

How to make friends in a large place

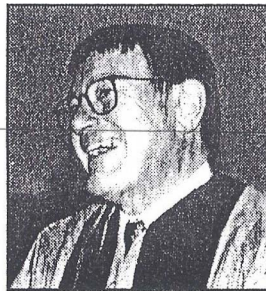
Making friends in a large city should not be so hard because there are so many different people to know; but many of us tell stories to prove that a city can be the loneliest place there is. It might be the sheer numbers themselves that work against such a person-to-person happening as friendship building, or it might be the efficiency of cities that enables us to do everything we need to do without asking any live person for help; it might be the danger factor of cities that keeps us from knowing the names of the people we meet, so that we isolate ourselves for our own safety or what we think is safety.

Whatever the reasons, we are pushed or pulled toward life choices that emphasize independence and minimize fellowship. If this can happen in a city, it can also happen in any large place including a large church or a large school.

But if I decide to make friends, is it possible? The answer is, "yes, of course," and people have done it when they follow these five rules for friendship building:

1. First I need to realistically decide that making friends is a good idea and preferable to the other options. I cannot be everyone's best friend, and the plain fact is that some people will become better friends than others, but having some friends must begin because I decide to be friendly.

Friendliness is one of the love words of the Bible and,



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therefore, friendliness has its source in God's love. If the starting place for friendship is the friendliness of God, just **knowing that fact helps me to take the risk to be friendly.**

2. The second rule has to do with the way I think about myself. Expect that people will like you if you relax and be yourself; friendship is a freedom event and it never grows a healthy tree from a deceptive root. The nature of friendship is that someone appreciates you for who you really are. When I think about it, it wouldn't be much of a friend who likes a "phantom me" or the "hero" I am not. Therefore, there is nothing to gain from friendship strategies that carefully aim an imaginary "me" toward some targeted person I want to like me. I might as well just relax in a friendly way and wait it out.

3. Making friends needs proximity. That is why most

friends are made at work, in a neighborhood, at church, on a shared project, while in a mission with others, or just because we happen to be at the same place at the same time with some regularity. Seize these natural places to be friendly toward people you know and who know you, but who also need to know your story as you need to know theirs.

4. Friendship takes faithfulness. When people describe a friend they always use words like "dependable," "reliable," "integrity." I have noticed that these faithfulness factors are markers of every real friendship.

It is what helps you over that inevitable disappointing setback that happens in the cycle of all human relationships when it dawns on me that this new friend I am getting to know is a very ordinary human being with weaknesses as well as strengths.

5. Friendship takes time. This is the one gift that friends know how to give. It is showing up at church or at a project, or at home. Sometimes scheduling your time is the most practical pro-active step you can make toward friendship building.

This is also true in making friends with your own family. You will know your kids are your friends when they count on just having you around, and on some afternoon in their lives they say to their other friends, "Oh, my dad, my mom wouldn't think of missing this."