

Time of Grace Ministry
Friend Request: I'm God's Friend
May 5, 2019

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Today, I have three real simple goals. First of all, I want to define what the Bible means when it talks about a friend because our modern definition is pretty shallow. And number two, I want to figure out what kind of things can we do to be better friends and find better friends. And then finally, and by far most importantly, I want to tell you what the Bible actually means when Jesus calls himself your friend.

When I'm in my mid-40's, my mid-50's, my mid-60's, I want to look back and have a story that's filled with friendship. Yeah, friendship is good, we talk with friends, we text with friends. Life can be great but it's even greater when we're surrounded with people that we love. And the toughest moments of life we can get through if we're surrounded by good friends.

I love this quote from author David Horne. He said, "Is there a more profoundly personal, more deeply intimate, more wonderfully informal, more powerfully expressive and more sought after relationship than friendship? I don't think so." And he wasn't the first one to say it. About 3,000 years ago, King Solomon, who was the wisest man who ever lived, he wrote this in the book of Ecclesiastes. He said, "Two are better than one." He was right. Sometimes it's nice to be by yourself, right? To watch the show that you want to watch and have the remote in your hand, a little bit of peace and quiet, and a good book. But doing life together is the way that God wired all of us to do life.

But friendship is not that simple. When you're a grownup, it's not so easy when you're putting in 40, 50, 60 hours at work, when you start dating and get married and you need to invest in that relationship more than any other. When you have kids and they take 187 percent of your time, friendship is difficult. I just read a study of 20,000 Americans and they said that the elderly are very often suffering from loneliness. Their spouses have died, some of their friends have died, they're in homes and they just feel often depressed, anxious, and alone. But they were actually the second group on the loneliness scale. Do you know who were the loneliest Americans in this study of 20,000 people? Americans 18 to 22 who, despite all their social media friends, all the texts, all the snapchats, all the Instagram pictures, they felt incredibly alone. Despite having, on average, 338 Facebook friends. In 2006, the average American said they had two people that they felt close enough to really talk to. Twenty-five percent of the people surveyed said they have no one to turn to with life's biggest burdens and problems. And to be real with you, that happens right here at our church. So often, back in my office, people come to me and they confess because they need help and they tell me about struggles with eating disorders and with sexuality and with pornography and with drinking and 1,000 other things and immediately, I try to bring them to Jesus and say that God loves us and he bears our burdens and he's a forgiving God. And then, secondly, I almost always ask this question: Who knows about this? Like, who's praying for this? And do you know what most often people tell me? "No one." And so today, I have three real simple goals. First of all, I want to define what the Bible means when it talks about a friend because our modern definition is pretty shallow. And number two, I want to

talk about what kind of things we can do to be better friends and find better friends. And then finally, and by far most importantly, I want to tell you what the Bible actually means when Jesus calls himself your friend.

So let's jump into that first part; what does the word "friend" actually mean? I would propose to you that the way we have redefined friendship here in our modern age is incredibly shallow and it's not what your heart craves. I mean, just think about that. What do pastors often do in churches? I mean, you walk in, maybe it's your first time and the pastor stands up in front and he addresses everyone here, "Friends." If you hear me say that, you should immediately be asking, "What does he mean by friend?" I mean, if I had to call you up here on stage and I said, "Hey everyone, I'd like to introduce you to my friend - yeah, what's your name again?" I mean, what kind of friendship is that? And maybe it's the kind of friendship that we live with, right? On social media, if you wanted to become Facebook friends, what would you and I have to do? I'd have to do this and you would have to do this. "Hi, we're friends now!" But I have a feeling you want something more than two clicks and the kind of shallow information that we share with the digital world. So I want to take you back to a better definition of friendship; the straight up Webster Dictionary definition and here's what it is, if you're taking notes. A "friend," in the dictionary is "a preferred companion." It's someone whose company you prefer. It's a person that of all the people that you know, if you're going to have coffee with someone, if you're going to go out and watch a game with someone, if you're going to vacation with another couple, whose company would you prefer to be in? That's a friend.

Think back to grade school, maybe for the easiest example. When a teacher says, "Hey, for this next assignment, I want you to pick a partner," and then you immediately don't hear the rest of the words that she says, right? Because what are you doing? You whip around and you point at the girl in the corner and she's pointing right back at you. If you prefer each other, if you want to be in each other's company, that's what it means to have a friend. By nature, friendships can't include everybody. So how do you get there? If you want people to prefer your company like you prefer theirs, what kind of person should you become and what kind of people should you look for for great friendships? That's the second thing I want to tell you. Dr. Debra Oswald is a Marquette psychologist who studied massive amounts of people who had become friends and she boiled all of her findings down to four keys to becoming a great friend.

Here's what Dr. Oswald found out. Number one, she said - and by far most importantly - friends confess. Friends confess. Friends are real with each other. When the stranger working at Target asks, "How's your day?" You might say, "Fine" because you don't know her. But if it's with a friend and you're not fine, friends are honest and they're transparent and they're vulnerable. In fact, most people believe that nothing can bring two human beings together faster than being real. I love how the Bible puts this in James 5:16. It says, "Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

It's great, I stumbled across this website on friendship. This is one of my favorite quotes. They said, "Relationships go deeper quicker because our conversations are fueled by vulnerability." No one says it out loud, "Hey, I'm a bumbling idiot and you seem like a slightly less bumbling idiot. Do you think you could help me out?" But that is where the field of community grows.

So here's my question for you and especially the men listening to this message: Who are you real with? Who are you completely transparent, the stuff you bring to God and say, "God, I need you to help me. I need you to forgive me." Who knows about that? That they can pray for you that you might find healing? I want to challenge you, if God has blessed you with a good circle of friends or maybe you don't have friends just yet, to drop the façade and be real because the best thing to become a good friend and make good friends is confessing.

Which leads us to key number two. According to Dr. Oswald, friends don't just confess, friends support. The issues that we go through aren't an inconvenience or an interruption for our friends; they're an opportunity to be a friend, to love and to serve. Because we really need support in life and so often our social media culture just doesn't give it to us, right? Like, if I was honest about some burden that I was going through and I went on Facebook and I posted, what do most people define as support these days? I'll show you. "Awe." Little tear emoji face. Click. "Praying!" Right? I mean, we don't actually stop to pray; we just type it and we move on. And I suppose that's nice but I'm guessing you want a little bit more than that. And if you have this heavy couch, think like a sleeper sofa up here on stage with me, and I couldn't lift it by myself and if I said, "Hey, can anyone help me? I just have this burden I need someone to bear with me," and if you went through and you clicked the little "thumbs up" emoji and you type, "Praying." Thanks? "Can you come over?" Because that's what friends do; they show up and actually give their time and energy to be a good friend. I love how apostle Paul put it in the book of Galatians, he said, "Carry each other's burdens." It's one of the reasons why you can't have 338 actual friends even if you have that many social media friends because you only have so much time, so much energy to show up and to truly support.

Friends confess the truth. Friends support each other. And then number three, friends work; friends work to stay connected. When you become an adult, life gets so busy that you can't do everything and it doesn't take some grand drama to blow up a friendship and to push people apart; life will do that all by itself if we don't work. I was thinking about my wedding the other day about the amazing guys that were my groomsmen that stood up with me; some of my best friends from high school and from college. And do you know what I realized? I don't talk to any of those guys. We had so many years together, we invested so much time, so much support, and it's not because anything bad happened with us; it's just that we didn't work on it. And I got a job here and he got a job there. And then I got married and had kids and he got married and had kids and life was so busy that life just naturally took us apart. We didn't do the work. In fact, I'm not sure if any of you are like me but I think that I only have one long-term friend in my life. Only one person who hangs out with me often and who has known me before I was a pastor. I got to say, his name is John. He lives about 30 minutes north of here and I see John often and the reason why is because he works at it. Whenever we say goodbye, John gives me a big hug - like, he was raised in Hispanic culture so his hugs are very long and lingering - and he refuses to let me go until we schedule the next time we're going to get together. "Hey man, like when are we going to hang out?" I'm like, "John, you got to let go of my arm so I can kind of get my phone and schedule this." That's a little bit of an exaggeration but not much and I credit John for our friendship. I'm sure, like so many others, we just would have drifted apart but he works at it. So think about that: Who are your closest friends and how could you work at it? What reminder could you put in your calendar, what repeating event could you put in your schedule, so life doesn't tear you apart and instead you stick together?

And finally number four, Dr. Oswald said that friends speak life. Do friends sometimes need to vent, to complain, and to get things off their chest? Sure. Are friends sometimes bothered with bad bosses or bad backs or frustrations with the government? Sure. Do friends sometimes have to confront each other and have hard conversations about the habits and the words they see in their other friends? Sure. But what Dr. Oswald found is that friends speak life more often than not. That they have one hard, grumbling, venting conversation for every nine that are filled with joy and laughter and happiness. Friends might take a little bit from us on occasion but most of our conversations are where they give life. And some of you know what this is like, right? Do you have someone in your family that's really negative? They're always grumbling about something going wrong, there's always some person that they need to vent about? You know, you can try to support them for a little bit but eventually, you just don't prefer their company. You don't want to stop by mom's house, you don't look at their latest social media posts because they're grumbling about something else. Like a relationship can only survive with a negative person for so long and so Dr. Oswald said friends speak life. They build each other up in love.

Now I find that's really, really good advice but when I stop to think about Jesus, it became really, really, really good news. Because according to the Bible - and this is the third thing I want to tell you - that you, through faith in Jesus Christ, are a friend of God. And some of you aren't grinning at me just yet so let me say that again. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you, you, you - now you're smiling - are a friend of God. Like if you could end that sentence with a period instead of an explanation point, you need to go back to the editor because Jesus is saying that he did so much for you on the cross that you are a friend of God. Not a Facebook friend; I mean, think about the dictionary definition: God prefers your company. No obligation. Not, "Well, I'm God, I guess I've got to hang out with everyone." If he calls you a friend, it means he prefers to be with you. He freely chooses it.

And that's what Jesus taught his friends. Look at John 15. He said the night before he died, "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends." And everyone who looks to Jesus in faith is not just his follower, not just his disciple, you are a friend of God. Just think for a second what that means; let's go back to Debra Oswald's research. That means that God is real with you, that means that God supports you, that means that God is working to stay connected to you and that means that God speaks life to you. Each one of those statements is incredible to me. Just think of that: God is real with you. Jesus really says it in this passage. He says, "I've shared the master's business. I haven't just treated you professionally; like this is business, this thing between you and me. I've revealed my heart, my will, my passion for this world." In fact, Jesus was so honest it was the reason that they killed him. Some of you know the story - Jesus' enemies wanted to arrest him but there were always these massive crowds that adored him. They would riot if they tried to arrest Jesus.

So how does his enemies get to him? Because there's a man named Judas that Jesus called his friend and that he was real with. Judas says, "I know where Jesus prays. He's taken me to that spot before. He's going to be there tonight." In fact, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus was so real he took three of his closest friends - Peter, James and John - and he said, "Would you guys stay here? Would you pray for me?" Think about that. Jesus is pure man and he says, "I'm overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." He didn't fake it. He didn't say I'm fine. He

didn't just post the best things on his account. Instead, he was real and he opened up his heart and because he's your friend, you can do the same thing.

Do you know one of the things I hate most of all about church in America? It's that so, so many people have it completely backwards. So many people think that church is the place where you go if you think you're good or you try to act good when Jesus intended the church to be the place where you run to when you've been really bad and you need to hear good news. So often people in church think, "I can't talk about that. I mean, I'm struggling with my sexuality. I gave into an addiction. I'm taking too many pills. I don't even know what I think about God," and we don't think we can confess that stuff because all the Christians will take a step back. It's the opposite of what Jesus wants because he's a friend!

Look what he says in 1 John 1. He says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." What have you ever done that isn't included in the word "all?" Jesus says, "Be real with me. Don't fake it. I already know. Confession is so good for your soul and as your friend, I'm never going to take a step back. I'll take a step forward and forgive you by the blood that I shed on the cross." Jesus is a friend and friends can be real.

Number two, if Jesus is a friend that means he supports you and he carries your burdens, which to me is amazing! There are two great passages in the Scriptures - Psalm 50:15 is God's invitation. He says, "Call on me in the day of trouble." Like whatever's troubling you - is the wedding troubling you? Is your marriage troubling you? Is a jail sentence troubling you? God says call on me. I want to support you. I want to grab the other end of that couch and help you. Even better, in 1 Peter 5, here's this invitation: "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you." All of it. Are you anxious about the prom? About the dress? About your dad's new girlfriend? Are you anxious about our country? Are you anxious about your back, your health? Are you anxious about your own anxiety? God never says, "Whatever. I've got bigger problems to take care of." He cares about you because he's a friend.

My favorite thought is this: If God is a friend that means that he speaks life. I did the most incredible research a couple of years ago that changed the whole way that I view preaching in the Bible. I went through the entire New Testament with two highlighters in my hand; one where I highlighted all the positive things that God said about Christians like you're forgiven and you're loved and you're holy and you're saved. And another highlighter with all the negative, realistic things that God says: You're still a sinner, oh you, of little faith, you're weak, you should be stronger than this. And when I totaled all of them up in both columns, I came up with a total of 690 different things that God says to or about Christians. Do you want to guess how many were positive and how many were negative? I mean, with all the things we struggle with, I would almost expect there to be like 90 to 10, but that's not what I found. You know, maybe 80 percent of the time God is pretty realistic about our sin and 20 percent he's positive. Nope. Was it 50 to fifty? Nope. Was it 30 to seventy? Nope. Twenty to eighty? Nope. In the New Testament, for every one time God calls a Christian a sinner, nine times he declares them a saint. God speaks so much life to us because of the death of Jesus Christ that in 16 books of the New Testament, God has nothing negative to say about his people. Meanwhile, when I found that out, it changed the whole way that I talk to you. I mean, are we going to be real about sin? Are we going to talk

about your relationships, about your divorce, about your addiction, about your attitude about your complaining? We're going to have some of those conversations just like God would. But the vast majority, nine to one, we're going to talk about what Jesus means. That you're forgiven and loved and saved and holy and righteous and redeemed and justified and purified. Jesus says here, "The Son of Man," that's Jesus, "came eating and drinking and they," his enemies," say, "Here's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." You know, they thought they dropped the mic and walked out and burned Jesus but do you know what Jesus did? He picked up the mic and said, "Amen." A friend of sinners? I agree with that. And I don't want you to forget it. Jesus is not just your God, your Savior. He's your friend.

So I want you to picture it this way. Next time you walk into a crowded restaurant or you're at a wedding reception and you don't know anyone and you kind of grab a drink or you find your place at the table and you feel a little bit lonely and out of place, I want you to remember what happens when that person you know walks through the door and you see that one face and even if you're in a crowded room, even if you don't know anyone else, just having one friend changes every single situation. And I want you to remember that whatever room you're in, if you feel completely alone - even if you are totally alone - there is someone who walks through the door every single time and his face is beaming at you because he calls you his friend.

I pray that God gives you great relationships, great friendships, in this life. But I know no matter how many close friends you have, you are a friend of God. You are a friend of God. Grab a pair of New Balances in the lobby; you are a friend of God. He calls you his friend.

Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, we're trying to picture you that way - not as just this king sitting on a throne, not as the CEO of the universe, running all things and putting them underneath your feet - but as a friend. We think of our best friends, God, how much joy they bring us. How great it is to pull up a chair at a restaurant and to sit with them but to know that you are the God who's even better than that.

I know, Father, some of us have been real and we've confessed in the past and the people we thought were friends weren't. There's been times when we grabbed the end of the couch and try to support someone and they didn't reciprocate and support us back. There's been times when we sent out the invitation, we put out the text and the post, and no one wanted to work to be with us. And there's been times when people have grumbled and complained instead of speaking life to us and that's why we are so grateful that no matter what happens in those relationships, you are different and you're eternal.

God, every human heart craves a best friend forever. But this life proves that nothing is forever except you. So I thank you, God, that you are always there and I thank you despite all of our struggles and all of our sins that you are willing, forever and ever, to call yourself our friend.

We pray these things with joyful hearts because we are friends of God. We pray, Jesus, in your beautiful name, Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Friend Request: I'm God's Friend

Study Notes

Summary

The Bible speaks of God befriending people in the Bible, a term of incredible closeness and intimacy. How does that compare to the modern, social media-driven idea of a “friend request”? What would it mean for our lives if the Almighty God was actually our ever-present friend?

- Ecclesiastes 4:9: Two are better than one.
- Friend = A _____ companion
- Four keys to Friendship
 1. Friends _____.
 - James 5:16: Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
 2. Friends _____.
 - Galatians 6:2: Carry each other's burdens.
 3. Friends _____.
 4. Friends speak _____.
- You are a _____ of God!
- John 15:15: I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends.
- 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- Psalm 50:15: Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.
- 1 Peter 5:7: Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

- **Matthew 11:19:** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.
- “Is there a more profoundly personal, more deeply intimate, more wonderfully informal, more powerfully expressive, and more sought-after relationship than friendship? I don’t think so.”—David Horn

Points to Ponder

1. Think of your current closest friend. What makes you “prefer” that person’s company as opposed to the hundreds of other people you see on a daily basis?
2. Do you see Jesus as your friend? Why or why not? What blessings might come from seeing Jesus as someone who requests a friendship with you?
3. **Agree/Disagree:** Most people only have time for three or four real friendships.

Homework for Next Week

Google “Bible passages on friendship,” and dig into God’s truth on becoming a great friend.

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—David Horn