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**AN INTROVERT'S GUIDE
TO FRIENDSHIP**

afton rorvik



Birmingham, Alabama

Living Connected: An Introvert's Guide to Friendship

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DEDICATION

To Mudder

Your gift of approaching people inspires me.
Your deep faith in God and your determination
to practice gratitude do too.

To Mom

You claimed the title of “introvert” but still
managed to have “700 friends.”
I watched and learned and marveled. Grateful!

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Thank you, God, for wiring me as an introvert. I cherish this gift.

Preface

How do we make and keep friends? And how do we who call ourselves introverts step outside our quiet worlds and reach for others?

I have wrestled with these questions for decades and read everything I could find about friendship (that is what we introverts do). I have also promised myself that I will work on friendships. Friendships breathe life and color into my life. My friends provide balance and perspective. They keep me honest. They help me fight depression.

Some of you might come from families where relationships inside and outside the family just seemed to add layer upon layer of stress. You may have concluded that relationships of any type just don't seem worth the effort. You haven't seen any that give you hope.

Or maybe you find yourself in the thick of busy years with a career and/or family. You scarcely have time to sleep. And yet you long for some time to spend with a friend. You vaguely remember that you used to enjoy that.

Perhaps you, like me, have an empty nest and suddenly have more time for yourself and for friendships.

Wherever you find yourself on the road to building friendships, you will find encouragement and practical thinking here. And maybe even a few laughs.

After the publication of my first book, *Storm Sisters*, in 2014, I received emails and comments on social media from many readers who said something that surprised me: "I like the idea of a Storm Sister, a friend

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who sticks around when life gets hard, but before I find that Storm Sister, I need to have a sister, a friend. How do I do that? How do I find friends?”

Headlines in our news about the raging epidemic of loneliness throughout our world echo these comments from my readers. And the COVID-19 pandemic certainly added an additional layer to that epidemic of loneliness.

The day I signed the contract for this book in March 2020, our state government issued a stay-at-home proclamation because of the COVID-19 virus. What irony to write about friendship in a climate of isolation and social distancing!

As I write these chapters, I wonder how this pandemic period of social isolation will affect our lonely world. Will we simply adjust and adapt to living socially distant? Or will we realize at the core of our beings what a gift we have in real-life connection and become even more committed than ever to pursuing relationships? Only time will tell.

Oh, how I hope we will become people who hunger for and pursue real-life connection. Even we introverts!

I have come to believe in friendship as one of God's greatest gifts. And so, I write this book to peel off some of the wrapping paper on God's good gift of friendship and help you start enjoying it as I have.

Thanks for joining me on this pursuit to live connected. Cheering you on!

Introduction

For most of my life, I have viewed my “quiet soul” as a liability.

And then I discovered Susan Cain’s profoundly thoughtful book *Quiet*, I began to think differently about my introversion. In fact, I began to see my introversion as a gift, particularly in the area of building friendships. What a surprise!

And then I went on to read Adam McHugh’s book, *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Introverted Culture*. I underlined liberally and nodded my head often. I particularly like his definition of introverts: “If your preference is toward your inner world, and even when you are out socializing you are thinking of a quiet place, you win the label ‘introvert.’”¹

For too long I shoved aside my natural, introverted ways and tried to imitate my extroverted friends. Now, rather than trying to ignore my introversion, I recognize it, embrace it, and make changes in my life that accommodate and even enrich it. I feel better!

I don’t write this book as an expert with all the answers; rather, I write this book as a fellow traveler, learning as I go about living connected as an introvert.

When I type the word *introvert* into a search engine on my computer, I see funny cartoons about people having a wonderful night in or people having a strong aversion to talking on the phone. I laugh and nod my head. But then I also see T-shirts and Pinterest quotations that display some version of “I’m an introvert. Go away!” Those images make me wince. On one hand, I

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agree. Living next to people presents challenges and inevitable conflicts. On the other hand, I believe my faith in God calls me to live connected.

I see the power of connection in the Book of Nehemiah as the people of Jerusalem worked *together* to restore their city. I see it in the story of the paralyzed man whose friends brought him to the feet of Jesus for healing as recorded in Mark 2. I see it in 1 Corinthians 12 as Paul described the many parts of the human body to illustrate the connectedness of believers in God.

I can't ignore God's powerful call to living connected. I also can't ignore my internal wiring as an introvert.

So how do I live connected while also living well as an introvert?

I wrestle with this question. Daily.

Of course, I set out to answer this question introvert-style, which included reading a lot of books. I returned to one of the first books I read on friendship: *The Friendship Factor* by Alan Loy McGinnis, published in 1979 and still in print today. I also read books and blogs by current writers.

And I had a lot of one-on-one conversations with people, including my husband and favorite extrovert. He knows that quiet fuels me. I know that people-activity fuels him. We give each other space, time, and respect to grow and live. And we've worked to find common ground. (And yes, we had some adjusting to do when his job moved home during our shelter-in-place order. But that's another story.) We both greatly value our friendship with each other and our friendships with others. We speak often of friendships and how to nurture them. Much of what appears in this book first began as a discussion with John.

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As a result of those discussions in combination with reading, thinking, and praying about my own quiet soul, I've landed on some words that I want to incorporate into my own friendships, words that help me follow God's call to connect: honesty, generosity, approachability, curiosity, empathy, loyalty, confidentiality, consistency, flexibility, creativity, hospitality, and humility.

Some of these words represent great challenge for me. And I bungle in friendship all the time. (Just ask my friends!) But I do hold these words in my head and heart and want them to shape the way I connect, even as an introvert.

- **Honesty**—Francesca Batestelli sings a song titled “If We’re Honest” in which she repeats a line: “I’m a mess and so are you.” What would our friendships look like if we adopted this way of thinking?
- **Generosity**—We introverts can easily get sucked into toxic friendships where we listen most and give most. How would our friendships change and thrive with a mutual mix of openhandedness and openheartedness?
- **Approachability**—My mother-in-law can (and does) talk to anyone. I admire her for it! Walking into a room full of strangers can make me want to run and hide under a blanket. And yet, I have to do this for work and for the sake of those I love who host parties and other events. How can we introverts learn to initiate connections in a quiet, thoughtful sort of way?
- **Curiosity**—Often introverts excel at curiosity. In fact, many of us long for an off switch for our brains that constantly observe and process.

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How can we tap into our natural abilities and build connections through asking thoughtful questions?

- **Empathy**—Because we introverts tend to listen well and think deeply, empathy often comes naturally for us. How can we hone this ability and use it to breathe life into relationships in this age of “me-first”?
- **Loyalty**—These days we mostly use the word *loyalty* to talk about a brand not a friendship. How can we wisely learn to exercise loyalty, but not loyalty at any cost, in relationships?
- **Confidentiality**—Because we introverts tend to spend so much time thinking and processing information before we actually speak, we hold a distinct advantage in the confidentiality department. How and when should we exercise confidentiality as a friendship-building tool?
- **Consistency**—Who of us would not want a friend who says, “When I tell you I will do something with/for you, I will definitely do it. You can count on me”? Introverts often thrive with schedules and routines and can learn quickly the value of acting with predictability in a friendship.
- **Flexibility**—We introverts, who don’t tend to think well on our feet, may struggle greatly with practicing flexibility. I do. How might our friendships grow if we decided to make practicing flexibility a lifetime pursuit?
- **Creativity**—God has drenched our world with color and creativity, something introverts tend to value deeply. How might our love of creativity spill over into relationships and revive or jump-start them?

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- **Hospitality**—Introverts often feel on the fringe, especially in a room full of people. What might happen if we tapped into our natural empathy and let it propel us toward others feeling the same way?
- **Humility**—We introverts can so easily feel less-than, especially in social situations. But what if we truly understood and accepted how God wired us and loved us? How then could we reach out and connect with others?

As my college English professor used to say, “Come with me on this journey!”

Chapter 1

Honesty

I'm a mess and so are you.

—Francesca Battistelli

I didn't mean to say anything; it just popped out of my mouth.

John and I had agreed to meet some friends for lunch, and we had covered the usual topics of jobs and family and vacations. And then, in the middle of dessert, my pain related to a family member's choices spilled out of my mouth.

Splat! Right in the middle of the table and right in the middle of our friendship with this couple.

I wanted to push rewind. I wanted to run out of the restaurant. I wanted to rush on to another topic. But I also felt so weary of pretending everything was “fine.” I just couldn't do it anymore.

John gulped, and we exchanged nervous glances. How would our friends react? Would they find polite ways to back out of future invitations to dinner? Would they feel overwhelmed?

Confront This Age of Image Management

Why do we worry so much about how others perceive us?

Maybe we want people to think well of us. Maybe we do not want to “burden” anyone.

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Maybe we have absorbed the social-media vibe of portraying ourselves in the best possible light at all times.

Image management. We want people to see our best selves.

But how can we develop deep, life-giving friendship if we never get below the surface conversations about work and weather and vacations? If we never reveal our imperfect, not-so-social-media-worthy selves?

A friend shared with me her journey of learning to let go of her need to appear fine. It all started with a self-revelatory conversation she had with a friend.

My friend has been through the journey of grief, of loved ones taken too soon. Her family has been deeply impacted by addiction. She has also experienced the chaos of finances turning her world upside-down and the emotional impact on her heart and on the hearts of those she loves.

As a result, a flame is ignited in the heart of my friend and her husband, as they lead a faith-based recovery group—a small band of those willing to honestly exchange their heartache for healing.

The flame grows as it is passed to others.

One morning, over breakfast, I received the torch. She handed it off after I finally unlocked the secret I had carefully hidden for years: a challenging marriage that I was totally unprepared to handle. All I knew was to hide it, to cover it up with appearances, and to sacrifice my sanity and my soul in the process. While trying to hold everything together—my marriage, my family, my faith—the secret tore me apart. The paste of appearance is unreliable, ineffective, and ultimately, corrosive.

My friend's words, "You are codependent," and her direct advice to join a recovery group launched me on a path toward healing friendships and personal integrity.

I am forever grateful that she honestly shared her story with me. She then became a safe harbor for me to finally forsake the bondage of my secret.

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Since that time, I have been learning to pass the torch of honesty myself. As a member of a support group, I've made the choice to be vulnerable to others by sharing my story. I've noticed that after I open up, it encourages another person to take the risk of authenticity.

The flame is strengthened and fueled. Ready to pass . . . again.¹

Honesty, self-revelation, however you choose to describe it, these words represent a more than slightly terrifying concept. And yet living out this concept changes lives. Again and again.

Fight the Urge to Overshare

Before we look closely at ways to let down our guard and use self-revelatory words to build friendships, let's pause and consider what happens when someone overshares personal information.

If I filled up a large pitcher with water and then emptied it on a tiny basil plant sitting on my kitchen windowsill, my plant would complain by developing yellow leaves. Too much water!

Sometimes in friendships we can overwater, can't we? We pour out the details of our lives in a great rush when we sense we have a listening ear.

Confession here: I have overwatered both plants and friendships.

When my freshman-year roommate and I sat down to talk through the list of get-to-know-you questions, I spilled my soul and talked about my pain at length. She listened well. Sadly, I can't tell you what she said that afternoon.

In that moment I longed for a friend. Far from home and thrust onto a college campus with people I didn't know, my introverted self felt desperate for a

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connection, just one friend. What better way to connect than to share my soul? All of it. All at once.

I have learned by doing and failing and doing again over many years that friendships thrive best with bits of water (many times of connection) over the long haul. Self-revelation, yes, but in doses. And in approximately equal measures from both friends.

Dr. John Townsend says it well in his book *How to Be a Best Friend Forever*: “Attachment among best friends works best when both people are vulnerable and open, and make that vulnerability a normal part of the friendship. This is important because without mutual vulnerability, one person becomes the counselor and the other the counselee, which is not the true nature of friendship. Friendship is always a two-way street.”²

When I unloaded on my unsuspecting college roommate, I talked to her as I would a counselor—all about me. But she had not signed up to serve as my personal counselor; she had simply signed up to live with me as a friend.

How often, I wonder, do we approach friendship with the hope that we will find a personal counselor?

Finding that sweet spot of not too much but just enough self-revelation in a friendship can feel like a dance. Sometimes we need to throttle ourselves; sometimes we need to take a deep breath and speak an honest sentence about a current struggle.

How can we know when to say what? And why bother? Why not just take a nap?

Introverts have a distinct advantage in the self-revelatory friendship dance. We can't help analyzing situations and people; it just comes with the territory of an always-active mind. When we listen to our brains and combine our knowledge with our intuition, we find courage to take a step toward friendship.

Ask Yourself Some Honest Questions

As we learn the dance of friendship and seek to present our true selves to others, the more we know about ourselves the better we will become at sharing bits of our true selves with others. And the more we know and understand ourselves, the better chance we have of developing healthy relationships.

So who are you? In real life, not just on social media. Let's take a look at some key questions.

What energizes you?

Many employers ask potential prospects to take personality tests, aimed at helping companies determine if this person would fit well in a specific role. Obviously, no test, no category, can completely define a person, but they can open our eyes.

Susan Cain does a marvelous job of explaining the nuances of two types of people—introverts and extroverts—in her book *Quiet*: “Introverts feel ‘just right’ with less stimulation, as when they sip wine with a close friend, solve a crossword puzzle, or read a book. Extroverts enjoy the extra bang that comes from activities like meeting new people, skiing slippery slopes, and cranking up the stereo.”³

As an introverted lawyer herself, she found that she could feel intimidated and “not enough” when surrounded by a room full of extroverts. She talks honestly of her journey to own her personality and see it as a positive.

Over tea recently, a perceptive friend pointed out to me that I had dodged her question by asking her a question and then settling in for a good listen: “You’re doing that introvert thing where you ask questions and listen.”

Busted! Conversation takes effort for me—more than it does for my extroverted friends who bubble over with enthusiasm and insights. So, to keep my friendships from becoming counseling sessions, I need to listen *less* sometimes and force myself to talk *more*.

Do you know where you fall on the introvert/extrovert spectrum? And in friendships do you need to push yourself to talk more or talk less? What else have you learned about your personality from tests such as the Myers Briggs Personality Test or the Enneagram Test?

Introvert Inclinations

Draw energy from quiet and alone time.

Often have an active mind.

(“I’ve been thinking . . .”)

Prefer “going deep” to small talk.

How do you communicate best?

I have an awkward relationship with phones.

I really don’t know how it started. Maybe the party line we had in my growing-up years? Maybe my introverted self really needs body language to find courage to talk. And I always wonder if my phone call will interrupt someone in the middle of an important meeting at work or in an intense family discussion.

Several years ago, I set my ring tone to quack like a duck because otherwise, out in public, I just ignored the normal, factory, preset ringtone, assuming it rang for someone else. Truthfully, the harsh quack of my phone mirrors how I feel about it. Every time it rings—“quack, quack, quack”—I jump. The harsh sound scares me, but I also worry, truly, about what I will hear when I answer the phone.

How ridiculous!

Honesty

And yet I must honestly admit to myself that I just don't like talking on the phone. I would so much rather text or email. When I communicate through a text or email, I have time to craft my words carefully and say precisely what I need to say without stumbling and saying something stupid.

But I have several friends who love to talk on the phone. They graciously call me periodically, knowing that I probably will not call them but will send an email or text.

As I write this, a new year has begun, and I hear a lot about New Year's resolutions. Some choose a word they want to define their year. Some want to get healthy. Some want to read the Bible in a year. My goal? I want to work on calling my "I-love-talking-on-the-phone" friends more, not forcing them to make all the effort to stay in touch.

Sigh. This feels embarrassing. This feels hard.

It also feels right. These people matter to me. I want to connect with them. I want to know their stories. I cannot expect that they will always communicate with me the way I feel most comfortable. I have to work at this.

Communication matters so much in building friendships, doesn't it? What is your go-to communication method? And do you know your friends go-to communication methods? Can you adapt as needed sometimes? And can you have an honest conversation with friends about how you communicate best?

What do you love?

After my mom died and I returned home to my family and friends, I couldn't remember what I had loved doing. So much of my time and effort had gone into days and months of thinking about my mom and what

she needed that I had lost myself. A wise counselor encouraged me to make a list of things I loved and do one thing on that list every day.

Seems egocentric to think about what I love to do, but if I don't think about it, then I simply get swept up into other people's preferences and become the person they need. That, again, feels more like the counselor/counselee relationship.

Any relationship involves two people—two voices. Both voices matter. If you have the quieter voice, you may feel kind and loving in letting your voice take second place. But, in truth, by concealing or burying your voice, you foster dishonesty in your relationship. Your friend will struggle to know the real you.

I married a man with strong opinions about all sorts of things. Just last night he said, "How could anyone not like chocolate pudding? Isn't this your favorite dessert?"

Truthfully, no. In fact, I would rather have a large plate of green beans.

Owning what I love and speaking it aloud has taken effort for me. Not so much for John. He has graciously learned to ask me frequently, "What do you love?"

Dr. Gary Chapman wrote a fabulous, best-selling book all about that question and how it impacts relationships.⁴ Knowing what you love matters as does using your words to state what you love in the context of a friendship (and in a marriage). And, of course, listening to what your friend loves matters too.

What family-of-origin pain do you carry with you?

We all grew up in imperfect families and learned imperfect habits. I grew up in a home where fear and anger ruled. Whether we want to admit it or not, our families of origin shape the current version of ourselves

Honesty

and our relationships. The more we understand and acknowledge our family-of-origin pain, the better we can forge strong, authentic friendships.

In her thoughtful book *Making Marriage Beautiful*, author Dorothy Greco explains: “Not long after we were married, Christopher and I started having conflicts about what it meant to be home in time for dinner.” They did the dance of anger and apology but kept returning to the subject until Dorothy took an honest look at her past.

During my middle and high school years, dinner could be a tense affair. *Would Dad be on time? Would he be sober? If he wasn't, how would Mom respond?* There was an obvious connection between my childhood wounds and our marital strife. Christopher's struggle with time management uncovered my unresolved pain and amplified my unprocessed anger. My response replicated my family of origin's patterns and certainly did not help Christopher feel loved or grow in his time management skills.⁵

If you have never taken a long, honest look at your growing-up years, please do. Otherwise, you will carry that pain and frustration into current relationships, repeating unhealthy patterns.

What challenges you?

For most of my life I have shamed myself about facing challenging social situations. I have muttered to myself some version of, “Oh, come on! Don't let fear win. Just do this. You have to. Other people do it!”

As an introvert, I thrive in quiet. Spending time at home alone suits me just fine. In fact, it makes my heart sing. Attending a neighborhood block party, a family reunion, a dinner party with people I don't know well,

job training in another facility where I don't normally work all make my heart pound. Truly.

We introverts have so much going on in our brains that we can struggle to corral and organize those thoughts into a coherent sentence, especially in a loud, unfamiliar environment. The whole process can make us feel utterly exhausted and in great need of a long nap.

In a delightful episode of the *New York Times* podcast *The Daily*, “A Special Episode for Kids: The Fear Facer”, nine-year-old Ella Maners talks candidly about her own particular, paralyzing fears of throwing up and tornadoes and her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). She also describes a Fear Facers summer camp where she learned to face (and talk to) her fears.

Ella named her OCD “Ocie” and says she imagines him or her as a blue bubble inside her brain—a sneaky blue bubble because she doesn't know what he or she will do.⁶

Ella seems to have discovered that speaking the truth about how she feels deflates rather than inflates the fear; in fact, it pops the blue bubble of fear.

I have discovered the same thing. Telling myself, *Just suck it up and get over yourself. Do what an extrovert would do*, doesn't work. But telling myself the truth about how I feel in a situation (or about an upcoming situation), based on my introverted personality, does work.

My friend Sharla recently had a significant birthday. Her sister noticed from Facebook that I knew Sharla, so she messaged me and invited me to a surprise birthday party at a local restaurant. I knew that I would know no one except my friend and her husband. For several days I formulated excuses: busy time of year, big writing project, not feeling great . . . And then I had a serious talk with myself: *Sharla is your friend. You want to celebrate her. And meet her people and*

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learn more about her. This matters. You need to show up.
And so I RSVP'd YES.

I also let myself say aloud, "This will be hard! I will feel uncomfortable."

And I formulated a plan, complete with some questions to ask other guests. Additionally, I gave myself permission to leave early. And I gave myself permission to take multiple, long bathroom breaks to recalibrate in silence.

I enjoyed the event! Speaking honest words to myself about the social challenge I faced made all the difference.

So, what challenges you?

Introvert Impediments

Struggle to find the right word at the right time to express complicated, inner thoughts.

Settle in to listen and forget to work at talking.

Often find the phone a challenging way to communicate.

Use Self-Knowledge as Fuel for Friendships

Understanding ourselves can lay the foundation for self-revelation, a powerful friendship-building tool. Sadly, however, we often use our personality quirks as an excuse not to make the effort of reaching out to people. Consider these scenarios.

I'm an introvert. I'm just not really good at social events. I think I'll just stay home.

versus

I'm an introvert. Social events challenge me, but I need to meet new people so I will come up with a strategy (connect with one person, go with a friend, attend for just an hour) that works for me.

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My new acquaintance loves to go to loud, expensive restaurants, but the whole experience wears me out. I guess we are just not meant to be friends.

versus

I'm grateful that this person wants to spend time with me. I will suggest that we order something from this restaurant or one that I love and then bring the food to my (quiet) house to eat.

I just keep ignoring this person who calls on the phone. He calls at the worst times. And I'm afraid I'll say something stupid if I answer his phone call.

versus

I know this person wants to reach me but talking on the phone is hard for me. I'll text him and set up a specific time to talk on the phone, and I will have a list of talking points in front of me.

My friend just won't listen to me the way I want her to. She seems more focused on getting stuff done. Guess I'll just give up on this relationship. Not worth the continued disappointment.

versus

This friend reminds me a lot of my mom, who was always so busy with her job that I just couldn't get her to listen to me. I need to realize that my friend is not my mother. And I need to find a way to tell my friend about some of my pain related to my mom.

On business trips I have to go to the networking events. I don't like the crowded, loud atmosphere, but I just have to suck it up if I want to keep my job.

versus

I don't really like networking events—all the noise and small talk with people I don't know well. I will consider asking to meet one or two colleagues for

Honesty

dinner instead or attending the event for a short amount of time or telling colleagues I just need some downtime now, but I could meet for breakfast.

Learning to practice honesty with ourselves should help us enter more confidently into challenging situations as that self-awareness helps us say, *I can do this in my own unique, introverted way*, rather than saying, *This just feels too hard. Why bother?*

Practice Self-Revelation with Someone Who Loves You as You Are

Even those of us who happily spend hours alone with our minds and our books need friends. The days of stay-at-home during COVID-19 showed me that so vividly. When I don't connect with other people on a regular basis, I sink into myself and depression lurks. The scary world looks ominous. My little piece of the story looms large.

But when I connect with other people and hear their stories, I realize that I don't navigate this scary moment alone. People see and care.

Most of us would so love to have a friend (or a spouse) who could practically read our mind and know just how to encourage and comfort and challenge. A 24/7 friend.

But no person, no matter how thoughtful, can ever provide all that we need all the time. Only God can and does do that.

We cause ourselves a lot of pain because we often expect from a friend what only God can give.

Living Connected

As a teenager I discovered the Book of Psalms in the Bible:

Lord, have mercy on me; all day long the enemy troops press in. So many are proud to fight against me; how they long to conquer me.

But when I am afraid, I will put my confidence in you. Yes, I will trust the promises of God. And since I am trusting him, what can mere man do to me? They are always twisting what I say. All their thoughts are how to harm me. They meet together to perfect their plans; they hide beside the trail, listening for my steps, waiting to kill me. They expect to get away with it. Don't let them, Lord. In anger cast them to the ground.

You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle! You have recorded every one in your book. (Psalm 56:1–8 TLB)

These words surprised me in their utter honesty. Nothing “fine” here. Lots of raw emotion. Lots of fear. And apparently the author could talk to God this way and not get struck by divine lightning.

I decided to read more of the Psalms. And the more I read, the more honesty and self-revelation I saw. And then I learned that one of the authors behind these honest bits of writing had committed adultery and murder.

The more I read the Psalms, the more I began to borrow these words to express the ache of my own heart. I realized that God could handle my rough, raw emotions and help me through them. And I realized that God loved me. Rough, raw, introverted me. Remarkable!

And now, many decades later, I make it a point to sit in my comfortable chair almost every morning and connect with God through listening to worship music,

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prayer, and reading the Bible. I open my heart to Him and confess my worries, failures, self-doubt, and fears, and I ask Him to open my eyes to see both my own heart and the hearts of others.

This time with God has become the fuel that starts my day. When I spend my morning time with God, I enter into the day feeling loved and heard. God has filled my tank with His love. I then have energy to reach out to other people. If I don't fuel my soul with God-time, however, I inevitably seek other loves to fuel my soul, including friends.

Go First

When I opened my mouth and spilled a bit of my pain at lunch many years ago to our friends, I knew that moment of self-revelation would define the direction of our friendship. It could serve as a roadblock: *We just can't go there.* It could serve as an irritation, either lasting or temporary: *Really? We were having so much fun talking about vacations. Let's get back to talking about fun things.* Or it could function as a life-altering detour: *Tell us more. We will go 'there' with you.*

After what seemed like a very long silence that particular afternoon, one of our friends said softly, "We are going through something similar."

I had no idea. I thought everything in their lives was fine. They seemed so together. And they smiled a lot.

That awkward, honest, in-the-middle-of-dessert moment led to a friendship that has grown steadily over the years. Our friends "went there" with us. We have now come to know each other well enough that we can say to each other, "If you need us to come at two in the morning, we will come."

What about you? Do you feel willing and able to mention one or two self-revelatory, honest bits to an acquaintance and lay the foundation for a potential friendship?

Challenge Your Introverted Self

Think of someone you know a bit but would like to know on a deeper level. Consider a neighbor, a coworker, the parent of one of your child's friends, a sister-in-law, brother-in-law, a cousin. Given your unique personality, how can you add one bit of self-revelation to this relationship?

Perhaps you have made gestures of connection in the past with someone and watched as that person erected a roadblock or grimaced and changed the subject or gossiped about your struggle behind your back to someone else.

Not everyone has the courage and stamina to learn the dance of friendship. Keep looking for those people who do, those people who can say truthfully, "I'm a mess and so are you." Don't give up on friendship because of some painful misfires. Instead, commit yourself to learning this rigorous dance with such rich rewards.

And read on to discover how generosity, living open-handed and openhearted can nurture friendships.

Journaling Questions

Before you read the next chapter on generosity, take some time to think about the role of honesty and self-revelation in your life and friendships.

1. How do you react to that word *honesty* in connection with friendships?

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2. Do you tend to “overwater” friendships with too much self-revelation? Describe a situation.
3. Or do you “underwater” friendships by keeping most of your thoughts and feelings to yourself? Describe a situation.
4. How have you worked at knowing yourself? What more can you do?
5. Who in your life has taken honest, self-revelatory steps toward you? How did you react? What did you learn from this experience?
6. Do you have an honest, self-revelatory relationship with God? If not, how might you begin to cultivate this? If so, how does this relationship provide you fuel for building other relationships?