

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Friend Request: Friends Unlike Me**  
John 17:15-20  
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Maybe Christianity isn't about comfort; maybe it's not about being liked. If Jesus was the most loving person in human history and he was tortured and put on a cross, then maybe if we follow in his footsteps, it's not going to be easy.

How many of you have great friends, close friends, who don't believe what you believe? When's the last time you had coffee with an atheist? An agnostic? When's the last time you prayed at the dinner table and there was a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim or a skeptic sitting next to you? How often do you do life together with people who don't have this close life and relationship with Jesus? What would he say to you?

Well, thankfully, I know the answer to that question because 2,000 years ago, the night before Jesus died, he prayed a prayer and someone heard it. In fact, his friend John, one of his closest friends, heard that prayer and he actually wrote it down in the Bible in the gospel of John. And in that prayer, I'm just going to share a snippet of it with you today, Jesus is going to say exactly what he wants from you and me as we're following Jesus; as we live in a world and do life with so many people who aren't sure about Jesus just yet. So let me show you a little snippet of this prayer from John 17. Jesus said this: Father, my prayer is not that you take them, the Christians, out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.

Now in that little prayer, I want to teach you three things that are vitally important for your friendships, your relationships on this earth. And here's the first one, if you're taking notes on your app or in your program, the first thing that Jesus prayed is that Christians would not separate. In other words, Jesus was praying that you would not do what this guy did. This is a depiction of an ancient Christian named Simon or Simeon Stylites. Ever heard of him before? He lived around the year 400 A.D. and Simeon did not want to be a hypocrite when it came to his faith. He didn't just want to say, you know, I believe in Jesus but then be conformed to the pattern of this world. He wanted to speak the words of Jesus, live the life of Jesus, follow the path of Jesus, and he realized, like so many of you do, that's pretty hard. That when you go to work or you go to school or you turn on the TV, not everyone embraces the values of Jesus; it's really difficult to do what's right. And so, old Simeon came up with this idea. He built himself a platform - I think it was about this size? - and he put the platform on top of a tall stone pillar. He climbed up somehow to the top and he spent the day there. Way, way up, far away, from the bad influence of the world. And then he spent two days there, and then 10, and then 20, and then 37 years. This man lived on a platform, raised up in the sky, for - don't ask me what he did with bathroom breaks and the details; I don't know the details of that story. I do know that he lived up there for the rest of his life until one day someone came and they saw old Simeon slumped over dead on his platform.

So what do you think Jesus would say about that? He would say, "Not impressed." But I am worried that this spirit of Simeon still exists in many Christian churches and in many Christian hearts. It's kind of this idea that the world is dangerous and the world can pressure me in bad ways so I should stay away from the world.

Let me give you a few examples. I know some parents that send their kids to a Christian school - like preschool, kindergarten, eighth grade, even high school - because more than anything they want to keep their kids away from those kids. I know some parents that if their kid made it to a high school graduation and, you know, they were still a virgin and they never got drunk and they never got high and they came to church every Sunday, they would be so, so happy and proud of their children even if their children never told a single non-believer the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like, these parents think the whole point is to keep our little kids safe and comfortable and make sure they don't sin like those bad people even if they never tell those people the good news about what Jesus has done. It's comfortable and it's easy and it's tempting but Jesus never ever intended us to insulate our lives and not rub shoulders with people of this world.

In fact, think for a second about the New Testament. The men who heard this prayer; what did they do and where did they go? To Christian suburbia; away from the bad people? No. Do you know the names of the books of the New Testament? Romans. Was Rome famous for Christianity? No, pagan gods. Corinth? My goodness, do you know about Corinth? Prostitution, sexual sin was just what people did and that's right where the Christians went. Philippians, Roman soldiers who wanted nothing to do except with the gods of Rome. Galatians, Ephesians were Artemists; the goddess of fertility was worshipped. They did not run away from the world like Simeon; they rushed into it. And you can guess why. In fact, you don't need to guess because Jesus went there just three verses later. Look what he said in John 17:20: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." Now if you're not a Christian just yet, this is a super cool verse. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus prayed, he was praying for people who didn't believe just yet. He didn't just pray for his people, his followers. He also prayed for the people who weren't sure, who had questions, who didn't believe. And he wanted his friends to be right out in the middle of relationships and neighborhoods and cities so that maybe people could hear the message and come to believe it.

And I'm smiling as I look at some of you because that's why you're here. You didn't just stumble across our church's website. You didn't just find like a church pen at a restaurant, "Oh, my goodness! I should go there." I would bet almost all of you who are guests are here because of someone; because a friend, a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a best friend, a roommate, a next-door neighbor that you knew and loved and trusted who didn't separate themselves from your life, they loved you and they invited you to come.

I heard a story this past week of one woman who thought that this place was like a cult and she was never ever going to come here until someone loved her and invited her and now she loves what she's found in Jesus and the gospel and in God's grace. I love how my predecessor here at the church used to talk about this. It's kind of an awkward analogy; I just want to prepare you in advance. It kind of grosses me out but it's pretty powerful. Pastor Ski used to say, "I want people to get my sticky, oozy, Jesus on them." Okay, I'm kind of a clean person so I don't like that analogy but I like what he's saying. He's like, I want this Jesus to just come out of me. Like,

the hope that I have, the forgiveness, the confidence that my best friend is running the universe; I want it to come out of my pores. And when I do life with people, when I have a cup of coffee, when I share a beer, when I'm shoulder to shoulder with people who aren't so sure, they get a little bit of this Jesus, they hear the message, and maybe one day they'll believe it.

Now, I know it's complicated. I know it's hard. I've hung out with friends and I've gotten caught up and conformed; it's why we're tempted to stay back. But you know what I know; that we can't take our Jesus and just throw it over the wall to those unbelieving people. They're going to have to see Jesus in us before they want to know about Jesus from us. And so here's my question and my challenge to you: What could you do this week to connect with someone who isn't sure about the gospel? What neighbors, friends, classmates, teammates could you connect with? Who could you grill out with in the days to come? Who could you watch the playoff game with this week? What person could you invite out to coffee? What relationship could you invest in? Not with a string attached, not with an agenda, but just to love people like God loves people? Because if we do that, just like has happened in so many of our stories, people might hear the message and believe it.

Jesus also prayed, "Father, don't let them sell out." Remember the words that he spoke? Let me take you back to John 17. He said, "Father, my prayer is not that you take the Christians out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth." Jesus wanted you in the world but not to be of the world. He knew - in fact, Jesus knew this would be so difficult - that he actually had to pray for you. He had to think about you and say, "Father, protect them from the evil one." The evil one is just a nickname for the devil, right? And Jesus knew the devil wants to put you in a blender of the world's behavior and push that red button and pulse it into what you say and what you think and how you live is no different than anyone else in this world. Jesus prayed, "Father, protect them from that. I'm not like the people of this world. Don't let my followers be like everyone else in this world. Sanctify them. Make them different and make them wonderful."

Do you know what it means to sell out? Now, we talked about that: "He sold out," or "Don't be a sellout." I consulted, you know, that high academic standard; the urban dictionary and this was their definition for a sellout. A sellout is, "A human being who abandons their convictions to impress people." See, Jesus knew in your heart is this deep desire and craving to be liked. I mean, when you're the new kid at the school what you really, really want is to be liked. And even if you grow up and you're 25 or 45 or 65, when you move to a new neighborhood, when you get a new job you want people to like you. You want people to want to hang out with you, to accept you, to smile. To laugh at the things that you say and so Jesus knew he'd have to pray, "Father, they want to be liked and they're going to be so tempted to sell out, to abandon their convictions, to hide what I've taught them, to deny it or at least not to say it in public. Don't let the evil one get to them, Father. Protect them from that temptation."

So what about you? Where are you most tempted to sell out? What things that Jesus taught, what ways did he want you to live, that in certain company you really don't want to do and you don't want to say? Like if you're hanging out with your Savior, your grandmother, and your pastor, what would be different about how you would behave in that circle compared to hanging out with your buddies from college? What are you tempted to change about your behavior? I

suppose the answer to that question is going to be different for all of us but I want to encourage you to think about that in the days to come. Where am I different? Where do I sell Jesus out? Where do I want to be people-pleasers instead of a Savior pleaser? When do I keep things quiet in the college classroom, on the sports field, because I really want these people to like me and I know if I say that, no one's going to smile. See, it's going to be hard. And you might find out that if you don't sell out, people will treat you kind of like they treated Jesus. That instead of being this vanilla, bland, wishy-washy person, you're going to be polarizing. If you stand up, if you don't abandon your convictions - even if you're gentle and humble and kind and respectful, which you need to be - there are some people who are going to hate you and there are some people who are going to be interested in you. It might cost you in the short term but Jesus knows that if you speak with authority and you live with conviction, doors are going to open and people are going to be curious. I think about a story I heard many years ago from a Christian named Ajith. Ajith was a pastor in Sri Lanka where there's an incredible temptation to sell out the teachings and the beliefs of Jesus. There aren't many Christians in Sri Lanka and many of the people who aren't Christians aren't ambivalent about religion; they're very passionate about religion and they do not like Christianity. In fact, Ajith told us at the time of the presentation the Sri Lankan government was debating a law that would make it illegal to talk about Jesus with anyone under the age of eighteen. So if you try to tell your 17-year-old neighbor the gospel of Jesus Christ, the punishment would be eight years in prison. But they refused to sell out. And then it got worse. The neighbors were so mad at these Christians trying to change them, trying to judge their religion, that 140 Christian churches were bombed, destroyed, or damaged. But they didn't sell out. In fact, Ajith told this amazing story. His son came up to him - in the midst of all this pressure. I mean, what would his life be like growing up around so many people who did not believe what he believed? He said, "Dad, you know what I think we should do? We should start a prison ministry," and Ajith said, "Well, why?" And he smiled and said, "So there's a church when we get there." Now think of that. That kid was not going to sell out. He knew that if all of the apostles were murdered for following Jesus, except for John who was boiled in oil, maybe Christianity isn't about comfort. Maybe it's not about being liked. If Jesus was the most loving person in human history and he was tortured and put on a cross, then maybe if we follow in his footsteps it's not going to be easy.

But then something happened: A tsunami. In 2004, a tsunami rocked Sri Lanka and people suffered in catastrophic ways but the Christians once again did not sell out. They did not sell out on the belief that Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to pray and bless those who hate us. And so they stepped up and they blessed their neighbors. They got their hands dirty grabbing stones and rebuilding the homes of the very men who destroyed their church home. And people noticed. I mean, when you're a man who has hated your next-door neighbor and now he's over helping you rebuild your home so your children can sleep with a roof over their head, you notice. Some of those people apologized. They said, "I was there. I destroyed your church and I was wrong," and the gospel spread.

So brothers and sisters, do not sell out. Even if they don't like you, even if they hate you, even if they talk about you because one day a tsunami is going to hit their lives and what they're going to need is 200 percent truth. They're going to need someone who has convictions; who doesn't just conform to the ways of the world but has found something so powerful in Jesus that it's worth suffering for. And when the cancer comes and when they're facing death and when they don't

love their job and when the marriage doesn't work, when life feels empty as if there is no God, they will be curious and they will come to the one who never backed down and yet always loved. Jesus prayed that you would be that kind of Christian, that would not separate, and would not sell out.

But then there's one last thing that Jesus prayed for. Last thing I want to share with you today is our final fill in the blank where Jesus prayed that you and I would be sanctified. Now, sanctified is a fancy Bible word that we don't use too often so here's my definition of it: It is to be wonderfully different. Growing up, my pastor told me to be sanctified was to be set apart or to be made holy, which kind of means that you're different not in a bad way but a holy way; a wonderful way. And Jesus was praying the night before he died that you would be wonderfully different. And then he made you that way. This is kind of like my lightbulb moment when I was thinking about this. In John 17, Jesus prays that the Father would sanctify you. Remember the words at the very end of his prayer? "Sanctify them by the truth. Make them wonderfully different. Father, your word is truth." You don't have to wait for God to accept you. The blood of Jesus makes you perfect now and acceptable now and delightful to God right now. Have you Christians ever thought about that? You're wonderfully different. And the peace that you have? When this world is freaking out about the latest headline that has happened, do you know what we believe? That our best friend is at the right hand of God the Father and everything in this broken world is underneath his feet. That everything that happens, God has plans for us and we don't just say that because it's a nice Hallmark saying. Jesus said he is ruling over everything for the good of his church. In all things he's working for the good of those who love him. And while the world's trying to figure it out, we can just smile and have this peace that goes beyond understanding. What you and I believe is wonderfully different.

You see, if you're here today in church or you're listening to this podcast or watching this program, we Christians do not think that we're like better than non-Christians. We struggle with the same temptation; we commit the same sins. But we do believe that what we believe is better than what you believe. We don't believe that karma is a great way to live; you just get what you got coming. We believe that grace and forgiveness and the free gift of Jesus is ridiculously better. We believe in a God that accepts us because of what Jesus did; that he did everything for us. He doesn't put all of our good works on this side of the scale and our sins on this side of the scale and, "Oh, you better hope you're good enough." Instead, he just accepts and cleanses and loves; that it's infinitely better. Instead of just believing that we're here by chance and it's just survival of the fittest and make something of these brief moments you have in life, we believe something so much better. That this life, no matter how challenging, is like one inch of a 40,000 foot rope and instead what's coming for us is pure joy and happiness. We are wonderfully different because of message of Jesus is wonderfully different.

And if people hear that from you, it will change them. If people see that peace in you, they'll ask about it. Now I think about Nhia's story. Some of you have met Nhia here at our church; she works with the Time of Grace team. Nhia did not grow up with Jesus. She was actually born in Thailand in a Hmong refugee camp and she grew up in a family that was not Christian. They practiced Shamanism and Animism and other really popular Eastern religions but not Jesus. But then when she was in high school, she met some people who did follow Jesus. And instead of taking a step away, seeing her as like dangerous because she wasn't a Christian, they loved her



and they invested in her. And there was one girl in particular that was interesting. Her name is Margie. Margie got a wicked form of cancer when she was in high school and she prayed that Jesus would make it better but he didn't. Margie actually died before she made it to college and Nhia noticed. Because Margie was not afraid and she was not bitter; she did not shake her fist at God who let this happen. She knew Jesus; that he had conquered death and she didn't need to be afraid of it. And Nhia noticed: How do you suffer like that? They gathered at Margie's funeral and there was a message of hope in Jesus Christ. And the next year, when Nhia herself went off to college, there were more Christian friends except this time she was curious and had questions. And she asked and they answered. And now if you'd meet Nhia, she is wonderfully different. She believes that there is a big God; who's bigger than life and death and everything that we face. And that's what Jesus prayed for.

So back to my original question: Do Christians have friends who are not Christians? Should you run away from them? No, no, no. Jesus prayed the very night before he died that you would not separate, you would not sell out. Instead, you would just be what you already are by his life, death, and resurrection: Wonderfully different. We have the most amazing friend in Jesus. Let's introduce our friends to that friend.

Let's pray.

Jesus, I think of where this started for each of us. Even if we come from a long line of Christians, there was someone generations ago who had the courage and the boldness to love someone, to invest in them, and to share the good news. And so I thank you for those people whose faces we don't know and names we can't name; who crossed the street and spoke to their neighbor. Who invited their new boyfriend to church and he believed the gospel and now generations of Christians have come from it. And I pray, God, that we could do that for other people. There are so many people in our world who have no clue; they think church is just some institution and organization and they don't know what we talk about here - about grace and mercy and hope in your Son. They think it's all hypocrisy and that Christians think they're better than other people and, God, we can break that stereotype if we run with your help into their lives and we love them like only you can.

So, God, would you help us? I think of our church; just hundreds of people, thousands of people, between our two campuses. And if we could just go into this community and invest in one or two people this year, there could be a new Pentecost! There could be hundreds of people being baptized; thousands of people being interested; tens of thousands would hear the good news that Christ has risen, he is King, and he wants to be our friend.

So, God, we are praying today that you would do more than we ask, expect, or imagine. And so many of us love people in our families, in our circle of friends, who don't know you just yet. Help us not to be offended by the differences in beliefs and behavior. Give us patience and kindness and wisdom and intelligence with our answers. God, help us to be bright lights in this dark world that's searching for you and doesn't know it just yet. We pray all these things with confidence because you love the sounds of your friend's voices and we pray them all in Jesus' beautiful name and all God's people who wanted this to be true, join their voices and they said, "Amen." Amen.



## TIME OF GRACE®

### *Friend Request: Friends Unlike Me*

#### Study Notes

#### *Summary*

The book of Proverbs might imply that hanging out with unbelievers is a bad idea, but the Bible is more nuanced than that. Rubbing shoulders with those who don't know Jesus is the best way to share the hope that only the Savior can give. This message explores the way Christians can invest in those who do not yet believe in Christ.

- **John 17:15-17:** My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- Don't \_\_\_\_\_.
- **John 17:20:** My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.
- Don't \_\_\_\_\_.
- **John 17:15-17:** My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- Be \_\_\_\_\_ (wonderfully \_\_\_\_\_).
- **John 17:17:** Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

#### *Points to Ponder*

1. Which is a greater temptation for you, to separate from non-Christians or to sell out on Christ? Why do you lean in that direction?
2. **Agree/Disagree:** Parents who choose Christian education for their children need to work twice as hard at going into the community to share the good news.

3. Think through the life of Jesus. How often did he surround himself with mature Christians? How often with weak believers? How often with those who lacked saving faith?

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Mark 11:27-33.

*“Jesus sought to win the lost and disciple the won. If you want to follow Christ’s example, associate with all those in need.”*

*—Michael Patton*