging over us, we want the freedom to choose our own life mates. I still believe that the soul is made up of an electrical current. To me, it's like a nucleus sharing protons. A friend's soul is able to share itself with another just like hydrogen and oxygen share to become water. Something is passed over or shared to become friends. Combined together, a new relationship is formed.

Genesis 2:24 *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”*

It's moving from a relationship learning school with family into friendship 101. In the family setting we are forced to love, endure, compromise and tolerate. Hopefully, we gain some skills in those trials. I think family relationships make us yearn for more. So, we look outside the family circle. Ironically, it appears we love picking our brothers or sisters friends. I have seen that so often. I do think that hens don't veer too far from the hen house.

A brother or great uncle are special and wonderful. I have heard so many stories of great moms and dads. Family training will be an asset or hindrance to our friendships. What will you do with what your family gave you? I have friends who tried hard not to be like their family. I have just resigned myself to the fact I am my parents.

I have often wondered if we choose friends or did, they choose us? On Facebook, I accidently got into a conversation with a friend of a friend. We have never met. Each of us lives in the opposite ends of the country. We are good friends. I suppose it's a surface friend, but we have had some great conversations. She has even criticized me for stupid posts. I accept her

solely based on her wonderful honesty and character. I mention her because we had no personal interaction. Were friends by dumb luck.

Is it dumb luck? Clearly, we think alike. Yet, we are so different too. When I have a problem, she the one I can text. It's crazy, I trust this person that I have never met. Didn't my mother tell me to never trust strangers? My internet friend is a great example of the essence of friendship. They are our mirror. We see ourselves in them. We think like them. Internet friends post funny things we can relate to. Our concerns are similar. It's more about the person inside than the pretty face or good job. The essence of friendship.

I can see you in your friends. The lack of friends makes me see something too. Possibly your weird or picky. Possibly, your smart and prudent. People are people. Does constructive criticism bother you? Are you unwilling to help a friend keep a straight path? How deep are you willing to go with friends? The lack of friendships is more than just being an introvert. I married an extrovert/introvert. Were friends first and lovers second. I know her. We work through the introvert/ extrovert thing. Both of us are different, yet similar. We are good friends.

I feel that is because we enjoy each other's company. There is not much we do apart. Both of us love having friends, but we don't need them to exist. We have found our soulmate. However, I have been misunderstood by some. I have had several dysfunctional relationships. She has too. We are severely cautious with friends. It's why both of us have so few relationships. Maybe it's why we have grown close and prefer each other.

The other end of the scale is too many friends. What gives you existence? When I was single, I decided to date myself. The problem was *who am I?* I had no existence outside of my previous relationship. Family relationships have always been trouble in my life. Gathering more

friends meant trouble in my eyes. For some, they find significance in the lives of others. Alone, they struggle. I know a man who admits he is a relationship guy. Yet, he has had disastrous relationships. The problem is in his own existence.

Having quite a few friends could mean your funny, happy, relatable, and so on. It could also mean you are not confident alone. You have no life outside of friends. What are your hobbies? Do others do what you like? By the way, what do you like? I also look at many friends as spreading yourself thin like jam. We taste you, but we don't get to know you deeper. From one relationship to another you give little time and little room for heartbreak, misunderstandings, or a good cry.

Good friendships are deep. They know you. Each one loves you because your you. They care enough to challenge you. People who want to experience people are the best friends. Hiding your insecurities and failures in the single life could be troubling. Could that be a sign of shallow relationships? It's not about whether being single is better or worse than being married. We enter into or run from deep relationships for all kinds of reasons. It might be better to ask the question, why? Why are you single or why do you have so many or so few friends?

My daughter asked me the other day about surface friends. Is it ok to just talk about the weather? It's a yes, and no answer. Jam is fine but it's the peanut butter underneath that makes the peanut butter sandwich a peanut butter sandwich. A relationship is better when it goes below the surface. Usually that leads to risk, involvement, and trust. It might be why we have so many surface relationships, and so few deep commitments.

Surface friendships are used at work. They are at a church of hundreds. I knew a church that had an agreement with its staff. Whoever gravitates to you is your part of the congregation

of thousands. It makes sense. We can't have deep friendships to thousands. We just can't. So, surface friendships work with all the others that don't gravitate your way. You still friends. Yet, there is an opportunity to go deeper with those who chose you.

I am surface friends with bosses. We have a work relationship. My customers on my mail route are surface friends. At church it's complicated. I serve with some that are surface friends. In a life group we try and go a little deeper. Deeper at church is not always a good thing. Christians tend to rate their own holiness against other believers. Going deep is dangerous to exposing one's flaws and losing some friends. My wife and I have had a hard time finding deeper relationships in church circles. They exist, but not for us.

My high school friends and I have history. We have many years of life experiences together. All the shared memories have drawn us deeper. Some have left the group because of bad experiences. My Son has struggled with departed friends. People change. Sometimes we can't let go of misunderstandings. History with friends can be extremely good or very bad. It's tough have friends growing from childhood to adult. We all change a ton. At times that's why we lose our childhood friends. We grow apart. That's just life.

I have a secret need for inspiring friends. I want a deeper relationship with my dad and kids. With some extended family like my brothers it's not that easy. Were siblings and friends. Yet, there is a great distance (literally) between us. Long distant relationships don't work well. We do things with people like concerts and sports games. I can't do that with long distant family and friends. They have grown up apart from me too. People change and so do our relationships with them. Especially when there's distance involved. I suppose were surface friends because of the distance.

Proverbs 27:17 *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”*

Taking our relationship skills and sharpening them takes time, patience, skill, and dumb luck. In a family we tend to compromise. In a friendship, we should compromise. People should experience another's life pursuits. I ran a singles group for over thirty-year old. It was the most dysfunctional thing I have ever encountered. Single after thirty means several things. Are you single for a bad reason? Are you single because of a sad or accidental reason? Was it because your divorced, nuts, ugly, or picky? Why are you single? It makes an amazing single relationship swamp.

Each of those people wanted a relationship. Yet, most of them had a reason why they were single. The ability to not compromise was one of them. I offered outings as a way to get to know each other better as a group. Each week we went to a place that one person liked. It was a way of sharing ourselves. Attendance varied based on if they liked the outing. The group comradery was a distant fourth or fifth. Compromise is near the bottom of a singles group list. When do I get the sex part was probably tops?

You would think that a singles group would yearn for deep relationships. Why be in a singles group if you don't want a relationship, surface or other? Of course, they wanted to meet someone. I can grantee that about six people in the group wanted community. They wanted a deeper relationship regardless of being single. The other twenty-three just wanted to do the things they liked. The things they were comfortable with. It was sad really.

In a family, we endure and tolerate siblings and parents. I know some family are friends. I wish it was true more than it is. With friendships, we want to be there. There is no endure. Friends invite us out to dinner. We say you pick. They say you pick. There is a sharing of lives

and experiences. For a friendship to flourish, compromise must be near the top of the list. Putting up with or enduring a friend should not be on the list.

Highschool friendships that last are so weird. In my group we are special. Most of them I never knew well in school. Yet, in this group we flourish. I am so glad I did not sleep with them now or then. I bet it would have ruined the friendship. These longtime friends do a certain amount of life that I don't see. Yet, when we come together, we share our life memories. The amount of sharing between the remaining high school friends is wonderful. Sometimes friendships work well.

It seems we are jealous of family sometimes. I suppose we could be jealous of friends. Just pick friends that are not doing as well as you. Just kidding. You can't do that with family. I think we embrace our friends' triumphs. Much of what we learn is found in friendships. Most of us chose to be there. We want to be friends. I have loved experiencing what my friends have to offer. Why? Usually it's because we're alike. It's the same crud.

This is training ground for the ultimate friendship. Family has the opportunity to share and go deeper. We travel great distances to see family. Half the time we leave wondering why we came in the first place. They are blood so we endure, tolerate, and compromise most of the time. People make time for friends. Sometimes we go deeper with friends at work or in a church setting. All of this relationship work is fertile ground. Hopefully, we gain insights into how to do relationships better.

Failed relationships are knowledge. Strained family relations are about endurance. In the end, we are stronger, more cautious, and less willing to tolerate terrible relationships. That brings me to the ultimate challenge of being family, friends, and in relationships: it's called marriage.



This thing called marriage invents a new family. The spouse is supposed to be your best friend. Is marriage really all that? We love romance movies. There is a picture of falling in everlasting love. it's magical, romantic, and the things dreams are made of. Most of my marriage experiences are not like that.

Good friendships are wonderful. I have heard people says they wished they had remained friends. Shouldn't marriage be the next step above friends? Friendships are a template of how to do marriage well. it seems that when we say "I do" the template is thrown out the window. People forget how they loved in the beginning. They forget that they married their best friends. Oh, oh, maybe they didn't.

Marriage should be vulnerable, deeper, and riskier than any friendship you have even known. It's personal on several levels. Do you get naked with friends and family? Don't answer that. To be sexually intimate takes risk. To share money, space, and time with one is hard. Are you willing to expose your flaws and endure the flaws of others? Is your baggage and crud sharable? Can you accept others baggage and crud in a loving way? Welcome to the world of the dating and marriage relationship game.