

THE ONE THING

A CONDENSED ARTICLE IN GROUP YOUTH MINISTRY MAGAZINE
MIKE TEDESCO SAID "RELIG- WHERE PEOPLE ARE SPECIAL"

THIS YEAR (2004-5 THEME) WE SAY "RELIG- FRIENDS FOR THE JOURNEY"

When passengers aboard the hijacked 9/11 jets realized they would not survive the ordeal, several reached for their cell phones and quietly dialed their loved ones. If no one answered, they left recorded messages with their final words: "I love you." The passengers could have said other things but, of course, they were focused on their personal relationships. We'd do the same. Life crises often clarify what's really important.

Our heavenly Father views his children in a similar way. He cherishes the love, the relationship, more than anything else.' God the Father sent his Son to live among us, to befriend us, and to show us how to befriend him. We see through his life and ministry a gallery of friendships-all varying in depth and maturity.

SEEING MINISTRY THROUGH THE FRIENDSHIP FILTER

The formation of healthy human friendships provides clues for deciphering "the one thing" that Jesus referenced in his dialogue with Mary and Martha. Remember, Jesus told Martha she needed only to focus on "one thing," not the "many things" she was worried about. And he noted that Mary had chosen "the one thing." So what is this "one thing"?

* Serving the Lord? Martha was directly serving Jesus, preparing a meal for him. Yet Jesus told her she didn't get it. Working full-speed for Jesus, in ministry for him, is not "the one thing."

* A good heart? Martha had good intentions. Her motives were fine, but she didn't get it. Righteous motives, even directed toward the Lord, are not "the one thing."

* Proper protocol? Tradition would have required both Martha and Mary to prepare for the guest. But Jesus ruled against the tradition, the ritual, the way things had always been done. That wasn't "the one thing."

* Justice? Martha argued that she was being unfairly overworked while Mary sat around. Even so, Jesus told her she didn't get it. Equality and fairness are not "the one thing."

* A growing relationship with Jesus? Yes, that's it! That's what Mary chose. She wanted to know and grow closer to Jesus. The Lord was (and still is) looking for friends with whom to develop deep relationships.

"The one thing" is a heart-to-heart relationship, a close and growing friendship, with God.

This is what God craves. This is what we crave. God created every person to yearn for this intimate relationship with him. **Nothing else will do. And without it, nothing else matters.**

We make friends with Jesus much as we make friends with other people. So what's involved in developing a good friendship? We asked our friends and associates to list qualities of and steps toward a great human relationship. Here's what they listed: common interests, shared values, volition (picking your friends), spending time together, talk that's give-and-take, shared experiences, having fun together, eating together, spending time with your friends' friends, sharing emotions, companionship, helping one another, healthy interdependence, love, intimacy, trust, loyalty, a close and willing sacrifice for one another, forgiveness, and commitment.

MINISTRY USING THE FRIENDSHIP FILTER

Deep, intimate friendships-the kind that mirror what God is looking for with us-are vanishing from our busy lifestyles. We find it harder and harder to establish, nurture, and rely on real friendships. It's a sign of our times. We're a remote-controlled, security-fenced, Internet-commuting, environmentally insulated society. We're increasingly cut off from genuine experiences and expressions of community. We're increasingly removed from real, dynamic relationships. Our high divorce rates, our fractured families, our corporate superstructures and our let's-just-move mindset all evidence our failures at relationships."

We're in a relationship famine. 4 people in 10 say they've been lonely for "a long period of time." The scarcity of real relationships intensifies our hunger. We're desperately seeking real friendships. Even as we sit solo at our computers, we graze Web sites that promise to link us with other like-minded people who also seek a friend. Here lies the real opportunity-and the responsibility-of the church. Jesus calls us to tap into the Mary-like hunger for relationship that calls out all around us.

* What if RELIG prominently fashioned itself around relationship building?

*What if the RELIG mantra was "we are a family, we intend to be known as a 'friend to the friendless.'"

* What if RELIG elevated human relationship-building above & going beyond one-way communication & using time as a catalyst to get kids talking with each other about your topic (community-building communication).

*What if RELIG utilized what we know about building great human friendships to nurture kids' real friendships with Jesus? Most kids don't know how to make new friends and keep old ones.

*What if RELIG made "the one thing" the top priority? That's what Jesus said we should be all about. Most Christians today came to the faith through the relational influence of their friends and families. They met Jesus while pursuing their relationships with other followers. They wanted to belong.

Kids want to be invited into a warm, friendly environment where relationships naturally incubate. They're spiritually hungry, and are looking for a *fireside ambiance* that nurtures friend-making.

It's time for a reordering & It's time to place a "friendship filter" in front of every decision, ministry, program, place, and procedure. So when we're considering our youth ministry options, we can use the friendship filter to ask: *Which option will best induce and enhance relationships- with other teenagers and with Jesus?

*Which option will convey to kids that building a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the top priority here? It's easy to lose sight of "the one thing." It's crucial we don't.