

“Bromance and Womance”: Encouragement through Friendship

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Preacher: Andrew Rim

[0 : 00] Father God, we thank you so much for this afternoon. Thank you that we have the opportunity this morning to gather as the body of Christ to make much of you. And Lord, we thank you for seminars like these, Lord, where we can continue to magnify you, where we can continue to see you as our great God, but also our dear and close friend, Lord.

And so, Lord, we just pray that during the seminar, we can just learn about what your heart is, Lord, about what your heart is when it comes to friendships. And Lord, help us to also just think about how we can foster close friendships as brothers and sisters in Christ and how we can also just think about friendships outside of the church as well during this time.

We thank you, Lord. We love you. And we pray all of this in Jesus name. Amen. Cool. So before I sort of open everything up, I wanted to do a quick book giveaway.

I know we at Trinity really love these book giveaways, but I so happen to have three copies of this book at home. Encouragement by Jared Millinger. This is a book written by a sovereign grace pastor who he just has a lot to say about what churches should be pursuing in regards to friendship and the culture of encouragement.

And honestly, reading this book has helped me sort of re-framework a lot of my own bad habits of being more of a critical person, of being more of a Debbie Downer in a lot of cases, an Eeyore, if I may.

[1 : 29] And has just showed me like what it can look like to be an encouraging person to those around you and where we can see in the Bible where examples of encouragement amongst people, amongst each other in the Bible and the ways that we can be encouraged by the word as well.

And so I wanted to share this book because I'm going to talk a little bit about it towards the end of our seminar today. So I'm going to give the first one a way to... I should have thought of this a little earlier.

Who has no friend now? Let's do this. Who is greatly in need of encouragement right now? Does anyone want to raise a hand?

All right. I'm going to pass it to you. Congratulations, brother. All right. A second here. All right.

So there are maybe a couple of you guys who may have attended the leadership retreat. So sorry, you guys already have a copy of this book, actually. So can anyone tell me what the name Barnabas means?

[2 : 42] Barnabas? Barnabas. Son of Encouragement. Son of Encouragement. That's the answer. Whoa! Yes, sir! Congratulations. Cool.

I hope that, yeah, that this book is of good help to you guys. And feel free to share with others once you're done reading it. Cool. Let's jump right on into our seminar now.

So, romance and womence, or we'll just call it friendship, encouragement through friendship. So, like I said, I'm going to preface this entire seminar. Or I'm going to, this seminar is going to be sort of a large-scale overview of what the theology of friendship is, as we see in the Bible.

And then towards the end, I'm going to sort of open it up to more of a Q&A; discussion type of time, so that we can talk a bit more about sort of practical observations, practical tips that we can consider as we pursue friendships both inside and outside of the church.

And so, let me start off by talking about why we are having this seminar. Like, why do we want to talk about friendship? In this day and age, we actually have a modern problem with friendship.

[3 : 58] We have so many different words for friends. We have buddy, pal, chum, A\$AP Rocky says friendo. People say my bestie, biffle, all these different terms.

And it's just so lightly thrown around. It's thrown around everywhere at this point that the meaning of the word friend has become very broad and vague in a lot of instances. The other day, I think it was about a month ago now, I met someone who shared a mutual connection with me.

And after we found this out, I literally exclaimed, oh my gosh, we're friends. I haven't spoken to this mutual in over 10 years. And yet, I call them friend.

When we look at our social media, our Facebook friends, how many of these friends can we identify as true friends, rather than just former friends or acquaintances or even just mere contacts?

And yet, as broad as the term friend has become, our world, our culture today, loneliness and lack of close friendships have become more and more pervasive over the years.

[5 : 04] We're so busy tossing the word friend around that we haven't realized that there's this acclimating loneliness that has been going through just our world here and now. A study back in 2006 reported that back in 1985, the average American had about three close friends.

People who they can confide in and share the most important details of their life with. But come 20 years later, in 2004, the average American only had two close friends. And out of those polled, about one-fourth of Americans who were polled reported to have no close friends at all.

Another study conducted back in 2021 by the American Perspectives Survey, they reported that the percentage of polled U.S. adults who claimed to have no friends had quadrupled from 3% back in 1990 to 12% in 2021.

And so there is this rise in people feeling the sense of loneliness, feeling the sense of not having folks who they can confide in, and sort of just being stuck in that situation.

There's a book that was really helpful for me as I was prepping for the seminar called Made for Friendship, The Relationship That Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joys by Drew Hunter.

[6 : 20] Highly recommend this book to you guys. Made for Friendship by Drew Hunter. He actually provides a really more, a much more in-depth theological analysis of what friendship looks like.

And he does a lot of good job on talking about what it means to have Christian friendships amongst each other. And so definitely do recommend that to you guys. But all that to say, in his book, Hunter, he identifies three different aspects of modern culture that creates obstacles to building deep friendships.

And so three obstacles that prevent us today, here and now, from creating and cultivating deeper friendships. The first modern aspect is busyness.

We've just become a lot more busy. You can tell just by the work hours, our culture is just hustle and bustle. The grind don't stop. And so because of this culture of busyness, it's just been harder to make friends.

And Hunter, he categorizes busyness into three different categories. The first is actual busyness. So based on your life stages, you're going to have children or family that you have to care for.

[7 : 28] You have your work hours. You have your unique life stage challenges and all that. The second category is distracted busyness. So distracted busyness is essentially procrastinating, doom scrolling, binge watching, just using time and taking up time, doing things that aren't necessarily the most meaningful for yourself.

It's just to take up space. And then the third category is perceived busyness. And that's looking busy. Oftentimes, if you actually are busy, your demeanor, your disposition is going to show that you are busy.

And so how that appears to other people, they'll see that and be like, oh, this person is a little too busy. I don't know if I'll be able to make time to hang out with them or whatnot because it looks like they have a lot going on.

I feel like that's often a trap amongst pastors and elders, the appearance of looking too busy. And so church members can come and be like, oh, you seem like you have a lot on your plate already, so I don't want to bring my problem over.

But it's not just limited to pastors and elders. Many of us can also have that same disposition of, oh, you look like you're going from one place to another without any breaks and whatnot. And so it just creates like a wall, a sort of obstacle that prevents people from wanting to reach out in that sense.

[8 : 50] And so that's the first modern aspect, busyness. The second modern aspect is technology. As good and helpful as technology is with forming connections or reconnecting with people or maintaining connections, it also has its own issues when it comes to building deeper friendships.

Hunter talks about how technology depersonalizes communication. There's something very disembodied about either just texting each other or even just like video calling.

Like you're not able to see the full person or either that or just you're just seeing a wall of text. So it doesn't allow you to have that sort of face-to-face interaction. And it does create a dependence on using very detached ways of communicating very personal issues.

Within the church, we can think about, say, addressing sin with each other or confessing sin to one another. It's so easy when you text to be able to draft something up.

It's so easy to curate your own message. And you can be like, hey, I messed up on this. But let me backtrack to a few days ago about how I came to this point of sin.

[10:03] But when you're face-to-face, you don't have that opportunity to draft up a response, draft up what you're going to say to people. It's going to be in the moment very real. And so that's one of the things that technology obviously takes away from.

You don't have that opportunity to have the face-to-face raw and live conversations with each other. And not just with sin, but with any personal issue, there is a lot that's taken up when you decide to just type something up and send it out.

Because you have the chance to edit it and make it look polished and clean. When in person, you can see the raw emotions and have those raw conversations.

And so that's the second modern aspect, technology. The third modern aspect is increased mobility. I think many of us here at Trinity are very aware of this, that we're a very transient church. A lot of people come in and a lot of people go out year by year. I feel like I've seen within one year like 20 members leave our church to go on to their next life stage.

[11:12] And another 20 just almost immediately flood in. And so it's not something that's just limited to outside of the church. We see it in Trinity as well. But increased mobility, the ability to move so much more easily than ever before, it does create in a lot of people an attitude of like, why bother?

Why do I bother investing in friendships when I know that this person is going to move within the next year or so? Why bother talking about very personal things or getting deeper into the weeds about my own life with this person?

When our demographics, our population, our members are going to look so different within like two years. I think there are plenty of people who have that sort of mentality of like, this is getting very fatiguing for me.

And because everyone's constantly moving, it's harder for me to like build connections and sort of hope that they remain over a longer period of time. And so increased mobility, it erodes a lot of those roots of being able to like have that feeling of long term connectedness.

And it often leads to jadedness and trying to build relationships and friendships. So those are the three modern aspects, business, technology, increased mobility. And like I said, these obstacles, they're at play even in the church.

[12:30] We're not immune to this loneliness epidemic that we see all around us. However, I will say, as friends and followers of Jesus, we have the unique reality of having an eternal friend in Jesus.

And through Jesus, we're able to cultivate close friendships with one another, that distance, that technology, that business of our lives can't and shouldn't necessarily create obstacles for.

I think the more I talk with a lot of my non-Christian friends, the more blessed I feel about the fact that we have like a weekly opportunity to get together with one another as the body of Christ to gather and worship our Lord.

But what happens after that is just as important as well. The time of fellowship, the time of the opportunities to build deeper friendships with one another. It's like it's like a softball in our day and age.

It's like you're just tossing. It's so easy for us to have that sort of access as opposed to many other people who are outside of the church. And so I personally just feel very blessed that I'm able to be part of a church family that is able to have that face-to-face interactions with us, with each other on the week-to-week.

[13:49] And then seeing other people be very intentional with trying to meet outside of church, outside of CGs, to connect with one another and go deeper in that way. And so all that to say, our thesis for our seminar today is this.

Friendship reveals God's own heart for us. Friendship, it strengthens our relationship with God. And friendship, it deepens our fellowship with one another. And so from here, I'm going to just sort of talk about the theological and biblical arc of what friendship looks like in the Bible.

And how we can consider a lot of things that God teaches us in his word regarding the Bible, regarding friendship. And so first, friendship is a gift from God.

Friendship and relationship is part of God's nature. In fact, friendship and relationship were divine realities before human realities. And we know that because of the Holy Trinity.

Before man was formed, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were in eternal fellowship and in perfect love with one another. And we have texts to prove this. Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[15:01] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The Spirit was with the Father. And John chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. The Word being the Son, Jesus. And so we see that the triune God was in eternal fellowship with one another well before man came into the picture.

And God, he doesn't keep this fellowship to himself. He's in perfect fellowship with the person of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. But he also invites humans into this fellowship, into this relationship with himself and with one another.

And just as we were created in the image of God, God, he gave us also a very relational heart.

Humans were created to have a need for relationships and friendships since the very beginning.

A couple of texts that I found in the Bible that were just a remarkable reminder of God's relationship to and his fellowship with us come in Genesis chapter 3 and Leviticus chapter 26.

[16:09] Genesis chapter 3 is a little interesting because we see that this is like after Adam and Eve, they fall into sin and rebel against the Lord. But we see in verses 8 to 9, And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

The Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? There was a time when Jesus, pardon me, when God was walking in the garden. And he was able to be face to face with Adam and Eve.

But the sin of the world obviously destroyed that relationship. But there was a time where God walked among us. Leviticus chapter 26 also says, And God says, I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people.

The very act of God walking among us, whether that's looking for Adam and Eve or him resting in the tabernacle, His presence resting in the tabernacle among the Israelites, it shows his desire for us to be close to him, to be in relationship with him.

And so prior to the fall, God walked with his people and he was with them face to face. God also creates us so that we can be in friendship and relationship with one another. And we see that from the very start in the creation narrative.

[17:24] Genesis chapter 2, verse 18. And then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. God, he creates all these things, the sky, the earth, the waters and the birds of the air, all these things.

And he says, oh, this is good. This is good. And then he creates Adam and he sees that Adam is all alone. And he finally deems something as not good. And that's the fact that Adam is alone.

And so there's that one thing that God deems. And mind you, this is before the fall. Before sin enters into the story. What God saw first as not good was Adam's and as a whole mankind's loneliness.

And in seeing that God, he so graciously and kindly gives Adam the gift of companionship. And he gives us that same gift of friendship and companionship. And so we see from the very start, we were made to desire friendship and companionship because our God is a relational God.

But the second thing that we need to remind ourselves of is that friendship has been marred by the fall. The very fact that we can't be in face-to-face relationship with God is proof of this here and now.

[18:38] Proverbs 16.28 says, A dishonest man spreads strife and a whisperer separates close friends. Satan, in the form of that serpent, was the first to whisper into man's ear and spread deceit to separate the very first friendships that were formed.

The serpent literally whispered into you's ear. Like, why would God not let his friends eat that fruit? Why would God not let his friends eat from that tree? Can you really trust in God as your friend? Was essentially what the serpent was saying to Eve. Like, can we trust him as, can you guys trust him as your friend? And as a result, Adam and Eve, they ended up not trusting God. And they rejected his friendship by eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and rebelling against God's law. And we see that in that moment where they eat the fruit, sin enters into the world.

And sin enters like a poison. It just spreads. Naked and ashamed, Adam and Eve, they hide from God. And then upon being found, Adam immediately goes into a whole blaming game.

[19 : 41] He blames God for giving Eve as a companion. He says in Genesis chapter 3 verse 12, the woman whom you gave to me, or sorry, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of a tree and I ate.

So automatically, Adam goes into blaming and his sin and pride. In fact, Adam, he double blames. He blames God for giving him Eve. And he also blames Eve as the one who caused him to sin. The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree. And so we see just in this one sentence, sin nefariously isolates and separates the different relationships and friendships between God and Adam and Eve.

And so it isolated man from God and man from one another. Sin turned us from friends to adversaries to God and one another. And death ultimately, in both a spiritual and physical sense, became the curse that threatened to eternally separate us and isolate us into loneliness.

We see in Titus chapter 3 verse 3, For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

[20 : 58] That was the reality that we lived in. But God, he's so gracious to bring reconciliation and redemption to our damaged friendship through his only son, Jesus.

And we see that in friendship redeemed by the gospel. This is just because our time. You look at the Old Testament and it's just depressing, you guys.

You see time and time again, Israel being like, oh, God, how we need you. And then the next second, they're bowing down to a cow or they're bowing down to some other idol or they're doing so many different things that God finds deplorable in his eyes.

And so that's that's the running theme of Old Testament. We see that Israel as a whole is not a good friend to God, even though God is trying to build and cultivate relationships with them.

But God, he has this plan of redemption, not only to rescue humanity from sin, but to restore our friendship with God and with one another. And that's the good news of the gospel. Amen.

[22 : 04] We see in the gospel of John, the gospel of John is so nice because John's literally known as the apostle of love because he loves talking about love. Anyone see Brooklyn Nine-Nine?

Terry loves love. John loves love, you know. And so this entire gospel, it's so it's so rich in its language of talking about how Jesus loves the world, how Jesus restores our friendship with God by first befriending sinners himself.

And we see a lot of Jesus sort of discussing this with his disciples in the upper room discourse in John chapter 13 to 17. And yeah, this entire section, it just contains a whole dearth of Jesus' teachings to his disciples about love and friendship that can only be restored by God himself through Jesus.

Jesus literally says in John chapter 15, verse 13 to 15, 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 have heard from my father, I have made known to you. Jesus calls his disciples his friends, no longer his servants, because he's revealed to them his father's plan of salvation and redemption through Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

[23 : 27] And we've seen that through Matthew, right? How Jesus continuously tells them, I'm going to die and I'm going to rise again. And we see time and time again that the disciples just seem to hyper fixate on, oh my gosh, Jesus is going to die.

And they don't seem to get the spoiler alert afterwards. And yet, Jesus, he continues to remind them that they're his friends, that greater love has no one than this, that someone would lay their life for his friends.

And this is significant because Jesus' friendship to his disciple, it points to the bigger picture. Jesus being able to call his servants his friends, points to God's ultimate plan of restoring his own relationship and his friendship with his people as well.

And Jesus, he practices exactly what he preaches and reveals what true friendship and true love looks like. He shows the greatest love by laying his own life on behalf of his friends.

That those who were once enemies to God could now be called his friends. John chapter 17, verse 26 says, I have made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

[24 : 46] That eternal fellowship that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had eternally before mankind was made. It was destroyed and, or that wasn't destroyed, but God's relationship with man was destroyed because of the fall.

And Jesus' sacrifice is that redemption, that restoration of that relationship again. The eternal love and fellowship that God the Father had with Christ the Son now is in the disciples and those who follow Jesus, as Jesus calls them his friends.

And so, Jesus' sacrifice, death, and resurrection not only restored our vertical relationship with God, but it also restored our horizontal relationship with one another.

Where we were once full of contempt and hatred for one another, Jesus gives his disciples this new command. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is interesting because we see in the Old Testament just many different instances where, I mean, literally the Ten Commandments, if we were to wrap it all together, it's to love God and love one another as yourself.

[26 : 14] But Jesus, he adds, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. If we go back to Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is saying, Scripture says, thou shall not murder, but I tell you this, even when you look at someone with deep anger or show resentment to them, you are murdering them in your hearts.

As Jesus raises that bar and that standard, he does the same thing with love your neighbor as yourselves. That's the bare minimum now. To love one another as Jesus loved us doesn't mean, oh, I'm not going to murder this person because I wouldn't want that done to me, or I'm not going to lie to this person because I wouldn't want to be lied to.

It's now to love one another sacrificially and generously as friends to go beyond that minimum, just as Jesus did for us by dying on the cross. And this is why Christian friendship is so crucial and sweet to the Christian life.

There was that J.C. Ryle quote that Nat so graciously shared with us. Friendship, it doubles our joys and halves our, was it pain, burden, sorrows, sorrows?

I think it was sorrows, yeah. Halves our troubles and doubles our joys. Halves our troubles and doubles our joys. We're able to say that because God has redeemed that horizontal relationship amongst us as well.

[27 : 40] There was a time where, like, we would have just been in constant enmity with one another, where even when we say we forgive one another, like, there is no guarantee that we have indeed done so.

But by the blood of Christ, we can say that, like, we are friends and our close relationship with one another does indeed help us to double our joys by carrying the burden of one another and halves our troubles in that same way.

And so this goes into our next section, friendship united in Christ. Just a, not a definition, but talking about how friendships are formed.

Friendships, they're formed on common interests all across the board, whether it's sports, hobbies, careers, ideologies. Friendships, friendships, they're formed by shared interests that you think you'll bond over.

Like, I have a bunch of guys here who, we've bonded over basketball. I have a bunch of people here who bonded over board games or, what other hobbies are there?

[28 : 44] Basketball and board games. Book club. Yeah, book club. Food. Whatever the case is. Like, I can't really think of any instance where you can form a friendship without a shared interest.

Without a common interest. And C.S. Lewis, in his book, The Four Loves, he does a great job of sort of nailing that on the head.

It's a little, he's a little harsh. Or maybe he's not harsh. He just says that as it is. But this is what he says. That is why those pathetic people who simply want friends can never make any. Where the truthful answer to the question, do you see the same truth, would be, I see nothing and I don't care about the truth. I only want a friend. No friendship can arise. There will be nothing for the friendship to be about.

And friendship must be about something. Even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice. Those who have nothing can share nothing. Those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travelers.

[29 : 51] Sean does a great job in talking about different types of love. And like romantic love is where two people face each other.

And they share in fellowship with one another in that way. Because they have a love for one another. But agape, it's when two companions, they look at the same thing together. They're standing parallel and they're looking at the same common interest.

And that's what they bond over. That's what they grow their relationship on. And obviously, as Christians, as fellow brothers and sisters of Christ, something must be shared in our relationships. And it can be basketball. It can be board games. It can be food. It can be book clubs. But we as Christians share the most important thing in our lives. And that's Jesus. We share in our devotion to him.

We share in our communion with him. We share in his mission. And we share in his love. And so we can find supreme commonality and unity in Jesus. And through that, we're able to become friends.

[30 : 54] One of my favorite passages when it comes to seeing friendship like this comes from Acts chapter 4. The context of this passage is amazing.

So after Pentecost, Peter and John, they go into the temple and they see this lame man who is unable to walk. And they heal the man in the name of Jesus.

And the temple officials, the Sadducees, they all see what happened. And they see that Peter and John, they're attributing this to the power of the gospel. They're preaching the gospel. And so they take Peter and John in and start interrogating them.

And then ultimately, they release them, threatening them. Don't you dare preach the gospel ever again. And when they're released, Acts chapter 4, verse 23 says that they went to their friends. They went to their friends, the other believers, and told them all that had happened. And it's so interesting because the author of Acts, Luke, he could have used any other word there.

[32 : 00] He could have said they went to the other believers. They went to the other followers of Jesus. But Luke decides to use the word friends. And I think the rest of this passage shows, can give us a clue as to why exactly he calls them friends.

Peter and John's friends, they hear of what Peter and John share. That they just were threatened to not share Jesus with people, to share the gospel with other people.

And Peter and John's friends, they respond by joining together and lifting their voices together to God. They prayed for Peter and John. And they prayed with Peter and John for gospel boldness.

And as they prayed together, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they were all the more empowered and emboldened to speak the word of God. And we see in Acts 4, later in verse 32. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. But they had everything in common.

[33 : 05] The early church in Acts, they were united, one heart and soul in Christ. And we see that in their joining together in prayer, asking for gospel boldness. And because of that, they were knit together as friends.

And in their response and being knit together as friends, they were able to joyfully and sacrificially care for one another. They were able to share.

And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. They were able to share their belongings with one another. And have everything in common with one another. They were able to call one another friends because they were truly united in Christ.

All after the same goal of glorifying God. And sharing a gospel-centered life with one another. And making disciples of all nations through the proclamation of the word. And so, we see that true biblical friendships, they're united in Christ before all else.

And so, sorry guys, basketball is nice. But first, we need to be knit in Christ. Board games are nice. But we need to first think about how we can honor one another in Christ-centered friendship.

[34 : 09] That way. I don't know why I'm looking at you guys with board games. We've never played board games together. But maybe we should. We can make that happen. I do want to...

I should have prefaced this a lot earlier. But even though I'm the one sharing this seminar, I feel like I had to fight a lot of imposter syndrome. And just bring this up.

Because in this season of life, I don't feel like I have really any close friends. Besides maybe my wife. And so, even just like writing this up, I was thinking to myself like...

Should I be the one like teaching about this? When I feel like I haven't been necessarily the best friend or the best person in trying to cultivate and foster close relationships with those around me. But honestly, God's been really gracious in also reminding me that like, even if in this season of life, I don't have that, I still have my closeness to the Lord.

[35 : 15] And honestly, he should be the first priority friend that I reach out to and confide in with all these things. And so, if any of you guys are also sort of in that season, I'll talk a little bit more about this later.

But seek out the Lord first. And then see how he just grows and cultivates this community around you. And like places where you can also grow your friendships.

And I say this. Augustine has a much better way of saying this in his book, Confessions. Which I believe I have to quote for you guys as well. No friends are true friends unless you, my God. Find them fast to one another through that love which is sown in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who has given to us.

I feel like a lot of my like close Christian friendships, I think without Christ, I don't know if I would have been like friends with them. I feel like I'm a, at my core, I'm a very like picky or particular sort of person when it comes to friends.

And it very much was like that before I like grew, I came to know Christ. But it's amazing what the power of the gospel can do in just building friends with people who you would have never imagined being friends with ever before.

[36 : 30] And so, that's the power of the Holy Spirit, you know. All right. Friendships grow, friendship grows us in Christ. So, passages like Acts 4, it also shows us that Christian friendships are a means of grace.

It's a means of grace for drawing us closer to God and growing to be more like Christ in our sanctification. When we pursue true Christian friendship with one another, Scripture also indicates that we'll naturally pursue godliness and Christ-likeness as well.

Three passages that I ended up choosing out were Hebrews 3, Hebrews 10, and 1 Peter 4. I'll just read each one of them. So, Hebrews 3, verse 12 to 13.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10, verse 24 to 25. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[37 : 47] And lastly, 1 Peter 4, 8-10. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace.

In all of these verses, we have this aspect of one another. And it's telling us to exhort one another, to encourage one another, to stir up one another, to show hospitality to one another.

In all these things, we also grow in our godliness and in our Christ-likeness. That as we do this, we don't grow hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That we grow in our hope of the day that's drawing near. That we grow in our extending grace to one another and to ourselves. We grow in our gift of hospitality. We grow in stewarding the varied measures of God's grace to ourselves.

And so, in our just cultivating Christian friendship with one another, we also just grow in becoming more like Jesus. We grow in becoming more godly men and women. Tony, you had a question.

[38 : 55] What does it mean for love to cover a multitude of sins? Love to cover a multitude of sins? In the first piece? Mm-hmm. Does anyone have an answer for that?

What does it mean that love covers a multitude of sins? A lot of sin comes from a lack of love for your neighbor.

So, like, being angry that somebody is valuing their life less. Which is lack of love. Hmm. Yeah, I think it is both...

I think it is both, like... It has... Love has preventative powers. And also...

I don't... It feels weird to call it reactive powers. Sure. Yeah, like, restoring powers in the sense of, like... You're not...

[39 : 57] Like, out of love, you, like, don't spread deceit about someone. You don't grow angry with them. And that's sort of the preventative so that you do not fall into sin. Or you do not cause someone else to stumble in sin.

But also, if someone does fall into sin against you and offend you, love... If you love that person, you'll also forgive them. And I think that's sort of also talking about how love covers all sorts of different sins.

That you would love them so much that you forgive them. Knowing that Christ forgave you first. So, I think it has sort of that double meaning sense. Any other questions before we jump in?

Cool. Yeah, so... Sort of like what we were just talking about. That aspect of one another. It's necessary. We can't follow any of these commands in Hebrews or 1 Peter without one another.

Without having the aspect of one another. Who am I going to show grace to if there's no one around me? Or if there's... Yeah, if I'm not, like, in relationship with anyone. Who am I going to love well if...

[41 : 03] If I'm not in relationship or in friendship with one another. Like, naturally, because of the fallenness of this world. If you're in... The deeper you get in, like, relationship and friendship with one another.

The more, like, uglier and uglier sides of one another. You're also going to see patterns of sin. Like, tendencies.

Like, yeah. Anger tendencies or tendencies to fall into a certain type of sin. Whatever the case is, you'll start to see that more and more as you grow deeper in your friendships with folks.

And I think that's why it's so important to just remind yourselves that we've been forgiven. We ourselves have been forgiven by Jesus. And so we can do the same for one another that way.

And it's through that friendship that's marked by that forgiveness, that extension of grace, that exhortation, encouragement, and loving in a Christ-gloating way that we ourselves were spiritually strengthened.

[42 : 02] And we're all the more sanctified in Him. And so, just to sort of tie all this together. I had said this before, but our Christian friendship with one another, it can't be pursued without a close relationship with Christ first.

It all needs to start from our vertical relationship with the Lord. And oftentimes, the vertical relationship will often dictate how our horizontal relationships are as well.

I can attest to many different times where, because my relationship with God was stale or not in the best of places, my relationships with my friendships, just human friendships, have also been not in the best of states as well.

I think as we just grow in the Lord and ask for Him to bestow unto us the fruits of the Spirit, that naturally just pervades to our horizontal relationships as well, and loving our neighbors and our friends as well.

And so, our friendship with Jesus will help to cultivate and enjoy deep friendship with others. Sort of like what I just said, Christ's unconditional love for us, His unconditional love for us, it empowers us to love others the same way, no matter how broken, no matter how sin and guilt-driven they may be.

[43 : 23] Jesus' all-sufficient love enables us to love others generously and not selfishly or fearfully. Because Jesus' love should be the all-sufficient power in our own lives, when we befriend other people, we don't have to do so out of fear of like, oh, what if they do me wrong, or what if they don't love me in the same way Jesus does.

Because that's the great thing, Jesus loves you that much, and He loves you that infinitely, that you shouldn't have to hold on to that love so selfishly for yourself.

And lastly, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, it transforms us to be people who can genuinely love others in a gospel-centered way. When we grow to be more like Jesus, we learn to love people genuinely.

Not like, oh, I need to be friends with you because we go to the same church or we're in the same small group. It genuinely gives us a desire to want to know deeper one another's personal lives, one

another's spiritual lives, one another's ins and outs and want to care for them well in that way. And so, yeah, our friendships start with Jesus. He's the founder and perfecter of our faith, and He's our greatest and truest friend. And when we reach the end, when all else has faded away, Jesus, He remains as our greatest and truest friend.

[44 : 45] And so, as we continue to think about friendships and relationships around us, remember that even human relationships like this, it's from God, and it can only be sustained through Him.

And we dedicate those friendships and relationships to Him, all things. Cool. That's sort of the, like, arch, the theological arch that I was talking about in regards to what biblical friendships can look like.

The next section that I had is titled Miscellaneous, but still very relevant topics. And these were sorts of different things that I was thinking about when it comes to friendships and questions that people have asked in the past in regards to building friendships.

I'm happy to sort of start us off, but if anyone has any question about, like, building friendships or friendship in general, this is sort of the, like, Q&A; discussion type of time.

And so feel free to just raise your hand and ask away. Yeah. All of, maybe start us off with just my first point, the practice of encouragement. So the reason why I wanted to also share that book on encouragement was because just as friendship has been, like, getting more and more distorted in our world and loneliness has been amounting all the more, encouragement has also been something that has been slowly waning within our society.

[46 : 17] Like, you go onto social media and whether it's politics or social commentary or even memes, like, they've just become more and more sort of demeaning towards people of just trying to, like, call people out about things or criticize them for certain actions.

And I think that also can pervade into our church as well. In Jared Mellinger's book, Encouragement, he talks about how he became the head pastor of a very large church down in Philadelphia, where all the men are going, actually, next weekend.

He became the head pastor of that church at 28 years old. He was my age when he became the head pastor. And during his pastorship, he was given the nickname the Hawk.

The Hawk. The Hawk typically is a pretty cool nickname. Like, if you were called the Hawk, like, if you're like, I don't know, it sounds really cool. I would want to be called the Hawk.

But the reason why Jared was called the Hawk was because he had such a critical eye about everything, about other people's ministry, about the way deacons and other church leaders were performing, about just all the ins and outs of his church ministry.

[47 : 40] And so he just always had, like, critique to give. And that's why he was called the Hawk. But he said that as he read Acts, in the book of Acts, and saw in Acts 5, Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

Barnabas's name actually isn't Barnabas. It's Joseph. But they decided to nickname him Barnabas because he was such an encouraging presence within the early church. And we see that because he so readily sold all of his possessions so that he could use it to equip and aid the church.

I feel like that's something that, like, we in our church can also grow in, in just being more encouraging figures and people who desire to give encouragements to one another, not for the sake of being encouraging.

Like, I don't, during passing of the peace, I don't want people to just walk up to each other and be like, you're a great greeter. You're a great pastor of the peace. It's just for the sake of, but, like, actually genuinely seeing evidences of grace in one another's life and speaking into it so that the truth can really, like, burst forth and be presented.

And so that's sort of one of my first tips in talking about friendships and the cultural friendship in our church. One thing that we can do is just be a lot more encouraging and be more celebrating of one another's evidences of grace.

[49 : 05] See how God is working in one another's lives and, like, really make an effort to point that out. Like most habits, it's gonna, it's like trying to throw a ball with your left hand.

It's gonna be really awkward at first, unless you're a lefty. With your non-dominant hand, it's gonna feel really awkward at first. But I think as we continue to, like, cultivate that culture of encouraging one another, like, people will, like, receive that well and also learn to, like, give that out as well.

One of the, like, tips that Jared gives is, like, as you are hanging out with someone and as you guys get ready to depart, spend some time at the end of your conversation to just point out an evidence

of grace.

Like, man, I had such a great time talking with you. And I'm, like, so thankful for this aspect of what you shared. Or I'm so thankful about, like, this character that you showed in our conversation or our time.

Or I know, like, what struggles you're going through in your life right now. And I'm so thankful that you've shown fortitude in this way or all that. And, like, I've been trying to make more of an effort to do that when I'm having my one-on-one with, like, friends and whatnot.

[50 : 13] And I think it really does make a big difference in helping us to see that, like, our friendships are also built not just for us to enjoy one another, but for us to supremely enjoy Christ, you know.

So that's my spiel on encouragement. Definitely read the book. I hope this gets, like, passed around the church if possible. Yeah.