

BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIP

WHY THIS TOPIC?

- For the believer, friendship is not optional...rather, it is essential to our God-given humanity...we all need friends
 - God has designed us for relationships
 - Even though the term “relationship” doesn’t appear in the Bible, the concept is found all throughout it
 - God has not designed us to live alone, in isolation from others...we were created to be social beings
 - Being in relationships with others is a foundational part of God’s design for humans
 - Humans were created to be in relationships with God and with each other since they were made in God’s image
 - Since God lives in relationship within the Trinity, he has designed us to share in similar relationships as those made in his likeness
 - This is evident in Genesis 2:18 where God said, “it is not good for the man to be alone,” a statement that says more about God’s design for humanity than it does about Adam’s need
 - The only thing in all of creation that was not good was man’s solitude
 - Though sinless and in perfect harmony with God, humans still needed to be in relationship with other humans
 - So, God created woman to be a companion to man and to allow him true relationship
 - God created Eve to be a helper to and in relationship with Adam because he is a social, relational God
 - While that text relates directly to the creation of Eve, it also functions as a statement about the nature of mankind...God created us as relational beings...and our growth and significance is worked out in relationships
 - In that sense, nothing has changed to this day...the need for relationships remains
 - “Just as human beings were created with a vertical need for God’s companionship, they are also created for the horizontal companionship of other people. Genesis 2 points to the fact that relationships are a core component of who God has designed you to be.”¹
 - Interestingly, God/Christ often call those who belong to him his friends
- Exodus 33:11** ~ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.
- Isaiah 41:8** ~ But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend,
- Luke 12:4** ~ I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.
- John 15:13-15** ~ Greater love has no one than this, that one 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 slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.
- Christ’s ministry was centered in deep friendships with the 12, within which three whom he formed an even deeper friendship
 - Christ came to make those were his enemies into his spiritual friends

¹ Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, 12.

Romans 5:10 ~ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- The healing of the vertical relationship with God results also in the creation of horizontal relationships of loving friendship between those who are in his family
- The result ought to be deep, close friendships which develop between believers as they grow together in the church
- In fact, the summons in Hebrews 10:25 is a call to relationships and friendships with other believers

Hebrews 10:25 ~ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- This short survey reveals that friendship is not an optional extra in the Christian life
- Sadly, however, genuine, biblical friendships seem to be on the decline
- “Among U.S. adults, about one in three said they feel lonely at least once a week. Worse, one in 10 Americans say they feel lonely every day, results show. Younger people are more likely to experience loneliness, which is defined as a lack of meaningful or close relationships or sense of belonging, according to the American Psychiatric Association’s latest Healthy Minds Monthly Poll. About 30% of respondents ages 18 to 34 said they feel lonely every day or several times a week.”²
- Does the change in the architecture of homes reflect this (from houses with large front porches to those with fenced and smaller yards)?
- “It is no longer unusual to not even know the families immediately surrounding one’s own house! The average American family moves four times, even when the job does not force it. People move from house to house looking for the elusive ‘something.’ We lack roots, continuity, and community – all of which is to say that friendship, especially deep friendship, has fallen on hard times.”³
- Does the fascination with the show *Friends* (with its theme song “I’ll Be There For You”) demonstrate the desire for a group of friends who become like family?
- “Living unfriendly and friendless lives is both a rejection of God’s purpose for us as his image, and a dehumanizing tragedy.”⁴
- We need good friends if we are going to avoid making messes of our lives...this is true for both male and female, introvert and extrovert, married and single
- Men tend to not do as well in this arena as women do...because men tend to be more task-oriented and women tend to be more relationship-oriented
- “Men are not helped to form deeper friendships by the widespread social expectation that they should be self-reliant. James Wagenvoord, in a book designed to help women understand men, describes the pressure: ‘He shall not cry. He shall not display weakness. He shall not need affection or gentleness or warmth. He shall comfort but not desire comforting. He shall be needed but not need. He shall touch but not be touched. He shall be steel not flesh. He shall be inviolate in his manhood. He shall stand alone.’ Unless men are able to resist this

² <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2024-02-01/loneliness-is-plaguing-americans-in-2024-poll>

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 58.

⁴ Vaughan Roberts, *True Friendship*, 17.

unhelpful understanding of masculinity and be able to be vulnerable with each other, they will always have companions, but not friends.”⁵

- Some men suffer from the delusion that real men do not need other people
- But it is not just men who may find making friends difficult
- There are numerous challenges to spiritual friendship in our current culture...challenges which make forming and keeping friendships harder than it has been before
 - ⇒ Increased mobility – whereas people often lived in the same house or at least the same geographical area for decades if not their entire lives (preserving long-lasting friendships), today most people are more transient moving from job to job and place to place throughout their lives (leading to fewer deep friendships)...more and more people lives in cities leading to “proximity without community” (i.e. people who are close to others physically but largely distant from them relationally)
 - ⇒ Technological advances – these can “certainly bring relational benefits, but they have also led to an increase in isolation. We have too often allowed gadgets to take the place of deeper communication with other human beings, rather than to assist it...[this results in being] more emotionally engaged with the characters in a game than with the people they meet in real life; they have the illusion of social interaction without the reality. We are in danger of raising a generation that finds it hard to relate to others because it has so little experience of doing so...We need to recognize that there is a difference between ‘friending’ – relationships which are conducted almost exclusively in cyberspace – and friendship. In friending, more is always better; but in friendship it is quality, not quantity, that matters...If we just have companions, but very few, or no, real friends, we are heading for trouble.”⁶
 - ⇒ Fewer spiritual connections – fewer and fewer people are truly engaged in a church family and those who are often are not involved in a church where there is robust body life happening; this leads to fewer genuine spiritual friendships and results in shallow relationships at best

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ON FRIENDSHIP FROM PROVERBS

- Proverbs has been called a “treatise on friendship” perhaps because seeking wisdom is often something done with the help of others
- “Life is presented in Proverbs as a journey in which we are constantly faced with a choice between two paths: wisdom and folly. We need good friends who will travel with us, help us discern the right road to take and spur us on to keep walking down it. Such companions will immeasurably strengthen us: ‘As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another’ (Proverbs 27:17).”

Strife Destroys Friendships

- Unresolved conflict can separate good friends

Proverbs 6:16-19 ~ There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

- These kinds of people stir up conflict in a family, community, or church
- They are divisive, disruptive, contentious, and factious...they create distrust and suspicion

⁵ Ibid., 23-24.

⁶ Ibid., 30-32.

- Such strife does great damage to relationships, even destroying friendships that were once close
- Whereas God aims to unify and bring together, Satan aims to separate...thus, believers are never more like Satan than when they sow discord in relationships
- “Troublemakers take delight in stirring up fights between various parties. Petty jealousies can embitter families. False rumors can undermine and divide churches. Many units of society can be broken by the troublemaker who shoots his poison of strife into the midst of his group.”⁷

Gossip and Slander Destroy Friendships

Proverbs 16:28 ~ A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

Proverbs 17:9 ~ He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Proverbs 20:19 ~ He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

- “If a friend does me the honour of opening up to me about something very private and personal, my lips must be sealed. Too often we break confidences in subtle ways by hinting at some information we are privy to, saying, for example, ‘I can’t say much, but between you and me, there are issues with Jane.’ We may feel that we have given no secrets away, but the context of the conversations makes it clear what we mean. Once others discover that we are not able to keep our mouths shut in this way, they will make sure they do not share anything significant with us, and we will find it much harder to develop close relationships.”⁸

Some Friendships are Superficial

- Superficial friends eventually fade away

Proverbs 19:4 ~ Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend.

Proverbs 19:6 ~ Many will seek the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.

Proverbs 19:7 ~ All the brothers of a poor man hate him; How much more do his friends abandon him! He pursues them with words, but they are gone.

True Friends Can Become Closer Than Family

- Family bonds were very important in the ancient Near East...but a bond can be forged between friends that goes so deep that the friend can be relied on even more than family

Proverbs 18:24 ~ A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

- The implication of this proverb is that we should strive to develop such relationships

True Friends Remain Through Trials

- Real friends stick with us through thick and thin

Proverbs 17:17 ~ A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

⁷ Louis Goldberg, *The Wisdom of Proverbs*

⁸ Roberts, *True Friendship*, 69-70.

Friendships Need to be Maintained

- Relationships require attention to keep them healthy

Proverbs 27:10 ~ Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, And do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.

True Friends Will Speak Truth Even if it Hurts

- They are willing to speak the truth in love for your good

Proverbs 27:6 ~ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

Proverbs 27:9 ~ Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.

- "If true intimacy is to develop, we must be willing to be honest in talking to our friends not only about our own failings but also, when appropriate, about theirs. Very often it is love for myself and a fear of being badly received, rather than a love for my friend, that holds me back from speaking an uncomfortable truth to him. But if I only praise him and never point out any faults, I am certainly not helping him...If our friends are forever telling us how wonderful we are and never pointing out our weaknesses, which they, more than anyone, are in a position to see, they are setting a trap for us."⁹

True Friends are Considerate

Proverbs 27:14 ~ He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning, It will be reckoned a curse to him.

EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS

David and Jonathan

- During the days of the Philistine occupation of Israel, a sense of despair and hopelessness plagued the people
- Despite this, Saul's son Jonathan was optimistic that the Lord would deliver them...and armed with this conviction and a sword, he attacked a Philistine outpost

1 Samuel 14:6, 13-14 ~ Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few."...13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. 14 That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land.

- Despite this victory, Israel continued to be plagued by the Philistines...making even Jonathan lose hope, thinking there was no one of like mind
- That is until he heard David's words before Goliath

1 Samuel 17:45-47 ~ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. 46 "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands."

⁹ Roberts, *True Friendship*, 58.

- Finally, Jonathan found someone whose heart was like his...a true friend...and his relationship with David demonstrates some of the essential elements of genuine friendship

A Shared Conviction

1 Samuel 18:1 ~ Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.

- Upon meeting David and seeing his boldness, Jonathan soul was immediately “knit to the soul of David” (literally, “The soul of Jonathan bound itself to the soul of David”)
- Jonathan saw that David viewed life the same way he did...that all of life is to be lived for the Lord
- As a result, he was instantly drawn to him because they shared similar convictions
- “This is the way it is with deep friendships. It is not that friends think alike on everything. Often it is quite the opposite. But they do share the same worldviews and approach to life. And this is why a Christian friendship exceeds anything that exists between nonbelievers – for such a friendship is founded on a supernatural mutuality of soul. The Holy Spirit makes your souls chorus the same cries.”¹⁰

A Shared Love

1 Samuel 18:1 ~ Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.

- As a result of their mutual convictions, Jonathan instantly was drawn to David in love...he had found someone who lived like he did
- They would become true brothers in the Lord because of their love for Him and their love for each other

A Shared Commitment

1 Samuel 18:3-4 ~ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.

- In this covenant, Jonathan recognized David as the true king of Israel and without reservation offered him the robe of succession
- His gesture formally ended David’s tenure as a shepherd and placed him side by side as his own royal equal
- “The deepest of friendships have in common this desire to make the other person royalty. They work for and rejoice in the other’s elevation and achievements. There are no hooks in such friendships, no desire to manipulate or control, no jealousy or exclusiveness – simply a desire for the best for the other.”¹¹

A Shared Loyalty

1 Samuel 19:1-5 ~ Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul’s son, greatly delighted in David. 2 So Jonathan told David saying, “Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself. 3 I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I will tell you.” 4 Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. 5 For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a

¹⁰ Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?"

- Despite Saul's jealousy and antagonism toward David, Jonathan remained fiercely loyal to him
- He defended him to his father and even persuaded his father to make an oath not to harm David
- "Loyalty is indispensable to the survival of friendship. How many once-prosperous friendships have faded because of disloyal talk?...You will never know a deep friendship unless there is mutual loyalty and trust."¹²

A Shared Encouragement

1 Samuel 23:16 ~ And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God.

- Because of Saul's frequent attempts to destroy David, David fled from his presence
- In one situation, he learned that the people in the town of Keilah were plotting to turn him over to Saul
- As a result, he fled into the desert, where Jonathan found him and encouraged him "in God"
- No doubt, this involved speaking truth about God to him, praying for and with him, and reminding him of God's sovereignty and glory
- Such were the characteristics of David and Jonathan's friendship...the mutual and affection they had for one another is reflected in the fact that they committed to caring for each other's family should something to either of them

1 Samuel 20:12-17 ~ Then Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? 13 If it please my father to do you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. 14 If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? 15 You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies." 17 Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.

- So close was their friendship that Jonathan's death on the battlefield brought David great sorrow

2 Samuel 1:25-27 ~ How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. 26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women. 27 How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!

- The relationship between David and Jonathan demonstrates what genuine friendship can and should look like
- We should be asking "What kind of friend am I?"

Paul and Timothy

Philippians 2:19-24 ~ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

¹² Ibid., 62.

- “kindred spirit” = *isopsuchos* = from *iso* (“same”) and *psuche* (“soul”) = literally “same-souled, like-minded”
- This refers to two people whose hearts are knit together...who have the same convictions, desires, passions, drive, love for Gospel and Christ...whose hearts beat together as it were

Paul and Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25-30 ~ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

- Notice the way Paul describes Epaphroditus: “my brother...fellow-worker...fellow-soldier”

CULTIVATING FRIENDSHIPS

Pray

- Like anything else, we should pray for the opportunity to develop friendships

Friendliness

- If you want to have a friend, you must be a friend
- “No matter what our disposition, we need to work at friendliness. We need to be consciously cheerful. We need to ask questions. We need to place ourselves in situations where friendships happen. If you are a regular church attender but do no more than attend morning worship, you are depriving yourself and the church of the friendship so desperately needed by all. Men, we must place ourselves in the ways of friendship: an adult Sunday school class, a home Bible study, a men’s Bible study, a men’s breakfast group, men’s retreats, and especially, service in some ministry of the church. Women are so much better at this than men. We must learn from them to take the initiative.”¹³

Love

- Love for others must characterize our friendships

Matthew 22:39 ~ The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’

Transparency

- “If we want greater intimacy with others, we will have to be prepared to be open with them. That may involve sharing our hopes, fears, and passions, as well as our darkest secrets or greatest temptations. I have found time and again that as I have taken the risk of being open with trusted friends, far from recoiling from me in horror, they have responded by revealing some of their own struggles, and our friendship has deepened.”¹⁴

¹³ Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 65.

¹⁴ Roberts, *True Friendship*, 48.

Listen

- Be a good listener and you will likely have good friends

James 1:19 ~ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

- “We all want someone to listen to us, but are we prepared to listen to others and take a real interest in their lives? Friendships are often strengthened by good questions... We should show an interest not just in what our friends are doing, but in how they are thinking and feeling.”¹⁵

Hospitality

- Use your home as a place to minister to others

1 Peter 4:9 ~ Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Commitment

- “There is a place for declarations of commitment and love, but these qualities will often develop naturally as we demonstrate them by our actions. Rather than waiting for others to take the initiative, we can do so ourselves in countless ways, whether we are single or married, not least by prioritizing time to see friends. Given the many demands on us, that might require making a regular commitment, rather than simply waiting for a moment when we are both free, which may happen rarely.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.