

verticalthought[®]

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

The Friendship Formula

Friends Don't Let Friends...

Can You Hear Me Now?

The Loneliness Trap

Infatuation or Love?

Pecking Holes in Evolution



A Model Friendship

Do you have a really good friend? If not, would you like to? Almost everyone wants to have a close friend, yet for some this goal seems unattainable. Many simply haven't been taught how to make and keep good friends.

One of the most famous stories of friendship in the Bible is the one between King David and Jonathan. The account begins in 1 Samuel 18:1 just after David had defeated Goliath. "Now it came about when he [David] had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan [Saul's son] was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself" (New American Standard Bible throughout).

While many are aware of David and Jonathan's friendship, few seem to have noticed the details about how this relationship began.

Rather than a mere accident—the way many friendships seem to begin today—the friendship between David and Jonathan appears to have begun over respect for each other and shared values. This friendship was not a *Brokeback Mountain* kind of story portraying homosexual love, as some try to grossly misrepresent it. Instead, it is a story of two courageous young men who looked to God for guidance and help.

While many are aware of David and Jonathan's friendship, few seem to have noticed the details about how this relationship began.

Before their meeting in the court of Saul, both men had served courageously in the defense of their nation. Jonathan had led 1,000 Israelites in a successful attack against a Philistine garrison in Geba (1 Samuel 13:1-3) and later single-handedly attacked another garrison to lead the Israelites to a major military victory (1 Samuel 14).

A key to Jonathan's success is found in what he said to his armor bearer: "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). And God did work for Jonathan and the Israelites. In the confusion that arose over Jonathan's assault on the garrison, God caused the Philistines to start fighting each other (verse 20).

Unfortunately the war with the Philistines lasted throughout Saul's reign (1 Samuel 14:52), and in the course of time the Philistines brought in their giant warrior, Goliath, to intimidate the Israelites. No Israelite dared to go against Goliath one-on-one. No one, that was, until David learned of the challenge and offered to fight him. David's courage was based on his trust in God. Explaining his thinking to Saul, David said, "The LORD . . . will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37).

So when David appeared before King Saul in 1 Samuel 18, there were a number of good reasons for Jonathan to establish a friendship with the young man. Both had courageously fought the Philistines. Both were heroes. And most importantly, both had relied on God for help.

The friendship between David and Jonathan was the kind where each was a good influence on the other. In this issue we examine how to make and keep good friendships. May we all choose our friends wisely, become better friends with the friends we have and grow in our friendship with God.

David Treybig, Managing editor



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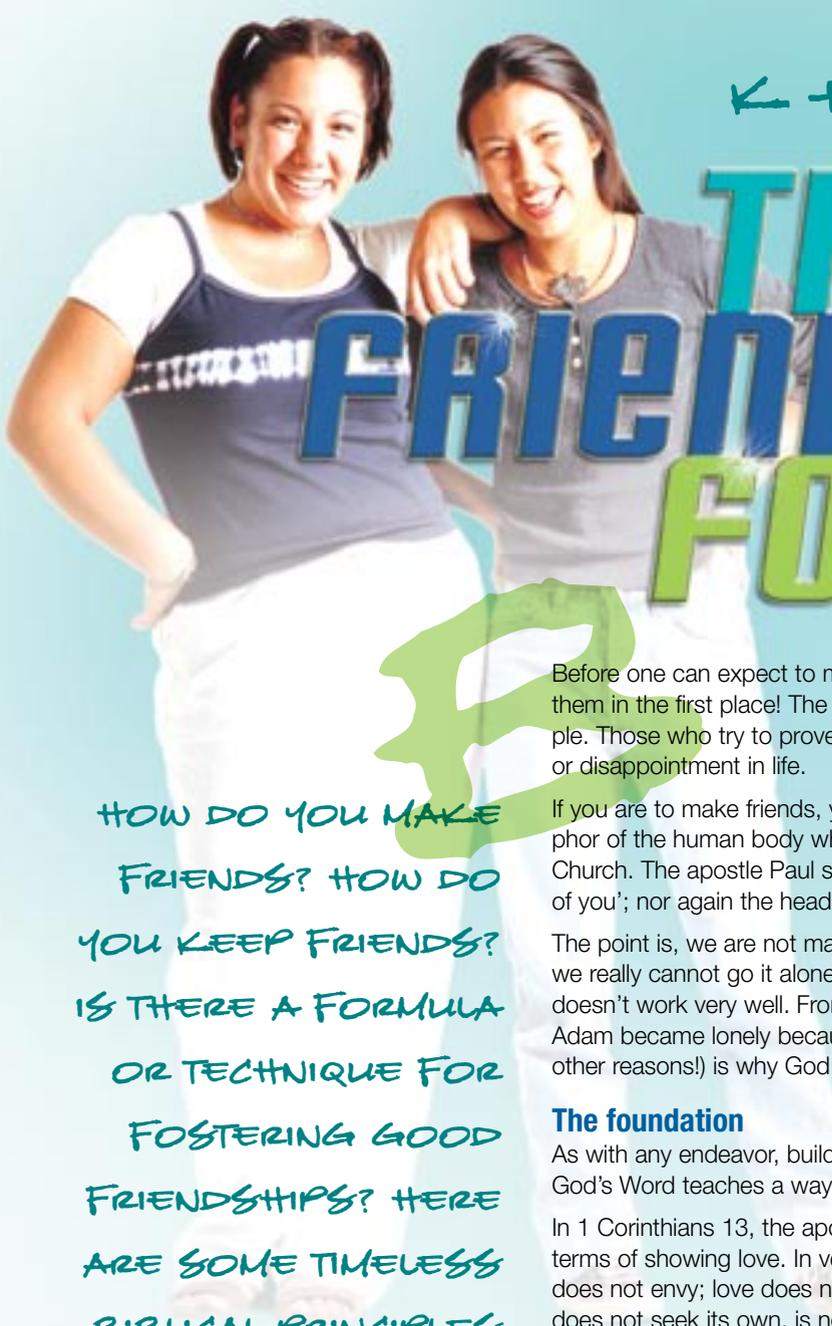
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$K + T = \text{FRIENDSHIP!}$

THE FRIENDSHIP FORMULA

HOW DO YOU MAKE FRIENDS? HOW DO YOU KEEP FRIENDS? IS THERE A FORMULA OR TECHNIQUE FOR FOSTERING GOOD FRIENDSHIPS? HERE ARE SOME TIMELESS BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT WORK.

by Doug Horchak

Before one can expect to make friends, he or she needs to see the value in having them in the first place! The old song “No Man Is an Island” is true! People need people. Those who try to prove they *don’t* need others set themselves up for failure or disappointment in life.

If you are to make friends, you must value the need for them. The Bible uses the metaphor of the human body when talking about the closest of all friendship groups—the Church. The apostle Paul says, “And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

The point is, we are not made to be totally independent creatures! To be successful, we really cannot go it alone. A do-it-yourself attitude leads to a lonely life that often doesn’t work very well. From the beginning, God designed human beings to be social. Adam became lonely because there was no one comparable to him—which (among other reasons!) is why God created Eve!

The foundation

As with any endeavor, building friendships needs to be based on the right foundation. God’s Word teaches a way of life based on being a “giver” rather than being a “taker.”

In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul talks about the importance of being a “giver” in terms of showing love. In verses 4-5 Paul says, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.”

The point is simply this—our desire to develop friendships should not be based on what we can *get from* an individual or relationship, but what we can *give* (time, an ear, encouragement, support). Helping others also has an automatic reciprocal benefit for us.

Reach out

Some may be reluctant to make friends because “reaching out” to others has risks. However, “reaching out” is a risk we should be willing to take.

The Bible gives us principles that apply in many areas of life, including making friends. As Galatians 6:7 tells us, we reap what we sow—whether positively or negatively. So if we are friendly and reach out to others in kindness and goodwill, making the effort to build friendships, that’s what we will reap in return.

To show others friendship, we also have to be willing to give of our time. As a formula, we could say that Kindness (K) and Time (T) lead to Friendship or $K + T = \text{Friendship!}$

An old anonymous saying explains: “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” Preoccupation and self-absorption will not bring fulfillment. Yet how many people spend years trying to get others interested in them rather than reaching out by showing friendliness and interest in others?

There is no substitute for being friendly. Making the first move also takes the pressure off other people. Most of the time they will be relieved that someone else has started the ball rolling. Being friendly creates an environment in which friendships can develop.

Learn to listen

Because most people are primarily interested in *themselves*, they tend to have a hard time listening to others! A necessary ingredient in building friendships is being willing to sincerely listen to your friends and to concern yourself with their needs and thoughts. Be sure to also ask questions about what they are expressing to you. This shows you are genuinely interested!



One of the more unusual friendships I've ever seen developed between a dog and cat we owned years ago.

We "inherited" a stray dog, an elderly cocker spaniel that showed up at a friend's door one day. Since she was such a sweet-natured and gentle dog, we named her "Lady."

We got a small male kitten not long after that, and the kitten was so young he fixated on the much older dog. It seemed only natural to name him "Tramp," since he was so feisty and full of spunk. Soon the two of them, Lady and Tramp, became best buddies.

Since Lady was quite old when we got her, her eyesight soon began to fail (she had cataracts and could only see peripherally). It wasn't long before young Tramp became a "seeing-eye cat" for the dog, a role he took quite seriously.

LADY & TRAMP— BIG DIFFERENCES, FAITHFUL FRIENDS

We lived on a dead-end road about 200 yards long with only four or five houses on it, so traffic wasn't a problem. Nearly every day, late in the afternoon, the two of them would take a walk down that road. How they communicated to each other that it was time for their daily excursion remains a mystery to me, but they did it almost daily except in very bad weather.

It was quite a sight—the two of them would walk slowly, side by side, all the way to the end of the road and back, then come back into the house to curl up together for a nap. Lady used Tramp as a set of eyes, and Tramp was happy to oblige, apparently because he simply enjoyed Lady's companionship.

They were quite a pair, those two. God's Word has a lot to say about true love being demonstrated by serving and helping others. That kind of attitude is at the heart and core of many a lasting friendship. I've seldom seen it demonstrated any better than in feisty little Tramp and his faithful companion Lady, who enjoyed one another's friendship so very much.

—Scott Ashley

Listening will not only make your friends feel better (which, let's face it, is important!), but it will also establish for you a good reputation among those who are not your friends. You'll be known as a friendly, concerned person. These qualities attract people like a magnet. And the Bible shows us these are qualities that Jesus Christ practiced His entire life!

Give your undivided attention while learning the interests, goals and aspirations of the people you meet. This may seem like a hard or unnatural thing to do, but you can start by simply making a habit of asking a few, nonprobing questions about the other person. Of course, don't "drill" them with questions as if you were a lawyer, but realize that by asking

a few questions, you will gain a good understanding of their interests and goals—the things that make them tick.

Give a compliment!

I'm not talking about complimenting just to try to impress someone, but giving a sincere comment of encouragement. These days, it seems that when you compliment another person, people can mistakenly think you are being insincere just to get your way. That's not what I mean at all!

God says we can do much good with well-chosen (and sincere) words. "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23). Commenting about how nice someone looks or about another quality you admire (without getting too personal) is a gesture that will be appreciated.

Follow up

If you get along well with someone, swap e-mail addresses or phone numbers and keep in touch. As always, consider whom you are developing a strong friendship with—as good friends should be trustworthy and share values similar to yours. Clearly, our best friends are going to be those with whom we share interests, including our faith and convictions.

Another key point in follow-up is to actually *keep doing it*—even with old friends! Sometimes people "ditch" their old friends or simply forget about them when they find new individuals who seem a bit more exciting or interesting. But good, "old" friends are hard to come by, and keeping in touch by dropping them a line every now and again is a good practice.

Be patient

Being patient is a great quality that is often called the *elusive virtue!* It seems so few have it! In friendships, we should realize that as we desire God to be patient with us, we will at times need to give friends time to consider their actions. We need

to be patient and not give up on people too quickly.

God's Word says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). In other words, we should not allow difficult times, a strained relationship or personal problems to cause a friendship to end.

Even when a friend has some personal problems and blind spots, a close friend can be in a unique position to offer humble, but meaningful, advice and direction. Be sure to read "Friends Don't Let Friends . . ." beginning on page 6, for a more complete explanation of this principle.

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WHEN IT COMES TO FRIENDSHIPS, MOST PEOPLE THINK THEY JUST HAPPEN. BUT ARE THERE ANY RESPONSIBILITIES IN BEING A FRIEND? JUST WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A TRUE FRIEND?

by David Treybig

Friends Don't Let Friends...

On a recent trip, the slogan on a T-shirt caught my eye. It read, "Friends don't let friends eat farmed salmon." The phrase grabbed my attention. I, too, prefer to eat wild salmon, and I think it tastes even better when I catch the fish myself. But it wasn't just the fishing connection that hooked me. It was also the concept of friends looking out for each other.

Perhaps you've also seen or heard the phrase about friends not letting friends do bad things. I've heard "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" and "Friends don't let friends do drugs." Perhaps you can add to the list. The underlying concept behind these phrases is that each of us has the responsibility of helping our friends keep out of trouble and harm—to stay on the right path and avoid the wrong.

But telling friends that they are doing something detrimental is hard to do, and many believe they should support their friends no matter what their choices. Furthermore, most people don't want friends who will tell them that they are doing something they shouldn't be. According to motivational speaker Andy Andrews, "When asked what they want in a friend, 80 percent answer, 'Someone who accepts you as you are'" (*The Seven Decisions* video). Most simply want friends who will support them no matter what they do.

What all of this means is that slogans about friends not letting friends do something they shouldn't are asking people to go against the majority opinion. So which is it? What should a real friend do? Rather than looking to human opinions, let's see what the Bible says about friends correcting friends.

God's Word tells us that friends are supposed to support each other. As Job explained, "Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:14, New Revised Standard Version). Almost everyone can agree that being kind to a friend is important, but how do we do this?

Two mistaken ideas

Consider those who believe they should always agree with friends whether the friends are right or wrong. These people call this being loyal. But in reality, it is *misplaced* loyalty.

Think about it. Do you want a friend who is loyal to you or loyal to the truth? Compromising the truth isn't loyalty; it's deception—even if it is supposedly done out of kindness. Real friends will be loyal first to the truth and secondarily to us. In following this order, our friends can help us likewise be loyal to the truth.

Mistaken loyalty is one wrong idea regarding friendships. Abandonment is another.

In order to keep from agreeing with a friend who is wrong, some abandon their friends whenever a problem arises. They'd seemingly rather disappear or pretend not to notice than to deal with what is really happening. These people are what some call fair-weather friends. They are willing to be our friends as long as everything goes well. But when the weather changes—that is, when a problem arises—they change as fast as the weather.

Yet Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Real friends don't desert when things get tough.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't ever end a friendship—because sometimes we should if a friend purposefully lives contrary to God's values. What it does mean is that we shouldn't end a friendship just because a friend with godly standards occasionally has a problem. Under these circumstances, real friends help each other get through and solve their problems. These are all-weather friends—the kind that will stick with us throughout our lives.



Three years ago, in a land far, far away, two young girls became best friends and had a perfect friendship . . .

Get a grip! In the past few years, I've learned that no friendship is without its faults. Every friendship has at least a few areas that need improvement, and I know from experience how hard it is to talk with a friend about problems that need to be changed.

Not long ago, my best friend and I began to go through a rough patch. I started to feel like I couldn't relate to her and express my true emotions without hurting her feelings. She, on the other hand, had no idea what I had been feeling because I had kept my feelings to myself. The longer I kept it in, the harder it became and the more I dwelled on it. I knew it was my responsibility to go to my friend, but I didn't know how.

Finally, someone stated the obvious: Ask God for help! For so long, I was trying to do this all on my own. In prayer, I asked God to help me keep from flying off the handle and to grant me the

wisdom and the tact to share how I felt. I also prayed that God would open her eyes and give her an open mind to solve our problems.

And God did help us. We realized that we both have faults and that proper communication is a must in a friendship. Now our friendship is strong once again, and I know that talking with a friend about problems is an important principle for strengthening and maintaining a relationship.

—Emily Quant

One time I got into an argument with my parents, and I was on the verge of leaving home. A friend of mine came to me and told me that I needed to obey the Fifth Commandment, which says we should honor our parents. He also suggested I talk to my pastor about the problem.

Even though my friend told me something I didn't want to hear, in hindsight I appreciate what he did. After talking with my pastor and my parents, we got things worked out, and I now really respect my parents. Real friends have to let their friends know when they are wrong.

—Aaron Weis

A friend came to me one afternoon and told me that the young man I was spending a lot of time with was lying to me and not acting honorably. Although the friend from an outside vantage point could see more clearly than I could, I didn't believe him. I ignored his advice. And what a mistake I made!

Eventually, my heart was broken, and I realized that my friend's advice was correct. Thankfully, my friend remained my friend, and I learned the importance of listening to friends. Heeding my friend's advice could have saved me a lot of grief. Real friends look out for each other.

—Lena Disman

The hardest talk

One of the most difficult aspects of being a true friend is telling someone that he or she is doing something wrong. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we know that occasionally we are in need of a little guidance and encouragement to make good decisions. We don't inherently have all the answers to life's questions (Jeremiah 10:23). And while we can always pray and study God's Word for guidance, it is also helpful to have a friend who will tell us when we're about to make a mistake.

Affirming the value of correction from a friend, Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

Real friends are people who will always tell us the truth—even when it is unpleasant to do so. Real friends give us much-needed reality checks—reference points that can help us know what is true and what isn't. It is this measure of friendship that identifies those who truly care for us. These are the kinds of friends who are always there for us—even when we run into adversity.

How to tell a friend

Assuming you need to tell a friend that he or she is making a mistake—something that will surely happen sooner or later—what can you do to make the message easier to deliver and easier for your friend to receive? Consider following these biblical principles:

- **Ask God for wisdom.** Knowing when to approach your friend and how to best do so requires wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."
- **Use a normal tone of voice.** Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Don't raise your voice as people typically do in an argument or confrontation. Use the same tone of voice that you do in normal conversation.
- **Be kind.** Remember that you're telling your friend about his or her problem because you care. Friends love each other even when they are relaying unpleasant information (Proverbs 17:17). Be truthful regarding what needs to be said, but don't add to your friend's pain unnecessarily.
- **Encourage a godly change.** Most people respond to positive encouragement. Affirm the good character your friend normally displays. Tell your friend that you know this problem is out of character for him or her. Then suggest some better courses of action in a humble, respectful way (Galatians 6:1).
- **Offer to help.** Finally, show that you are a true friend by offering to help him or her change and go in a better direction (Romans 15:1).

Let's all be true, all-weather friends whether we're giving or receiving correction. Remember: "True friends don't let friends . . ."

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DUTIES OF A FRIEND



Sometimes I wonder how the human race survived before cell phones and the Internet. Once in a while, I run into a person who doesn't have a mobile phone or a business without a Web site. How do they expect me to contact them, I wonder, mildly outraged. By carrier pigeon?

Advances in technology have indisputably made communication easier. But have they made it better? The average American has only two close friends today—a third fewer than people did 20 years ago, according to a report recently published in the *American Sociological Review* (Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Matthew Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades," June 2006). The same study revealed that one in four Americans has *no* confidants. So communication is easier than ever, but we have fewer close friends to contact. Why?

Ironically, the use of technology itself is partly to blame, according to Andrew Wolvin, professor of Communication at the University of Maryland. In an interview, Wolvin explained that mobile phones, instant messaging programs and e-mail take the visual components out of communication. He says that our minds tend to wander from conversations when we aren't visually focused.

"Everybody is on iPods, IM, computers—everything but face-to-face communication," he says. "But we are wired for being visual."

We love our cell phones and text messaging because they let us multitask during conversations, Wolvin says. But dividing our focus between the conversation and driving, typing and other tasks makes it harder for us to really listen. And the rapid-fire exchanges these devices allow have decreased our attention spans.

Good communication for good relationships

Despite technology, one thing never changes—*good communication* is a key ingredient to good relationships, Wolvin says. When relationships break down, it's usually because at least one person has stopped listening.

Listening is probably the most useful life skill we have, and yet the least emphasized, says Melissa Beall, a member and past president of the International Listening Association. In a phone



Younger people tend to be more in tune with and users of the latest technologies than those who are older. But are we really communicating better?

by Kristin Yarbrough

interview, Dr. Beall, who also serves as a professor of Communication Studies at the University of Northern Iowa, said, "We just expect people to listen, but we really don't teach them how to do it."

During our teens and early 20s, we are trying to find our place and role in this world, Beall explains. Especially during these years, we find acceptance, explore our feelings and work through problems through the course of our conversations. So, if someone doesn't listen to us very often, it's easy to assume they don't care about us, our feelings and our problems, Professor Beall says. And if we don't think they care, we're less likely to spend time with them, and the relationship suffers.

Keys to better listening

We can become better listeners by taking active steps during conversations, Professor Beall says. Our listening should be more than just auditory—it should be visual, mental and emotional. She suggests these tips to make our listening more effective:

- Tune out physical distractions, like music, television or other people.
- Pay full attention to the conversation instead of engaging in other tasks.
- Focus your attention on the speaker—make eye contact—if the conversation is in person.
- Don't interrupt while the other person is talking.
- Make sure you really hear what the other person is saying instead of just thinking about what you're going to say when he or she stops talking.
- Listen actively—nod, smile or show concern when appropriate.
- Stay focused. Don't let your mind wander.

It's reassuring to find similar advice for good communication and friendships in the Bible. In James 1:19, we are advised to be "swift to hear, slow to speak."

Since God Himself created us and thus knows how we work best, we can be sure that following His advice will help us build better relationships through really listening to each other.

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Long ago, in a culture far past, ladies and gentlemen adhered to a set of behavioral protocols known as etiquette. Ladies curtsied; men bowed. Ladies called in the afternoon to pay neighborly respects to one another and drink tea. Gentlemen dipped their fingers in little bowls of water between courses of moist and juicy food. The rules of etiquette served to keep people friendly and respectful of one another in daily life.

Where, then, have all the good manners gone? Just like acid will eat away at metal, so too does a modern culture that puts individual interests and desires ahead of outgoing concern for other people. Soon the habits of good manners are no longer taught and become forgotten altogether.

Etiquette, or manners, today is ridiculed for being elitist, snooty and nitpicky. It's true that most people no longer use finger bowls at nightly family dinners, but the basic purpose of good manners survives: Doing to others what you would have them do to you!

Manner emergency

What's to be done? How do we drag the poor, banished remnants of etiquette back to the mainstream? Let's start with a specific exercise in basic manners that everyone will be able to fulfill: the lost art of RSVP!

This unusual collection of letters is typically found at the bottom of a written (e-mail or paper letter) invitation to an event. It is a holdover from the days when French was the universal language instead of English. RSVP stands for *répondez s'il vous plaît*, which is French for "please respond."

All that is required is that you respond to the person who

invited you as to whether you will be able to attend the event or not. This can be done by returning the card enclosed with the invitation, by a phone call or by a note of your own. Electronic invitations are more simplified; click on a respond button at the invitation Web site or send an e-mail.

RSVP also means that the person requesting it desires an accurate count of who will be attending his or her function. By answering promptly, you are being respectful and helpful to those who organize the activity, which will allow for better planning. Good manners are beneficial to others and also to each of us.

Stationery etiquette

Above and beyond basic courtesy, let me put in a good word for the handwritten letter. Receiving and sending e-mails is fast, fun and practical, but writing a note on paper or in a card in your own handwriting means more. It communicates to the one receiving it that you respect him or her enough to take the time and effort to sit down, choose a card or paper, think about the person who invited you, come up with a message and write it in your own hand. In this way you have given more of yourself and your time than it would have taken to click out a message on the keyboard. Therefore, it is more personal.

So the next time you receive an invitation to a wedding, party, shower, formal dinner or picnic, and you see RSVP, respond promptly. If you have extra time, do it by a handwritten note to show that you appreciate and respect your friends.

Amanda Stiver earned a B.A. in history from the Robert D. Clark Honors College of the University of Oregon and currently resides in Columbus, Ohio.

As a way to help make your friendships last, put into practice this important aspect of etiquette.

by Amanda Stiver



The Lost Art of R.S.V.P.



The Bible records many marvelous stories about friendships to inspire and encourage us on the benefits of having loyal, uplifting and helpful friends—Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Abraham and Lot, Paul and Timothy, just to name a few. Yet not all relationship stories have a happy ending, so this issue of *Vertical Thought* would be incomplete without some information about friendships that go wrong.

Consider the story of Ahithophel, told in 2 Samuel 15 through 17. He was a close adviser and high official of King David. He gave such outstanding advice that his words were regarded almost as though they came straight from God (2 Samuel 16:23). Yet when David's son Absalom usurped the throne and David had to flee his capital city of Jerusalem, Ahithophel defected to Absalom.

to anger, and do not associate with hotheads" (New Revised Standard Version). The next verse shows this advice is for our own good: "You might learn their habits and not be able to change" (Today's English Version).

It's natural for us to think we're strong enough to not let someone else's habits rub off on us, but the reality is that bad behavior always rubs off more easily than good behavior. And bad behavior is called a "snare" to us because when it gets us in its grip, we have a hard time breaking free. Just ask yourself how easy it is to break *any* bad habit you may have started in your life.

But what if you have already built a friendship with someone not involved in glaring bad habits, but who has since begun to drift into them? What if someone betrays you and still wants to be your friend?

No one likes to think about friendships that come to an end, but sometimes this is the necessary course of action. Here are some points to consider when you face this decision.

by Ken Treybig



Friendship Gone Wrong

The crushing sense of betrayal David felt from having a trusted friend turn on him to become his enemy is expressed in Psalm 55:12-14. David describes his view of the smooth words of his former friend that now feel like daggers stabbing him in the back (verses 20-21).

These same concepts are used in the New Testament to describe Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' trusted 12 disciples who betrayed Him (John 13:18). So, in addition to our personal experiences, we have historical, biblical proof that not all friendships end on a positive note.

In fact, vertical thinkers who want to think ahead to avoid some of the heartaches that come from less productive choices (see Proverbs 22:3) will pay close attention to whom they have as close friends.

The Bible tells us we should be concerned about everyone and not show partiality by paying attention to only the rich, famous or those we think can do something to help us. However, the Bible also tells us to be careful whom we choose as our *best* friends—those we spend more time with.

Biblical instruction

Proverbs 22:24 warns us, "Make no friends with those given

After all, few of us will ever face a situation like King David where a friend and adviser defects to an opposing army's leader. But almost all of us have felt betrayed by a friend at one time or another—or we've experienced some other negative relationship issue, such as gossip. Proverbs 16:28 says a whisperer (someone who spreads private or embarrassing information) can separate the best of friends. How do you deal with such issues?

These are some of the "hard issues" in life and require a lot of serious thought, heartfelt prayer to God for help in making the right decisions, and often getting counsel from someone—such as a parent, pastor or other counselor—who can help you sort through the variety of issues and concerns.

Smaller concerns in a friendship can often be resolved by applying the principle of going to your brother (Matthew 18:15). This means going to your friend to openly and humbly discuss the issue that is causing problems in the relationship. This is an important subject covered in "Friends Don't Let Friends . . ." on page 6.

When friendships turn toxic

What if you've talked to your friend with no positive result—the

issue is not resolved or even becomes worse? What if your friend begins to change—starts to become an angry hothead, for example, and won't change? What if your friend begins using illegal drugs, or starts some other serious negative behavior, and won't respond to your loving, concerned efforts encouraging him to change?

What if the friendship has begun to turn "toxic," as it is sometimes called—detrimental to you? How should you respond? What are your options and what is expected of you? What determines if it's really a "toxic friendship" in the first place?

A subject this large is impossible to cover completely in a short article, but here are some important, general points to consider and apply:

- Toxic friendships are those that are consistently negative or hold potentially serious negative consequences for you. A friend getting into drug use is easily recognized as toxic. It is more difficult to recognize that a friend who is always needy, negative, emotionally draining, controlling, gossiping, self-absorbed or overly critical can also be a toxic friend.
- The more subtle emotional issues require much thought, and often counsel from someone else, to help you recognize if a friend is just struggling with a problem (where you would want to be a supportive and helpful friend), or if he or she has no interest in changing and is becoming an emotional "black hole" that will swallow and consume you.
- If you are a true friend, you will try to help your friend change his or her bad behavior.
- If the wrong behavior of a friend is an immediate safety or health danger to you (physically or emotionally), you need to express your concern to your friend and put some space between you (literally and emotionally) for your own protection. You don't have to stop caring about the person, but you must withdraw from a close friendship in such instances.

The distinction between the last two points is the hardest and most challenging because it requires us to think and analyze our friendships. That's hard work! Often it's also difficult to see clearly when we're close to a situation, which is why getting advice from other trusted, wiser and often older people is so important.

As Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." A wise person will monitor his friendships, even as he enjoys all the wonderful benefits of having close friends.

If you feel there is any chance a relationship is becoming toxic, find a wise counselor to help you decide the best course of action. It may be that your friend really needs your help at that time to overcome a bad behavior, and you need to be that friend who is there through thick and thin, who sticks closer than a brother (see Proverbs 18:24).

It could also be that the friendship has become "toxic," meaning you need to withdraw and build other, better friendships. As you look for answers in dealing with a friendship gone wrong, always remember to ask God for guidance to help you with this tough issue.

Ken Treybig is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas.



Go to **verticalthought.org** and read:

Changez Vos Amis! Change Your Friends!

What do the late, great French President Charles de Gaulle, actor Vin Diesel and King Solomon of Israel have to say about your toughest friendship challenge?

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You *Can* Pick Your Friends

by Randy Stiver



Imagine your first day in a new school in a new town. Your father drops you off near the entrance on his way to work. You know no one. You feel a little lonely, a little intimidated. Immediately you identify the usual social groups.

The athletes and popular girls laugh and joke as if they own the world. The long, black coats, clothes, badly dyed hair, tattoos and too many piercings mark the goths. The baggy trousers and shirts of the gangster crowd belie their sullen, semicriminal

You must take seriously the personal responsibility of choosing the right friends. The good news is that with these guidelines, you *can* pick them!

look; the girls attracted to them dress in spandex-outlined, flesh-flashing contrast.

Dark-rimmed glasses of the studious types slide down their noses as they struggle to carry small libraries of books into the school. The overly wide-eyed or bloodshot-red-eyed drug- and alcohol-inflamed rock star wannabes strut their spiked or grunge hairstyles and skintight, pretorn denim outfits for all to see. Whoa—this place is starting to look like where you just moved from!

The strange parade of school “friends” continues. Sprinkled among the crowd are even some regular-looking kids too—what a relief! Everyone tries so hard to fit in with some group. Your challenge is to pick a few new good friends from this modern menagerie.

God made us to have friends and be friends to others. He created the role of friendship itself and declared it a very good thing. “Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s [woman’s, boy’s or girl’s] friend gives delight by hearty counsel” (Proverbs 27:9). It truly is a pleasure to enjoy the company, camaraderie and counsel of a good friend.

A wise Australian grandmother once said: “Love all, trust few and paddle your own canoe.” As followers of Jesus Christ we’re commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). Thus, we “love all.” But close friends must be chosen carefully. Thus, we “trust few.” Remember, God wants your friendships to be mutually beneficial—to build each other up.

To “paddle your own canoe” means you must take seriously the personal responsibility of choosing the right friends. The good news is that you *can* pick your friends! And with the guidelines listed below, you can pick the right ones.

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio.

Your friends will powerfully influence you (and you them)—for good or evil. Here’s how you can apply vertical thinking when picking close friends:

- Who shares your outlook on life that comes from personally knowing the true God of the Bible, the Word of God itself and His plan for the salvation of mankind?
- Who is a young man or woman of good character and reputation (Proverbs 22:1)?
- Who speaks with kindness, thoughtfulness and without cursing or foulness, as “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34)?
- Who has an abiding respect for the law and a conscience to obey it (Proverbs 1:10-19)?
- Who has a respect and outgoing concern for other people and their property?
- Who is sexually moral?
- Who is honest and willing to tell you directly his or her considered opinion about the issues of the day or about you yourself (Proverbs 27:17)?
- Who will listen thoughtfully to your considered opinions?
- Who has a desire and drive to do the right thing?
- Who has some true, godly wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)?
- Who sees you as more than a sex object or big hunk and has respect for you as a person?
- Who refuses to flatter you to get something from you or to use you and lose you?



Q ■ I'm considering having some body piercings and would like to know if piercings to display rings, jewels and earrings uphold Christian standards? Does it make a difference whether one is male or female?

A. Piercings for both men and women have become common in many cultures today. While women have been piercing their ears to wear earrings for quite some time, it has recently become popular in much of Western society for both males and females not only to pierce their ears but other body parts as well. Some feel it is stylish to have a piercing for a ring or jewel.

Yet many who get piercings don't consider that styles and fads change and that piercings can leave small but permanent scars long after the fad has passed, or after one changes his or her mind about the style. Additionally, piercings can become infected and may even have other serious repercussions on one's health—especially when a piercing is not done in clinically clean conditions.

The Bible records that both men and women wore earrings (Genesis 35:1-4; Exodus 32:1-3), but there is no comment in these particular cases as to whether this practice was appropriate for people of God. These passages simply record that this was the custom at the time. Both scriptures represent adornment—the first showing that earrings represented idols and the second showing how the earrings were used to fashion an idol.

We also find that having one's ear pierced became a sign that Hebrew slaves, both men and women, had voluntarily chosen to continue as slaves for the rest of their lives (Deuteronomy 15:12-17). This situation appears to have just been a piercing—without the wearing of metal or jewelry.

Later, in describing Israel as His bride, God says: "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver . . . You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty" (Ezekiel 16:11-13).

So we see that biblical history shows the use of earrings and piercings of the ear represented a variety of concepts ranging from identification with an idol to a divinely instituted sign of voluntary slavery, and even to adornment of a bride in marriage with God's sanction.

Today, even though a growing number of young and old accept piercings as a way of looking good and being acceptable to their friends and peers, there are also negative meanings regarding piercings that can also be conveyed, especially when it comes to men wearing earrings and the piercing of other body parts.

Piercing parts of the body not customarily pierced (tongue, eyebrow, navel, etc.) can also represent rebellion against parents and previous standards, conforming to new standards of our changing world and extremism.

Because of the variety of reasons (both good and bad) that people have for piercings and the mixed messages that can be sent, the issue of whether or not to have a piercing is a complex question. As Christians, we have to look at biblical principles related to the *motives* behind getting a piercing and the messages we may send to others.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 that women should "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." While the meaning behind this passage does not prohibit the wearing of gold or jewelry, it does indicate that women professing to be Christians should be careful to exhibit modesty, propriety and moderation in their appearance.

Similar to the above instruction to women, Paul wrote to both sexes: "Do not be conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2).

Thus both men and women who want to model Christian values must be careful not to give others the impression that they reject authority, that they support immorality, that they are immodest or that their goal is to conform to the world and its standards. Instead, our appearance should portray Christian godliness—not the standards of the world.

Another important principle to keep in mind is God's command to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12). If your parents don't approve of you getting a piercing, then to honor them as God instructs, don't get one. As long as our parents' instruction does not contradict God's law, we should heed their advice (Jeremiah 35).

While the motives and the impressions given by piercings will vary according to the individual and the culture in which he or she lives, our goal as Christians should be to live the finest examples of godly modesty and balance in all areas of life. For further study, please see "You Want to Pierce Your What?" in our *Vertical Thought* archives.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



A new study shows that the number of Americans without close friends has doubled in the last 20 years. “Americans are far more socially isolated today than they were two decades ago, and a sharply growing number of people say they have no one in whom they can confide” (Shankar Vedantam, *Washington Post*, June 23, 2006).

That’s not really surprising to many of us. We know loneliness can strike anyone, anywhere, even in the middle of a crowded college dorm.

Imprisoned in my mind

My first year of college I had a scholarship to pay for room and board, so I moved into the dorm of a small college less than 50 miles from home. I could go home on weekends, still see my church friends, and there were even a few people from my high school in college with me. What more could I ask for?

My roommate, another freshman guy, was easy to get along with, though as time went on I didn’t see him much. By second semester he asked to move to be with his circle of friends. Somewhere in the back of my mind was the question, What did I do that made him want to move?

The girl I liked at church had grown distant, and my calls to talk to her were taking on a desperate tone, even to my ears.

The college assigned me another roommate, a prisoner on work release (study release?). He was probably in his 30s, and we didn’t seem to have much in common. But he was only there during the day, since he had to go back to prison at night, so I rarely saw him. For some reason those nights felt kind of strange.

I was busy with my heavy load of classes and writing for the college newspaper, so it was okay that I didn’t really have a social life, I thought. But I found myself listening to melancholy music (even one of my prisoner

roommate’s albums) and feeling intensely lonely. Here I was a college student, and I was feeling like a scared, abandoned, homesick little kid.

Feelings of abandonment

Loneliness is based on our genetically programmed fear of abandonment, says John Selby, author of *Solitude*. “Abandonment is experienced by babies as the most fundamental threat to their survival . . . Once we reach a certain age, angry outbursts do little good. And, in fact, little children, when left alone or with a relative stranger, must go beyond rage and enter into the next phases of abandonment feelings—sorrow, hopelessness, depression, despair” (1998, p. 29). Over the years we are forced to develop, to a greater or lesser degree, coping mechanisms for those times of loneliness that come on all of us.

Loneliness truly is a common human experience. The earliest pages of the Bible reveal a lonely man and a loving God who said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). God provided the solution by creating a companion as the beginning of family and community.

But there have always been times of transition—moves, deaths, disasters, divorces and other events that cause separations between people. And these have all inevitably brought times of loneliness. Moses felt it. Elijah experienced excruciating isolation. Even Jesus, while surrounded by 12 close friends, was abandoned at the end, and was never truly understood during His lifetime.

A different way to look at loneliness

According to the Counseling Center at the University of Illinois, college students are particularly susceptible to these misperceptions:

- “Loneliness is a sign of weakness, or immaturity.
- “There’s something wrong with me if I’m lonely. These should be the best years of my life.
 - “I’m the only one who feels this way” (www.couns.uiuc.edu/brochures/loneline.htm).



by Mike Bennett

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

—Mother Teresa

Loneliness is “an ‘inner worm’ that gnaws at the heart.”

—D. Perlman and L.A. Peplau

These ideas are wrong and counterproductive, as I discovered. Consider a different way of looking at loneliness.

"We tend to do most of our growing only when provoked by pain, discomfort, or crisis of one kind or another . . . The feeling of loneliness, like any other pain we might experience, functions as an indicator that something is wrong in our lives," writes John Selby.

"Loneliness stimulates us to develop good relationships with others and ourselves, to create experiences that can prove ultimately rewarding in our lives . . . It pushes us out into the world to satisfy our interpersonal needs. Otherwise, we might retreat entirely into our solitary worlds and sever our connection with others" (Selby, pp. 28-29).

Loneliness is a signal and a catalyst for change. But which changes are effective and which are not?

"Solutions" to avoid

When our loneliness is from the loss of a friend or love interest, here's something to beware of:

"Over the years, what I have found in my own life experience, as well as in that of my therapy clients and my friends, has been this: when one runs out and immediately finds someone to take the place of the old love or friend, this new relationship is doomed to failure.

Loneliness truly is a common human experience. The earliest pages of the Bible reveal a lonely man and a loving God who said, "It is not good that man should be alone."

"A 'rebound' relationship is not a solid relationship, but just an attempt to ease pain by substituting a new person for the one lost. The grafting process might temporarily ease the pangs of loneliness, but in the long run it interferes with emotional healing—and the new relationship explodes at some point, leaving us in worse shape than if we had faced our solitary condition honestly and alone" (Selby, pp.73-74).

While loneliness is natural, some of our natural responses are not effective, but just amplify the lonely feelings. "These behaviors include such things as watching TV, sleeping, eating, taking tranquilizers (or alcohol, etc.), sitting and thinking and doing nothing" (Dr. Sean Seepersad, webofaloneliness.com).

So what changes *do* work to develop friendships and defeat loneliness?

Real solutions

The goal is "being with and a part of other people; enjoying their company, confiding in them or letting them confide in you, and working together towards shared goals.

"Going to church, joining a club or group, chatting on line, calling a friend on the phone, or hanging out with friends are all means of socialization. These are the activities that banish loneliness" (www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=9776&cn=353).

Robert Putnam, professor at Harvard and author of *Bowling Alone*, says the solution is "getting more involved in our communities and spending more time with family and friends" ("You Gotta Have Friends," *Time*, July 3, 2006, p. 36). He says Americans go on 60 percent fewer picnics today and families eat dinner together 40 percent less often than in 1965.

Other specific suggestions from a variety of sources are:

- Call, write and e-mail family and friends at least once a week. Share your feelings, concerns and goals.
- Invite friends and family to spend time with you.
- Have a party.
- Find out about service organizations and volunteer with the one you are most interested in.
- Get physically active—especially if you can play or exercise with others. Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep.
- Find a study or exercise partner.
- If you have to be alone, use the time to develop yourself, your knowledge and skills. You'll become an even more interesting person.
- Take a class or join a club and get to know people interested in the same subject.
- Remember that successful people find humor in past rejections—try not to lose your sense of humor.
 - Introduce yourself to neighbors.
 - Practice getting to know others and letting them know you.
 - Close friendships develop gradually as people learn to share their inner feelings. Don't rush things or you could scare the other person off.
- Find a confidant and challenge yourself to trust that person, to share your goals and action plan.
- Value all of your friendships, instead of believing only a romantic relationship will remove your loneliness.
- If you are having trouble breaking free of loneliness or depression, talk to your parents, minister or other counselors to get help (sources: Counseling Center at the University of Illinois, StopLoneliness.com and MentalHelp.net).

Getting out of the trap

I was never so glad to go back home as after that freshman year! After that year I decided to transfer to a school with a one-year biblical program before finishing my degree. There, more than 1,000 miles from home, I discovered a warm, inclusive environment that taught me not only how to deal with my own feelings of loneliness, but to recognize and try to help others facing those feelings. We can't let those feelings trap us. Act on the tips in this article.

As the Counseling Center at the University of Illinois advises: "Don't wait for your feelings to get you going—get going and good feelings will eventually catch up to you."

Mike Bennett, a minister of the United Church of God, is the managing editor of *United News*. He and his wife, Becky, and their two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.

You Have a Friend in God

The God of the universe desires a relationship with you!

by Larry Greider

I know a five-year-old who has a full set of autographed baseballs from one of the World Series teams of 2004. That year the St. Louis Cardinals won the National League Championship Series and played the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. Along with the boxed set of signed balls, this young man met many of the team's players and its manager, Tony La Russa.



How did a kid get so lucky? Well, his mother has a good friend from high school who became the director of marketing for the Cardinals' organization. I remember the day that Max, this little blond, blue-eyed baseball novice, walked onto the field at Busch Stadium as the honorary batboy and talked with many millionaire players and sports icons. He even chatted with sportscaster Bob Costas, who was a guest at the stadium.



Max had chosen Yadier Molina, the Cardinal catcher, as his favorite player. With a signed jersey, he was escorted into the Cardinals' tunnel where the players congregated, and Max chatted with many of the National League All-Stars, including Albert Pujols.

Sometimes, it is *who* you know! My grandson has been very blessed to have such connections and an amazing grasp of America's favorite summer game. Max claims that when he is older he will be a baseball player and a minister.

A very important Someone

Have you ever been favored because you knew someone important? I have to admit it has been a rare experience for me to move through the crowds and be given special attention. However, the knowledge that the God of the universe wants a relationship with those whom He calls has humbled and inspired me.

Jesus Christ mentioned to His disciples, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14). He went on to explain, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (verse 15).

Can you imagine the Giver, Designer and Sustainer of all life being interested in *you*? He wants a relationship with His creation and for us to become part of His family.



If we want to be in harmony with our Maker, we have to talk to Him, to read about Him and to try to understand His plan for our lives.

Friend of God

The biblical patriarch Abraham, known as the father of those who believe (Romans 4:11), was tested in some remarkable ways. God often works with us as we are struggling to live in this world. Yet these struggles are not lost on our Captain and Leader, Jesus Christ. He is willing to work alongside us to help and encourage us (Philippians 1:6). We are told to have confidence in this test.

We need to realize and deeply appreciate our incredible human potential to be a part of God's family. In the book of James we read, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the *friend of God*" (James 2:23).

What does this mean to you and me? If you think a boxed set of autographed baseballs is cool, how about the right to talk to God on a daily basis and ask Him for help in your life? Can you imagine walking into a major company and asking to talk directly to the CEO, or going to the Major League ballpark and insisting on talking to the general manager or coach of the team? Hardly!

Today, if you are not a very important person (VIP) in the world's eyes, you cannot expect to be noticed or given access to those in positions of authority. Yet God invites each of us to call on Him when we are in need. The Bible describes a nation that has access to God. "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7).

King David, who is prophesied to once again rule on the earth under Christ, said, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me" (Psalm 55:16).

Do you realize you can drop to your knees and seek an audience with the God of the universe and that He will hear you if you desire to serve Him and seek to follow His laws? While we don't always do what we intend, we do have access to ears that hear and a Being who can intervene for us. God does pay attention to our needs and is very willing to be involved in our lives. Isaiah wrote, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1).

Friendship takes commitment

If you want a relationship with the God of creation, it does require something from you! You must seek God and ask for His help in your life. Sadly, many today have bought into the idea that there are no absolutes in life and that we exist in the universe by time and chance. This simplistic and dangerous error gets those who accept it into a mess.

Try denying that gravity exerts influence on you while jumping off a cliff. Or try telling the sun that you don't want it to come up in the morning.

The rain comes, the stars shine and life marches along with a cadence that reflects design and order. If we want to be in harmony with our Maker, we have to talk to Him, to read about Him and to try to understand His plan for our lives.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for moderns is to admit we don't know stuff. We can Google for any piece of information and deceive ourselves into thinking we don't need God. Try that in an earthquake or tsunami or with the tragic loss of a loved one. What does it take to get our attention? We need God! The amazing epiphany is that God also desires a relationship with us.

My little grandson has been treated to memorabilia that will likely someday be worth many dollars to sports enthusiasts—if he can keep from losing them like I did. I had a cigar box of Mickey Mantle baseball cards that I collected for years, only to move away and leave them behind. Who knows what happened to this treasure?

But if you want a sure winner, seek a personal relationship with the God of the universe who wants to call you a friend. Just imagine the pull He has in the neighborhood. Don't wait to live your life with a Friend who has ultimate influence and is deeply interested in your future. Start now to develop a personal relationship with God!

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What is love, and what is infatuation?

Do you think you know? Before you assume you're in love, you should be sure you know what it is!

by Tim Waddle

It was the first day of classes my senior year in college. I walked into a computer class and looked around for a familiar face. As I quickly scanned the room, I noticed a couple of my friends, but I also noticed a beautiful brunette with deep dark eyes, and an empty seat next to her.

Our eyes met briefly, and I noticed a sweet smile come across her face. That was all the invitation I needed. Valerie and I started dating shortly after that first day of class together, and we were married almost one year later to the day. That was 16 years ago.

Was this love at first sight? Are we part of the lucky few who met their "soul mate"? Did we fall in love when our eyes met?

Wanting to love and be loved is very normal and healthy. Many of us grow up watching movies, listening to songs and reading books where the heroes "fall" in love and live happily ever after. This is what we desire in our own lives. Not only do the movies, songs and books deceive us into believing that we should *fall* in love, but our own brains can fool us as well.

When someone we think is attractive notices us, our brains release chemicals that make

us feel good. Many confuse these feelings with love. But is this really love? Many people believe it is love, and they continue to *fall* in and out of love as these feelings come and go.

An article titled "Love Is the Drug" claims that passionate or romantic love is like a drug in the human brain. "That's exactly what a team of scientists is discovering as they watch new love literally blaze its trail across the living brain. Using real-time MRI brain images of people in the initial throes of passion, they're finding that love originates far from the brain's logic center" (*HealthDay News*, June 10, 2005).

"In fact, love may vie for the same real estate in the brain as drug addiction. 'There's this general craving-and-desire system that's engaged, only in this case the desire isn't for money or a drug or power or freedom. The desire is for merging with another person,' explained co-researcher Arthur Aron, a professor of psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook" (*ibid.*).

Dopamine + serotonin = infatuation

Scientists seemingly confuse these feelings with love. Could we do the same?

Other studies have shown that when we meet someone we find attractive, the human brain's

Infatuation or Love?



neurotransmitters, dopamine and serotonin, kick in.

“In the right proportions, dopamine creates intense energy, exhilaration, focused attention and motivation to win rewards” (“Love: The Chemical Reaction,” *National Geographic*, February 2006). At the same time we develop a serotonin imbalance similar to people who have obsessive-compulsive disorder. The article goes on to say, “Love and mental illness may be difficult to tell apart.”

This is how strong the emotions and feelings can be! *Emotional chemistry, passionate love, romantic love* or *love sickness* are all terms people use to describe the new and exciting feelings of attraction. But one word can sum it up—*infatuation*. A huge aspect of having a successful loving and lasting relationship is recognizing what infatuation is and recognizing that true love is not infatuation.

According to WordNet online dictionary, infatuation is a “foolish and usually extravagant passion or love or admiration; temporary love of an adolescent” or “an object of extravagant short-lived passion.”

It takes time for real love to grow. It doesn't happen at first sight. It doesn't happen only when we find a soul mate, and it is not something we fall into.

Notice that lasting love is not part of the definition. The emotions change, the feelings are lost over time and those susceptible to infatuation “fall out of love” and begin the search for those feelings, which they think constitute love, all over again.

True love

I mentioned earlier the influence that movies, songs and books can have on our perception of love. At least one love song I know gets it right. On his album *Nothin' but the Taillights*, country artist Clint Black recorded a love song titled “Something That We Do.” Here is one verse from this song:

*I remember well the day we wed
I can see that picture in my head
Love isn't just those words we said
It's something that we do
There's no request too big or small
We give ourselves, we give our all
Love isn't someplace that we fall
It's something that we do*

I like this song because his emphasis isn't on falling in love, but recognizing that love is much more than a feeling. Love may very well start with feelings, but it must become something we do, not just something we feel or something we get.

In Greek, the language of the New Testament, there are three words for “love.” One is *eros*, which refers to a romantic or sexual love. Another is *philia*, which means brotherly love or friendship. And the third is *agape*, a broader word used to describe God's outflowing love.

A good marriage will have all three kinds of love. Romance and romantic feelings are good and should be a part of a healthy marriage. But a relationship should not be based just on romantic feelings. Friendship and companionship with good communication are also part of a healthy marriage.

But true love goes beyond friendship. True love will have and demonstrate outflowing, caring love. This is the type of love that God expresses toward mankind. It is the kind of love that is listed as part of the fruit of His Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

This kind of love takes time to develop. It goes beyond feelings and emotions. This true love or outgoing concern means being willing to set aside our own desires in order to provide for the needs of the other and to give of ourselves even when the dopamine and serotonin have settled down and we are back to reality.

Again, it takes time for real love to grow. It doesn't happen at first sight. It doesn't happen only if or when we find a soul mate, and it is not something we fall into.

Notice what the apostle Paul says about true love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

This is outgoing love. Notice that this love does not seek its own. This means not focusing on self nor on what you can get out of a relationship, but on what you have to give and contribute to a relationship.

How true love develops

This type of love is best developed by first establishing a lasting relationship with God, and then by striving to be more like Him. Once you have a relationship with God, ask Him to be involved in your love life. Ask God to help you develop godly love that you can share in the right way at the right time with another human being. Focus on what you have to offer to someone else, instead of what you can get from a relationship.

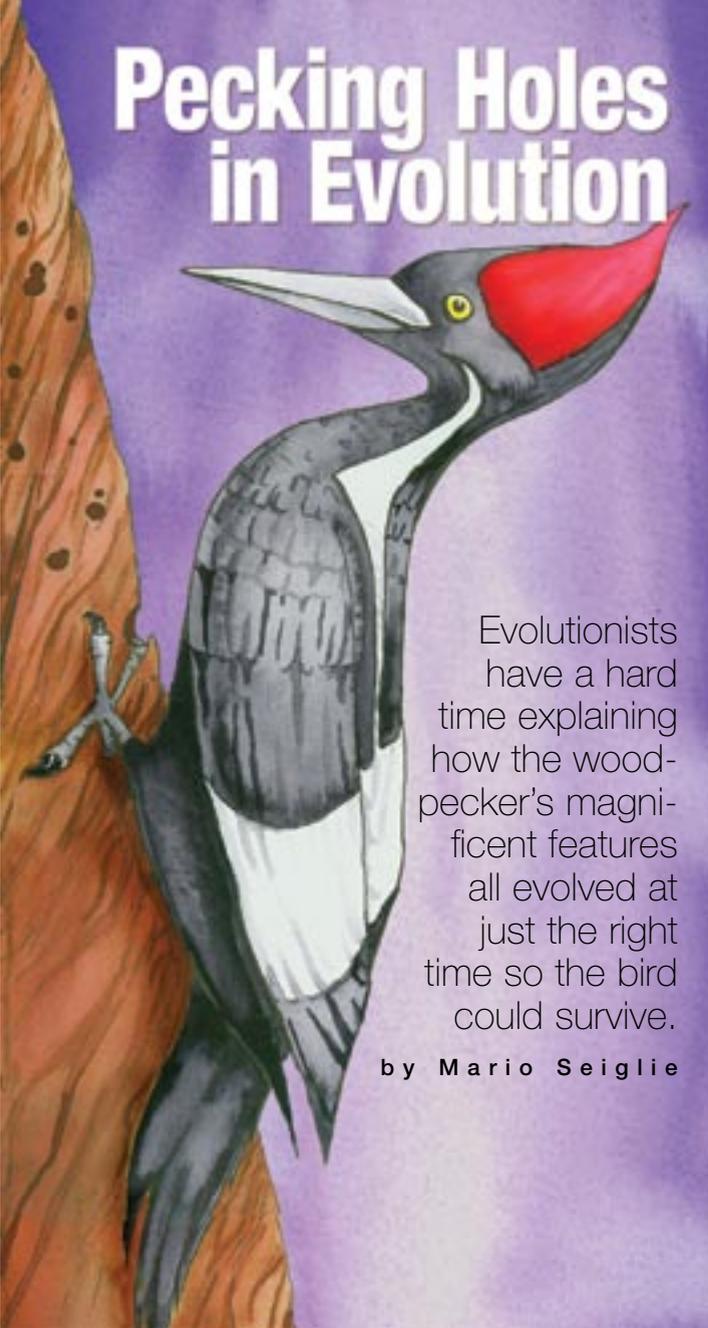
The feelings are the easy part. The feelings will come and the feelings will go. Will you recognize them for what they are? Will you mistake emotions and feelings for true love? If you do, when the feelings wear off you'll fall out of love and have to start looking to fall in love again.

Valerie and I had those feelings for each other over 16 years ago, but we did not allow them to dictate our actions. We got to know each other, and with God's help we developed love for one another. We still have those feelings. We still have love for one another, and we still have God involved in our relationship.

Emotional chemistry may be the start of a lasting relationship, but if it's lasting love you want, it's important to recognize what infatuation is and what love is. They are not the same, even if your brain tells you they are.

Tim Waddle is a husband, father and pastor of United Church of God congregations in Morgantown, West Virginia, and Marietta and Athens, Ohio.

Pecking Holes in Evolution



Evolutionists have a hard time explaining how the woodpecker's magnificent features all evolved at just the right time so the bird could survive.

by Mario Seiglie

Have you ever walked through the woods and suddenly come across a woodpecker busy at work? Its machine-gun pecks can be heard hundreds of yards away.

The pecking might seem quite useless, but through it the woodpecker obtains food, builds nests, rids trees of insects, pounds out territorial markings and gives warnings to other males as well as mating calls to females. Truly it is one of the marvels of nature. But it is also a real headache for evolutionists!

Even Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, marveled at the incredible features of this bird. He asked in his book *The Origin of Species*, "Can a more striking instance of adaptation be given than that of a woodpecker for climbing trees and seizing insects in the chinks of the bark?" (p. 166).

At least four uniquely developed features make the common woodpecker so unusual.

The first is its amazing tongue. It can be three times as long as its beak! Normally, a bird's tongue is about the length of its bill, but a woodpecker needs this extra long tongue to reach the grubs inside the trunk of a tree.

Where does it have the room to store such a long tongue? In some woodpeckers the tongue structure actually forks in the throat, goes below the base of the jaw, wraps behind and over the top of the skull and inserts into the bird's right nostril or around the eye socket. How did it manage to go almost 360 degrees around its skull and still manage to work?

Evolutionists have a hard time explaining this wondrous "adaptation." They claim the woodpecker must have evolved from other birds with normal tongues that go straight out of the beak. Yet the idea that this all happened through small, gradual steps stretches the imagination.

Not only is the length of the tongue a marvel, but also its texture. In young woodpeckers, the tongue is smooth, and it does not grow barbs that can catch larva until adulthood. So how do young woodpeckers catch their meals? They secrete a special saliva that acts like glue until they can eventually develop the barbs to hook the insects! So the woodpecker's tongue can create glue and later become a barb factory—all arriving at the right time so the bird can survive. Can evolution explain all of these characteristics?

A second amazing feature of woodpeckers is their beak. Imagine trying to drill into a hardy tree trunk. First you have to bore a hole through the tough bark and then into the hard wood. Yet the woodpecker can make it look easy because of its specialized bill.

The woodpecker's beak works like a chisel, capable of boring right into a tree. As it pecks, it finds the grubs inside the trunk through vibrations and the grub's noise. Then it makes just the right hole with the proper angle to reach the insect galleries with its long tongue. In this way, it does its job in nature—protecting trees from insect infestation.

With modern technology, we can use steel chisels to cut into trees like a woodpecker, but eventually the chisels lose their sharpness. Yet scientists have found that a woodpecker's bill stays sharp, no matter how many holes it drills into trees! So man's technology can't duplicate with the same effectiveness what the humble woodpecker can do.

A third feature is the woodpecker's special shock-absorbing head. If an ordinary bird tried to bore a hole in a tree trunk, the impact would soon kill it. It is like taking the full impact of a hammer hitting a chisel on the end of your nose thousands of times. The woodpecker, however, comes equipped with a shock-absorbing system that protects its head from damage. It is composed of a spongy tissue between the beak and the skull, thus absorbing the violent shock waves without affecting the bird's brain.

Finally, the woodpecker does not have ordinary tail feathers but specially designed ones to anchor it while going about its business. These stiff, spine-tipped pointed tail feathers are used as a brace while climbing a tree or feeding. They allow woodpeckers to lean back in order to literally throw their body into their work.

All four of these amazing features (and many others) would have to evolve at the same time to give survival benefits to a "proto-woodpecker." How could evolution and natural processes explain that?

Actually these are just a few of the marvelous features of the woodpecker that give strong evidence of its being the product of intelligent design rather than of evolution. As Psalm 14:1 says, "Only a fool would say, 'There is no God!'" (Contemporary English Version).

Mario Seiglie is a pastor of United Church of God congregations in Garden Grove, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

The Friendship Formula

Continued from page 5

Keeping friends

Overall, the human desire for friendship is easily understood. People simply want to share their lives, have someone to be with, to trust, to depend on and to genuinely listen to them.

We want friends who care about our feelings and perspectives, friends who will tell us the hard things without meaning to hurt us and friends who will not let time or distance stop communication. We want others who will tolerate and forgive our failings and friends who will bring pleasure to others by sharing the joy in their own lives.

When you think about it—all of these things we've discussed are also elements of a good relationship with God.

Consider this:

- If you could know that God is interested in your life, your dreams and your disappointments—
- If you could know that He cared about your feelings and perspectives—
- If He would tell you when you are headed in a wrong direction

—without ever meaning to hurt you—

- If you could be assured that God would understand your needs—
- If you could know that He would never let time and distance stop His interest or desire to communicate with you—

If these things were true in your relationship with God—it would be of great encouragement to you, wouldn't it? Well, the fact is, these things are *all* true!

We see that the formula to build human friendships is similar to the relationship that God desires to have with each of us. Both are based on love and patience.

So don't forget these basic principles for making friends with others. And realize that if you understand the value of friendships, base relationships on outgoing concern, reach out in a friendly way, learn to listen, follow up and strive to be patient with others, you *will* make good friends and keep them. The author of this formula (God) stands behind it!

Doug Horchak, husband, father and director of the Challenger II canoeing program on the Buffalo River in northern Arkansas, pastors congregations in Dallas and Sherman, Texas.

KEYS TO BETTER FRIENDSHIPS

DON'T:

- Monopolize the conversation. Instead, take pauses in conversation; ask about the other person.
- Try to impress. Your good qualities will reveal themselves all on their own.
- Be overly critical. Share your opinion honestly, but with tenderness and discretion.
- Focus on yourself. Wait to be discovered; spend time discovering the person you're with.
- Overwhelm with attention. Start slow. Put out feelers and see if you get any nibbles. The most beautiful fish are often frightened by too much light!

DO:

- Reach out to others. Being too picky can leave one exquisitely discriminating and alone.
- Listen. Seek to understand the other person; be sure your comments relate to what you've just heard.
- Be other-minded. Use your empathy; that is, understand and feel from the person's perspective. Let your responses show this. For example, "I bet that was scary."
- Share your vulnerabilities. Being imperfect makes you more human, more accessible, less threatening.
- Be complimentary. Don't overdo it, but when it's genuine, share your appreciation of her or him.

From Our Readers...

Regarding *Vertical Thought*

I came in contact with one of your publications some time ago and found the contents very interesting and edifying. I am a young Sabbath-keeper who has just been baptized, and I am longing to grow fervently in spiritual things.

I do not pass up materials that provide me with spiritual nourishment, and I shall be glad to subscribe to your publication. I found past issues on your Web site very intriguing. I would also like to order your booklets *Making Life Work*, *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Keep?* and *How to Understand the Bible*.

Ndifreke

I must register my heartfelt gratitude for the magazines and

literature you send to me. It is must-read material for not only youth but also the aged!

Jim

I want to congratulate the United Church of God for the wonderful work you are doing. In addition to spreading knowledge, you are connecting people around the world. The articles in *The Good News* and *Vertical Thought* are mind-blowing. Reading such magazines is a wonderful experience. Keep it up. You are doing a great work.

Abhishek

If you have comments or questions, feel free to e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org. Messages may be edited for clarity and space.



IN THE NEWS

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

America's Morality Measured

Where does America stand morally? Recent research done by the Pew Research Center finds that adultery is wrong to 88 percent of American respondents, 79 percent think it is wrong to cheat on taxes, 61 percent disapprove of drunkenness, 52 percent feel abortion is wrong, and 50 percent disapprove of homosexual conduct. These numbers reflect both the good and the bad in American society.

The good, according to an article in *Family Facts*, is that despite nearly a half century of sexual revolution promoted by the media and popular culture, a majority of Americans still holds to the Judeo-Christian ethic outlined by the Ten Commandments.

Indeed, Harvard's Institute of Politics released findings of a poll in which 70 percent of college students said that religion is "somewhat" or "very important" in their lives and 25 percent responded that they have become "more spiritual" in college ("Morality and Religion," *Louisiana Family Forum*, June 6).

The bad news is that America is missing the benefits of a full application of the Ten Commandments and the blessings, physical and spiritual, that result from obeying God. God's laws are still applicable and still fundamental to a healthy life. For more information, request or download *The Ten Commandments* (www.ucg.org/booklets).



The Drug Dealer in the Medicine Chest

Illegal narcotics are not the only drug problem for young people. Teenage abuse of prescription drugs has become a serious problem that is often missed by parents. One in five U.S. teens has tried painkillers like Vicodin or OxyContin to get high—a total of nearly 4.5 million teens.

Using the family medicine cabinet as a drug dealer is more common for teens than buying on the street ("Teen Abuse of Prescription Drugs Goes Unchecked, Study Indicates," Associated Press, May 16).

Besides the obvious problems of poisoning your body with chemical substances, getting high on illegal or unprescribed drugs is similar to the sin of drunkenness from alcohol in which a person loses full control of his or her mind. But drugs—whether illegal or prescription—can be much more powerful, dangerous and deadly.

God tells us to guard our minds ("heart" in Proverbs 4:23) and to take care of our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). He describes the dangers of abuse and addiction (Proverbs 23:29-35) and warns that no drunkard will be in God's Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:10).

HPV Vaccine: Medical Miracle or Agent for Disaster?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Gardasil, the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer, precancerous genital lesions and genital warts due to human papillomavirus (HPV) types 6, 11, 16 and 18, according to a release at www.fda.gov.

The vaccine will not be useful to women who have already contracted HPV, but will, according to recent studies, prevent some lesions and warts from occurring in young women if inoculated from age 9 to 15 and before they become sexually active.

Some experts are enthused about the vaccine. The implication seems to be that people won't have to monitor their behavior and abstain from premarital sex because now the vaccine will supposedly remove this health risk of illicit sex (though there are many more risks—there's still AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, chlamydia and numerous others).

A number of nations are already ordering large quantities of the vaccine to try to stem a rapid increase in cervical cancer (Deanna McFarlane, "Cancer Society and Ministry Welcome Cervical Cancer Vaccine," *The Jamaica Observer*, July 3.)

Some Christian family groups are concerned that the vaccine will be mandatory for school-age children even without the consent of their parents.

Linda Klepacki of Focus on the Family said: "By giving its highest level of recommendation, the [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices] panel has placed strong pressure on state governments to make HPV vaccinations mandatory. If that happens, state officials, not parents, would become the primary sexual-health decision makers for America's children. That's the way things are done in dictatorships, not democracies" ("Panel Backs HPV Vaccine for Young Girls," Associated Press, July 1).

A letter to the editor by Thomas Szyszkiewicz in the June 29 *Los Angeles Times* sums up the real situation: "The logic is simple, scientific and elementary. It goes like this: Human papilloma virus is a sexually transmitted disease. One does not get a sexually transmitted disease if one doesn't have sex. Therefore, the way to avoid this virus is by not having sex until marriage—and [hoping] one's spouse has followed the same logic."

This is, in fact, what God commands, and it works immeasurably well. For more information, request or download *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Potent Plants Neutralize Pugnacious Pests

Much has been made of human-directed genetic engineering in recent years, but what did the Creator originally program into plant and animal life to provide for survival? Consider these examples:

Though a culinary delicacy to human beings, fiddleheads from bracken ferns unleash a ferocious fusillade against insect invaders. The bracken tissue is filled with ecdysones, a hormone that causes insects to go into molting overdrive and shed their exoskeletons, thereby killing them. Just to be sure, the bracken also releases an enzyme that produces hydrogen

cyanide, highly toxic to the mandibles munching at its tissue.

Corn plants use another tactic—they call in reinforcements when caterpillars try to feed. When the enemy begins to eat, the corn plant releases a chemical that attracts a predator, parasitic wasps, which in turn paralyze the caterpillar and deposit eggs inside. When the little wasps hatch, they have an instant meal.

The ant, of Proverbs 6:6 fame, is also called on to protect its host plant. Jungle ants will swarm to the spot where a scientist has cut a sample from a tree and try to attack the invader. Amazonian ants are so protective of their specific tree home that they will kill other specimens nearby over thousands of square feet in order to give their tree the best shot at nutrients. The plants in turn grow nodules of nutrients for the ants (Sharon Begley, “Don’t Be Fooled, Those Nice Plants Are Packing Heat,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 26).

God’s creation has a phenomenal array of intricate mechanisms that protect and keep it in balance. King David said that the human body was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Likewise with all the elements of God’s creative design.

Demands of a Global Economy

Seeking employment in today’s globalized business world requires some special new skills, with surprisingly ancient origins.

Managing workers in different time zones requires thinking ahead. If your support staff is in India, you’ll be working at very different times of the day. Independent thinking is



required at lower management levels, as is creativity and clear communication—especially if that requires communicating with workers from a different background. What is common knowledge in American business culture isn’t the same for workers in other countries.

Learning a foreign language like Chinese, among others, is an increasingly critical ability (Dan Tynan, “Five Technology Skills for the Global Economy,” *InfoWorld*, May 22).

The ancient biblical concept of treating other people as you would want to be treated encompasses most of this skill set. Treating fellow workers with respect, especially across international borders, requires ingenuity, but it reaps excellent rewards.

Cool Isn’t Cool Anymore

The classic rebel, the archetype of “coolness” is no longer the reigning champ in the world of cool. Coolness is now defined by socially desirable characteristics like friendliness, appealing appearance and industriousness.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia found that those surveyed came up with two types of coolness. First, there’s the well-adjusted, friendly cool person and, second, the classic rebel. Coolness is more dependent on what people like, as opposed to a marginalized person seeking protection by remaining aloof (Scott Deveau, “Not Cool, Man: Classic Definition No Longer Applies,” *Toronto Globe and*

Mail and The Columbus Dispatch, May 17).

The real test? If a behavior, appearance or attitude reflects God’s laws, it’s cool—because who better than our Maker to set the standards?

The Inky-Dark Side of Tattoos

Besides being questionable according to God’s way of life, tattoos and body piercings have significant health risks. Puncturing the skin for either a tattoo or a piercing disrupts one of the largest organs of the body, the skin. Dirty needles and instruments can contain blood, body fluids and other materials that can lead to infection.



Routine earlobe piercing is generally safe (and the Bible does mention earrings positively), but piercings in the upper ear or other body cartilage can cause physically deforming infections. Cartilage has no blood supply and therefore cannot fight infections (“Tattoos and Piercings: Know the Dangers,” *Boeing Health Wellness Letter*, April).

One particular danger in getting tattoos and body piercings is the methicillin-resistant germ staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). A series of outbreaks of this drug-resistant bacteria occurred in individuals who visited unlicensed tattoo artists in Ohio and Kentucky in 2004 and 2005. All the affected individuals recovered after hospitalization, but MRSA can be fatal (“Officials Say Some Tattoo Customers Developed Drug-Resistant Infections,” *Associated Press*, June 22).

Therapeutic Riding Helps Amputees

Horseback riding therapy is helping injured soldiers and other individuals who have lost limbs redevelop motor skills. Horses from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, the Old Guard, are being used to help amputees regain natural hip movement.

Horses and human beings use the same circular movement in their hips, and riding on the back of a horse can help those who are injured learn how to balance and move their joints and muscles again, especially after the trauma of an amputation.

The rider’s body is moved as the horse walks, and that movement stimulates nerves in the body to recognize familiar motions. The resulting overall improvement was measured when injured soldiers were tested on different daily tasks, including getting up from a chair.

Within a few weeks, one individual, who had done therapeutic riding three times, was able to improve the time it took him to rise from a chair and sit back down from a starting time of 20 seconds down to 13 seconds (“Horses Help Wounded Soldiers Walk Again,” *Associated Press*, June 3).

God’s creation is incredible in its complexity, and one of the most amazing aspects is the nature of human interaction with animals. Many people have had a treasured pet, and for those who are ill, animals can be a great comfort. Therapeutic horseback riding is a clear example of the built-in benefits God created for man when He populated the earth with animal life.

- Check all that apply:**
- Family troubles at home
 - No friends
 - Hassles with teachers and other students at school
 - Problems on the job
 - Broke
 - Don't feel well
 - Life has no meaning

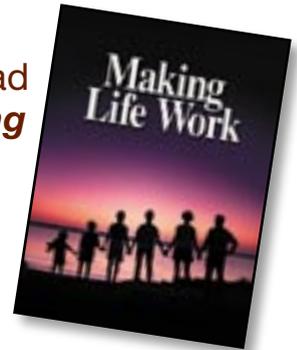
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WHERE DO I GO TO FIX IT SO IT WORKS?

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BUT THE BIBLE IS OVER 1,000 PAGES
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