

Significant Lives — Chapter 9

By Jim Golden — FRIENDSHIP — The Tie That Binds!

*"One will put a thousand to flight, two will put ten thousand to flight and a threefold cord is not easily broken."
(Ecclesiastics 4:12 KJV)*

For such a long time I echoed the cry of David thinking, *"There is none that careth for my soul."* I assumed if I were part of a church that would be the job of the Pastor. I had even been a Pastor and tried to care for the souls of others knowing that if I would sow care I in turn should reap care. Over the years I have come to see things differently. I believe the Pastor is simply someone who leads us to the pasture, there he shows us where we can find grazing land. It is our role to eat.

Caring isn't just an act of ministry, like correcting someone when they are doing something unscriptural or wrong. Caring is that intangible and mystical joining of one human soul to another in a way that fills you with desire and longing to meet all that persons needs that God will allow you to meet. It is difficult to define, in objective terms, something that goes beyond our ability to understand with our intellect, reaching down into the depths of our beings to bring wholeness. But, this is what friendship does.

A number of years ago, while spending time with the Lord, I thought of my first and best school friend, Tommy. We did everything together. It was quite a special time in my life. Many of us can think back to how special their first "real" friend was. Yet if your life is anything like mine the years have found that friendship betrayed or simply washed away. Time has found our hearts building up walls against similar experiences, and we have never found another friend like our first friend.

Suddenly something happened to me in that time of loneliness that was the beginning of one of the greatest changes of my Christian life. Jesus spoke to me and told me he was "a friend that sticks closer than a brother." In the atmosphere of all the memories of my first friendship, Jesus became my friend. He filled the need in me for the kind of friendship we all long for.

Then over the next few months, what usually happens with a word that brings me such excitement happened, it wore off. No matter how hard I sought to have the same experience again *it* was nowhere to be found. Little did I know that the word and experience was a seed that Jesus had planted deep in my heart. He needed to cover it up so that it could develop strong roots and grow into a tree of life within me. Shortly after that we moved to Pasadena, where God renewed some old relationship. It was here among so many old, fond memories, that Jesus began to bring back the word he had planted two years before.

I have often contended that the ministry of a prophet was the ministry of Jesus the Prophet through a man or woman to His people. The example follows for the Pastor and Evangelist, Apostle and Teacher and all the Gifts of the Spirit. A man I once knew said it best, "restoration is simply allowing

of the Spirit. A man I once knew said it best, "salvation is simply allowing Jesus to be Jesus in you." The question we should ask is not if there is still apostolic or prophetic ministry available today, but is Jesus still involved in the lives of his people. I never had any problem grasping this concept as it related to ministry. Yet for some reason I never thought of friendship as a manifestation of the life of Jesus also. I was beginning to realize how much Jesus longed to be a friend to me and through me.

When someone in the Church wants to get you to change or feels you may be moving in a wrong direction they usually quote a scripture to you like, "faithful are the wounds of a friend," feeling this somehow qualifies them to speak into your life. A couple (couple "A") I know recently experienced just such an episode. They received a letter from another couple (couple "B") they hadn't hardly seen in almost 12 years. The above verse, quoted in the letter, apparently made them (couple "B") feel they had the right and were qualified to address areas of perceived need in couple "A", setting them straight. I call this gross presumption at best. Unfortunately the ones who really need the wounding are usually the ones doing the wounding.

However, unlike "couple A's" "friends", our friend Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The faithfulness of his wounds bring forgiveness and healing. They give him the right to speak into our lives and are the foundation of our relationship with him. How many of us can make that same claim with those we desire to "set straight"?

I remember a prophecy someone once gave me that said because of my "prophetic" calling God would often allow me to see the weaknesses of my fellow Christians. However, I would hardly ever be called to do anything more about it than pray for them. There is a lot of truth in those words, we would all do well to heed them.

In our society we have watered down the word friendship. My children come home from Sunday school every week telling me of another friend that they have made. Yet scripture declares that friends are few. Friendship is a gift from God, and a supernatural experience, initiated by God. God is love and as we partake of his divine nature his presence allows us to become friends. Jesus is "THE FRIEND" and the source of all true friendship. We can't be a friend until we become one with the friend! We must learn to allow Jesus to be Jesus in us.

I believe that the longing in our hearts for friendship is really God's longing. He formed us out of the dust of the earth and breathed his Spirit into us. Then because of his great longing he made himself a body that he might live with us, walk with us, hold us and be our friend.

Yet, his plan didn't stop there. His capacity to love and care for us is beyond measure. His friendship was so great he demonstrated his own words, "no greater love has any man than he lay down his life for his friends." After his resurrection he could live in the hearts of countless millions over a thousand generations expressing his loving friendship. He calls us no longer servants but friends because he has shown us what he is doing. Friendship is as supernatural and miraculous as deliverance, and divine healing. Friendship is as much a manifestation of Jesus' ministry as that of the apostle, pastor or

prophet.

I believe Jesus spends most of our Christian lives healing, restoring and purifying our souls so that he can pour himself through us as "the friend" that loveth at all times. This is what scripture calls the end of our instruction. This is the sign of a mature faith. Once these friendships are formed he can then begin to release the "ministry of example" to a starving world that will declare, "See how they love one another." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples that you have love for one another."

Here is a scriptural definition of love from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails..." We usually think of hate in only its vile or heinous terms when scripturally it is simply the opposite of LOVE. It is this misconception concerning what hate is that allows it to spread its venomous malignancy throughout the Body of Christ. If we viewed being unkind or not believing the best as an act of hate we all might be a little more "friendly".

I feel we have stopped short of God's longing for our lives by putting anything above this kind of friendship. We are totally inadequate to make this happen. We need to cry out for God's mercy and goodness to do this in all our lives. We need to ask Jesus to purify our souls for the sincere affection of the brethren. The way Peter put it was, to give us a love for each other that was fervent (or heated white hot). We will be unable to experience this type of friendship until we see Jesus as our friend and source.

My friend Tommy and I were almost inseparable. We met in a hallway in 7th grade, rolling on the floor as we traded blows. No one can remember what started the fight. From that point on there was no need to prove anything to each other. We simply loved and accepted one another. If one of us had money the other had money. We didn't try to make each other feel poor or underprivileged. We shared everything from cars to heartaches. No matter what happened we were there for the other.

How special that first friendship is. It is a shame that everyone's first friend isn't Jesus He is the only one who will never betray us or let us down. How hard it is to give the same depth of trust we so freely gave that first time, again. We must try not to fear friendship, and entrust our souls to Jesus. Tommy is gone. The outcome of his life is unknown by me. But Jesus, "...is the friend that sticks closer than a brother!" This is how he desires to express his life in us. The question before us as we read this is, "are we willing to open up old wounds or receive new ones that the walls of self-preservation may be torn down within us? Are we willing to share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering that we may see the power of his resurrection? Will we allow Jesus to be Jesus in us?"