

# BROTHERLINESS

## A Distinguishing Mark of Jesus' Life

By Rod Handley



Within each of us lies a deep desire to have a true brother or sister in our lives. As the oldest of four siblings, I treasure my family relationships, but what I'm talking about here goes beyond genetic connection. Brotherliness is a sense of kinship and a disposition to render help, based on a relationship that offers assistance, no matter the cost or consequences. Kinship is tied to the concept of "we are family" that extends beyond immediate family.

Jesus Christ modeled this trait, making a profound impression on both friends and foes. His enemies sneered at him for being friendly to tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, but Jesus would not be deterred. He was a brother to the lowest of society.

Jesus not only spoke to these people but he visited them in their homes and ate with them. What audacity! In spite of what some believed, Jesus saw them as children created by his Father. Therefore, in spite of what they'd done or who they were, Jesus treated them as brothers and sisters.

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus spending time with individuals from different backgrounds, often with unique needs, but he always showed a spirit of brotherliness. Jesus daily connected with people through a listening ear, tender touch or challenging word. The apostle John shares three specific examples that demonstrate the depth and breadth of Christ's ability to connect as a brother as he addresses each one's need.

### Setting the Example

Jesus interacted with Nicodemus, a highly respected teacher and member of the Sanhedrin, who represented the best of the Jewish nation.<sup>1</sup> Jesus has a polite, theological discussion with him that has a clear brotherly tone. In their lively dialogue, Jesus explains the concept of being "born again." Though we don't see the specific results of this visit, we have indications in later references<sup>2</sup> that something very significant happened to Nicodemus that night.

Then Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman who'd come to draw water from the well.<sup>3</sup> Initially this despised, immoral woman was hostile, and shocked that Jesus would even talk to her. But Jesus captured her attention, stimulated her curiosity. He established a communication bridge by intently listening to her, building rapport. He aroused her interest with his questions, and without being obnoxious, turned the conversation to her spiritual needs. He touched her deeply with his gentleness and compassion, and she responded enthusiastically. Through her witness, many friends and neighbors embraced Jesus as the promised One who would save them from their sins.

And again, we see Jesus meeting the need of a paralytic.<sup>4</sup> The invalid lay helplessly for 38 years at the Bethesda pool without a single friend to offer a lifting hand. Jesus' spirit of brotherliness is poignant in his treatment of the sick, and he performed many miracles of healing. When he saw the deaf, the dumb, the blind, his compassionate spirit responded with healing power.

In Jesus' teaching, we also see his brotherliness and compassion for people. He saw their confusion, perplexity and misery, like sheep without a shepherd, and his heart cried out for them. "Come to me," he said, "and I'll give you rest."

Charles Edward Jefferson, in *The Character of Jesus*, tells us, "Without brotherliness there can be no religion that's pleasing to God." In spite of all the ugliness, vindictiveness and maligning heaped upon him, Jesus kept helping everyone he could. And when they made plans to kill him, he bravely stepped forward, claiming his death would convince them he was truly their brother.<sup>5</sup>

Although many of us have numerous friends and acquaintances, the spirit of brotherliness demonstrated by Jesus is pretty rare today. Our fast-paced world is consumed with schedules, job pressures and life challenges—leaving little time to practice brotherliness.

Ministry leaders, pastors and Christian workers have numerous opportunities to engage this character quality

every day, but many don't. Why? The reasons include a lack of time, a desire to maintain privacy, mistrust of others primarily due to past hurts, a fear of rejection, a secret pattern of sin, and an unwillingness to change and get help, just to name a few.

### No One Should Stand Alone

Howard Hendricks states, "Those who are serious about living a pure and effective life before the Lord will find more strength when accompanied by true brothers." Each of us needs brothers and sisters to help us pursue godly behavior. King Solomon tells us, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"<sup>6</sup> Real brothers are attentive, ready to help whenever they become aware of your needs.

One of God's basic principles is violated when we try to exist without brotherly relationships. As the song, *Brother's Keeper*, states, "No man is an island, no man stands alone. We all need our brothers, to point each other

home. As iron sharpens iron, we urge each other forth. To walk as men of promise, committed to you, Lord. So let us be our brother's keeper, and help us

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stand as men of love. Let us inspire each one as seekers, to glorify you, Lord above."

### Caring Enough to Confront

True brothers not only stand with us

and sharpen us, but they're also willing to confront. In the book of Hebrews, we're reminded to "encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."<sup>7</sup>

I'm not naturally confrontational, but I recognize that if I'm to grow in depth and maturity, I need brothers who will honestly share the truth with me by pointing out my blind spots, asking me the hard questions, challenging me and praying for me.

David Augsburg says, "Life without confrontation is directionless, aimless, passive. When unchallenged, human beings tend to drift, wander and stagnate. Confrontation is a gift, a necessary stimulation to jog one out of mediocrity or prod one back from extremes."

I'm at my best when I have a team of people around me who are committed to sharpening me. As Ted Engstrom once remarked, "About the only thing we can do successfully by ourselves is fail." My own track record shows that my failure rate is significantly higher when I face life alone. Therefore, I actively pursue brotherly relationships, and it's my desire to be a brother to those who need me as well. These intentional friends are my soul mates—people I'm willing to die for and who would die for me as well.

Brotherliness was the distinguishing mark of Jesus' ministry because it validated his work and person. How are you doing? Do you have genuine brothers and sisters in your life? Are you a true brother or sister to those around you?

*This article is part of a series, exploring the character traits of Jesus and applying them to our lives as Christian leaders and managers.*

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<sup>1</sup> John 3: 1-21

<sup>2</sup> See John 7:50-51 and John 19:39-40

<sup>3</sup> John 4:1-26

<sup>4</sup> John 5:1-15

<sup>5</sup> John 15:13

<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 3:13

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