

CLEAR VISION

A monthly publication of the Center for Christian Life Enrichment

Friends | The Most Worthwhile Investments



Relational unrest and breakdown is all around us and has hit close to

home. Recently, we were surprised to see moving vans in front of the house of our next-door neighbors. They were a young couple with three kids. We later learned that they were going through a messy divorce. We never even knew they were struggling. Last week we were shocked to see the police surrounding the house of another neighbor two doors down from us. A domestic disturbance led to a five-hour siege with SWAT teams converging on this older couple's home. We had no idea they were having any trouble. Sadly, the husband committed suicide.



Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

John 15:13

Relationships are a mixed bag. We experience the most intense pain as well as the most meaningful pleasure in our relationships with others. From the moment of our conception, people are surrounding us. Conception initiates a relationship in which the fetus is completely dependent on his or her maternal host for existence. From start to finish, we cannot live without each other.

Admittedly, our survival is dependent on other people; however, without meaningful and nourishing relationships, we only exist and fail to experience the [fullness of life](#). If we desire to have the

abundant life that God wishes for each of us (John 10:10), we must cultivate our capacities and sharpen our skills for engaging authentically and meaningfully with others.

Relationships are a function of how we relate to ourselves. We are the living channel through which we relate to others. How we see, feel about, and treat ourselves matters—it impacts how we interface with others. Much like how the diet of a breast-feeding mother influences the digestion of her baby, so how we relate with ourselves influences how we will attach with others.

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Many of us take our people skills for granted, mistakenly assuming that our capacity to connect meaningfully with each other is automatic—it is as if relating to each other were a part of our autonomic nervous system. Most of us will spend at least sixteen years investing in our education; yet, how many of us will even spend a couple hours with a [counselor](#) or [life coach](#) to enhance our friendships. We assume that we should naturally know how to relate effectively with others. Patently untrue.

It is a fact that we will all have relationships; however, what is in question is the quality and depth of our relationships. Relationships are on a continuum, from schizoid and splintered to intimate and interdependent. We have the choice as well as the responsibility to decide whether we want to have mediocre relationships or fulfilling friendships.

How we relate to others is heavily influenced by the quality and characteristics of the relationships we had with our parents

and our siblings. It would behoove us all to take a second look at the health of our relationships within our family of origin. No family is perfect—all are filled with a blend of hurtful and healthy experiences. The wise person is the one who learns from their past and practices for his or her future. As you learn and grow you can increase your capacity for intimacy with others. You attract more relationships and build more nourishing and genuine friendships.

Would you like to hear more about Friendship? Please check out Rich's live recording, in which he introduces the key concepts about friendship from his upcoming book, [Grappling with God: Renew Your Relationship and Deepen Your Faith](#). The 25-minute webinar entitled, "[7 Steps for Genuine Friendships](#)." can be viewed on our website at www.cle.us.com/video.

Upcoming Events*

FRESHSTART 5K | RACE RESULTS POSTED



Highlights from the first annual FreshStart 5k are on our blog! Check out the results, a special thank you from Nancy Rollins, and most importantly, the CLE Running and Walking Community's goals and aspirations for 2012. www.cle.us.com/blog.

EXPERIENCING AUTHENTIC SPIRITUALITY | 3-PART SERIES BEGINS JANUARY 26TH, 2012



Do your spiritual disciplines need a tune-up? Come join Rich Blue and the CLE community for an inspiring [3-part series](#) to help you renew your relationship with God, deepen your faith, and make the Bible come alive!

WINTER COUPLES RETREAT | FEBRUARY 10TH-12TH, 2012



Experience a deeper level of commitment and connection in a community of couples dedicate to growth through intimacy. Explore with Rich and Sue Blue how systems thinking can transform your relationship for the better.

**a full calendar of upcoming events can be downloaded at www.cle.us.com/events*

Take Away the Hurt

by: Jon Noto

Supporting another person in a time of pain is a skill just like any other. It's possible to do it poorly, and it's possible to be deeply meaningful and helpful. I try to think back to the funerals I have gone to as a supporter, but also as someone needing support. Several times I have been surprised when someone says exactly the right thing. It's like a weight is lifted and the rest of the day is a little easier. What exactly makes our support more effective? And how can we create a more supportive environment for ourselves?

A study out of the University of Florida attempted to determine just how support works. They had two college friends sitting in the room. One would engage in a painful, but safe, task (submerging their hand in a tank of 0°C water for three minutes). Every 20 seconds they would point to a scale rated 1-10 to determine how painful it was. The second student was the "supportive other". They were given one of four sets of instructions: "Support the other student as much as possible during the experiment," "Sit next to the student, but refrain from saying anything or gesturing," "Say as much or as little as you want about anything," or they were asked to stay out of the experiment.

The experimenters wanted to see if active support, passive support, distraction, or being alone modifies just how much pain we feel in our lives. Basically they wanted to determine what kind of support is most helpful in a painful situation. From these results we can glean tips that we can use to grow personally and reduce pain – both in our lives and in others'.

Be intentional – Students receiving active support from a peer actually felt less pain! These supportive students were not trained or prompted. They had nothing but the

intent to support and help someone, and they made a significant difference. Intent generates change. We can provide meaningful and life-changing support if we are deliberate and conscious.

Avoidance doesn't work – What researchers were not expecting, however, was that the friends who were talking about whatever they wanted, the distracted ones, felt the same amount of pain or *more* than students alone in a room with nothing to focus on but the pain. These friends engaged in small talk and humorous comments, but were not generally encouraging or reassuring. Small talk is often a way to tend to your own anxiety by taking the focus away from the topic or situation that is generating the pain.

If you don't have anything nice to say... Don't say anything at all! Silent supporters, those holding space for their counterparts, were just as effective as the encouraging and reassuring support. It's easy to think that if I'm not saying anything then I'm not doing anything. This is not the case. Our presence alone is reassuring and encouraging. Simply *being* with another person is powerful.

"Who" is less important than "how" – What would you expect if the experimenters ran the entire trial over again, but this time the supportive other was a complete stranger? You may expect the support to be less helpful, but the results were nearly identical. Good support is good support. The power of our encouragement, expressing understanding, and presence does not require a lot of relational history. Realize how powerful support is and know how much of it is out there for you.

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