

## **The Powers of Friendship**

Friendship is a powerful word. Unfortunately, too many pastors have too few friends. A lack of friendships not only impedes a pastor's life, it diminishes his ministry. Amazingly, the same skills developed for friendships are vital to pastoral ministries. In some cases, seminary students have traded the fundamental skills of friendship for professional communication skills, only to distance themselves from their audiences. Personally, I find reviewing the fundamentals of friendship necessary for my own well-being, as well as the making of better ministers and servants of God.

I am persuaded that empowering the church of Jesus Christ with **The Powers of Friendship** will enhance marriages, parenting, churches, and outreach into communities. **The Powers of Friendship** are applicable to all relationships, families, and neighborhoods, including cross-cultural connections. However, all too often they are the crossbeams of the bridges to others we have burned.

## **The Power of Presence**

In an age of internet, emails, Facebook, cell phones, text messages, Skype, Go To Meeting and who knows what's next, is showing-up ever necessary? Technology has made communication without meeting face to face so accessible and time saving that we really don't have to get together. Say it by email. Say it by text message. Say it in any way communication technology provides. Personal presence is no longer viable. Or is it?

Technology has certainly made communication faster and more convenient. But the power of presence is more than an option. In business, the power of presence is still preferred when it come to big decisions, investments, and hiring. As one company says, "It helps to put a face with the decision." Families separated by hundreds and even thousands of miles still gather at the bedside of a dying loved one. And who would suggest that romances come to fruition online? Sooner or later the relationship begs for a meeting between two people.

The power of presence allows for pauses that are otherwise awkward during phone conversations and unintelligible by email and text messaging. As a young pastor, I began to notice the power of presence during hospital calls. People said I had done so much for them by showing up at the hospital. Not knowing what to say in a time of crisis, I often felt like a fifth bedpost. Doctors and nurses shuffled in and out while a spouse or parent sobbed with sorrow or shivered with fear. I contributed no medical expertise to the patient in need; I just stood there.

Weeks after the hospital stay, parishioners would rave about how meaningful it was to have me there. It isn't just my story. It is the experience of many people who dare to shown up at a hospital or the scene of a serious need.

Why should we be surprised? The Holy Spirit is in every believer, and He is the Comforter. It is time that we wake up to the scriptural truth that the Comforter shows up

when we dare to show up and let Him minister through us before we say a word and often when we never say a word. I used to think I understood the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Now I admit that I don't know half of what goes on inside another person in the presence of the Holy Spirit. But I believe He is at work providing what is needed within the person, be it conviction or comfort.

Our disbelief in the power of presence may preclude the work of the Holy Spirit. We often feel helpless, useless, and out of control unless we say or do something. I think that is how Peter must have felt when he suggested they have a campout before the glorious transformation of our Lord: "Lord, it is good that we are here, if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Matthew 17:4) It was an opportunity to be present and absorb the magnitude of the Lord's divine presence, not a time to say or do anything.

Listed below are several scriptural examples of the power of presence. Take your time meditating on them until you are convinced that there are situations where you are better off not saying anything. Sometimes your job is to just show up. Once convinced, teach your congregation that they are able to minister in numerous situations by just showing up in person with the power of presence.

#### A. The Power of Divine Presence:

God the Father

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)<sup>1</sup>

God the Son

". . .and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

God the Holy Spirit

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:16)

#### B. The Power of People Presence:

The Apostle Paul with all his spiritual gifts and calling from God craved the presence of fellow believers. He was a passionate, highly motivated, take-charge leader, whose sufficiency was in Christ (Philippians 4:10-13); yet he acknowledged his need for human presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated scripture quotes will be from the New International Version of the Bible.

“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. . . .<sup>16</sup> At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.<sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.” (II Timothy 4:11, 16, 17)

“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there.” (Titus 3:12)

“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . .” (II Corinthians 7:6)

Jesus expressed a desire for human presence.

“He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” (Mark 3:14)

“Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’” (Matthew 26:38)

The disciples couldn't do much of anything for Jesus in terms of action. They wanted to fight for Him. (Later Peter picked up a sword Matthew 26:51). Jesus didn't want their protection. They couldn't die in His place for the sins of the world. He alone was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus requested of them the one thing they could offer at that time - the power of their own human presence.

C. Common examples where the power of presence is appreciated. In fact, it is the only thing you can offer.

- A husband in the labor and delivery room
- A friend at the deathbed of a loved one
- A parent at key events in a child's life