

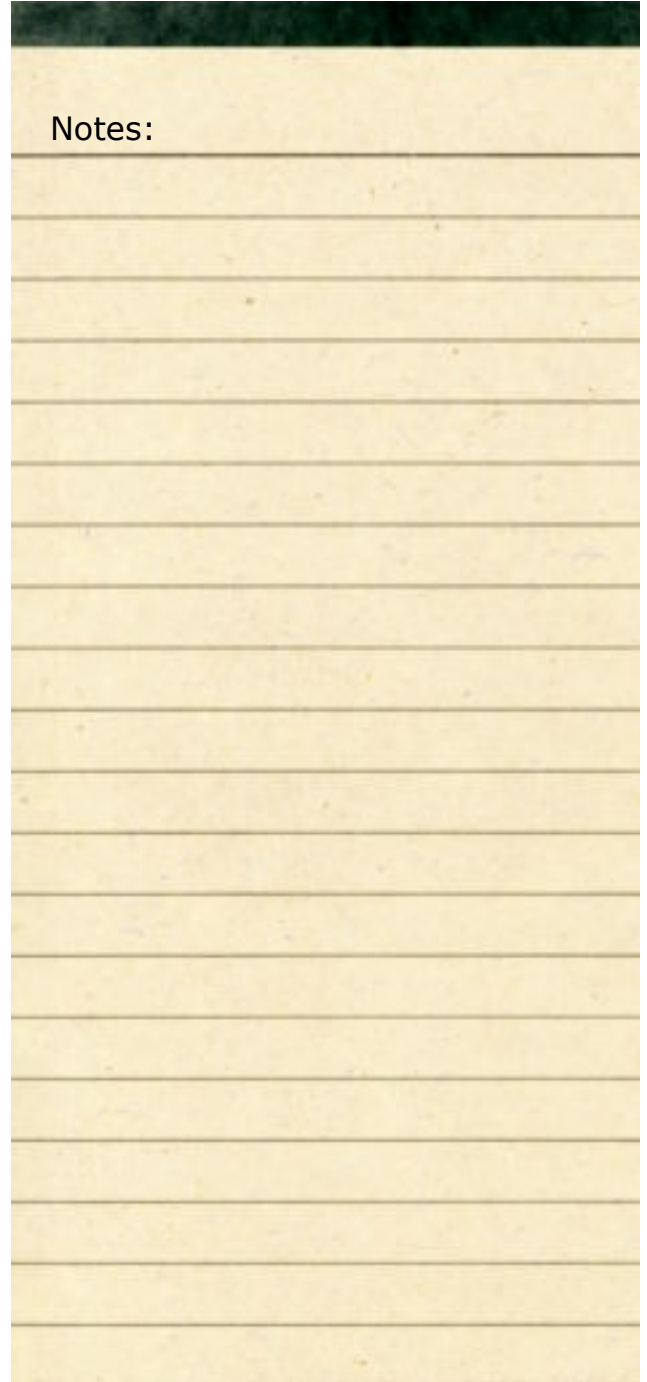


Why Are Close Friendships Especially Difficult In The Church?

You've all heard people talk about the old television sitcom Cheers and it's nice to be some place where everybody knows your name. I've heard lots of preachers and lots of other people contrast what happens in a Cheers-type relationship with a church relationship. Why are friendships sometimes harder to develop in a church community than in a bowling league or in a Cheers-type atmosphere or on a golf course . . . at least that's how we see it. I'm not sure if they're all that close of relationships over there but why are they difficult to develop in a church?

You know I think that maybe at least part of the answer is this: when I go to church, even though I don't want to do this, it just comes naturally; I've been conditioned. I put on my church face. I put on my church persona. I don't see you for a long time in church. I see you and it's, "Hey Laura. Hey George. Hey whatever. How you doing? Really good. Thanks. How are you doing? Fine, great; let's go worship." And it meant so much to me when a fellow who was part of a worship team when I went to church about a month or two ago, I walked into church kind of early and the fellow that was going to be in the worship team said to me, "I have nothing in me that wants to sing today but I'll just get up and perform." I felt like I met that guy. I felt like he took a risk with me knowing that. I think he took the risk—I'm assuming at least, maybe not knowing—that I wouldn't jump all over him and say, "Well, come on, you can do it for Jesus' sake. I said, "Maybe you ought to tell the pastor you're not going to

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sing today. Why don't you just sit in the back row and grump for an hour and maybe that would be a little more authentic." I think we're afraid to stop pretending and maybe to get authentic believing that somehow we're responsible to make God look good by smiling a lot and by being fine. We make God look better when we reveal who we really are and find him sufficient in the middle of wherever we are. That may be something to think about in your church relationships.

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