

RELATIONSHIPS

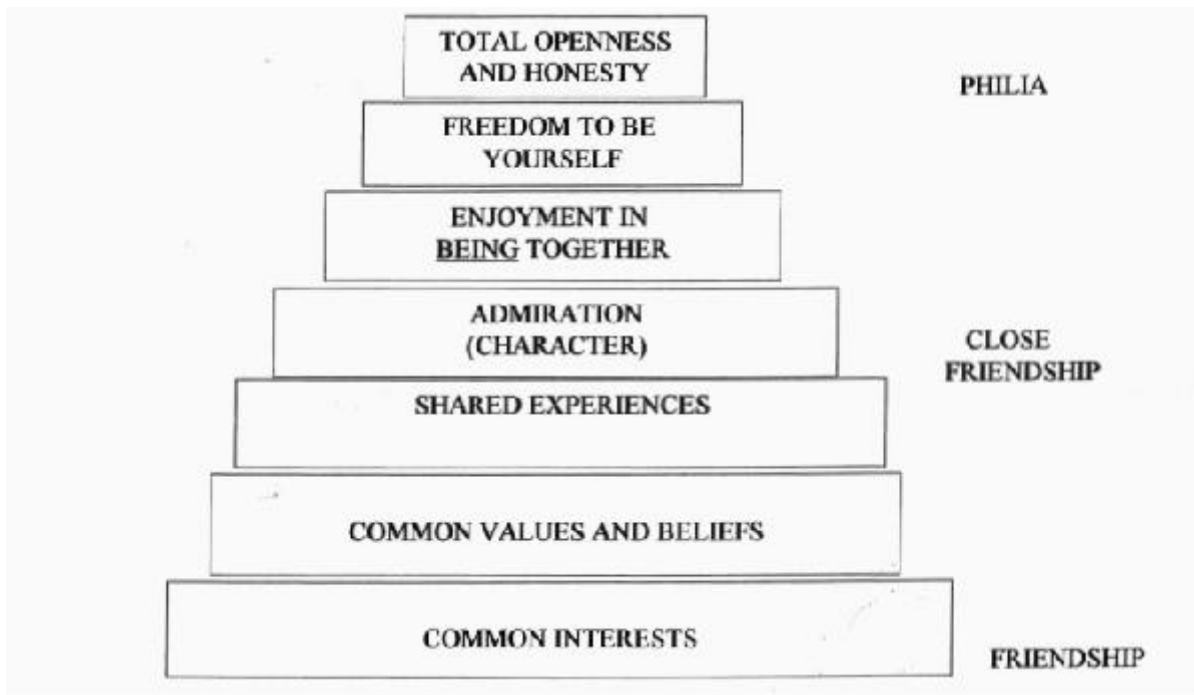
THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING: Healing from addictions absolutely requires that we learn how to form healthy, life-giving relationships. We deal with the obstacles to friendships and encourage participants to form wholesome friendships.

1. We overcome addictions primarily through our relationship with Jesus Christ, but there are other relationships that are also essential to our development as healthy, mature men and women. These are relationships with other people, primarily people of the same sex.
 - a. Addictions are a substitute for real relationships--a poor one.
 - (1). People act out on their addiction largely out of a longing for acceptance, worth, affirmation, significance--not purely out of a desire to use.
 - (2). Each of these needs, except for touch can be met through healthy interpersonal relationships.
 - (3). Overcoming addictions is to a large extent learning how to fulfill these needs in God directed ways.
 - (4). We will sustain our healing as we develop healthy friendships. In fact, such relationships may be essential for sustaining our healing.
 - b. Relationships rooted in dependency are a substitute for real friendships.
 - (1). This is why both emotional dependency and co-dependency are ultimately not going to meet our basic human needs.
 - (2). Overcoming addictions, therefore, is also to a large extent learning to relate to others in ways that are not rooted in extreme neediness.
 - (3). We will sustain our healing as we develop healthy non-dependent relationships.
2. Before going further here, I want to distinguish between “needs” and “neediness”.
 - a. God created us having certain basic human needs, among which is a need for other people.
 - (1). From the beginning, He said that man should not be alone, and if we take the whole

- of scripture, we can see that this truth doesn't just mean that we all should marry.
- (2). He made us social creatures--with the capacity to love, help, serve, encourage and enjoy one another. We get along much better when we relate to other people in these ways.
 - (3). He gave us different gifts, so that we would have to work together and so that we would compliment each other.
 - (4). He showed us examples of deep, life-giving friendships: David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi. Jesus and John.
- b. But when we talk of "neediness" as opposed to needs, we are discussing those extreme longings that are not rooted in our basic human nature, but are rooted in deprivations or deficits in our past lives; extreme needs for affirmation, worth, security, etc.
- (1). It is this neediness that lies at the root of addictions.
 - (2). Trying to feed this neediness through using or dependent relationships is what addiction is all about, and trying in these ways is always doomed to failure.
- c. In very simple terms, we look to Jesus as the solution to this neediness; we look to other people to meet our basic God-given human needs for relationships. Separating the two is essential, and I hope it is something you have been starting to understand as you have been going through New Directions.
- d. Healthy friendships will be healing, but generally in a very slow way, and unless we gain our basic healing through Jesus, we may not even be able to sustain healthy friendships.
3. We are going to be talking about three kinds of relationships:
- a. Basic friendship - the kind of relationship we could have with many, many people. It usually involves little or no intimacy.
 - b. Close friendship - the type that we can only have with a small number of people, and it may involve a moderate amount of intimacy.
 - c. Philia (brotherly or sisterly love) - of which we can only have very few. This would be the most intimate type of relationship.
4. We are using two words here that reflect basic human needs--friendship and intimacy. Which do you think is more vital to emotional health? *[Encourage group discussion on this. The point*

we want to make is that friendships--other people--are essential to any kind of life; intimacy is important, but less so].

- a. Do you know any people who live fairly good lives without any real intimate relationships?
 - b. Do you know anyone who lives a fairly good life with no friends?
 - c. In this session, we are talking about friendships as an essential part of our healing and growth. Intimacy is a wonderful part of some relationships as we will see later, but it is not our primary subject for this session.
5. In the development of a typical relationship there are certain normal elements. We might look at



them as building blocks as follows:

- a. We are using the image of building blocks because we want to stress that relationships are something that we build.
 - (1). They don't usually come about all at once. If they do, we are right to suspect that they might be responses to our neediness--not the development of real friendship.
 - (2). Certainly, every block should not be present in every relationship, because every friendship should not reach the most intimate level.

(3). And as we shall see, even some of the basic blocks may not be present in some friendships.

b. Now, let's look at each block and see how friendships are built. *[The more the teacher can give personal examples, the more meaningful this will be].*

- (1). Common Interests - A common interest in anything--computers, nature, the theater, roller skating, bingo, almost anything can serve as the basis for a friendship. You simply enjoy an activity more sharing it with another person and you relate to them through the common thing that you share. Many, many friendships start out this way.
- (2). Common Values and Beliefs - A more serious and satisfying level of friendship starts to develop when you start to discover common values and beliefs. You can communicate so much better with someone who shares your basic beliefs. They provide a foundation that is easy to build on. Of course, this is why we may be more comfortable with fellow Christians--or even a religious Jew--or someone who shares our family or political values.
- (3). Shared Experiences - These are not always present but when they are, they do a lot to create a bond between two people. Two men who have been through boot camp or a war together may experience this. Two women who have struggled to overcome a common addiction may experience it. Sometimes, just the passage of time--we have known someone for many years--or a shared blood relationship may draw us close to another person. Shared experiences may be particularly important in male friendships, where there is less verbal expression in the relationship.
- (4). Admiration - At some point in the development of a real friendship, there will need to be an appreciation of the character of the other person. This is a "good" person; someone you admire or appreciate.
- (5). Enjoyment in Being Together - I stress "being" to distinguish it from doing something together (which is usually based on common interests). This is the situation in which you don't have to be doing anything. You simply enjoy being in the presence of the other person--maybe just watching television together.
- (6). Freedom to be Yourself - When there is real comfort and security in the relationship, you know you no longer have to act a certain way with someone to maintain a friendship. This is the beginning of intimacy.
- (7). Total Openness and Honesty - Finally, you reach real intimacy. There is nothing that you would be afraid to tell this person about yourself Such a level of trust has

developed that you are afforded to be truly transparent.

6. To live a fulfilling life, we need some of each kind of relationship, but to have an emotionally healthy life, we must at least have some friends.
7. If everyone needs friends, why are they often so hard to find? If relationships are a basic human need, aren't there millions of other people out there who are just like me; who would really like to find a few good friends? Yes there are, and it's very important that you remember that there are vast numbers of people needing friends just as much as you. Remember this when you decide to seek out friendships.
 - a. But there are certain things in our fallen nature that tend to block the formation of friendships.
 - b. And for the person overcoming an addiction, there are often special problems. After all, addiction is to a great extent a problem in how we relate to other people.
8. The universal problem in friendships is the fundamental sin problem itself--selfishness. For any friendship to develop, a part of ourselves--our desires, our needs, our preferences, our quirks--must be yielded, given up for another person, and we just don't want to do it. This is why many singles groups don't work and it's why many marriages break up as well.. We are not willing to meet the other person at least halfway.
9. Overcomers, like everyone else, need to look at selfishness as a major block in relationships, but we need to pay special attention to certain special hindrances that are likely to interfere with building good relationships.
10. The first big hindrance is that we seek friendships as a way of resolving our neediness. I am lonely, so I want you to be my friend. I need acceptance and affirmation and if you are my friend you can provide them to me.
 - a. Notice, that nowhere in the building blocks did we show meeting our neediness as basis for friendship. We have friends because we all need them, because we are created to be social creatures, but healthy, lasting friendships can seldom be built on you being an answer to my neediness.
 - b. Needs will be met in friendship, but neediness is not a strong enough foundation on which to build a relationship. The other building blocks must be there.
 - c. Very often, the person who will enter into a relationship with a needy person, is someone who is very needy herself or himself. That is the basis of co-dependent relationships.

- d. If we are needy, that's a reality and we shouldn't deny it, but we simply need to look at other foundations on which to build relationships: common interests, common values, shared experiences, etc.
11. The second great hindrance to forming lasting friendships is our rush towards intimacy. You have a reading assignment in your homework, but let me just highlight this for you.
- a. Intimacy involves truly knowing and being known. To a certain extent, then, it takes time to develop.
 - b. An intimate relationship involves a willingness to be vulnerable at a deep level, and therefore it involves trust. Again, this should not be entered into without some degree of discretion; we need to know the character of the other person before we should be willing to be intimate with them.
 - c. Intimacy rests on the belief that I will accept you and you will accept me despite my weaknesses and frailties. Again, we need to allow time to prove our mutual readiness for an intimate relationship.
 - d. Seeking an intimate relationship prematurely is a special vulnerability with women, just as seeking a premature sexual relationship (before marriage) is a particular vulnerability with men.
12. There is a third hindrance for overcomers forming friendships, and it is a much more difficult one to deal with. It is low self-esteem. We talked about this a great deal earlier, but not in this context.
- a. The person with severe low self-esteem very likely has a deeply rooted belief that no one else would want to be friends with him or her.
 - b. And to paraphrase an old joke, "I wouldn't want to be friends with anyone who would be willing to be friends with me."
 - c. The only answer to this, other than the generally long term healing of low self-esteem is to realize that, as we said before, many, many people are out there looking for friends. And, certainly, many of them also suffer from low self-esteem.
13. We've talked about the ingredients of a friendship or relationship, we talked about different kinds of relationships, and we've discussed the barriers we may encounter. Now, let's look at how we go about establishing friendships. I hope I can offer some principles and practical help.

- a. First, keep reminding yourself that having friends is not optional; it is essential to emotional well-being and to your growth as a Christian woman or man.
- b. Second, accept the truth that good friendships take time. Don't rush them.
- c. Third, start with the basic building blocks.
 - (1). Find people with whom you have some kind of common interest. Get involved with them at some level, even if it's only very superficially at first.
 - (2). Find people with common values and beliefs. This almost certainly is going to make your church the first place to look for friendships.
- d. Fourth, get rid of any criteria that are not basic building blocks, that don't have to be there. Do your friends all have to be single or married? Do they have to be your age? Particularly in the Body of Christ the complementarity that God has built into us can bring forth wonderful mutual advantages in friendships between married and single people, or between people who are a generation apart in age.
- e. Fifth, lower your expectations. This can have a couple of advantages.
 - (1). It can help you avoid rushing in too fast and driving the other person away by the intensity of your expectations.
 - (2). It can help avoid another problem of relationships among overcomers--idolatry. This other person is not going to meet all of your needs. Such unrealistic expectations usually doom the relationship from the start and leave one or both parties hurt or bitter.
 - (3). When you feel your expectations for the other person are getting too great, transfer them to the only one who can meet your deepest needs--Jesus Christ
- f. Sixth, stay aware of your vulnerabilities
 - (1). Emotional dependency
 - (a). Read the book, Emotional Dependency, by Lori Rentzel if you haven't already read it--or if you know this is a problem read it again.
 - (b). Look out for the warning signs: jealousy, possessiveness, exclusivism., anger at withdrawal, and obsession.

- (c). If you have become emotionally dependent, there are only two solutions--fight the dependency or flee from the relationship.
 - (2). A closely related vulnerability is co-dependency
 - (a). In these relationships, there is always a helper and a "helpee".
 - (b). The co-dependent person can't be in a relationship unless he or she is needed. Primarily, this is rooted in low self-esteem and so it is very difficult to deal with.
 - (c). We all need to look for level ground relationships--friendships with people who are our peers in maturity, emotional health, etc.
 - (d). If you believe you are an emotionally dependent type of person, look for other outlets for your need to love and nurture. Get a cat, volunteer to help children, the aged, handicapped.
 - g. Seventh, let giving, not receiving be the basis of your relationships, but not because this will win you friends, but because it would be pleasing to the Lord.
14. Should you consider your fellow overcomers as possible friends?
- a. Yes, why not? Right up front we share some of the building blocks of friendship. We share a common interest-overcoming an addiction. We almost certainly share common beliefs and values--we want to be obedient to God. And, we have certainly shared common experiences.
 - b. Of course, though, we need to recognize the risks.
 - (1). With both parties being needy, there has to be special caution against relating in a destructive way emotionally.
 - (2). And, we should not let the addiction world be our final resting place. If other overcomers are the only people you are comfortable with, then much further healing is needed. Real effort must be put forth to establish relationships outside of the addiction community.
 - (3). But, take advantage of what is here. This can be a good starting place.
15. God said that man should not be alone--and He made marriage as a special solution to the

problem of aloneness. But He showed us, and He taught us other ways to overcome aloneness:

- a. Jesus did not marry, but He had special friends: Peter, John, James, Mary, Martha, Lazarus.
- b. We have the Old Testament examples of deep personal friendships that were mentioned before.
- c. The imagery of the Body of Christ shows that we are meant to be joined one to another.

16. Friendships are one of the joys that God wants us to experience.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE:

John 8:36 (NASB) "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE:

So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. . .

Col. 1:10 (NASB)