Knit Together

Charles F. Stanley – In Touch Ministries
For everything, 
a season, 
and in everything, 
prayer.
MADE FOR RELATIONSHIP

Have you ever had someone knit a blanket or scarf for you? The time and love that went into its creation make it an especially meaningful heirloom. It can give comfort and warmth for many years and remind us of our loved one even when they are gone.

That’s a bit like how relationships are supposed to work. People, like threads, bending and looping around one another, supporting one another, work together to create something bigger than just themselves—an heirloom of God’s love and care for the world. As the wise King Solomon noted, “a person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (Eccl. 4:12 NLT).

The people who are woven into our lives can be a great support system for God’s calling on us. Unfortunately, good relationships can be difficult to maintain. In our fallen world, it’s a miracle any two people get along and manage to sustain an amicable connection, much less a genuine affection. Relationships need a lot of love and forgiveness. Even when I see things one way and you see them another, we are still to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

The greatest relationship we have—with our Creator—was broken, and it cost Him His Son to repair it. He chose to forgive our offenses. He is long-suffering, kind, good, and loving to us, even though we rejected Him. And, because He first loved us, we can love others (1 John 4:19). As we study Jesus’ example in creating, sustaining, and mending relationships, we learn to fulfill our own calling to the ministry of reconciliation—reconciling others to God and with one another.

Even when it seems like phileo love (or brotherly love) gets lost in a world full of animosity, the Lord gives us the power to overcome any obstacle to love. Our enemy would like nothing more than to see division in the ranks of God’s people. He wants us to feel separated, alone, and fearful, but God gives us the power of His Spirit, the truth of His Word, and the strength of the body of Christ. You are not alone. You have allies in Christ and His followers.

That’s why we’ve compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley’s teachings on relationships. We hope the Lord uses this booklet to help you pray through your interactions with others and inspires expressions of gratitude for the people who are truly blessings in your life.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries
Brotherly Love

Relationships come in a variety of forms ranging from casual to intimate. Casual friendships are plentiful and happen quickly, but trusted friends are fewer in number, and the relationships take longer to develop. No matter what our position or status in life, we all need friends, especially those who are genuine, loyal, and lasting. We can be grateful if we’ve found a friend like this, because he or she is a priceless possession.

In 1 Samuel 18:1-7, the story of David and Jonathan is a wonderful example of a true friendship. Immediately after David’s victory over Goliath, “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself” (v. 1). This was an unusual friendship because it appears to have developed suddenly, yet it reached deep into their souls. Being knit together is like having an inseparable companion—nothing can come between you, and you are stronger together than you are apart.

Jonathan, who was a great warrior himself, saw David’s courage and felt an immediate bond with him. A meaningful friendship requires time and investment, and that’s what Jonathan did. Because of his love for David, he made a covenant with him that day, giving him his robe and armor. And his loyalty was proven true when he rescued David a number of times from the jealous rage of his father, Saul. Although Saul saw David as a threat to his kingdom, Jonathan saw him as a trusted friend, and that friendship lasted until his death.

We all need a true friend who’s loyal and makes a positive impact on our lives. Close friends delight, develop, and drive us forward. We enjoy being with them, and their encouragement helps us become better people. They make an awesome difference to us because they can see our potential and look for ways to help and challenge us.

Genuine friends are a valuable blessing from the Lord, but the wrong friends are a negative influence that drags us down. That’s why it’s so important to evaluate our relationships to make sure they are uplifting and devoted.
Choosing the People in Your Life

When it comes to friendships, more is not necessarily the merrier.

Proverbs 18:24 warns, “A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” In other words, it’s better to have one loyal friend who encourages, helps, and lifts us up in times of trouble than to be popular with many people. When we’re indiscriminate in our choice of friends, we’re headed for ruin because some of them will drag us down. And the more friends we have who impact us negatively, the harder it will be to make godly decisions and reflect Christ’s likeness.

Since we tend to become like the people with whom we associate, we must think carefully about what kind of interactions are beneficial. True, godly relationships are built with the following attitudes and actions:

- **Share a Deep Common Interest.** The best of friendships can develop from a mutual pursuit.

- **Meet the Needs of the Other Person.** The goal is not to focus on self but on our friends. We consider what’s best for them and how we can build up and encourage them in their walk with Christ.

- **Risk Rejection and Pain.** To develop a genuine friendship, we must be willing to let our guard down, even if it means possible rejection. It may be that the person we’re trying to befriend has experienced rejection in the past and has built emotional walls in order to avoid pain. Sometimes we need to see past our hurt to discover that the relationship is worth pursuing.

- **Love Sacrifically.** This means we’re willing to love unconditionally. Friendship is not all about receiving what we want and need. There may be times when we must give love without receiving it or sacrifice our time, preferences, or even money in order to express love to a friend.

- **Be Open and Transparent.** We all have areas in our lives we’d prefer to keep hidden. Maybe we’re ashamed of our background or faults and fear rejection if our friend discovers the truth. But authentic friendships are built on transparency and the willingness to reveal who we really are.
• **SERVE JOYFULLY.** Genuine friendships are not based on what the other person can do for us. There's great joy when we view the relationship as an opportunity to give of ourselves without hesitation to meet the needs of the other.

• **ASK FORGIVENESS.** In every relationship there will be occasions when we hurt or offend each other. If we let pride get in the way and refuse to acknowledge our wrong, we hinder that relationship. True friends are willing to humble themselves and ask forgiveness so the relationship can be restored.

• **ACCEPT CRITICISM AND PRAISE.** Most of us are much better at handling commendations than criticism, but to become a person worthy of praise we must accept and learn from criticism. True friends are willing to receive hard truths in order to grow in the relationship.

• **COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE OTHER'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH.** When we truly love someone, our desire is that they have an increasing interest in the things of God—Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, witnessing, and godly relationships. And if we're committed to helping them mature, then we must be growing in our relationship with the Lord as well. Conversations about the Lord, prayers for and with each other, and open sharing about our struggles are all part of building a relationship centered on Christ.

• **GOVERN THEMSELVES BY PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURE.** When our conduct and attitudes are in keeping with God's Word, we have a good foundation for true and lasting friendships. And if His Word is important to us, it should be a frequent topic in our conversations with friends. There's great benefit in sharing with each other what God is doing in our lives or how He has answered prayer.

• **EXHIBIT LOYALTY.** Friendships are a treasure, but they are also a responsibility. We don't want to be fairweather friends who are only faithful when all is well. Loyalty means we're there no matter what happens, even when it's inconvenient or difficult. If others criticize, mistreat, or malign our friends, we stay faithful and encourage and strengthen them in their time of need.

### 6 “FRIENDS” TO AVOID

- **THE GOSSIP.** “He [or she] who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip” (Prov. 20:19).

- **THE QUICK-TEMPERED.** “Do not associate with a man [or woman] given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man [or woman], or you will learn his [or her] ways and find a snare for yourself” (Prov. 22:24–25).

- **THE DISLOYAL AND DISCONTENT.** “My child, fear the Lord and the king. Don't associate with rebels for disaster will hit them suddenly. Who knows what punishment will come from the Lord and the king?” (Prov. 24:21–22 NLT).

- **THE SELF-INDULGENT.** “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father” (Prov. 28:7).

- **THE IMMORAL.** “A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth” (Prov. 29:3). God gives us further strong warnings about the dangers of immoral friends in Proverbs 4:23, 25–27: “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life . . . Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil.”

- **THE FOOL.** “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20). A fool is someone who refuses to acknowledge God and spiritual matters, and as a result will not turn away from evil.
THE FABRIC OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

Because God designed us to live together in relationships, the people we connect with are an important part of His plan for our lives. Friends are gifts from the Lord for which we should be truly grateful. Since they are so precious, we ought to do all we can to nurture these relationships and be the kind of friend God wants us to be. The most important relationship we can have is with Jesus Christ. When we walk closely with Him, we’ll become the companion others need and want.

Great relationships don’t just happen; they have to be built and nurtured. If we truly love and care for the people in our lives, we will invest our time and energy in building bonds with them.

- **SPEND TIME TOGETHER.** This is the most important ingredient and the only way we will truly get to know each other.
- **TALK TO EACH OTHER.** Through conversation we learn more about the other person. As the relationship progresses, the interaction becomes more personal and open.
- **CRY AND LAUGH TOGETHER.** Close friends are willing to share their hearts with each other in both the joys and heartaches of life.
- **SHARE ACCOMPLISHMENTS.** Promotions and successes are reasons to rejoice together.
- **SHARE TRIALS.** True friends stay close in times of trouble or pain and faithfully bear each other’s burdens.
- **BE THANKFUL.** Realizing what a blessing friends are, we should be generous with our gratitude, letting them know how much we appreciate them.
- **BE THOUGHTFUL.** Everyone wants to feel loved and remembered. We can reach out to friends with visits, calls, texts, or small gifts.
- **SHOW TOLERANCE.** We all have flaws. We must be willing to overlook one another’s mistakes and freely grant forgiveness.
- **TOUCH.** Another important ingredient is appropriate physical touch, whether it’s a casual handshake or a friendly hug.
- **BE TRANSPARENT.** Deep connections require vulnerability—letting the other person see who we really are. If we try to cover up and appear perfect, we limit the relationship.
- **BE TRUTHFUL.** This is essential for trust. Our friends and loved ones need to know that some conversations will be kept confidential and that they can believe what we say.

A FRIEND

IS A TREASURE WHO LOVES YOU AS YOU ARE, SEES NOT ONLY WHO YOU ARE BUT WHO YOU CAN BECOME, IS THERE TO CATCH YOU WHEN YOU FALL, SHARES YOUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES, ACCEPTS YOUR WORST BUT HELPS YOU BECOME YOUR BEST, UNDERSTANDS YOUR PAST, BELIEVES IN YOUR FUTURE, ACCEPTS YOU TODAY JUST AS YOU ARE, AND COMES IN WHEN THE WHOLE WORLD HAS GONE OUT.

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SNAGS, RIPS, AND TEARS

Relationships end for a variety of reasons. Sometimes this is the result of circumstances. At other times it is due to one or more of these damaging behaviors:

- **SELFISHNESS.** Focusing on ourselves and wanting our own way will eventually ruin our connection with others.
- **MANIPULATION.** We should never use or manipulate someone to get what we want.
- **POSSESSIVENESS.** Attempting to limit the other person's friendships will smother the relationship.
- **JEALOUSY.** Trying to control others in an attempt to keep them is a sin, not a sign of love.
- **CRITICISM.** If we continually find fault with someone, we'll drive that person away.
- **EXPLOSIVE TEMPER.** We will very likely hurt others and do irreparable damage to a relationship if we are prone to angry outbursts.
- **COVETOUSNESS.** Wanting what someone else has is selfish and the opposite of focusing on what's best for the other person.
- **DISLOYALTY.** Distrust drives a stake between two people, destroying the relationship.
- **DISHONESTY.** When we try to cover up the ways we've failed our friend instead of admitting our wrongs, we are being dishonest.
- **BUSINESS.** If we are too busy to spend time with others, our relationships will wither.

MENDING A BROKEN BOND

If you have a relationship that is in trouble, you must first decide whether it’s worth rescuing and if you are willing to take the necessary steps to make it right. If so, consider taking these actions:
A PRAYER FOR STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

It’s not good for us to be alone (Gen. 2:18). You created people to be in relationships: first, with You; second, with others. It’s not always easy—You know who we’re praying for, who we’ve lost, who we’ve gained. You send people into and out of our lives to build us up, to challenge and sharpen us, and to join us together for a greater purpose than we can fulfill on our own. Teach us to love—even when we rub one another the wrong way. Mend our broken hearts, and show us how to mend the brokenness between us. You weave us together to create a beautiful tapestry, revealing Your love to the world through the interwoven relationships of Your people. We experience the best life has to offer when we are in a right relationship with You and with others. Help us to be wise in our interactions and considerate of the feelings of others. We are our brothers’ keepers, and we hold their hearts in our hands—may we care for them as You would.

If you’d like to know what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, visit intouch.org/believe.

You can also contact us at intouch.org/contact or call 1-800-789-1473.

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DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND WHO MEANS A LOT TO YOU BUT MAYBE YOU HAVEN’T SEEN IN A WHILE? Print this note, cut it out, and write a thoughtful message to brighten their day and strengthen your relationship. Use specialty paper and/or colored pens to add your own creative touch!

A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

ECCLESIASTES 4:12