

Building Friendships

by Heather Haworth
Children's, Family & Women's Ministries Director
British Union Conference
Trans-European Division

Start with an activity:

- Use several “bricks” that you have prepared from cardboard boxes such as empty cereal packets. For older children, write on the bricks the words *love, trust, understanding, honour, respect* and *commitment*. Explain in simple language what the words mean.
- Younger children can build a tower with the bricks. When they have finished, let them push it over. Make sure all have a turn. Ask, “Was it easier to build up or to knock down?” When they have answered, explain that tearing down is always easier, but that it takes time and care to build a good strong tower.

Continue with the story:

I want to tell you a story about how we build up friendships and how they can collapse just like the tower you built.

Mary and her family moved into a new house. Mary was happy to find a boy named Dan, who lived next door, to be her friend. Dan was just her age. He invited her to the Pathfinder fun day at church. She had not realised that going to church with a friend like Dan could make her so happy.

One day their friendship nearly ended. It happened like this. Mary had a birthday party. Her school friends and Dan came to it. As they arrived, Mary received their presents and cards. She had fun opening the packages and looking at the birthday cards. Each one gave her a store-bought card, bright and shiny.

But she didn't enjoy Dan's card. It was made from plain paper. He had drawn a picture of a

flower on it and the words “Happy Birthday” in his messy writing. Looking at it alongside the others, she simply grunted, “Thanks.”

After the party, Mary and her mummy looked at all her cards. They put them out on the table so she could enjoy looking at them for a few days. When Mummy saw Mary throw Dan's card away, she asked, “Why are you doing that?”

“Oh, it's just a messy bit of paper,” pouted Mary. “Dan didn't bother to buy me a shiny card like everyone else.”

Mummy put Mary on her lap and asked her a few questions. “Did anyone else think of *making* you a card like Dan did? Did your other friends spend time doing such a colourful picture? Did you notice that only Dan put some “kisses” next to his name?”

Mary sat still for a few minutes thinking about how unfair she had been toward Dan. She had said nasty things about him that really were not true. She felt really bad about how she had not said a nice “thank you” to him.

“Oh Mummy, I was wrong,” responded Mary. “I am going around to Dan's house to tell him that his card is the most special one I had received.”

Do you think Dan was happy when Mary thanked him? I can tell you he really was.

Just as it takes time to build a tower, the Bible tells us (Hebrews 10:24) to take time to build friendships with others. When we are selfish

or unwilling to say “thank you,” it is like tearing a tower down. As Mary learned, it is easy to misunderstand and criticise what people do.

Sometimes that happens in our families too. But when we apologize for the wrong things we do, when we say “thank you” for the good

things people do for us, we build up our friendships with people just like we built the tower.

Let us now ask Jesus to help us say nice things to one another just like Mary learnt to do with her friend Dan.