**True Friends**

It’s been interesting to observe the friendships between children at my daughter’s school. Each year when the kids are put into new classrooms, the friends they are closest to may be tweaked a little.

Can you recall your early friendships back in innocent times?

There were also those first times when you learned the tough lessons of friendship—when a friend moved away or when a friend chose another person to whisper to and left you out. Perhaps you remember a shattered spirit when a solid friendship began to show some cracks. You learn early who your true friends are.

Even as adults certain friendships are stronger or more distant in various years, as life moves us in different directions. But that’s one joy of technology. I can still see photos of distant friends online and marvel at how their children have grown. I can call and text to check in on friends when it’s been months or years since we’ve been face to face. I can read stories of their joys and pray specifically when I hear of their needs.

These past 9 to 12 months my family has experienced several huge occasions when we would not have made it without our friends. I’m thankful to have a number of ladies I know I can call on when I need immediate prayer, a listening ear, a hug, and motivation to keep going. I know friends who will help me out, and they know I’ll reciprocate. I appreciate my husband’s words and example makes you a stronger Christian? Text that to [date].

**Leaf Piles, Swing Sets, & Bad Advice**

By Courtney M. Brown

I’m thankful that God created us to bond with other people. Though he is our provider, he knew we’d need earthly folks to experience life with. What blessings friends are as we enjoy laughs and events together.

Consider the friends in your life. Who has been there for you, steady and strong? Find a way this week to tell those friends how important they are to you. Who makes you laugh no matter what? Send a card expressing the joy they bring. When something amazing happens, who is the first person you want to tell? Call and thank that friend this week. Whose wisdom and example makes you a stronger Christian? Text that to [date].

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**The Lookout**

The Lookout is a Christian magazine that offers insightful articles, practical advice, and encouragement for those seeking to live a life that honors God. Each issue covers a variety of topics, including relationships, parenting, personal growth, and faith-based content. The Lookout Mag encourages readers to grow in their faith, develop strong relationships, and live out their Christian convictions in everyday life. 

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Kelly Carr, Editor

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www.LookoutMag.com
I need an accountability partner. I’ve been praying about it, and I believe the Lord led me to ask you.

The phone call came not long after I processed thoughts about my life: What should be my future focus? I felt God wanted me to pass on my baton—mentor, train, share insights into ministry, and encourage. Then my friend called. His question validated what I felt the Lord said to me.

We began meeting twice a month in order to help one another. But the sessions I speak most of the time while he sets aside needed to talk out his options that session. In other instances, when my accountability partner sought a sabbatical would have happened without first envisioning the need to talk about some of these issues.

In preparation for this article, I asked him to jot down a few benefits he’s found from our time together: "The times we get together are priceless. There is a process of informal transmission of knowledge. The psychosocial support is relevant to my work, career, and family, and professional development. We want the other to succeed in life. Sometimes I listen more and sometimes he listens more. It is based on the need, and we both try to listen for the need in the other. Without accountability I could make a wrong turn that would be dangerous to me and my family."

What has surprised me is how I have benefited from the accountability process. I have shared with him how some positive choices in the past have helped us see those dreams become reality. For instance, I am now on a sabbatical to accomplish some writing I’ve dreamed of—but for which I have not had time. I do not believe this three-month sabbatical would have happened without first envisioning the possibilities during an accountability session.

Knowing that someone cares, that we can call one another for any need, that we lift one another in prayer, and that we genuinely seek the best in the other’s life—all these things benefit us both.

**BENEFITS OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

My friend needed an accountability partner for two main reasons: he faced some life changes and he couldn’t talk about them with his aging father. Since I am 11 years older, he felt he could talk with me about some of these issues.

In preparation for this article, I asked him to jot down a few benefits he’s found from our time together: "The times we get together are priceless. There is a process of informal transmission of knowledge. The psychosocial support is relevant to my work, career, and family, and professional development. We want the other to succeed in life. Sometimes I listen more and sometimes he listens more. It is based on the need, and we both try to listen for the need in the other. Without accountability I could make a wrong turn that would be dangerous to me and my family."

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**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

Through this and past accountability partnerships, I’ve discovered a few things that have helped sustain this beneficial friendship:

- **Choose a regular time.** We found that meeting regularly helped us keep on track. We meet twice a month. However, we are not rigid. If one of us has extra responsibilities, we simply postpone our meeting to another set time. We have found this freedom has helped us not to feel burdened by the meetings and yet to keep them a priority.

- **Several years ago I met with a men’s accountability group of four. It worked well for us to meet weekly at a local park where we walked and walked—since each of us needed to get in better shape.**

- **Both my accountability partner and I have some training and experience in counseling. Neither of us needed to get in better shape.**

- **After those sessions I spoke most of the time while he sets aside needed to talk out his options that session. In other instances, when my accountability partner sought a sabbatical would have happened without first envisioning the need to talk about some of these issues.**

- **In preparation for this article, I asked him to jot down a few benefits he’s found from our time together: “The times we get together are priceless. There is a process of informal transmission of knowledge. The psychosocial support is relevant to my work, career, and family, and professional development. We want the other to succeed in life. Sometimes I listen more and sometimes he listens more. It is based on the need, and we both try to listen for the need in the other. Without accountability I could make a wrong turn that would be dangerous to me and my family.” What has surprised me is how I have benefited from the accountability process. I have shared with him how some positive choices in the past have helped us see those dreams become reality. For instance, I am now on a sabbatical to accomplish some writing I’ve dreamed of—but for which I have not had time. I do not believe this three-month sabbatical would have happened without first envisioning the possibilities during an accountability session.**

- **Knowing that someone cares, that we can call one another for any need, that we lift one another in prayer, and that we genuinely seek the best in the other’s life—all these things benefit us both.**

- **Another tip for success is to listen—to what is said and to what is not said. For instance, if my partner talked about a struggle going on in his family for several months, then in one session says nothing about the struggle, I know to ask, “What’s up?”**

- **The ability to listen well cannot be overstressed. It rates as the number one positive trait to look for in accountability. Good partners listen far more than they talk. The other accountability partner often can talk his way out of trouble—that is, he can talk until he fully accesses his options in each situation. For instance, when my accountability partner sought a new job, I asked about him moving his family. And then I listened. He talked several minutes about options. Then he talked about how it would be difficult to get the help he needed with a gifted child. Then he talked about increased housing costs in the new area. I continued to listen and only occasionally asked a probing question. He spent almost the whole hour-and-a-half talking through options. I likened only 10 percent of the time and he 90 percent. But he needed to talk out his options that session. In other sessions I speak most of the time while he sets aside any items he may have had.**

- **Be sensitive and confidential. With no set agenda, sessions can devolve into routine talk that produces little long-term good. We counter that tendency by being sensitive to ask delicate issues and to pick up on areas of concern. (Having a same gender partnership is an important element of this.) What has troubled my accountability partner? Is there an area of great temptation? Is there an area where he feels a heavy burden? Has he had recurrent dreams? Is there an ongoing family crisis? How is his daily time with the Lord? Of course, confidentiality is the key to honesty and openness. Without the other’s permission, we share nothing of what goes on in the accountability meetings.**

- **Don’t try to fix. Accountability helps us to keep in mind the important things so that the urgent doesn’t crowd them out. Accountability also helps us sort out options so that we make wise choices. Doing these things requires great openness—something that would be troublesome if one thought the other was trying to mold him or to fix his problems. In truth, God is our judge and healer. As Christian brothers, we challenge each other at times, but we have agreed not to try to take God’s place.**

- **Pray. Prayer is a vital part of the accountability process for Christians. Jesus has told us that without him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). We both follow our Lord and therefore want to know and do his will. We pray for one another during the week and then pray together over lunch (or share a meal) and also at the close of our meetings.**

- **What about you? God’s Word says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). Have you considered accountability? Ask the Lord about it. Ask him to send you to just the right person or group. Through accountability you can sharpen your skills for the journey of life.**

Dr. Bill Patterson is a minister and freelance writer in Henderson, Kentucky.
A quite painful, I would be a lesser person if they hadn’t circumstancced differing opinions, and though it was of friendship. And though I’ve lost a few friends to 40s, I find myself as convinced as ever of the benefits at the world and the troubles of our time. Now in my 20s we hammered out friends. As a teenager I sorted through the emotional blessings of friendship. As a child I played with my lingering ache.

 Forgiving. When we have a friend, we feel as though we have moments, and it’s present in our worst. Friendship teaches I’ve spent the better part of my life enjoying the It provides comfort. It can be found in our best days. It seeks out the best in us. It flexes and grows and isn’t afraid to ask the hard questions.

 Friendship is as old as time and as cherished. We can trace its roots back to the Garden of Eden when God visited with Adam and Eve and in Exodus when he spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). Divine inspiration placed the word friend in the Bible. It flowed from God and was demonstrated by Jesus, our magnificent Savior. Bible commentator Matthew Henry noted: “Christ takes believers to be his friends. He visits them and converses with them as his friends, bears with them and makes the best of them, is afflicted in their afflictions, and takes pleasure in their prosperity; he pleads for them in heaven and takes care of all their interests there.”

 David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi offer wonderful examples of friendship done well. But there are others such as Esther, who showed herself a friend to the Jews when she risked her life to save them, and the four men in the New Testament who lowered their ailing friend through a hole in the roof just to get him close to Jesus. Elisha pledged his devotion to Elijah, and I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that the two on the road to Emmaus were friends. How lovely that Jesus joined up with them on their journey. “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20). Such is the promise of Christian friends, that whenever they gather in Christ’s name, he is also there.

 There is another beautiful friendship in the Bible between Peter and John that I hadn’t previously considered. Matthew Henry described it this way: “Peter and John seem to have had a peculiar intimacy after Christ’s resurrection more than before. The reason of which (if I may have liberty to conjecture) might be this, that John, a disciple made up of love, was more compassionate to Peter upon his fall and repentance, and more tender of him in his bitter weeping for his sin, than any other of the apostles were, and more solicitous to restore him in the spirit of meekness, which made him very dear to Peter ever after.” How compassionate and beautiful are the friendships that reach out to us when we’ve fallen—they lift us up and keep holding on.

 SUPPORTIVE FRIENDSHIPS

 What was God’s plan for creating this beautiful relationship on earth? Friends listen when we need an ear. Friends hug us when we are broken and hold our hand when we are lost. Friends pray for us. One is perfect, but when we find a faithful friend, she almost always gives her best. Knowing we have a friend on our side makes this world a less trying place.

 Sisters in Christ help me keep my focus on the Lord. When we’re frustrated with our husbands, when our children push our buttons, when work both in and out of the home demands too much, when we’re physically ill, when we’re mentally weary, when the devil tries to steal our joy and make us live in defeat, we remind each other that we have Jesus, the “friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

 TRUSTED FRIENDSHIPS

 Clearly we see the value of friendship in adversity, but its usefulness goes far beyond our times of struggle. It blooms in the sunshine of our life—when the day is peaceful and the night is full of sweet rest. Friendship is the unexpected card in the mailbox, the bouquet of spring flowers, the thoughtful gift, and the time spent together just because. Our conversation confirms our friendship while pointing our hearts to the one who gave us life. “Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice” (Proverbs 27:9).

 An added bonus, true friends can speak honestly and directly with each other. A friend knows us and is invested in our life; consequently she may be the one person who can reach us when no one else can—when our mind is closed off, when we are in danger of walking down the wrong path. “Wounds from a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6a).

 This kind of exchange must be handled with care, and sometimes space and time will be required afterward. But a true and godly friend loves us enough to risk the loss if it’s for our best. If she has been trusted, even if we think she’s wrong, we should at least consider her advice.

 CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS

 With all that’s right about friendship, there are a few cautions. The Bible urges us in 2 Corinthians 6:14 not to be “yoked together with unbelievers.” While having all types of acquaintances is a positive, it is important that our closest confidants be of the same spiritual mindset. That doesn’t mean we’ll agree about everything—it does mean that sisters and brothers in Christ will help us follow the path of faith because...
M y friends and I were rolling alongside a creek on a rocky, rooty, rutted-out trail, laughing and enjoying the crisp air. Our mountain-biking group had traversed this trail a hundred times before, but this time my front tire hit a root the wrong way and my bike and I careened over the embankment into the creek. I lay half-submerged in the flowing water for just a moment, and then stood up to notice that the sides of the ditch were steep, muddy, and slick; I couldn’t climb out on my own. I was thankful that my friend Dave came back, reached down, and pulled me out. He checked on me and my bike to be sure we were both OK, and then we saddled up and continued on our ride.

Later I recalled King Solomon’s wise words: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help up. ... God will do for them what he did for us years ago when he worked through our group of friends. We lived and worked as the early church did, valuing others above ourselves, not looking to their own interests but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Real Friends Are Partners
I learned a valuable lesson with that group of friends: authentic biblical friendships always have an external purpose. God blesses us with friends, but the blessing is meant to become a blessing to others. Kevin and I became teammates on the basketball courts around our neighborhoods. We played to win, but our ultimate win was to have an opportunity to share our faith with the guys we were playing with. When my wife and I started an investigative Bible study in our apartment building, one couple from our group of friends came to the meetings to support us. Other friends were praying for us.

Nothing cements a friendship more than a common mission and partnering together for something bigger than ourselves. As ambassadors for Christ, we need partners. Jesus sent out his disciples two-by-two because “two are better than one.”

Real Friends Show Up
When Kevin was rushed to the emergency room after a workplace accident, our group of friends filled the waiting room, encouraging his wife, making arrangements for their kids, and praying fervently for Kevin. When our senior minister walked in and surveyed the situation, he said matter-of-factly, “Looks like I’m not really needed here!” I began to apologize, but he interrupted. “No. This is exactly the way the church is supposed to operate,” he said, smiling.

What we did for Kevin and his family was what he had done for us many times. I’ve called him or he’s called me at 3 a.m. and we’ve met at an open restaurant to talk. Even after many years and moves, Kevin has been there for me, often on the phone, to listen, give godly advice, and pray.

Real friends show up. They live as the early church did, valuing others above themselves, not looking to their own interests but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Real Friends Share
One young couple in our class was going through a painful separation. One practical complication was that the wife was left with no car. My wife, Heidi, was a stay-at-home mom at that time, so she generously offered her car. Several weeks later, Heidi’s circumstances changed and she needed a car. Another couple had a car they could live without, so we borrowed their car until they needed it back. Then another couple decided to sell us their van for just a couple hundred dollars. One day my next-door neighbor asked me about all the different vehicles in our driveway over the last month, and when I told him the story, he was incredulous. “You know, normal people don’t do that,” he said. It gave me an opportunity to tell him about God’s grace.

We didn’t consider what we were doing for our friends abnormal. Our model was the New Testament church, where “no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32).

I was a Christian, but most of the time I was still living life as my own god, with no other God before me. I lacked humility and authenticity in my relationships. Of course I didn't have the self-awareness to realize any of this. Kevin quickly became a bold friend. He asked me questions that confronted my beliefs, ideas, and behaviors. He challenged my stories, my decisions, my assumptions, my behaviors. He made me squirm. And yet I always knew that Kevin had my best interests in mind.

Eventually Kevin and I and some other men from our church launched a small group. It wasn’t for sissies. Kevin’s leadership paved the way for us to confess our brokenness to God and to one another and then work together to become more godly men—better husbands, dads, employees, and leaders.

I am who I am today because of Kevin and those other friends.

True spiritual friends don’t try to hide their genuine selves from you and they expect you to be the real you with them. There’s no hiding, no half truths, no putting on your “Sunday best” when your life is at its Friday-night worst. God will use these kinds of authentic friends to mold us into who he wants us to become.

Real Friends Are, Well, Real
Not long after I became a Christian 25 years ago, I met a guy at church named Kevin. He and his wife didn’t just invite us to their Sunday school class—they grabbed us by our elbows and dragged us there. Kevin is one of the most passionate Christ followers I know, and I believe God put him into my life to disrupt my entire viewpoint.

I used to ride alone, but now I know that group rides are best. I need friends like Dave and Kevin and others who I know will pull me up, spur me on, make me better, give me strength, and partner with me to do the same for others. And they need me too. The truth is we can’t grow into what God wants us to become without friends like that.
Distance & Devotion

When I was 9 years old, my family moved away, but within days of arriving at my new address, I had a letter from Bethany. It was on fancy paper and sealed with a sparkly sticker—indisputable evidence of real devotion. For a while our letters travelled with a frequency that could probably best be attributed to complementary desires to receive mail, since we had nothing of much importance to say. But time gets filled with other things, and as we grew older, our letters grew fewer. Even so, she remained my best friend; ours was an abiding rather than momentary best friendship. When her letters did arrive, they were always the words of one who knew me best and loved me anyway.

We were both away at college when Bethany’s doctors found a tumor on her spine. Even as kids she’d been smaller and more breakable than my rough-and-tumble self and had visited doctors for problems I’d never entirely grasped. But medicine then had been magical in its predisposition for the miraculous, and it was easy to have confidence in the immortality of youth.

Bethany’s days became filled with surgeries, physical therapy, and new nurses and doctors. She left her dorm and slept in a hospital bed at home. Her body began to show the strain of steel and chemical invasions and she left Bethany’s memorial service, I sat with old friends we had shared. We remembered, cried, promised to write, and went home, each of us heavy with our own Bethany-shaped grief. I thought about how happy she’d always been to see me, what a perfect best friend she’d been. I tried to come to terms with how ashamed I was that I had gotten too busy to take time for her.

I am fortunate not to have many genuine regrets in my life so far. But there are a few moments I look back on with guilt and desperately long to change. The last months of Bethany’s life top that list. I think often of my friend, and I miss her. I wish I’d seen her more often. I wish I’d told her how much like a sister she’d always been to me, even before I had a sister of my own. I wish I’d shared better and argued less. I wish I’d thanked her for being such a faithful friend. I wish I’d hugged her more.

But mine is not an infinite sorrow. Memories of shared innocence, gilt-edged by time and frequent recollection, blunt the sharpness of her absence. I try to wait patiently for the bittersweet remembrance to return to simply being sweet. Bethany accepted me without caveat or condition, with my many chips and dings, imperfect in every way. It was the perfect love that only a best friend can give. Even now she keeps me humble in my undeserved good fortune and reminds me when things are hard that I should behave and be kind.

And someday I know I will see her again. When this world fades for me as it did too soon for her, I will find her and I will ask her to forgive me and my failings. I know she will because I know her. And as we turn a thousand perfect somersaults across Heaven, I will finally find her and I will ask her to forgive me and my failings. I know she will because I know her. And as we turn a thousand perfect somersaults across Heaven, I will finally cross my greatest regret off my list.

She knew me best and loved me anyway.

Courtney Brown is an educator and freelance writer in Florida who still enjoys turning somersaults in the backyard.

She knew me best and loved me anyway.
J eremiah is one of the best-known Old Testament prophets. He tried valiantly to save the people of Judah from falling to Babylon, but was unsuccessful. After King Josiah’s positive changes, the nation had again slipped back into sin. As Jeremiah warned, the Hebrew people were facing disaster. They had again done the very thing that God had warned against. He may have stood by the New Gate (Jeremiah 22:14). Appropriately the temple in Jerusalem served as the location for Jeremiah’s warning about the city’s coming downfall. He may have stood by the New Gate (Jeremiah 26:10). At another time Jeremiah gave part of his message in the court of the temple (v. 2). His call was to the people of Judah who come through these gates to worship. This included both local residents and those who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This included both local residents and those who made a pilgrimage to the holy city for one of the special yearly feasts. Today’s text includes a scathing indictment of the nation’s wickedness. God would hold them accountable!

Prophetic Message

Jeremiah 7:1, 2

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. This was the usual way to introduce a message from God by the Old Testament prophets (see Ezekiel 1:3; Jonah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). These messengers claimed and demonstrated that they were not presenting a human message, but a divine one. The New Testament affirms this as well (2 Peter 1:21).

Appropriately the temple in Jerusalem served as the location for Jeremiah’s warning about the city’s coming downfall. He may have stood by the New Gate (Jeremiah 26:10). At another time Jeremiah gave part of his message in the court of the temple (v. 2). His call was to the people of Judah who come through these gates to worship. This included both local residents and those who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This included both local residents and those who made a pilgrimage to the holy city for one of the special yearly feasts.

False Trust

Jeremiah 7:3-8

His message to them was: Reform your ways and your actions. “Ways” refers to habits, “actions” to the individual separate acts which form them. Even at this point, despite their years of disregard for his warnings, the Lord was still willing to forgive the people, if only they would demonstrate a heartfelt change of life.

Jeremiah warned of deceptive words which led them to declare, This is the temple of the Lord. The false prophets had been telling the people what they wanted to hear. “Nothing can harm you here. After all, this is the Lord’s own temple! You will be safe! Nothing bad can happen!” For 300 years the temple had been safe. The people had been miraculously protected from the judgment they so clearly deserved. One thing is certain: God had not forsaken Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). It remained there through the time of the judges (1 Samuel 1:9). Later, however, it was destroyed. The Old Testament does not tell us exactly how or when this happened, only that God forsook it (PSalm 78:60).

Simply having God’s temple nearby does not give people permission to live evil lives. I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen. God’s patience will not last forever.

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Exposed Injustice

Jeremiah 7:9-15

To illustrate the problem, the Lord specified five of the Ten Commandments that the people were continually breaking (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). Seemingly oblivious to the implications of their abominable lifestyle, the nation continued to insist that they were safe, protected by God with nothing to worry about. Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord. Jesus quoted these words when he cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:13).

After Canaan was conquered, the Lord had the tabernacle set up first in Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). It remained there through the time of the judges (1 Samuel 1:9). Later, however, it was destroyed. The Old Testament does not tell us exactly how or when this happened, only that God forsook it (Psalm 78:60). Simply having God’s temple nearby does not give people permission to live evil lives. I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen. God’s patience will not last forever.

God had sent the northern kingdom into captivity before. The same fate awaited the southern kingdom, James E. Smith observed, “Judah had done similar wickedness and had spurned every effort of God to call them to repentance. God therefore would do to the Temple and to Jerusalem what he had done to Shiloh.”

God’s words must be taken seriously. As Peter wrote, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise . . . he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).}

Sam E. Stone

Sam E. Stone is the former editor of Christian Standard. He continues his writing and speaking ministry from his home in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Based on International Sunday School Lesson, © 2011 by the Lesson Committee.
Mentoring Youth

Help! Our kids are becoming teenagers! We’re looking for ideas to keep our kids heading in the right direction during these challenging years.

The best idea we’ve heard recently comes from the insights of Dr. Chap Clark, Professor and Chair of the Youth, Family, and Culture department in the School of Theology at Fuller Seminary. Clark has been saying to leaders in the church that we need to reverse the ministry adult-to-kid ratio. What exactly does he mean by that?

Many children and student ministries strive to have a 1:5 ratio of adults to kids (meaning one adult for every five kids) for their small groups. Dr. Clark says we need to reverse that ratio and have five adults caring for each kid. He’s not talking about five small group leaders per child. He’s talking about five caring adults whom parents enlist to invest in their kid in little, medium, and big ways. This is a new take on the old idea of mentoring.

Benefits of Mentors for Your Kids

Everywhere you can hear the stories of teens whose lives have been changed by a caring adult. Bev’s grandmother, Frances Farris, believed in her and encouraged her to be a teacher. After more than 30 years, Bev still loves teaching middle school students and making a difference in their lives. Mark Johnson was a youth minister who took an interest in Phil and encouraged him to enter the ministry. Almost 40 years later, Phil is still doing ministry. Like us, you likely have stories of caring adults from your own youth who pointed you in the right direction.

We know for certain that mentoring matters to positive youth development. Youth are more likely to succeed in life when they have the additional support of a caring adult. Youth with mentors are less likely to become problem youth.

We believe the best approach is an informal web of adult-mentor relationships. Look around you at those who spend time with your kids already. Is there a grandparent, aunt, or uncle who your kids are especially close with? Is there a teacher or coach in your child’s life who shares your values? Those involved in church already have several caring adults who are with their kids on a weekly basis.

Mentors are not meant to replace a parent or guardian—instead mentors echo their positive values. As with most aspects of parenting, you have to be intentional. Talk to these adults and let them know you appreciate their involvement with your kids and that you consider them part of your high five. There’s no need to keep what you’re trying to do a secret.

Tony Dungy, the Super Bowl-winning coach of the Indianapolis Colts, talked about the impact other adults made on his son. Back when Tony’s son was playing high school football, Tony knew the energy that both school and football drained out of players. So Tony urged his teen to have more than a Pop Tart for breakfast.

One morning Tony saw that his son had gotten up early to make a big breakfast of bacon and eggs. Tony was tickled that his son had finally taken his advice, so he commented, “I see you’re having a bigger breakfast today.” His son looked up and replied, “Yeah, my coach said I should.”

This teen was living with one of the most respected NFL coaches in the nation, but since that coach happened to be his dad, he refused to heed his suggestion. It was his high school coach who finally got through!

Other adults are often able to speak into our kids’ lives in a way that we as their parents cannot. We agree with Chap Clark and Kara Powell that every parent should surround their kids with five other adults to create a sticky web of relationships to guide them in the right direction. Start a high five for each of your kids.

Forming a Web of Adults

Dr. Kara Powell, Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute, uses the phrase “sticky web of relationships” to describe a team of mentors. At our church we talk about the “high five” when referring to the need to have five caring adults in each kid’s life to support parents. We believe the best approach is an informal web of adult-mentor—naturally occurring adult/youth relationships.

“Every airplane passenger has looked out a plane window at some point and asked, ‘What’s that?’ The answer may soon be at our fingertips.”

During the 2013 season, Baltimore Orioles’ first baseman Chris Davis was at the top of his game: his record was so good that he was third in the American League MVP poll. But then the 2014 season began. His record started to slip, then plummet. The slump, along with several Christian friends leaving the team, caused Davis’s normally strong Christian faith to languish too.

“When you separate yourself from God and don’t have him at the center of your life, you’re going to be more susceptible to temptation,” Davis said. That temptation resulted in drug use, which got him suspended from the game. Diagnosed with ADHD years earlier, he had started taking Adderall again to help him focus during the slump—but he didn’t pursue the necessary waiver for the league to affiliate it. The result was a 25-game suspension, which finished after opening day 2015.

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“It was pretty dark,” Davis explained in a recent interview. “Not surprisingly, God was able to use it for his glory.”

While Davis was frustrated, angry, and disappointed, he didn’t fight the suspension. “Once you make a mistake you own up to it,” he said.

Davis reached out to Josh Hamilton, a Christian teammate from his time on the Texas Rangers. Hamilton reminded him of the power of forgiveness. “When we stumble we’re so hard on ourselves that we forget what it means to be forgiven—to have the slate wiped clean,” Davis said. “A lot of times we ask forgiveness and we’re forgiven before we forgive ourselves.”

In The World

Chef-Prepared Meals for Seniors—at Home

“The number of seniors out there who aren’t eating properly is shocking to me,” said Barrett Allman. His son, Nathan, thought of a solution to nourish seniors who are living on their own, and the whole family helped put it into practice. Chefs for Seniors, based in Madison, Wisconsin, sends professional chefs into seniors’ homes to prepare meals—they’ll even do the planning and grocery shopping.

Jim Schulz, age 85, lived off frozen dinners after his wife passed away. “I was anemic, I’d lost a lot of weight, and it was [because] my diet was lousy,” he said. But now chef Sina Sundby comes to his home each week to prepare meals for the week, customized to Schulz’s tastes and dietary needs.

“It’s good for the food, but it’s also an interpersonal outlet for potentially isolated seniors. “We chatter a lot when it’s just the two of us,” said Schulz.

Chefs for Seniors also aims to keep its service affordable: beyond groceries, most clients pay $45 to $75 a week. “I can’t solve all the problems in that senior’s life, but as a chef, the least I can do is make them food,” Allman said.

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- Jim Tune, 2015 ICOM president

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