

LET'S BE FRIENDS!

by Karen Holford



Pippa finally settled the last child into bed, poured herself a glass of water, and slumped down on the sofa. She felt so alone. Jakob was out again at some church meeting or other; she had lost track of all the board meetings and business meetings and elders' meetings and prayer meetings. Except for the church banquet, they hadn't been out together for at least five months. She was exhausted from looking after the children and managing the chores by herself. She thought back to the time when her mother had come for a week; Pippa and Jakob had booked a table for two at their favorite restaurant, but Jakob had been called to the hospital because Mrs. Landers had been rushed in for emergency heart surgery.

When Pippa married Jakob, they'd been best friends for five years. But since they had moved to this new church district, they'd hardly had any time to talk unless it was in bed when they were both exhausted or while they were trying to feed breakfast to the twins. Jakob played golf once a week with another young pastor; they spent 3-4 hours on the greens every Monday and then had lunch together—networking, they called it. But he hadn't spent three hours doing anything with Pippa except sleeping or driving to camp meeting. Her mind began spiraling through other thoughts. Why doesn't Jakob want to spend time with me? What's wrong with me? Maybe he doesn't love me anymore. Why is everything about the church more important than me and my needs and our marriage? Can I cope with a lifetime of this intense loneliness?

Ministry marriages can easily suffer from friendship-hunger. Regular working hours are often opposite of pastoral working hours. Maybe you have small children who need care and attention, so it's hard to go out alone without paying for a babysitter. The weekend is crammed with activities, meetings, and other events, and even Sabbaths can be packed full of pressure and people who want a piece of the pastor!

FRIENDS AND LOVERS

Being friends with your spouse is not just a contemporary or "Western" idea; it's been happening for thousands of years and across different cultures. In the Song of Songs, the lovers are friends. Their exquisite poetry overflows with descriptions of their friendship. They long to be with each other (Song of Solomon 1:14; 3:1); they openly admire each other (2:9); they tease each other (5:2-6); they play games of hide-and-seek (3:1-4); they enjoy each other's bodies (4:1-5); they spend time in the countryside together (7:11-13); they pick flowers for each other (6:2); they have dinner together (2:4); and they sing and write each other love poetry (read the whole book!).

TAKE A FRIENDSHIP AUDIT

List the activities that each of you have done with your friends in the past month; maybe you shared lunch, played a sport, went shopping, took a walk, watched a film, exercised, sang together, worked on a charity project together, chatted on the phone, wrote a letter, sent a card, made a gift, etc. Then make a list of the non-routine friendship activities you've done

with your spouse in the last month. Compare the list of things you've done with your friends with the list of things you've done with your spouse. Don't be hard on yourselves—or each other—if you haven't written anything on this list! Be delighted about any small thing you've managed to do together, and remember that if you plan just one special friendship time in the next month, you'll have improved 100 percent!

Being friends isn't just about going on dates and spending special time together. Being friends is something that needs to happen every day. A sprinkling of friendship moments throughout the day will help you stay warmly connected, even when your lives are busy.

Friends speak kind and loving words. Send a text message or an email. Make a short phone call. Put a note in your spouse's lunch box. Send a greeting card or love letter. Whisper a special message into your spouse's ear. Say something appreciative and encouraging. Tell your spouse why you're glad you married him/her.

Friends give little gifts. Pick a few wildflowers and arrange them in a vase or jug. Hide a tiny treat in your spouse's bag or place it under his/her pillow. Slip a gift voucher for a favorite store into his wallet or her purse. Buy a magazine he/she enjoys. Borrow a book from the library that he/she would like to read. Driving together? When you stop for gas, buy a bottle of his/her favorite drink or an ice cream to share.

Friends help each other. Do a chore that your partner hates doing or pay someone else to do it. Offer to help with a task for an hour or run an errand that your spouse would normally run. Pick up a prepared meal so your partner doesn't have to cook. Make sure the car has a full tank of gas. Pick up after yourself. Take the children to the park for an hour or two.

GATHERING THE SCRAPS

Peter was a youth pastor, and Lynne worked full-time. Their lives were hectic, and there wasn't much time to be together. Peter was out in the evenings and busy during the weekends when Lynne was free. After a few months, they realized that all their time together was spent trying to sort out chores, bills, household repairs, and other mundane things. And they spent an increasing amount of time arguing or having rushed and inadequate conversations about important things.

One day Peter was preparing a sermon about feeding the 5,000. As he worked on his conclusion, he realized that it was very important to gather up the "scraps." He thought about the scraps of time that he and Lynne had together and decided to make the most

of them. He took a sheet of paper and divided it into four rectangles; he labeled the rectangles "5 minutes," "15 minutes," "30 minutes," and "1 hour." Then he listed different things he could do with Lynne if he had that much time to be with her.

Under the "5 minute" heading were suggestions like: "make her hot chocolate; give her a lingering kiss; share a joke together; send a romantic text message; read her a poem or psalm; tell her how much I love her; share one chocolate." Under "15 minutes" he wrote: "make pancakes for breakfast; let her sit and chat to me while I iron a shirt (or two); write her a letter; ask about her day and listen to her; walk around the garden together; take a photo of her looking beautiful; give her a hand massage." In the "30 minute" rectangle he wrote: "give her a back massage; have a long cuddle and chat about hopes and dreams; take a bath together; read a chapter aloud to her." In the "1 hour" section he wrote: "go for a walk in the park; watch a nature video together; take her out for lunch when she's at work; go to a short concert together; visit a beautiful place nearby; go to a free museum; go cycling; lie on a blanket and look for shooting stars; play a game together."

He showed his list to Lynne, and she added some more ideas. They made a poster and stuck it on the kitchen door. They made the best use of their scraps of time and spent one of the 30-minute sessions each week planning a special date for the following week.

HAVING FUN IS A SERIOUS MATTER!

Friendship deprivation can have serious consequences for ministry couples. Being friends is not just about having fun together. It's not a frivolous waste of time. It is seriously important! It can save your marriage by protecting both of you from the danger of an extramarital affair. It can even save your ministry. If you're having fun together, there's less room for you to feel bored or lonely, and you're less likely to be attracted to other people who make you feel loved, special, and happy.

When we have a warm, caring, and enjoyable relationship with our spouse, it helps to protect us from depression, addictions, and other negative experiences that can harm us and our relationships. Solomon wisely said that "a cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22, KJV). And cheerful hearts are grown when we work on building friendly and supportive relationships with our spouse.

When God created Adam, He said, "It is not good for the man [or woman] to be alone" (Gen. 2:18, NLT). We need each other. When a couple is united spiritually,

sexually, and as friends, they are much more likely to be resilient and able to manage the challenges of life that ministry families often face.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT OR DISCUSS:

- What did we do for fun before we were married?
- How can I spend time doing what my spouse most enjoys?
- What's the most fun we've had as a couple?
- What fun things have we always wanted to try but never had the chance?
- What could we write on our "scraps of time" list?
- How can I help my spouse feel less lonely?
- What can I do each day to be friends with my spouse?
- How does our friendship as a couple protect our marriage, our home, and our ministry?

FRIENDSHIP FUN THAT'S ALMOST FREE

- Register for free email updates or newsletters about events in your area.
- Find the most beautiful walks in your area.
- Go out and share one delicious drink together.
- Buy one pastry and eat it together in the park.
- Walk on a beach together and find a special shell or stone to give to each other.

- Paddle in safe water.
- Watch a sunset and then watch the stars come out.
- Feed each other slices of fresh fruit.
- Find a free concert or listen to rehearsals.
- Do something practical together—plant a garden, cook a meal, refinish a piece of furniture, etc.
- Read to each other.
- Watch a funny movie together.
- Learn how to give each other back, foot, or hand massages.
- Find a way to join in with each other's favorite hobbies.
- Watch each other play sports.
- Go to a zoo together.
- Visit tourist attractions in your local area.



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THE VIEW... FROM THE HOT SEAT

by Sarah K. Asaftei



A few weeks ago, I was sitting on the beach during our family vacation as we spent quality time with some (non-pastor) friends we hadn't seen in years. The men had gone to swim in the waves, and the little ones were happily building castles or eating sand. It was a deeply peaceful moment, full of companionship and comfortably meandering conversation.

And then my friend turned to me and said, "Can I ask you a personal question?"

"Of course."

I could see that she felt awkward. But she also felt the need to sort something out. Apparently, a relative in another state had been talking to a colleague of my husband's from a previous church, and the grapevine