

# “Why Friendship Is So Important” // John 15:9–16; Prov. 13:20 // *From the Beginning #6*

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Before we get started today, there’s something really important I want to challenge you to join me in, for the entire month of June...

## Introduction

How many of you have ever been **unfriended by someone** on social media? Happened to me recently... I opened up Twitter and noticed I’d lost 5 friends since the last time... You don’t know how to feel... “Was it something I said? Was I posting **too many cute kitten** videos? Too many ‘here’s another picture of my **so stinking adorable kid** #blessed’ posts? Too many **angry political** rants? (Or, maybe these are all my reasons for unfriending people).

- In **January of 2009, Burger King** ran this ad campaign where they said if you would “un-friend” 10 of your Facebook friends they would send you a coupon for a free Whopper. (*The way it was supposed to work was when you un-friended the person, BK would send them a notification that they had been un-friended for a delicious hamburger, which was supposed to make you say, “Wow, this burger must be something.”*) Well, the NYT reported that the stunt worked too well... within the 1<sup>st</sup> week 233,906 friendships were terminated and BK was obligated to 23K Whoppers, and had to discontinue the ad.<sup>1</sup>

**How valuable is friendship to you?** The word friendship has taken on a skewed meaning in our culture. I don’t know how many friends I have on Facebook... but most of them are not what the Bible would refer to as a “friend,” even if Mark Zuckerberg calls them “friend.”

I want to spend our last message in this *From the Beginning* series talking about “friendship...”

Most people in our culture just don’t pursue genuine friendships. Some don’t know how; some don’t think it is important.

- A **recent survey asked the question**, “Over the past 6 months, with how many people have you “discussed deeply an important matter?” Over **half** of them couldn’t come up with anyone outside their family.

**Many just don’t think it is important...** Example: **Think about your dad. Can you think of your dad’s “good friends?”** Not “people he worked with” but “good friends.” If you can come up with his “good friends,” you are in the rare minority. Most men quit pursuing any friendships after they get married.

**JOHN 9... As you study God’s word, you’ll see that few things in life are as important as friendship... for two primary reasons:**

- 1. We are made for friendship...** I’m going to explain today why it is virtually impossible to be really happy without friendships, by God’s design.
- 2. Friendship makes us...** *We’re made for it; it makes us...* There is no more formative factor in your life than your friendships.

I’m **going to suggest that if you get your friends right**, that one single thing, maybe more than any other, will set you up for success.

- And, on the **flipside, if you get them wrong**, you are almost guaranteeing some significant struggles in your future.
- Here’s a phrase I’m going to use a lot: **Show me your friends, and I’ll show you your future.**

**ACTIVITY: WRITE OUT your 5 friends**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/whopper-sacrifice-de-friended-on-facebook/>

So here's what we are going to do. I'm going to show you the two reasons friendship really matters in your life... and then tell you how you can pursue the right friendships.

## 1. Friendship matters... *Because we are made for it* (John 15:9–17)

**Let's start**, where we have in every other message of this series, with **what Jesus says about God's design** in these things "from the beginning."

[9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. [12] "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you... [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another. (John 15:9–17)

**This passage is all about friendship.**

- Jesus uses the word "**friend**" 3 times... it's clearly his subject.
- So, whenever Jesus uses the word "**love**" in this passage he is talking about friendship love.

**Why is friendship important?** Well, the **short answer is in vs. 9:** From all eternity the Father and the Son have existed as friends, and being made in the image of God, that means we are made for friendship.

The doctrine of the Trinity might be **hard to understand**, but it is the **foundation** for understanding how you are **wired**. **From all eternity the one God has existed as Father, Son and Spirit**, bound in friendship love.

**Friendship was never created.** It's part of the **eternal nature of God.**<sup>2</sup> There has never been a time, in all of eternity, when there was not friendship.

**You and I are created in God's image**, which means we were created for friendship.

**That's why when God created Adam, he said**, "It is not good that man should be alone."

- **Think about it...** that's an odd statement... Why would God look at something he has just made, that **no one has messed up** yet, and declare it to be 'not good'?
- Because **Adam was alone**... and Adam was like God, and God was not alone.
  - You see, *Adam was not lonely because he was imperfect; Adam was lonely because he **was** perfect.*
  - All of our other problems in life arise out of our sin and imperfections; **loneliness is the one problem that you've got because you're made in the image of God.**
- **You say, "Well, I just feel like I don't really need friends. I'm kind of a loner... Enjoy fishing and working on my car." That just means you are not very much like God.**
  - *"Let 'us' make man in our image, said one member of the Trinity to another.*
  - *You are in the image of God, therefore you have a deep need for true friendship (whether you are an introvert or extrovert!)*

**Tim Keller points out that in these verses, Jesus also gives us a glimpse into what God-like friendship looks like:**<sup>3</sup>

Jesus believes **"A true friend is someone who *always lets you in* and *never lets you down.*"**

<sup>2</sup> Rankin Wilbourne, "Friendship."

<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, message "You are my Friends" on John 15:9–17.

- **“Always lets you in”**: See where Jesus says, [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.
  - **Servants don’t really know** the hearts of their masters... they just obey.
  - Jesus says, “I have always wanted more from you... not just servants who obey, but to share my life with you... my joys, my thoughts, my pain. I want us to fellowship; walk together.”
    - The **Hebrew word for friendship** is the same as the word for secret (**soad**).<sup>4</sup> A friend is someone you let into the secret places in your heart.
  - **That’s why, incidentally, why you can’t have that many true friends.**
    - There is not enough space in your life to tell everybody everything... It’s **not safe!**
    - And you **can’t promise everyone** in your life that you know that you can be there for them **“whenever.”** I can’t **post on Facebook** to all my “friends”: **“Call me anytime, night or day. You need help moving? I own a truck. Someone to watch your cat on vacation? Bring them to me.”** My real friends would never do that, because they know I’d box that cat up and Fed Ex it back to the depths of Sheol where it came from.
    - Seriously, you **just can’t have that many people** that just show up at your house at 1 a.m. and expect you to get up.
- A true friend “always lets you in”... and true a friend **“Never lets you down”**: [13] Greater love has no one than this—that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends (you who do what I commanded you)...”
  - Jesus was so committed to **his friends he would go to hell and back (literally) for them.** *Before we would let them down he would lay his life down.* There was nothing that **could make him turn away... no burden he wouldn’t bear; no offense he wouldn’t forgive.**

*“What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer!”*

- BTW, this is one of the most absolutely distinctive things about Christianity. Other religious leaders... Muhammad, Buddha, Confucius... they never related to their followers this way.
- They left behind their sayings after they died and said, “Obey this.” Jesus left himself behind... in the Holy Spirit and his invitation was “follow me” and “walk with me.”
- Not just OBEY ME but COMMUNE WITH ME.

So, friendship matters because we are made for it. *The quality of your life goes up so much when you have friends.*

- “Last year, researchers [studied 34 students](#) at the [University of Virginia](#), taking them to the base of a steep hill and fitting them with a weighted backpack. They were then asked to estimate the steepness of the hill. Some participants stood next to friends during the exercise, while others were alone. The students who stood with friends gave lower estimates of the steepness of the hill. And the longer the friends had known each other, the less steep the hill appeared.” (NYT)

BTW, many marriage researches say the single greatest factor **determining the quality of your marriage is the quality of your friendship.** One study showed, *“Whether wives feel satisfied with the sex, romance and passion in their marriage is 70% dependent on the quality of the couple’s friendship. For men, whether they are satisfied*

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<sup>4</sup> See Psalm 25:14

with the sex, romance and passion in their marriage is 70% dependent on the quality of their friendship.”<sup>5</sup>

- Most of us don't think of marriage in terms of friendship... we think it's mainly attraction and *romance* **spiced** with a little *friendship*. Good marriages are primarily *friendship* **spiced** with a little *romance*.<sup>6</sup> So it turns out that good marriages are really “friends with benefits.” God believes in the ‘friends with benefits’ concept... just within the bonds of monogamous, covenant marriage.

Friendship matters because we are made for it...

## 2. Friendship matters... *Because it makes us* (Prov. 13:20)

Now we go to the book of Proverbs... written by the wisest man to ever live... **Prov 13:20**, “He that walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed.”

According to that verse, what one factor determines how your life turns out? *With whom you choose to walk in life.*

Prov 13:20 means **“You show me your friends; I'll show you your future.”** Or, as Craig Groeschel says it: **“Your friends are your future you.”**

- Groeschel says you are usually the **average of your 5 closest friends**.
- So, take back out that post-it with those 5 friends... (Take out the extremes... one extraordinary, one bad...)

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<sup>5</sup> My paraphrase. John Gottman, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> This thought came from a message by Tim Keller, “Marriage as Friendship.”

- If you were **stoned** last night chances are 3 or 4 of your friends were too. If you are **chasing after God** with all of your heart, chances are 3 or 4 of your friends are chasing after God too.
- **And your friends show you the future you...**
  - Consider this: The **friend** relationship was the most significant one when it comes to gaining weight. So if your spouse gained weight, you had a 37% chance of gaining weight. If your sibling gained weight, you had a 40% chance of gaining weight, too. But if it's your **friend**, that number jumps to 57%. What your friends are eating is actually more of an indicator of your health habits than your closest family members.
  - *So if your 'bestie' all of a sudden suggests that 'every night is ice cream night,' you might want to have a talk.” (BFF)*
- Craig Groeschel says, **“We all have something we'd like to become... maybe, a better parent. A better student/worker. A more solid Christian... What if the decision to become that was really a decision about what friends you chose?”**
  - (I often tell you it's **not the dreams you dream** that determine your destiny; it's the small decisions you make... and one of the most important decisions is whom you choose to walk with.)
- He says, **“You are one friend away from being a better parent, better spouse... or one friend away from being a worse one!”** You show me your friends, and I'll show you your future.
- You say, “Am I supposed to break up with all my non-wise friends?” Here's **another way** to look at it: 3 CONCENTRIC CIRCLES
  - Intimacy: 3 or 4
  - Influence
  - Care
  - (LAST CIRCLE: THE ‘WHATEVER’ CIRCLE)
- How your life will change... make sure those in the intimacy circle are believers... because you will become like them!
  - *Years ago scientists were trying to decide why fish swam in schools. They took one fish and did a partial lobotomy on*

*it because they had isolated the part of the brain that caused the fish to swim in schools. They put the fish back in the water. He could still swim and he swam off not in a school but by himself. Do you what happened? The rest of the fish followed that one lone fish. HOW FADS START IN HIGH SCHOOL...*

- You need to move some friends out of the circle of intimacy to the circle of influence... (don't send them official notification... this taxonomy is for your mind, not to label them: "Congratulations... you've been upgraded!")
  - **SO IMPORTANT: The spiritual life of your kids... your spiritual life** is determined most by the friends you choose to walk with. THEY CAN COME LISTEN TO ME... EVEN IF THEY HEARD THE BEST SERMONS... wouldn't influence them as much as their community. **AVERAGE OF 5 FRIENDS...**
  - **Your spiritual life... circles not rows. YOU SHOW ME YOUR FRIENDS...**
- **Proverbs 12:26**, "The righteous man is cautious with his friendships, but the way of the wicked leads him astray." Literally, "spies out" his friends.

I mentioned that the book of Proverbs was written by Solomon... Jewish rabbis claimed that a lot of it was David's wisdom he had passed on to Solomon. David's life was built around 3 major friendships... and I'd suggest that these are 3-types of friendships we all need:<sup>7</sup>

- **Friend Type 1: Samuel (Crown Bestower)**—God revealed to Samuel what he had called David to when he was a shepherd and declared that over him. **Do you have friends like that? I do.** They have been so influential on me. They could see what God was doing and called me up into it...

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<sup>7</sup> Craig Groeschel built a whole message around these 3 kinds of friends in the life of David, called "One Friend Away," from whom I got the idea for these 3 kinds of friends.

they held the crown over my life and urged me to grow into it.

- "Your identity is determined by what the most important people in your life think about you."
- **Friend Type 2: Jonathan (Faithful Companion)**—Jonathan was David's best friend as a teenager... he was Saul's son... Saul who was the king of Israel at the time. King Saul started to hate David because he was jealous of him. Jonathan risked his own life several times to warn David, to encourage him.
  - **And that's even more remarkable** when you consider that David's ascension to the throne came at great personal cost to Jonathan... Jonathan was Saul's son... who should have been king next? He should have. But Jonathan said, "God chose you, and if I can help you get to that, I'll do it."
    - **Do you have a friend like that?**
  - **Listen to these verses about Jonathan:**
    - "And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, where he strengthened David's hand in God." 1 Sam 23:18 // He heard David was discouraged, and got up and walked 30 miles to encourage him! 30 miles!<sup>8</sup>
    - **(Don't you get annoyed by passive friends?** Won't call back, etc. I need just a few who are always close. I can't have that many, but I want a few. Jonathan is the opposite of the passive friend.)
  - A faithful companion is that person who walks in when everyone else walks out.
    - These friends say, "I'm not just going to pray for you, but I'm going to pray with

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<sup>8</sup> Holiness Day by Day, Jerry Bridges

you.” SHARES YOUR PAIN; MAKES YOUR PAIN HIS OWN

- **You need these friends.**
  - **My favorite place where** Solomon says this... **Ecclesiastes 4:9–11**, *Two are better than one... For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?* When you lie down in life’s cold, you need someone to spoon with.
  - **Proverbs 18:24**: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* If you have your Hebrew OT open, which I know may of you do, you are noticing that “sticks” is the same word in Hebrew translated “cleaves” in Gen 2. This kind of friendship is a covenant that in some ways is similar to marriage.
- **You say, “I want these kinds of friends.”** We provide a vehicle for developing those kinds of relationships... again, not for spooning, but friendships to develop... **small groups...**
- **Friend Type 3: Nathan (Loyal Wounder).** Later in David’s life he would get into sin... tried to cover it up and live a lie. It was destroying David. God sent Nathan to tell him the truth. Nathan tells this story...
  - Do you have these people in your life?
  - *When is the last time you got a friend who loved you enough to tell you, “That is a stupid decision. What you’re doing is not going to work, you’ll hurt your marriage... you’ll hurt your testimony, you’ll hurt your relationship with God”?*

- *How did you respond? When this happens... it will make you mad. But it will save your life.*
- **Proverbs 27:6** “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” Kisses feel better than wounds; and if you only have people around you who give you kisses, life may feel good for a while, but you’ll destroy yourself.
- *You must deputize a few friends. In other words, we must give them a hunting license... BLIND SPOTS. (by definition, you don’t know about them. when you know about them, they become weaknesses. Blind spots are spots you can’t see.) Ask them to be honest*
- **“Things in a secret garden inevitably grow mutant.” David Powlison**
  - If you are a loner... go fishing, work on your car... your life has grown mutant. And you don’t know it.

**So those are the two reasons that friendship matters... because you are made for it and it makes you... so take great care, and “spy out” your friendships (as Proverbs 12:26 says)...**

Now before I end this, I want to do what I have done every week... I want to show you that the power behind good friendships—the power for all relationships, really—comes from the strength of Jesus’ relationship to us. **It’s really the theme of this series:** The quality of these relationships (horizontally) is determined by the strength of this relationship (vertically).

**You see, Jesus is the best, and ultimate friend we could have**

- When you think about it, he is the combination of **Jesus is Samuel; Jonathan; Nathan...**
  - **Samuel:** spoke courage. He said, “You’re a sinner. I call you saint. You are dead. I declare you to be alive. You were not my people, but I have made you my people.” Your name

was wrath, failure, judgment. I call you “mercy,” “new creation,” “more than a conqueror” and “useful for my service.”

- **Jonathan:**
  - He served us even at great personal cost to himself.
  - When David was in need, Jonathan walked 30 miles to Horesh. Jesus did more than that, he crossed the gap between deity and humanity.
  - Jonathan gave up his right to the palace to help David get in; Jesus purchased our place in the palace at the cost of his blood.
  - **He made his cause ours...**
    - He took our sins and and our sorrows...
    - Jesus at the grave of Lazarus... why he wept.
    - What a friend...
- **Nathan:** He loved us enough to confront us... he **could have just ignored us and annihilated** us, but instead he came to us, even when despised and reviled and murdered him.
- **Jesus is the best friend he describes in John 15...**
  - **Let us in...** He opened up himself to us... He stretched out his arms open wide on the cross... he made himself vulnerable.
  - And he **refused to walk away** from the cross for you, even when he could have... “**I won’t let go... For the joy** that was set before him, endured the cross, forgot about its shame...”

That friendship with Jesus enables us to become good friends.

**(A) GIVES US THE ABILITY TO BE VULNERABLE:**

- **Let me tell you why we can’t really open up to others...** we are afraid that when we do they’ll **yawn or walk away**.
  - Did you see in John 15:16 where he said, “**You did not choose me, I have chosen you...**” (**John 15:16**)

- **Jesus’ main point here was not, “Hey dudes, I am a Calvinist). Jesus didn’t make us his friends because** we were righteous. He **didn’t choose the popular, rich, cool kids** to be his friends.
- And **it wasn’t like in Disney movies**, where you he looked under the dirty layer and saw our inner beauty... he looked on the inside and saw even more death. He said, “You think you’re dirty on the outside, you should see what you look like on the inside!” **WHITE WASHED TOMBS**.
  - *And he chose to love us anyway.* But **what that means is that we’re not afraid of him discovering** something **NEW** about us and rejecting us. He already **sees all the brokenness** that we are and loves us anyway!
  - **The gospel is that we are simultaneously more wicked...**
- *That gives you the ability to be vulnerable.* You’re not afraid to open yourself up to people... Because someone more important than them saw it all and accepted us.. and we’re **not afraid of them exposing a broken part** because he has promised not just to accept us but to fix that broken part!
  - **And then, then, when you can be honest about your weaknesses, you can really connect with someone else.**
  - Because here’s what I’ve learned... “**You can impress people with your strengths, but you’ll only connect with them through your weaknesses.**”<sup>9</sup>
  - True friendship is born by connecting over shared weaknesses.

**B. TEACHES US HOW TO LIVE WITH GRACE**

- Other thing I’ve learned... **True friendship is hard.**
  - Light friendship is easy... “I like you. You make me laugh.”
  - But true, lifelong, Jonathan/David type friendship is hard... because, inevitably, they let you down; they are **inconsiderate** or **inflexible** or **blind** to your needs... their

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<sup>9</sup> Craig Groeschel.

selfishness gets the best of them... If you don't know how to show grace, **you'll never have life-long, satisfying, Trinity-like covenant** friendships.

- But through Jesus' friendship to you, you learn grace. As he accepted you, you accepted them.
- **Jesus' friendship to us gives us the freedom to become the friend we've always wanted for ourselves.**

## My Big Question: Are you Jesus' friend?

**You may be religious, but has he ever become your friend?** That's what it really means to be a Christian, to become Jesus' friend. He's not looking just for servants who will obey and be scared of him... but friends who will love and walk with him. **True Christianity is not about obeying rules, but entering a relationship.**

That one realization revolutionizes your Christian life... *What a friend!*

- **Changes how you pray.** The comfort you feel in trouble. Every burden I bear he makes his own and shoulders with me.
  - **Here's how you know if you relate to Jesus as friend...** you pray often and naturally. It's your first response. You and he *share life*.
- **How you see your sin:** If just as Lord and Judge (which he is), you'll always be trying to see what you can get away with... trying to appease him like a judge. But when he is a friend, you start wanting *not* to hurt him.<sup>10</sup>
  - I think of **Judas** who walks up to Jesus and calls him friend and then betrays him.
  - **"If it was an enemy** who did this, I could understand... but you, a friend?"
- Before, when I only saw Jesus as Lord and Judge, I curbed my behavior to avoid his judgment. Now, I don't want to hurt the one

who laid down his life for me, or let down the one who refused to let me down.

- **Being scared of God's judgment changed my behavior; embracing the friendship of Jesus changed my heart.**
- All this begins with receiving the friendship of Jesus, which is offered to you as a gift.

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Keller.