

## JOHN 15:12-17

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### [PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- Welcome—If new with us, you've found a beautiful church.
  - We are far from perfect—but we are perfectly loved.
  - Delighted to have you on the journey—enjoy your time here.
- And you've arrived on a great day because we're starting a short three-week series:
  - *Interpersonal: Growing Stronger in Our Closest Relationships.*
  - Consider what God has to say about friendship, marriage, parenting.

### [SERIES SETUP]: Two things to say before we get going.

#### 1. This series is for everyone—no matter what phase of life you're in.

- Important to say bc might be tempted to tune out if not in one of those relationships.
- But:
  - One day we might be!
  - More than that—we all have a role to play in this church family.
    - Even if you're not married or a parent...
    - Important to know what Bible teaches so we can encourage those who are.
- This is part of the unique blessing of being part of this family called the church.
  - Have a shared sense of care, compassion, and concern for each other.
  - Even if we're in different phases of life.

#### 2. There's a sense in which we're covering a silly amount of ground in three weeks.

- Could easily do a whole series on each of these relationships.
- To bring some focus to it, I want to look at each relationship through a narrow lens—**the endgame.**
  - What is the end of these relationships and how does that end impact the way we navigate them now?
  - Think of it like a recipe: you need to know what you're trying to cook before you start messing around with the ingredients.
- We'll consider how the end of friendship, marriage, and parenting lead us to make the most of these relationships now.

[Transition]: Today, we start with friendship but first—let's **pray.**

## [INTRODUCTION]

Friendship has a way of capturing our imaginations.

I recently finished Phil Knight's memoir, ***Shoe Dog***. He traces the journey from being a broke college graduate, traveling the world with a *Crazy Idea* to start a shoe company. No one believes in it. Even his own father asks him when he's going to stop messing around with it—and he uses a far less diplomatic word than *messing* around. By the end of the book, Knight retires from Nike—and he's worth \$10B.

But the thing that stands out isn't the money. It's the friendships he forms along the way. A small group of coworkers who stick together through constant brushes with bankruptcy, IRS investigations, and frequent controversies. They endure decades of pressure and delight in endless laughter. Later in life, they love Knight through the devastating loss of his adult son.

Knight reflects that the relationships he formed along the way—not the money, not the success—are what mattered most.

Or maybe you've been hooked on ***Stranger Things***. There's lots in that show, and I wouldn't recommend it all. But the best scenes, for me, aren't about monsters or mysteries. They're about friendship—kids playing games in the basement, riding bikes through town, hanging out at the mall, falling out and defending each other in equal measure.

Friendship. It shows up in books, shows, and songs. It speaks to a longing we all share—to have a connection that matters. To see and be seen. To know a person and to be known in return.

**[Transition]:** Which makes something about our cultural moment deeply sad.

Our age has been called the [age of loneliness](#)—and more recently, the [anti-social century](#). A thousand small societal shifts have contributed to this.

- We used to go to the movies—now we watch them at home.
- We used to eat at restaurants—now we UberEats at home.
- We used to connect in person—now we do so on our phones.

Derek Thompson, author and essayist, [recently wrote](#) that, “*Self-imposed solitude might just be the most important social fact of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in America.*”

Many of these developments are convenient—and some are good. But together, they're part of a larger picture that isn't doing us good.

Here's some data:

- A recent poll from the [American Psychological Association](#) found that 50% of Americans feel lonely and emotionally disconnected.
- 20% of us say we have [no close friends outside of our families](#).
- Men and young adults seem to be impacted the most.
  - Up to [70% of men](#) say they don't see their friends enough.
  - And [61% of young adults](#) say they feel serious loneliness.

What about you?

- Kids—Have you sat alone at the lunch table?
- Students—Have you been stuck in your dorm alone on a Friday night?
- Grown Ups—Have you wondered how on earth you're supposed to make friends as an adult?

How many true friends do you have?

- Not just colleagues or acquaintances—but friends.
- People with whom you can share life—the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows.
- People who know the real you and love you all the same.

If we remove family members—and anyone you're paying!—how many names are left on the list?

**[Transition]:** The good news is that God invites us into a better story than the one our world is telling—a story that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.

- But to get to that end—and see how it can lead us into beautiful friendships today—we need to start at the beginning.
- There's two sections to our sermon today.
  - First, we'll trace the biblical story of friendship in six short chapters.
  - Then we'll make some practical applications at the end.
- First, then...

## **[THE BIBLICAL STORY OF FRIENDSHIP]**

### **CHAPTER 1: ETERNITY PAST—Christianity has a unique appreciation for friendship because we believe that it has always existed.**

Everywhere we look we see created things: clothes, podiums, lights, this church, the pew you're sitting on. And even those things that seem permanent were once created: the mountains, sun, and seas—and, of course, our very selves.

But friendship is different. No one invented it. No one created it. It has *always* existed. There was never a time when friendship was not. We know this because we know about the Trinity: God exists as one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God exists—and has always existed—in relationship with himself, in community. Friendship is inherent to the very essence of who he is. It had no beginning. It has always existed in God himself. Friendship is eternal.

I find this to be a beautiful and compelling thought. Golf isn't eternal. Coffee isn't eternal. You don't sit around an eternal fire pit. But when you do these things with friends—they become a portal to something eternal. Through golf and coffee and fire pits—we participate in something that God enjoyed before time began.

**[Transition]:** And participate we must, for while friendship wasn't created for us...

### **CHAPTER 2: CREATION—We were created for friendship.**

One day God had an idea. Then he spoke to his friends about it. Father, Son and Spirit agreed, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). The relational God decided to make relational creatures.

Friendship is inherent within the very essence of God and—made in his image—it is inherent within us as well. We are designed to be in relationship with him. And we are designed to be in relationship with each other. Vertically and horizontally we are hardwired for relationships—it's at the very core of who we are.<sup>1</sup>

Friendship is not a luxury—the cherry on top of our lives! Instead, it's central to what it means to be human. Don't feel bad for needing friends—like you're supposed to be a maverick who can make it on their own or like you're supposed to be 100% fine if it's just you and the Lord. No, this same Lord made us for friendship.

**[Transition]:** This explains why loneliness is so difficult, which takes us to...

### CHAPTER 3: THE FALL—Friendship is hard.

We were created for friendship, but after creation comes the fall, and with the fall—the breakdown of relationships. In the early chapters of Genesis, we see Adam and Eve hiding from God and fighting with each other. The vertical and horizontal relationships are coming apart at the seams. Sin ruins everything—even the very things we were created for.

All of us have experienced this from one degree to another. Relationships can be difficult. As country-theologian Billy Currington put it, “*God is great, beer is good, and people are crazy.*” Misunderstandings, frustrations, awkwardness—they’re all part of our relationships!

And then there’s sin. We yell and are yelled at. We lie and are lied to. We betray and are betrayed. We sin and are sinned against. Day to day life provides endless opportunities to hurt and be hurt—even by those we love the most.

If you find relationships difficult—and especially if you find yourself in a difficult relationship today—know you’re not alone. Friendship is hard.

**[Transition]:** But know too that there’s hope.

### CHAPTER 4: REDEMPTION—Jesus has befriended us.

In John 15:13 Jesus issues one of his most famous lines: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”

It’s a beautiful phrase—but the context makes it even more compelling. It’s Thursday night. The next day Jesus will be nailed to the cross. What’s motivating him in this moment? The knowledge that he will do this—not for servants or slaves, not for his followers or fans—but for his friends.

He drives the point home in verse 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...”

This is the gospel:

- Sin didn’t just break a rule; it broke a relationship. God offers us life with him—security, purpose, and joy—but we turn away. We get busy and stressed. We pursue our own agendas and get caught up in our own plans. We forget his ways and then forget about him.
- But God doesn’t give up on us. He sent his son. The cross is the greatest act of friendship the world has ever known.

***Greater love has no one than this, that someone [namely, Jesus] lay down his life for his friends [namely, us].***

- Jesus paid the price of our betrayal so we can be welcomed home—so we can be friends with God again.
- That’s what it means to become a Christian: Admit that we haven’t loved God as he has loved us, receive forgiveness through Jesus, and be restored—not as enemies, but as friends.
- Jesus doesn’t just forgive us—he befriends us.

**[Transition]:** And that gospel changes everything...

- The healing of our vertical relationship with God has huge implications for our horizontal relationships with each other.
- Which takes us to...

## **CHAPTER 5: RESTORATION—We can befriend others.**

Verse 12 couldn’t be clearer: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

It’s provoking to note that Jesus says this is his “commandment.” Not a suggestion, a recommendation, or a free piece of advice. Jesus *commands* us to love one another as he has loved us.

And don’t you love the logical flow of his command? Love one another, yes, but only as I have loved you. This is gospel obedience: We love because we are loved; we forgive because we’re forgiven; we serve because we’ve been served.

How has Jesus loved us? Passionately, unconditionally, to the end! So he says, we are to love others. Recklessly, unconditionally, to the end!

**[Transition]:** This obviously has significant implications for our friendships, but before we get there, notice that we’re not quite at the end—the story of friendship continues beyond this world...

## **CHAPTER 6: ETERNITY FUTURE—We will be friends forever.**

The endgame of friendship is not merely healthier relationships now. Instead we end where God began—in eternal friendship—but now with us included in heaven.

Revelation 21:3 describes it: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

The endgame of friendship is that, through Jesus, we are brought into an eternal community of love—friends with God and friends with one another—forever.

This is an end that will never end.

Why? Because this is a story, not a cycle. We won't return to creation and fall to repeat the same relational brokenness endlessly. One day, friendship will no longer be hard. No one will sit alone. Instead, in our future—friendship is secured. Everyone will be fully known and fully loved forever.

The endgame is eternal friendship.

### **[Transition]**

- Well, if the endgame of friendship is eternal life together—friends with God and friends with one another—what might it look like to live in light of that end *now*?
- Let me suggest a few possibilities—see which applications are relevant to you.

### **[PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS]**

#### **1. Live as if loneliness is temporary.**

- If Revelation 21 is true, loneliness is not permanent—it's temporary.
- Which means loneliness is not a verdict on your life; it's just a season in the story.
  - So don't let it harden you. Don't let it make you lose heart. Don't let it make you give up.
  - There's hope.

#### **2. Take the risk to make new friends.**

- If we're going to be friends for eternity—let's get on with it now!
- Most friendships don't begin with chemistry; they begin with courage.
  - Someone risks rejection, chooses to move toward someone else, and makes a simple invitation.
  - A movie, a meal, a walk, a coffee.
- Friendship requires you to put yourself out there—but eternity says it's worth the risk.

#### **3. Enjoy your current friends.**

- Make the most of your friends—prioritize them, celebrate them, be grateful for them.
- Adult friendship takes a lot of work.
  - Make time. Follow up. Choose presence over convenience.
  - And enjoy the heck out of your friends.

#### 4. Don't give up on difficult friendships.

- This one is harder.
  - But if eternity future is life together, we can't give up on each other now.
  - Hanging in, awkward conversations, extending forgiveness—they're all part of the training we do for eternity now.
- This doesn't mean staying in unsafe situations—but it may mean refusing to give up too quickly.
  - Choose persistence. Choose forgiveness.
  - Trust that the grace that will make us one in eternity can do something powerful now—and certainly something that resentment never will.

#### 5. Make eternal friends.

- This might mean coming to faith in Jesus if you haven't yet.
  - The only people who'll enjoy eternal friendship are those who've been saved in him.
  - It's a heavy thought...
  - But if you want that future—friendship with God and others, where you are fully known and fully loved forever—you can have.
  - If you sense that longing in your heart—all you have to do is put your faith in him.
- If you've done that, making eternal friends might mean sharing your faith with friends who don't yet know him.
  - Tell them about Jesus...
  - If they accept him, you'll be friends with them in the world beyond this one.

**[Transition]:** Let me close with this...

#### **[CONCLUSION]**

- What Phil Knight discovered late in life, and what those kids in *Stranger Things* knew early on, is what the Bible has been telling us all along.

#### **Friendship matters most.**

- Don't lose heart. Take a risk. Enjoy your friends. Don't give up on each other. Make eternal friends.
- Bc we know the endgame—eternal friendship with God and each other in the life to come—we can live differently now.

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> I owe this point and the language of vertical and horizontal hardwiring to Redeemer New York City's Community Group Leadership Training.