

*Beauty*  
Unleashed

Transforming a  
Woman's Soul

Heidi McLaughlin

**VMI PUBLISHERS**  
Sisters, OR

Copyright ©2007 by Heidi McLaughlin. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV” are taken from the Life Application Bible, New International Version, Zondervan Publishers, copyright© 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991.

Scripture quotations marked “MSG” are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scriptures marked “TLB” are taken from The Living Bible Paraphrase, Tyndale House Publishers, copyright © 1971, 1973.

Published by

**VMI PUBLISHERS**

Sisters, Oregon

[www.vmipublishers.com](http://www.vmipublishers.com)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-933204-40-6

10-digit ISBN: 1-933204-40-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007924529

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by Joe Bailen

Heidi uses her passion and gifts of speaking and writing in her ministry called “*HEART CONNECTIONS*.” You can contact her through her web page:

[www.heartconnection.ca](http://www.heartconnection.ca) or write to her at:

Heidi McLaughlin

1529 Chardonay Place

Kelowna, British Columbia

Canada

V4T 2P9

250-470-9299

This book is dedicated to the man who has gently taught  
me to let God unleash all the beauty in my life:

My darling Jack

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	7
INTRODUCTION .....	9
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF PURPOSE	
<i>Like an Ant</i> .....	13
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF FRIENDSHIP	
<i>Heart-Connection Friends</i> .....	31
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF LOVE	
<i>Annoying People in My Mirror</i> .....	53
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF HOPE	
<i>Three Quarters</i> .....	67
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF GODLY DESIRES	
<i>Me, Myself, and I</i> .....	89
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF MY NAME	
<i>Becoming Visible</i> .....	105
<i>Chapter 7</i>	
UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF ADVENTURE	
<i>Could Be Trouble</i> .....	117

*Chapter 8*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF MY HOME  
*Stress, Impress, or Bless* ..... 131

*Chapter 9*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S GLORY  
*Double Rainbows* ..... 145

*Chapter 10*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF PURE MOTIVES  
*The Stinky Heart* ..... 159

*Chapter 11*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER  
*Prayer Is a Melting* ..... 173

*Chapter 12*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF VICTORY  
*The Phantom of Shame* ..... 195

*Chapter 13*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF GRATITUDE  
*Ubuntu* ..... 217

*Chapter 14*  
 UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF TRUTH  
*Beauty and the Beast* ..... 235

EPILOGUE ..... 251

NOTES ..... 253

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**B**EHIND EVERY RESTLESS desire, certain people are needed to stand on the sidelines to cheer us on and encourage us to put our inspiration into action. Thank goodness for those people who love us enough to believe in us and validate the unusual stirrings in our spirit—who listen and hope with us against all odds.

When I told my two accountability partners that I was thinking about writing a book but that the odds of getting published were probably 1%, my friend Joanne confidently responded, “Heidi, that is all God needs.” This is the type of person we all need in our lives to help us realize our dreams.

My husband Jack spent hours with me on the patio deck outside our home in the summer of 2006, answering my endless questions such as, “What do *you* feel like when you are disappointed?” and “What does a scarcity mentality look like to you?” He never tired of my passion or ever grumbled when I asked him to read another chapter—again.

When I told my children that I was writing a book, my son Donovan immediately replied, “Mom, I would love to be your reader.” I told him that it would be a book for a female audience, so he just wistfully smiled and shrugged. Whenever I needed a second set of women’s eyes and ears, I e-mailed the chapters to my daughter Michelle, whose comments were always so insightful and honest. My stepchildren, Jennifer, Janice, and David, and their families were so generous in their praise by letting me know how proud they were of me. When Janice came to visit in the summer of 2006, I sat her down, and we spent hours talking about the joys, pain, and expectations of friendships.

My mother, sisters, and many friends who prayed for me always asked, “How is the book going?” I thanked them for joining me on this exhilarating journey. It is a magnificent gift when people share our joy.

Mark Buchanan, the author of *The Rest of God*, gave me my best advice. He told me that while I was writing this book, I should write every word as an “act of worship” to God. That wisdom was imprinted in my mind and poured out of every prayer and sentence which I put down on paper. Consequently, every word in this book is an offering of praise and an *act of worship* meant to unleash women’s beauty and bring glory to our God.

## INTRODUCTION



HERE IS NOTHING MORE beautiful than a woman who knows that she is loved. She is the one who glows with energy and confidence when she walks into a room. Everyone yearns to be this kind of woman, but many just can’t seem to find the magic formula. Never before in our society’s history have we been able to access more information, technical advice, and “how to” steps to make over every area of our lives. Yet, our souls are emptier than ever as we hide behind our masks of frantic activities and silent fatigue.

I love to sit across from a woman whose eyes beg to discover her own beauty and to find ways to bring fulfillment and purpose to her life. So often, however, when the mask comes off, those same eyes are filled with pain and despair. That woman knows there has to be more passion and value in what she does, but she doesn’t know how to find it. She thinks the rest of the world has it, so she can’t understand what is wrong with her. In fact, many women confess their feelings of hopelessness and anxiety, often turning to anti-depressants so they can “just get through this rough spot.”

What has happened to the innocent laughter and beauty that came from within us as little children? Girls giggle and laugh when we make faces at them, their eyes sparkling with glee. They adorn themselves in princess dresses, twirl, and dance uninhibited in their bare feet. Because everything delights and fascinates them, they engage their world with creativity, joy, and the giddy anticipation of a great adventure. Little girls spread their unconditional love wherever they go and eagerly accept it in return. They are carefree because they believe life is like the fairy-tale stories in which they always become the beautiful princesses who are rescued by handsome princes.

Now that we are women, I fear that we have become too smart and busy for this uninhibited kind of joy. Who will rescue us and make us feel beautiful once again?

- Have we been hurt so many times that we've learned to shut off our feelings?
- Have we perfected the art of pretending to be the woman everyone expects us to be?
- Are we so busy with our endless "to do" lists that we have no time to "just be"?
- Is life just a series of "shoulds," "coulds," and "have-tos?"
- Do we feel that we do not even *deserve* abundant joy in our lives?
- Does our self worth come from our accomplishments rather than who we are?
- Has anyone ever taken the time to help us connect with God to find our true self?

*We have not lost our beauty.* It is right where God placed it on the day He created us in our mothers' wombs. Our life struggles, disappointments, and humiliations have taught us to lock beauty away, hiding and protecting it from the world. Many women do not enjoy their beauty because they don't feel worthy enough to even acknowledge that it is there.

I need to know how to use each day of my life the way God has intended for me to live it. I don't believe I was meant to aimlessly survive each day at break-neck speed. God tells us in His Word to "be still and

know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10 NIV). By staying quiet, seeking Him, and experiencing the beauty of God's magnificent, unconditional love and kindness toward us, we will begin to discover and identify the unique beauty that is within each of us.

Let's look at our modern-day crisis of too many choices, hectic lifestyles, and the resulting emptiness through the eyes of the one who created us and knows us better than anyone else—our rescuer, God's Son Jesus. He walked and talked with His twelve disciples and taught them how to live through stories, object lessons, and a lot of love. I believe stories are powerful ways to teach truths so that we can comprehend confusing and difficult situations.

As you read each of the following chapters, I encourage you to imagine me sitting across from you, gently urging you to soften your heart and connect it to God so that He can speak to you. Then, anticipate His answers to give you new hope and wisdom for obstacles you face each day.

Each chapter starts with my personal story of the mistakes and challenges I have encountered over the years. Life can be hard, but I want you to know that you are not alone with your disappointments and confusion. Then, I invite you to explore with me the pressures that enter our daily lives and rob us of this beauty. Each chapter ends with a reminder of the ways God can unleash your beauty.

## *Stop and ask God to Unleash Your Beauty*

**S: Scripture verse** will be available here for reflection.

**T: Thanksgiving.** Thank God for the beauty He has placed in our souls.

**O: Observation.** What would we like to ask God to do in our lives?

**P: Pray.** Ask Him.

*My Prayer for You:*

I will end each chapter praying with you because I am passionate about God transforming your life into the most magnificent beauty you have ever known. I may have never met you, but I have ministered to women like you for many years, and I love you dearly. I have seen God change women's lives right before my very eyes. I know He can do it, because He is your creator, as well as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has been pursuing you your entire life, so let Him because He wants to. The King is enthralled with your beauty.



## UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF PURPOSE

Like an Ant

*The trouble with so many of us is that we underestimate the power of simplicity. We have a tendency, it seems, to overcomplicate our lives and forget what's important and what's not. We tend to mistake movement for achievement. We tend to focus on activities instead of results. And as the pace of life continues to race along in the outside world, we forget that we have the power to control our lives regardless of what's going on outside.*

—ROBERT STUBERG



**M**Y FEET HIT THE GROUND running as the alarm went off at 6 a.m. There was no time to think about anything except being the first one in the bathroom for my coveted long, hot, luxurious shower. This would probably be the only pampering and quiet time I would get all day, so I wanted to make it last as long as possible. It was just another frantic day in the Conley household, with a mental “to do” list that had me on the verge of tears just thinking about it.

# 2

## UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF FRIENDSHIP Heart Connections

*The greatest sweetener of human life is friendship. To raise this to the highest pitch of enjoyment is a secret which but few discover.*

—JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719)

BRITISH ESSAYIST, POET, AND STATESMAN

*I* WAS DOUBLED OVER, and the tears were streaming down my face. The laughter was coming so fast and hard that I was gulping to catch my breath. It was the second night at a women's retreat, and it was almost 2:30 in the morning. My new friend Bea and I should have been asleep, but we had found a common ground in our conversation and did not want to lose the magic of the moment.

One of the reasons Bea Stinner and I had come to this retreat weekend was that we were both looking for a new Christian friend. By coincidence, we ended up sharing a room. What a surprise to learn that



we both were the products of a traditional German upbringing. Vivid memories of our childhood returned as we shared hilarious stories and mimicked the different German accents. Once the laughter had simmered down, we discovered that both of us had a longing to develop knowledge and experience in our spiritual journeys. Amid the silly laughter and the authenticity of our shared spiritual longings, we discovered the embryo of a *heart-connection* friendship.

Fourteen months later, we doubled over again, but this time it was with the sobs of disbelief, brought on by grief. When the policeman showed up at my door in the middle of the night to tell me that my husband had died on the basketball floor, one of the first things he said to me was, “Mrs. Conley, you have to call a friend. You need someone to be with you and drive you to the morgue.” This is one of those crisis points in our lives when we discover the reality of our friendships. Who do you call in the middle of the night when you have received the worst news of your life?

During that entire night and the days to come, I learned the value of friendship. Bea never left my side for that entire night. She insisted that I call my children right away, despite my concerns about awakening them, because she knew it was the right thing to do. It was comforting to know that someone was doing my thinking for me. She brewed tea, held my hands, and wiped away my tears while we waited for the sun to come up.

In the days that followed, other friends from all over Alberta and British Columbia showed up at my door with tears, hugs, and words of love. After the funeral service, our best friends served as the pallbearers who carried Dick’s casket out of the church. His dearest friends who carried him through many turbulent times in his life now lovingly carried him to his final resting place. My two darling children never left my side, and together we watched the power of love pour from our friends and family. It is absolutely true that during those times in our lives when we are bereft of all comfort and consumed with anguish, our friends become the manifest loving and comforting arms of God.

There is a powerful drive within women to have intimate, loving friendships. God created us to have deep, close relationships, and our hearts yearn for them because there is a void within us that needs to be filled. While we are living in our human bodies, it makes sense that the

ones who can satisfy that emptiness are the ones who are wired the same as we are: other women. Our brains function the same way, and it is almost like we even have a secret language. We can ask our girlfriend, “How are you today?” and she will answer, “Fine.” By the expression on her face and the tone of her voice, we can tell what that word “fine” really means. It can mean any of the following:

- My life is crazy, but I’m holding it together.
- I’ve just about come to the end of my rope.
- I’m just so-so.
- I had the most amazing thing happen to me today.
- I’m depressed.
- Things have never been better; I’m on top of the world.

No one else in the world is able to de-code one word and receive that many different messages, but women can. A landmark UCLA study suggests that friendships between women are indeed special and have more power than we ever imagined:

“Friendships are also helping us live better. The famed Nurses’ Health Study from Harvard Medical School found that the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged, and the more likely they were to be leading a joyful life. In fact, the results were so significant, the researchers concluded, that not having close friends or confidants was as detrimental to your health as smoking or carrying extra weight.

And that’s not all. When the researchers looked at how well women functioned after the death of their spouse, they found that even in the face of this biggest stressor of all, those women who had a close friend and confidante were more likely to survive the experience without any new physical impairments or permanent loss of vitality. Those without friends were not always so fortunate.”<sup>7</sup>

This is the kind of friendship we are all looking for—something so beautiful and intimate that it will make us laugh and cry until the tears

are rolling down our faces. We long for it to heal us during our pain, affirm our self-worth, allow us to share those dirty, ugly secrets that we can't tell other people, and stick with us through our joyful times. We need a friendship that eliminates isolation and loneliness and keeps us sane by allowing us to be who we need to be at every stage of our lives.

Every person shares these three deep, inner longings:

1. I wish somebody would listen to me without giving me a solution.
2. I wish someone would believe me. Don't judge me to see if I am lying; just believe me and validate my feelings.
3. I wish someone would be there for me. No matter what I am going through, I need to know I have someone at my side.

We want someone we can have a rapport with; be ourselves with; share our trust, values, and dreams; and who will love us anyway.

I call this a *heart-connection friendship*.

## HEART-CONNECTION FRIENDSHIP

The word friendship in Greek is *philia*, which involves “the idea of loving as well as being loved.”<sup>8</sup>

When my children were lonely, they would ask me how to find a new friend. To their chagrin, I always quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, “*The only way to have a friend is to be one.*”<sup>9</sup> They would groan and walk away, hoping each time that I would come up with an easier solution. The fact is, however, that there is nothing easier. In order to have the loving, intimate relationship we are looking for, we need to go out of our way to search for it and cultivate it. We like the idea of *being loved in a friendship*, but how do we find it?

### 1. Pray, watch and listen.

Whatever stage of life you are at on your life's journey, what you love to do in your free time and what makes you laugh are two factors that will

determine who your new friends will be. Make it a top priority to find a new friend. We all hope for that magical moment when we meet our new friend without any effort on our part. This can happen in ways we don't anticipate, such as sharing a common experience like a disaster. After I moved to Kelowna, I *prayed* that God would give me new friends in this unfamiliar city. When I heard there was a women's retreat coming up, I registered for it right away because I wanted to grow in my spiritual journey. I also knew that this would be a good place to find a friend with whom I could share common interests. I actually made several friends that weekend who are still a part of my life to this day.

*Watch* the women around you. Who laughs at the same things you do? Who is in the same stage of life as you are? Who loves to read the same books or watch the same movies as you? If you are a runner or hiker, a writer or golfer, or a mother or grandmother, eventually you will find those other women who are passionate about the same things you are. Never forget the fact that God may have placed a friend right under your nose. She may have been there all along, but you did not even realize that she could be your dearest friend. Now, it just takes some extra initiative to go after her and get to know her even better.

*Listen* to what women are saying about their heritage, values, stage of life, or what they do in their spare time, along with how they are saying it. Listening can be one of our most valuable tools for finding a new friend.

When we focus on the interests and feelings of other women, they will stop long enough to take a second look. Dee Brestin tells us in her book, *The Friendships of Women*, “...women who have contagious laughs, words of encouragement, and warm and caring smiles are the ones who find themselves magnetically drawing others.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, some women immerse themselves in so many social activities, Bible studies, church ministries, or a whirl of parties that there is never an opportunity to establish a close relationship. We need to devote ourselves instead to cultivating deep friendships.

To this end, we must intentionally focus on *loving others as well as being loved*. By *praying, watching, and listening*, we will draw women to us so that we can develop beautiful friendships.

## 2. *Be authentic.*

I believe a lack of authentic transparency is our biggest obstacle to developing strong friendships. We want the intimacy, but, at the same time, we are afraid to let people know who we really are. We can't have intimacy, however, without authenticity. In order to have a *heart-connection friendship*, we have to allow ourselves to be transparent enough for someone to see our *hearts*. Many of us are afraid that we will be rejected if people find out what we are really like. We are afraid that they will discover that we are not as smart as we've pretended to be, that we have things we are ashamed of, or that we have other deep-seated issues of insecurity.

What if we take off our masks and disclose ourselves, only for that friend to walk away?

But, we still have to let down our defenses of shyness and fear, and feelings of unworthiness, stupidity, shame, or guilt. When we put away our pretenses, eliminate the empty small talk, and remove the fake smile, we are drawn to each other. Finally, we have found someone who has the same insecurities we are experiencing, so we can begin to share our life stories with them. As we laugh, cry, and hug, we will create authentic friendships.

Being authentic also gives the other person permission to be vulnerable. Dee Brestin says in her book:

“Vulnerability not only hastens bonding, it can embolden a hurting person to open a festering wound that needs to be opened. A godly woman told me, ‘Sometimes, when I am aware that it would be helpful to a friend to open up to me about a problem, but sense hesitancy, I’ll lead the way by making myself vulnerable. I’ll share where I am hurting or failing.’”<sup>11</sup>

I strongly believe strong friendships are forged more often during painful times or disasters because they are periods during which no one has the time or energy to pretend. We can wail in pain, show our anger, and share the common goal of helping each other. By showing who we really are, a *heart-connection* is formed.

## 3. *Time.*

Even though time is our most valuable commodity these days, it is also the enemy that prevents our friendships from being formed and nurtured. A recent UCLA study arrived at this insightful conclusion:

“Every time we get overly busy with work and family, the first thing we do is let go of friendships with other women,’ explains Dr. Josselson. ‘We push them right to the back burner. That’s really a mistake because women are such a source of strength to each other. We nurture one another. And we need to have unpressured space in which we can do the special kind of talk that women do when they’re with other women. It’s a very healing experience.’”<sup>12</sup>

We absolutely have to make time for our friendships. It has to be an intentional, uninterrupted period of time when we are not feeling rushed, or not always checking for messages on our cell phone or BlackBerry. In order for us to share deep matters of the heart, it has to be a safe place where we can hear each other, look into each other's eyes, and communicate without feeling like we are taking time away from their next appointment. It also has to be a two-way street, with both of us sharing in each other's lives.

In today's hectic world, where we feel pulled in so many different directions and sometimes even feel overwhelmed with all of our responsibilities, we need to get serious about setting time aside for people if we want to cultivate meaningful friendships.

Make a commitment with your girlfriends to spend some time together. Perhaps you can agree to meet for dinner or lunch once or twice a month. How about planning a weekend away, or a retreat? E-mail can be a solution when personal contact is not possible, but embraces and eye-to-eye conversation are still the most powerful ingredients to keep a friendship vibrant and healthy.

## 4. *Bring out the best in each other.*

Friends have the ability to empower each other in ways that no one else can. Once we have reached that place where we can be authentic and

trust each other, we have reached a pinnacle of power in our relationship. This is a place of safety where we can kindly point out each other's faults without feeling destroyed. Wise King Solomon tells us that, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov.27:17 NIV).

Friends have the power to *sharpen* each other in many ways:

- They can encourage us to pursue our creativity.
- They affirm our hopes and dreams.
- They warn us when we are going down the wrong path.
- They validate our feelings when we are feeling exhausted or overwhelmed.
- Friends pray for each other to bring out God's best in their lives.
- Friends bring an added sharpness or clarity to new ideas or passions.
- They stimulate and challenge us to grow in our spiritual journey.
- They are the ones who can assure us that we are not horrible mothers.
- They can tell us when our egos are getting in the way.
- Friends can instill self-confidence and affirm our self-worth.
- They can stick with us despite our mistakes and failures.
- Friends can gently point out our faults.
- They see the potential of who we can become in the Lord.

Ghandi inspired millions of people to go beyond their human limits to accomplish unheard-of feats. In his book, *The Friendship Factor*, Alan Loy McGinnis observes, "He refused to see the bad in people. He often changed human beings by regarding them not as what they were but as though they were what they wished to be, and as though the good in them was all of them."<sup>13</sup>

We need for someone to tell us when we are doing something well so that we will be inspired to go further. We also require a second set of eyes on our spiritual journey to warn us when we deviate from our path of obedience to God, admonish us when we have spoken unkind words, or remind us when we need to forgive. I believe that often God uses our *heart-connection* friends to reveal truths to us that we are too proud or

blind to see. True friends are the ones who use this power to help us—not destroy us.

### 5. *Commitment.*

When I ask women what they long for in friendships, they tell me over and over again: trust and loyalty. *Loyalty* is defined as, "Faithful to one's oath, commitments, or obligations; faithful to any person or thing conceived of as deserving fidelity or imposing obligations."<sup>14</sup>

This is something we all need in our friendships because we can't find it in the world around us. When we find someone who cares enough to call us a friend, do we not *deserve* her loyalty?

I also treasure this quality and am blessed to have several loyal friends. One of these friends is my dearest Fran. We met in Africa in 1981 while on a business trip with our husbands. (It was one of those divinely appointed times that we could never fully understand. We felt something tugging at our hearts and found ourselves being propelled toward a relationship that we knew was meant to be magnificent.) It started with light-hearted bantering back and forth as so many friendships do, but soon all this changed. As we explored the rustic, enchanting countryside of Africa, we also took bold and exciting steps of faith to venture into each other's hearts. As we began to explore our spiritual beliefs, our children, and our passions, our hearts started to connect.

After the trip was over and we landed at the Calgary, Alberta, airport, we all enthused about what a wonderful time we had and that we should get together again. How many times have we heard those words? "Hey, let's do lunch some time," or "You know, we should get together soon." Fran's greatest gift in her friendship to me is loyalty, and she did make that promised phone call.

When my husband died, Bob and Fran, of course, were the first people on my doorstep. Before they left to fly back to their home in Calgary, Fran assured me: "Heidi, I am far away and I don't know how else I can help you, but I will call you every day." The phone rang every day for an entire month. Sometimes when I answered the phone, all she would hear was my sobbing, so she wept with me.

There is no greater gift we can give our friends than our loyalty to

them through both the good times and during adversity. We need our friends to put us first by allowing us to share our deepest longings and wildest fears and then trust them with that information. We need someone to stick with us like Ruth in the biblical story.

Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons had to move to the foreign country of Moab because there was a famine in their own land of Judah. While living there, her two sons married Moabite women. Over the course of time, Naomi's husband and two sons died. Now, she was in a foreign land, all alone except for her two daughter-in-laws. When Naomi said she was going back to her homeland of Judah, her daughters wanted to go with her. She protested with both of them and told them to stay in Moab. Orpah agreed and remained in Moab, but Ruth would not leave Naomi all alone. I believe that Ruth's response has ignited the hearts of women everywhere:

“But Ruth replied, ‘Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me’”(Ruth 1:16, 17 NIV).

When any of us are in a difficult situation, we want someone who will walk alongside of us and say, “I'll be there for you.” We long to have someone that committed to us. This is the kind of loyalty that both empowers us to survive adversity and forms life-long friendships.

### 6. *We need a third person.*

I suggest that the third person in our relationships needs to be God. A deep friendship involves *hearts connecting*. Who can connect hearts other than the one who created them, knows what is in them, and knows how to fill them with love and restore their pain? For us to have that *heart-connection friendship*, we need a third person. On our own, we are not able to be loving, loyal, trustworthy, and forgiving. When three people are involved, there is more help and power available to help us in our

pursuit and maintenance of that great friendship. King Solomon reminds us again:

“Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one for the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble. Also, on a cold night, two under the same blanket gain warmth from each other, but how can one be warm alone? And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back to back and conquer; *three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken*” (Eccles. 4:9-12 NIV).

When we have the ingredients of a deep friendship and add the power of the Holy Spirit to it, we have a *triple-braided cord that cannot be broken*. We need to possess spiritual grace that will help us overcome misunderstandings, rejections, betrayals, harsh words, and competition. We need to be able to go to God in prayer when we go through difficult times such as misunderstandings or feeling betrayed. One of us may be struggling through depression or some kind of a deep loss in their lives, and we may not be able to pick each other up unless we have the power of God to pull us through that time. We need God's love to affirm our self-worth and help us fend off the insidious enemies of comparison and jealousy. We need God's mercy when our friend has said hurtful words that just want to make us walk away forever. We need God's forgiveness when we have turned our back on our friend, and she in turn has stabbed us. We cannot do a *heart-connection friendship* alone. We need a third person with us: God.

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE if we could stop right here and soak in the warmth and love of discovering and savoring that perfect friendship? Unfortunately, that is not a reality in this life. There is no way to have an authentic, close relationship without some conflict along the way. We are women with deep longings and different personalities who are all trying to establish our sense of significance. We all bring old garbage into our relationship. Even though we may hide it inside our



beautiful designer Prada baggage, it is still garbage nonetheless. This unwelcome intruder will emerge during times of stress, miscommunication, and complete openness, when we are laying our hearts on the table. Part of the beauty of becoming vulnerable and authentic can also be the very thing that can destroy a relationship. Once we are aware that conflict is simply part of life, we don't need to run away from it, but rather embrace it to help us grow stronger. We all need to feel safe in every aspect of our lives. Once something happens in any relationship to threaten that safety, we'll experience conflict.

## HEART CONNECTIONS

### 1. *The comparing game.*

It's one thing to say that we want to bring out the best in each other, but beware when one person accomplishes more than you. We may not be aware that we have feelings of jealousy until something brings them out of the dark shadows that they were lurking in. One of the things that help our friendships to grow are common experiences and shared interests. We like it best, however, when we are all on the same level. Jealousy can rise up when our friend experiences blessings such as new job promotions, economic successes, improvements in looks, more dating prospects, achievements of their children, and growth in their spiritual journey. This toxic feeling will destroy a relationship if it is not discussed and dealt with.

When we were growing up, we were all taught to compete. We were told to get the best grades and excel in athletics. On top of that, we desired to be the most popular and prettiest girl in our class. There is a difference, however, between competing *for something* or competing *against someone*. Immaturity and jealousy comes when we direct our energies to compete *against someone*.

Jealousy can destroy our friendship, but it can also destroy our own soul. Proverbs 27:4 warns us that "jealousy is more dangerous and cruel than anger" (TLB).

Jealously is the same right-brain emotion that springs from feelings of compassion and affection. These originally good feelings become danger-

ous when they shift into negative emotions so ugly that they keep us awake at night, put poison into our words, cause us to gossip, and ultimately destroy the relationship. We all know what jealousy feels like because at some point in our lives, we have all experienced its bitter taste.

David Foster, in his book, *The Power to Prevail*, explains jealousy this way:

"Jealousy is like a low-level hum in your ears, like hearing voices of dissatisfaction deep down in your soul that refuse to be stilled and cannot be satisfied. At times, jealousy will feel like a low-grade fever; at others, like a raging paranoia that robs you of rest. It creates a restless tension full of whispered lies that, if repeated often enough, sound real. Sometimes it sounds like a background noise, faint and constant, but other times it erupts like a marching band blaring our Dolby stereo, 'You deserve more and they deserve less!'"<sup>15</sup>

How do we get rid of this ugly, all-consuming toxic bile?

First of all, we need to be honest about how we feel. Until we accept the fact that we are jealous, we cannot see the ugliness of it. I believe most of all jealousy arises because we perceive that someone has an advantage over us. Jealousy also indicates that we are feeling insecure in our relationship with that person, as well as in our relationship with God. When we have a beautiful, intimate relationship with our heavenly Father, we are aware that God works differently in people in various times. We understand that *our time will come*. This is not our time for a raise, a special appointment, or financial success. God works everything out according to His timetable, not ours.

We have to show wisdom in how we disclose our feelings of jealousy to our friend. I am not sure there is ever a time in our lives when we are completely healed from this ugly disease. On several occasions, friends have confided that they *were* jealous of me, but they are no longer. This was one of those times when a friend's feelings were probably better left unshared because from that point on, I have felt like I am walking on eggshells whenever I am around them. Those jealous feelings may have departed for a while, but knowing our sinful human nature, I realize that

there will be an event when that green-eyed monster will appear once again. I just don't know where or when.

The power of jealousy dissipates only when we are secure in our identity and relationship with God. I personally know that I do not want to feel any jealousy about anything or toward anyone. In order to accomplish this, I have to remind myself that God has a perfect plan for *my* life, and it doesn't look the same as the one for my friends. God knows what is best for us, and maybe we are just not ready to receive what our friend just got. You might even feel that your friend did not even *deserve* this wonderful thing that has happened to her. We have to trust that God knows what He is doing and that His timing is always perfect.

In his book, *Love Beyond Reason*, John Ortberg says, "I do not like the envy in me. I would make it go away if I could. But I cannot stop envying by trying harder. Envy can only be healed when we live as one who has been chosen by God."<sup>16</sup>

You and I need to realize that God chose us even before the foundations of the earth were laid. Knowing about that kind of love is the power that sustains us when we want to compare ourselves with others. If we get caught up in comparisons, we are really asking God who He loves more: you or me. When we are secure in our love relationship with our heavenly Father, we begin to realize that there is enough love to go around. Let's not hold back, but rather rejoice when our friends are blessed.

It seems that it is easier to mourn with our friends rather than to be happy with them, but the Bible tells us to rejoice with our friends. "When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow" (Rom. 12:15 TLB). If you find this difficult to do, pray and ask God to help you.

## 2. *Expectations.*

Hope plays a huge part in relationships. From the moment our friendship begins, each person involved has different expectations. Every morning that you and I wake up, we hope for something good and wonderful to happen. Friendships are the one place where we feel we can expect to find some of that hope fulfilled.

We need to be realistic about our assumptions of what the other person can bring into the relationship. Nothing will turn a person off faster than voicing premature expectations of life-long commitments and activities. It is imperative, however, that we express differing personal views before going on a trip or a shopping spree, doing a Bible study together, or even incorporating her into our own family dynamics. We need to make sure, for example, that she is not going to flirt with our husbands, fight over religion, or expect to be invited to all the family gatherings. When we have expectations that the other person does not know about, or is unable or not interested in fulfilling, it will quickly cause us to feel unloved and build resentment.

You also have to be bold and honest enough with your friend to find out what type of expectations she holds for the relationship. These may be ones that you are unable or unwilling to fulfill.

- She may be expecting you to mentor her.
- She may be looking to you to fill a God-void in her life.
- She may be looking for a mother figure.
- She may be expecting you to spend more time with her than you are willing to give.
- She may be looking to you to fill neediness in her life that comes out of a wounded heart.

Some expectations within a friendship are simply not healthy. When you realize that someone demands that you do things which are morally wrong, such as taking drugs or going to R-rated movies, or tries to force you to give them constant attention that you are unable to provide, this is a good time to sever the relationship. Letting unhealthy relationships continue will only cause a lot of unnecessary disillusionment and pain.

## 3. *Betrayal.*

The things that we desire the most will hurt us the most when we don't get them. One of the things that women need most in a friendship is our loyalty. When we invest our time, emotions, and love in a person, we

need to know that we can trust them. This is probably why we are so hurt by betrayal. We feel that we *deserved* to be treated better than that.

When I speak to women about pain in their girlfriend relationships, the common thread is that “*trust was broken.*” This can be due to your friend breaking a confidence or a promise, flirting with your husband or boyfriend, spreading gossip, lying to you, or saying something that was inappropriate. We also feel betrayed when we are criticized or judged. The emotional pain that this can cause is excruciating; subsequently, the friendship will need a lot of repair. In order to bring healing into this relationship, we need to accept the fact that because we are all still sinners, we will all fail each other at one time or another.

Jesus had spent three years with His twelve disciples. When He needed them the most, some of them betrayed Him. His disciple Judas actually kissed Him on the cheek before turning him over to the authorities for a few pieces of silver. This is a man whom Jesus taught and with whom He shared His passions and even His last meal.

Betrayal is part of life, but humanly, it is not easy to overlook. Forgiveness is supernatural and only flows from the power of the Holy Spirit working it out in us. Betrayal must be dealt with through supernatural powers of forgiveness; there is simply no other way to heal that kind of hurt.

## FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

It puts a smile on my face to know that at my age I am going to be a bridesmaid *again*. My best friend Shaunie is getting married for the first time, and I have been chosen to be her matron of honor. I am so proud of her, and I consider it to be such an honor to be a part of her wedding party. If this wedding had happened five years ago, I may not have been chosen.

Shaunie and I met in 1993, and our relationship has been one that is so deep and beautiful that we’ve called it a *heart-connection friendship*. It has all the right ingredients, so we realize that it has been a gift from God and ordained by Him. One of the things that attracted me to her right

away was her laughter, her love for God, her loyalty, kindness, and fun-loving spirit.

This is what Shaunie has to say about our friendship:

“True friendship has involved the offering of unconditional love. It has been the acceptance of who I am as an individual and the encouragement to be the best that I can be. It has been a relationship of trust—both given and received. With trust as a key component, only on that basis can we embrace the times when accountability is necessary. It is the excitement of seeing each other’s visions, dreams, and desires come to fruition. It is the times of laughter—sometimes when we’re not even sure about what—and the times of just listening to each other and often crying together. It is that listening ear and the words of wisdom. *It is that commitment to pray for each other.*”

It was that last sentence which saved our beautiful relationship in August of 2001. While we were having lunch in a quaint Victorian restaurant in Langley, British Columbia, Shaunie said words to me that were unkind and very hurtful. Realizing I was deeply hurt, she promised to call me that night. Her promise helped somewhat, but my trust was destroyed when she did not call that night. As a matter of fact, I did not hear from her for two and a half weeks. By then, anger had started to burn in my heart, and I was at the point of letting the friendship dissolve. I knew I needed to forgive because that was not an option, but first I needed to get over my anger and get on with living.

When we finally talked on the phone, we decided to give each other more time. Soon after that, we made an agreement to start communicating by e-mail. We made a decision to work this out, not by fighting with each other, but by *fighting the good fight*. There is a huge difference. We need to be able to make the same declaration as Paul when his life was finished here on earth: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7 NIV).

In order to *fight the good fight* in our friendship, we had to:



- Step into each other's shoes to feel each other's pain.
- Confront and be honest about what hurt us.
- Continue loving each other unconditionally.
- Give each other time.
- Both stay committed to this process.
- Realize we could not change each other. We each had to change.
- Make it our goal to save our friendship, not to make accusations about who was wrong.
- Pray and ask God to remove my anger.
- *Forgive.*

We knew we had to forgive, not just from the head, but also from the heart. When we forgive with just words, it is just an intellectual response to hurt; instead, we need God's help when we are involved in a heart matter. I asked God to help me to forgive Shaunie in the same way that He forgave all of mankind: "Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NIV).

We frequently say and do things from our own wounded hearts that hurt others, so we must be aware of our own painful emotional experiences when betrayal and rejection come our way. Sometimes our wounds are still so raw that the hurtful words that blurt out of our mouth are simply an overflow of that pain. When we ask God to heal our past pain, however, He can turn our anger and despair into a miracle.

God is the only one who can help us forgive, but it takes our prayers to accomplish that, along with the determination and communication of all parties involved. In time, healing *will* come.

Almost five months after our devastating luncheon, Shaunie came to Kelowna to visit. As we looked into each other's eyes, we knew the forgiveness process had been completed. There was no anger and no residual hurt. There was forgiveness, new joy, and a deeper love, as well as real appreciation for what might have been discarded. To this very day, we still treasure and guard our friendship with respect, honesty, and unconditional love. Keeping a relationship going can be hard work at times because it doesn't always come naturally, but in the end, the rewards can be *priceless*.

## SEASONS OF FRIENDSHIP

I believe that some friendships are meant to last for a lifetime, while others are meant to be in our life for only a season. God knows when we need something, so He uses human beings to be His hands and feet on this earth.

It is true that women's priorities change, people move away, and occupations disrupt the flow of time spent together, so we may feel that a friendship has run its course. There are also times when one person loses interest and is no longer committed to the relationship. Sometimes people just drift apart for no apparent reason. There are times to let friendships go, but before we let them go, we must always check our motives. If there is unresolved hurt or anger, it must be dealt with before we separate. We are all going to stand before our holy God someday to account for all our words and actions, so we must be certain that we are ending a friendship with a pure heart.

We never want to stand before another human being or God with regret in our hearts. We need to make sure we live life without regrets. Two of the saddest words that I often hear are, "*If only...*" If you can bless that person as you are letting them go, then I believe that friendship season has come to an end.

## UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF FRIENDSHIP

For a woman, there is nothing more precious and valuable than a *heart-connection friend*, and we all long for one. I believe that God has placed us in relationships so that we can learn to become more like His Son. God uses other people in our lives to not only bring out the beautiful aspects of our lives, but our ugliness as well.

A woman of beauty allows the difficult seasons of friendship to make her even more beautiful. In order for *iron to sharpen iron*, sparks have to fly, due to the great amount of heat that is necessary to bring about the desired result. When these sparks start flying, however, many want to run away as fast as they can, but a woman of beauty sees this as an opportunity to allow

God to teach her and change her. This is also how great friendships are strengthened and forged.

Most of us are afraid of conflict of any kind because we know it will involve emotional pain. In every conflict situation where people are fighting against each other, there is always a winner or a loser: somebody will get hurt.

As a woman of beauty, you have the courage to be all who God created you to be: loving, kind, forgiving, and full of His marvelous grace. With that kind of Holy Spirit-power in your life, you do not have to win the arguments in your friendships. You can be the one to mercifully let it go and desperately run after God's grace instead. You're through with getting caught in the comparison trap that forces you to compete and be jealous because you now value relationship over winning.

Difficult times of suffering teach us to accept God's grace and forgiveness for ourselves, but we have to remember that it is not just for us. Believe it or not, it is also for the ones who betray us, reject us, and talk behind our backs.

I long for you to emerge from your pain and struggles the same way a beautiful butterfly comes out of its chrysalis. Often early in the morning, *light* stimulates the butterfly to begin its struggle to escape from its gossamer cocoon. This painful process strengthens the butterfly and enables it to fly.

I am asking you to allow the *light* (the radiant love and grace of God) to stimulate you amidst your struggles so that you will be *strengthened* and become more beautiful over time with each relationship you form.

A woman of beauty also acknowledges that in friendships:

- She may only have one or two intimate friends in her entire lifetime.
- There is risk involved.
- Her greatest relationship will be with Jesus.
- Reconciliation takes two people.
- She has a lot to offer other women.

While we are living our lives here on earth, God is preparing us for heaven. I truly believe that life is not about accomplishing things, but

rather how much we learn about unconditional love in our relationships. Our friendships become the greatest opportunities to know and experience God's love and grace in our lives.

I trust that we will treasure each other on the journey. Our friendships are gifts from God: you are a gift from God to someone else. Two hearts connecting with God make for a *heart-connection friendship*.

## *Stop and ask God to Unleash Your Beauty*

**Begin by asking:** God, where I have allowed comparisons or envy to cause pain in a relationship? God, how do I make this right?

**S—Scripture:** “Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love makes up for many of your faults” (1 Peter 4:8 TLB).

**T—Thanksgiving:** Thank You, God, that love and laughter cover so many faults. Thank You for being such a kind, merciful, and forgiving God. Help me to show a dark and hurting world the power of forgiveness in friendships. Thank You for being the author and teacher of forgiveness. Make me Your most eager and successful student.

**O—Observation:** We live in conflict every day. Everyone does things in different ways, and people have irritating faults. Forgiveness and loving one another is not an option. We need to be obedient to God and forgive every time someone hurts us.

**P—Prayer:** God, thank You for making women such amazing, delightful, and fun creatures. Thank You for the joy and laughter of relationships. Thank You for tears that can express pain or triumph. God, teach me to be a great friend. I have so much to learn about relationships, such as overcoming comparisons and allowing You to work goodness out in everyone's life in Your timing. Thank You for loving us all equally and pouring Your blessings out on us in different ways and at different times.

I ask that You would reveal to me the natural talents You have given me so that I can begin to enjoy them and share the delight of them with other friends. Help to bring beauty into relationships and not pain. Quicken my heart and hold me accountable when I am about to break a promise, say an unkind word, make a judgment, or criticize. Help me to bring out the best in each woman that crosses my path. Amen.

## 3

## UNLEASHING THE BEAUTY OF LOVE

### Annoying People in My Mirror

*“Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays.”*

—ANDREW MURRAY

I

CAN STILL REMEMBER where I was sitting and what my voice sounded like when I prayed, “God, draw me closer into Your presence. Make me more like You. Teach me to love others with the unconditional love that only comes from You.” Since that time, I’ve discovered that this is a dangerous prayer. We need to be very bold when we pray these words and get ready to put on our hiking boots, because we are going on a field trip over unknown terrain.

I had no qualms about praying that prayer with such courage, because I felt very confident about the way I loved everyone in my life: the employees at my office, the people in my church, the friends in our neighborhood, and, of course, the easiest—my family and intimate friends. I was in safe territory, just as long as I did not have to talk to any car salesmen.