

Fall 2014



a restored hope network  
member ministry

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## FRIENDSHIPS FOR GOD'S GLORY AND OUR GOOD

by Laura Leigh Stanlake

It seems to me that our entire Christian culture is looking for the inspiration for connection. What is the best way to connect? What is the face we want to put out there that draws people? How do we connect with hurting people? What is the right formula for making “community” happen in our churches?

While all of these are great considerations, I want to find answers for people who are longing for that connection. I want to find ways to empower those who feel uninvited to act for themselves in finding community. My motivation here is that I was the awkward, lonely one. I did find some answers and encouragement, and did, eventually, learn the art of connection to the benefit of not only my own heart but also the benefit of others.

So what are the paths to genuine friendship and the sense of “community” that a man or woman needs? The purpose of this article is to identify some practical aspects of friendship for any disciple of Jesus and some of the blocks and solutions to making friends.

### The Prevailing Foundation of All Relationships—Love!

The Bible, which grows us in wisdom and instructs us in conduct, is clear that the real marker of a Christian's life is their love. In fact, a Christian (in Bible times) was recognized because of his/her love. Jesus said in John 15:17, “These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” So, what is this command to love? Everyone knows that we don't love everyone we meet. That is true, but that is also the test. It is an almost outrageous command and it is a significant topic in most of the letters in the New Testament. Do we want to minister and yet find that people are annoying? Lacking in genuine love makes our ministry useless. (I Corinthians 13:1-3) Do we play favorites in our relationships with each other? (James 2:1-4) *Our tendencies to make distinctions reveal evil motives in ourselves.*

Can any of us really live up to the grand command to love? I am astonished every time I consider the clear definitions of love that are present in scripture. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (ESV) says, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends.” Wow! What a definition that is! Let's take a moment and break it down:<sup>(1)</sup>

Love - affection, good will, love, benevolence, brotherly love

Love is patient – does not retaliate when suffering wrong, it suffers long, enduring

Love is kind – obliging, willing to help or assist in meekness & gentleness

Love does not envy – to boil in anger, to exert one's self for one (that he may not be torn from me), carries the idea of possessiveness, does not live out in jealousy

Love does not boast – to make a vain display of one's own worth, attainments or decorations; to brag

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Love is not Proud - prompts a man to vaunt and overvalue what he is

Is not arrogant – to be puffed up, proud

Is not rude – unbecoming or shameful; act in a manner which brings disgrace

Does not insist on its own way – not selfish or nor looking for opportunities for itself, it is not selfishly ambitious

It is not irritable – easily aroused to anger, touchiness, grouchy, ill-tempered

It is not resentful – doesn't meditate on offences nor does it imagine them, is not easily offended

Does not rejoice at wrongdoing – iniquity; unrighteousness of heart and life; injustice

Rejoices in the truth - that candor of mind which is free from affection, pretense, simulation, falsehood, deceit

Love bears (to cover, protect, hide, conceal) all things, believes (trusts, takes to be true) all things, hopes (joy and full confidence) all things, endures (patient endurance, perseverance) all things

After such a strong declaration of what love is and is not, every disciple of Jesus must examine their own motives and ask whether the signs of pure love are growing in their hearts. It is important to notice that the truths above applied to all Christians in their conduct with one another and these truths affected even the conduct among unbelievers. *This is not a personality-driven ability but a God-given command.* This is a true challenge. Jesus said it this way in Luke 6, “<sup>27</sup>But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...<sup>32</sup>If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same...”<sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

What healthy Christ follower would not want to love others in this way? It is a generosity of spirit that is attractive and warm.

This generosity of spirit is commanded<sup>(2)</sup>, explained,<sup>(3)</sup> and stated as the fulfillment of the law,<sup>(4)</sup> and is a fruit of the Spirit,<sup>(5)</sup> and is set before us as the chief aim.<sup>(6)</sup> So, we are challenged to have this kind of love as we move forward.

**We Need Friends – How to Make Friends**

It is tempting to try to present a 1-2-3 formula for making friends. However, I've come to believe that the real solution for my relationship needs is found in *changing my own heart*. I say this because I see very little success in attempting to change the hearts and attitudes of those around me.

After we begin to put on love as our chief goal, we add to it some perspective that comes from growing in wisdom. It may go without saying, but a great place to begin to learn some *wisdom* is in Proverbs. My early discipleship included the challenge to read Proverbs on a daily basis. It conveniently has thirty-one chapters so I could cover a chapter a day. Here are some examples of what can be learned in Proverbs:

17:17 – “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

18:24 – “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

22:11 – “He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend.”

27:6 – “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

27:17 – “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”

27:9 – “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.”

I also learned the first lessons of character development during those early years. There are some who really ace this category. I know that people exist who are truly full of all godly character. For a woman like me, I am a work in progress and so I am still a student of this. Most godly character derives from the ongoing work of Holy Spirit in our lives. Love, for example, “issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere

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**Restored Hope 2014 Conference Report**



The Restored Hope Conference was a wonderful hope-filled event in Portland, OR. It went really well and we saw God do some amazing things in the lives that attended!

Most of the staff was able to go and teach or serve. We are grateful that Stephen Black is able to serve this thriving national network as Vice-Chairman of their Board of Directors. One notable story is of a young woman who testified of receiving a touch from God. If she had not received such overwhelming ministry from Him, she would have tried to end her life; this is a sweet result of our ministry's influence on souls. God is SO GOOD to make himself known to this woman as well as countless others who attend events like these.



faith.”<sup>(7)</sup> There are many sources for character definitions. The scriptures are my primary<sup>(8)</sup> source but I also have benefitted greatly from the lists that others have made to expound of the topic of character.<sup>(9)</sup> I’ll highlight a few character definitions that were helpful to me as I began to look at the landscape of friendship.

- Security – “Structuring my life around that which cannot be taken away or destroyed.”
- Patience – “Realizing that everyone is at varying levels of character development.”
- Virtue – “The moral excellence evident in my life as I consistently do what is right.”
- Wisdom – “Making practical applications of truth in daily decisions.”
- Discretion – “Recognizing and avoiding words, actions, complaints and attitudes that could bring undesirable consequences.”
- Faith – “Confidence that actions rooted in good character will yield the best outcome, even when I cannot see how.”

The list I was given in my early walk had over thirty such definitions<sup>(9)</sup>; so, I kept myself pretty busy learning how to make better decisions by not living on the impulses of my emotions but more securely on foundations of love.

With character starting to grow in me, I learned to set some reasonable goals for the development of friendships. I had to ask myself whether I was willing to *begin at the beginning*. Was I willing to learn how to be a friend?

### The Diagram <sup>(10)</sup>

I found a diagram many years ago that helped me look at my relationships from an objective light. In this diagram I could see that friendships are not all the same.

Take some time to pull out some paper and sketch out your relational world moving from the outside circle toward the inner circle.

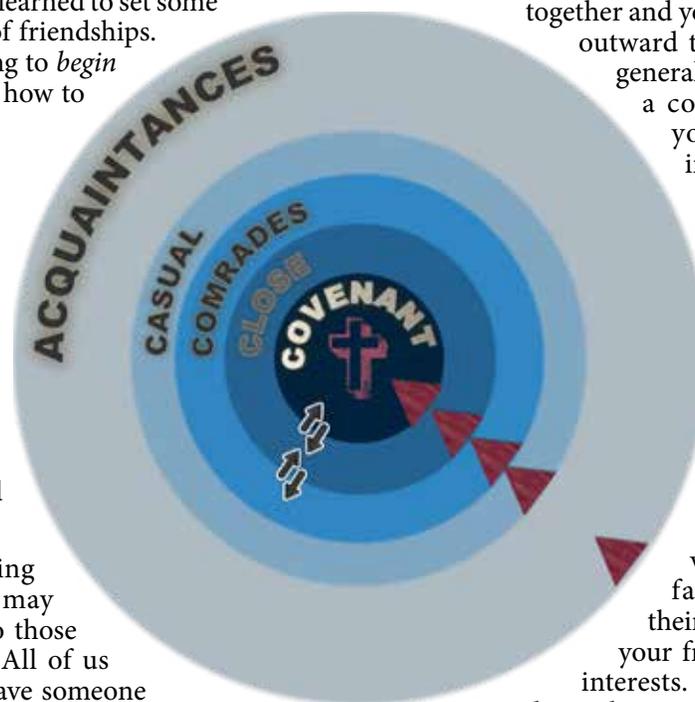
**Acquaintances** – This is the beginning point of relationships. These people may range from those you just recognize to those you really like but don’t know well. All of us have this circle full. We are going to have someone or something in common—work, church, stores, family introductions, social media sites, conferences, networks, news boards, blogs, etc. We are meeting and making acquaintances with people all the time. However, we do not know these people to the point of sharing life together.

**Casual** – These are the people with whom you share a similar situation. These may include church members; real life people with whom we share interests, causes or hobbies; work companions; colleagues; travelers or service groups. These are low intensity relationships but a step above the acquaintance level. It is from this pool you will find the color and interest in developing friendships. These casual friends can gather for an afternoon, fill in the plan for a gathering or deepen your ability to be a friend. They are the pool from which friendships deepen. These are the beginning point. You must know someone *fairly well* before you know them *really well*.

**Comrades** – You will be acquainted with at least one aspect of a comrade well, and you like them. Shared activity or interests or common purposes lead you to spending regular time together over it. You will know what they are like—their openness, attitudes, moods, dependability, humor and integrity.

**Close** – You are doing lots of life together and your time is yielding good fruit in your life. These friends know what makes you tick and love you for it. And, it is mutual. These close friends are going to be willing to challenge you too. They are not going to reject you for those little (or glaring) defects but they are going to challenge you deeper into your discipleship. These relationships are characterized by a growing trust and commitment to the development of healthy relating. These people point you to God.

**Covenant** – You have done a lot of life together and your friendship faces you outward to Kingdom work. You generally don’t set out to make a covenant friend; rather, you realize some years into your friendship that this person has become your covenant friend. In most cases, these friends are lifetime friends. You can be separated by time and space and find that you still regard and appreciate one another and seek the input of the other. You value what they value. You love their families and you love their interests; and, they love your friends and families and interests. These people probably hate what you hate too, so be careful.



In setting out to identify these levels of friendships, it is important to understand that you cannot maturely look at your new acquaintance and sanely say, “I want them to be my covenant friend.” There is no such thing as instant friendship.

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Sure, you may be inseparable on the mission trip, but you don't really know each other in ways that sustain healthy relating. Though it is another topic really, *that feeling* like this person you've just met last week is someone who knows you better than you know yourself, is, well, not healthy. ALL friendships take time and testing to develop. So, then, if we desire healthy friendship, we must be willing to begin at the beginning.

The red arrows on the diagram represent the potential of all relationships to potentially move closer. The black arrows represent the natural ebb and flow of life. It is very possible that even your closest friends could become more casual. Life and circumstances can change the availability and interests in friendships. Friendships can change. Do not fear. It is painful at times, but it is normal.

As we began by looking at love as the prevailing foundation of all relationships, we should also look at some things that break relationships. Not all broken relationships will be your fault. Not all broken relationships can or should be repaired. However, there are some things that can destroy developing relationships.

Unresolved issues within our own hearts can be very destructive and lead to all manner of troubling behaviors. Selfishness is having the end object of every decision be for your own gain. Being possessive in an attempt to keep your friend as your private property will snuff the life out of friendship. Jealousy and envy<sup>(11)</sup>, explosive anger, accusation, gossip and slander, speaking words that divide friends and things like these will destroy what you have hoped to build.

We are urged in Ephesians once again to return to love and walk in a manner worthy of our calling by walking in "all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (4:2-3) We are urged to demonstrate the fruit of love to everyone and not just our friends. (James 2:1-13) We are strongly exhorted to watch our tongue because of its ability to build up or destroy (James 3:2-18). It says, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (2:12-13)

### Some Final Thoughts

Most of us discover that friendships go through changes and shifts. Working on yourself inwardly and working through the difficulties will strengthen you for those shifts and changes. Friendships need room. If you are smothering or being smothered, there is no dishonor in getting some breathing room into the relationship. Also, just because someone gets hurt in the relationship doesn't necessarily mean that someone did something wrong. Moods, stressors, misunderstandings and the like can influence us all. All parties in the friendship are allowed to have needs. All parties in the friendship are allowed to have expectations. All parties in the friendship are allowed to have other friends. Sometimes, genuine and close friends are for a specific time in life and then it is, for all

practical purposes, over. It is sad, but it will happen though it is nobody's fault. Choose being real over being defensive. Everybody will do better with that. (This would include saying, "Hey, I'm feeling defensive and weird. Give me some time to chill!" AND, this would include giving your defensive friend time to chill before trying to talk things out. Dealing with it—right here and right now!—isn't always good for everyone involved. People process differently.

It might be wise to put aside the goal of finding that "one friend" into whom you can pour all your need. This goal will have disastrous results. However, if you become the disciple who is a life-giving source of kindness, joy, truth and affirmation...if you are intentional and generous of spirit, you will have friends because you will be a friend.

*Laura Leigh Stanlake is Director of Women's Ministries at First Stone Ministries.*

### Endnotes

- 1 These definitions of words have been taken from several sources:
  - Thomas, Robert L. *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1981.
  - Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga: AMG International, 1992.
  - Vine, W.E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with Their Precise Meanings for English Readers*. Iowa Falls: Riverside Book and Bible House.
  - *English Standard Version Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008.
  - Webster, Noah. *American Dictionary of the English Language*. 1828. <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/>
- 2 John 13:34; John 15:12,17; Romans 12:10
- 3 I Corinthians 13:4-8a;
- 4 Romans 13:8,10
- 5 Galatians 5:22
- 6 1 Timothy 1:5
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 This can be an interesting study for people who like words and their meanings. Scripture lists are loaded with good words. Examples of biblical character words can be found in: Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-9.
- 9 <http://www.characterfirst.com/qualities/>
- 10 This diagram and description were derived in part from a diagram in the book, "Where to Draw the Line: How to Set Healthy Boundaries Every Day" by Anne Katherine, M.A.
- 11 James 4:1-3



## RESURRECTION: The Wrong Side of History?

by Andrew Comiskey

“I could strengthen you with talk, or shake my head with silent lips...” (Job 16:5)

I spoke to him plainly of the dangers of ‘gay marriage,’ and the power of Jesus and His church to raise the ‘homosexual’ to wholeness. The earnest bishop implored me: ‘But we don’t want to be on the wrong side of history!’

I understand his dilemma. Last night while channel surfing for 15 minutes, I witnessed two same-gendered couples smooching to celebrate ‘gay marriage’ victories in PA and OR, a piece on skater Johnny Weir who alongside his male partner

wore a full face of make-up and bouffant hair, followed by the ‘testimony’ of a former Navy SEAL who was in the process of undergoing a sex-change.



The wrong seems right. To some, we are finally coming to our senses concerning ‘gender diversity.’ In truth, we are witnessing a mix of moral blindness and personal brokenness that scrambles humanity’s most basic foundation: what it means to be male and female. I say ‘moral’ because the decisions we make concerning what we do with our tendencies (be

they to merge with a same-gender friend, to look like the opposite-sex, or to cut off one’s genitals in an effort ‘to

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## WHAT YOU MEAN TO US

By continuing to receive our newsletters, we are encouraged because you care about the work God is doing through us. We trust we are not alone in desiring to declare to the broken that there is healing and freedom through Jesus Christ. Thank you for standing with us in this.

A few of you are able to give monthly, quarterly or even yearly. Donors like you enable us to go further in God’s work for us. For example, Stephen Black is being invited more and more to speak to churches and groups both in and out of our state. Our voice is being carried further because of you! In fact, in the past few months Stephen’s testimony has gone live at [www.pfox.org](http://www.pfox.org) where dozens of other testimonies of God’s grace, mercy and healing for those broken by sexual and relational sin reside. Additionally, Laura Leigh’s testimony was recently released as part of Dennis Jernigan’s *Sing Over Me Movie* (Google search: *Sing Over Me: Interview - Laura Leigh Stanlake*).

It is you who make possible upgrades to computers, software, furnishings and websites. We are in the process of upgrading our website right now. Hopefully this will be running by



year’s end! Recently, a couple of our readers contacted us to donate fairly-new computers. We have been able to put these to immediate use and are so very grateful.

Of course, we continue to minister to several hundred people monthly, again because of you!

**Would you consider giving \$50, \$75 or \$100 each month to allow us to further our to the sexually and relationally broken in our city, state and nation?**

We gratefully accept donations by check, ACH or debit/credit card. **Securely donate online by visiting** <http://bit.ly/FSM-donate> (case-specific link).

## Staff

Visit [www.firststone.org](http://www.firststone.org) for staff testimonies, enlightening articles and accompanying information.



*L-R: Stephen Black, Laura Leigh Stanlake, Verla-Marie Hull, Joseph Thiessen, Angie Morelock. New Staff Member: Marci Moyer.*

*All staff may be reached by phone at 405.236.4673 or email:*

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## Support Groups

Visit [www.firststone.org](http://www.firststone.org) for information, registration and applications.

### LIVING WATERS

Living Waters is an in-depth, Christ-centered program for people seeking healing in areas of sexual and relational brokenness. A healing, teaching and discipleship study that addresses the reality—we are all broken in our ability to love others well. The goal of First Stone Ministries' support groups are to lay a foundation for relational and sexual wholeness in our lives. Living Waters meets on Thursday evenings from 7-10pm.



**Living Waters 2014-2015 begins on October 9th. Applications are now being accepted through October 22. More Info on Living Waters page: [http://bit.ly/fsm\\_lw](http://bit.ly/fsm_lw)**

### PARENTS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP

First Stone hosts a group of parents and family members who meet together on a regular basis for support in loving their loved ones who are gay. If you find yourself needing the support of others who are also dealing with this in their families, please consider the Parents, Family and Friends group. Meetings take place on the first and third Friday of each month, from 7-9:30pm.



**An interview is required to participate in this group. If interested, please call 405-236-4673 or email [groups@firststone.org](mailto:groups@firststone.org).**

### Join us for Corporate Prayer Tuesdays 11am-12pm

- Those FSM Serves
- Provisional breakthrough for FSM and Staff
- Staff and Staffing Needs
- Revival in OKC, Nation
- Increase in Partners with FSM

### Intercession Team

If you would like to partner with FSM in prayer and receive monthly prayer updates, please email Verla-Marie: [verlamarie@firststone.org](mailto:verlamarie@firststone.org)

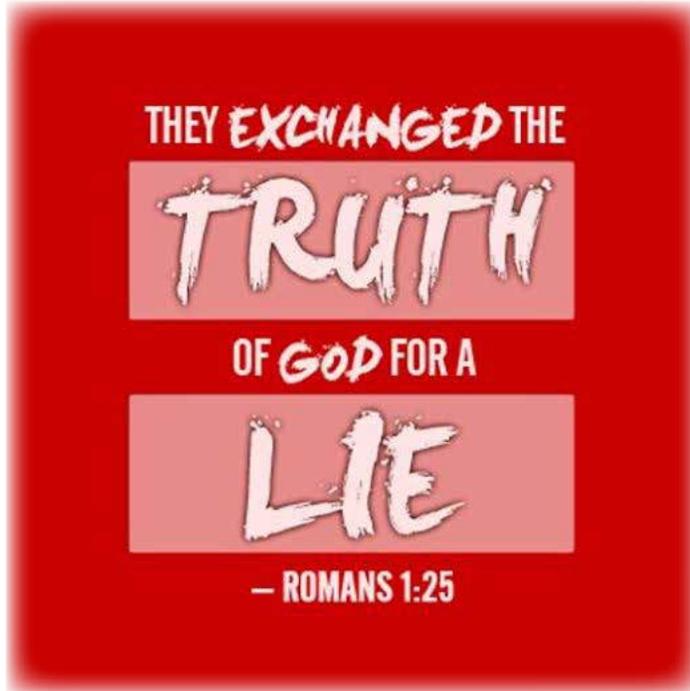
become' the other gender) involves choices as to what is right and wrong.

We take these cues substantially from what our culture says is right and wrong. The new normal, gender-wise? Anything goes. In the name of justice, invoking racial equality, western culture has nearly deconstructed gender identity and rendered its formation null and void, with the added warning that if you disagree with another's gender choices you are a 'hater.'

My kids know better. You know why? They were raised among dozens of men and women whom Jesus raised from the dead of homosexual and transgender decisions, including their father. Of course they can discern like any honest person that a Navy SEAL in drag needs healing, not more hormones, and that the last thing Johnny Weir needs is more camera-time. Beyond that, my kids know that persons who are inclined toward their own gender or toward identifying with the other gender need the God who stoops down to meet us in our gender. The Resurrected God gives us what we need; He frees us to resume the journey toward realizing what it means to be made in His image, male and female.

His Resurrection changes the conversation from dead-end decisions to hope. When Jesus rose from the dead, He redefined hope and history itself. The Jewish religious leaders and Roman political leaders converged on the 'right' side of history; they seemed to create a formidable block to the future influence of this 'Jesus.' Yet death could not hold

Him, any more than the gay or transgender 'self' needs to define persons who welcome Him into their gender conflicts. His legacy emerged from the tomb, as will ours.



What we need today are bold witnesses of persons raised from the dead of such conflicts. How else will we counter witnesses to the contrary? **If there ever was a time for us who have received healing in our gender identities to say so, it is now. Our silence is deadly to a generation which no longer believes that Resurrection applies to gender distortions.**

We of the Resurrection may have to endure more scorn than we might like

for such a witness—for upholding life-giving choices for the gender broken. At least we will be in good company. True Christians usually seem to be on the 'wrong' side of history. And to suffer for it. How precious this opportunity to declare what is right and to endure the opposition of mere men. The living God is on our side!

“Take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children.” (Deut. 4:9)

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