



6. Friendship

God is made visible when we love each other

If God's grand plan is to fill the earth with His glory, and glory means to put one's attributes on display, God wants to make Himself visible on earth. He has made Himself visible through Jesus (John 1:18, Col 1:15, Col 2:9). And now He continues to make Himself visible through us, those who have been transformed through seeing Him. One of the primary attributes of God is love (1 John 4:8). So, when we love one another, we show who God is.

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

John 13:35

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The forming of friendship

Friendship is both discovered and forged. You can't make someone value the same object as you, but you can allow such a bond to disintegrate without investment.

C.S. Lewis says

"Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, "What? You too? I thought I was the only one."

— C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

It is like being on a viewing platform, when, absorbed by a magnificent sight one tourist bumps into another. One expresses their wonder at the scenery, taking the words out of the other's mouth.



Lewis remarks, in contrast to the posture of lovers, which is face to face, consumed

with each other, friends are side by side absorbed in a common interest.

The quest for a friend is destined for failure because there needs to be an object of transcendent value of which both parties subscribe. As Lewis writes

That is why those pathetic people who simply 'want Friends' can never make any. The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends. Where the truthful answer to the question 'Do you see the same truth?' would be 'I see nothing and I don't care about the truth; I only want a Friend', no Friendship can arise – though Affection of course may. There would be nothing for the Friendship to be about, and Friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice. Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers.

In Christian terms, we become friends as a by-product of having both witnessed the same incredible God.

Awkwardness of Biblical Friendships

'Friend' is an overused term. It can mean anything from a lifelong, loyal companion to someone who subscribes to my Facebook profile (whom I have never met).

The bible's definition of friendship diverges from the modern, cultural understanding in two clear ways.

1. Compatibility

World says, "Friendship is about what you get out of it. You don't want to have to change yourself too much so find someone who is 'compatible' (i.e. won't inconvenience my lifestyle too much)."

- They need to have the same likes and dislikes and slot into your life without you having to adjust.
- You can purge your social media accounts of anyone who holds a different opinion to you.
- One benefit of the pandemic restrictions is that you haven't had to mix with people who you'd rather avoid!

Biblical friendship says, “if Christ is the centre of your life, we need no other commonality”

The reason there are so many exhortations in the New Testament for Christians to love other Christians is because . . . the church itself is not made up of natural “friends.” It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In this light we are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus’ sake. That is the only reason why John 13:34–35 makes sense when Jesus says: “A new command I give you—Love one another as I have loved you.” . . . Christian love will stand out and bear witness to Jesus because it is a display, for Jesus’ sake, of mutual love among social incompatibles. (Love in Hard Places)

- D. A. Carson

Jesus’ unlikely lads

Matt 10:2-4

*These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and **Matthew the tax collector**; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; **Simon the Zealot** and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

Tax collectors were hated by Jews, and especially by nationalists, who considered them Roman collaborators and traitors. Zealots were ‘freedom fighters’, the resistance against Roman Imperial rule. They were the insurgency against the Roman forces. The only possible reason that Matthew and Simon could be part of the same group of friends is because Jesus was in the midst of the group.

Paul’s eclectic church plant

First church meeting in Philippi included a middle class business woman (Lydia), a blue collar civil servant (jailer), and a slave fortune teller (equivalent to inner city crack addicted prostitute).

The only commonality we need is common allegiance to God.

2. Reciprocation

World says, “I will be generous if you are generous to me” or “If I am faithful to you and you fail me, I won’t relate this way to you again”

Biblical friendship says, “My God is my source of life. He ensures I have everything I need (2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life...). He will never leave me short changed. If I give to you but you don’t give to me, that is

a shame for you and our friendship, but I am not left depleted because He will always supply my every need. This means I can afford to give myself wholeheartedly to you”
This means there is the potential for deeper, more meaningful, more abandoned friendships because I’m not burdening you to be my supplier.

How did I end up being join to this bunch?!

In friendship...we think we have chosen our peers. In reality a few years' difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another...the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting--any of these chances might have kept us apart. But, for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," can truly say to every group of Christian friends, "You have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another." The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others. ...At this feast it is He who has spread the board and it is He who has chosen the guests. It is He, we may dare to hope, who sometimes does, and always should, preside. Let us not reckon without our Host

- CS Lewis, The Four Loves

The rock band Queen asked the question, “Can somebody find me somebody to love?”. The answer is ‘yes’, God has orchestrated that these people are in my life, and I’m now called to love them.

The world sees God when they look in through the window and see the type of people, who can’t get along outside the church, living in deep devoted love within the church.

Uncomfortably pure friendship

Acts 2:44-47

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The way the early church lived was scandalising

Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

- Lucian of Samosata (around 165AD)

If we aren't similarly scandalised perhaps, we aren't taking this call as seriously as Lucian or other onlookers of the early church

Acts 5:13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

How can a community live like this?

Koinonia & Charis (Tim Mackie)

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship[koinonia], to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The church were hanging out together and had everything in common. They were willing to sell possession to meet the needs of others. They had commitment to share their stuff and their life with others.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared [koinonia] everything they had.

- 3,125 at least (more added daily) – all in one mind and heart?! Where do we see this today?!
- All Jewish but different languages, national homes, cultures
- It's not just about sharing stuff, but the fundamental realisation we are deeply connected because of Christ.
- How many individual stories went into this general statement in Acts 4? What happened whenever anything needed to be sold?
- What could cause people to relate to each other like this?

There's no way to describe what is going on in this community other than it was great grace

Acts 4:33

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace [Charis] was so powerfully at work in them all

ESV version talks about *great grace*, and the NASB translates this as *abundant grace*.

So it's not just God doing something on our behalf, but when we accept this gift of grace it starts to mess with us. God's grace wasn't just something God did for them, but it became a power/presence in their lives, beginning to motivate and generate these kinds of behaviours.

There was a huge famine which hit Jerusalem in 46AD (Acts 11:28). This was an opportunity to demonstrate unity across the region between people who had never met; the only connection was that God had reached them. Paul invited the newly planted churches in Greece to participate in an unprecedented financial offering.

2 Cor 8:1-2

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace [Charis] that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Paul is astounded by the Macedonians' generosity. Without this grace you could imagine perhaps that very severe trial (persecution) plus extreme poverty might result in something as extreme as suicide. But actually, very severe trial (persecution) plus extreme poverty with the added ingredient of **grace** resulted in overflowing joy and rich generosity!

2 Cor 8:3-4

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing[koinonia] in this service to the Lord's people.

Paul simply can't understand *how* they managed to raise so much money considering everything they were facing. And it wasn't only the funds they raised, but the fact of the privilege of koinonia that led to an attitude which expressed as "*Don't leave us out, let us be involved*"

What happened to the Macedonians? Simply – Grace. Something was dropped into them which reacted and caused something to come out of them. (A bit like dropping mentos into a coke bottle)

Am I up to scratch?

How would you rate your part in your friendship? Am I satisfied ("I couldn't ask for more")?

The more important question perhaps, is, is He satisfied?

John 15:13

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

He could and does ask for more – I might be able to do it on rare occasions, if the stars align, I've slept well, and am well fed. With the right conditions I might just be able to. But day in, day out? When tired? When running on empty? When rejected or neglected (perhaps by the very friend)?

If I'm really honest, I can't do it. I'm overwhelmed. I can't be a friend this good.

I can't, but He can

3. He has done it for me

Jesus has ticked every box, fulfilled everything the bible requires from a friend. He fulfilled the requirement on my behalf. He calls me His friend! He was faithful to me when I was unfaithful to Him.

John 15:14-15

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.

4. He is still doing it through me

He drops something (His Spirit/grace) into me which causes something (enduring and sacrificial love, commitment and fellowship) to come out of me. The Holy Spirit wears me like a glove. He is still doing what He has always done, only now He is doing through me. Jerry Cook, in his book *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*, describes the moment something was dropped inside of him, enabling him to love someone he couldn't have otherwise.

"Love is commitment and operates independently of what we feel or do not feel. We need to extend this love to everyone who comes into our church: 'Brother, I want you to know that I'm committed to you. You'll never knowingly suffer at my hands. I'll never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. I'll always in every circumstance seek to help and support you. If you're down and I can lift you up, I'll do that. Anything I have that you need, I'll share with you; and if need be I'll give it to you. No matter what I find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, my commitment to you will never change. And there's nothing you can do about it. You don't have to respond. I love you, and that's what it means.'

“A church that can make that commitment to every person is a church that’s learning to love and a church that will be a force for God.

“Sometimes when I am speaking, I select an individual from the group whom I do not know. I express the forever love commitment to him personally before everyone. I do it for effect, but it is also my sincere commitment to that person.

“One of these people came to me several years later and reminded me of the commitment I had made to him. In fact, he repeated it to me almost word for word. ‘I’ve been up all night in anticipation of talking to you,’ he continued. ‘I have to tell you that I’ve blown it.’ He then proceeded to describe the chaos in his life, his marriage, his ministry. As his shocking story unfolded, I found myself becoming angry and disgusted with him for blighting the name of Jesus and forfeiting his ministry so foolishly. Dear God, I thought, what have I gotten myself into? Can I really keep my commitment to this man? When he’s all done pouring himself out to me, can I totally accept him and not think any less of him? I was not at all sure I could.

“But while he was speaking, a strange thing happened. God gave me compassion for the man. When he was through, I said, ‘What you have told me is probably the most disgusting, despicable thing I can think of. I don’t know of anything more you could have done to make me reject you. You’ve left no stone unturned. But you need to know that the Holy Spirit is giving me the capacity to love you. And because I love you, and that love has been placed in my heart by the Holy Spirit, God loves you and offers you complete forgiveness.’

“It was just like turning on a faucet the way the man began to weep. Then he prayed. On the basis of my love, he asked God to forgive him. The outworking of all that over a period of time brought about the restoration of his home and his ministry, and now he is serving Christ.”

- Jerry Cook

The amazing thing is, when we are born again, when Jesus reveals who He is and the Holy Spirit takes up His rightful place in us, we start to operate from a different life source. He puts this love in my heart. Suddenly I find I have a capacity to think of others before myself, I have an ability to love, I have a desire to do kind things for others, I am enabled to sacrifice my preferences for others.

I can’t do it – But God knew I couldn’t and so he sends His spirit, who is the greatest friend, to enable me.

- Because He supplies me with all the love I need, I don’t need my friend to reciprocate the love I show them.
- Because He sets my identity, I’m not crushed when my friend says something thoughtless about me

- Because He fills me with His compassion, I am willing to cancel my plans to meet their need
- Because He softens my heart, I can weep or rejoice with my friend
- Because He nudges me, I can think to say or do things for my friend at key times

Characteristics of a Friend

1. Proximity

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

Proverbs 17:17

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18:24

A friend sticks close. They don't disappear when the going gets tough. It can be excruciating to have to watch someone who is enduring chronic pain, knowing you can't do anything to fix the problem. It's tempting to throw a solution and then justify backing away.

2. Emotionally connected/empathetic

Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Prov 25:20

You will only be as happy as your unhappiest child – whether you want to or not - you are emotionally connected to them. You give the gift of emotional connection. You rejoice or weep when they do.

3. Speak truth in love

Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Prov 27:5-6

A true friend would be more willing to risk the relationship than allow a loved one to drive off the cliff they are hurtling towards. When hard truths are brought by one who truly loves you, it makes it possible to hear.

“Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo.”

Ralf Waldo Emerson

Loyalty is shown by commitment to help a friend come into the freedom of the truth (John 8:32) not in a willingness to be united in ignorance.

Biblical friendship (using David & Jonathan)

1. Love as one's self
1 Sam 18:3 - And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.
 - i. Loved him
 - ii. There was regular contact & they spent time together
2. Strengthen in God – re-stating and applying the word of the Lord
1 Sam 23:16 - And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God
 - i. Friendship isn't about mirroring your friend's emotional state – we're to be empathetic but lead one another to God's perspective and empower one another to step into His strength
 - ii. Praying with each other
3. Expressed emotion, sharing in each other's experiences
1 Sam 20:41 - Then they kissed each other and wept together--but David wept the most.
 - i. Share where things are good and bad
 - ii. Mutual vulnerability (creating an environment that facilitates reflection)
 - iii. Compassion
4. Desire to see and relate to your friend based on who God says they are and not just as they present
1 Sam 23:17 - You will be king over Israel
 - i. Excited by what is going on in each other's lives
 - ii. What development are you looking for your friend?
 - iii. Accept who God has made friend to be
5. Prefer one another. Jonathan stepped aside from the throne (even though he was Saul's son). He wasn't competitive
1 Sam 23:17 - You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you.
 - i. It takes effort to be interested in others
 - ii. Willing to do things that wouldn't be your preference for their sake
6. Gave to him
1 Sam 18:4 - Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.
 - i. He was hospitable
 - ii. Demanded nothing in return

5. Committed out of God joining them together
1 Sam 18:1 - Jonathan became one in spirit with David
1 Sam 18:3 - And Jonathan made a covenant with David
 - i. Commitment even when it's inconvenient

6. Knew where he was at when no one else did
1 Sam 23:14,15 - Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands...And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.
 - i. Ability to anticipate how his friend is doing – predicted the pressure points
 - ii. Close enough to know
 - iii. Promoted by the spirit - God catches our attention with something we see – then we enquire (you had my curiosity, but now you have my attention)

7. Desire to serve
1 Sam 20:4 - Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."
 - i. Enjoy opportunity to express love by serving

7. Ability to speak passionately and honestly with one another
1 Sam 20
 - i. David was proactive in confessing, rather than waiting to be drawn out (1) He knew Jonathan would care (2) would be interested and (3) might have something to share
 - ii. David needed to be honest – he was prepared to risk the relationship for their sake

Friendship in action

God put a love in my heart (which continues to grow) causing me to want to:

1. Always place your interests equal with my own.
2. Serve you, minister to your needs in any way I can.
3. Never say or agree to things behind your back that are not said to your face (including by keeping silent).
4. Give the necessary time to hear your thoughts and concerns.
5. Be honest with you regarding any misgivings I might have about your direction (love enough to risk the relationship in confrontation and disagreement).
6. Never take advantage when I see your weakness.
7. Hold on and seek to see issues through when we don't agree.
8. Consider your success my success, your failure my failure.

The Purpose of Friendship

1. Indispensability of Friendship

In our Western culture there is a premium on individualism. We even call our products iPhone, iPad, iPod. We don't even need to argue over what you watch in the living room because now everyone streams what they want via their phone without having to leave their room. We want freedom to choose exactly what we want at every step of the way. *Yet there is an epidemic of loneliness.*

We weren't designed to be alone. We were made in God's image and God is a community, a friendship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God admitted it wasn't good for us to be alone (Gen 2:18). He sets the lonely in families (Ps 68:6).

We are used by God to help in our transformation to become more like Him.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17

We are to challenge, encourage, weep, and rejoice with each other.

There are a number of idioms within our culture...

No man is an island

It takes a village to raise a child

And in popular culture

"We're a team. We win together, we lose together. We celebrate and we mourn together. Our defeats are softened, and victories sweetened because we did them together".
- Toby Ziegler, West Wing

These cliches are formed because they come into alignment with God's truth. It takes a community to know an individual. C.S. Lewis offers some great insight into friendship in his book, *The Four Loves*. Lewis was part of the Inklings, a close friendship between Ronald, Charles and himself. He describes the impact on his relationship with Ronald when Charles passed away.

"In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him 'to myself' now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. ... We possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases."

Tim Keller builds on Lewis' point by saying

If it takes a community to know an ordinary human being, how much more necessary would it be to get to know Jesus alongside others?

I need to hear your stories of your encounters with God, to give me a better understanding of His magnificence. But it's not just for our benefit. Jesus said the way we relate to each other helps the world know of the one we represent (which is where we started at the beginning of this article).

We are privileged to show what God is like to a world desperately in need of Him. How could we show His nature, especially His love, if we don't have anyone to express it to.

2. Dispensability of Friendship

Friendship is critical but not all friendships qualify for this incredible status of revealing God. You can only journey with someone if you are heading towards the same destination. Otherwise you are in danger of being distracted.

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?
Amos 3:3

Friendship should be sought, but not at all costs. It shouldn't become more important than Jesus and what He has called us to. Following Jesus might necessitate us laying down our most precious relationships.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:26

The bible constantly calls us to lift our focus from the temporal to the eternal.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
Col 3:2

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.
Matt 6:19-20

We don't want to be in a position where we are investing in relationships which are merely about the here and now, and aren't building for eternity.

The term 'friendship' can cover many different meanings, but I want to invest in those relationships which lead to God being made known on earth. This means that friends who aren't heading in the same direction will peel off. It can be a joy to journey with someone for a part of the journey but always be clear that when the road forks, we know which direction we are heading.

"Do you love me? Means at last do you see the same truth I see? If you do, we are happy together; but when presently one of us passes into the perception of a new truth, we are divorced and the force of all nature cannot hold us to each other."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sometimes revelation and calling brings tension to the relationship. It was after Lot and Abram separated that God showed Abram more of what He had in store for him (Gen 13:14-15). In these moments we can't hold the relationship together, and we part ways, hoping that our paths may intertwine later.