



FRIENDSHIP:

GOD'S GIFT TO BLESS OUR LIVES

By Lou Blanchfield



Women's Ministries Seminar Series

A five-part workshop on friendship that will be encouraging, inspiring, practical and fun! These workshops will address how God's gift of friendship affects our relationship with Him, how it affects our self-esteem, how it can build family relationships, as well as enhance our church and neighborhood relationships.

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About the Author

Lou Kinzer Blanchfield and her husband Roger Lee Blanchfield live on a farm in Northwest-central Iowa where they raise grain crops of corn and soybeans, and where Roger works as a real estate appraiser. Their grown children both live in Lincoln, Nebraska, where Lorelee works as a registered nurse and Brett is a college student.

While the family was young, they all worked and played together on the family farm. After the children were both in school, Lou worked part-time as a nurse in a rural hospital. She holds degrees from Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington (B.S.N.) and Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa (M.S.N.). She is a doctoral student in the department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. She has taught nursing students at Iowa Central Community College and Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. Currently, she teaches second year nursing students at Des Moines Area Community College in Boone, Iowa. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau, the national honor society for nursing, and has been listed in Who's Who in American Nursing.

Roger is a musician who plays keyboard instruments and sings bass. Together they enjoy Bible study, walking, biking, water and snow sports. Lou dabbles in a variety of art forms, such as drawing, painting and gardening.

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Decoration/Activities

INTRODUCTION

Since this workshop is about “God’s Gift of Friendship” I had a big box wrapped in pretty paper with a lid that could open on top, tied with a fluffy bow made of tulle netting, on the table beside me. Each day I opened the box to discover some part of the “gift” that fit with the day’s lesson.

DAY ONE: “Models of Friendship” handout for participants to follow the presentation, then at the end of the presentation. I opened the box again and handed out:

- “Random Acts of Kindness” exercise—gifts for each person
- “Jesus, Our Example”—worksheets for participants to complete after class including “God’s Model” and “Principles In Our Model for Building Friendships.”

DAY TWO: Handouts for discovering their own self-concept and their concept of God.

DAY THREE: Piece of lace—placemat, doilies, pictures of family members in frames and small vase with flowers to set up in front of the gift box.

Handouts to give at end of class to help them discover their primary love-language and to take home to discover their partner’s primary love language.

DAY FOUR: A large bowl full of a variety of assorted kitchen utensils that I pulled out one at a time and showed the audience while I began the presentation.

DAY FIVE: A placemat, two teacups and saucers, a tea pot, a plate with fruit and crackers in the middle and a pretty lamp. I set these out in front of the box at the beginning of the presentation to indicate a friendly conversation with a friend.

Equipment Needed for Workshops

- Chalk board with chalk, OR dry eraser board with two or three NEW markers of various colors (red/blue/green).
- Overhead transparency projector with a new bulb and a spare bulb.
- Manila pocket folders to hold handouts for each person attending the seminar (preferably bright yellow).
- Some type of tablet for note taking, optional, color should blend with the pocket folders!
- 4-1/4 inch (approx) felt tip pens, chisel tip (black).
- Fans in the room to help the air conditioner! (OR—heat if the room is cold!)

Workshop #1

WHAT FRIENDSHIP MEANS IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS AND WITH GOD

Note:

Slide transparencies - SLIDE(#)

Handouts - HA(#)

SLIDE 1 What kinds of blessings do people miss because they don't have close friends?

What blessings come when you and I do have close friends?

SLIDE 2 LIFE IS TO BE FORTIFIED BY MANY FRIENDSHIPS. TO LOVE, AND TO BE LOVED, IS THE GREATEST HAPPINESS OF EXISTENCE.—Sydney Smith

Have you ever been lonely and longed for a friend and did not know how to make friends? It first happened to me the winter after we moved from the West coast to our farm in Iowa.

I was born and raised in College Place, WA, an Adventist community, where I attended church school from first grade through college and where people my age and with my own belief system lived in abundance! My home church had a membership of 3000 people; my new church in Iowa was 20 miles away and had about 20 members, all of them older than my parents.

My precious husband Roger moved us to Iowa in the spring of the year when our babies were ages 1 and 3. We planted crops, built a house. We were very busy that first spring, summer and fall.

It was wintertime before I began to miss my friends. I became so lonesome I thought I would die. One dreary, cold, winter day I decided to take my babies to the city and go shopping, that should help—you know—walk through crowds of people, ride escalators, and see the stores decked out for the holidays!

We meandered through the crowded mall, and to my dismay, loneliness overwhelmed me as I realized everyone in the mall was a stranger to me. Then all of a sudden I saw a familiar face! It even looked friendly! I strained for another glimpse of someone I knew, but could not see her, so I backed up to where I had been when I saw her face, and lo and behold, it was my own reflection in a mirror.

Looking back, I see that something wonderful was about to happen during that time away from friends. An opportunity was developing for me to learn to trust and depend on God in a way that I had never experienced before.

I knew that all the blessings of my life had come from God, but I did not know one of the principles He uses to guide our lives...

SLIDE 3 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 148 "But the gifts of Jesus are ever fresh and new. The feast that He provides for the soul never fails to give satisfaction and joy. Each new gift increases the capacity of the receiver to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of the Lord. He gives grace for grace. There can be no failure of supply. If you abide in Him, the fact that you receive a rich gift today insures the reception of a richer gift tomorrow. The words of Jesus to Nathanael express the law of God's dealing with the children of faith. With every fresh revelation of His love, He declares to the receptive heart, 'Believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.' John 1:50."

This week, we will consider many ideas for building friendships that will be encouraging, inspiring, practical and fun. You will have an opportunity to select ideas you can use to enrich your life at home, at church and in your neighborhoods.

I'll share ideas I have read, and ideas that have worked for me. If you have new ideas you'd like to share, let me hear from you. There is always room for each of us to grow.

Friendships between women begin when we are little girls. Girls play with their mothers and pretend they are "best friends". Childhood and youth are spent striving to find and keep a "best friend." There are many factors present during childhood and youth that assist us in developing and maintaining friendships.

The school classroom environment places us in contact with people in our own age group.

At academy and college, in boarding schools, we are placed in intimate contact with people our own age and generally with people who share like interests. However, in our mobile society, and in the normal process of growth and development, many of us move away from our parents' home and our family support system.

- Jobs take us away from our friendship circles.
- Our lives become busy with making a living, building our own families, and we find less and less time to cultivate friendships.
- We also find fewer people who share like beliefs, and like interests.
- If we are married, our best friend then must have a spouse who is compatible with our spouse.

During that lonely winter long ago, I was not aware that I had reached another milestone in the normal process of growth and development. All I knew was that I did not have friends, and in my new environment, I did not have a clue how to make friends.

Since that time, in my reading, I've found that much research has been conducted about building and maintaining solid friendships and relationships. The more I read, the more I realized the best solutions offered in books were written first in the Bible! I became aware that God's plan for us is to help us build deep and meaningful friendships with others, and that He has a deep yearning for us to develop a rich and meaningful friendship with Him.

Researchers indicate that becoming a friend is a skill which can be learned, and that it has to do with a person's ability to love, to be loved, and to communicate love!

The Bible tells us that God is love. It tells us that God's greatest desire is to teach us how much He loves us. The Bible is God's record of how He has tried to make that love known to us, hoping that in turn we would respond by loving and trusting Him. It goes further to say that when we know God, we will be like Him. He is love! When we are love, others will be attracted to us; we will have friends. More than that, we will be able to make friends for God!

SLIDE 4 2 Corinthians 5:17-19: "Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all human beings His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends." *Today's English Version, ABS.*

We will discuss three principles for building friendships. I found these principles discussed in several books on friendship, *Making Friends*, by Em Griffin and *The Friendship Factor*, by Alan L. McGinnis. Both authors developed a model for building friendships based on the principle of John 15:15: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you." From this verse, it appears that even though friendship seems illusive at times, for the Christian, it is not an option; it is the highest calling! Jesus upgraded our relationship with Him. We are no longer servants—but friends!

HA 1 As I read the verses around John 15:15, I found God's model for building friendships in the verses John 15:12-17.

HA 2 You will find the outline on your handout, I have called them, "Models of Friendship."

SLIDE 5**Principles for building friendships**

The first principle in our model for building friendships is:

1. COMMUNICATE WARMTH

McGinnis suggested that many people hold back expressions of warmth for fear of being rejected, or of seeming sentimental. Saying what is on your heart can help build friendships:

We say “thanks” when we mean “God bless you.”
and “so long” when we mean “I’m going to miss you.”

It is important to communicate warmth.

Now let’s look at John 15:12. We will see that God’s model for building friendship’s begins with the concept of communicating warmth. “My commandment is this: love one another, just as I have loved you.”

How is that for “communicating warmth”? But you might wonder, “How can you command someone to love? I wondered, and looked this verse up in *Strong’s Greek Dictionary* of the New Testament, p. 29. In this verse, the word “commandment” is defined as “an authoritative prescription”! Think of it, a prescription to love, from the Great Physician himself—who first loved us, and asks us to share His love with others.

And if we follow the prescription, what can love do?

SLIDE 6 Love—can heal broken hearts!
Love—can restore broken relationships!
Love—can build friendships!

Does God know we need love to encourage friendship? Listen to how God communicates warmth to us:

Jeremiah 31:3 KJV “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.”

Nothing encourages friendship more than knowing someone loves you. Communicate warmth!

The second principle in our model for building friendships is:

2. ASSIGN A TOP PRIORITY TO YOUR FRIENDSHIP

Counselors and psychologists suggest that people who are deeply loved believe other people are a basic source of happiness. Their friends are very important to them, no matter how busy their schedule, they have developed a life-style and way of managing their time that allows them to have profound relationships with people.

On the other hand, lonely people lament their lack of close companions; however they actually place little emphasis on the cultivation of friends. There may be many reasons for this.

- past hurt
- personal pain
- and... time

Time prohibits our having a profound connection with more than a few people. Deep friendship requires cultivation over the years—time together, time for lots of talk.

The next verse in God’s model of Friendship, John 15:13, says, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down His life for his friends.”

How is that for assigning a top priority to your friendship! Do we understand all it meant for Jesus to lay down His life for His friends? What does it mean to you to “lay down your life for your friends”?

John 15:14 says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

This prescription to love must be important because it is repeated here again.

When you are ill and your doctor prescribes a medication or treatment for you, what is his purpose in giving the prescription?

To bring healing to our bodies.

What do you think God’s prescription “to love” is for?

God longs to heal our broken hearts:

- to heal our broken relationships
- and to heal our friendships

And so the Great Physician prescribes treatment He knows will work. Jesus could have spent all His time with large crowds of people, yet the gospels are full of instances which show us how He assigned a top priority to building relationships with a few people:

Example: Jesus’ relationship with his disciples:

“When Jesus spoke with the crowds, He used parables, “but when He was alone with His disciples, He would explain everything to them.” Mark 4:34, TEV.

The Bible tells of Jesus’ relationship with three special friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In three of the gospels it tells how He spent the night at their house, how

they prepared meals for Him, and how they confided in Him. (Matthew 21:17, Mark 11:11,12, and John 12:1-8).

What about His relationship with His Father?

“After sending the people away, He went up a hill by Himself to pray.” Matthew 14:23, TEV. He asks us to spend time with Him too.

“Come to Me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28-30, TEV.

Jesus spent time with His close friends. Jesus needed friends to give Him comfort, and to be around people with whom he felt “safe”.

Close friendships do not “Just Happen”. When friendships develop, it is because we recognize their importance and devote ourselves to them. Close friendships can grow for those who assign them enough importance to cultivate them. It takes TIME to develop a relationship with our friends. And, it takes time to develop a relationship with God. We need to spend time with those who matter most.

I believe that is one reason God gave us the Sabbath. The Sabbath gives us time to develop relationships, with each other, and most important of all, with God. Assign a top priority to your friendship.

The third principle in our model for building friendships is:

3. CREATE OPENNESS IN YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

McGinnis and Griffin both suggest that people with deep and lasting friendships have the characteristic of “openness.”

SLIDE 7

- they have a certain transparency, allowing people to see what is in their hearts.
- they do not pretend to be more than they are.
- they know how to share the hurts and joys of others.

Have you ever felt you could not be open, reveal your sadness, your concerns, or your joys with another person, for fear they would find out something bad about you, that you were not perfect? I have.

By the time I had been in Iowa two years, God had given me two of my life’s dearest friends, Jeanne and Basia, neither of these new friends belonged to my church and I was afraid to discuss any problem I had with them for fear I would deny my faith in God’s ability to work in my life. One day I was terribly burdened about an issue and about to my limitations for dealing with it. With great trepidation I decided to talk to Jeanne. The first thing she did was hug me, and say, “I’m so glad you told me. Now

we can both pray for God's guidance in this situation". Our friendship blossomed! We drew on each other for comfort, strength, and wisdom to deal with the issues of life. We lifted each other and our families up to God in prayer.

In the medical field we are aware that people who repress their thoughts and fears often develop stress related illnesses. On the other hand, honesty and openness can prevent both mental illness and certain kinds of physical illnesses.

John 15:15 in God's model for friendship tells how He has created an open relationship with us. Listen:

SLIDE 8 "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."

God created an open relationship with us. He has made known all of heaven to us. He wants us to know Him. John 17:3 says that it is, "eternal life to know God." John 1:17,18 says that Jesus came to make God known. The whole plan of salvation is a plan to restore friendship between God and man by winning man's love and trust.

If you want to deepen your friendships with another—a friend, your spouse, or with God, create openness in your relationship.

I love the way the *Good News Bible* translates the next text: John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

Isn't that exciting?

Think of it! "You did not choose me, but I chose you!"

If you think no one has ever chosen you to be a friend, you must know that you have been chosen by the King of the universe, the Savior of mankind, to be friends!

What does it mean, "you should go and bear fruit? That it should abide"? I think the fruit is the result of friendship with God. You know that in Galatians 5, it says:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

Don't those sound like the characteristics you would choose in a friend if you could choose a perfect friend? This is a description of God, and it is the fruit of friendship with God.

John 15:17, "This then is what I prescribe for you: love one another."

(CLOSE WITH PRAYER)

HA 3 Next: Open the gift box—Hand out & explain “**Jesus, Our Example**”
(Participants to complete this form after class at their leisure.)

SLIDE 9 “Jesus, Our Example”

HA 4A and HA 4B

Then: Hand out “**Random Acts of Kindness**”.

Explain this will be an exercise for them to complete during the days of the workshop. They should bring their completed cards back to class on the last day and the leader should reserve time to read some of the “random acts of kindness” performed by the participants! (This is a lot of fun; they won’t want to read their own cards).

NOTE: For **HA 4B** - use a heavier card stock when duplicating.

Workshop #2

HOW FRIENDSHIP AFFECTS OUR SELF-CONCEPT

YESTERDAY, you were given some assignments. Let's discuss them briefly:

SLIDE 10 To apply Jesus' model of building friendships from John 15:12-15 to your life...

- a. Did you identify new ways to communicate warmth?
- b. Assign top priorities to your friendships?
- c. Create openness in your friendships?
- d. What changes can you anticipate in your friendships when you put these ideas into practice?

Friendships can be a tremendous blessing, a gift from God. Problems can arise when healthy, friendships turn out to be hurtful and confusing. One way this happens is when friends become emotionally dependent on each other.

Definition of emotional dependency: *Emotional dependency occurs when the ongoing presence and nurturing of another is believed to be necessary for personal security.*

No matter how wonderful that friendship may appear at first, emotionally dependent relationships can lead to bondage greater than anything imaginable.

I believe that is one reason the Great Physician who wrote that authoritative prescription to love in John 15:12, also said, "Love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." When our emotional dependency is on God first, then love to our neighbor and to ourselves is put in proper perspective.

Today, we are going to look at how God's gift of friendship can build a positive self-concept.

SLIDE 11 What kinds of problems do people have because they have a negative self-concept?

What happens to us when we have a positive self-concept?

Have you ever watched a newborn colt try to stand up and walk for the first time?

Those little animals look like God made them all wrong...their legs are too long and wobbly to hold up their bodies, their eyes are so big they are out of proportion to the rest of their heads, and as they try and try to stand, their mothers just stand by and watch, no helping hand from Mom, maybe a nudge or two with her nose!

I don't think horses, either mama horses or baby horses, contemplate their own existence, but people do. God gave us the ability to step outside ourselves and ponder what we're like. Some of us have reserved grandstand seats to watch ourselves play out our lives... what we see ...and the conclusions we make... make up our self-concept.

The personal issues of identity and self-esteem—the two sides of self-concept are important, because the view we have of ourselves has a direct impact on how we relate to others and how we make and keep friends.

We'll discuss:

- how our self-concept affects our relationships with other people and God
- how our need to know God affects our self-concept
- how we come to believe the concepts we hold about ourselves
- ways we can change our self-concept

Identity is the mind's eye picture we have of ourselves...some of us have a clear picture of who we are; we are in focus. We may not like all we see, but at least we know what is there.

A well-focused identity is important. Unfortunately, many people have only a fuzzy picture of who they are, their image of themselves is blurred. This is tragic because it can lead to a hesitant or fearful approach to the outside world.

There are certain times in life when our identity is likely to blur are times of major life change.

The teen-age years—

- teens are going through dramatic physical changes.
- they are trying to establish their own identity apart from parents.
- they are adapting to new relationships away from the family.
- they have to cope with pressures of school and the idea of soon coming independence.

Some go through this time easily, however, this is a tough time in life, especially for those who do not have a clear grasp of who they are.

SLIDE 12 Life changes that can cause a crisis of identity:

Teen-age years	Death
Marriage	Change of jobs
Birth of a Child	Stress
Children Leaving Home	Menopause
Divorce	Moving

All of these crises come when our identification of who we are changes in relationship to another person or role.

I would like you to take a few minutes to look at your self-concept. This is a personal exercise. You will not need to show your responses to anyone, neither will you need to discuss your responses.

HA 5 Hand-out pieces of paper—three columns of numbers 1-12.

Column #1 you will write **nouns** to describe your “identity”, the various roles you play; positions you hold; and groups you belong to. My list includes: Child of God, Christian, wife, mother, daughter, farmer, teacher, member of the Adaza Thursday club! Many of our roles will be similar, but as we describe ourselves more fully, we become unique. We call this part of our self-concept, identity.

Allow 1 to 2 MINUTES TO WRITE A LIST in column 1. It WILL NOT BE CONCLUSIVE...

A SELF-SURVEY: Who Am I?

“Identity”

I am (a child of God)

Identity is only part of the self-concept story. It gives the facts, not the feelings. We move to a crucial area of self-esteem when we ask about our feelings:

The question can be simply stated: “Do I like myself?” But the answer is not always so simple.

SLIDE 13 Building Blocks to Self-Esteem

Em Griffin in his book, *Making Friends and Making Them Count*, suggests that in order to build self-esteem, we first need to discover our “**sense of moral worth**”: In order for people to have high self-esteem, they must be confident they are approved by God—that they are basically OK, they need inner assurance they will react in a good or upright way when confronted with an ethical choice.

Because of Jesus and His love, Christians are in a unique position to experience a sense of moral “okayness”. God has declared us worthwhile. The evidence of this is at Calvary. Look at what He was willing to do for us. Because He places so much value on us He was willing to give all to win us back to Himself. He loves us, not because we are particularly lovely, but because we desperately need His love.

The second area to discover is our “**sense of competence**”. Of course we are not experts in every area. Even studies with the most talented and gifted, show people usually have specific areas of special strength in a primary and a secondary area. If we feel we have to be experts in everything, we are doomed to have a poor self-image. Our sense of competence is partially determined by our actual ability, the other factor is our expectations. Our self-esteem will rise if we either increase our skill, or, scale down our expectations. And we can become discouraged if our expectations rise, yet our skill does not match it.

The third area to discover is our “**sense of self-determination**”. Sometimes this is an overwhelming thought, yet it is scriptural. “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” Joshua 24:15. And the saying, “If change is to be it’s up to me” indicates we have control over our own destinies. This feeling of self-determination is crucial for a positive self-concept.

The fourth area is a “**sense of unity**”. Is our behavior consistent over time? Or are we always wondering, “now, why did I do that?” Can we be certain of how we will react based on past experience?

As Christians, if we know we have made a habit of taking our problems to the Lord, we have learned to lean on Him for strength. We know He cares for us and watches over His children with a love that is measureless and everlasting. When new trials come, we can face them with less anxiety, because, we know how we reacted to problems in the past, (we took them to God) and we know how He reacted in the past! He gave us wisdom and strength.

2 Timothy 1:7 TEV says, “For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, His Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.”

Now, take your handout and in Column #2, write adjectives to list emotional attributes or traits you see in yourself, how you “feel” about yourself. I find this more difficult. My list includes: dependent on God, people-oriented, supportive, and learning to love! Note that in this list we may have both positive and negative characteristics.

How do we interpret these characteristics? People-oriented I view as a +; supportive is a +; I always try to be supportive, yet sometimes I am overzealous, which may be a -. This is a growing process!

I’ve taken you through some of my responses to help you learn a good way to get in touch with yourself. If you sum up the pluses and minuses on your list, you’ll begin to see a bit of how you feel about yourself. This emotional part of self-concept is usually called self-esteem.

Take 1 - 2 minutes to write in column #2.

Christian literature suggests that our self-concept is made of three parts, identity, self-esteem, and our personal view of God.

Identity: the roles we play in life.

Self-esteem: how we feel about ourselves as a person.

View of God: what kind of “person” we believe God to be.

As Christians, we may find that until we have a clear picture of who God is, and if He can be trusted, we as His created beings are not complete. I think we recognize our need for completeness in God when we realize His call in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19:

“Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all human beings His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends.”

When my daughter was 18 months old, I began to realize the tremendous responsibility I had to raise her to know God. She was such a happy little girl—so bright and inquisitive. Her little face just seemed to glow with love and trust. How could I teach her all she needed to know in order to move safely through this life and on to the heavenly life?

I had a fairly positive self-image: I had graduated from college, lived on my own for a year, married a magnificent man, then worked three more years in my chosen field before we decided to start a family.

I had known God and loved Him all my life, yet this new responsibility created a crisis that caused me to recognize that even with my strengths. I had serious limitations for meeting the challenges of leading this precious soul to Jesus.

I still had questions of my own to deal with before I could effectively teach my child. In my heart, I wanted a clear picture of how God deals with sin and sinners. I turned to the Bible and the Christian writings to seek answers.

In the story of the Good Shepherd, I found a tender, compassionate, understanding Savior. When one of His lambs wandered away, He did not curse or swear, or ignore it. He went looking for the lamb, He found it and carried it home. He put salve on its wounds and He rejoiced over the lamb that was found.

When I read that story as a young mother, it had a great impact on me. I realized how many times God, the Good Shepherd, had come looking for me, found me, saved me and all the time, He was healing me from the wounds of my sins! I rejoiced in the God of my salvation! "We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to its own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isa 53:6 NIV. I was learning to trust God more fully! I could teach my child about this loving Savior. How do we gain a clear picture of God so we can be complete?

The Bible says God is love. 1 Cor. 13 describes love, and in essence, it describes God's character. But how do we know for sure?

A good idea is to read the Bible for yourself, from front to back, watch step by step the history of how God struggles to show Himself to people, how He struggles to keep a knowledge of Himself alive in the world, how He seeks, woos, and eventually wins some to Himself. If you have difficulty understanding, just keep on reading and eventually the picture of God will become clear.

Natural law of the mind— *The Great Controversy*, p.515

SLIDE 14 "It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence."

God had Paul write the concepts of this natural law to the people of Corinth found in 2 Cor 3:18 NASB: "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

By beholding, we become changed.

When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, we shall become like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

*** Take 3 to 4 minutes to complete your handout. List up to 12 words or phrases in column #3 that describe your concept of God that affect who you are as a person.

SLIDE 15 “As we discern the perfection of our Savior’s character we shall desire to become wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity. The more we know of God, the higher will be our ideal of character and the more earnest our longing to reflect His likeness. A divine element combines with the human when the soul reaches out after God and the longing heart can say, ‘My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.’” White, E. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, p. 18-19.

As nice as it would be to stop and say, “if you have a right relationship with God, your poor self-esteem will vanish and you will become whole”, we cannot stop here.

Babies watch their parents faces and respond in kind... to smiles and coos, to frowns and harsh words.

Other people attribute meaning to our lives. People can look at the same action and interpret it different ways. The way we allow their comments to affect our self-esteem, depends on how well we know ourselves.

SLIDE 16 *flexible* or *wishy-washy*
firm or *stubborn*
courageous or *foolhardy*
generous or *wasteful*
enthusiastic or *unstable*
steady or *dull*

Because others see us one way, it may not be the true reflection of our real selves.

STORY:

Auntie brings two lollipops for her little 4-year-old nephew and 3-year-old niece. She asks the little boy to choose red or green. He has no preference for flavor when asked, “What color do you liked best?” His sister runs up and grabs the red one. Auntie says “My, she knows what she wants; can’t he make up his mind about anything?”

- Who was giving him a picture of himself?
- How would it affect his self-esteem?
- Was it a true picture?
- Who gives you your picture of yourself?

If you are dealing with poor self-esteem you might try one or more of these suggestions:

SLIDE 17

- toss yourself into a meaningful cause
- surround yourself with folks who make you feel good
- share your feelings with someone else
- seek professional counseling
- change the way you look
- practice assertiveness
- know yourself

Read your Bible, get to know God, it is a law of the mind that you will become like the person you worship and adore.

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” 2 Timothy 1:7 RSV.

SLIDE 18

Divide into groups of 3 or 4. Choose any question on SLIDE. to discuss. At ____ o'clock we will discuss your answers in the large group.

HANDOUT:

TAKE 3 TO 4 MINUTES TO COMPLETE YOUR HANDOUT. LIST UP TO 12 WORDS OR PHRASES IN THREE COLUMNS THAT DESCRIBE GOD TO YOU THAT AFFECT WHO YOU ARE AS A PERSON.

SLIDE 19 QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How important is it to have positive self-concept?
- What can people do to develop a more positive self-concept?
- How does knowing God affect your self-concept?
- What questions do people have about God that may hinder them from trusting Him with their whole life?
- How do people find answers about God so they can grow and become all He designed them to be?

Workshop #3

HOW FRIENDSHIP BUILDS FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

(In “gift box” I placed a piece of lace, a collection of family pictures in frames, a small vase of flowers to put beside the pictures. I set this all up in front of the “gift box” at the beginning of the presentation.)

SLIDE 20 What kind of blessings do people miss because they are not friends with their family members?

What kind of blessings do you and I have when we are friends with our family members? (Blessings of living with a spouse who feels loved and knowing I have learned to speak his or her love language fluently.)

Today we are going to talk about how to enhance the gift of friendship within our families.

Monday I told you how lonely I was when we first moved to Iowa and about the two “best friends”, Jeanne and Basia, God gave me. Well, eight years later when our kids were in school we began looking for jobs outside the home. Except now Basia, Jeanne and their husbands found off-farm jobs away from Churdan. I was friendless again!

I began looking for a “best friend” and found no one in my age group or with similar interests. I thought I would be sad for a while until I saw Roger, my husband, sitting in his big chair reading! I thought, “now there is “best friend” material! He’s fun to be with, we have similar interests, he’s about my age and he’s not moving away!!” So I decided to ask him if he would be my best friend.

I didn’t know what to expect from him, but I knew having him for a “best friend” would be much different than having a best girlfriend. My idea of a “best friend” is one who will talk things over at length, discuss feelings in depth, help out when there is work to be done, then go shopping!

I appreciate my husband. Roger is a man with a plan. He’s a problem solver, (he prides himself in being quick to solve problems) and he likes to be quiet for long periods of time. I asked him the big question “will you be my best friend?” and I told him what I thought it meant to be a “best friend”. Do you know? He was thrilled! He accepted and it has been great! He has been the **best** friend I have ever had, because I can tell him anything and he really loves to listen. I don’t want to give you the impression he goes shopping, “or anything silly like that”, but he is a tremendous friend. And we are learning to communicate better all the time.

I hope you are already “best friends” with your husband and your children. I don’t want to give you the impression that Roger and I weren’t friends all along, but ever since we defined friendship, (as a need to talk about things at length and in detail), our friendship has changed for the better. I still believe women need women friends, but today I want to talk to you about developing rich friendships within your own families.

For reasons that are not altogether clear, many of us have a tendency to stop talking to the most important people in our lives.

It seems that home, where the sweetest ties of earth are to be found, is sometimes the place where people are most lonely, full of heartache, and despair.

I looked in the Bible to find a Biblical model of marriage and family to discuss with you, a family we all could identify with because we could see life from both his and her viewpoints, but I found only marriages with problems—Adam and Eve; Abram and Sarai; then there was Job and his wife, not a woman disposed to give encouragement! Even Jesus’ earthly parents had a rocky start. Annanias and Sapphira are not an inspiring couple! And the reaction of the disciples to Jesus’ teaching about marriage and divorce gives a glimpse of how they valued long-term commitment in marriage... when Jesus said, “I know Moses gave you a rite of divorce, but in the beginning it was not so. But because of the stiffness of your necks and the hardness of your hearts God gave this law.” The disciples responded in effect, “Well then, is it good for anyone to marry if he can’t get rid of his wife if he wants to?” Matthew 19:7-10.

I find that the people in the Bible do not look very good, but God does. The picture of the family in Eden, with God walking and talking with Adam and Eve, and the picture of the family of God walking in the earth made new walking and talking in the perfection of eternity. God looks good. God has a perfect plan.

Because we are human we forget our need to communicate continually with our heavenly Father. Marriages where the bond between husband and wife is made solid by both partners being connected to God is the strongest marriage of all, that marriage can withstand the storms of life. In that marriage, both partners will be looking to God for wisdom and guidance in daily life. And as they look at God, they will become more and more like Him. “It is a law of both the intellectual and spiritual nature, that by beholding we become changed.” *The Great Controversy*, p. 555

And what is God like? God is love. How would you like to be married to a husband who is love? How would your husband like to be married to a wife who is love? What does love look like? I found a wonderful description of love in the *SDA Bible Commentary* (1957), vol. 6:780-786. If you have access to the Commentaries, why not spend time reading it, too.

SLIDE 21 1 Corinthians 13 is a description of LOVE:

This is very important, but very long! You may want to say it in your own words? (Or address the verses that speak loudest to your own heart?)

Love suffereth long—love bears long with the faults, failings, and weaknesses of others. It recognizes that all human beings are fallible, and that, therefore, due allowance must be made for manifestations of the outworking of errors that result from man's inherently sinful nature. Long-suffering is opposed to haste, to passionate expressions and thoughts, and to irritability.

Is kind—gentle, considerate, mild. Love is the reverse of hatred, which manifests itself in severity, anger, harshness, unkindness, and revenge.

Envieth not—feelings of envy give rise to strife and division, feelings that are entirely contrary to the teachings of Jesus, His command was to "love one another". Envy, or jealousy, is one of the most cruel and contemptible of all human failings. Love does not envy.

Vaunteth not itself—love does not sound its own praises; it is humble and does not try to exalt self. Is not puffed up—love does not inflate a person with vanity; it does not produce a condition of conceit and self-exaltation. Love does not produce ideas of self-importance, it does not seek the flattery of others for anything that has been accomplished.

Does not behave itself unseemly—Love is never uncivil, rude, or unmannerly; it never behaves in such a way as to offend the sensibilities of others. Every true follower of the Lord will be courteous at all times, never responding to the promptings of the natural heart to repay rudeness and harshness with discourtesy. Love always searches for that which is right and proper or becoming in all the relations of life, because it seeks to promote the happiness of others.

Love seeketh not her own—The exact nature of the nature of real love is a selfish seeking after one's own advantage, influence, or honor as the great objective in life. Mankind naturally is interested first of all in self, and frequently that interest overshadows all others; but Christ's way puts self last and others first.

*****Love is not easily provoked—The word "easily" is supplied, and apparently without warrant. It actually gives a wrong shade of meaning to the statement. Love is not provoked, whether easily or otherwise; nothing can disturb the equanimity of perfect love and cause a display of annoyance, impatience, or anger. To insert the word "easily" would be to suggest that there are times when a certain amount of anger, irritability, or resentment are permissible, but such is not the case with real love. (See Ps. 199:165; Heb. 12:3; 1 Peter 2:23).*

Isn't that amazing?

Thinketh no evil—Love puts the best possible construction on the behavior of others. One under the control of love is not censorious, disposed to find fault, or impute wrong motives to others.

Rejoices not in iniquity—Love does not rejoice over the vices, but in the virtues, of others. Love is interested in the advancement of truth and the happiness of man.

Love beareth all things—beareth means to protect, to support...Love...is silent about such things as the faults of others, which the selfishness of the natural heart would gladly expose.

Love believeth all things—love is disposed to put the best possible construction on the conduct of others, imputing good motives to them. This is the attitude of love, because love seeks to make others happy and will not believe anything to their detriment except on irrefutable evidence.

THINK OF THIS!

Love hopeth all things—however dark appearances may be, and whatever grounds there may be for questioning the sincerity of others, love still hopes that everything will be well in the end, and will maintain this position until all possibility of its being confirmed has disappeared.

THIS IS INCREDIBLE!

Endureth all things—love consistently works for the best interests of others, and consequently is prepared to look upon the unfavorable conduct of others with an understanding patience and sympathy inspired by God.

Love never fails—This must be so, for love is the very foundation of law, and the law of God is eternal. Love never ends.

To me this description is powerful.

I believe battered men, women and children sometimes are misled to think if they are Christian, they must endure all things. The 1 Corinthians 13 description of love does not indicate that at all. It indicates that the soul of the perpetrator is a soul for whom Christ died. In love and sympathy, the perpetrator of harm and violence needs to be taken for counseling and victims need to be taken to safe places where their souls and bodies can heal.

When a person is loved fully, they feel secure, the whole world looks bright, and they are able to reach their highest potential in life. But when a person feels used and not loved, the whole world looks dark and that person likely will never reach his/her potential for good in the world. No wonder God gave that prescription...“love one another”.

So, questions remain...if we are Christians and we know about love, and we know what love is supposed to look like, then why do our marriages and relationships slide into monotonous routines and sometimes fall apart?

Dr. Gary Chapman, in his book *The Five Love Languages*, suggests that just as people living in different countries speak different languages, people growing-up in different homes, with different needs, interests, and values, view love and the expression of love differently—they speak different love languages.

As English speaking Americans we may be able to communicate our basic needs to people in Russia without knowing their language: however, they may not recognize our statements of care and concern unless we speak Russian. Just so, we may be able to communicate basic needs and words of love to our partners, but they may not recognize our fullest statements of love unless we speak their specific love language!

Why doesn't the simple Golden Rule work in every family? "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

I think that is what we most often try. We think, well I would feel loved and cared for if my husband would only say lovely things to me. So I will say all kinds of loving things to him, words of appreciation, affirmation and affection, thinking someday he will take the hint and speak loving words to me! But he doesn't; he brings flowers and gifts and I think, he can't possibly mean anything by these gifts. He thinks giving me gifts makes up for not expressing appreciation for all the work I do around the here. Our relationship deteriorates, when all along we both are trying our best to communicate love to each other.

Dr. Chapman suggests there are five basic love languages:

SLIDE 22

- ***Words of affection***
- ***Quality time***
- ***Receiving gifts***
- ***Acts of service***
- ***Physical touch***

The following information applies to your parent/child relationship. It focuses on your spouse, but you can make the application elsewhere! When we learn to speak the basic love language of our spouse and our children we will be able to communicate love to them and they will recognize it as love!

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

If the primary love language of your spouse is **words of affirmation** then they will feel most loved and valued when you express words of love and appreciation.

And the key to changing the emotional environment in your house by using words of affirmation is to express verbal appreciation for the things you like about the other person, and, for the moment, suspend your complaints about the things you do not like. It focuses on what we're saying;

"You look sharp in that suit."

"Do you ever look nice in that dress."

"You must be the best potato cook in the world. I love these potatoes!"

"I really appreciate your washing the dishes tonight."

"I really appreciate your taking the garbage out. I want you to know I don't take that for granted."

SUGGESTION:

List positive traits about your spouse or things they do that you notice. Add to this list in the weeks ahead. Then twice a week, select one positive trait and express verbal appreciation for your spouse. Another thing, if your spouse gives you a compliment, you are not to return a compliment then, but rather simply receive it with a "thank you for saying that." Do this every week for two months. If your relationship improves, then continue!

QUALITY TIME

If **quality time** is the primary love language of your loved ones it means they feel most loved when you give them your undivided attention; for example,

- *Sitting on the couch with the TV off, looking at each other while talking, giving each other your undivided attention*
- *Taking a walk, just the two of you*
- *Going out to eat and looking at each other while communicating*
- *Playing a game, if the focus is on the fact that you are together*
- *Putting in a garden*
- *Visiting flea markets*
- *Listening to music together*
- *Picnicking*
- *Washing the car on a hot summer day*

SUGGESTION:

Make another list, this time listing some of the things you know your spouse would like to do with you. Things he/she has mentioned through the years. Now do them! One activity a week for the next two months. The central issues of quality time are togetherness and focused attention. Making time to do things together is as essential to marriage as eating is to health.

RECEIVING GIFTS

If **receiving gifts** is the primary love language of your loved one, it means they see gifts as a visual symbol of love. If receiving gifts is my primary love language, I will place great value on gifts you give. I will be greatly moved emotionally by gifts you give through the years. I will see them as expressions of love. Without gifts as visual symbols, I may question your love.

Gifts come in:

- all shapes, colors, sizes
- all prices; expensive, free
- purchased, found, made

Gifts need not be expensive, nor must they be given weekly. But for some individuals their worth has nothing to do with monetary value and everything to do with love. Sometimes the best gift is the gift of **self**; being there for the other person.

(If your partner has been critical of your gifts in the past and almost nothing you have given has been acceptable, then receiving gifts is almost certainly not her primary love language.)

ACTS OF SERVICE

If the primary love language of your loved one is **acts of service** then they will feel most loved when you do thoughtful, kind deeds for them. These are different from gifts of self. "Acts of Service" means doing things you know your spouse would like you to do. You seek to please your spouse by serving him/her; by doing things for them,

- cooking
- setting the table
- cleaning
- washing the dishes
- vacuuming
- taking out the garbage
- changing the baby
- painting a room
- keeping the car washed/waxed; in operating condition
- keeping the lawn mowed, raked and trimmed

These are acts of service. They require thought, planning, time, effort, and energy. If done with a positive spirit they are indeed expressions of love.

SUGGESTION:

Make a request list. List three or four things that if your spouse chose to do them would make you feel loved when you walk into the house after work. Or if making the bed is important to you, put that down. If your spouse chooses to do three of four things, you would take the actions as genuine expressions of love toward you.

PHYSICAL TOUCH

If **physical touch** is the primary love language of your loved one they will feel most loved and adored when you take time to touch them in ways that are meaningful to them.

We have known for a long time from numerous research projects in child development that babies who are held, hugged, and kissed develop a healthier emotional life than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact.

Physical touch is also a powerful vehicle for communicating marital love, such as,

- holding hands
- kissing
- embracing
- sexual intercourse
- putting your hand on his shoulder as you pour his juice
- sitting close on the couch while you watch a movie
- touching your spouse as you walk through a room
- touching his/her back as they walk through the door
- running your hand through his/her hair
- getting/giving a backrub

All of these and other “love touches” are the emotional lifeline of the person for whom physical touch is the primary love language. Now let’s see if you can discover your own love language.

Use handouts for workshop #3.

See: Instructor’s Guide, The Five Languages of Love
HA 6 and HA 7

Workshop #4

HOW FRIENDSHIP CAN ENHANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH

(In the “gift box” I had a large bowl full of a variety of assorted kitchen utensils that I pulled out one at a time and showed the audience while I said the following...)

I just found a recipe for bread that sounds fabulous! I want to make it right now! And I have a box of kitchen utensils to use. Now let’s see...

Well, these are kitchen utensils all right, but not one of them will make bread. What is wrong with this picture? If they won’t make bread, why are they in the kitchen?

Does this picture in any way resemble a picture of our church congregations?

I think we are very much like this pile of kitchen tools.

Kitchen tools have a purpose; they are in the kitchen to help the cook look good!

And the purpose of a Christian?

We have been created to bring glory to God.

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.”

Most kitchen tools work best while working in combination with other tools.

The individual Christian may feel inadequate to accomplish tasks alone, yet, in connection with the Master, and in connection with other Christians, they can function to their fullest potential.

Kitchen tools are in the kitchen because they belong there; they were purchased to function in the kitchen.

People are members of our church because they were drawn by God to a closer walk with Him. They have been purchased by God to reflect His glory. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” Jeremiah 31:3.

Psalm 23 says: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name sake.”

Some kitchen tools are classics, tried and true; some tools look like new-fangled gadgets. In the church we have both older and younger members, we have members whose families have been in the church for many years, who are mature Christians who are on a long walk with God, they have a wealth of experience and knowledge of God. Other members are newborn Christians with all the eagerness and energy of youth.

How do we learn how to cook? Early on, our mothers and grandmothers teach us, later we may take courses in cooking all kinds of foods.

How do we learn to be Christians? Someone needs to teach us. Sometimes our parents do, sometimes we find people in the church who take us under their wing and show us godly lives.

Today we will be focusing on developing nurturing relationships between women in the church.

SLIDE 23 What Blessings Do People Miss Because They Don't Have Friends in the Church?

Susan Hunt wrote a book entitled *Spiritual Mothering*. Her book is based on Titus 2:1-5.

SLIDE 24 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

These verses suggest that older women are to be godly role models for younger women in the church, teaching and encouraging them in godly living.

Susan Hunt calls this role modeling "Spiritual mothering".

SLIDE 25 What is Spiritual Mothering? The definition of Spiritual mothering is:

"When a woman of faith and spiritual maturity enters into a nurturing relationship with a younger woman in order to encourage and equip her to live for God's glory." (Hunt, p. 12)

I love this concept; I think it is needed in our churches.

As an OB nurse, I have seen new mothers go through various stages of mothering. During the first 48 hours after birth, most new mothers are in what researchers call the "taking-in phase", these new mothers engulf their babies with their eyes. They

explore them gingerly with their fingertips before they venture to touch them with their whole hand, then enfold them in their arms. They are tentative about everything the new baby is doing, and they need “mothering in order to mother”. The nurse acts as the mother, teaching her about the needs of her new baby.

Then with confidence, the new mama “takes hold” of her new responsibility and goes on to nurture her own little one.

It makes sense to me that more experienced Christian women would be called to “mother” younger Christians, to help them “take hold” of God as they grow in the Christian life.

A teenager was unmarried and pregnant. She had experienced incredible emotional highs and lows during the last several days. She wondered where to go for solace and comfort. She knew of an older woman cousin who was also her friend and chose to go to her home. As she stood at the front door of the older woman’s house, she wondered what her reaction would be. She knew what rejection felt like. She remembered her fiancé’s reaction and the events that caused him to change his mind about marrying her. Would this friend reject her too?

We don’t know what emotions were swirling inside Mary as she raised her hand to knock on the door. But we do know that less than five minutes inside that door, she experienced a joy and confidence unexpected in one so young. Only a few moments in Elizabeth’s presence and Mary burst into a magnificent song of praise to God!

What happened between these two women is the essence of spiritual mothering. When women do for other women what Elizabeth did for Mary, I believe we will see young women burst forth in lives of praise to God! And that is the goal of spiritual mothering.

Mary and Elizabeth are wonderful examples, but they are not the ultimate models for spiritual mothering. “In the beginning God created”, God is the source of life and the model for living life. A proper approach to any situation begins with God.

LEADER: Choose **one** of these story approaches:

The first time I looked for a picture of God in the Bible as one who could understand my needs as a woman, I was pregnant with my second child. Lorelee was two and I was tired and exhausted! I felt frustrated and overwhelmed with responsibilities, I wasn't certain God could understand the needs of a pregnant mother?

I looked for answers and to my surprise I found references that gave me great encouragement. The story of the Good Shepherd in Isaiah 40:11, "He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that are with young." Believing God represents Himself as the Good Shepherd and His people as the sheep of His pasture, I realized God knows our needs. He understands young mothers who are tired and pregnant. He expects no more from us than we can give. He will lead us gently and will carry our little ones close to His heart! What a great God! What an understanding Father. What a perfect friend!

It is important to realize God knows and understands the deepest longings in our hearts. When we know this, we can encourage others. When we don't know this for certain, we can turn to other Christian women for encouragement. Does God really know about women's needs? Yes, He knows and understands us, He is the ultimate model for spiritual mothering.

Who can be a spiritual mother? Do you need to be a mother in order to mother? NO! The development of the mothering capacity is affected by instinct and learning, but is hindered by sin.

When a woman becomes a Christian her growing desire to imitate God produces obedience to His word, she develops:

SLIDE 26 Mothering Characteristics:

Strength	Excellence
Tenderness	Generosity
Desire to nurture	Comfort
Compassion	Affection
Protection	Sacrifice

These characteristics are relational. They depend on a relationship with God, and they create a desire within the individual to nurture others.

Let's look at another Bible story that illustrates spiritual mothering. It's the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi, these women had a deep attachment with each other. When the story opens, Naomi is a sad and bitter woman and you might wonder

why her daughter-in-law wanted so desperately to stay with her? I think Ruth, as a Moabite woman, raised in a heathen culture, probably did not expect much support or respect from anyone in her life. Evidently, in the past, Naomi had shown her real acceptance. The love shown between members of this Israelite family had led Ruth to love and reverence Naomi's God. Now that their husbands were dead, the common bond between them was their commitment to God.

SLIDE 27 Ingredients for Spiritual Mothering:

This is the first ingredient for spiritual mothering:

A common commitment to God.

The next ingredient for spiritual mothering is to:

Equip another and give encouragement to do God's work.

How did Naomi do this for Ruth?

Ruth found a job; Naomi gave her encouragement and advice! Every night after work, she gave more encouragement and more advice!

An ingredient essential for being a successful spiritual daughter is a teachable spirit.

Ruth was willing to listen and follow the directions given by Naomi.

The end of the story is delightful! Ruth marries Boaz, a kinsman redeemer, and has a baby boy to carry on the family name. Naomi no longer feels sad, alone, outcast, but full, rich and blessed.

This baby becomes the grandfather of King David!

Another example of spiritual mothering is one of a young woman meeting an older woman living in a nursing home who expressed feelings of uselessness. She could not understand why she was still living. She saw no purpose or hope in her life. When the younger woman asked questions about her faith, simply rehearsing the goodness of the Lord in her life refreshed the older woman.

A close friendship developed between them; they continued to visit. When the younger woman became pregnant, the older woman gave her encouragement to be a godly mother. On another visit, the older woman excitedly told that she had led her roommate to the Lord! Now she says, "I believe this is the reason God has kept me alive this long!"

This 85 year-old woman continues to encourage her roommate and spiritually mother her young friend.

In our mobile society, where school, marriages and jobs take us away from our family of origin, many women long to be nurtured. They want the love and acceptance of a mother or a mother-substitute. They want to feel the warmth and security of an older woman's approval.

Susan Hunt writes:

SLIDE 28 *"I am deeply impressed by the excellence of Christian women around the world whom I have had the privilege to meet and/or observe. These women believe God's Word is the only infallible rule for faith and practice, and they are committed to living out God's truth in the daily occurrences of their lives. These women believe in and live by prayer. Their social consciences have been shaped by God's truth; they are committed to making a difference for Jesus in this generation. They believe that the church is the bride of Christ and have committed themselves to serve Him through their local fellowships."* (page 19)

I believe women today are committed to using the power of grace in their lives to influence families, churches, communities, our nation, and the world.

Is God your reference point? Does He have supremacy in your life? If so, you have much to offer a younger woman. Begin praying for an opportunity. Also, seek out an older woman who displays this kind of focus in her life and learn from her.

A nurturing relationship is built: The relationship between spiritual mothers and daughters is a nurturing one. A nurturer is concerned about the growth and development of the one being nurtured. The nurturer is promoting spiritual growth and development; therefore, this is not a self-centered, self-serving, emotionally dependent relationship. Nurturing involves serving, which drives us back to God and His grace again.

SLIDE 29 Colossians 3:12-14 is a beautiful text that shows us how to nurture one another: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

What practical things do you think Elizabeth might have done for Mary?

- time to talk
- praised qualities of excellence in Mary's character
- provided a safe place for Mary

A spiritual mother is willing to cultivate a nurturing relationship with a younger woman by spending time with her:

- teaching her to bake bread
- meeting for breakfast to discuss a situation at work
- keeping her children so she can have a night out with her husband
- taking her to lunch

This opens the way for the younger woman to share her story with the older woman.

But younger women need to follow Mary's example and seek out older women who display evidence of God's grace and ask for their help to live for God's glory. Often older women are willing, but they feel it would be presumptuous to approach a younger woman.

Older women can do the cultivating, but younger women need to do the initiating.

AGE DIFFERENCES ENRICH A RELATIONSHIP:

Older women have been through the life stages a younger woman is just approaching. She may have counsel for dealing with problems the younger women are facing. Younger women can give enthusiasm for living and a zest for life to older women.

When older women begin to retreat from activity, it is not a sign of unconcern about God's work, it may simply be a sign they do not have the energy to assume the same kind of responsibility and activity they once did.

Another thing I have learned is that older women have more time and energy for prayer and meditating on God's Word. Many are widows; many live alone. They have entered into a dimension of dependence on God that can only come when you are alone. How sad if we miss the value of this life-stage by resenting them if they "do" fewer activities. When the life-stage of these women is appreciated they can become the prayer warriors and encouragers for younger women.

Living for God's glory frees us to value and appreciate rather than resent one another. We can appreciate:

- our diversity of temperaments
- our life-stages
- our life situations
- abilities, and callings from God

We don't have to do the same thing or be the same. The essential thing to have in common is a desire to glorify God.

Nurturing relationships of spiritual mothering encourage and equip women to live for God's glory!

Elizabeth's verbal affirmation poured encouraging energy into Mary that caused her to praise God and rejoice in Him. Verbal affirmation is essential to encouraging and equipping because women need the encouragement of other women. Verbal affirmation is more than flattery; it is giving words that encourage and equip women to live for God's glory. Pray for sensitivity to the needs of others and reach out to meet those needs in positive and practical ways.

Encouragement is needed first.

SLIDE 30 *Encouragement is:*

Serving in love. Giving encouragement may be in the form of

- a hug
- a word of encouragement to mothers who make the effort to get themselves and their children to church

It may mean—

- reaching out to a young woman who has become withdrawn and inviting her to lunch or taking a meal to her because you detect unusual fatigue

It may mean—

- laying aside your own plans to help another work through problems in her marriage

As this happens we move to the second stage in the process which Paul describes as being "knit together in love" Col. 2:2.

The connecting of our lives through serving in love is one of the most powerful aspects of the Christian community. This close joining characterizes women's friendships. And it builds the church.

The encouragement we receive in the safe place of the church, produces the confidence and the ability in us to be encouragers, it is not confidence in our own ability; it is confidence in God. And ability grows out of spending time with Him.

It is important in a spiritual mothering relationship to give careful thought to how we can encourage others to find their safety and security in Him, and not in us. Our dependence needs to be in God, not in each other. Isa. 35:3-4.

"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear; your God will come... he will come to save you."

Another and very important aspect of spiritual mothering is to give comfort to the comfortless.

"As a mother comforts her child so will I comfort you." Isa. 66:13.

Many broken-hearted women feel helpless. They sit on the pew next to us, but they suffer in silence because they are afraid we will reject them if we know about the problems in their family. Someone may be in jail, or in treatment for alcoholism, someone may be pregnant or have just had an abortion. Sometimes the pain is too severe to talk about. I know women who seek counseling and support groups away from their churches because they can't risk exposing their pain to people in their churches.

Some women live with hurting hearts in silence because they think it is wrong to suffer with depression, fear, or grief.

In both cases, we as individuals and members of the church need to examine the message we are conveying. What atmosphere are we creating? What skills are we developing? Are we comforting others as part of our ministry of encouragement?

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in ALL our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Cor. 1:3-4.

Listen to that, the God of all comfort us in all our troubles. Nothing is outside the range of His ability to comfort us. This comfort is so compelling that it not only gives us relief, it also equips us to comfort others.

Sometimes our pain is so severe we think we cannot go on. Listen to Paul in his despair. Corinthians 1:8-9:

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 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."

Our God wants us to know Him, to learn to trust Him, to rely on Him, to live for His glory. As Christian women, we can nurture, encourage and equip each other to this glorious calling.

"He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. Set our hope that He will continue to deliver us." 2 Corinthians 1:10.

Hurting people require enormous energy just to survive. We can be a further drain on their energies through insensitive remarks or neglect, or we can provide an atmosphere of love that makes it easier for them to experience God's comfort.

I am saddened if you are suffering alone, but I urge you to avail yourself of the sufficiency of the God of all comfort who can comfort you in all your troubles. Use your alone time to drink deeply of His Word and to spend much time in prayer. Then turn your trouble into a treasure by using what you learn about Him to be a comforter to others.

A practical application: Women need to pool their knowledge and their energies to provide comfort to hurting sisters.

Assignment: Depending on length of time, here is an "end of class activity"—have women pair up. The woman who has been a Christian the shortest period of time should ask one or two of these questions to the woman who has been a Christian the longest period of time. Have questions written on pieces of paper to hand out, or on an overhead transparency or chalkboard!

SLIDE 31 and HANDOUT (HA 8):

While visiting with an older woman you might ask her these questions:

- What is a special childhood memory you have?
- What is a precious memory you have about your husband?
- What have you learned about God that you wish you had known when you were my age?

HA 9 Assignment: After-class assignment: "Developing Friendships and Nurturing Friends within the church: spiritual mothering".

Workshop #5

HOW FRIENDSHIP ENHANCES OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR NEIGHBORS

(In the "gift box" I had a placemat with two tea cups and saucers and a tea pot, a plate with fruit and crackers in the middle and a pretty lamp. I set these out in front of the box at the beginning of the presentation, to create the setting for a friendly conversation with a friend!)

When Jesus said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" the question, "Lord, who is my neighbor?" was answered by Jesus with the story of the Good Samaritan. I think that is a wonderful story, but, I've always been sorry the best story about neighborliness Jesus could tell, was not about one of God's own people. Or was it?

Who are God's own people? What is He looking for? People who reflect His character. In *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69 we read, "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own". I don't think he is looking for the world to get so bad He can't take any more; I think it's been like that for a long time. He's looking for us... to look to Him... and be changed.

What does His character look like when it is reproduced in people?

I have a story about friendship and neighborliness that inspired and amazed me!

"Neighbors" this story by John Sherrill, from *Guideposts*, (April 1992) is presented in slightly adapted form.

Once there was a man who loved roses. His name was Jiro Ninomiya (pronounced Nee-no-MEE-ya). Mr. Ninomiya brought his family to this country from Japan at the turn of the century and bought a few acres of land just northeast of San Francisco, California, on Route 17. There under a palm tree Mr. Ninomiya built a house for himself and his family. Behind his home he grew roses that each morning he trucked into San Francisco to be sold.

It happened that immediately across the street from the Ninomiyas lived a second immigrant, a man named Frederick Aebi (pronounced A-bee), who had immigrated to this country with his family from Switzerland about the same time as the Ninomiyas. Like the Ninomiyas, the Aebis struggled to make a living growing quality roses on a strip of land behind their home.

The Ninomiyas and the Aebis were just the kind of immigrants who have given America its strength—hard-working, family-centered, churchgoing people (the Ninomiyas were Methodists; the Aebis, Lutherans). And they were raising their sons, Tamaki Ninomiya and Francis Aebi, with the same standards.

For three decades the rose-growing neighbors lived across from one another. By now Tamaki and Francis had taken over the rose farms. Both young men worked too hard to do much socializing, and neither family was great talkers, but each enjoyed the other's culture. The Aebis, for example, often admired a Japanese doll, which the Ninomiyas kept in their living room: a dancer wearing an elaborate costume of black-and-white silk, encased in glass. The taciturn youngsters of the third generation were allowed to look at the doll, never to touch it.

In time both families became modestly successful; their roses were known in the markets of San Francisco for their long vase-life.

Then on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the U. S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. And in California, reports of violence in nearby Richmond reached the truck farms out on Route 17; a Japanese car had been overturned, and a Japanese greenhouse stoned. Rumors spread that soon Japanese people, especially those on the West Coast, were going to be rounded up and sent away to internment camps.

Francis Aebi, his wife, Carrie, and their two children walked across the street and knocked on the door of Tamaki's house, under its palm tree. While skinny nine-year-old Lina Aebi stood looking at the dancing doll, her father spoke.

"Tamaki," Francis said, "we've lived across from each other for many years."

"Three generations," Tamaki said, glancing at his own five children.

"We are your neighbors," Francis Aebi said, and with that meaningful statement Francis went on to make clear that if a need arose, he would look after the Ninomiya nursery. It was simply something that each family had learned in church: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." "You would do the same for us," Francis said.

The possibility that Tamaki would be interned was not farfetched. Tamaki's wife, Hyane, was an American citizen. Their children were Americans too, but Tamaki was an alien; he had been born in Japan and had never become a naturalized citizen.

Meanwhile the fear and animosity grew in the cities. There were stories of stonings and boycotts not only of Japanese but also of those who befriended them.

On February 19, 1942, ten weeks after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, providing for the designation of "military areas...from which any or all persons may be excluded." Speculation was that it might be used to get Japanese people off the West Coast.

When the news of the Executive Order was broadcast, Tamaki and Hyane immediately paid a visit to the Aebis to discuss the quirks of the watering system in the Ninomiyas' greenhouse. They came carrying a gift-wrapped package: the exquisite dancing doll in its glass case.

Little Lina jumped up and down in delight, but Francis had trouble finding words. "I couldn't possibly accept this, Tamaki," he finally said. "But we'll keep the doll safe until things are back to normal."

Every day when the Aebis awoke, they checked to see if the Ninomiyas were still there. Then at noon one day in late February 1942 a black car pulled up to the Ninomiyas' house. Four men dressed in business suits went inside. Tamaki came in from the sorting shed. The Aebis watched from their front window as he was escorted to the car and driven off.

That same day, Hyane, the five children and old Jiro Ninomiya, Tamaki's father, went to live with friends in Livingston, California, which was farther from the coast; they reasoned it would not be considered a "sensitive area," and citizens of Japanese ancestry would be left alone. They loaded the pickup with clothes, a few pots and pans and some favorite toys, and drove away from the home that Jiro had built with his own hands. Hyane's last sight of their rose farm was of her neighbors—Francis; his work-worn wife, Carrie; and their two children, Lina and her older brother, standing under the palm tree waving farewell.

The move inland didn't help for long. On May 3, 1942, a new Civilian Exclusion Order was issued by the Western Defense Command. ALL persons of Japanese descent, citizens included, were to be evacuated from the area. Assistance would be granted for the disposition of property, such as real estate and automobiles. Evacuees were required to carry with them bedding, clothing and table articles, including a bowl for each member of the family. In August the Ninomiyas boarded a crowded train, having been told only that they were going East.

"East" turned out to be Granada, Colorado. From there the family was transported by truck to a relocation center of tar-paper-roofed barracks surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards.

While Hyane was trying to settle into the living space allotted each family in the barracks, her father-in-law came running in. He led the family outside and pointed excitedly to a sandy bit of ground. Each family had been given a plot of land, 10 feet by 50 feet, for a garden. "We'll grow flowers!" Jiro said.

"Annuals," he added. "It takes years to grow roses. They won't keep us here that long."

Back in California Francis Aebi didn't mind the longer hours running two nurseries. But one thing he did mind. To qualify for a farmer's ration of fuel he had to uproot the roses and plant vegetables. In the Ninomiya greenhouses he planted cucumbers; in his own, tomatoes. In both, he left room for a few roses.

“For tomorrow,” he explained to his family.

Months passed. The whole Aebi family labored beside Francis. The children worked in the greenhouses before school, and on Saturdays they also had to work instead of going to Luther League at church. Even with their help, Francis’s work stretched to 16, 17 hours a day.

A full year went by. Then two years. Then three. Occasionally a letter arrived from the internment camp. The best news was that after two and a half years Tamaki had been allowed to join his family again.

Francis and Carrie and the children continued their exhausting labors, but at least Lina’s brother was now 16, old enough to drive. That helped. Japanese property was still being vandalized, and Francis kept lights burning all night in the Ninomiya home across the way. Another child was born to the Ninomiyas in the camp. Hyane knit wool socks and sweaters for the Aebis.

At long, long last the war in the Pacific ended. Word came through the public address system in the relocation center cafeteria that the detainees were to be sent home. Once again they boarded a train.

In his letters Francis had reported that all was well at the Ninomiya nursery, but Tamaki wondered: Could that really be true? What would they actually find when they reached their rose farm?

Finally the train came to a stop in Richmond, California. There on the platform, waving his wide-brimmed hat in welcome was a man so drawn and thin that his cheekbones showed. The oldest Ninomiya girl whispered reverently to little David, now five, “That’s Mr. Aebi, our neighbor!”

Francis and Tamaki shook hands a bit awkwardly, as if they wanted to hug, but couldn’t quite. There were so many Ninomiyas that Francis had brought along a friend to help transport them. The Ninomiyas piled their few belongings into the vehicles and stared anxiously out the windows as Francis and his friend drove them through Richmond, then into the country and onto Route 17.

Finally they were turning into the driveway, stopping beneath the palm tree in the front yard. Tamaki and Hyane got out, followed by Jiro and the children. They all stared.

There was their nursery, intact, scrubbed and shining in the sunlight—looking neat, prosperous and healthy. And so was the balance in the bank passbook that Francis turned over to Tamaki.

Carrie Aebi came running across the road, followed by the Aebi children, who were not too old at ages, 12 and 16 to dance their greeting! Together the families stepped into the Ninomiyas’ home, which was as clean and welcoming as the nursery.

There on the dining room table was the dancing doll in its glass case. And next to it was one perfect red rosebud, just waiting to unfold—the gift of one neighbor to another.

I remember as a child, hearing my teachers say that Adventists had something special to offer the world. That no matter where we went in life, we would be able to offer more to our neighbors and our communities than anyone else because we knew about a loving God. So when I left home and moved to an Iowa farm, I was full of enthusiasm about my “mission field”! But do you know, I hadn’t been in my new little home very long before I began to wonder what I had to offer these neighbors.

When a neighbor died, I felt proud to take food to the family before the funeral. Then six months later I found out that the neighbors were still taking food!

When a barn burnt down, it was the neighbors who called to arrange for food for the firemen!

When a tornado hit a newlywed couple’s trailer, it was the neighbors who arranged a “shower” of food supplies and bedding for the young couple!

What do we have to offer people like this? These are wonderful Christian people.

How can we draw neighbors like these closer to Jesus?

How can we draw neighbors who aren’t so nice closer to Jesus?

SLIDE 32 What kind of blessings do people miss because they don’t befriend their neighbors? I’ve watched my neighbors for 19 years now, and they give so much love and care to each other. They accept newcomers into their neighborhood and into their families. Loyalties run deep to God, church, family and country.

I’ve looked long and hard to see what I had to offer that they don’t already have. I know about the Sabbath, they watch every week as we drive to church, they see tractors sitting idle Friday night until Sunday morning, we have invited them to share Friday night supper and to share Sabbath dinner... we’ve had Friday night Bible study groups with Baptists, Quakers, Catholic, what FUN it has been!

I believe the “truth” we have to share includes the truth about the Sabbath and the soon coming of our Lord. But to understand the true meaning of the Sabbath is to understand the Creator of the Sabbath. And to correctly understand the second coming, is to understand the truth about the One who is to come.

Others share our belief about the seventh-day Sabbath and about the second coming of Christ. I believe the distinct doctrine we have to share with the world is the truth about the Creator of the Sabbath and the truth about the One who is coming back to take His people home. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, the life”

SLIDE 33 *The Desire of the Ages* (p. 22) "The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, 'with healing in His wings'. Mal 4:2."

I believe the stories of His life and his death on the cross tell a story so glorious of our gracious God, these stories dispel the darkness of misapprehension about God because they tell of a love that is everlasting. A love so devoted and true. Jesus said about His death on the cross, "I, if I be lifted up will draw all unto me." It is this love that draws, that transforms hearts and lives, that wins us to Him, that protect us from the lies of the deceiver.

This is our responsibility; to reveal to our neighbors and friends, to all those within our sphere of influence, that God is love, and that He wants us to be His friends. He wants us to show them how He can be trusted.

"Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into His friends and gave us the task of making others His friends also. Our message is that God was making all human beings His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends."
2 Corinthians 5:17-19, TEV.

SLIDE 34 *Christ's Object Lessons* (pp. 415-416) "Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."

People are sick with the malady of sin. What do we say to them? People need the love of Jesus demonstrated in a life. They need to know He loves them.

SLIDE 35 *Christ's Object Lessons* (pp. 419-420)

"It is the privilege of every soul to be a living channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and character. There is nothing

that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Savior's love. All heaven is waiting for channels through which can be poured the holy oil to be a joy and blessing to human hearts.

"Christ has made every provision that His church shall be a transformed body, illumined with the Light of the world, possessing the glory of Emmanuel. It is His purpose that every Christian shall be surrounded with a spiritual atmosphere of light and peace. He desires that we shall reveal His own joy in our lives. Christ does not bid His followers strive to shine. He says, let your light shine. If you have received the grace of God, the light is in you. Remove the obstructions, and the Lord's glory will be revealed. The light will shine forth to penetrate and dispel the darkness. You cannot help shining within the range of your influence."

If you are light, you shine!

Who is within the range of your influence? Family, church, workplace, neighbors.

Mark Finley—Conversational Evangelism

People are more receptive to spiritual truth when they are at a time of need. Ask God for the right word to say at the right time to have an impact to change hearts and lives.

The advantage a friend has, is that they will be near during a time of need! They will know about the time of need!

Using a model developed by Dr. Donald Smith, Mark Finley suggests the "Onion Approach" to people. People have areas of personal interest that are layered—least personal on the surface, most personal interests near the core...

SLIDE 36 *The "Onion Approach" to Reaching People*

General interests
Specific interests
Philosophical interests
Spiritual interests

Unless we have earned their trust, we have no right to talk to people about personal issues. How do you earn the right?

- Being friends
- Developing credibility in your work in the helping professions
- Being in places where we come close to people

But in conversation, and in your neighborhood, after you have established trust, what can you say to help understand the spiritual needs of your neighbors?

SLIDE 37 Discuss questions you might choose to ask to begin using this as spiritual conversation.

- What is your source of strength?
- What helps most when you are alone or afraid?
- How would you describe your God?
- Is prayer helpful to you? What happens when you pray?
- Are there any religious practices that are important to you.

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