

Friendship

Sam Williamson

I wonder, sometimes, if the thing we most deeply need is friendship. Sure, we'd love success in our work and a great family, and financial stability. But I know people who have these—or at least some of these—and they remain unhappy and unsatisfied.

I recently re-watched the movie *The King's Speech*, and I was struck by *what* moved me. Lionel is an uncertified speech therapist and Bertie is a stuttering prince who is required to give speeches. By the end of the movie, the prince is a king who can move his people with his speeches, and the therapist's practice's has blossomed (after all, he just helped the king!). So both Bertie the king and Lionel the therapist have moved onto greatness.

Yet their greatness is not what moved me. (Okay, all right, it did move me some!) What moved me deeply was their friendship. Two unlikely and very different men find in each other a friendship which transcended their roles—a king and a therapist. Their friendship became their strength. Their friendship infused each of them with power. It infected each of them with strength to face their daily issues.

And I believe this is what each of us needs in our own daily walk. Sure, we also need advice, which get from books or counselors; and we need direction, which get from bosses (and spouses!); and we need fellowship, which we get from small groups or churches.

But we also need friendship. We need that depth of relationship in which we feel we are not walking alone. We need more than signposts along the way; we need someone walking with us, helping to carry our load as we help to carry theirs. We need someone who says, "I am with you in this current danger," and, "I am with you in this current joy."

One of the Hebrew words for friend, *sowdh*, also means secret or intimate. It perfectly describes the core of friendship; in friendship, we let people into our lives. They know the secret us. They sometimes know us better than we know ourselves. Lionel the therapist says of Bertie the prince, "He is the bravest man I've ever known." Bertie didn't know his own bravery. He saw the seemingly insurmountable circumstances of the weighty kingship, and he saw his own fear. Bravery is not fearlessness. Bravery is courage in the face of fear; and Lionel saw that courage in Bertie when Bertie himself saw only his own fear. He knew the inner Bertie, he knew the secret Bertie.

Dostoevsky said, "To love someone means to see him as God intended him." We all need friends who see what God has intended for us.

And friends draw out that God-intentioned self. C. S. Lewis wrote, "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not

large enough to call the whole man into activity.” This is God’s intention. He designed us to need others to see us and to bring that hidden secret self to the surface. We are all partially blind. By ourselves we are unable to fully see ourselves. True friends see and encourage and cajole and draw out what we ourselves are blind to.

And friends bear each other’s deep inner, often secret, burdens, and they fight. David Guyor, a *friend* of mine, was walking down the street one day, downcast, and a man who was driving past stopped and said, “What’s happened to you? Let’s go kick his ass.” While that man was a stranger, he had a friend’s heart. He saw the need to fight for a friend, to bring his own strength to another. We all need to receive that fight, and we all need to offer that fight.

At times we also need someone to speak hard words. Proverbs 27:6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” We’ve all had others butter us up when we need our deepest friends to see the deepest us, and to draw that out. Christians are particularly bad at this. We tend to live at one end of the spectrum or the other. Some of us are superb at daily correction, and we correct anyone anytime anywhere, no matter the circumstances. And some of us are wonderful encouragers who lack the love to speak deeply into our hearts. Sometimes the very thing I need is someone to say, “Sam, you are being a jerk!” Because the wounds of a friend are faithful and true; they bring a life.

Great! We all need this and deeply desire to *receive* it, but it is oh so hard to *give*. We need to give true friendship, seeing into the deepest secrets, bringing out the very best, bearing their loads as though they are our own, fighting their demons, and encouraging and correcting in just the right dosage.

Where do we get the strength to BE the friends we want others to be to us? In John 15, Jesus says, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” Jesus has revealed his true self to us. Jesus bears our burdens as though they are his. Jesus fights for us (vs. 13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”). He sees us as we are and loves us.

When we see him as our friend—and to the degree we see him as our friend—we can be a friend. And that is what we need, to be “friended” and to be a friend.

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