

## Chapter 12

### Relationships Are the Real Wealth

There is a kind of wealth that rarely appears on a financial statement. You cannot deposit it in a bank, borrow against it, or leave it in a will. Yet by the second half of life, its value becomes increasingly hard to ignore. The people who know us, love us, and walk beside us matter in ways our possessions never can.

For much of adulthood, relationships can seem to form almost automatically. Work puts us around people every day. Children connect us with other parents. Church, neighborhoods, and shared activities create regular opportunities for conversation. Because we are surrounded by others, it is easy to assume we are deeply connected to them. A man can know hundreds of people; however, he has very few who truly know him. He can spend his week in meetings and conversations while carrying things inside himself that he has never told another person.

Work can hide this particularly well. Professional relationships create a steady flow of human contact, and some become lasting friendships. Others depend largely on the role. When the role changes, the relationship changes with it. Retirement sometimes reveals this abruptly. The phone rings less often, invitations change, and people who once interacted with us every week move on to their own responsibilities. The sudden quiet can reveal that we had many contacts and fewer close friends than we realized.

That discovery need not be another source of regret. It can help us recognize what deserves our attention now. Having considered what our money is for, we turn to the people our resources can help us serve, even though they can never be replaced. Faithful stewardship includes learning to be present with them, to receive their care, and to love them without making them responsible for our sense of worth.

### Friendship Requires More Than Proximity

When we were children, friendships often formed because we saw the same people repeatedly. We went to school together, played on the same teams, or lived in the same neighborhood. Adult life makes those rhythms harder to sustain. Marriage, children, careers, and household responsibilities take time. Friendships that once required almost no planning now demand deliberate effort.

A friendship can fade without a quarrel or a decision to end it. Two men grow busy, months turn into years, and someone once considered a close friend becomes someone we occasionally think of calling. Neither has necessarily stopped caring. They have simply stopped making room for that care. If that describes a relationship you value, it may be time to make room for it again.

Not every absence stems from neglect. Some men have buried their closest friends. Others have moved, become caregivers, or faced limitations that make familiar gatherings difficult. A small circle may reflect grief or circumstances a man did not choose. Before we turn friendship into another assignment we believe we have failed, we need to be honest about what has happened.

We can grieve what has been lost while staying open to someone new. An old friendship may be renewed with a regular phone call. A connection at church may deepen when we begin meeting outside the usual gathering. A man who cannot easily leave home may need to say that a visit would be welcome. These beginnings may feel awkward, especially after years of managing on our own, but they are still worthwhile. Closeness usually grows through ordinary contact over time.

## **Jesus Did Not Live Alone**

Jesus' earthly ministry brought Him into contact with enormous numbers of people, yet the Gospels also reveal sustained relationships with individuals. Mark tells us that He appointed twelve to be with Him and sent them out to preach (Mark 3:13–19). Peter, James, and John were with Him at the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8). John tells us plainly that Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus (John 11:5).

The calling of the twelve held a unique place in His mission. It was more than a model for organizing a social circle. Still, these accounts remind us that His life among people included personal love and shared life, as well as public ministry. We should not confuse spiritual maturity with keeping everyone at a distance or with being equally available to everyone who seeks our attention.

We do not need hundreds of intimate friendships. What matters is having room for relationships where we can know and be known, while remaining willing to welcome people beyond our familiar circle. Two or three close friends may be a great gift. So may one friendship that gradually becomes more honest. The number is not a measure of spiritual success.

## **The Risk of Being the Strong One**

Some men find deep friendship difficult because they have spent most of their lives being the person others depend on. They solve problems, provide for their families, lead teams, and respond when things go wrong. There is dignity in being dependable, but the role becomes isolating if we come to believe that dependable people are not allowed to need anything.

We learn to answer “How are you?” with “Good” almost automatically. Sometimes that answer is accurate. Sometimes it means we have decided this is not the place to discuss what is really happening. Discernment about time and setting is appropriate, but after enough years, we can stop

making room for an honest answer anywhere. Many people may depend on us, while almost nobody knows when we are afraid, discouraged, tempted, or exhausted.

Paul offers us a different picture. In 2 Corinthians 7:5–7, he describes outward conflict and inward fear, then recounts how God comforted him and his companions through Titus’s arrival and the news Titus brought. Paul recognized God’s care in the presence and encouragement of another believer. His leadership did not make him self-sufficient.

Neither does ours. We come to Christ as people in need of grace and continue to need help as we follow Him. Letting a trusted friend pray with us or stand beside us does not relieve us of a lifetime of responsibility. It gives someone else the chance to love us. Some of us have gladly offered that gift for years, even as we find it surprisingly difficult to receive it.

## **Known as Well as Respected**

Respect is valuable. Integrity, consistency, and character should earn the trust of those around us. Yet respect can remain at a distance. People may admire your faith without knowing where you struggle. They may trust your advice without knowing whether you have anyone to turn to when you need it. Being known requires letting someone see more than the public version of your life.

That does not mean sharing every private thought with everyone. Trust develops when people show they can listen carefully, speak truthfully, and handle what is shared with care. We also need to protect the confidences of our spouses, children, and others. Honesty about our own struggles is not permission to expose someone else’s private life.

James places confession and prayer within the shared life of believers (James 5:16). Paul tells us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2, NASB 2020), a passage that calls for gentle restoration and humility. These instructions invite us to make room for help. A friend cannot respond to a struggle that he does not know exists.

You might begin with something specific: “I have been more discouraged than I have admitted” or “There is something I need prayer for, and I would like to talk.” You need not tell the whole story at once. Nor should you require the other man to disclose something equally personal in return. Give honesty room to grow. When he does share, listen without immediately taking charge of the problem. Ask what would be helpful, and follow through on what you agree to do.

## **Iron Sharpens Iron**

Proverbs gives us a familiar description of the effect we can have on each other:

“As iron sharpens iron, So one person sharpens another.” — Proverbs 27:17 (NASB 2020)

We often use that verse to describe men challenging one another, and honest correction can be a gift. A friend may ask a question we have avoided or notice behavior others are reluctant to mention. At other times, his help comes as encouragement when we have become overly critical of ourselves. The point is our good, not his opportunity to prove he sees more clearly than we do.

A good friend does not merely tell us what we want to hear. He also does not seem to enjoy correcting us. Truth and loyalty can coexist in a relationship, and knowing that someone wants our good can help us hear difficult words. We should offer the same care in return, speaking humbly and remaining open to the possibility that we may have misunderstood.

Friendship allows both people to give and receive, though it will not always look evenly balanced. During illness, grief, or a long period of caregiving, one friend may need far more support than he can offer. That does not make the relationship any less valuable. Reciprocity means that neither person is permanently assigned the role of the superior. It does not require keeping an account of equal contributions. Sometimes a man accustomed to leadership needs to set aside his answers long enough to be taught, comforted, or helped.

## **When Pride Keeps Relationships Broken**

Some important relationships are damaged. A disagreement turned personal, someone spoke carelessly, or trust was broken. Neither person made the first move, and enough time passed for the silence to feel normal. Years can slip by as two people wait for the other to act.

There are also relationships in which distance remains necessary because of abuse, manipulation, or ongoing dishonesty. We must not treat every separation as a failure of love or assume that both parties share equal responsibility for what happened. The question is whether there is something faithful we can do about our own conduct without denying the truth of the relationship.

Jesus gave reconciliation urgent attention. In the Sermon on the Mount, He taught that when someone presents an offering, they should first seek reconciliation upon remembering that a brother has something against them (Matthew 5:23–24). Worship does not excuse us from addressing a wrong we need to correct. If we have caused harm, an honest apology deserves more than a place on a list of things we may eventually get around to doing.

An apology should name what we did without making the other person responsible. “I was wrong to speak to you that way” differs from “I am sorry you were offended.” When repair is possible, we should be willing to consider what it requires. We should also allow the other person time and freedom to respond. Asking for forgiveness does not entitle us to renewed access or immediate trust.

Numbering our days can help us see the cost of pride, but it must never be used to pressure anyone. Our urgency does not erase another person's need for space. We are responsible for our response to God; we cannot determine another person's response to us.

## **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Scripture grounds our forgiveness of others in the forgiveness we have received: "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32, NASB 2020). When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, Jesus responded with a parable about a servant released from an enormous debt who then refused to release a small one (Matthew 18:21–35). We forgive as people who have been forgiven far more than we will ever be asked to forgive.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are related but not identical. We can begin surrendering resentment and the desire for revenge to God even when the other person has not apologized. The other person's refusal to acknowledge the wrong need not leave us bitter. Yet a relationship cannot be restored unilaterally. Reconciliation requires participation from both people and an honest response to what damaged the relationship.

Trust is different again. It can be damaged quickly and rebuilt slowly. Forgiving someone does not necessarily mean restoring the previous level of closeness. Grace does not require us to pretend harmful behavior is harmless, and love does not eliminate the need for wisdom or accountability.

At the same time, we can ask God to reveal where wounded pride has hardened into a refusal to pursue peace. That examination should accompany honest reflection on what happened. We need not accept blame that is not ours, minimize the injury, or treat ongoing grief as proof that forgiveness has failed. When the situation is hard to understand, wise pastoral or professional counsel may help us discern what faithfulness requires.

Paul wrote:

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people." — Romans 12:18  
(NASB 2020)

That verse contains both responsibility and limitation. In the surrounding passage, Paul urges believers to avoid revenge and to do good. We can take our responsibility seriously while recognizing that peace is not ours to force. Sometimes the next step is a humble conversation. Other times, it is seeking counsel, honoring a request for no contact, or continuing to entrust an unresolved wrong to God.

## Relationships Require Time

Relationships do not always align with our ideas of efficiency. Someone may need time to find the words for what troubles them. A conversation may move through ordinary details before reaching something deeply personal. Our productivity-oriented instincts push us to get to the point, yet often simply being together is part of the point.

Some of the most meaningful moments in our remaining years may come over breakfast, on a drive, or in a conversation after church. A familiar story can become an opportunity to understand why it matters so much to the person telling it. A quiet visit can communicate care even when there is nothing useful to say. We do not have to make every encounter profound for it to contribute to a lasting friendship.

Time must also fit both people's lives. A short, reliable call may serve a friendship better than an elaborate plan that never comes to fruition. A home visit may be more welcome than an invitation that requires difficult travel. Ask what works. When you agree on a rhythm of contact, make room for it and adjust it as circumstances change.

If you are lonely, a first step may be to tell someone plainly that you would welcome company. You might ask a trusted person at church to help you find a small group or introduce you to someone with a shared interest. You may need practical help to participate. Receiving that help is part of belonging. No one can promise that the first invitation will become a close friendship, but one unanswered invitation need not determine what is possible next.

## Jesus First in Our Friendships

Our governing order remains **Jesus > Others > Self**. When self comes first, we tend to judge people primarily by what they offer: opportunities, affirmation, influence, or usefulness. Networking has its place, but friendship demands more of us. It calls us to care about another person's life, even when no advantage is to be gained.

When Jesus comes first, relationships become places where we practice His character. We learn to listen, forgive, speak the truth, and remain present in difficult times. His selfless love teaches us to serve without constantly calculating what we receive in return. It also frees us from needing to be indispensable. We can love someone without directing every decision he makes.

Putting others before self does not mean being endlessly available. Neither does it mean refusing the care they offer us. In the relationships God has entrusted to us, we are learning to give and receive love faithfully. The people in our Entrusted Inventory are people to know, not projects to manage.

Before you begin the plan, consider whose life you know well enough to notice when something is amiss. Who can notice that in you? If no name comes to mind, tell the truth without condemning yourself. The next step may be as modest as returning a call or accepting an invitation. Grace gives us room to begin, and friendship gives that beginning a place to grow.

## **Your Remaining Years Plan**

### **My Relationship Commitments**

Use the three circles below to identify where attention is needed. The circles may overlap, and you do not need to include a name in every circle. Include family where appropriate, building on the commitments already made in Chapters 7 and 8. Keep these notes private, and use initials if you prefer. The purpose is to choose a faithful next step, not to measure your worth by the size of your circle.

#### **The Inner Circle**

Think of people with whom you can be honest and whom you want to understand more fully. Consider both the care you offer and the care you are willing to accept.

**People who know me well and relationships I want to sustain:**

**One relationship that needs more attention and what would help it:**

**Something I could share more honestly or help I could ask for:**

If this circle is empty, start here instead. Name someone you could approach or a setting where you could regularly meet people. Also include any support you need to participate.

**A possible beginning:**

## **The Investment Circle**

Consider someone you are encouraging, supporting, or walking alongside. This may be a peer, someone younger, or someone older. Ask what would truly serve that person, and remain open to what you might receive from the relationship.

**Someone I could encourage or support:**

**What I know about this person's needs and what I should ask:**

**A form of contact or support that could fit both our lives:**

## **The Reconciliation Circle**

Consider whether you owe an apology, need to address your resentment, or could appropriately seek peace. These are distinct responsibilities; name yours carefully. Do not initiate contact solely to complete this exercise. If contact would be unsafe, unwelcome, or in violation of an existing restriction, seek appropriate counsel and honor that limit.

**A relationship needing prayerful attention or no current concern:**

**What is mine to acknowledge or change:**

**Counsel needed or a boundary I must respect before taking action:**

## **One Thing I Will Begin**

Choose one step to take within the next seven days. You might invite a friend to meet, schedule a call, ask for help finding fellowship, or seek counsel on a damaged relationship. If an invitation is appropriate, keep it simple: "I was thinking about you and realized it has been too long." Leave the other person free to respond.

**The relationship or opportunity I will give attention to:**

**The action I will take and the date I will take it:**

**A habit I need to change in how I listen, speak, give, or receive:**

**A rhythm of contact I could propose and agree on together:**

### **My Relationship Commitment**

Write two or three sentences describing how you intend to love the people God has placed in your life. Include your first step and the kind of friend you want to be. Commit to your conduct rather than to another person's response.

**I will review this commitment alongside the rest of my plan on:**

At that review, consider whether you took the step, what you learned, and what needs adjustment. An unanswered invitation does not make the effort worthless. A restored relationship is a gift to receive, not a result to demand. Continue with patience, honesty, and care.

### **Wealth We Can Share**

Wisdom, encouragement, love, and friendship often grow as they are shared. A friendship nurtured over decades becomes something neither person could create alone. That does not make love effortless. It takes time and can bring sorrow, especially when someone we love suffers or dies. Its value cannot be measured by how easy it makes our lives.

The invitation in this chapter is to give that love a place in the years ahead. We can make time for people, accept their help, and repair what is ours to repair. We can thank God for the relationships that have sustained us and remain open to friendships yet to begin. None of this requires us to become impressive. It asks us to be more present and faithful.

As we listen and walk alongside others, we may also have opportunities to share what God has taught us. Experience alone does not make us wise, but lessons shaped by Scripture, repentance, and grace can become a gift to others. The question we turn to next is how to offer that gift.