

# Sharing the Journey of Life

## How to Begin Your Transformational Journey with Two or Three Friends.

Dr David Hart Draft Version

John records Jesus commandment to **Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.** (John 13:34-35.)

### Who were Jesus' 2 and 3?

This love finds its outlet within relationship. Jesus had a range of friendships – some closer some less close. John was His special friend. Peter and James were in the inner circle. So Jesus not only taught this principle in Matthew 18:20 “For when two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.” But He also models it for us in places like Matthew 26:37-38 when at Gethsemane He took Peter James and John with Him to share His darkest hour- being sorrowful and troubled, overwhelmed to the point of death.

I believe it is not by might not by power but by meeting in 2 and 3's that we, others and so the world, will be changed. Recently a friend of mine told me how his church had started this process. Some one came along who wasn't a Christian but was attracted by the idea of authentic relationship. They told him it's just something we do as Christians. “Then I want to become a Christian” he said. Love, genuine relationship, a safe place where one can just be one self is attractive and precious.

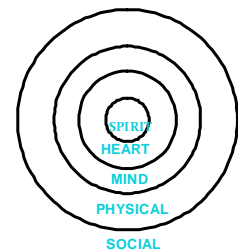
Whenever I teach on this topic it seems that God wants to remind me how vital it is. I was facing some significant personal issues last week, things I had pout aside for a while as too difficult. But The Lord kept gently urging me that they were important. So I asked my prayer partner to share lunch. I as able to be open and truthful about some things with Him and before God. As always, Jesus showed up, and lifted my burdens. And He will for you too.

### *Its relationship that hurts but it's relationship that heals.*

**A prayer friendship** is one where we feel safe, can meet and grow as friends, sharing our life and faith journey together with Jesus. Surely He is there with us as He has promised.

Our lives were created to be a balance of the outer life: Social and Physical circles, and the inner or soul life consisting of Spirit, Heart, and Mind.

- We have both an inner and outer life
- Friendship and trust takes time to build.
- Prayer friendships help us in a very practical way- giving us a base of trustworthy friendship where we can refuel, rest, revive the inner life, and give, and receive, the love that Jesus talked about.
- Thus empowered we can become who we were made to be, and achieve all we were meant to achieve in the Kingdom.
- Prayer friendships form a vital and specific part of a growing persons pyramid.
- Central to transformation are these three foundations. Truth Love and Trinity.
- Transformation occurs as we relate to our friends in Truth, with Love, inviting the Trinity.



### My Story

I want to share a personal experience with you regarding one of my prayer relationships, of which I have had a number over the last twenty years, I hope of increasing maturity. None have been perfect, but I can I want to share a little of what I've learned.

Being an introvert I never quite found I could share as deeply in a larger group. Introverts seem to prefer smaller groups- maybe two or three people or couples, while extroverts may prefer twenty or thirty! But again a small group of just two or three may really be what they need to allow then time and intimacy to be very real; in fact many extroverts in midlife begin to prefer to explore their shadow deeper side, which is facilitated by a smaller group.

My prayer partner Joe is here in Asia. We share some similar interests and some theology, both have families, but also we have significant differences. Over several years we have become better and better friends as we share on various levels.

We freely share about what we are doing, behaviors, needs, theological opinion, feelings, dreams, ideas, our marriages, kids, our inner core- relationship with self: identity, esteem, what makes us fragile, mad, and inadequate.

Trust has developed slowly but surely. Four years ago I was new in the area and keen to find a friend to meet and pray with. The Lord was clearly saying to ask this fellow. I found I kept meeting Joe in various settings, so it was almost impossible to dodge asking. He was busy, seemed mature and well established here – why would he want to spend time with me, yet another new foreigner here.... But when I asked he was delighted to and also felt the need for a peer prayer type relationship.

Now it is one of the deepest prayer friendships I have had, and I have been doing this for over 20 years. Partly for its equality – I have learnt better to share, and Joe is also asks good questions and listens well. Partly for it being a place where vulnerability is valued not scorned. Inner secrets are held as diamonds, allowing us each as safe place to process life pain, questions, temptations, and celebrate joys and victories.

We both agreed on total confidentiality, so neither wives were initially involved. We openly share accountability on every aspect of our lives, and nowadays if one of us is doing something stretching, challenging, or downright scary in His service we will text a message or call for prayer, it's always there.

Initially I tried to show my strengths. Then I almost gave up as for a time it seemed difficult to connect, and I was frustrated. But because the Lord had said do it, I persisted and am so glad I did. Our brotherly love and respect has grown over time, and been a blessing to each other, our families, and those we serve in a wider way here.

It is said that many of us have 80% good, 15% struggle, and 5% vulnerability and weakness. In friendship we will sooner or later strike the 5% - so better to expect it and ride it out- even talk about it! Bringing that 15%, and even 5 %, to the light and the Lord in the presence of a trusted prayer partner is an immensely humbling and strengthening experience.

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## **Benefits of Prayer Friendships.**

Looking through the circles we can see how His desire is to strengthen us in each circle through friendship.

### **All Circles**

A companion provides us with strength, protection (in prayer) a place for self reflection, as well as offering us love, acceptance, and responsive prayer. What an environment for the transformational journey to continue in, but remember it's a two way street! Transformation will occur within each circle as follows.

### **Social Circle**

Learning to relate to a few others effectively gives us a stronger foundation from which to relate to all others. One or two deep friendships will shape our relationships with all others! Studies have shown that people with one or two good friends have better physical and psychological health than others that don't.

**Loneliness is less, and confidence increased.**

### **Physical Circle**

The benefit of inner growth on our physical health is well documented. Our behavior will also become healthier, even our appearance will show that something is happening in our life. As we improve in our communication with these friends, our communication with others beyond that group will also strengthen.

### **Mind Circle**

Friendships of this sort allow us a place to develop the ability to share feelings, thoughts, opinions, ideas with others - mind circle work. Some of these come easily for some, but not so easily for others. Example As they share, two business men may begin to talk about feelings and values not just the stock market. Or two nurses who feel very comfortable about sharing feelings may begin to share ideas and opinions. Both are growing within relationship.

### **Heart Circle**

Within a friendship of this sort we are accepted and valued for who we are. It gives us a place to love and be loved in true agape fashion - a place for practically working out the great commandment in real life, a place to accept each other, strengths, weaknesses, and in between. As issues arise within the friendship do we run or face them? Loyalty, faithfulness, endurance, patience, generosity, are all great character qualities that can be built in the house of friendship. As these strengthen we can let go a little of our need to control others. And so strengthened, we can begin to change our coping mechanisms- experiment with a new fresh way. Face, forgive, and have fun rather than the old way of fight, flight, or fake/ perform. Healthier ways of living. Growth. Transformation within, leading to an abundant outer life.

### **Spirit Circle**

These friendships give us a safe place to explore and strengthen our relationship with the Father Son and Spirit - a place where we can talk through questions, and doubts, about God, and have permission to ask difficult questions. These can actually be Gods invitation to know and understand Him more deeply, resulting in stronger faith. Ignoring or suppressing these questions can actually cause us to drift away from Him. Such a friendship is a place where we can be real, admit we don't have the answers, and bring them to the surface and grow from the experience.

## Who do I Choose to Travel With?

When Jesus chose His friends He first spent early morning in prayer (following 40 days in the desert too!) and chose from those whom He was probably already acquainted. He could have chosen others, but these were who was available. Generally you can choose friends wisely from those available close to you.

Choose prayerfully and carefully. Look for someone with some similar interests, similar in age, same gender, someone you can feel you can trust, and living in a similar location. Interestingly some of the best scientific research on friends showed most good friends live nearby. Like Jesus' friends did!

### Starting out: Walking Together.

Start slowly, share some things, test the waters, and if it seems safe and solid continue to grow closer, sharing on a range of levels. It can be useful to agree to meet for say 2 or 3 months, then assess how it is going, and decide whether or not to continue.

Share from the circles. **Connect** with each other, spend time just **Understanding** how life is for your friend, listen and pray. Suppress the desire to simply fix your friend. Prayerfully sit with them in their struggles in dialogue as a valid **Response**. Perhaps even at times take the opportunity to **engage the help of others** if need be. And at times **evaluate** and celebrate what the Father is doing in your midst.

**Social.** Do social stuff together. Maybe work on projects, or minister together to others.

**Physical** My prayer partner and I have climbed mountains together – and got stuck at high altitude in the snow!!

**Mind** Share thoughts ideas and opinions and feelings.

**Heart** Sometimes just share from the heart - fears, apprehensions, doubts, insecurities, inadequacies, dreams, pain, despair temptations, personal victories. This is where real friendship is forged.

**Spirit** Dialogue. Pray. Intercede. And be faithful. A good friend is closer than a brother. Soul friends are precious. Celebrate that.

## Establishing a Place of SAFETY

The SAFETY acronym provides a summary of key attitudes for people in a prayer friendship. Let's work through this now, and then look at some landmines that can arise to derail these friendships, and how you can wisely minimize these.

### **S** Small Same Gender

Usually two or three people, while four would be maximal. Same gender is safest. It is very healthy to have one or two same gender prayer partners outside your marriage. However this does not mean that you can't or shouldn't develop this kind of relationship with your spouse.

### **A** Attitudes

Key attitudes include the beatitudes –mixed with truth love trinity above.

- Love- a place of love and acceptance of each other.
- Truth- a place where truth can be told and heard, in love, without judgment. Be real!
- Trinity Father Son and The Holy Spirit welcome.
- Confidentiality pervades all that is said- nothing shared will ever be spoken about outside your time together, either now or later, without the speaker's permission.
- Choice- each member is responsible for their own decisions and choices, and should not be coerced into sharing or responding. The attitude of the invitational posture is well practiced here.

### **F** Face

We all have different coping mechanisms to life stressors. As you share life, encourage each other to do more facing, forgiving, and having fun, and less fighting, flighting and faking.

## **E Empathy**

This safe group is a place where empathy need abound- feeling what it is really like to walk in the other persons shoes. Empathy is listening with love.

## **T Time**

Each person needs to have access to equal time and importance. Some may be more talkative or appear to have more significant needs than others. It is the responsibility of each to ensure time is equally allocated. Maybe one week one person has pressing needs. Ensure over time there is equality.

## **Y You**

Making space for you - my prayer partner! Learning the art of really listening to their soul. And sharing yours. The following types of questions allow people to self reflect and probe their own depths, enabling better self understanding.

- Do you want to talk more about that area?      Choice gives safety.
- Reflection- what I hear you saying is ...?      Listen for facts and feelings.
- What is that like for you?      Give time to self reflect.
- What is the meaning there for you?      Self- Realization can promote growth.

## **Landmines**

It is never the devils plan for us to grow spiritually mature. The relationship we are describing is a key to maturity. No doubt it will be attacked if it is producing good fruit within us. So be on your guard. Here are some thoughts about the dangers that may lie ahead, and how to wisely avoid them.

**Phases of Relationship** – most relationships go through phases and seasons. It is normal to experience

- Warming -initial warmth of meeting- all the nice bits showing
- Storming -all the less nice bits somehow begin to leak out
- Norming - acceptance of the shadow side and saying that's ok
- Performing – in a good way when the partners are getting on with the business of being each others prayer partner. ( Not at all meaning faking it by performing for each other!)

Accepting these phases as natural, and accepting none of us are perfect is very helpful. Being real and honest and open brings transformation. I would suggest that any friendships that have not survived a disagreement are in fact quite shallow friends. Some friendships last a season, some a lifetime.

Sometimes the difference is knowing which phase you are in and doing the work that needs doing in that phase.

**Disagreements:** Take the courage to own as much of a problem as you can. Take responsibility for your feelings and thoughts. Use “I feel, I think language”. Proverbs 27:5-6 says “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted but an enemy multiplies kisses.” I was challenged to do this with another friend now over a year ago and the friendship has risen to a new and greater level- and we both celebrate that! Respect for myself as well as my friend grew.

**Transference** can be dangerous in these precious relationships. We will explain transference later in this course.

**Fair balance** Many of us have a heart for helping others, but we may end up helping the other and denying our own growth opportunity. It is imperative we truly bring some revelation of ourself into the friendship. Otherwise it will become another appointment in the diary, we will feel that it is “work” and draining and we will tend to avoid meeting together.

**Agree on Boundaries** and expectations. Be realistic about what you can and can't contribute.

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**Prayer** The most powerful time to pray is when you least feel like it! But also never use prayer as a band aid, a way to spiritually dodge real issues.

**Growth Pains.** Be on the lookout as to see and hear what the Lord is inviting you to grow in. Growing pains are a lot easier to bear if you know what He wants to change or grow you in; when you can cooperate with, rather than resist Him!

**Closure** Healthy closure can be a valid stage of friendships that are fading out. Closure can be a time to remember good times, struggles shared, debrief about unresolved conflict, and sometimes actually bring the friendship to a stronger level.

The safer you feel, the more understood you feel, the deeper you share, the deeper the friendship and the more you are empowered in the Kingdom for what He has for you. A good friend at this level is a powerful force for inner restoration and so for outer contribution to the world.

## What do we talk about?

A good starting place is to introduce your life with a time line- a drawing of your life so far- highs and lows, special experiences, significant people, and so on. Maybe plan to prepare this so when you first come together you can each spend say 20-25 minutes introducing this. As you feel your way you will become more comfortable at deeper and deeper sharing. You may like to try using the questions below over a three meeting cycle, being free to vary content absolutely as various issues arise in life. Others prefer a non structured approach. Find what works for you.

### Week 1 Outer Life

How is it going for you in your work and Ministry?

How is it going in your relationships with others? Social and physical circles.

### Week 2 Mind and Heart

How are you going in your inner circles? – Mind – thoughts emotions, will; Heart- coping with life, centeredness, control identity and worth?

### Week 3 Spirit

How is your relationship with God - Where has He been present and absent from you lately? What do you seek from Him, and He from you? What would be His invitation to you?

## When you meet together:

1. **Connect** regularly (1-2 weekly), in an enjoyable/creative way, in a safe and confidential environment. Confidentiality is a strict requirement for this approach to be effective- think about it- the safer you feel the more open honest and vulnerable you can be, and the greater the benefit. So offer this to each other as a gift. Agree on time allowed maybe 1- 1.5 hrs for 2 people; 1.5-2 hrs for 3 people. Ensure each person gets an equal turn, and is well listened to, understood, and prayerfully lingered with.
2. **Understand** what each person is experiencing in life- How has life been for you in the last 1-2 weeks? Better to understand and travel with each other than to fix each other. Resist the urge- or the relationship will become yet another task and you will soon tire of it. Share how life has been in your outer and inner circles perhaps using questions above.
3. **Respond** with Trialogue: Prayerfully linger with each person, listening to what the Holy Spirit may be saying to them. It can help to realize that we may need to learn to listen more to the person and the Holy Spirit and offer less lengthy prayers of our own.
4. **Evaluate** and celebrate progress, growth, and life together. Jesus did!

How can you remember to pray for these people during the week as well?

Who will take responsibility for organizational aspects for next meeting – and can this be equally shared?

## **Summary Prayer Friendships**

What a gift to both give and receive. Despite previous struggles in this area that we have all had if we have even tried a little, what a source of power both for us, those around us, and those we are seeking to serve in growing the Kingdom. Given this present opportunity perhaps with this added knowledge it is worth another try? Friendship is a truly great source of empowering for us all. When two or three gather together there He is in their midst. What an easy way to be close to Jesus! This friendship can be a safe place to discuss our progress and failings while living the greatest commandment. A place to give and receive care as we do this.

Paradoxically, it is likely to be in the area of trust, allowing self revelation, that friendship and effective prayer partnership will rise or fall. It requires our courage to overcome fears we may have – but we can become who we truly are. Fear inhibits sharing the truth about ourselves – leaving us stuck with a nominal relationship. Courage lets us take careful risks and develop this area of deeper sharing - to ours and many others benefit. Friendship is priceless, let's not rob ourselves or others of this gift from God.

## **Further Questions, Scriptures on Prayer Partnerships.**

The idea of getting together is to share the gift of yourselves and Him with each other. At times this may involve study and talking about ideas but please be real with each other! These resources are an extra- not for Bible study in place of friendship. You may want to quietly study one question at home each week and discuss anything you found helpful with your friends.

### **1. Love one another**

Read Jn 13:34., 1 Jn 3:11- 4:21. Especially verse 11, 18,19. Why should we love others? How can you do this practically? Jesus loved 3 others closely and consistently, then others beyond that. What does that suggest to you about being specific and focused in loving others?

### **2. The greatest is Love**

1 Cor 13:4-8 has many ideas on how to love others. How will these ideas translate into reality for you? What will you do more of and less of in the next week?

### **3. Who do I choose?**

Does this possible friend remind me of anyone? Who? Will this be healthy if I transfer expectations from someone else onto them? Do I need to acknowledge issues from previous relationships and deal with them so they don't cloud and corrupt these new ones?

### **4. Great Friends**

What do you hear God is saying about true friends in these scriptures? What applies to you?

1 Samuel 18: 1-4 and 19: 1-7. Ch 20. 2 Sam 1: 25- 26. Ecc 4: 9-12

What character qualities developed in Jonathan and David? What others do you think are important in being a good friend?

### **5. Honesty in friendship- even about the friendship.**

What does proverbs 17:17 and 27: 5, 6 suggest about friendship? Can what Jesus says in the beatitudes (Matthew 5) be understood to apply in friendship? How would these principles change how you are as a friend? What is scary about this for you?

### **6. The ripple effect.**

How you are as a close friend will reflect how you are to others beyond that intimate circle. Reflect.

### **7. Closure, Transference and growth.**

Are there some friendships you need to bring clarity to, and perhaps bring healthy closure to?  
 Who do some of your close friends remind you of? Is this healthy or unhealthy?  
 Who do you most feel yourself around and why? How can you more be yourself in other relationships?

### **8. It can be tough to be a friend.**

How did Jesus deal with the hard parts of friendship- eg Peter's Denial – John 13.37-38. Follow on with John 18:15-18 and 22-27. Make sure you also read John 21: 15- 22.  
 What can you discover about the love Jesus shared with Peter and also John?  
 How did He cope with disappointment and pain in these relationships?

### **9. Hearts filled with love.**

Rom 5:5 suggests that we come to Him when our hearts need to be filled with love. It seems like we are meant to be filled with love then go out and love others. With 1 Cor 13 love. How will this idea change your behavior with those close and further away from you relationally?

### **10. Character growth**

The story of Ruth – only 4 chapters.  
 What character qualities did Ruth develop through friendship?  
 How can you develop the quality of loyalty and faithfulness within close friendships?  
 Also read Luke 9: 28-36. What clear boundary was observed here by the 3 friends?  
 What is He saying to you about qualities of a good friend in Ruth?  
 What boundaries do you together consider healthy in a deep friendship?  
 How will you together ensure that these are not violated?

### **11. Intimacy in friendship.**

What is God's purpose with the concept of intimate friends?  
 How does the healing journey continue within a friendship?  
 Why the intimacy of the inner circle that Jesus chose?

### **12. Sharing your Spiritual Journey**

Talk about your relationship with God. What is He like to you?  
 What doubts do you have about God? How do you face these?  
 Have you ever had a dark night of the soul- when despite all God seemed distant? How did you manage?

## **Further Reading**

**Sacred Companions** David G Benner 2002 IVP Books ISBN-10 : 0-8308-3270-X

Check out [www.christianwholeness.com](http://www.christianwholeness.com)