



Walk with Me

Being a Faith Partner in the Family of God

Paula J. Marolewski

Copyright © 2002, Paula J. Marolewski. All rights reserved. No part of this ebook may be reprinted, reproduced, or distributed in electronic, print, web, or other format without express written permission of the author.

Introduction

Family. The word conjures up so many images. Support. Fellowship. Laughter. Companionship. Teaching. Discipline. Tradition. A family is composed of people who are together because they are related by blood. They share memories, hopes, sorrows, and dreams.

So, too, the Church is related by Blood. We share the same Father, were redeemed by the same Brother, and walk in the same Spirit. We are to be a family – a family at its very best; a family the way God intended from the foundations of the earth.

As a family, the older should help the younger. Help them to walk. To grow. To learn. To mature. Encourage them when they're down, pick them up when they fall, and correct them when they make mistakes – gently, and with love.

You might call it discipleship. Or mentoring. Or teaching. But really, it all comes down to walking. Walking with younger brothers and sisters, and helping them to walk and grow in the Lord.

You may think you aren't ready for such a responsibility. But consider ... in a family with multiple children, even a four-year-old can help a toddling brother to stand on his feet. Jesus doesn't expect us to be able to do everything for each other. He simply asks us to give what we have to each other.

So in this little book, we won't call it discipleship or mentoring ... though that is what is happening. We'll call it walking. Learning how to walk beside someone as a faith partner with them, and helping them to grow in the Lord.

1. Keep in Step

You can't help someone else to walk unless you are keeping in step with Jesus yourself. So make these things a priority:

- ✓ *Prayer.* Relationships cannot exist without communication. Keep in touch with your Father – every day, throughout each day. Praise him, give thanks, confess your sins and ask for his in-filling Spirit to give you victory over them, talk about your problems, listen for his wisdom, present your needs ... tell him everything, and listen for his still, small voice speaking in your heart, through his Word, through others, through the Creation, and in all the other myriad ways he reveals himself to us.
- ✓ *Scripture.* Spend time in the Word. This is the main way the Lord communicates with us. Learn it inside out and backwards. Meditate, read, study, memorize ... let it transform you entirely. Don't worry about what you don't know: just seek to learn a little more each day. Be patient with yourself as you learn and grow. Growth may be slow and almost imperceptible to you, but know with assurance that God delights in transforming an acorn into a mighty oak.

Prayer and Scripture are the foundation, but not the whole building. Keeping in step with Jesus involves all our life ... fellowship, communion, confession, giving, service, ministry, worship, etc. But if you start with prayer and Scripture and let God transform your life through them, all the other pieces will come together as well.

2. Know the Basics

You may think you don't know enough to help someone else walk and grow in the Lord. Perhaps you have an image in your mind of some great preacher or teacher, and you are comparing yourself to them. Perhaps you think that you have to have "Doctor" or "Reverend" in front of your name before you can teach. But that is not the case. Just as a child plays "school" with younger siblings and teaches them basic arithmetic and spelling, so we are called to teach what we know. As we learn more, we can teach more, but we can start teaching as soon as we understand the basics.

If you understand and can explain the following simply and easily, you understand the basics:

- ✓ *The Basics about the Bible.* What is the Bible? How do you find things? Why should I read it?
- ✓ *The Basics about God.* Who is God? What does "Trinity" mean? What is God's basic nature?
- ✓ *The Basics about Man.* Why is man special? What is free will? Why is free will important?
- ✓ *The Basics about Sin.* What happened when mankind fell? What is sin? What are the effects of sin?
- ✓ *The Basics about Jesus.* Who is Jesus? What does it mean to be perfect God and perfect Man? What did the crucifixion and the resurrection accomplish?
- ✓ *The Basics about Salvation.* How am I saved? What is faith? What is grace?
- ✓ *The Basics about Living in Christ.* How do I live a life pleasing to God? How am I filled with the Spirit? How do I know and develop my spiritual gifts?

3. Reach Out in Love

People are not projects. The basis of being a faith partner is not “so that you can teach someone what they need to know.” It is to love the person. Honestly, simply, and completely. Teaching and encouraging and discipling flow out of love – not the other way around.

Love means that:

- ✓ I spend time with you.
- ✓ I keep your confidences.
- ✓ I accept you as you are.
- ✓ I want you to be all that you can be.
- ✓ I look out for your best interests.
- ✓ I forgive you when you hurt me.
- ✓ I ask forgiveness when I hurt you.
- ✓ I help you when you are in need.
- ✓ I pray for you regularly.
- ✓ I correct you when you're wrong.
- ✓ I treat your weaknesses with gentleness.
- ✓ I encourage you to try new things.
- ✓ I rejoice in your gifts and strengths.
- ✓ I trust you with myself.

Love is an active verb.

Love is an active life.

4. Make Contact

So how do you start a faith partnership with someone? Well, it will start in one of two ways: you may approach the other person, or they may approach you.

Many people assume that they are to wait on the sidelines until someone asks them to walk with them. Not so. The younger brother or sister may not know they need help, or may not know how to find the help they need. Therefore, if the Spirit of the Lord whispers to your heart to approach someone and begin a faith partnership with them, trust him, and initiate contact yourself. Believe that the Lord has prepared their heart, and they will be ready to accept your help.

Of course, you may be approached by a brother or sister and asked directly. In that case, pray to discern whether the Lord has indeed placed this calling on you. If so, then go forward with a faith partnership.

The keys to a successful and fruitful faith partnership are simple:

- ✓ A faith partnership is directed by the Lord.
- ✓ Both members are committed to growing in the Lord.
- ✓ The younger member (spiritually younger: chronological age is irrelevant in faith partnerships) must be willing to accept teaching and discipline from the older member.
- ✓ The older member must recognize their accountability before God and the Church for helping the younger member to the best of their ability.

The issue of accountability reminds us that faith partnerships are not just friendships, though friendship certainly is part of them. Faith partnerships are relationships founded on love, but guided by a purpose: growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Give Fishing Lessons

An old proverb runs, “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.” That is one of the goals of a faith partnership: to teach the other person to fish.

Put otherwise, your goal as a faith partner is to help the other person mature. To make decisions. To discern the will of the Lord. To think well and logically.

Think again about the family: when a child is young, many decisions are made for them. They need to be taught a great deal. Sheltered and shielded. But as they grow up, a sign of maturity is that they begin to make decisions on their own. Their thinking processes develop. They learn to weigh pros and cons. They discern good from evil. That is the goal of the faith partnership as well.

For example, I was faith partner at one time to a wonderful woman. She called me one day and said that she didn’t want to attend the church’s weekly Bible study anymore, and what did I think? I could have said, “Yes,” or “No,” and given some reason – but that would only have addressed the problem of the day. Instead, I asked her a series of questions: Why did she want to stop attending? Was she too busy? Was her job over-stressing her? Was the Bible study itself causing her some disturbance, for instance, did she have a conflict with someone there, or was the teaching somehow “off”?

By helping her analyze her emotional state, the Bible study itself, and her situation in life in general, she was able to come to the conclusion that she was over-committed in her responsibilities, and that it was appropriate to stop attending the Bible study since she was getting solid spiritual food elsewhere throughout the week.

Six months later, she had a similar situation where she needed to make a decision about commitments – and she was able to discern the right course with ease and confidence. She had learned how to fish.

6. Teach from Life

If you enter into a faith partnership with a very young Christian, it is recommended that you use some written material to make sure you cover all the basics of the Christian faith with your partner. There are plenty of books and workbooks available that will guide a new Christian through basic Bible knowledge, doctrine, and Christian life and practice.

But regardless of whether or not you are using written material, remember this key point: many of the most important lessons you will teach will come from life. Life lessons are timely, important to the learner, and remembered forever.

For instance, suppose you are going through a workbook, and the next lesson is on spiritual gifts. But your partner begins talking that day about how depressed she is because her brother-in-law is dying of leukemia, and God doesn't appear to be hearing or answering her prayers.

Your course of action? Put aside the lesson on spiritual gifts. It will wait for another day. Address the issues at hand: talk about prayer, and how God works through prayer, and how God doesn't always answer the way we want, but always promises that all things will work out for our good. Speak hope to her emotional needs. Comfort her. Cry with her. At a time like that, she needs both mental understanding about prayer so that she doesn't throw up her hands and assume the Christian life is useless, and spiritual understanding about God's love for her and her dying brother-in-law. She also needs emotional support from you to help her through her grief and pain.

When you touch your partner at their point of need, they will remember what you say – and what you do – for the rest of their life.

7. Learn to Listen

In order to teach your partner to “fish,” and to bring forth lessons out of life, you have to listen. Remember that listening is an active verb ... a very active verb, and it takes both effort and practice. You need to listen both to your partner, and to God.

- ✓ *Listen to what is said.* This seems obvious, but sometimes it is ignored. Listen to what is being told to you. Be willing to lay aside your own plans for the discussion if your partner brings up a topic that they obviously need to talk about. Just as your partner is not a project, your time together should not be run on a rigid agenda. Listen to what is being said to you, and respond to it directly and with your whole person.
- ✓ *Listen for principles.* If you are discussing something going on in your partner’s life, listen for the principle that is involved and bring that principle to light. For instance, they may say that they can’t stand having their father over for holidays. Rather than just commiserate, probe deeper: are there underlying issues of bitterness, broken trust, or forgiveness that need to be addressed?
- ✓ *Listen to stories and tangents.* Your partner may not know how to bring up a topic that concerns them, or may be nervous about bringing it up. To compensate, they may tell you a story or go off on a seeming tangent that alludes to the topic they really want to address. Listen carefully to stories, and pay attention to tangents. They may contain the seeds of the life lesson you need to talk about.
- ✓ *Listen to what is not said.* Finally, listen for what your partner doesn’t say. Are they avoiding some topic? Are they uncomfortable about something? Pay attention. You may be sensing an area of great need or hurt, or an area of sin that that needs to be confessed. Touch these areas very carefully, and with great prayer and sensitivity.

8. Use Your Experience

You will never speak with greater conviction than when you draw examples and lessons and wisdom from your own life. Certainly you can point to the experience of other Christians, to their teaching, to their books, etc., but what will make the greatest difference to your partner is hearing what your experience following Christ has been.

- ✓ *Teach principles from your past.* Story-telling is one of the most effective modes of teaching. Jesus knew that; that's why he taught in parables. Use your life stories to teach principles of the Christian faith to your partner.
- ✓ *Talk about your journey.* Your partner may look at you as someone who woke up one day and was suddenly a strong Christian. Remind them that the Christian life is a journey, a process, and that you have had ups and downs, good times and bad, dry years and fruitful harvests.
- ✓ *Reveal your weaknesses and sins.* This is hard, but it is very important. Your partner may feel that you don't understand the struggles they are in, or what it is like to fail again and again, or to sin terribly against God. When you show them that you do know and have experienced all these things, and that God has forgiven you, strengthened you, and given you victory, they will know that they can trust God to bring them through as well.
- ✓ *Prepare them for hard times.* Be proactive in your talks and discussions. Talk about the dry times that come in the Christian walk. Talk about conflict, despair, doubt, pain, suffering, persecution, and grief. Encourage them that they will get through all of these things – that God is faithful, yesterday, today, and forever. Then, when they experience those times, they will remember your words and the hope that Christ alone offers.

9. Encourage Constantly

Encouragement is key to a good faith partnership. Encourage your partner constantly. Lift them up. Exhort them to press on in the Lord. Focus particularly on the following:

- ✓ *Affirm their identity.* Your partner may feel unlovable or unworthy, or struggle with a poor self-esteem. Express constantly how much you enjoy being with them, what a valuable person they are, and how much God loves them.
- ✓ *Acknowledge their growth.* Many times, we can't see our own growth because it is so slow and subtle. Take the time to point out to your partner how they are growing, how you can see that growth, and how far they have come in their walk in the Lord.
- ✓ *Encourage their gifts.* Watch for the spiritual gifts your partner has. Talk about those gifts with them and make sure they see their gifts themselves. Then, encourage them to use their gifts and to develop them to their fullest potential.
- ✓ *Praise their diligence.* Remember that you are not responsible for your partner's growth. It is God alone who causes growth, and it is your partner's responsibility to desire and seek that growth. So encourage your partner as they read, study, pray, and minister on their own.

10. Finish with Grace

The time will come when your faith partnership will come to an end. Perhaps you had set a specific time frame in mind, and that has been concluded. Perhaps there were no specifics ever talked about, but you sense in your heart that the Lord is telling you to bring this phase of life to a close.

However it happens, be sure to finish with grace. Talk openly with your partner about concluding this aspect of your relationship. Reassure them that this does not mean an end to your friendship, or an end to your availability for questions and prayer and support. It simply means that the more formal aspect of the faith partnership is dissolved.

Take the time to affirm all the growth you have seen in them during the time you have partnered together. Be very specific, and very complete. Doing so will help them to focus on how the faith partnership has accomplished its goal: helping them to grow in the Lord. It will also strengthen their faith to see that they are well-equipped to continue on in their walk with the Lord: that they have learned the basics well and can walk and even run with confidence and endurance.

It may be that you have developed a lasting friendship above and beyond your faith partnership during the time you have walked together. If so, rejoice and enjoy it. Other times, you will find that your ways go in different directions; that also is fine. Regardless, be sure to contact your partner regularly for a time after concluding your faith partnership to reaffirm the fact that you are still there, always present as a help and resource, and that you love them.

Conclusion

Being a faith partner simply means walking alongside a brother or sister in the Lord and helping them grow. Few things in life have more eternal impact or transforming power than this.

You will find that you learn as much as you teach during the time you spend together. The Lord will bring forth in you the fruits of gentleness, kindness, and sensitivity. He will teach you how to be firm but loving. He will convict you concerning sin in your own life, so that you can turn from it and gain the victory over it. He will encourage you to press on in your own walk to know him and love him more and more each day.

As we walk beside each other, the older helping the younger, the Church will push back the darkness and conquer the strongholds of Satan ... one life at a time. Paraphrasing Philippians 3:13-14:

*Forget what lies behind.
Press forward to what lies ahead.
Reach upward for the prize
of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ!*