

Building Bridges to Our Friends

Shortly after graduating from High School, I got a job at a Furniture Store. I was trying to make ends meet financially so that I could move out and live on my own, but at the same time I was drinking more than I should have and I was spending way more money than I could afford. My dad and I and my younger brother and I argued about everything imaginable. In short – my life was chaos, a mess and was getting worse by the day. I hated my job, despised my boss, and my attitude made it impossible for me to get a different job or better pay.

One day my boss hired a part time secretary/receptionist. Her name was Bonnie Farber. I didn't know it at the time, but her husband was the pastor of the Watseka, IL Church of the Nazarene. When I found out she was a pastor's wife, I made it my mission to make her life miserable by using as much foul language and by using God's name in vain as much as I could. One day I meet her husband Jim. I was amazed. He didn't fit my pre-conceived ideas of what a preacher was. To make a long story short – Jim and Bonnie started looking for ways to become my friend; invite me to Church, and to introduce me to Jesus Christ. Several months after I first meet them I knelt at an altar; asked God to forgive me and if He could to please clean up the mess I had made of my life – and He did!!!!

Friends, this morning I want to begin a series of messages that I'm calling "Building Bridges God's Way." It's a follow-up to the series that we just completed on our New Day vision. The messages will deal with our relationships and how God wants to use our relationships to impact people for Jesus Christ. This series will continue to help us learn how to live out the New Day vision of building God inspired relationships so that we can bridge Christ's love to our world.

During the next few weeks we will learn how we can be involved in building bridges to our friends and families God's way so that God can use us to influence them for Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2:5 "There is one God and one way human beings can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus, who is himself human." NCV

In other words Jesus Christ is the bridge between men, women, boys, girls, teenagers and God. Jesus Christ is the one way to God and it is our responsibility to be the type of friend that God can use to influence people for Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:18 "God has done all this. He has restored our relationship with him through Christ, and has given us this ministry of restoring relationships." GWT

You see friends, that's where we got the idea for our New Day Vision. It's from God's Word, which tells us that our ministry, yours and mine, our vision is to restore relationships and we do that by building bridges to people that God has placed in our lives.

This morning I want to show us some principles that will help us build bridges to friends so that God can help us to build God inspired relationship and then use us to bridge Christ's love to the world – to influence people for Jesus Christ.

Principle #1: Take the First Step

Jesus describes an attitude about life that is called the Golden Rule. It is to become our attitude as we approach relationships with people.

Luke 6:31 "Do to others as you would have them do to you." NIV

Luke 6:31 "Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!" The Message

That attitude is to be applied to all areas of our lives including the area of building relationships with people. It is telling us to not sit around waiting for someone to make the first move. We are to take the initiative. We are to take the first step. We are to reach out to them.

We live in a very isolated cocooned society. We try to protect ourselves by staying at a distance and in order to build relationships we must meet people more than half way. I believe that God specifically puts people in our lives so that we can take the first step – initiate relationships – so that we can influence them with God's love.

Discussion: How do we break out of our isolated existences so that we can be used by God to influence people for Jesus Christ?

Principle #2: Be Yourself

2 Corinthians 1:12 “We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you.” NLT

You see, in order to build relationships with friends, co-workers, neighbors and class mates we have to be authentic and honest. We must be ourselves. Let me share a secret with us this morning. Everybody already knows that you and I are not perfect, so let's learn to just be honest about it and be ourselves. I have problems, you have problems, and we all have problems. One of the ways that we can influence people for Jesus Christ is to be honest about our problems and then show them that we get our help from God. When we are honest with people about our weaknesses and problems they understand first that they don't have to be perfect before coming to God and second, they see that God helps us when we have problems and weaknesses and if He can and will help us, He can and will help them.

Principle #3: Find Common Ground

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 “When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. ²³ I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.” NLT

To build relationships – to build a bridge – we need to find some common ground with people, and the way that we do that is to listen. If you want to make someone's day, ask them to tell you about themselves and then really listen. People are starving to find someone who cares enough to listen. While we are listening we need to take some mental notes. Note if they like music and what kind of music, sports and who their favorite team is, if they have children, how many and their ages, listen for what their hobbies maybe. Then we start looking for ways to develop some common ground in any one of those interests that we've discovered. Invite them to go to a concert with you, offer to bring them to a local HS or College sporting event; give them a book on children that has helped you. Do something, do anything that will help you to develop some common ground with them.

Discussions: List some other ways that we can discover some common ground with people that are a part of our world?

Principle #4: Demonstrate God's Love

Ephesians 5:1-2 “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.” NLT

Ephesians 5:1-2 “Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. ² Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.” The Message

1 John 3:18 “Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” NLT

What the Bible is telling us is that it is not enough to say that we love others, we must demonstrate our love for people. Here are three words that will help us demonstrate love.

Accept: We can demonstrate God's love by accepting people.

Affirm: We affirm people by being there for them while they are going through a tough times.

Assist: We demonstrate God's love by offering to pick up someone's kids from school, by offering to baby-sit or by helping them with a project around the house.

Principle #5: Build People Up

Romans 15:2 “We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord.” NLT

Romans 15:2 “Let each of us please our neighbors for their good, to help them be stronger in faith.” NCV

That is the goal of building God inspired relationships so that we can bridge Christ’s love to our world. It’s all about people being built up in their faith, growing in their relationship with God, coming to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Several years ago Mercedes Benz ran a TV commercial about a feature on their car’s frame that makes them very safe in crashes. The President of Mercedes said; “We didn’t patent this feature because some things are too important not to share.” Friends, that is true about what God is doing in our lives – it is too important not to share it with others.

Application: Which of these principles do you most need to focus on this week? What will you do specifically to focus on it?