

Will You Be My Tomato Stake?

Do you know why tomatoes need a stake? A spindly plant may grow too quickly, developing long and flimsy branches. One that produces a high yield may become so laden with heavy fruit that its branches bend and eventually break. As tomatoes grow, they ALWAYS need some kind of support system or they will lay their fruit on the ground where it will rot; thus the invention of the tomato stake. A tomato stake must be strong and straight in order to support the plant. You might call it a *keeper*.

The Biblical principle of *keeping* (as with a tomato stake) had great significance. Being a *keeper* was not a casual thing but was treated with reverence and great care because it involved making a covenant with another person. Throughout Israel's history, you can read of *keepers* of the city gate, *keepers* of the king's forest, *keepers* of the house, *keepers* of the vineyard, *keepers* of one's armor, etc.

When David sought out an "armor bearer" he did not just grab any foot soldier. He searched for the strongest, bravest, most integrity-filled warrior he could find. The term "armor bearer" literally means "*keeper* of my head." In today's terms an "armor bearer" is most like a body guard. It is a person who is willing to lay down his life for another by putting himself between that person and danger. Biblically, as "*keepers*", we are to guard one's soul, mind, heart, family, property and more.

It's interesting to ponder the idea that our heads staying on our shoulders might be directly reliant on our "keeper" or "best friend." I am an "armor bearer" for those I call friend. A friend may say to me "I think I am going out of my mind" or "I am in such a fog." This ups the ante of relationship – of friendship. *Keeping* a friendship includes helping, guarding, watching over, giving shade, **staking oneself to**, and protecting. We must be constantly vigilant when we *keep* one another; our concentration must never waver. As our Father in heaven "*keeps*" us, we are to *keep* our friends.

For the people I have been given to *keep* I must remain vigilant; being deliberate and purposeful in connecting with them and praying for them. I look into the lives of my friends and ponder what the Lord is showing me concerning them? How can I stand side-by-side with them? Do they need my help or just an ear to listen? The *keeper* doesn't wait to be asked; he or she sees the need and steps up. I talk with them openly and honestly, asking: What do you need from me right now? How may I pray for you? What can I do for you?

Keeping is not a passive concept – it is alive, active, serious and intentional. If my friend is being attacked, I am being attacked. They will not fall, for I am there to prop them up—like a tomato stake. I want to stand with them, even though geographical distance might separate us.

In the same manner that God *keeps* me securely in His nail pierced hands and strong arms; I want to *keep* my friends, offering a safe place for them to rest and safety. I want to sacrificially give all that I have to be my friend's *keeper*.

***Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends. John 15:13***

"A true friend is one soul in two bodies." Aristotle

Book Review

Hiddenness and Manifestation by Graham Cooke

I read this book years ago and recently picked it up again to read afresh. I had been feeling as if God had earplugs in or that He just wasn't speaking to me. I remembered reading somewhere that God did not speak to Israel for 400 years. Cooke writes that, "In hiddenness God answers our questions and teaches us His ways." Hiddenness! What does that mean? Is God playing "Hide and go seek?" I know God is doing something, but what does He have up His robe? I haven't figured it out yet, so I must wait. I am not good at that.

Graham looks at the seasons of God's presence. Why does it seem that at times God's presence is so overtly with us, yet at other times He seems strangely absent? What is God doing during those times? Is it our fault? Has He withdrawn from us for some reason? These are some of the questions that are answered as the "hiddenness" of God is illustrated from the Scriptures. This book is an absolute must-read for anyone who is feeling distant from the Lord: incredibly encouraging, gentle, and life-giving!