

Supporting women

by Vickie Shurelds

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.

Proverbs 22:24–25 Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare. (NRSV)

Whenever I think of friendship among women, my mind instantly goes to the painting of two young girls playing in a field of yellow flowers. By the tilt of their heads you can sense their joy at just being together with the first person they've found to be a perfect match to what they know of their own true selves.

As I watch the young girls in our youth group try to figure out the friendship thing, I'm fascinated. They hug, hold hands, look into each other's eyes, play on their DS's with their heads together—full-force giving each other open advantage to their innermost selves. Then, the inevitable moment of betrayal occurs. Over a boy, or a misunderstood statement, or a broken promise; and the whole world crumbles. From that moment on, although there are tears, forgiveness and hugs, the friendship has changed. The tears shed are in acknowledgment of the loss of innocence. The mustard seed-size loss of faith.

My best friend from first grade into early adulthood was Julaine. We shared so much. We were both intelligent African American girls in a school that was 98% Caucasian, so our teachers were baffled. We played games that no one else understood—for instance, our library competition game.

We'd go to the public library and start at opposite ends of a randomly chosen row of books, grab ten books, and begin to read. We each had to read the book, and then give each other a report of what we read, so we could track the progress honestly. The row had to be finished in one week; when we met in the middle, we'd move on to the next row. No one else could know about the game because then they'd know how geeky we really were. It was our secret, and I was so happy to find another person as weird as I was, someone who shared my love of reading and knowledge. This secret bond Julaine and I shared helped us get through the bullying we were subjected to at school. We were saved from the humiliation of not being picked for recess games, because we didn't need

to play with others; we were content to sit around the corner of the building, away from our classmates, reading, laughing, and giving each other the strength to be who we were.

I've met many other women throughout my life, but none of them ever reached that place inside me that holds my truest self. As I write this, my eyes fill with tears again and again as I remember the time I spent with another human who really knew me, and liked me anyway.

Ironically, we both ended up marrying into abusive relationships, and looking back, I wonder if we had remained close, if we would have been able to help each other through those horrible times. Would the support of a true friend have helped us feel strong enough not to be a victim?

PONDER

- 1. Am I the solid support of a friend that allows them to be free to reveal their true self to me?*
- 2. Do I have the support of a friend I trust to know my true self?*
- 3. How do I demonstrate to the young people in my life the value of being a treasured friend?*

Last year, I met Denise Brown, sister of the late Nicole Simpson. We had quite a conversation about the abuse her sister endured prior to her murder. I spoke with Denise of the disturbing pattern I was beginning to see among some of the young teen girls I was teaching as they wore bruises from abusive relationships like badges of honor. She expressed how she thought Nicole understood how much Denise was willing to support her sister, but Denise never knew extent of Nicole's circumstances until after her death. She believes that Nicole still felt she was alone and without a strong enough support system to change her situation.

The support of a female friend that understands our true nature can be a critical mechanism to keep us safe.

Prayer: Precious Lord, bring me to the understanding of ways I may reach out to women in need of my support. Provide within me a safe haven for their thoughts, fears, dreams and aspirations, so they may feel that they do have, right here on earth, a person who can see them through the eyes of God. 🙏