

Chapter One

Portraits of Spiritual Friendship The Relationships of Spiritual Friends

*“Spiritual growth is concerned with companionship: first companionship with God, and second, companionship with our fellow human beings” (Alan Jones, *Exploring Spiritual Direction: An Essay on Christian Friendship*, p. 1).*

The Art of Arts

A church member knocks on her pastor’s door early Monday morning. She’s in tears over her teenage son’s suicide attempt. Her pastor greets her with a loving, gentle welcome, ushers her into his office, and opens in prayer. Together they’re ready to engage in the art of arts: spiritual friendship.

A young man firmly grips the hand of his new friend, a graduate-counseling student serving as his mentor. By this point in their relationship they’re oblivious to the required videotaping, as they enter the “Counseling Center.” Together they’re ready to engage in the art of arts: spiritual friendship.

A client arrives for his scheduled appointment with his professional Christian counselor. He’s hopeful that he’ll finally find help to break the hold that rage has on his heart and relationships. Together they’re ready to engage in the art of arts: spiritual friendship.

A young woman hugs her female lay encourager as they enter the “Encouragement Center” for their seventh meeting. They both experience a close connection and a calm confidence that Christ will continue his good work in and through them. Together they’re ready to engage in the art of arts: spiritual friendship.

Two friends sitting in the corner of an almost empty local diner sip coffee as they talk. For two years this has been their “sacred place” where they meet to bear one another’s burdens. Together they’re ready to engage in the art of arts: spiritual friendship.

The settings are almost limitless and the individuals so very diverse. Yet, the art is the same—the art of spiritual friendship.

The titles seem almost endless as well: spiritual friend, physician of the soul, soul care giver, spiritual director, sacred friend, soul friend, spiritual companion, companions in hope, pastoral counselor, lay counselor, biblical counselor, Christian counselor, discipleship counselor, discipler, mentor, elder, pastor, shepherd, and encourager.

The concept seems equally bottomless: spiritual direction, care of souls, soul care giving, the art of

Exploring Your Spiritual Journey

1. What impact are you hoping *Spiritual Friends* will have on you personally?
2. What impact are you hoping *Spiritual Friends* will have on how you minister to others? How do you long to use this equipping in other people's lives?
3. Share some of your fears and apprehensions as it hits you, "I'm going to 'counsel' people!"
4. Share some of your joy and anticipation as it hits you, "I'm going to 'counsel' people!"

soul keeping, the practice of Christian spirituality, discipling, mentoring, encouraging, coming along side to help, comforting, confronting, sharing, shepherding, pastoring, and befriending.

All these settings, titles, and concepts paint portraits of the art of arts, portraits of spiritual friendship. Each pictures something of what it means to be a spiritual friend. But what exactly is a spiritual friend? What does a spiritual friend “look like”? How do spiritual friends relate?

Stories of Spiritual Friendship

You’re reading this book because you want to learn how to become a more effective spiritual friend. I’m writing this chapter because I long to turn your *want to* into a *have to*. By the time you complete this chapter, I pray that your heart cries out, “I *have to* be a spiritual friend.” By the time you finish reading these stories, vignettes, illustrations, and biblical examples of spiritual friendship, I’m wanting you to say, “Father, I *have to* engage others, regardless of the setting, regardless of my paid position, in the art of arts, in spiritual friendship.”

Join me as we picture in our imaginations and experience in our souls what it means to be a spiritual friend. Eavesdrop on some personal stories of spiritual friendship.

Lisa Beamer’s Story of Spiritual Friendship

Recently my daughter and I have been reading *Let’s Roll!*, Lisa Beamer’s account of her husband, and 9-11 hero, Todd Beamer. Lisa writes:

September 11, 2001, began like any other normal day. Yet it was a day we’ll never forget. The ringing of an alarm clock dragged me reluctantly from a deep sleep at 5:45 AM on Tuesday, September 11. My husband, Todd, rolled over and silenced the annoying noise. I roused slightly, peeking out from under the covers only long enough to notice it was still dark outside (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 1).

Some three hours later, Lisa’s friend Elaine called.

“Hi, Lisa. I know Todd is traveling today . . . and I was just calling to check on him . . . Do you have your television turned on? Have you seen what’s happening?” “Elaine, what are you talking about?” “Turn the TV on,” Elaine instructed. “There’s been a plane crash at the World Trade Center” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 4).

There would be four plane crashes that day. The United Airlines Flight en route from Newark to San Francisco that shattered upon impact in the fields of Pennsylvania farm country, shattered Lisa Beamer’s life.

“No!” I screamed helplessly at the television. Without a shred of hard evidence, I knew intuitively that Todd was on that flight. Suddenly I felt as though my body weighed a million pounds; it seemed my heart might explode. I fell to my hands and knees and gasped again, “No!” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 10).

In a chapter Lisa entitles *Inside the Nightmare*, she describes the clash of realities that we all face when tragedy ruptures our existence.

As I sat on the bed that Tuesday morning, September 11, my world had suddenly come to a halt. For a long time after I saw the crash site on TV and heard the news that it was a United flight that had crashed in Pennsylvania, I stared blankly at the field outside our window, trying to make sense of it. Just a few short hours earlier, Todd had been lying beside me. Now I was certain he was dead. My day had started out so . . . *ordinary*—with a shower, breakfast, laundry. And then the phone call had come. My mind somehow couldn't reconcile the two realities (Beamer, *Let's Roll!*, p. 163).

Lisa raised the question that we all wonder. "What do you do when your whole world is suddenly turned upside down?" (Beamer, *Let's Roll!*, p. 164).

What did Lisa Beamer need at this point? What would spiritual friendship have looked like?

David's Story of Spiritual Struggle and Spiritual Friendship

God calls shepherd-boy David to shepherd all Israel. Called, David serves. Serving, David suffers. When the chorus line of the day sings out, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7), Saul becomes enraged. The refrain galls him. From that time on, Saul keeps a jealous eye on David. An evil eye.

The more success David enjoys, the more fear Saul endures. When Saul realizes that the Lord is with David and that his daughter, Michal, loves David, Saul becomes still more afraid. He remains David's enemy the rest of his days.

Plotting to kill David, Saul even enlists his son, Jonathan. Jonathan, very fond of David, spills the beans, not only warning David of impending danger, but also spying on his own father on David's behalf.

Exasperated, Saul expels a torrent of rage toward the harp-playing David, attempting to pin him to the wall, through the heart, with his spear. David eludes him and makes good his escape.

The plot thickens. Saul assembles his death squad to hunt down and execute David. David hides out in the cave of Adullam, surrounded by a rag-tag bunch described by the biblical author as, "all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented" (1 Samuel 22:2). Sounds like an ancient version of *The Bad News Bears*.

Day after day, Saul pursues David, forcing him to move his band of brothers from place to place. Camping in the wilderness like vagabonds, David learns that once again Saul has come to take his life (1 Samuel 23:15).

What did David need at this point? What would spiritual friendship have looked like?

Your Story of Spiritual Friendship

What about you? You've been there. We've all experienced a "dark night of the soul."

Think for a moment about one of the darkest times in your life: the death of a loved one, a dashed dream, a work termination, the illness of a child, the failure to overcome a besetting sin, a prodigal child, betrayal by a trusted friend, the affair, a divorce, a church split, unresolved conflict, depression, anxiety, your teenager's eating disorder, a rape, childhood sexual abuse, a robbery, the car accident, the fire . . .

What did your soul need at this point? What would spiritual friendship have looked like? What help do we need when we are suffering or sinning?

The Rest of the Story of Spiritual Friendship

Paul Harvey has always been one of my favorite radio personalities. I love his signature closing in his distinctive voice, "This is Paul Harvey. Good day." I enjoy the stories that he tells and how he tells

them. “Page two,” he’ll say as he moves along in his story telling. Then, after the obligatory commercial break, he returns with his famous words said famously, “And now, the rest of the story.”

To you, I say, “And now, the rest of the story.” We’ve considered three stories of spiritual struggle: Lisa Beamer’s, David’s, and yours. Now let’s hear the rest of the story of spiritual struggles endured through spiritual friendship.

The Rest of Lisa Beamer’s Story of Spiritual Friendship

Lisa Beamer, who is a committed Christian, writes in her book what she needed and received. Having received official confirmation from United Airlines that her husband had indeed died in the crash of Flight 93, Lisa’s spiritual friends swarmed to her side. “Rev. Bob Cushman, Todd’s and my pastor, was among the first to arrive, along with Dr. Al Hickok, the professional counselor at our church. They came upstairs and prayed with me” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 168).

However, it wasn’t only the “professionals” who came alongside Lisa. “Members of our Care Circle and others from the community and church brought in food all day long, feeding the many people who gathered at our home, cleaning up messes, running errands, and taking care of the children” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 168).

Lisa highlighted one particular spiritual friend.

At one point, in the middle of the day, during a lull in the activity in my room, I was staring blankly into space. I looked across Todd’s and my bed, and there was Jan Pittas, one of our more quiet-natured friends, just sitting on the opposite corner of the bed, quietly praying for me, not talking aloud. Not talking at all. I didn’t want to talk; I wasn’t able to talk, and with her sweet, gentle spirit, Jan knew better than to try to talk to me. But her presence in the room was comforting. *Thank you, God, for sending Jan, I prayed* (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 170).

“*But her presence in the room was comforting.*” What did Lisa need? She needed *human* love to keep her open to faith in *Divine* love. People like Jan Pittas and others enabled Lisa to remember the goodness of God. “In those days following the crash, this truth became even more real to me: God knows exactly *what* we need *when* we need it” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 170).

Throughout the remaining pages of *Let’s Roll!*, Lisa shares the quiet, natural way others helped her to see her human tragedy from God’s perspective—through prayer, interaction, listening, and exploring Scriptures like Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:30-31; Romans 11:33-36; and 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

In an appropriately titled chapter *The Big Picture*, Lisa shares how these human messengers, her spiritual friends, helped her to hear God’s message. “God has whispered two words to me over and over again: *Look up . . . Look up*. Through that quiet voice I’m reminded to look beyond my own little life to the Creator of the universe and what I know of his perspective. Without fail, looking up brings peace to my soul” (Beamer, *Let’s Roll!*, p. 297).

What did Lisa Beamer need? Lisa Beamer needed:

- ◆ *Human* love to remind her of *God’s* love.
- ◆ *Human companionship* to remind her of her *Divine Companion’s* goodness.
- ◆ *Compassionate discernment* to reconnect her to God by reminding her of God’s grace.
- ◆ *Community* to invite her to *communion* with Christ.

Lisa Beamer needed spiritual friends—ordinary people helping her to connect to her extraordinary God.

The Rest of David's Story of Spiritual Friendship

And what about David, the innocent fugitive hunted by the insane king? In David's desperate setting, we learn the source of his strength. "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength (*hazaq*) in God" (1 Samuel 23:16).

Finding strength (*hazaq*) pictures binding together, girding, and uniting. The Old Testament uses it for strengthening, encouraging, instilling courage in another, and aiding. The core idea emphasizes strengthening another person's grip by joining hands in support (Carl Weber, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 276).

We're made firmer and stronger when we bind ourselves together with one another. When we're losing our grip, we need to be gripped by others. In spiritual struggle, we need spiritual friendship.

As illustrative as this is, we've pondered only a portion of David's story of spiritual struggle and spiritual friendship. As David's spiritual journey continues, Saul pursues. David evades. Saul is vulnerable. David spares Saul's life, not once, but twice.

David battles victoriously for Yahweh. Returning from Yahweh-battle, David and his men experience Yahweh-mystery. The evil Amalekites have raided their camp at Ziklag where the wives and children of David and his men resided. Returning to Ziklag, "they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive" (1 Samuel 30:3). Grieving greatly, "David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep" (1 Samuel 30:4).

We would say that they're "wiped." Exhausted. Shattered. Overwhelmed.

David is no exception. "David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters" (1 Samuel 30:6a). If my wife and children had been taken hostage while I was away ministering for God, I would be distressed, too. If all those who worked for me were so bitter that they wanted to kill me, I would be distressed, too.

David's narrative begs for the intervening voice of Paul Harvey saying, "And now, the rest of the story." Here it is. "But David found strength (*hazaq*) in the LORD his God" (1 Samuel 30:6b).

Strength is the identical Hebrew word we examined in 1 Samuel 23:16—*hazaq*. David's previous *connection* with Jonathan empowers him to experience *communion* with Yahweh. Having *a* spiritual friend in his life to strengthen him, equips and empowers David to connect with *the* Spiritual Friend.

**We need spiritual friends—Christians,
and we need the Spiritual Friend—Christ.**

**Spiritual friends—the Christian community—
point us to our ultimate Spiritual Friend—Christ.**

From whence cometh David's help? Who do we need when we are suffering or sinning? What do we need along our spiritual journey when we face spiritual struggles? We need spiritual friends—Christians, and we need the Spiritual Friend—Christ.

Spiritual friends—the Christian community—point us to our ultimate Spiritual Friend—Christ. God has designed us to find communion and closeness with him—our true source of all help—through community and connection with one another. Spiritual friendship is our greatest hope for connecting to God's help.

The Rest of Your Story of Spiritual Friendship

From whence cometh your help? What did you need and receive during your dark night of the soul? Think about it. Reflect. Remember. Ponder.

How did God touch you? Who did he touch you through? How did you experience his love? What enabled you to live based upon his truth? Which spiritual friend comes to mind as you ponder how God empowered you to victoriously confront your spiritual battle? How did your *connection* with your human spiritual friend encourage you to *commune* with your Divine Spiritual Friend?

God's Art Gallery of Spiritual Friendship

In the midst of spiritual crisis, we need spiritual connection—spiritual friendship. But just what does spiritual friendship look like? Would we know it if we saw it?

Allow me to guide you on a tour through God's art gallery filled with walls lined with pictures of spiritual friendship. View pictures of spiritual friendship as:

- ◆ Sacred Companionship
- ◆ Voice and Touch
- ◆ Christ Incarnated in Christians

Art Gallery Portrait One: Spiritual Friendship as Sacred Companionship

Spiritual friends are *sacred companions*. I'm convinced that one of the primary reasons that we fail to experience Christ's power is because we fail to take our friendships seriously enough.

Our close friendships are sacred. They're holy and sanctified, committed and consecrated, serious and mysterious, beautiful and blessed by God.

A sacred companion dares to enter the holy place of your soul—the messy rooms filled with fear, darkness, chaos, and confusion. She also thrills to enter the redeemed core of your soul—that central room touched by God, yet rarely tapped into or stirred up by the mere acquaintance. A sacred companion is someone who cares about you so much and knows you so well, that he helps you to taste God's goodness and grace where others only see suffering and sin.

Even more, your sacred companions courageously encourage you to enter the Holy of Holies of your soul—to live face-to-face with God in intimate integrity. No wonder the author of Hebrews directly links bold entrance into God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-23) with the bold encouragement shared between brothers and sisters in Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Art Gallery Portrait Two: Spiritual Friendship as Voice and Touch

Spiritual friends connect *voice and touch*. In the prologue to *Leadership Jazz*, Max DePree writes about his granddaughter, Zoe:

Zoe was born prematurely and weighed one pound, seven ounces, so small that my wedding ring could slide up her arm to her shoulder. The neonatologist who first examined her told us that she had a 5 to 10 percent chance of living three days. When Esther and I saw Zoe in her isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit, she had two IVs in her navel, one in her foot, a monitor on each side of her chest, and a respirator tube and a feeding tube in her mouth. To complicate matters, Zoe's biological father had jumped ship the month before Zoe was born. Realizing this, a wise and caring nurse named Ruth gave me my instructions. "For the next several months, at least, you're the

surrogate father. I want you to come to the hospital every day to visit Zoe, and when you come, I want you to rub her body and her legs and arms with the tip of your finger. While you're caressing her, you should tell her over and over how much you love her, because she has to be able to connect your voice to your touch" (DePree, *Leadership Jazz*, p. 1).

DePree concludes with these insightful words. "God knew that we also needed both His voice and His touch. So He gave us His Word (His Son) and also His Body (the Church). God's voice and touch say, 'I love you'" (DePree, *Leadership Jazz*, p. 2).

God's Word is his voice speaking to you. God's people are his touch speaking his Word into your soul.

Art Gallery Portrait Three: Spiritual Friendship as Christ Incarnated in Christians

Spiritual friendship is *Christ incarnated in Christians*. Dave is one of my best friends from seminary days. One night when his daughter, Kristen, was about five or six, she awoke from a bad dream. Hearing her cries and whimperings, Dave got out of bed to comfort Kristen. He hugged her, and she was still. Then they prayed together. His prayer was meant to reassure her that Jesus was watching over her. But when Dave finished praying and was about to leave Kristen, her whimperings began again. Dave reminded her again, "You know that Jesus is watching over you."

Kristen responded, "I know, but I need Jesus with some skin on him!"

That's what God calls us to be for each other: *Jesus with skin on him*. Spiritual friends give each other small tastes, samples now, of how good and gracious Jesus is.

Spiritual friendship is a human relational bridge that reconnects our soul to God. We are more than professionals, or practitioners, or pastors; we are fellow pilgrims. We journey with one another through the valley of the shadow of death. Then we lay down our lives for each other, forming a bridge from the valley of death to the oasis of hope—the oasis of God's goodness and grace.

The Power for Spiritual Friendship: Grace Alone

Having enjoyed stories of spiritual friends and portraits of the nature of spiritual friendship, now we need to ponder how we practice spiritual friendship. By "how," I do not mean what we do—we'll learn and experience that throughout *Spiritual Friends*. By "how," I mean by *what power* for *what purpose* and in *what manner* do we perform the art of arts?

The Priority of Spiritual Friendship: Grace

Spiritual friends are dispensers of Christ's grace. Why grace? Because only two things have ever changed the human soul: *sin* and *grace*.

Sin, spread like a cancer by Satan, changed us from lovers of God to prodigal spouses. Grace, dispensed as the cure by Christ, returns our hearts home. Grace enables us to envision God once again as our *Pursuing Father*, Christ once again as our *Worthy Groom*, and the Holy Spirit once again as our *Inspiring Mentor*. Grace enlightens us to envision the Trinity as a *Divine Community of Lovers* who long to welcome us into their eternal, perfect circle of unbroken love.

God commissions us to connect one another to Christ's grace. As ambassadors of reconciliation, we understand that Christ's gospel of grace heals the evils we have suffered and the sins we have committed.

The Purpose of Spiritual Friendship: Grace Glorification

Let's start big. Huge. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life on planet Earth? Why hasn't Jesus brought us home to heaven yet? Our primary purpose while we remain on planet Earth is to experience *communion* with Christ, *conformity* to Christ, and *connection* with Christians, while fulfilling our *commission* to call others to enjoy and exalt Christ.

In Philippians 3, Paul counts everything else in life dung (camel manure) compared to knowing Christ intimately (communion), being conformed to Christ's likeness (conformity), and calling others to Christ's family (connection and commission). That's our goal as spiritual friends: to *interdependently* help each other to move toward *intimacy* with Christ and *imitation* of Christ that *increases* the glory brought to Christ.

In other words, ultimately spiritual friendship is not about us. Spiritual friendship is about our ultimate Spiritual Friend.

The Process of Spiritual Friendship: Grace Relationships

How do we know him and make him known? It may be simpler than we suspect: by knowing one another. The purpose of the Church is to be a community of lightbearers who make Jesus known through grace relationships.

God unleashes his power to be like Christ in Christian community. The ability to know Christ is nourished as we connect to Christ's children. "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, *together with all the saints*, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:17b-18, emphasis added).

Since living face-to-face with God by grace alone is central to biblical Christianity, then grace relationships are the key to Christian maturity. We need gospel communities where we truly touch soul-to-soul with the grace to recognize and delight in the goodness God has created in each other.

The issue is not, "Can I listen? Can I diagnose?" It's, "Can I relate? Can I share tastes of grace?"

In Colossians 1:27-2:3, Paul pictures the life of Christ in him being poured into his disciples. He explains how this occurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us" (KJV). Paul shares his *soul* and the *Scriptures*. Paul believes in *intervention* through *interaction* and *insight* because he believes that relationships are God's channel of grace. He practices spiritual friendship, modeling the nature of all true spiritual friendships:

- ◆ Spiritual friendship helps us to pay attention to God.
- ◆ Spiritual friendship provides company along a tough but extremely important journey.
- ◆ Spiritual friendship opens us increasingly to Christ's resurrection power.
- ◆ Spiritual friendship brings spirituality and sacredness to relationships.

Spiritual friends are *conductors of Christ's resurrection power and dispensers of Christ's grace*. The communication of wisdom takes many forms, the most intimate and powerful being friendship. "I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Some of my dreams for you as a spiritual friend are:

- ◆ To possess and present compassionate discernment.
- ◆ To share the wisdom of God in the context of spiritual friendship.
- ◆ To participate in the art of caring engagement.
- ◆ To share spiritual theology where truth deeply impacts relationships.

The Pattern of Spiritual Friendship: Grace Narratives

We are called to live a “grace narrative.” Our lives are Christ’s epistle. Our purpose is to dispatch love letters to the world that read, “God is good. He’s beautiful. Awesome. He’s your Worthy Groom. Come home to his good heart.”

In what manner do we dispatch love letters in spiritual friendship? This question reminds me of another question that people often ask me, “Is spiritual friendship non-directive or directive?”

My answer?

“Neither. It is *collaborative*.”

Directive spiritual friendship is like a *monologue* where one person talks *at* another. Non-directive spiritual friendship is like a *dialogue* where two people share together. Collaborative spiritual friendship is a *trialogue* where three people share—two spiritual friends and the ultimate Spiritual Friend—Jesus.

Some approaches to spiritual friendship and counseling focus on *monologue*. There is a declaration of truth, but it is given apart from an intimate relationship. Still other spiritual friendship and counseling models highlight *dialogue*. There is a discussion, but God is relatively absent from it. True biblical counseling and spiritual friendship is a *trialogue*. We invite God into the core of our lives. His Word communicates to us piercing both our hearts. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20, KJV).

Effective spiritual friends *exegete souls* and *Scripture*. We combine truth and love. Christianity is an invitation into a drama, a love story. Our spiritual meaning and mission is given to us in story form. As spiritual friends, we enter others’ journeys helping them to remember their part in God’s drama. We help them to see that God is good even when life is bad, and that God is gracious even when they are sinful.

Biblical counseling is Emmaus Road Counseling (compare Luke 24:13-35 and see a parable based upon this passage in Box 1:1). As traveling companions, we unveil the hidden Christ to hungry and hurting people.

Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Headed

How’s your *want to*? Is God moving it to a *have to*?

We’ve entered Lisa’s, David’s, and your story of spiritual friendship in the midst of spiritual crisis. We’ve browsed God’s art gallery of spiritual friendship seeing pictures of sacred companions, voice and touch, and Christ incarnated in Christians (“Jesus with skin on him”). We’ve pondered the priority, purpose, process, and pattern of spiritual friendship, detecting that *grace* claims ground zero in each case.

What is God stirring in your heart? Are you leaving the same as you came?

On second thought, don’t leave just yet. On your own, with a spiritual friend, or in a spiritual friendship small group, spend time further developing your spiritual friendship competency of grace-based spiritual friendship by completing the two pages following Box 1:1.

Then, return for Chapter Two: The Qualifications for Spiritual Friendship. Here we’ll view the spiritual friend’s résumé.

Box 1:1

Emmaus Road Counseling

Once upon a time, two discouraged middle-aged men endured a seven-mile walk. Talking as they walked, they dialogued about the events of the past week.

“Not how I expected it to end,” said the first man, Cleopas.

“Nope. Not at all,” concurred his friend, Jacob.

“Kinda’ like that time I ran the marathon,” Cleopas continued. “I was way ahead at the twenty-mile mark. Got my hopes up. Thought I might finally win something. Pictured the victor’s crown placed on my head by the Emperor. The cheers of the crowd. The pride of my son. The joy in my heart. But those last few miles killed me. Seemed like the whole world was passing me by. I said then that I’d never dream again about anything. But Messiah started me dreamin’ again.”

“Boy can I relate. When my ship sunk in that storm—right after I had the best fishing season of my career, I said the same thing: ‘Don’t hope—ever!’ But Messiah, he made me hope. Wish he hadn’t. Wish I hadn’t.”

About then a stranger sauntered upon them. “What are you talking about, men?”

Cleopas, head down, heartbroken, responded. “You have to be the only person on the face of planet Earth who knows nothing about what happened this past week!”

“Tell me,” the stranger urged.

“Messiah of Nazareth came. A great prophet. Powerful in every way. We had hoped that he was the one who was going to bring us life. But he only brought death. His death. The death of our dreams.”

“Fools!” Stranger shouted. “Blind. Slow. Didn’t your Scriptures teach you anything? Nothing about death before life? Winter before Spring? Suffering before resurrection?”

For the next several miles, Stranger trialogued with them from Scripture. Opening their eyes to himself.

Reaching their destination, they invited Stranger to their home for dinner. It was then, when Stranger prayed, that their blind eyes saw.

*They asked each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire inside us while he talked to us on the road? While he **trialogued** with us, bringing compassion and discernment into our dialogue?”*

Jacob added, “No one ever talked to me like that. With such passion. Such power. So personal. Truth and love kissing, soul and Scripture mingling. Cleopas, you are my best friend in all the world. I’ve known you for over four decades. We’ve shared so much together. Yet, we’ve never shared like Messiah just shared with us. What does that say about our relationship?”

“Hmm.” Thoughtful. Stroking his beard as he leaned away from the table, Cleopas finally replied. “Guess it means that we could go deeper. Oh, I love swapping war stories. Talking about work, the weather, the kids. Love walking to the synagogue with you. Yet, when our hearts were discouraged, neither of us talked the way Messiah talked. Neither of us connected with Jehovah Elohim deeply enough that his words spilled over into ours, that his encouragement empowered us to encourage and empower each other.”

*“Cleopas,” Jacob interrupted, “I want to be different. I want **us** to be different. From now on, let’s invite Messiah into the center of every conversation.”*

“Jacob, I couldn’t agree more,” Cleopas concurred. “I want to commune with God so I can connect with you. I want our relationship to strengthen each other so we can find strength in God.”

Then off they raced to trialogue with others about Messiah.

Maturing Your Spiritual Friendship Competency Becoming a Grace-Based Spiritual Friend

1. Describe one of your best friendships as a child. What would your life have been like without that friendship?

2. Share about one of your best friendships now. What would be missing from your life without this friendship?

3. During one of your dark nights of the soul when you felt God's seeming absence:
 - a. What did you need? In your situation, what met your need? What helped you?

 - b. How did God touch you? Who did he touch you through? How did you experience his love? What enabled you to live based upon his truth?

4. Who is "Jesus with skin on him" for you? How?

5. For whom are you "Jesus with skin on him"? How?

6. As a spiritual friend, is your tendency more toward:

- ◆ Interaction: Sharing Your Soul Love Grace Relationships?
- ◆ Insight: Sharing Scripture Truth Grace Narratives?

a. Where did you learn your tendency?

b. What might it look like for you to better integrate these:

- ◆ Intervention through Interaction *and* Insight?
- ◆ Sharing Your Soul *and* Scripture?
- ◆ Grace Relationships *and* Grace Narratives?

7. What do you think needs to occur in your soul for you to grow as a spiritual friend?

8. Share a recent time when:

a. You were involved in a *monologue* conversation. What impact did it have on you?

b. You were involved in a *dialogue* conversation. What impact did it have on you?

c. You were involved in a *trialogue* conversation. What impact did it have on you?