

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP...The Principle

If you asked me, “What is the one thing, humanly, that has made the most difference in your spiritual life?” The answer to that question for me is an accountability partnership that began in January of 1985 and continues to this day.

It’s not a concept that is original with me. The idea of accountability relationships predates modern use – “soul friends” were a catalyst in the Celtic revival (5th to 9th centuries). Wesley utilized the concept in group formation in order to reinforce forward

spiritual progress for those still seeking to those desiring reinforcement in living out their fully surrendered lives. It goes back even further – to the days of the Bible. There are “soul brothers” in Scripture (i.e. David and Jonathon – I Samuel 18:1-3) and “soul sisters” too, such as Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45)

Research bears it out. The comprehensive REVEAL survey by the Willow Creek Association reveals these insights about “spiritual friendships” across four quadrants of spiritual development:

Exploring Christ → Beginning in Christ → Close to Christ → Christ-centered

Spiritual relationships play an increasing role as people advance across the spiritual continuum. People also express an increasing need for these relationships to “hold me accountable” and “speak the truth to me.” Interestingly, the most advanced segments say they are committed to “mentoring or helping others grow spiritually.” Survey statements:

__ “I have close relationships with other Christians who influence my life.”

__ “I want other Christians to hold me accountable for my actions.”

__ “I have spiritual friends who speak truth to me and don’t hold back.”

__ “I am committed to mentoring or helping others grow spiritually.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 summarizes the power of partnership (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12):

Two can be more productive (9)

Two can overcome failure (10)

Two can avoid isolation (11)

Two can find protection (12)

A spiritual friendship can help us break destructive patterns (Galatians 5:16-21) and live a life in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26). It builds perseverance that brings about spiritual maturity and combats spiritual instability (James 1:2-8).

We all need a soul friend or two. How are “soul friendships” distinct from regular friendships? Their primary orientation is not social, but spiritual - its orientation is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Its focus is primarily spiritual, while it speaks to the whole of life from a spiritual perspectives, i.e. care for physical body in the context of being stewardship of God’s temple). The best spiritual friendships are mutual, so seek someone who shares your desire for Kingdom living.

See “THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP...the practice” for steps in developing an accountability partnership (spiritual or soul friendship).

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