

Home: Our Place in God's Family

Part Three- Friends of Jesus. Friends like Jesus. Friends for Jesus.

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John 15:12-17

Apprentices of Jesus

Our stated purpose at Summit Drive is: "To glorify God by developing caring passionate followers of Jesus Christ."

A follower, a "disciple" of Jesus is an apprentice to his way of life.

Jesus' Life in Community

Based on "Dunbar's Numbers" – Research from Dr. Robin Dunbar of Oxford University

1. Tribe: The largest circle is our "**Tribe**" – the big group we identify with and belong to. It's that greater than 150 number, and so we don't know all these people personally. But this group is where we get a vision of life, our values, and a call to live with meaning and purpose. For people in the secular world, this might be a political party, or sports team, or the company they work for.

For Christians, this group is the church as a whole – the larger church body. This is our "spiritual extended family." Believers across denominations, around the world, and throughout history. Jesus speaks of all who do his Father's will as his "brother, sister, and mother." (Mark 3:35)

2. Village: Your "**village**" is around 150 people. Sociologists call this the law of 150 – this is about as many people as you can be in actual relationship with, and it's noted as the ultimate size for a human organization. For church life, it's big enough that the giftings of the group can complement one another as each person brings their unique self to serve the body. Jesus had a group of dedicated followers he sent on short term missions in Luke 10. He had a group of 120 followers who gathered in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1-2).

3. Friends: this is up to 15 people. These are the people you do life with. These are the people we share meals with, drop off groceries when people are sick. We help each other move; we go on vacations together. This is our "community" in the best sense of the word. These are Jesus "12 disciples", and a few others like Lazarus and his sister, Mary and Martha.

4. Intimates: Dunbar calls our inner circle our "intimates." By "**intimates**" – he's talking about this group's size of 1-5 people max. They are the ones who know us as we are. They know the great things about us, and our 'shadow side', those areas of our life that are broken and painful. Jesus chose this "inner circle" of Peter, James and John as his most "intimate" friendships.

Jesus experiences community on every level and apprenticing ourselves to him means we will as well.

John 15:12-17

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.” – John 15:12-17

I. Friends Of Jesus

Even though he is the Lord, he makes them – and us – his *friends*.

And this is only possible because, in Jesus, God has taken the initiative to “lay down his life” for us. For his friends.

“They [the disciples] will **show** that they are indeed his beloved, his friends, by their obedience to his command – which is the command to love one another. It is not their obedience which will make them his friends. It is Jesus who takes the initiative and made them his friends. They are the beloved, because he loves them and lays down his life for them...Therefore their obedience will be the eager, intelligent obedience of those, whose master is also the one who has made them his friends.” – Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel*

We are made friends of Jesus through his self-giving love. And to be friends of Jesus means we become friends *like* Jesus.

II. Friends Like Jesus

What’s a friend?

- 1. We are friends like Jesus when we look out for the best interest of the other – even at great cost to ourselves.**

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”
– Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Practicing Friendship: To be a friend means giving the costly gift of: **Attention** and **Interest**.

Your attention is the most valuable resource you have. It takes times to be attentive. It takes effort to pay attention.

A key to costly, loving friendship:

Showing interest in your friend’s life. To ask good questions and listen with genuine curiosity. Like, “How are you...really?” How’s your work, your relationship with your spouse, or kids? Your relationship with God?” And listening without judgment.

2. We are friends like Jesus when we open up our lives.

“I have called you friends...for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” – John 15:15

The Hebrew word for “secret” is also closely related to the word for “friend.” Because a friend is someone you tell your secrets to. It’s a person we can confide in – which means, they will hold a confidence. An intimate friend – a soul friend – is someone who knows your soul. Who you share your heart with.

“When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” - 1 Samuel 18:1 (NRSV)

Barrier: The Freudian View of the Human

One of the greatest issues with friendship today – especially for guys – is the influence of Freudian psychology on western culture for about a century. One of the most significant aspects of Freudian thought sex underlies all of life.

The result is that our culture says ‘sex and intimacy’ are virtually the same thing. But the fact is, you can have lots of sex without any intimacy, and the Bible says you can have intimacy without any sex.

The Bible tells a different story. It presents a different view: that you can have real intimacy, real close friendship, and it doesn’t have anything to do with sexuality. Believe the better story!

At other times in history, and other cultures not soaked in the Freudian view, this wasn’t the issue:

Augustine of Hippo, in the 4th Century, said: “In this world two things are essential: a healthy life and friendship. God created humans so that they might exist and live: this is life. But if they are not to remain solitary, there must be friendship.” – Augustine of Hippo, 4th C

Another early Church Father, Gregory of Nazianzus once wrote to his buddy Basil the Great: “The greatest benefit which life has brought me is your friendship...If anyone were to ask me “What is the best thing in life?” I would answer, “Friends.” – Gregory of Nazianzus, 4th C

On Making Friends: *To have good friends, we need to be a good friend.*

1. Be Patient.

Friendships take time. You can’t “Amazon Prime” a deep friendship. I heard one pastor say we need “Friendship kindling,” not trying to throw big logs on a piece of paper. Trust is built over time. Vulnerability between people is necessary for there to be closeness, but not everyone is able to keep a trust. So you work your way towards this sort of closeness through experience.

2. Be Trustworthy.

A friend is someone you can trust to keep a confidence – so keep a confidence. Proverbs 16:28: “A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.”

3. Be Friendly.

You have agency. You have responsibility. Community generally won't just "happen" to you. We are making this together, and that means you are responsible for connection. You are responsible to make friendship happen. I know. Different personalities will experience this differently. It is more or less difficult to make a move toward people. But we still have agency.

4. Make Room for Faults.

Your friends will blow it at times. They will let you down. And you will fail them. One of Jesus' closest friends – Peter – denied he even knew Jesus, three times. And Jesus does what? Forgives him. Restores him. There will need to be time to rebuilt trust. For sure. But there will need to be grace for each other.

"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." – Proverbs 10:12

We'll have to say "sorry" and "I forgive you." That's part of it.

5. Be Real.

Get past the social-media mindset. Which is what? "Show the best, hide the rest." The highlight reel of real life is not real life. There is a "bloop reel" – and our friends will have access to that as well.

There is no closeness without honesty. To be friends is to be known – truly known. At some point you will have to exercise a level of trust.

6. Be Open to receive the gifts of others.

The way to deepen a friendship, or any relationship, is to not always be in the position of the "giver," it's to become the one in debt to the other; to receive the help, the gift, the kindness of another. Friends "help" each other. It goes both ways. And maybe it's just guys, or mainly guys, but receiving can seem to us like "weakness", neediness, and we often hate the idea of being weak or in need.

7. Be Wise in Choosing Intimate-Friends

I think wisdom would tell us that the "intimates" – the 1 to 5 – these will probably be followers of Jesus who share our vision of Jesus, and life, and share in the mission of Jesus.

Friendship, at that "intimates' level", is about sharing something at your very core – your "soul" is your "inner life." For a Christian, the very centre of my life is the life of Jesus in me. It would be very difficult to share that most important thing about me with someone who does not understand Jesus or believe in Jesus.

I'm not suggesting they cannot still be your best friend, but – and I know this because I've talked with people about this – there is an ache when this most important thing is not shared. My only word to you is, God bless you as you love the other as best you can. He can be trusted to guide you to the right kinds of closeness, and he hears your prayer for that person. And you will need other "intimates" who do share your faith in Jesus.

III. Friends for Jesus

"...I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last..."
– John 15:16a

What is the fruit?

1. **A life that looks like Jesus' own life.** The fruit is what happens when the disciples of Jesus do obey what Jesus commands here: *"Love one another as I have loved you."* So, the lasting fruit is the result of a life that is attached to Jesus that becomes like Jesus. And we actually and truly need each other to do that.

Tim Keller says it so well: "We cannot know God, change deeply, or win the world apart from community." – Timothy Keller

2. **Offering the Life of God to Others.** After Jesus' death and resurrection, he makes abundantly clear that to share in the life of Jesus includes sharing in the mission of Jesus. He says in John 20:21: *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

We are a *sent people*. How does the Father send Jesus? To bring life and hope to the hopeless. To bring peace to the chaos. To give of himself so that others might know the One True God. Bearing fruit means being agents of God's love and goodness in the world. It means more and more apprentices of Jesus.

The most significant way to share our hope in Jesus is through deep and meaningful relationships. But there's a serious caution here.

A note on "Evangi-friending"

To be friends "for" Jesus doesn't mean what Ricky calls *"evangi-friending."* Not "I'll pursue this friendship in order to lead you to Jesus...and if you're not interested in Jesus, or don't respond to him, I'll dump you as a friend." That is not the goal. That's not what real love looks like.

I have real friends who do not share the same vision of life or faith in Jesus. I continue to pray for and seek opportunity to point those friends to Jesus. And I will continue to share in life with them just because I love them. My love for my friends includes my desire for them to see the most important thing they ever could: how they are loved by Jesus. But I can seek to bless my neighbours and friends regardless of how they respond to my appeals to know God.

Life Group Discussion:

Open Up

Why do you think it is easier to make friends as children than as adults? If you could 'recover' one element from that ease of childhood and bring it into your adult friendships, what would it be?

Dig In

1. **Read John 15:12-17.** What stands out to you in this section? How does it connect with your own longings?
2. We looked at being "friends *like* Jesus" in the message. The two key elements of friendship Jesus mentions here are "love" (sacrificial self-giving) and "openness" – telling them his business.
 - a. How have you experienced these in a friendship? What did it mean to be entrusted with someone's "inner life" if they opened up to you?
 - b. What keeps you from being a friend like Jesus in this regard?
3. In the message, we looked at seven elements of being a good friend that the Bible speaks to (See the notes above).
 - a. Which of these do you feel like you are naturally good at? Which do you feel like you want God's help to practice with more intention?
4. Jesus had a close group of "intimate friends" – Peter, James, and John. He entrusted them to see his glory revealed on the mount of Transfiguration and asked them to be with him in his deepest moments of agony at Gethsemane.
 - a. If you have some "intimate friends", how can you keep strengthening your bond with them?
 - b. If you do not have any intimate friends – and many people do not in our context – what steps would you like to take to move deeper with others?

Prayer

Take some time to simply respond to the kindness of Jesus, who makes us his friend through his self-giving on the cross. Bring the needs of the group, and any portions that came out of the discussion to God – asking for his grace. Give thanks for our community and pray that we would be a people who experience deep and meaningful friendships.