

Introduction

One of the greatest indicators of our emotional and spiritual health is how well we're connected with others. Who has your back? Who can count on you? We fall short, rarely because of a lack of some knowledge or ability. We often fail in our personal and work experiences because of our inability to connect well with others. No one plans to lead a mediocre life; it just happens. We're more likely to form alliances than we are friendships. We don't seem to mean much to each other anymore. It doesn't have to be that way.

This book is about a real-life positive and practical journey to form enjoyable and genuine and spiritual relationships in every area of life. It's no surprise that those who have your back will usually be the same individuals who know they can count on you in the good times and in times of trouble. It may seem counterintuitive, but giving to others is often more satisfying than receiving from others.

It's the individuals we're close to who make life worth living.

I'm curious about and committed to learning more about friendships. I wonder about questions like these: What kind of friends do you have? Are they work friends, sports friends, or neighborhood friends? How about friendships at church? Recent Pew Research reveals that only about one in five men attends religious services weekly. Whom would you turn to if your whole world caved in? Whom would you trust enough to share your intimate thoughts, fears, and frustrations? Who in your life would drop everything to help you during a difficult time?

How many friends do people have? What's your definition of friendship? Does the Bible offer practical advice for creating friendships? How do friends think and behave? Why do women typically have more friends than men? Why are friendships with the opposite sex so rare? How does age and marital status affect friendships? Why do some friendships fall apart? What's involved in making and keeping satisfying and worthwhile relationships?

To learn more about close friendships, I read as many of the secular and faith-based publications I could find. This was useful, but what was also very helpful for real life was when I conducted my own interviews, usually with strangers. While I interviewed friends and neighbors and guys at work, most of the slightly more than four hundred conversations I had were with strangers who were willing

to talk with me in a neutral setting, often at a shopping center. Strangers were usually very honest, I found. They had no image or reputation to protect since they'd likely never see me again. What they told me was often surprising and I believe important. I continue to ask the opinions of others at conferences and retreats when I'm invited to give presentations. I've shared much in the following chapters from what I learned from many candid conversations and from my own life experiences. I'm therefore less formal; I've decided to make this book more like a conversation with less attention devoted to a formal bibliography and cited notes.