

## THE ULTIMATE GIFT

19<sup>th</sup> September 2021

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### WEEK 3 - FRIENDS

Blurb:

*Join us this Sunday as we do a biblical study on what the Bible says on friendship. Please feel free to bring a pen and paper or to use your phone as we explore ten biblical truths on friendship and go through plenty scripture while doing it. Be prepared for a few on the spot questions.*

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

What friendship is? Question to the audience? (Dictionary to be on table)

Story time (Worship team to be involved)

Good Friends/ Bad friends

Friends who teach us lessons

Friends who make us mad, sad, laugh, cry, friends who break our heart, friends who up lift us, friends who we don't have to see for years but when we see each other it's like no time has past.

#### Biblical friendship

What does the Bible say about friendship? Perhaps more than we may have thought. The theme of friendship weaves through the whole storyline of Scripture, climaxing at the cross of Jesus Christ and stretching out ahead into an eternal future of true friendship. It also gives us the practical wisdom we need to cultivate it well.

Here are ten insights from the Bible to help us recover true friendship:

#### 1. The First Problem in the World Was Not Sin but Solitude

At each step of the way when God created the world, he pronounced that everything was "good." But then once he created Adam, a statement startles us: something is not good. **"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18).** This was before the fall — before sin had entered the world. Adam was not yet complete; he needed community.

What does this show us? Although our deepest problems are sin and idolatry, our first problem was social isolation. Therefore, even today, in a world filled with society, Proverbs warns that the one who "isolates himself. . . breaks out against all sound judgment" (Prov. 18:1).

#### 2. Friendship Is a Whole-Bible Theme

The Bible tells the story of the creation, fracturing, and ultimate restoration of true friendship—friendship with God and also with each other. **In the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed the fullness of friendship. But their sin led them into hiding (Gen. 3:8),** and we've been hiding behind our own fig-leaf masks ever since.

Yet God is restoring true friendship. He restores friendship with himself, as he did with Enoch and Noah, who “walked with God”—a Hebrew expression of friendship (Gen. 5:24; Gen. 6:9). **Abraham was called “a friend of God” (Isaiah 41:8).** Moses spoke with God “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (**Ex. 33:11**). He drew near to all who called upon him with true faith.

And then **Jesus came as the great Friend of sinners, befriending all who trust and follow him. He came to lay his life down for his friends (John 15:13-15).**

Now all those befriended by God are brought into communities of friendships in the church. We can now befriend others as God in Christ has befriended us.

### **3. Proverbs Is a Practical Guide to Forging True Friendship**

Proverbs gives us wisdom for navigating the complexities of our relationships. And it doesn’t just address relationships in general, but also friendship in particular. **For example, it teaches us what to look for in finding true friends (Prov. 13:20; Prov 22:24-25). It shows us why loyalty is so important for cultivating friendship (18:24; 19:6; 27:9–10).** It also shows us the one thing that is most damaging to this kind of relationship: spreading secrets (16:28; 17:9).

### **4. True Friendship Is More Like a Covenant Than a Contract**

We often treat relationships as consumers: we befriend for the benefits we receive. But like a contract, when the relationship doesn’t give us the goods we want, we leave.

But the Bible shows us that real friendship is more covenantal than contractual. **Proverbs teaches us about “a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). It commands us, “Do not forsake your friend” (27:10). It warns us about the fickleness of fair-weather friends: “Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend” (19:4).**

### **5. Friendship Thickens Church Community**

Studies show our culture’s increasing social isolation. We are in the midst of a loneliness epidemic.

But what if local churches felt like countercultural communities of spiritual life and love? Every church is equipped with all the resources needed to be a community of thick relationships. This is our heritage, after all: **The book of Acts portrays the church as fulfilling ancient ideals of friendship (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32--35).** The apostle John refers to fellow believers in churches as his “friends” (3 John 15). Every local church can be a surprising and welcoming counter-cultural glimpse of true friendship.

### **6. Friendship Is the Goal of the Gospel**

Christians rightly think about salvation as forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But it is more than this. Jesus gives all who trust him the privilege of being his friends (John 15:14–15). And what is eternal life, after all? According to Jesus, **“this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).** He rescued us to forge an intimate relationship with the triune God (14:20–23). God forgives us that we might share in his triune fellowship of love forever.

In the new creation we will enjoy true friendship with all other believers. Our future is a world of friendship.

### **7. The Cross Is History's Most Heroic Act of Friendship**

Jesus wants us to view the cross in terms of friendship. On the night before he died, as he explained the meaning of the cross to his disciples, **Jesus said, "greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).** The cross is certainly an act of substitutionary atonement, where Jesus bore the wrath of God in our place. But it is also, very personally, a relational act of friendship.

Through his death, Jesus expressed the deepest love for his people. He did not die for an unspecified humanity; he died for specific people. He died for those he considered his dear friends.

### **8. Jesus Is Our Truest Friend**

Many Christians hesitate to call Jesus a friend. But Jesus doesn't share our hesitations. And it matters to him that we embrace this. **He invites us to understand our relationship on terms of friendship (John 15:12-17).** We may need to exchange an either-or false dichotomy—"Jesus is our King, not our friend!"—for the biblical both-and: Jesus is our glorious king and our greatest friend.

### **9. Friendship Shows the World That We Belong to Jesus**

When this lonely world of broken relationships sees churches filled with friendships—imperfect friendships, to be sure, but relationships filled with true repentance and forgiveness—then they will know that something has come from above. They will see that our talk of Jesus as the friend of sinners is real.

**That's what Jesus said in John 13:35: "by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." And later in this same conversation, Jesus defined this "love for one another" in terms of the mutual love of friends. He said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (15:12). And how has he loved us? "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (15:13).** This is how we are to show the world that we are Jesus' disciples: when we love one another as he loved us, namely, with sacrificial friendship.

### **10. Friendship—with God and One Another—Is Our Greatest Joy**

The apostle John wrote to believers for a purpose: **"so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:3-4).** According to John, vertical fellowship with God + horizontal fellowship together = completed joy.

Our greatest joy is found in our fellowship with God and one another. This is why Jonathan Edwards said that friendship is "the highest happiness of moral agents" (Works, 23:350). According to the Bible, our chief happiness is in fellowship with the triune God and all who trust him.

The Bible gives us everything we need to recover a greater vision of true friendship. It shows us even our feeblest of efforts at forging friendships echo a more glorious reality—every friendship is a small and imperfect echo of the triune God, who made us in his image to enjoy friendship forever. Friendship didn't come from us; it came from God. And he gives us everything we need—through his word and his Spirit—to cultivate it well, for the glory of God.

**What a Friend We Have in Jesus** (To be shown online)

**Paul Baloche**

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
 What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
 O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
 All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
 We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
 Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
 Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
 In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear  
 May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.  
 Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer  
 Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there

Closing Prayer

**A BENEDICTION FOR AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIP**

*May we have*

Wisdom to know when to be quiet and listen.  
 Courage to be vulnerable and share our story.  
 Understanding when we feel hurt.  
 Eyes to see ways we can be a better friend.  
 Bravery to share honestly and openly.  
 The capacity to love selflessly and forgive unconditionally.  
 Words to share when we feel wronged.  
 Ears to hear how we have wronged.

Hope as we seek new and meaningful friendships.  
 Grace when it's time for a necessary ending.  
 Patience to restore broken relationships.

*May we seek*

Connection, beauty, and goodness instead of gossip,  
 judgement, comparison, jealousy, or isolation.  
 With bravery, compassion, and grace.

*Amen.*