

## The Community of a Disciple

**Big Idea:** The friends of Jesus are friends of each other, loving each other as Jesus loves us.

**Text:** John 15:12-17

*What do you want them to know?* Love for God is tied to and verified by love for other believers.

*Why do they need to know it?* We are intended to weave a web of relationships that distribute and display Gospel love.

*What do they need to do?* Value, pursue, and promote friendship and community in the body of Christ.

*Why do they need to do it?* One critical way we grow is by caring for and nurturing one another.

### Intro:

→ Friendship is the seedbed of many sitcoms. From *Cheers*, “where everybody knows your name,” to *Golden Girls*, “Thank you for being a friend, traveled down this road and back again.” To *Friends*, “I’ll be there for you.” The list goes on: *Laverne and Shirley*, *The Honeymooners*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Gilligan’s Island*, *iCarly*, *Big Bang Theory*, and *Seinfeld*. This points to the reality that *we are made for friendship*.

**III.)** Growing up, my mom had this cross-stitch artwork on the wall of our house of a beehive with one bee flying back to the hive. Every day, often multiple times a day, I was reminded by this stitchwork that, “To have a friend you must bee one.” One of my mom’s favorite songs is “You’ve Got a Friend.” By James Taylor. I heard it many times through my childhood.

→ These reminders reinforced the value of friendship. As with most children and adults, if we are honest, I longed for friendships with the neighborhood children and classmates. But we moved a lot during my growing-up years, so I had a lot of friends who came and went (*I’m actually the one who came and went, they stayed*). I knew the challenges of striking up a friendship, challenges that seem to get more difficult the older we get. I knew the ache of saying goodbye to blossoming friendships that were stunted by our transitory lifestyle. As a result, I often classify myself as friendship flawed, not because I don’t have them, but because I don’t do the best at being a friend. Still, I live the reality that *we are made for friendship*. We need friendship.

- Believe it or not, The Mayo Clinic has done research concluding that friendships enrich your life and improve your health. They write, “Good friends are good for your health. Friends can help you celebrate good times and provide support during bad times. Friends prevent isolation and loneliness and give you a chance to offer needed companionship, too.” Friends can also:

- Increase your sense of belonging and purpose
- Boost your happiness and reduce your stress
- Improve your self-confidence and self-worth
- Help you cope with traumas, such as divorce, serious illness, job loss, or the death of a loved one
- Encourage you to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as excessive drinking or lack of exercise

Adults with strong social connections have a reduced risk of many significant health problems, including depression, high blood pressure, and an unhealthy body mass index (BMI). In fact, studies have found that older adults who have meaningful relationships and social support are likely to live longer than their peers with fewer connections.<sup>1</sup> *We are made for friendship*.

→ Sadly, according to recent studies, we are severely wanting in the friendship category. Pew Research decided to take a deep dive into friendship in America and found that only 53% of adults say they have between one and four close friends. Another 8% say they have no close friends.<sup>2</sup> Another poll done by Meta-Gallup uncovered that adults between the ages of 19-29 across the globe are currently experiencing the highest levels of loneliness (27% or 1 in 4)<sup>3</sup>. *We are made for friendship*, but nearly half of us are not experiencing it.

→ We have been working our way through a series entitled, “Called to Follow”. Pastor Matthew is guiding us through what it looks like and what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Mayo Clinic Staff, “Friendships Enrich Your Life and Improve Your Health,” January 12, 2022. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>.

<sup>2</sup> Isabel Goddard, “What Does Friendship Look Like in America?,” Pew Research Center, October 12, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/12/what-does-friendship-look-like-in-america/>

<sup>3</sup> Ellyn Maese, “Almost a Quarter of the World Feels Lonely,” The Gallup Organization, October 24, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/512618/almost-quarter-world-feels-lonely.aspx>

Christ. We are going to continue this exploration today, looking at the community of a disciple. God intends for us to weave a web of relationships that distribute and display Gospel love.

<sup>12</sup> "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are My friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. <sup>17</sup> This I command you, that you love one another." John 15:12-17, NASB 1995

<<PRAY>>

**Big Idea:** The friends of Jesus are friends of each other, loving each other as Jesus loves us.

It is no small thing that Jesus calls His followers friends in this passage. Jesus is telling those made for friendship (*us*) that in Him we find the greatest fulfillment of that need. I'm reminded of the "friend" verses in Proverbs: Proverbs 18:24b, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Proverbs 17:17a, "A friend loves at all times." Proverbs 27:9, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend." The two individuals in the Old Testament called friends of God, Moses and Abraham, enjoyed extraordinary access to the mind and heart of God, as did these disciples walking with Jesus daily. The implications of friendship with Jesus are immense in terms of our relationship with God, but I want to focus this morning on the benefits in our relationships with one another.

### **JESUS CHANGES THE STANDARD FOR LOVING ONE ANOTHER (John 15:12, 17)**

<sup>12</sup> "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

→ Jesus is saying this just hours before He is arrested. He is sharing the Last Supper with His disciples. It is His last teaching opportunity before they head to the Garden to pray. Then comes His arrest, trials, beating, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. Ironically, just a couple of days earlier on the road to Jerusalem, this band of disciples argued and debated who was the greatest. Jesus is surely aware of the tension still brewing under the surface among His disciples.

- We have heard this teaching from Jesus before. It comes from **Leviticus 19:18**. It is part of what we call the Great Command (**Matthew 22:34-38**). He already made this point earlier (**John 13:34-35**). In each of these other occurrences, the admonition has been to love others *as we love ourselves*. This time He raises the bar, making Himself the standard of our love for each other.
- Love is a primary theme of Jesus' teaching in John 13-16. (**13:1, 34; 14:21, 23, 28; 15:9, 12, 17**). We live in love, and love defines our relationship with Jesus and other believers. Jesus is telling His disciples to love one another as intentionally and genuinely as He loves each of them. Not only do they have the history of His last three years, but in less than 24 hours they will witness the depths of His love, though not grasping it initially, as they witness Him dying on the cross.

**Appl.)** I am so grateful that I can stand up here today and declare the immeasurable love of Jesus toward us. John expanded on how Jesus loves us in another letter he wrote. "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins." **1 John 4:9-10, NASB 1995**. Christ loves us by taking upon Himself our guilty verdict resulting from our rejection of God (*sin*) that separates us from God. Now, by trusting that He took our place and our punishment, we are forgiven and called friends of God. Now, through experiencing His love, we can love one another in this way. What does that look like?

### **WHAT LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER LOOKS LIKE**

**It Is a Sacrificial Friendship (John 15:13)**

<sup>13</sup> "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

→ This is how Jesus loves us – this is how He commands us to love each other. We can safely say that our friendship as brothers and sisters in Christ is extreme, risky, and includes a commitment to get messy.

**III.)** This may seem silly to some of you, but I am reminded of people who help each other move. We moved in November and let me tell you, we are so grateful for those who helped us move. I think this is one of the greatest sacrifices a person can make. Especially when it involves stairs, hills, and pianos!

**Appl.)** Friendship thrives on sacrifice. The simplest way to capture what is meant here is that we adopt a give-first mindset rather than a get-first mindset. It takes a giving mindset to care for one another in our darkest moments. When we are navigating messy, broken relationships, when we are ailing physically and cannot do the things we once could, when we receive disappointing

news and just cannot emotionally regulate so we lash out. A give mindset isn't thinking about what is personally convenient, beneficial, productive, glamorous, etc. This is where Jesus begins with us. Albert Mohler calls this "dangerous." The extent that we are to love one another could be very costly. It could be very inconvenient. Jesus has loved us infinitely. This is a manifesto for the Christian Church. The kind of love that should be present in the Christian Church is the kind of love in which believers love one another, as Christ has loved us. We are incapable of loving, as faithfully, as Christ loved us. We are incapable of loving, as infinitely, as Christ loved us. But we are to love as intentionally and as genuinely as Christ has loved us.<sup>4</sup>

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**It Is an Informed Friendship (John 15:14-15)**

<sup>14</sup> "You are My friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> 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."

- The more we know Jesus, the deeper our love for Him grows (John 15:1-11). The more we know Jesus, the more we desire to align ourselves with Him. We call this obedience. It is an obedience that characterizes our friendship, it does not make our friendship. This obedience is not conditional (*If I obey, then you owe me*). This is how it translates to our relationships with other believers. Why do you love one another? My love for Jesus means I love my brothers and sisters in Christ.

**III.)** There were times growing up when I didn't like my sister much. She was an active child and a younger sister. She had an ornery streak in her, and she enjoyed getting under my skin. She had a very hard time sitting still. Even when we were in the car, she refused to sit still. So she would "bounce" in the seat. The problem is that because she would bounce, so would I, and I did not want to bounce. I tried to tolerate it, ignore it, and distract myself, but when I couldn't take it any longer, I would explode to her and my parents. But she would just keep bouncing! Sometimes she would bounce lighter or stop for a little, but she never stopped bouncing.

- Though I didn't like what she did, I never stopped loving her. In part because she was my sister, but also because I saw my parents loving me and loving her, and I wanted to be like my parents. They did not need to tell me that I could dislike my sister, but I had to love her. They modeled it.

**Appl.)** Obedience to the commands of Jesus defines what it means to be His friend. The command to love one another is right up there with the command to love God. Therefore, if we profess to love God but cannot bring ourselves to love our brothers and sisters in our church, something is rotten in Denmark. Our community as believers is not first and foremost conditioned by whether I like you and you like me, it is conditioned by Jesus' love for and friendship with me and you.

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**It Is an Active Friendship (John 15:16)**

<sup>16</sup> "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."

→ Jesus' friendship with us is one that clearly shows Him taking the initiative in the relationship. He left heaven to dwell among us. We can get very hung up on the phrase "*I chose you*" in these verses, questioning our freedom. I do not want to minimize the importance of that conversation, but I also do not wish to go there this morning. Instead, we must recognize another element of what Jesus means here. He took the initiative. He came to us and called us friends on His decision. That should warm our hearts.

**III.)** I don't want to take this analogy too far, but I'm reminded of picking teams in the neighborhood. There were two criteria by which the picking order was established: Talent and friendship, and if you had both you were sure to be the first pick. In many ways, what we can glean from what Jesus says here is much the same. He picked us to be on His team, we didn't just waltz up and tell Him. This is good because the truth is that all of us are running from God in our lives when He says, "I pick you – welcome friend!"

**Appl.)** As I think about our friendships in the church, I wonder how different it may be for some of us if we begin to take this approach. The "I choose you" approach rather than waiting around for someone to choose us. We all desire to belong. I think we intuitively know that we need those

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Mohler, "John 15:12-17," Third Avenue Baptist Church, Sunday School, The Gospel of John series, November 15, 2020. <https://albertmohler.com/2020/11/15/john-1512-17/>.

around us to grow and flourish in life (*which is why we often fight it so much*). But we want that feeling of someone choosing us. We want someone else to do the heavy lifting. Jesus says when you love each other like I love you, you commit to the heavy lifting. You take the first step. You own the responsibility of keeping the relationship fresh and growing. Rather than a passive approach, we actively engage with one another.

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**It Is a Productive Friendship (John 15:16)**

<sup>16</sup>“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”

→ I love that Jesus tells us why He chose us – to bear fruit, fruit that remains. He gives us purpose, something to do, meaning. As if there isn’t enough meaning in the blessing of a relationship with Him, He gives us a greater purpose of being fruitful and productive in our lives. Yes, this means being more like Jesus in our character, our conduct, our speech, and our disposition, but it also means something greater. It means that we have the privilege of producing fruit in the lives of others. Growing more and more like Jesus personally is a wonderful goal and pursuit. But remember, Jesus wasn’t just focused on Himself and being the best version of the Son of God He could be. He came for others. He lived for others. He poured His life into others.

**Appl.)** We only enjoy half the story when we focus only on our personal relationship with Jesus. When we isolate ourselves from the drama of relationships and the difficulties of the EGR people around us. Jesus is telling us here that friendship is about pursuing and celebrating the fruit that we get to cultivate in the lives of others.

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**It Is an Enabled Friendship (John 15:17)**

<sup>17</sup>“This I command you, that you love one another.”

→ What Jesus commands, He provides the means to accomplish (John 15:1-11). If you are looking at this passage and listening this morning and thinking this is impossible, you are not wrong. There is a reason why we are struggling with friendships today. We are made for them, we need them, but we are fallen, and broken, and therefore selfish, and sinful, and prideful – and all these things hinder us from enjoying the thing we need. Friendship with Jesus and friendship with one another. Without Jesus it does not happen, and even with Jesus it is challenging because we still struggle with sin and face adversity. But do not allow small problems to get in the way of loving other believers. Jesus commands that you love them, and He will give you the strength to do it.

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**Concl.)**

The call to follow is a personal call. Each of us has to choose to follow Jesus personally and no one can do it for us. The call to follow is personal, but the call to follow is not private. The call to follow is a call to community, to friendship with Jesus and friendship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We contribute to the growth of others, and others contribute to our growth. Without this we never fully realize what Jesus intends for us in this life. We are made for friendship, we need friendship, we need each other.

→ In a world that seems to be starving for genuinely fulfilling friendships, we have the opportunity to experience and display the reality that friendship with Jesus results in friendships with other followers of Jesus that are attractive and compelling.

C. S. Lewis, Four Loves, “Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, “What! You too? I thought I was the only one.””