

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS
The Single Reality
Part 2
Doug Fields
August 9-10, 2003

What we know about friendships...

- We know friendships fill a universal
- We know bad friendships lead to
- We know good friendships provide a depth of _____
- We know developing friendships

Friendship Direction from God's Word

1. Develop a healthy _____

"For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of His Son... So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God – all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God." Romans 5:10a-11

"God...is the one who invited you into this wonderful friendship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." I Corinthians 1:9

2. Express what you _____

"[Jesus said] 'I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.'" John 15:12-13

"I'm eager to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. In this way, each of us will be a blessing to the other." Romans 1:12

The depth of my _____ will determine the quality of my _____

For more Scriptures; specifically on friendship & the friendship models in the Bible
go to www.Saddleback.com/friendships

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In this singles series, what we're doing for the month of August is talking about four values that the single series maintains. Let me tell you what those four values are. One, spiritual growth; two, friendships and developing healthy relationships; three, sexual purity; and four, making difference in the world in mission and service. Last week we had guest speaker who talked about that first value – spiritual growth. He talked about spiritual choices that we face. His name was Dave Edwards and he was a great, great guy – bless his heart. (If you weren't here last week that means nothing to you. Sorry.)

Today I want to talk about this second value. That's developing friendship, significant, more fulfilling, life changing, altering friendships. Quality, intimate friendships are something that we all crave. We all need them. And it's proven that you and I will live richer, deeper, more fulfilling lives if we have friendships. What I want to do is I want to admit this up front. Let's just make this real clear. This is not a singles versus a married issue. Friendship is life issue. One of the things that people think about: friendships – because we're in singles series and single people are well single, so they must need friends or at least a pet. So this is for them.

But the truth is I know a lot of married people who feel so alone. They may share a bed with somebody but technically they're single. Or they hide behind their spouse and say, "My spouse is my best friend." Which is great. But for many it's because they're unwilling or unable to connect with somebody at a deeper level.

We also know that with a crowd this size we just got to be honest there is a gender here that struggles with friendship more than the other gender. Right? ...men?

I've discovered in working on this series and being with a lot of single people and married people as well that there's a great irony going on here in this series. The irony is that there are a lot of single people who are looking at life through the lens of married people and vice versa. Do you know if you're married, let me tell you how Saddleback is viewed by some single people. I've had people say, "I hate going to Saddleback because it's a married church. They come here and we stand and sing. They'll see husband and wife hold hands and they feel sad. They see couples making out in the bleachers – just kidding, just wanted to see if you were awake! They see that and they get discouraged. It breaks their heart. Why? Because that is the desire of their heart. I've talked to married people who come here and they see all the single people, beautiful people and they think to themselves, "I wish I was single again!" I walk around this campus and I see all the handsome, pretty Ken and Barbies with perfect bodies and tans driving sports cars, eating steak and lobster at Claimjumper while I'm at McDonalds with my three kids ordering off a menu that we're later going to fold into hat. But I'm not bitter. (That'll be my last call back to last week's message – sorry.)

Isn't it true that contentment is an illusive destination? I really believe the good news of this message today is that one of the building blocks to contentment is to develop deep, authentic, genuine friendships. What I want to do as we jump into this message is I want to create two friendship scenarios for you.

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

The first scenario goes like this. I want you to think of two people walking around a lake. I just picked a lake a couple miles down the street. Rancho Santa Margarita Lake. It's a one-mile loop. When you see that it's human made. It's nice, it's pretty, it communicates suburbia, safe, clean. There are four Starbucks within one block of it. There's two people walking around this lake. But the two people are walking at different speeds. One of the walkers is one of those speed walkers. The really short shorts and they're walking like they have to go to the bathroom! But their face is like zippidy-do-dah. They're perky and they're moving fast. The other one, the other walker you really can't even term this person a walker. It's barely a walk. They're kind of strolling. So they're both going around. They've got different speeds. We've got the Jeff Gordon racing team and Jaba the Hut. Just making their way around.

By walking in different speeds and going in circles there's always going to be a time when there's brief connection, an intersection where they meet for a little bit of time. And that connection is brief, it's slight, it's superficial, it's "Hey, friend!" but there's this unusual peace that has settled in their hearts because they know one another as friends. They're just not willing to change their pace to walk alongside the other person.

You got that? That's the first picture I want you to see.

The second scenario goes something like this. I have in my mind two friends that are walking together but they're walking at the same pace. As they walk at the same pace they're able to talk, they're able to share, they're able to laugh (usually they laugh at the guy that's walking really fast) but they're doing life together at the same pace. They're not walking in circles. They used to. But they've chosen to change their track. They've chosen to change their priorities and they left the superficiality of the human made lake and they walk just two blocks down in O'Neal Park. Those of you who know the area you know the park is just block or two away. They walk through that park. They see the trees and the beauty of God's creation. They walk a little bit further through Gypsum canyon and see the wonder and the uniqueness of that. They walk up the value of Saddleback Mountain and down Saddleback Mountain facing the Cleveland National Forest. All of God's great creation.

The exercise and the destination were not important to them. It was the journey. That they did something together. They left what was human made. What's human made looks nice but it's not real. To explore what is God made and what is God made is sometimes wild, sometimes dangerous, but beautiful and amazing and created by God.

The sad thing is I think of many of us in here we're just walking in circles, with people that we say are friends. But it's slight. It's superficial. There's not much connection. And the incredible truth of today that there is amazing beauty, there's amazing wonder, there's amazing richness, there's amazing depth just a few blocks away. Just a few choices away.

That's what I want to call you to this morning. I want to call you to something that's just right around the corner. It's within reach of who you and I are. It's a deeper more meaningful friendship.

What I want to do is just start by saying, Let's talk about some things that we know about friendships. What do we know about friendship?

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

We know that friendships fill a universal need. From the time you were very, very little. Go back with me to where you could barely walk or talk. You wanted to be around friends. As a little kid you wanted friends. That was the currency of the neighborhood, to have a friend. I always wanted to choose the guy whose dad brought home the big firecrackers on the Fourth of July. The big, big value pack. Not the friend whose mom hung his bed sheets out the window. Not that guy. If you had a cool friend, you were cool as well. But what about being the child. Every time you don't get your way you switch friends. Then you claim a new best friend. But from the time you were little you wanted friends. Then you grow up to be a teenager. What is adolescence but friendship? You were defined by your friendships. Friendships in adolescence is everything. Unfortunately some of us did things during adolescence that the only reason we did it was because of our friends.

When I was in high school Orange Bowling Alley, not too many miles down the street, I remember one of my friends said, "Doug, I dare you to go get a bowling pin and get it out of the building." I said, ok. Why? Because of the friend. So I go running down not knowing that they put oil on the lanes. I hit that lane and I landed on my back and slid down, got the bowling pin, tried to run out and I'm like cartoon character trying to run on the oil of the lane. (I can't go into details because I'm still on probation!) But you think, "Why do you do some of those things?" Because a friend asked. And that friend was so important. You do stuff because of friends that you would never do in your entire life. You would never hear this scenario ever. "Hey Doug, what are you doing tomorrow?" *Just hanging out by myself. I kind of want to be alone. But I think I'm going to go down to the bowling alley, steal a pin, drive around town, hoot at girls, throw eggs out of my car, go up to drive through a throw a fire extinguisher through their window. Just have some fun, be alone.* You would never do that. Because friends are so important. They fill a need that we have as a little child to where we sit today.

The older we get friends still remain important. We just become better at masking our need for them. We hide behind the busyness of our lives. Or we hide our need for friendship behind a career. But the hunger for friendship still cries out to our soul. Everybody in here wants a deeper connection. Most people have tried the independent thing. They've tried the rugged individualism of the American way of life. I need connections. Everything I've done has just left me lonely. Why? Because it is a universal need that God has wired into us.

What else do we know about friendships? We know that bad friendships lead to pain. That's honest, isn't it? Raise your hand if you've been in a friendship and you've been hurt by that friendship. Raise your hand. Look around and see that you're not alone. Raise your other hand if that person is sitting next to you! Friendships go sour and they hurt. Even good friendships visit pain. But the bad ones will head there.

This week as I was working on this sermon I got a phone call, a voice mail, from another pastor here at Saddleback who was mad at me. He was mad at me because he had heard from somebody else who heard something from me and there was a misunderstanding of that and he left this voice mail and he was ticked, he was hurt. You could hear it in his voice mail. I couldn't get back to him right away. I hate relational turmoil with friends. I hate it. I wasn't able to talk to him right away. It took me about three hours before we connected. But those three hours were difficult, painful, wasted, frustrating. I don't know if you're like me but when you don't get to talk to somebody and there's relational turmoil and you really love that person

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

and you want to connect you begin creating these things in your mind. The longer the time goes the more bizarre. You're wondering what they're thinking and when I actually talk to them, what am I going to say? And then all of a sudden I started getting mad at him for misunderstanding what I said to somebody else. All of a sudden I'm thinking, "Maybe I should have said that! What are you going to do about it, you little bald headed singer!" It was minor. It was short lived. It was reconciled. But there's still pain.

Some of you are sitting here and your friendships are broken and they're not minor and they're not quickly resolved and when friendships end you begin to think, "What's wrong with me?" You feel used and lonely and abandoned and scared and disappointed. That pain leads to bitterness and that bitterness sabotages other friendships. And your relating efforts and that relational pain keeps you from living life the way God intended it to be lived.

Plus, I know it seems crowded in here but from where I stand I can see bunch of empty seats. Do you know that there are people in our community that will never fill those empty seats because of the relational pain that they have with you and with me? Our acts of friendship and pain are going to keep people from ever darkening the door of this church. Pain hurts other people too.

That was depressing. Let's move on.

Here's the other thing we know about friendships. We know that good friendships provide a depth of richness. This is what we're talking about. If you don't know this truth experientially at least you've seen rich deep authentic friendships with others and you've envied it. Rich friendships provide a place to love and to grow and to change and to laugh and to cry. And to do it all together as if that's what God had in mind when He designed and defined friendship. To love and be loved. To serve and be served. To know and to be known.

This week I was talking to some single people and we talking about the difference between friendship and romance. One single person said, "Romance can be flighty. But healthy friendships provide me with something rich and deep." As I began to think about that I thought that's a really good illustration. Romance is kind of like cotton candy. It provides a quick sugar buzz but then it disappears. Where friendship is like a big juicy seventy-two ounce steak that takes forever to eat and stays with you for weeks.

I think a biblical illustration of this rich type of friendship, this type of friendship that leaves the superficiality of the circle and heads into the wonder of God's beauty can best be described in a friendship in the Old Testament between David and Jonathan. It's not in your notes. Just trust me on this one. David and Jonathan had the best of friendship. They had a rich friendship. As matter of fact when Jonathan died I want to read to you what David said at his funeral. This is friendship that really shouldn't have happened. As a matter of fact, Jonathan was the next one in line to be the king of Israel and David became the king. They should have been enemies not friends. I'm reading out of 2 Samuel 1. Listen to what David said at Jonathan's funeral. *"How I weep for you my brother Jonathan. O how I much I loved you. And your love for me was deep, deeper than the love of women."*

Could it be possible that a friendship could be so deep that it could be better than sex? Possibly deeper than marriage. David seems to think so. Within the richness of friendships there are

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

words that pop out like love and empathy and support and trust and fun and safety and honesty and transparency and forgiveness and dependability. Those words come alive and personal and they provide us with something that money can't buy because friendships are rich.

The other thing we know about developing friendships is this. Developing friendships isn't easy.

Remember the movie *Stand By Me*. In the movie there was great quote. It said, "I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve." Why is that? Is it because when we get older we have adult stuff to do and developing friends seems trivial in comparison? It's not easy. In my notes I have an exclamation mark by "It's not easy." Why? Because you've got to log time, share experiences, risk, passion, conflict, tenderness, energy. You have to set yourself up to be known, to be hurt, to be broken, to be wounded. Plus, you have to help friends move. That's never fun. It doesn't matter how much pizza you provide, it's never fun. Can you imagine being Saddam Hussain's friend right now, helping him move? Every two hours you're getting phone call from him. "Careful of that box that's ticking!" That would be a drag.

But if friends were easy we wouldn't be talking about it here. And if it were easy many of us in here wouldn't be going after imitation forms of friendship.

I'm going to hurt some of you right now. I don't mean to. It's not my intention. I've really thought through this a lot. But an imitation form of friendship – many of us in here, we have left the eye to eye, knee to knee, face to face, conversing person to person and we sit down and we've developed a relationship with the computer. We go after these fake forms of intimacy which is really an imitation of friendship. Some of you will get defensive and tell me all the different needs that it meets. But it's not the same as face to face. And in many ways we can hide and change personalities. We set down as Mr. Mild Mannered and we log on as Wild and Crazy at I'maStud.com and we become somebody who we're really not. When in reality we need to go on maybe our screen name is more like "I'm too scared to connect in person @ I'mAfraid.com."

When we go after the imitation or we live life in the superficial circles, loneliness comes creeping back to our soul and we're wishing the next day that there was somebody in our life who knew everything about us and who loved us. We want that. And the God of the Bible, the God of the universe, the God who wants a friendship with us, wants that for us too. That was His design.

So why isn't it working? Because we're going after the easy routes. We're going after the superficial connections. We're going after the convenient ways of relating and they're not working. We find ourselves walking in circles and our pace and our friendships are not rewarding.

God's word has a better way. I want to talk a little bit about friendship direction from God's word. As a matter of fact, 18 months ago right here I did a message called "Deepening Friendships." If you didn't get that you might want to pick that up. I've asked the tape people to have extra copies of that. But what I talked about a year and half ago was three different types of friendships, three different levels. Let's be honest there are different levels of friendships. I gave biblical examples for each of those. You might want to get that. Because it was only eighteen months ago I was thinking this week, How can I teach that in a different way and in a

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

fresh way. The angle I want to go after today is I want to talk about that real friendship, the foundation of any friendship really starts with our friendship with God. I want to give us two things, two action steps, two things to think about this week.

1. The first is this: develop a healthy friendship with God.

As you write that down, I just wonder. I wonder how many people in here today would say that that is their primary friendship strategy. Really when you think *friends* what do you think about? You think about other people. When you think about friends, when you say, Who is your friend? You think about people that are living your life with you or around you or near you. We really doesn't think *God*. For many of us God is out there, He's distant, He's for some He's uninvolved until you want to call on Him to answer a prayer or get involved in your life. But for a lot of us in here, let's admit it. God is about church. God is about Sunday. God is about when I set down at dinner and invite Him to the dinnertime. Or God is about crises. Many times we walk through life and we have brief encounters with God. But we don't see God as constant friend and closest companion. A lot of us in here would admit, God is big, He's powerful, He's all knowing, He's sovereign, He's deity. But He's not Friend.

As a result what we've done is we've created what I want to call a God-view that's unbiblical. It really is. It's a figment of our imagination that God is unapproachable, He's uninterested, and He's unavailable. We've created a stereotype of God. We should be offended by is a God view that creates a God who doesn't have any time for us, who's not interested in us. The truth of the Bible – what the Bible teaches from cover to cover, what many of you have sensed in your spirit, as God has invaded your life is that God does have time for you. He longs for a deep friendship with you. The deeper it is the more that we have to offer other people. As a matter of fact, He wants a friendship with us.

Romans 5 *“For since we were restored to friendship with God, by the death of His Son so now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.”* I read this and I'm embarrassed to stand before you and tell you as a pastor here at Saddleback church I can't tell you how many times I've read past that and those words “friends of God” have not leaped out and grabbed me. I've read by them very quickly and maybe you have too that I'm friends with God, the author and creator of the universe who knows everything about me, knows my name, knows my wickedness and He's still my friend. That's a powerful truth. But unfortunately for many of us it's not a personal truth. That I'm a friend with God.

When was the last time you thought about that? That you're a friend of God. You've all played the game Brush with Fame where people say, Who have you ever met that's famous? How many of you have ever answered that question, “God.” I haven't. People ask me who I've met that's famous I always go back to my friend Roger who set next to Jim Carey at a fund raising event. He was telling me about it. I like Jim Carey and he said Jim Carey's stomach was growing and Roger looked over at Jim Carey and Jim Cary went, “It's the cheese!” for some reason that is something special to me. I'm two degrees of separation from Jim Carey's gas bubble and his indigestion is a bigger deal to me than the incredible theological, profound and deep truth that I'm a friend of God.

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

I just want to imagine sometimes as I get on my knees and I get before the Lord, “What would my life be like if I so allowed You to invade me and I actually believed that You were my friend? How would that change the way I lived my life? How would it change the words that I say that if I really believed that You were my friend.” Imagine tonight you go to a party. You know what parties are like. People are posturing. Who do you know and where do you live and all that kind of stuff. Imagine somebody says, “Who did you come here with?” and you say, “God.” Then you say to him, “Who do you know?” “Oh, I met Bill Gates once.” “Oh, isn’t that interesting! Bill Gates. God told me in a love letter that He wrote to me that all of Bill Gates’ wealth is just a penny to God. Who else do you know?” “Oh, you live in Newport! You’re neighbors with Koby. That’s interesting. You see I’m friends with the God who created Koby. And behind that whole media circus is my friend God wanting to invade Koby’s life and offer him forgiveness and take over center stage so that Koby doesn’t have to depend on his fame, his fortune, his charisma, his four million dollar diamonds. But the very presence of God inviting Koby into friendship. Isn’t that cool that my friend God wants to do that? Who else do you know?”

You’ll never be invited back. But wouldn’t that be interesting? “I’m friends with God,” would make a great bumper sticker. I want to say to those of you in here today who are Christians, that term “friends of God,” if that’s not putting a little *Wow* in your heart right now, you may be dead! Or you may be spiritually dead. That’s a deep, deep truth. I’m thrilled to surround it with a little bit of laughter but that is a deep truth.

And if you’re not a believer today. You’re here kind of checking the church out, checking the God thing out, checking Christianity out, we’re thrilled that you’re here. Maybe it doesn’t put a *Wow* in your heart. It puts a *Huh!?!?* in your heart. That’s good. That’s ok. You know what I want you to know? The God of the universe who created you wants to have a relationship with you that’s not distant and uninvolved and uncaring but that’s personal. And He wants to invite you to something deeper. He wants to walk with you in a way that will change you from the inside out so that you will relate to others in deeper ways. And He’s inviting you.

Look at this next verse – 1 Corinthians 1:9 “*God is the one who invited you into this wonderful friendship with His Son Jesus Christ.*” Just focus on that word “invited.” He invited you. He invites you today. If you don’t know Him He invites you to know Him. If you do know Him, He invites you to a deeper life. If you’ve already taken Him up on that deeper life He invites you to express that to other people. What I’ve learned in my spiritual journey over the years is that the deeper that I go with God, the deeper that I develop that friendship, the more time that I spend, where I really begin to feel that I am a friend of God, it makes me want to be different. It makes me want to discover the uncharted territories of my soul and I don’t want to do it alone. I want to do it in community. I want to do it with friends. Why? Because that’s how I was designed and so were you.

When I look back over my journal and I see times I’ve had personal revival and spiritual health it always involves two things. A depth with God and a depth with friends. That’s how it works. When you’re deep with God you just see things different. Instead of reading this and it becomes black and white and another book, it becomes color. It jumps out of you and it pierces your soul and it throws up this filter in front of you and it effects how you make decisions and what friends you choose and how you’re going to treat your friends. That really the foundation of a healthy friendship starts with a friendship with God. Friendship with God is the foundation.

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

If you want to, blow it off. Blow this message off. Keep spending all your money on self help books. There's a lot of them out there on how to develop friends. Spend all the money you want. Or think about this. Maybe you begin to develop a friendship with the author who was the author of those people. That's what I want to do.

How do you develop friendships? First, you develop a healthy friendship with God.

2. You express what you receive from God.

This seems to make sense, doesn't it? You develop a relationship with God. You accept that. You live it out. Then two you express it. It's about giving. You give to others what you receive back from God. Some of you say, "Ok, Doug, help me with this. What do I receive back from God?"

Let's go to John 15:12. Jesus is speaking *"I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. Here's how to measure it. The greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends."* So He's talking about friends. You lay down your life. How do you show love? You lay down your life for your friends. Let me ask you. When you hear that term "lay down your life for your friends" what words come to mind. Besides crazy or insane. What words come to mind? – "lay down your life for your friend." Die. Sacrifice. Now we're going from big to small. I want to go practical with you here.

How do you express love to others? You've got to sacrifice. If you want healthy friendships, there has to be sacrifice. Friendships require and demand sacrifice. You've got to stop walking in circles with friends and if you really want to do life together you've got to be willing to sacrifice. Here's kind of the take away question that I really hope will kind of haunts you this week: Where is your sacrifice? A lot of you want deeper friendships but where is your sacrifice? Where are you sacrificing?

Some of you are going, "Unpack this a little. What do you mean sacrifice? What am I supposed to sacrifice?" Let me give you a few things that I think you need to sacrifice. We need to sacrifice the urge to be superficial. It is so easy to be superficial. We've got to sacrifice what's easy for what's best. You know what our world has become? We've kind of set up this world where we've become friendship samplers. We just want to sample bunch of stuff. Imagine a big salad bar. Imagine big buffet. Just think big. Las Vegas buffet. (From what I've heard, they're real big.) Just imagine that. Then what do you do when you go to that thing. You've got your plate and you just take a little. You just skim off the top because you don't want to go too deep into anything because you don't want to fill your plate up. That is the picture of what I'm talking about relationally. That's what we do. We're friendship samplers. We just skim the surface. Why? Because it's easy. The surface is easy. You've got to sacrifice the temptation to go there.

Our world no longer has the seven-course meal. It takes way too much time. That seven-course meal that used to communicate community and laughter and talking and stories, it's no longer there. It's been replaced by the seven-layer burrito that you just quickly go in and get. (Which, by the way, is an excellent meal.) You and I have got to fight that drive through, superficial friendship instinct. So when you talk to a friend you don't just stay there with the one-word answers. You dig a little deeper. You try to think, how can I engage that person so they might

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

open up their heart a little bit and expose a little bit more of who they are and when they do I can express God's love back to them.

We have killed a great phrase. We've made it a cliché. I'm as guilty of this as the next person. But the phrase, "How you doing?" that no longer has any power in our society. "How you doing?" "Good... Fine... Great..." You know we've killed it when you walk by and you just say "Hi" to people and they're expecting you to say, "How you doing?" but you say, "Hi" and they say, "Fine." I just said, "Hi." You don't answer "Hi" with "Fine."

You know how you freak people out? The next time someone says, "How you doing?" you stop them and tell them: "Thanks for asking. It's been kind of a tough day. I have a colostomy planned and the bills are piled high. I've got so many things to do." They'll never ask you that question again!

Some of you are weird. I've been here twelve years and some of you are weird. There's a small faction. They usually go to the 8:00 service; they get up real early. These are the ones that are going to abuse this. They're going to go, "No. How are you doing?" They're going to have bug eyes and get in your personal space. You go, "I'd be doing better if I knew your name." And kind of back a way a little bit.

It is so easy to be superficial. You've got to sacrifice that.

Another thing you've got to sacrifice is you've got to sacrifice time. You can't get this depth, this exploration, this walking into the wilderness and into the forest of God's design without taking time. Buzzing around the lake doesn't take much time. Exploring, going deep takes time. You've got to get involved in other people's lives. If you're not involved in people's lives Saddleback is an incredible place to get involved. I say this all the time. There are so many groups at Saddleback – men's, women's, children's, married, young married, newly married, wish-they-were-married, wish-they-were single. You've got everything. If you're 27 years old and you have back spasms we have a group for you! If you like sports, Taco Bell, you love to laugh and you're often confused with being a male model you could be in my group. But you've got to sacrifice time. You've got to get involved.

This week I heard a story of a lady who moved here from Hawaii. She moved here to be with her boyfriend. Their relationship didn't work out and she was stuck here with basically a job. On her birthday she went to a restaurant by herself. It was a low point in her life. After that she came to Saddleback. She got involved in the singles ministries. She sacrificed some of her time to get involved and put herself in people's lives. Do you know what happened two years later on her birthday? She went back to that same restaurant and she rented the whole restaurant out. And she filled it with people that she had met at Saddleback and some of those people involved are her deepest, closest friends. People say all the time, "Saddleback is so big." Put me in a fifty person church and I can hide. As a matter of fact, I can hide anywhere you put me. You have to sacrifice time.

Let me talk to the men for second. Men, you know what we've got to sacrifice? We've got to sacrifice our pride. I know way too many men who have no friends. A lot of acquaintances. A lot of people know their name. People they play golf with, play tennis, do different things. But no friends. As a matter of fact I've been a pastor long enough to bury people who died with no

THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

The Single Reality - Part 2

friends. Men, we've got to sacrifice our pride. Some of you in here can you imagine going up to a guy that you've connected with and you know that there's something there and you could go deeper and you say, "I don't know how to do this friendship thing but I know that there's got to be more to life than this? Can you and I get together and have coffee and talk?"

Me saying that, some of you are like, "No way! I'll tithe more or take away my remote control. But not that! Not a chance."

One of the other things with sacrificing pride. And this works for women as well. You want to take relationship to the next level you admit a fault. You admit failure. You share something you're struggling with. A friend did this with me a few days ago. We were in a parking lot. He says, "Doug, I want to talk with you about something." He told me he was an addict, a nicotine addict. He said he'd smoked for years, been a closet smoker. Nobody knew. He said, I've tried to quit. I can't. I'm an addict. He's joining an addict group. He wanted to tell me. He was a little afraid to tell me because he thought I might judge him.

I already knew. Just standing next to him, my eyes always water. He left his jacket in my car one time and I had to have my lungs cleaned. I knew. But I didn't think less of him. I thought more of him. And you know what he sacrificed? He sacrificed his pride. Then I'm there and what I've got to do is sacrifice my superficiality and my temptation to just stay at the surface. Now together we've got to sacrifice some time if this relationship is going to journey away from the human made superficiality that many of us live in. It takes sacrifice.

What I was able to do to him in that moment is really what this second point is all about. I was able to express love to him. I was able to express to him what God was able to express to me. Love. Acceptance. Hope. Accountability. And in doing so you know what happened in that moment of us being together? We blessed each other. As a matter of fact one of my favorite verses in Romans 1 Paul says "*I'm eager to encourage you in your faith but I also want to be encouraged by yours. In this way each of us will be a blessing to the other.*" Underline the last phrase – "each of us will be a blessing to the other."

Here's the summary. You develop a friendship with God. The deeper that goes the more you have to offer others. You express that to others. You express that sacrifice, the sacrifice of being superficial, the sacrifice of time, the sacrifice of pride. The truth is Christians should have the deepest most fulfilling, powerful, life altering, witness producing, friendships on the face of the planet. Why? Because they require sacrifice and Christians understand sacrifice. If you're a Christian you have put your faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It's what we cling to. When Jesus hung on the cross He hung on the cross as a sacrifice so that He could restore me to God. That's what we put our faith in. We understand sacrifice. If you're a believer you put your faith in that sacrifice. That's what friendships take. That's how come we can be a friend of God.

If you're not a friend of God today you can become a friend of God right now. You don't have to go through any classes, fill out any forms. Just invite Him into your life. The Bible says He's knocking on your heart. Inviting you into that friendship. You just say, "God as much as I understand I want to start a friendship with You. Would You come in and invade my life? Forgive me of everything I've ever done. I don't fully understand this but what he's talking about that's what I want." We're a church that wants to help you do that. If you want our help, when the offering's being passed there's a card there. Put a check mark by "I'm committing my

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life to Christ.” We’ll send you some information so you can begin to read it and it will help you. You can go out to a table out there called Fresh Start With God and just say, “Can I get some material?” If you don’t want to talk with anybody stay anonymous for a while. But don’t stop the journey or the search.

Here’s the last fill in in your notes. The depths of my sacrifice will determine the quality of my friendship. That’s a lot to think about. I’m guessing, no, I know that most of us in here want to leave the circle of superficiality to explore the depth and richness that God has designed for us to live and not to live alone but to live in community.

Prayer:

As we pray can I tell you that this message is an invitation. It’s an invitation to a great life. Don’t exist in a temporary life, walking in circles, waiting for the good life. The good life is available *now*. And a friendship with God and expressing sacrificial love to others will blaze a more meaningful trail.

O God this is the cries of our heart. We want this so bad. May we be different because we were here. Thank You for being our friend. May we understand what means in our lives and live it out as friends of you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.