

## V. The Power of Shared Experience

The first four powers of friendship call upon you and me to listen more than we speak. If you find yourself doing more talking than listening, you probably haven't caught on to beginning the process of becoming a friend. The art of making friends requires more listening than speaking.

### *The Power of Shared Experience*

*Invites you to speak freely about yourself and experiences  
that will help others identify with you.*

It is interesting to note that Jesus said nothing about His childhood years in Nazareth, the home of Joseph and Mary, or growing up with His brothers and sisters. He also didn't tell us about the immeasurable eons of heavenly experiences with His Father and the Holy Spirit before the incarnation. He simply said that He was the way to get there and that they would enjoy eternal life. This Friend of friends left a lot to be told in the believer's forever home with Him. However, for three years on earth, Jesus spoke in parables which were full of the everyday experiences of common people. He was often the main character in these coded scripts. The Parable of the Vineyard in Luke 20 is just one example:

*"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'<sup>14</sup> 'But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'*

*<sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 'What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?' <sup>16</sup> He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.' When the people heard this, they said, 'May this never be!'" <sup>17</sup> Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'?" (Luke 20:13-17 NIV)*

Turning now to the Apostle Paul, he said much about his journey to Christ, including his enviable credentials as a religious Jew (Philippians 3) which identified him with high-ranking Jews. He also identified himself as the worst of sinners as well as a former persecutor of Christ and His church (I Timothy 1:13-16), thus identifying with the lowest of sinners.

Paul shared more about his desperate moments than his actual successes as a follower of Christ. One of my favorite passages is found in II Corinthians 1, where the Great Apostle sounds anything but self-assured:

*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, in our hearts we*

*felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup> He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, <sup>11</sup> as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. (II Corinthians 1:8-11)*

By sharing his vulnerability to despair, Paul identified the key to survival as dependence on the resurrection power of Christ and the prayers of fellow believers.

God knows what you need in difficult times, but other believers have no idea about your circumstances unless you share it with them. Vulnerability provides opportunities for others to know you and accept you for who you are. Those to whom you give an opportunity to know the real you are more apt to love the real you and become authentic friends. Paul was totally confident that God, who knows all, forgave all his sins. Since God who is perfect totally accepted him, Paul was able to openly share his life with others as one who had *nothing to hide*, *nothing to lose* and *nothing to prove*. That is a winning combination for making friends.

A dated but relevant Bill and Gloria Gaither chorus says it well:

*I am loved. I am loved. I can risk loving you  
For the one who knows me best loves me most.*

As a practical means of sharing your personal experiences, I encourage you to complete the following sentences with as many paragraphs as necessary:

*“I experienced the comfort of God when . . .”*  
*“I experienced the loving discipline of the Lord when . . .”*  
*“I experienced betrayal when . . .”*  
*“I experienced the joy of the Lord when. . .”*

Your Friend in Christ Always,

Jim Anderson  
Pastoral Care