The Church: Our Friendships

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[0:00] Well, it's a joy to be with you all this morning, as it is every Sunday, but I especially! like any opportunity I get to preach and share God's Word with you all. And I always want to express my joy and appreciation for you as a church. You guys make my life a delight, not a burden, but a joy. And I can't fully express how much that means to me and to my family. And I speak on behalf of all of our pastors when I say that. You make our lives easy and a joy and not a burden in any way.

There's certainly challenging days of ministry, as there always will be, but there's no better place to do ministry than here at First Baptist Mustang. And I'm not saying there aren't other good churches, there are, but I truly mean that this is the greatest place to have the privilege of serving.
And I really, this church has just ingrained itself in my personality beyond what I can express. I've been here since I was 14, and so I really don't know who I am apart from all of you. And so I just want to thank you for who you are and who you've shaped me into being. And so it's a great privilege to serve friends and to serve alongside friends as we do ministry all together, serving the Lord.
And it's on that theme that we'll focus this morning. We're going to continue our series on the church and this morning look at our friendships. And so we're continuing that church series. And as has typically been the case with this series, we're going to step away from our normal diet of looking at just one particular passage and analyzing it. I kind of want to zoom out and look at what the Bible teaches holistically about the topic of friendship. So just be ready to turn to a few places in your Bible with me. My aim, as always, is to be biblical, but I do hope today that it will be incredibly practical as well as we think about friendship in our life and in the life of our church. If I were to ask you to think of a biblical topic that's theological and practical and is at the, the center of the storyline of Scripture. I'm sure a few things would come to your mind. I'm sure a few good things would come to your mind. I don't think any of us would say friendship. I don't think that would be a term that we'd use to describe something that's theological and practical and at the center of the Bible's storyline. Friendship isn't the most theologically heavy-hitting topic we could cover on a Sunday morning. But friendship is actually at the center of the biblical storyline. And I hope you'll see that this morning from Scripture. And friendship is something that is central to all of our lives. You can't get away from friendship for good or for bad. It affects us. It permeates every area of our life. And so friendship is actually incredibly theological. And I'm thankful for a book I read a couple of years ago on this topic by a guy named Drew Hunter. It's called Made for Friendship. If you want to study this further, that would be a great book to get. It's fairly short, but very, very helpful.
We are aware of friendship. We're aware of how much it affects us, but it's probably not something we think about in a thoroughly biblical way. And what I mean by that is I think we typically view friendship as something that's unspiritual. Not that it's evil, but we think of friendship as like something we experience as we do spiritual stuff. So we go to church and we make friends. We sing songs together.
[3:38] We study the Word together and we make friends. But I don't think we view friendship itself as something spiritual. And I don't mean that we view friendship as evil, but if you compare reading your Bible and singing and praying to spending time with friends, well, spending time with friends doesn't seem like it should be in that same conversation. It seems like it's unproductive. It seems like it's non-theological or just unspiritual. And I think that just goes to show that we need to spend a little bit more time thinking about what the Bible has to say about friendship. I think we can be thoughtless about it.

I think we can, I think we don't value it as much as we probably should. And I think this is something that our youth students are just inherently better at than the rest of us old boring people is friendship. They don't care what's going on or what time of day it is. If their friends are there, they

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want to be there. They will burn their house down to go hang out with friends.
And I think they can be a good example of prioritizing friendship. But as we go on in life and get a job and a spouse and have kids and grandkids, friendship can go to the back burner or get buried under a pile of laundry. It's something we'd like to be better at, something we'd like to prioritize if we had time, if we had time for hobbies. But I hope to show you this morning from God's Word that friendship isn't a hobby, it's a biblical command. Friendship is something that we are made for and commanded to pursue.
It's very easy to neglect friendship in our lives. It's very easy to view it as insignificant. But no one underestimates its power when they feel all alone.
No one, when they're feeling lonely, thinks, I don't need friends. You feel the weight of how powerful and helpful a friend can be when you feel all alone.
[5:37] And so when we feel the sting of loneliness, we don't underestimate friendship's power in that moment. But it's also in those moments that we can't microwave a friendship.

We can't just quickly establish a deep friendship with someone in our moment of need. That's when the payoff will come. That's when the harvest will come of years of investment and work to develop a deep friendship. I was talking to Michael about this recently and he said, you can't make old friends. And that's so true. And I was trying to do some digging on where that quote came from. And it's actually the title of a Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers song. So I don't know if Michael listens to that or I'll just give credit to Michael. But you can't make old friends.
That's so true. You can't microwave a friendship. And J.C. Ryle said this about friendship. He said, friendship halves our sorrows and doubles our joys. It halves our sorrows and doubles our joys.
And the Bible actually has a surprising amount to say about friendship. Now, if you just search the word friend or friendship, you're not going to get a lot of results from the Bible. There'll be a few things that pop up, but not much is said explicitly about it. But if we broaden out our understanding of what friendship is, the Bible's overflowing in its commentary on the topic of friendship. So the Bible doesn't say much about friendship explicitly, but it says a lot about loving your neighbor.
The Bible doesn't say much about friendship explicitly, but it says a lot about serving and loving and forgiving and being patient with each other. And what is that? What are those things? They're acts of friendship. And so if we broaden out our understanding of what friendship is, the Bible has so much to say to us about it. And so if we think about friendship as simply loving others, friendship is essential to godliness. You cannot love God without loving others. And if you love others, you will have friends. You will be a great friend. And not only does the Bible talk about it all over the place, but friendship is also an incredibly important need within the church today and within our church today. I've never heard anyone complain that they have too many friends. I hear people complain a lot about, man, I'm in a big crowded room, but I don't feel like anyone knows me. I don't feel like I've got actual friends. I feel like
[8:10] I've just got a bunch of acquaintances. We are in need of friendship. And by way of introduction, I want to look at the Apostle Paul. So go with me to Romans chapter 16 to begin our time together in the Word this morning. The Apostle Paul was the best missionary the world has ever seen. He had a theological depth of no parallel. I've never met anyone personally with the theological depth that the Apostle Paul had. And he had a love for people that was unmatched. And both those things are hard to find in one person. And Paul was both. He had a theological depth to him, an understanding of God's Word, and he had a deep love for people. So much so that in 1 Thessalonians 2.8, he says, we were affectionately desirous of you. And so we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our own selves because you had become very dear to us. This was essential to Paul's ministry. He had a deep love for those to whom he preached. He taught them, he invested in them, and he loved them as his own friends. Paul loved the Bible, and Paul loved people. He was a great friend. And as you look at Romans 16, remember that Romans is the most theological of all of Paul's letters. The depth of theology here is really unmatched in the rest of Scripture. And yet he's got 16 verses here. It's a list of names.

It's a list of people he's thankful for, a list of people he wants them to check in on and greet. And I won't read all these names because there's some of them that I don't want to read publicly, but you get the idea that here's a list of names that Paul is thinking of and praying for.
He lists 31 names in these 16 verses. And it actually accounts for even more people than that because he'll say sometimes, you know, and greet his sister or greet all the saints who are with them.

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So there's a larger number of people than just 31 who are accounted for in this section of the letter. But Paul says in chapter 16, verse 1, Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Eponidas, my beloved Eponidas, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who's worked hard for you.
Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They're well known to the apostles. And he lists name after name after name. If you look down at verse 13, greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, also his mother, who's been a mother to me as well.
[11:29] In verse 15, greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympus, and all the saints who are with them. So you get the idea. Paul knew a lot of people here in Rome. And you might think, okay, he spent a lot of time in Rome then. Well, the reason he's writing this letter is because he's never been able to get to Rome. And so he's writing a letter to express his love for the Lord and his affection for them. And so he knows 31 people by name in a place that he's never been.

I don't know if anyone in here knows 30 people in a place that they themselves have never been. Paul was a great friend. Paul was concerned for these people. Paul loved these people.
And we all want to be like that. We all have a deep desire to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. But we can very often have a lot of struggles with friendship. Friendship can be very difficult. We are sinners trying to get along with other sinners. That leads to some turbulence at times. And friendship is in crisis in our world and in our church too. Very many people feel all alone. And I think typically men struggle with friendship more than women do. Women have their own struggles with friendship. But I think men can tend to feel alone more than ladies can. And some of that's like, yeah, you got to talk to people, guy. Like, you haven't talked to your best friend in 12 years.
Like, check in on them. So much so that one guy said the biggest miracle of Jesus' life was that he was in his 30s and had 12 friends. But we can all have struggles with friendship. And I hope this morning will be a help to all of us to cultivate and cherish godly friendship. And so this morning, I want to look at the importance of friendship and the need for friendship. The importance of friendship and the need for friendship. And we'll conclude with some practical application for friendship, both for our church and for us as individuals. So number one, the importance of friendship.
[13:35] And again, you might think this isn't really that theological. Like, is this actually worth spending a Sunday morning thinking about? But the Bible's very honest in speaking about friendship having great power, both for good and for bad. And on the negative side of that, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, bad company ruins good morals. And Solomon says in Proverbs 13 that whoever walks with the wise will become wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm. Friendship has power. As we think about our own lives, the thing about my life, some of my greatest joys are centered around people. Some of my best memories are from time spent with friends, time spent with people I love. And some of my worst memories, some of the most difficult times I've walked through are also centered on people.

Why is this so central to us? You're probably like me. That's probably true for you too. Friendship truly fills every area of our lives. We can't escape it. And why is that? Why is it that people are so central to both extremes of our experience? And I would argue that the Bible teaches that it's because we were made for friendship. We were made for friendship.
And Jesus was asked a question in Matthew 22, what is the greatest command? And Jesus said to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And a second is like it, that you love your neighbor as yourself. And what is that love for neighbor? What is that love for others other than friendship? It's acts of friendship towards each other. And so our whole task as human beings, Jesus boils it down, love God and love others. Be a friend of God and be a friend of others. And as we think about the life of Jesus, he was and is a man of friendship. The Pharisees critiqued Jesus in Matthew 11 and said, that guy is a friend of tax collectors and sinners. They meant it in a derogatory way. They meant it as an insult, but that was so true. Jesus is a friend of sinners. Jesus truly is a friend to sinners. And turn with me to John chapter 15. It's what we read earlier. John 15 verses 12 through 17.
As Jesus is speaking these words, he's in his final moments on earth before he was arrested, before he was tried, and before he was ultimately crucified. And what do we find Jesus doing? He's spending time with his friends. He's spending time with his disciples. He's instructing them and

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teaching them and giving them things to be on the lookout for once he's gone, things they will endure and walk through.
And in John 15, we get in Jesus' own words, his description of what he's going to do on the cross. We get Jesus' own take on what he's going to accomplish on the cross, of why he's going to the cross.
[17:00] How much more theological could we get? How much more central to the biblical storyline could we get than Jesus, the Savior, describing in his own words what he's going to accomplish on the cross?

And yet the terminology he uses is surprising to us. The terminology he uses to describe his work on the cross maybe makes us a little bit uncomfortable. Verse 12, we'll read this again.
This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.
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've heard from my Father, I've made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
These things I command you, so that you will love one another. Jesus describes his work on the cross as an act of friendship. He describes his death on the cross as a divine display of friendship.
[18:25] Jesus is our friend. And if Jesus himself didn't describe himself in this way, I think it would maybe be wrong for us to describe him like this. It's almost just too casual. It's almost too irreverent to describe our master and Lord in this way. But Jesus himself has defined our relationship with him on these terms. And so, it would actually be wrong for us to shy away from this. Jesus is inviting us to think of him in this way. Now, our friendship with him is not exactly like our friendship with each other. There's an asymmetry here for sure. He says in verse 14, you are my friends if you do what I command you. If I came up to any of you and said, you're my friend if you do what I say, you'd be like, I'm good. And so, there's a difference. We can't throw off all boundaries in our relationship with Christ, but he does invite us to call him friend. And he says in verse 12, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Jesus' work on the cross is a divine act of friendship.

And it's the foundation for all of our friendships as well. Because Jesus has loved us, we must love each other. Because Jesus has befriended us, we should befriend each other. Jesus was and is a man of friendship. He truly is a friend of sinners.
And when he befriends us through his work on the cross, when he saves us, he turns us into men and women of friendship as well. We are conformed to the image of our heavenly friend. And so, as we believe in him and trust in him for the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls, we become like him. And because the gospel is an act of friendship and the gospel is central to the biblical storyline, friendship is at the heart of what the Bible is teaching us. We were created for friendship. And so, we need to do our best to cultivate friendship. And we need to do our best to cultivate godly friendship. It's important to our lives because friendship is important to the storyline of Scripture. And that leads us secondly to the need for friendship. The need for friendship.
Friendship isn't just important in general. Each one of us needs friends. We need friendship in particular. It's possible to understand that theological significance of friendship, but miss its importance in your life. Fail to bring it home to your life. It's also possible to understand the need for friendship for other people and think, well, I just don't need friends like other people might need friends. But how is it that I can stand up here and with God's authority say, you need friends? It's because that's what we were created for. We were created to live in friendship. We are made for friendship. And I've said that, but I want to show that to you from Scripture. So, go with me back to Genesis chapter 2, all the way back to the beginning of your Bible.
And I'm sure you're familiar with Genesis 1, which is really kind of a highlight reel of God creating the entire universe. He speaks it into existence. He creates absolutely everything that exists.
[22:14] And he does it with a breathtaking ease. He speaks. And reality conforms to what he speaks. Things come into existence that previously did not exist. And at the capstone of that creation is mankind. He creates man and woman in his image to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And it's carried along by a chorus of, and God saw that it was good. That's repeated six times in Genesis 1. And the seventh time, it's said that God looks across everything he's made and sees that it is very good. It is the goodest of all the goods that he's made. Everything is good. But in

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Genesis 2, we kind of get a replay from an angle.

And we see that while Adam and Eve were both created on day six, they weren't created at the same time on day six. And so there was a moment in time where Adam existed as the only human being in the universe.
Adam existed alone before Eve was formed. And so we get that in Genesis 2 and pick up with me in verse 15. It says, Yahweh God took the man, that's Adam, and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
That was his task. And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Now, it's important to remember that Eve did not hear God speak these words. And that'll play into how Satan tempts her later. But Adam alone received these words from God.
And they applied to Eve or any other human being that would come into existence from Adam, but they were only spoken to Adam himself. In verse 18, then Yahweh God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. This is a shocking statement. We've just read Genesis 1 where God sees everything and it's good. And now we see from Genesis 2, there was a moment in time during that creation week when God did not think everything was good.
[24:32] And this doesn't mean that it was evil or broken, but something was missing. It was incomplete. It wasn't finished yet. And that imperfection, that incompletion was that Adam was alone. Adam was by himself. Something was missing from creation. There was something that was incomplete and inadequate about Adam living in the presence of God alone. Something was missing. Adam lived in paradise.

There was no sin in him. There was no sin in the world. He was in the presence of God himself. And God said, that's not good. And as we think about Adam's situation, we're like, that sounds pretty good to me. That'd be great. But God looks at that and says, it's not good. Something is missing. Something's incomplete. Adam's relationship to God by himself was insufficient. And I don't want to question the sufficiency of our relationship to God through Christ, but these are God's own words about Adam living in isolation, even in the presence of God. Adam could not be who or what he was supposed to be while he lived in isolation. There was imperfection in him being alone, and Adam felt that loneliness even in paradise. God says, I'm going to make a helper for you, and he causes all the animals to pass by him, and Adam's naming them, and he doesn't find a helper that's fit for him. So now, even in paradise, even in a perfect environment, Adam feels alone. He feels his isolation.
Adam's relationship with God wasn't sufficient for him to fulfill his task on earth as a human being. But notice how God solves this inadequacy. Notice how God fulfills this incompletion. Verse 21, So Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that Yahweh God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. And remember, Adam has seen all the creatures, great and small, and says, there's nothing here for me. But when he sees Eve, he says, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.
Notice how God solves Adam's loneliness. He doesn't give Adam a group of acquaintances. He doesn't give Adam a lot of people that he kind of knows about but doesn't really know. He gives Adam the deepest form of friendship. He gives him a wife. Adam wasn't created to have a primary relationship with God and not much social life outside of that. God provided Adam with the closest friend he could give them.
He gave them marriage. He gave Adam a wife. And marriage really is just the closest form of friendship, and it's the foundation of all other friendships. It's the foundation of society. The reason you have a friend is because your friend has parents. Someone brought him into the world. This is kind of the foundation of all relationships, of all friendships. So there's a need for friendship that's wired into who we are, so much so that even before sin entered the world, Adam needed friendship. And if Adam felt that loneliness even in paradise, it's not surprising that we can feel alone if we neglect friendship in a broken world. You will feel isolated if you neglect friendship or if you don't have deep friendships.
[28:29] We are created to enjoy our relationship with God through friendship with others. And as you think about our salvation, God has saved us. He's given us a relationship with himself, but he doesn't leave us as individuals. Salvation isn't individualistic. We're saved one at a time as people

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come to Christ, but he saves us as individuals. He saves us as individuals. He saves us into the church. He gives us a community of friends to live life with. And so we don't glorify God instead of friendship. We glorify God through friendship and through community. God really made us like himself. God is a God of friendship.

If you think about God, who is he or what is he? He is one God. He's got one nature. He's one thing. And he exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. So for forever, before anything was created, God experienced friendship. God experienced community and love within himself between all three persons of the Trinity. And when he creates, he's sharing that love with us. He's revealing who he is to us and he's making us in his image. He makes us like himself to live in community. And Michael Reeves has described God this way. He says, God is an extrovert. His love overflows and he makes new friends.
He befriends sinners. He brings people into his community. He brings people into his love. And so we reflect the love of God through our love for others and we imitate him in friendship. And if we have good friends, we become more like God through friendship. We were made for friendship, friendship with God and with each other. And the objection that's most common to our need for friends is to say like, well, I've been hurt by people. If I just kind of withdraw, if I don't get as close to people, I won't be as affected by them. I won't be as hurt by them. I've been deeply wounded by people. And you guys know what that's like. You have scars from people. You have wounds that were inflicted by people you thought were friends, by people you got close to. And so it can be easy to say, well, I'm just not going to open myself up to people because then I have less of a chance of getting hurt again. And there is a great potential to being hurt by friends. That's true. I think we need to acknowledge that that's a two-way street. We've certainly hurt others as well as having been wounded by others. But there is a serious potential to being hurt by people. And there's a couple of lengthier C.S. Lewis quotes I'll share with you. One's right now. I think that's typically unhelpful in sermons, but I'm going to let it fly.
C.S. Lewis was talking about this potential to be hurt by people. And he says, to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.
If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements.
[32:06] Lock your heart up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, your heart will change. Your heart will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. There's just an inherent risk in friendship. There's an inherent risk in any relationship. It's not inherently safe.

But as we think about Jesus as a man of friendship, he's not only the initiator of our friendships, but he's the perfect example of a friend. He's the perfect example of friendship because Jesus was a friend at all times. He was always a good friend, even when his friends hurt him. You think about the pain that Jesus experienced on this earth. He was sad when his friend Lazarus died. That wasn't Lazarus' fault, but Jesus was hurt by that. He was wounded by that. He grieved, and the people that saw him cry at his friend's grave said, look at how he loved him. He loved his friend. Jesus was hurt by that. You think about Peter, the leader of the disciples. And on the night that Jesus was arrested and tried, perhaps the moment he needed a friend the most, Peter denied him three times. I don't know him.
And what does Jesus say to Peter? His next recorded words to Peter are, Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep. Peter, do you love me? Tend my lambs. Peter, do you love me? He didn't talk to him like a football coach. He spoke to him as a friend who continued to love through heartbreak and pain.
And you think about Judas. Judas was one of Jesus' friends. And Judas betrayed him for money. Judas had a price and he was bought. And we don't see a single harsh word spoken about Judas by Jesus.
We don't see a single bitter word that Jesus spoke. He certainly spoke about Judas factually, about the betrayal that took place. But he never speaks about him in bitterness. He doesn't speak about him out of anger. And that wounded him so deeply to have one of his own friends betray him.
[34:49] And what we see in the Bible and what you've seen and experienced in life is that superficial friendships kind of wither away when difficulty comes. When something hard happens in life, superficial friendships can tend to just wither and completely disappear. But true friendship is deepened and sweetened through trial. And so it's common to ask in the midst of difficulty, what is

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God doing with this suffering? What is God doing during this difficulty?

And maybe what he's doing is strengthening our friendships. Maybe he's deepening your friendships with others. Friendship is important and friendship is needed. Let's look thirdly to conclude some practical tips for friendship. Practical tips for friendship. And I want to look at this first congregationally and then individually. So how can we as a church cultivate friendship? How can we as a church be good friends? How can we be a friendly church? Well, I've got two things for us as a church.

Number one, remember that we are called to friendship with each other. Emphasis on with each other. Remember that we are called to friendship with each other. As you look around the room, these are the people the Lord has called us to be friends with. And you might think, I like the idea of friendship in general, but when you put it like that, these are who the Lord has called us to be friends with. And one person said to live above with the saints we love, oh, that will be glory. But to live below with the saints we know, well, that's a different story. But these are the people the Lord has called us to be friends with.

And that doesn't mean we can't have friends outside of this church. Don't, don't, keep pursuing friendships outside of the church for sure, but we're certainly called to be friends with each other, with the people who belong to our church. And that doesn't mean we have to be equally close to everyone, or there's a competition going to see who can have the most friendships and the deepest friendships. But we are called to be friends with each other. And when someone's evaluating a church, when someone's trying to find a new church, there are really just two things they're looking for. They evaluate a church by the teaching and the friendships. Is this a place that has good teaching? And is this a place where I can make good friends? Those are really the things you're looking for. And then teaching includes obviously the songs and Sunday school and all kinds of things, but is there good teaching here and are there good friends? And if you have both, people will flourish. If one of those is missing, the strength of the other is greatly diminished.

But no one wants to go to a cold church, even if the teaching is great. No one wants to go to an unfriendly church. We all want to go to a place where we are both fed and loved. And so remember that we're called to love each other. Number two, remember that friendship reflects the heart of the gospel.

[38:03] Remember that friendship reflects the heart of the gospel. In John 13, Jesus says, people will know that you are my disciples by what? By your love for each other. And so what Jesus is saying is that outsiders will look inside and the way that they will determine whether we belong to God or not is how we love each other, how we befriend each other, how we get along with each other. And so our friendships inside the church have an evangelistic force to the watching world. They have evangelistic power to those who are outside of our body. And so because of that, don't de-spiritualize practical things. Okay, so on your way into church this morning, I'm sure you saw a couple of golf carts whizzing around, electric baby. I'm sure you saw people greeting you as you came in the hallway. Someone handed you a bulletin on your way in. Why do we do so many practical things? And you might be tempted to think those don't really matter because they're not spiritual. They're not theological necessarily.

And these things can feel non-spiritual, but these things are acts of friendship. These things are a way for our church to be a friendly place, a place where guests are wanted and expected to pop in, to show up.

These things are practical acts of friendship. But they're not unspiritual because those acts of friendship are built on the foundation that was laid by a bleeding Savior. He died to save us. And as we follow Him, we become more like Him and reflect His heart towards sinners. We want to be a friendly church. And maybe you've had the opportunity of going to an unfriendly church and it's uncomfortable. It's not, even if the teaching is great, you do feel awkward. You don't feel like you were expected to be there. And so many unsaved people's first impression of a church is how they treat each other, how they treat guests, how they welcome people. And not that greeting someone or handing them a bulletin is going to save someone, but that may be what stands out to them and gets them to come back and continue to hear the gospel and watch and hear the worship that we sing. It's good for us to expect guests. It's good for us to want guests to be here.

Now, the primary purpose of our gathering isn't for outsiders. It's not for unbelievers. It's not for guests. It's so that we, as members of this church, can be spiritually formed. But that has an evangelistic force to it when guests show up. We don't want guests to feel unwelcomed. And so

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practically, what that means for all of us is just go introduce yourself to people.
Greet people. Find out about people. And you might think like, well, it's gonna be awkward if they've been at the church longer than I have and I'm meeting them. It's like, yeah, that could be potentially awkward, but it's better to meet someone for a second or third or fourth time than it is for a guest to go unwelcomed or un-greeded. And so we want to be a friendly church. Okay, now shifting to individually. Let's think individually about friendship. Number one, don't focus on having friends as much as on being a friend. Don't focus on having friends as much as on being a friend.
[41:43] And I think this is the heart of what Jesus is getting at when he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. There's a lawyer that comes to him and says, what do I need to do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus essentially says, love God and love your neighbor. And the self-righteous lawyer asks, well, who is my neighbor? He's thinking in his heart, the only way I haven't fulfilled this perfectly is if I just have a wrong definition of who my neighbor is. And Jesus goes on to tell him the parable of the Good Samaritan and it shifts his thinking to not who is my neighbor, but am I being a neighbor to anyone I come in contact with? And so I think the heart of the New Testament's teaching is, are you being a friend? And if we get so focused on how many friends we have or if someone's as close to me as they are to someone else, then, you know, we can start feeling self-conscious. But if we focus on being a friend, I think that's what the New Testament wants from us, to focus on being a friend more than having friends. So be friendly, ask questions, be interested, be encouraging.
And Kent Hughes said, a friendly, accepting soul is like a well-lit home on a cold, dark night. So don't focus on having friends as much as on being a friend. Number two, speak to and about your friends well. Speak to and about your friends well. When there are problems, a true friend speaks to someone and not about someone. Speak to your friends well. We also want to speak about our friends well behind their backs. We don't want to be friends who cut people down when they're not around.
It's been said about our country that people from the north act mean but are actually nice. People from the south act nice but are actually mean. And so you'll meet some people, nicest person you've ever met in your life, and you turn around and they will stab you straight in the back.
We don't want to be like that. We don't want to be a church that's like that. We don't want to be Christians who are like that. We want to speak to and about our friends well. And there's a guy by the name of Blaise Pascal who wrote this. He was a mathematician and theologian, Goals. He said this, if all men knew what each other said about the other, there wouldn't be four friends in the world.
[44:18] And we've all been guilty of that. Speaking out of anger about our friends, speaking out of bitterness about our friends behind their backs. Be careful how you talk about your friends.

And I think just a practical tip for that would be don't meditate on your friends' weaknesses. Your friends have weaknesses. We all have weaknesses. I have weaknesses. And if we meditate on those, we can be discouraged or become bitter. But as friends, we want to highlight what our friends are strong at. If we meditate on their weaknesses, it'll come out in how we talk about them. So speak to and about your friends well. Number three, consider your funeral. Consider your funeral.
What's going to be said about you? Who's going to be there? I love going to a funeral and hearing just a good eulogy about a believer. And good eulogies, what do they talk about? What do they focus on?
It's family and friends. Very few eulogies ever focus on educational accomplishments or professional achievements. It's about how they love their family and their friends. And so what's going to be said about you at your funeral? Are people going to be able to stand up? Are your friends going to be able to stand up and say, he was a man of friendship or she was a woman of friendship? Or will there be some kind of hemming and hawing and some joking about being tough to get along with? What will be said about you at your funeral? And number four, related to that, consider eternity.
Consider eternity. I want you to turn with me to the end of your Bible, to Revelation 21. Revelation 21. In Revelation 21, the Apostle John is seeing the new heavens and the new earth in a vision.
[46:39] He's seeing the fulfillment of all of God's promises in the future beforehand. He's seeing it happen as if it were happening before his own eyes in this vision. And he describes what this eternal city will be like. He says in Revelation 21, starting in verse 1, Then I saw a new heaven and

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a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 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. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And this new heavens and new earth is so different from our present experience that the best way to describe that future reality is by what won't be there.

There won't be pain. There won't be death. There won't be crying. Things we're so accustomed to experiencing here on this earth, those things won't be there. And as you think about heaven, there's a man from church history by the name of Augustine, or you can call him Augustine if you want to sound smart. But he said that he was describing heaven. And the first way he described heaven was this. He said, heaven is the place where we will never have to say goodbye to our friends. And there's a lot more that can and should be said about heaven for sure, but that's where he started. And as we think about his life, he was experiencing persecution. He was watching his friends be killed for their faith in Christ. And he was saying, heaven is that place where we will not have to say goodbye to each other anymore. Heaven is the place where we will be together forever. And again, there's so much more about heaven that needs to be said, but that is true about heaven. As you think about what it will be like, it'll be a place where we are with our friends forever. And what sweet times we'll have together there. What incredible memories we'll make together forever as we spend time with each other in the future. So consider eternity. Number five, or seven total. Number five, have fun. Have fun.

I think this is what Solomon's getting at in Ecclesiastes 11, 9. He says, rejoice, oh young man, in your youth and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. So in other words, do whatever seems pleasant to you or do whatever seems fun to you. But know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment. And so I think what Solomon is saying is there is enjoy your life. Have fun. But remember, you'll give an account to God for the fun you had. You'll give an account to God for the way you spent your time. You'll give an account to God for who you spent time with. And so have fun. Enjoy time with friends, but know that we will have to give an account for how we spent that time. But God will not look down on time spent with friends. I think Solomon encourages us to that there. And so include friends in what you're already doing or include friends in what is fun to you. Watch a football game together. Go get coffee together. Read a book together. Just have fun. I think that's good for developing, cultivating friendships. Number six, remember that some friendships are for a season. Remember that some friendships are for a season.

I think we can sometimes feel a false sense of guilt about friends we've lost touch with, friends we had in school or friends we had in a previous place we lived that we've lost touch with. [50:53] And I think we can feel guilty about that. But I think we need to recognize that here in this life, some friendships are for a season. And a day's coming when friendship will always be in season. But recognize that, you know, the Lord brings friends into our life to provide what we need for certain times. And so remember that friendship, some friendships are for a season. Number seven, praise God for your friends. Praise God for your friends. Praise God for your friends.

And here's the other C.S. Lewis quote. He said this, 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.

You think about friends and people in your life, you didn't choose them. There are so many circumstances that led to you guys knowing each other. And kind of in this vein, I can say I'm thankful for the Mustang High School Choir Program in the early 2000s. You might think, I didn't know you're in choir. I wasn't. I think, I didn't know you were in high school in the early 2000s. I also was not.

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But there was a family that moved from Olathe, Kansas to the Oklahoma City area. And with their three daughters were deciding whether to send them to Edmond Public Schools or Mustang Public Schools. And they'd heard that the choir program, which their oldest daughter was interested in, was really good at Mustang. And so they chose Mustang. And I married their youngest daughter. And so to think about if the choir program at Mustang High School hadn't been what it was, I wouldn't have met Lacey. And so we can look back on things like that and say, we did not choose each other. The Lord chose us for each other. And we can truly say that about all of our friends. [53:54] And I'm so thankful for all of you. The Lord has brought us together for this life here on earth. And we might think that we're wise or discerning choosers of friends, or we can assess people's character quickly. But in so many ways, we did not choose each other. The Lord chose us for each other.

And just think about the strengths of your friends. Your friends are strong in so many ways where you're weak. And that's certainly true for me. And true friendship, as Lewis said, is a divine enablement to see and appreciate their strengths. To celebrate their strengths. The call to follow Jesus is a call to friendship. We were made for friendship. And what a privilege it is to be friends with each other. And so let's praise God for all of our friends. But let's not forget that the foundation of all of our friendships is God himself and the friendship he offers us in his son. Friendship is at the heart of the gospel.

And so friendship is the heart of the storyline of the Bible and should be a significant thing that we think about and cultivate in our lives. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the opportunity this morning to consider friendship. To think about our friendships with each other. To think about the friendliness of our church.

And we just praise you for befriending us through Christ. You loved us and sent your son for us who died and paid for our sins and was resurrected on the third day so that we would no longer be strangers and enemies, but we would be friends with you. And that's the highest form of friendship. That's the most important form of friendship. But because of that, we are able to be friends with each other. And so I pray that we would do our part, that we'd be obedient to the biblical command, that we would befriend each other, that we would serve each other, we'd love each other and forgive each other, knowing that it's because you have made us friends that we are able to befriend others.

[56:05] And so I pray for our church that we'd be a friendly place, that we would cultivate godly friendships amongst ourselves in order to glorify you and be obedient to your word. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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