

OpenTheo

Friendship



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of friendships and their role in shaping personality and moral values. He distinguishes between worldly and Christian friendships and emphasizes the significance of biblical principles and sacrificial love in friendships among believers. Gregg stresses the need for constructive criticism to promote growth and improvement and highlights the importance of choosing friends based on discerning and following God's will rather than personal gain or advantage. He also shares how friendship evangelism can be effective in sharing faith and reflecting Christ's character and love.

Transcript

Tonight what I wish to talk about is the relationship that we call friendships. We have been talking in general about relationships in our previous lectures about the biblical basis for relationships, God's purpose in relationships, how to maintain harmony in relationships, the value of relationships, and so forth, the central place they hold in God's design and purpose for our lives and for his world plan. And we've been very general, although we've been specific about the general subjects we've been talking about, we haven't been specific about various kinds of relationships which we begin to do tonight.

And that is as we begin to talk about the relationship that we call friendship. And this probably of all the relationship types that we could address is, I would say, probably the most general because friendship actually overlaps with many other kinds of relationships. We would trust that a husband and wife who have a very special kind of relationship, just by being husband and wife, would also have a friendship.

Also, we have neighbors who are non-Christians, but that should not keep us from being friends with them also. And it may be that the relationship between ourselves and the pastor of the church is also a friendship, though by virtue of the position of the pastor and our position in the church, there's also other dimensions to that relationship. But friendship also exists as a thing in and of itself.

That is to say, there are friends who are neither a husband or a wife or a pastor or who

have no other special characteristics to their relationship to us, but are simply what we call friends. And as Christians, our friendships take on a very new dimension over that which our friendships had in the world. And we must admit that there are many differences between the friendships we now have as believers and especially with other believers than there were with our friendships in the world.

Different things are considered to be important. There are different ground rules for relating, different assumptions at the beginning, and different goals in our friendships now as Christians than were in our relationships and friendships in the world. I've actually heard some Christians say, I had better friends in the world than I have in the church.

You ever heard anyone say that? I've heard it quite a bit. People often say that. I think a lot of times that isn't even a true statement, although it may be in many cases.

But I think a lot of times people say that just to get back at Christians who they think are not treating them right. And basically, they know one of the most stinging things they can say is, well, I have better friends in the world than these Christian friends of mine. Because of course, that suggests that their present friends, though they are Christians, are not as good people as unbelievers are.

And that simply is not a true statement in general. Now, I might say this. There are some non-Christians who are better people than some Christians.

I can't deny that. Not better in the sight of God, because of course the only thing that commands man to God is his faith in Christ anyway. Therefore, the worst Christian in the sight of God is higher than the best non-Christian.

But as far as character is concerned, we definitely could say there are some unbelievers who have better character, who are more fair, who have a higher concept of justice and of mercy and so forth, than some Christians. Some Christians have very little development in some very important areas, whereas some unbelievers have moved a great deal further. And it may be, of course, that you knew some very good unbelievers at one time and have known some very poor Christians.

And in which case, it is very possible that some of your friendships in the world may have been better, or your friends may have been better people than some of your friends in the church. But in general, I don't think it can be said honestly that the friends in the world were better friends than in the church. And I might say this too.

If some think that by finding better people in the world than they find in the church, that this somehow discredits the validity of Christianity, let them consider that those persons in the church who they find to be so low in character, we don't know what they would be like if they weren't Christian. They may be far better people now than they were before

they were Christian. And nobody in the world is a person that you think is such a low person in terms of quality of their person and character, but that person may have made tremendous strides over where he was before he was a Christian.

And so it does not in any way impugn the validity of Christianity to point out that there are some Christians who are not very far developed. The fact of the matter is, if they are better than they were, it shows that Christianity in fact is true. And it also shows that they have a lot of developing to do.

But a lot of times I think when people say, I had better friends in the world than in the church, they are not taking into consideration some important factors. For instance, what was the basis of their friendships in the world? You'll find that the basis of your friendships in the world were probably very different than the basis for your friendships here in the body of Christ. We've observed before that the people that are around you right now, with whom you are forced to relate because you're in the same church or in the same community, in the same school, with them, are not necessarily all the same people that you would have chosen to be your friends if you were all in the world.

And with them you may not have a great deal in common, except that you're all Christians. And therefore it's not surprising that your friendships would be very different and in some ways a little less satisfying than the friendships you had in the world. Because when you were in the world, you chose your friends for personal and very probably selfish reasons.

For example, one of the things that is a major basis for friendship in the world is personal attraction. A desire to be with somebody or to be close to somebody because they are attractive, either physically attractive or attractive to you for other reasons. For instance, if they seem intellectual and you like to be in league with intellectual people and be associated with them, they attract you because they have a sense of humor.

They attract you because you get so much from them in one way or another. This attractiveness of people is very frequently, and maybe in every case, a basis for friendships in the world. And that a person who is absolutely unattractive would not be an early choice of yours to be a close friend.

Now maybe that wasn't true of you, but it certainly is true of most worldly friendships that personal attraction, attractiveness of the other party to you, is a major basis of choosing friends. Another basis is mutual interest. Obviously, if both people like to go hunting, then it's obvious that those persons can be friends.

And in the world, that could be the only thing that makes them friends. They might have very little to commend them to each other as friends, but they both have a similar interest that is a compelling interest. They're both auto mechanics, they're both surfers, they both are patriots, so they join this particular organization of patriots or whatever.

They both like playing chess, so they join the chess club or something. There are mutual interests that draw people together. And it is usually considered by worldly psychologists that, and I don't say that this is wrong either, that the best marriages, or the best, most successful relationships between the opposite sexes are those where there's a great deal that they share in common in terms of mutual interest.

If they like the same kind of music, it helps a lot. If they have similar taste in clothing, and so forth, it'll help a great deal, rather than butting heads all the time over what's nice and what's not nice. And so mutual interests in the world often are a principal basis of continuing friendship.

Another consideration is very often loneliness. A person who's lonely often will attach himself to a person as a friend, or hope to be a friend to somebody, on practically no other basis but that they're lonely enough to be with anyone. There are people in bars tonight, probably, to whom this applies.

They just go there because they're lonely, and they'll go home with anybody. Just because they're lonely, and they're looking for someone else who's lonely. And they hope to find some kind of satisfaction in any kind of friendship.

And there's a phenomenon which many of us probably know, first hand, which is usually called rebound. That when a close relationship is broken, a lot of times if a divorce takes place, or simply a very close friendship or close relationship, especially with the opposite sex, that the party who has lost the close relationship will go, and very often be very indiscriminate in choosing a replacement. And you find the phenomenon very frequently that a woman who's had an abusive alcoholic husband will, you know, finally be freed from him, a divorce will take place, and the next thing she does is go to a bar and find another one just like him.

And I have some friends, some women who are not Christians, who have been married to three successive alcoholics. And you just wonder, why do they keep doing this? And the reason seems to be that when they are lonely, their loneliness gets an advantage over their sensibleness. That their rational thinking is sacrificed because of the overwhelming loneliness.

And there's such a gap, a vacuum created by the absence of that person to whom they've been so close, that nature abhors a vacuum. And that empty space has to be filled somehow, anyway. And so they'll go to the easiest place to find another person.

And usually that's a bar, someplace like that, or a singles club of some kind. And they'll usually get the same kind of person as they got before, because they're not thinking any more straight than they were the first time when they chose their mate. And I'll tell you, if two people enter a friendship together because of mutual loneliness, there is hope.

There is a possibility that a friendship of some quality may develop, but it's unlikely. Because the likelihood is that they will both be so self-serving in the relationship, and so self-centered. And entering the relationship because they have a sensed need.

And if both persons are entering the relationship because they sense a personal need on their own part, then they'll have a parasitic relationship where they're both living off each other's energy, living off of each other's strokes, or whatever they get from each other. And it usually will not lead to a very wholesome relationship. Now, loneliness is a phenomenon that even Christians experience.

It's not a sin to be lonely. I'm sure that Jesus was lonely at times, and I know that, I know Paul must have been lonely when he was in prison, and he said, All have forsaken me, except for Luke and Timothy. And he said, At my first answer, all men forsook me, no one stood with me.

He must have felt very lonely at that moment. And Christians do. Jesus felt very lonely in the Garden of Gethsemane, I'm sure.

But if a person is overwhelmed by their loneliness to the point where they go out and indiscriminately enter into a relationship and seek to build a friendship, on that basis, it is probably not going to be a good friendship. It will not be a healthy one, most likely, because they'll be sort of an emotional vampire He's just sucking the blood out of the relationship because of their own sense of need. Alright, well, that's another reason, then.

Loneliness is often a basis of worldly friendship. Another, amazingly, although maybe not as frequently, is a shared antagonism. Both parties hate the same person or thing, and therefore they get together.

In the Bible we see this, where the Herodians conspired together with the Pharisees against Jesus, because they both hated Jesus, and yet, ordinarily, they didn't get along with each other either. Politically, these groups were at opposite foes, and when Jesus wasn't in the picture, they usually were battling each other. But when they found that they both had a mutual foe, Jesus, they bonded together.

We see a similar thing in the story of Pilate and Herod, in Luke chapter 23, how it says that after Herod condemned, or rejected Jesus, and Pilate also condemned Jesus, that, it's an interesting statement Luke makes, that previous to this, Herod and Pilate had hated each other, but after this, they became good friends. Why? Because of mutual antagonism. A lot of people who would have no other reason to be friends with someone will band together because they have a common foe.

We all hate the Communists, so we all join this club, this anti-Communist club. Now, we might have nothing else in common with these people, but because we're all fighting on

the same team against the same despised enemy, therefore we link together, and friendships are formed, and if that's the only basis of friendship, of course, it's not an extremely good one. And, then again, there are some friendships that are chosen for the sake of personal advantage.

That is, the advantage of being in with a certain group, the advantage of getting rich. Many people accuse Jackie Kennedy of having this motive for marrying Aristotle Onassis, and I doubt if there's very many who could convince us that that was not her motive, but she, of course, denied it, as anyone would have expected to, but without seeking to judge her, it's very evident that there was strong suspicions along those lines, and that many people have entered into such relationships with marrying rich people, or choosing friends who are rich and influential politicians, or people who can give you some advantage, being a friend of somebody who's a presidential candidate, in hopes that you might get appointed to an office, or similar dynamics in relationships are practiced at much lower levels. But the point is that some people choose their friends because they can see that they can get something out of it.

And, you know, this makes it very frustrating for people who are rich, or for people who are pretty, girls especially who are pretty, or anyone else from whom another might gain an advantage by being close to them, because people like that are always doomed to wonder whether people really like them for who they are, or whether people are just using them. And we well know that the using of a person in a friendship is a very common thing in the world. In the book of Jude, there's reference to this also.

In Jude, there's only one chapter in Jude, so it's chapter one. In verse 16, it says, "...these are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts, and their mouths speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Now, the King James Word's that a little strange, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage, but what it's saying is they attach themselves to people, they brown those up to people, because they have some advantage they hope to obtain. They become the teacher's pet, and they always compliment the teacher on how nice her hair looks today, and so forth, because they hope to get some advantage out of that.

Or they become close to the valedictorian of the school, and sit next to them in class, so that they can look over at his paper, or whatever. They choose their friends on the basis of advantage, and that's very common in the world. In Proverbs chapter 19, on this point, it says in verse 4, "...wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated even from his neighbor." And then in verse 6, it says, "...many will entreat the favor of the prince, and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts." What's that talking about? Both of those verses.

Wealth makes many friends. Everyone seeks the favor of a prince, and the guy who gives gifts is going to have a lot of friends. It's obviously talking about this particular

basis of friendship.

People who will become a friend for the sake of advantage. Now, these are really the reasons that people enter into friendship, for the most part, in the world. Now, I don't say there are never any pure motives.

There are. I don't mean to paint with a broad brush all unbelievers, and say they're all very, very wicked in all their relationships. Although, I do believe that the Bible teaches that even the best and most worthy acts of unbelievers are tainted by desire for self-fulfillment of some kind.

And that until a person actually denies self and is crucified with Christ, they are actually incapable of making decisions totally free from selfish considerations. And even Christians don't find it easy to make decisions totally free from selfish considerations. But some non-Christians, of course, have much higher reasons for some other relationships than these.

Some people enter into relationships for philanthropic reasons. It makes them feel good about themselves to befriend the handicapped person, and to be the one who's always there. Now, whether or not that unbeliever who befriends the helpless, handicapped person is doing so because he hopes that people will acknowledge him to be a great, merciful philanthropist, or whether he's doing it because it just makes him feel good about himself, none of us can judge.

We can't judge another man's motives. But we can admit that there can even be selfish motives for such things as that. Although, there may be some people who do it out of a better motive.

But the point I'm making is, when people say, I had better friends in the world, realize what really happened in the world. If you think more realistically about your friends in the world, why did you have better friends? What you probably mean if you say something like that is, I was more satisfied in my friendships than I am presently satisfied with my relationships in the body of Christ. If that is true, it may be because you chose the friends that you liked the most.

Which you don't do in the body of Christ. God chooses your brothers and your sisters and your friends for you in the body of Christ. And you chose your friends before.

And God doesn't always choose the friends that will be the most attractive to you, or from which you can derive the most carnal pleasure or advantage. Or who will satisfy your loneliness the most. It may be that God will draw you to somebody because they need you for their loneliness, or for some other reason.

And not for your sake. But of course, whatever God does is good for everyone involved. But the point here is that in the world, you see, people who offended us ceased to be our

friends.

Isn't that true? If people really offended us sufficiently for us to think very badly of them, we just ceased to be friends with them. And so the circle of those that we call good friends narrowed to that small group that never offended us very badly. To that group that attracted us the most, and from whom we derived the most pleasure and fulfillment, and the least offenses.

Well, when you think about it, not everybody who was a friend in the world, even if you had some good friends in the world, not everyone who was a friend remained a friend very long. And the ones who remained friends did so partly because they were of that small circle that never really challenged you, or never really offended you enough to cease to be friends. Now, in the body of Christ, things are very different.

Because in the body of Christ, if someone offends us, we can't just write them off. We're not allowed to do that. We still have to be friendly.

We still have to associate. We still have to fellowship with a person. And see, in the world, if a person didn't do something you thought they should do for you, when you were sick for six weeks and in bed, they never came over or called, well, they probably wouldn't be your friend unless they came up with an awfully good explanation after that.

But in the body of Christ, if someone neglects you at a time of need, you can't just write them off. At least you're not supposed to as a Christian. They are still your brother and sister.

Therefore, you need to treat them as friends. And that's perhaps why sometimes it was easier to relate in our friendships in the world. Because we got to be more selective about who we continued to be friends with than we have the option of in the body of Christ.

I'd like to talk about more biblical purposes for friendship, more biblical basis for friendship, than those which the world has to offer. And I want to look at it from God's point of view and from ours. And we'll use the scripture in every case for what we say.

But I will list a number of things that are biblically said to be a basis for Christian friendships. And you will find that these bases for friendships may bring us into friendships that are very unlike those in the world. Friendships with persons that we would not have wished to be friends with in the world.

But because of the wisdom of God and the leading of God, we become involved in friendships with people that we find are fruitful for our lives and for theirs. Though in the world we would have been off our list perhaps early. And one thing that we know is a basis of friendship, and this is both true from the worldly point of view as well as biblical, and it's certainly not the first in importance, but it is one of the first that we encounter in

the scripture, is for companionship.

It is not good that man should be alone, God says in Genesis chapter 2. And since it was not good for man to be alone, God created relationships. And now the relationship he created in that particular instance was, of course, a marriage relationship. But not everybody marries.

And even those who do marry don't always marry as soon as they wish they could. And so people who are not married many times have to learn how to not be alone though unmarried. And there are other relationships that have to fill that void.

There is a need for companionship, even if there is not a lifelong mate that has been brought to a person yet. And it is simply not good for a person to be a hermit, for a person to be a recluse, for a person to hole up in his home. When I was a child, I was not very outgoing to people.

I'm not sure exactly why. I've thought about it a lot. I'm not sure exactly what all led me to be this way.

And I didn't necessarily care for people that much when I was a child. I was different than a lot of other children, I think. But maybe I just couldn't relate to some of them.

But I was into my pets. I had all kinds of strange pets. Snakes and iguanas and alligators.

Then I raised opossums for a few years and things like that. And I even wanted some stranger pets, but my parents wouldn't let me have them. But for me, pets were an escape from relationships.

Because I didn't find it desirable at that time to get close to people. And yet, there was a void. You cannot be alone.

And so, for some people, their poodle or their cat or maybe their parakeet, or even in some very desperate situations, a goldfish, will become a substitute for a friend because people find that companionship is necessary. It is necessary not to be alone. And almost everyone, you know, people who don't have any friends often will make imaginary friends.

And, you know, when I was a child, I even did that. I had an imaginary friend. I think a lot of kids do that.

But it's really tragic when adults are still doing that because they have not been able to become friends with other people. To be alone is definitely a sub-healthy way to be. And it was not good, God said.

And that's why he created relationships in the first place. And if we turn to Ecclesiastes, we see another statement about the need for companions and the need not to be alone.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 4, and we might read verses 8 through 12.

Ecclesiastes 4, 8 through 12, says, There is one alone, and there is not a second. Yea, he hath neither child nor brother. Yet is there no end of all his labor, neither is his eye satisfied with riches, neither saith he, For whom do I labor and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is short travail.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he hath not another to help him up.

Again, if two lie together, they can have heat. But how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Now, what is being said here is several examples and illustrations are being given of the value of companionship.

The first is the case where a man labors his whole life, but never has anyone close to him. He doesn't have a child, he doesn't have a brother, he doesn't have anyone. He's all alone.

And yet he labors, and it never crosses his mind, because he has never had a relationship, there is no one to carry on his labor or to benefit from his labor after he dies. In the case of, you know, if he has a son, he can raise up his son to take over the business, and what he's sown into the business all his life long, he can hand over as a progressed thing to his son, and his son can start where he left off and continue it. And, of course, I think in those terms, with ministry also, I think it's a tremendous tragedy for a person to spend their whole life learning the ways of God, and yet have no one to pass it on to.

And so, the next generation, you see, could benefit from all the things that person learned if he had been discipling somebody, or if he had a friend that he was imparting those truths to. But here is a man who has no one, he has no relationships, and yet he still puts in as much time being as productive as possible in the world, but never crosses his mind that all of the benefits of his labors will die with him. There's no one but himself.

And when he dies, his labor ends, and no one will have been benefited by it. Whereas if there were friendships, if there was a son, if there was a brother, if there was someone he was closely related to, he could have passed on the torch, as it were, passed on the baton to this friend who could run with what he'd accomplished. Then he says, two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor, for if they fall, the one will help his fellow up, but woe unto him who is alone when he falls, for he hath not another to help him up.

This is no doubt illustrating something in the natural, that if a person falls down, for

instance, in a ditch or something that's above his head, he can't get out very well by himself, but if he has a friend, there's a way to be helped out. And yet, of course, I think that anyone would immediately see the spiritual, meaning far more importantly, that if you get hit by one of the flaming darts of the enemy, and you're down for the count, and you have no Christian friends, you have no one close to you, no one who's got their finger on your spiritual pulse, no one who knows what you're doing or has any commitment to you above that of any other person in the church, it's very easy for you to lie there and rot without anyone assisting you. But if you have a close friendship, if you have spiritual brothers that you are relating to in a special relationship, then of course you can't fall down for long and get away with it, because they're on your trail.

They help you up. Sometimes when you fall into sin, you don't necessarily want to get up as quickly as the brothers require it, but after all, it turns out to be for your good that someone's there to help you up. It's the very lack of desire to get up, in fact, that makes it impossible to get up alone.

And it's so valuable to have spiritual friends, because if you fall into sin, if you fall into some weakness, then your brothers can help you. And in fact, in many cases, they can keep you from falling in the first place. He says, if two lie together, they have heat, but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, that is, if you're attacked, you're far better off if you've got a friend there.

I mean, if you've got one person attacking you, and there's two of you, you're in pretty good shape. The two will withstand him. And he said, a threefold cord is not soon broken, meaning the more friends you've got, the better.

It's a whole lot better to have two than one, and it's better still to have three, and we might assume that he'd go so far as to say four would be better still. The more relationships, the more quality friendships that you have, the less vulnerable you are to attack from the enemy. And if you do fall, the more assistance you have in getting back to your feet.

This is one of the great reasons for friendships, because every man needs to have companions for these reasons. No man can walk alone very successfully, and that is why it is not good for a man to be alone. So companionship is necessary, and that is truly a basis for relationships, though that is true in worldly relationships as well as in Christian ones.

And the choice of which companions you have is, of course, going to have to be based on Christian principles, whereas the choice of companions would be based on something else if the person's in the world. A second reason for relationships that God has, or purpose that he has for relationships, is for the sake of influence. A relationship is a force, is a power that has influence over a personality.

It is amazing how much influence strong friendships exert over a personality. The Bible very clearly says, he that walks with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed. It depends on who you're relating with, who you are friends with, how you will turn out.

And the reason for that, of course, is because we are such delicate persons, so needing of relationship. And most relationships in the world are so conditional, that if you don't please the person that you're sapping your morale from in your friendship, that they might reject you. You have strong incentive to do the things that please that person.

And in every group of people, there are some who clearly are leaders of the group, and others who are not. And unless you're one of those leader types, you're probably one of the follower types. And even in a friendship with just two people, there's almost always one that tends to take the lead, that tends to make the suggestions.

Well, what are we going to do today? Well, I think we'll do this, and the other one goes along. Some relationships are quite equal, but most relationships, there's one party or another that takes the lead, and that person has a strong influence over the other one. And friendship is a very influential thing over the parties involved in it.

And it's also true that friendship and companionship influences simply by creating an environment, a moral environment, to which we inadvertently conform. I think that the persons that we're around, you see, if we're around people who blaspheme God and take the Lord's name in vain, as Christians, we're likely to shrink from that the first few times we hear it. But if we continue in that relationship, we are likely to become numb to it.

So, I mean, it's true, you might be aghast the first time you hear someone blaspheme Christ, but if you, for carnal reasons, want to be a friend of that person, and you want to please that person, and you want to hang out with that person, then the time will come where you will numb yourself, morally numb yourself, so that blasphemy doesn't affect you, or doesn't offend you anymore. When that has happened, you've lost something, spiritually. And, you see, your associations create a moral environment, and you will either propel yourself from such an environment in disgust, or else you will conform to it.

You will not continue to remain unaffected in an environment that is very different than your own personality, than a moral environment that's different. You will either be an influence for good, or it will be an influence for evil upon you. In either case, it confirms my point that relationships are influential.

You will either be the influential party, or the other person will be. And, if you associate with a number of people, and they're all wise men, according to Proverbs, if you associate with wise men, you will become wise. Why? Because the very environment that is set among people who walk in the wisdom of God, and when they speak, they give the counsel of God, will just condition your way of thinking, to think those ways too.

It's unavoidable. But, if you're always around people who are talking and telling lewd jokes and things like that, unless you leave those friendships behind, you're going to have to compromise morally. You may not end up telling such jokes, but you'll come to the place where they don't offend you anymore, and it may come to the place, and will probably come to the place where you enjoy hearing them, and then after that, it may come very easily to the place where you're letting slip some of those yourself.

Influence of friendship is very important. That's why it says in Hebrews, chapter 10, and verse 24, that we need to provoke one another to love and good works. Hebrews 10, 24 says, let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.

Because we will influence one another. We need to make a conscious effort to be the right kind of influence. We need to have relationships that also provoke us to love and good works.

You see, you may be a person who's a little bit sloppy in your Christian behavior, but if you're always around people who are very exact and scriptural and very careful to do the right thing, biblically, you are going to become sensitive to that too. If you're among people who walk in the fear of God, you will develop the fear of God. You cannot help it, because if you didn't have the fear of God before, it's simply because the judgment of God, the holiness of God, and so forth, were not called to your attention graphically enough or often enough to make you have the fear of God.

When you're around people who are always walking in the fear of God, the holiness of God will be the atmosphere of the relationship. And you will just sense that you can't do things when you're with those people that you could do when you're with a bunch of sinners. And you will become aware that some of the things you're doing are offensive in the sight of God, because you'll suddenly become sensitive about them yourself, because the persons you're with don't do them.

So it's necessary to have friendships in order to influence ourselves the right way, and of course, to be an influence on others. Realize there's something called friendship evangelism that a lot of people are talking about a lot. Almost every new book on evangelism has a chapter or at least some reference to what they call friendship evangelism, which is something other than just going out on the street corner and preaching, but rather getting to know the new family that moves in across the street and taking them over cookies and tea the first day they're there, and offering to help them out or mow their lawn or to help them get established or whatever, or making friends in some way with a person without ever seeking to evangelize them overtly.

And then later, once you're a friend of theirs, that you begin to gradually share with them what it is that makes you tick, namely your Christian faith. And this, while it might seem like a coward's form of evangelism to some of the more radical street preacher types, is nonetheless effective. And people are saved through friendship evangelism.

And again, it underscores the power of a friendship to influence, for good or for bad. And the scripture teaches it very plainly, that friendships are influential, therefore we need to choose the right kinds of friends. In Psalm 119, in verse 63, the psalmist says, I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

Now he says, I'm a friend or a companion of all those who fear you. Now that means that anyone who fears the Lord is automatically a friend of mine. They may not be the most attractive person.

I may be able to derive no carnal advantage from the relationship. It may be that they will have some offensive habits. Maybe they sniffle.

I know some like that. And maybe they have BO or some other things that would impede a friendship if they were acquaintances of yours in the world. But because of the influence that they can have upon you for godliness, you choose that they will be your friends, because you acknowledge that friendship is influential.

And therefore, anyone who fears the Lord is a companion of mine, is a friend of mine, he says. Because I find that I need to be influenced by people who fear God. And I need to be surrounded by people who generate that kind of a moral atmosphere and a spiritual atmosphere, because it will influence me inevitably.

It's interesting that the Hebrew word in the Old Testament for friend, when you find the word friend in your Old Testament, it's translated from the Hebrew word that means to tend a flock, like a shepherd does. And in a sense, it is suggesting that the biblical concept of friendship is to feed, or to nurture, or to tend another person. In other words, it's just the opposite of choosing a friendship because you're lonely and you need nurture, or because you are attracted, or you have some advantage to gain from it.

It's the opposite. You are entering a friendship in order to be an influence, a positive influence, to feed and meet the spiritual needs of another person. And I thought it was interesting when I read that, that friend is taken from the Hebrew word that means to tend a flock.

In a sense, every friend is a shepherd. Now, there are special persons who are called shepherds in the scripture, who have a shepherd in ministry, but the reason it could be said that every friend is a shepherd is because every friend wields some influence over his friend. And there is something in friendship that is a very powerful force over a person's character and personality.

And therefore, that can be good, or it can be bad. But because it can be good, it makes friendship a very important thing, and that's one of the purposes of friendship, is that through friendship we might be an influence upon others and affect them in a positive way. Thirdly, I said first of all, friendships are for companionship because there's a need

for companions, and it's not good to be alone.

Secondly, the purpose for friendships has to do with the influence that a friendship can wield over persons. And thirdly, the purpose of friendship, and probably the highest purpose from the Christian point of view, is to reflect Christ to the world. Now, we'll talk about this.

In fact, the remainder of our talk tonight will sort of radiate from this hub in certain directions. But in support of what I said, I would turn your attention to John chapter 13. John chapter 13, and verse 34, Jesus said, A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I loved you, that ye also love one another.

In other words, the way Jesus loves us, we're supposed to demonstrate through the way we love others. Therefore, our love for others, our friendship, reflects Jesus' friendship toward us and his love toward us. So that as persons see the friendships and the way friendships are conducted and the principles upon which friendships are based among Christians, that should tell them a lot about Jesus.

And that's the idea. As he loved us, we are required to love others. So that our love for others, our friendships, become an expression and a reflection of Jesus himself.

Now, if you say, well, what in the world is, how can you make that connection between love one another and the concept of friendship? Well, simply by going over to something Jesus said later in the same discourse in chapter 15. In chapter 15, in verses 13 through 15, John 15, verses 13 through 15, Jesus said, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. And you are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth, I call you not servants. For a servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends. For all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.

So in the discussion of how these are friends of his, he says the highest expression of friendship, the greatest love that can be shown to a friend, is that a man lays down his life for his friends. And he said that's what, of course, he was doing for us. And in the earlier verse in chapter 13, we're supposed to love one another in that way.

So, biblical friendship for the Christian is to love another person for all the same reasons and in the same way and to the same extent as Jesus loved us. And therefore, our friendships will or should reflect the character of Christ to others. And what the world needs is a demonstration of Christ.

When we sadly have to say to people, don't look at Christians, look at Jesus, we're admitting that something's really wrong. We sometimes have to say that because we're witnessing to people and they say, well, don't talk to me about Jesus. I know religious

people who did this and that and the other thing and they were really bad and they thought they were so holy and everyone thought they were good Christians and then they really ripped us off.

You know, what do we say? But well, you know, don't look at Christians, but look at Jesus. Don't we say something like that? And yet, what an admission that is. When we have to say there's something different about the way Christians relate from the way Jesus is.

Wouldn't it be, isn't it the ideal that we should say, look at Christians so you can see Jesus? Where else are they going to see Jesus? It's invisible. And what they need is a demonstration in the lives of Christians and that's what God has intended us to give. Our relationships, our friendships should be like Jesus, our friend relating to us.

And when people see your loyalty to your friend, they'll say, well, what is it that's different about this person? And they'll say, oh, he's a Christian. That reflects the God he worships. That reflects the Christ whom he obeys.

And your friendships are intended to be a demonstration, an acted out testimony of who Jesus is and what he is like. Now, let me make some very obvious points about Jesus' love for us and his friendship with us. He has called us friends.

We are friends. Therefore, he is the model friend, right? Our friendships are supposed to be like his. Our love is supposed to be like his love.

And therefore, of course, if we call ourselves a friend to somebody, we should be toward them as Jesus is toward us. But what do we see as the basis of Christ's friendship for us? Why did he choose us as friends? Was it because we were attractive? Was it because we were attractive? In the world, people choose friends because of attractiveness. But we're not attractive, at least not in the ways that Jesus views attraction.

Remember that God looks on the heart. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. A woman who is absolutely gorgeous to the eyes of man may be offensively abhorrent in the eyes of God, because God looks at the heart.

And it says very specifically in 1 Peter chapter 3 and, oh, I think it's around verse 4, it says that the godly woman should be arrayed not with the outward things, but with the hidden ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the hidden man of the heart, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. That which attracts God is holiness, meekness, quietness of spirit, and inner quality, which nobody purely has in the world. And only Christians begin to develop it as a fruit of the spirit, meekness and so forth.

Now, that means that when Jesus chose us, we were not attractive, because we did not have that which he considers attractive. We might have been among the beautiful

people in the world's eyes. We might have had a lot of friends who might have been popular, but those are not things that make us attractive to God.

Jesus did not choose us because we were attractive to him. We were not attractive people. It says in Romans chapter 5 that God commended his love toward us, it says.

We've memorized it, but I want to get the verses before it as well, which I haven't memorized. Romans 5, verses 6 through 8, for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, for scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet for adventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

He chose to die for us. He chose to move into a relationship with us, to call us his friends, while we were yet sinners, while we were not attractive people in his sight. He had a vision for us.

He knew that we could become something more than we were, and he does desire an attractive bride without spot or wrinkle, but that certainly is not what he found us to be when he called us. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, there's a description of the general motley nature of the collected persons in the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, in verse 26, it says, for you see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. Now, it's God chose friends who were not necessarily prestigious, not necessarily beautiful people in the world, not necessarily persons from whom he could get an advantage, but rather persons who had a need, persons who had something to benefit from his friendship with them. And therefore, not attractiveness, and not advantage that God could gain from us, but more just love, more self-sacrifice, seeing that someone had a need for a friend like him, and making himself available.

It's very clear that Jesus even taught that we should not be friendly to persons if advantage is our motive. In fact, he indicated that we should be careful not to be friendly too much to people from whom we might derive some advantage for fear that we might have the wrong motive. It says in Luke chapter 14, for example, in Luke chapter 14, verses 12 through 14, then said he also to him that bade him to the feast, when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, meaning your worldly friends of the same rank as yourself, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors, lest they also bid thee again and have recompensed thee made thee.

But when thou makest the feast, call the poor, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. So, when you want to be friendly, when you want to extend

yourself to someone, when you want to create new friends, don't invite the people who are of the same rank as yourself because they are likely to reciprocate your kindness, in which case you've got a reward. And of course, if that's the kind of people you're inviting, it may be that that's the very reason that you're inviting them, because you hope to gain some advantage.

You hope to get some reward from these relationships that you're seeking to establish and strengthen through inviting them over and showing your hospitality. Do the research. Listen, you choose the people who you know can't give you anything back.

Then God will be obligated to pay you back. If you get paid back in this world, God has no obligation. You've already been paid back.

But you're far better off if you don't get paid off in this world, and if God pays you back in the resurrection of the just, He says, choose that one. Choose friends who cannot help you, just like Jesus did. Jesus chose people from whom He had nothing to gain.

Now, you might say, well, He needed a body. He needed creatures. He needed this and that.

And of course, that's true. But He could have, if He'd done everything differently, perhaps chosen angels for the purpose. But the thing here is that He doesn't need us.

We're expendable. He is not enriched at all by us. And yet, He chose us to be friends.

It's all of grace. And therefore, grace needs to be the basis of our friendship. Grace.

Not that we have something to gain, but that someone has something to gain from us being their friend. It says in also Luke chapter 16, in the end of that perplexing parable about the unjust steward, Jesus makes an even more perplexing statement of conclusion. And that is in Luke 16, 9, which says, I say unto you, make yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, or another translation would say, when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitation.

Now, if you've read this parable before, you've probably come away scratching your head, because it's a very difficult parable in some respects, although really the basic idea is not too difficult. But one of the most difficult things is the conclusive remarks that Jesus makes here. That we're supposed to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness.

Mammon of unrighteousness is simply an idiom meaning money. Use our money to make friends. So that when it fails, that is when our money runs out, these friends can receive us into eternal habitation.

What does that mean? Well, I've heard a lot of suggestions, and I can't be certain that

my understanding is the only one that has any validity, but I believe what it means is this. That you can use your opportunities. I believe it's carrying on further what Luke 14 said.

If you have a feast, make friends with what you have. Make friends for eternity, that is. Not necessarily people who will repay you in this life, but people who will receive you into the eternal habitations.

That is to say, you use your money and your opportunities to befriend persons for evangelistic purposes. Make friends with people using what God has given you, and later, because they will go to heaven through your evangelistic efforts, they will be there to receive you when you come there. You won't arrive alone.

You'll have friends that you've made. You've used your resources for the kingdom of God. You've made friends.

I believe that it really is a tag on to what we read in chapter 14. You don't invite your rich friends. You invite the poor, the maimed, the ones who can't.

And then the only way they'll be able to reward you at all is in the resurrection, and by receiving you into heaven with them. Not that they're the ones who will make the decision whether you go there or not, but the point here, figuratively, is if they go on before you, they'll be there to greet you when you come in everlasting habitation. Now, a lot of other interpretation has been suggested of that, but in light of chapter 14's statement, I feel there is a valid claim to that interpretation on this verse.

That the idea is that we choose friends for the purpose of having an eternal future with them, rather than for the purpose of being paid back in this life by them. And that's all the opposite way of thinking than most friendships in the world were based on. Now, let me talk about, and this will be in the remainder of what we're going to talk tonight, some of the characteristics of faithful friendship.

And this we will take Jesus as our model in different aspects of his friendship toward us, which should be the characteristics of our friendships with others. First of all, our friendship, if they're to be the proper kind, the Christian kind, must be unconditional. That is to say, we don't break them off as soon as we're offended.

Now, there are some friendships that should be broken off, but not for the same reasons that we break them off in the world. Not because we were personally offended, but because the friendship ceases to be fruitful in the ways, for the purposes that you feel God had the friendship established in the first place. If you felt like God led you into a friendship for the sake of nurturing a certain person, and they totally reject, or whatever, and you just have no influence whatsoever for good, and on the other hand, they're just influencing you for bad, then you might break off the friendship, but you don't break off

love for the person.

You still have an unconditional love for the person. You don't necessarily stay in a friendship under every condition. Sometimes if the purposes of God are not being accomplished in the friendship, it's better not to associate so much with the person.

But your love for them, and your sense of being friends with them, in a sense, should be unconditional. Jesus is the example here, of course, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here Jesus was subjected to the anticipation of untold agony, and he experienced that agony even in anticipation of the cross.

And here comes the man who is responsible for it all, in a sense. The man who is the most culpable of Jesus' death, largely because he was the man who had the power to deliver Jesus into the hands of those that wished to harm him, Judas. And it made it all the more bitter that this man had been a trusted friend in whom Jesus had invested a great deal of his own life, and had given a great deal of honor and responsibility as one of the apostles.

And furthermore, to rub salt into the wound, or to turn the knife a little bit, the man comes up with a hypocritical show of affection in the act of betrayal, and kisses him and betrays him with a kiss. This would be just as offensive as anything we could imagine would be. And yet, what is the first word that Jesus says to Judas? Friend.

Friend, do you betray this man with a kiss? Isn't that an amazing thing for him to say? Why didn't he just say Judas? How could he look at a man like that and say friend? Except that, you see, Jesus had said to his disciples in the upper room, you are my friend. And the fact that Judas, a few hours later, betrayed him did not change the fact that Jesus had extended himself as a friend to this man. And while the man was not being a friend to him, very obviously, Jesus did not withdraw his affection and his love for the man and his status as a friend.

If Judas had been in need at a future time, I'm sure that Jesus had the opportunity to be different, that Jesus would have very quickly and gladly reconciled or at least come to Judas' aid, because Jesus was unconditional in his goodness. The Father is that way. The Father causes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust, and causes the rain to fall on the evil and on the good.

Those who are his friends, and those who don't treat him well. He is gracious in many respects toward all. And so friendship should not be based on whether a person treats us right or not.

Jesus certainly was remarkable in this respect in saying to Judas' friend, you betray the son of man with a kiss. In Proverbs chapter 7, there is a verse that I relate to this matter of unconditional friendship. Proverbs chapter 7, I'm sorry, 17.

Proverbs 17, 17. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. What that means when it says a brother is born for adversity, it means that God gives you brothers so that they'll be there when you need them, when you're in adversity.

And a friend is a person who loves at all times. He's not a person who loves you when you're being lovely. He loves you even when you're going through your unlovely times.

Even when you got up on the wrong side of the bed, which, by the way, doesn't give you any excuse to do so, to be unlovely. But the fact of the matter is, a true friend will love at all times. Now this is not, the principles we're talking about are not principles by which you are to judge your friends.

These are principles by which you're to judge your own self as a friend. Others may not be as good friends to you as I'm saying you should be to them. But that's just the point.

I'm advocating unconditional friendship. So that even if people do not reciprocate kindness or friendliness to you, that you love at all times. A friend loves at all times.

When the person deserves it, or when the person doesn't deserve it. And Jesus is obviously a tremendous example of this. And so one characteristic of faithful friendship is the unconditional nature of it.

It is not based on whether you're getting out of it what you want to get out of it. Or whether the person is a very good friend. You can still be a good friend to them.

In a sense, you can be a friend to everybody that you relate with. Of course, not all friends are equally close friends. We talked about that earlier, about relationships.

Not all relationships can be equally deep, or should they be. There are some people who are going to be close friends, and others will be more remote friends. But nonetheless, you can be a friend on some level to everyone that you deal with.

Because a friend loves at all times, and you can simply be a person who loves at all times. Unconditionally, others. Another thing about friendship that's rather interesting is that it's perpetual.

And I mean by that, from generation to generation. Now what does that mean? To answer that question, I'd turn you to Proverbs 27. And we'll follow that with a few biblical examples.

Proverbs 27, and verse 10. Interesting statement from Solomon. He says, Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not.

Neither go into thy brother's house in the day of calamity, for better is a neighbor that's near than a brother far off. Now, your friend and your father's friend do not forsake. That means friendships should be carried on beyond a single generation.

Now we know that feuds and enemies sometimes carry on their hostilities from generation to generation. In some parts of the world, there are groups that are killing each other, even though they have no personal grievance against each other, but because their grandfathers were feuding. You know? There were feuds between their fathers or their grandfathers or their ancestors.

And although there's been no personal cause for grievance, they still carry on the grudge of their parents. Well, that, of course, is a ridiculous thing to do. But friendship should be passed along.

We have examples of that in the scripture. And of course, you might say, well, this isn't very practical because I don't even know my father's friend. And that may be true, of course, that you don't know your father's friend.

But what is being said here is there is such a thing as family friends. Friends of the family. And you should not lightly esteem the value of such relationships.

To have persons who knew your father and to remain in good terms with them is a ready-made kind of friendship. And if you're into a relationship for the sake of influencing a person, sometimes it's hard to strike up new relationships. But if someone was a friend of your father, then you've got a ready-made entrance into them.

My mother dated a man when she was single, when she was young, who later became a Baptist minister. And because of the friendship that he had with my father and with my mother later on into his present time, I was able to minister at his church in New Jersey. And then through him, I met some other people that created some other very fruitful opportunities for ministry.

And this is because there were family friendships. In the Bible, we have the case of Hiram, who was the king of Tyre during the reigns both of David and Solomon in Jerusalem. And the Bible tells us in the second king, or first king, chapter 5, verse 1, that when Solomon came to power, Hiram, the king of Tyre, had always been a lover of David.

That is, he'd always thought very highly of David. And for that reason, as soon as Solomon came to power, Hiram came and volunteered to help Solomon to build the temple. Not because of any friendship he and Solomon had had before, but simply because Hiram had been a friend of his father.

Now, this is a principle that is kind of lost to our generation, and maybe in some respects it can't be carried on in the same way as it could be in ancient times when families were more clannish and people knew, you know, family friends were much more of a... there was more of a community, a family pool of associates and so forth than there are today in our society. Nonetheless, there still is much to be gained if there are friends of the

family that can be tapped as people upon whom you can have influence, or channels through whom influence can be had in new relationships. As I said, this minister friend of my mother and father's, who had known them when they were teenagers, provided a tremendous opportunity for me to minister to a number of groups eventually.

And, you know, there's the Hippocratic Oath, which doctors used to have to take in order to practice medicine. Though it's a very heathen oath, it's not Christian at all. In fact, it begins with a swearing of an oath to the Greek gods and goddesses, including Aescapolis and some others.

Though it is a very pagan oath, it still observes this principle of your friend and your father's friend do not forsake. Because in the Hippocratic Oath, one of the lines is a promise that the person makes that he will always treat, free of charge, any child or descendant of any of his former instructors in medicine. That is to say, whoever trained him in medicine, their children have claimed to free services from this former student of their father.

And that it suggests, you know, an obligation on the part of a person who has been befriended to continue the friendship to future generations. Now, for the Christian, of course, this would mean that any friend of, or any son of my friend is a friend of mine also, or any daughter. And if I, for example, died, I would like to think that the people who were my closest friends would have the same concern for my children that I would have, and that they had for me.

And that if I left my children without a father by death, then that those men who had been close friends of mine would be the ones who would look after the needs of my, and the discipleship of my children. I certainly have that commitment to my friends. That I know that because they are my friends, I have at my heart the thing that's most at their heart.

And, you know, if the needs of their children are, and should be, one of the greatest concerns that anyone has, then obviously if something would happen to one of my friends, their children would have a place in my home, or would have a, you know, I'd be committed to their children as to my own. And I suppose that's where the idea of Godfather came from, though again that's something that's not very much practiced in our society, but where a Godfather would be appointed to a child, usually it was a close friend of the parent, who the agreement was if anything happened to the parent, the Godparent would take charge of the children and show the same kindness and care for the children that the parents would have had. Some of these traditions are lost on our generation, but there is biblical value in them.

And so relationships, in other words, are perpetual. We see this in God's own nature, in his friendship to Abraham, because it says in Isaiah chapter 41, I believe it is, see if I can find it here, Isaiah 41 verses 8 and 9, God is speaking to Israel, who are of course the

children of Abraham. He says, But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend.

Now notice, not all the Israelites were God's friends. Some of them were very apostate and rebellious toward him, but Abraham was his friend. He says, You are the seed of Abraham, my friend.

Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. In other words, even though you were wicked, idolaters, and I had to banish you to the ends of the earth, namely to Babylon, and he's talking about the Babylonian captivity, yet because I have a friendship with Abraham, who is now long dead, but because you are his children, and I know that his children would be a concern of his if he were alive today, you are a concern to me also, because I had a friend in Abraham, and therefore you who are his children have a special relationship with me also. This is brought out in a New Testament text very graphically also in Romans chapter 11, a very interesting verse about the status of the Jews today, the unbelieving Jews.

In Romans 11, 28, it says, As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake. Now, the Jews, Paul says, are enemies of the gospel. They are not being friendly toward God at all, yet for their Father's sake, they are beloved by God.

Now, that doesn't mean that they're still the chosen people, or that they're, you know, regardless of whether they believe in Jesus or not, that good things are going to happen to them. Listen, he said they're beloved, but still there was a holocaust. He said they're beloved, but still there was, shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem, and wiping out of over a million Jews by the Romans, which Jesus predicted as a judgment, whom he loved, he chastened.

You know, and people that God loves sometimes go to hell, too. But the point he's making here is that God cannot erase from his heart a concern for the Jewish people, and because of the Fathers. Now, you see, if not for the Fathers, he could wipe out the Jews like he did Sodom and Gomorrah.

He could say, I've had enough of your guff. You're gone, eh? And just send fire to heaven and wipe them all out. Because he, I mean, who has been more rebellious throughout history against God than the Jewish people? Read the Old Testament.

Read their own writings. They're the ones who bear the most eloquent witness to their rebellion against God. And yet, he has preserved them.

Why? To this present time, he's preserved them. Because, even though many of them are lost, he preserves them so that there might still be some of Abraham's children, his

physical seed, who will still have an opportunity to be saved. It does not mean that they're saved because they're Abraham's children, but because Abraham was their father, because God had a good relationship with the Fathers, he still has a special concern about the children of Israel.

So, God observes this idea of friendships that go from one generation to another. And even if my good friend's children turn out to be rebels, because they have the name of my friend upon them, because they are the children of my friend, I know that my friend loves them unconditionally, and I must also, because of that friendship. And so, friendship transcends or passes over generational barriers.

The sad thing, of course, is in our society, in our generation, many people aren't even friends with their parents, much less their parents' friends. And that is something that should change. And that's one thing that Elijah is said to change.

In Malachi, in the prediction that Elijah the prophet would come, it says, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, in the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite you with a curse. The situation in our society where children are not friendly with their parents is a situation that will call forth a curse if it is not reversed on the society. But even when friendships are re-established between children and parents, well, then, of course, it follows that friendships are re-established between us and our parents' friends as well, insofar as that is possible.

Of course, as I said, we don't know all of our parents' friends, and it's not saying that we need to. It's simply saying if someone comes to your door and he's destitute, he says, I was your father's good friend, you know, in such and such a time, and we were like this, you know, and he was really my pal and everything, and you say, well, I don't know who you are, and but if you were a friend of my father's, you know, out of honor to my father, to my father, I'll, you know, I'll take you in. I know a father would, therefore I will, you know.

And so, it's kind of nice to think that friendships can go on for generation after generation. They don't always do that, but they're supposed to. Because if you're faithful to a person, you will do for them what you would want, you know, they would want done.

And for instance, like I said, if I died and left the job of just helping my children undone, I would certainly hope that those who were my friends, who had my concerns upon their hearts, would say, well, I know Steve would want these children trained in this way, and I'm going to look to it. I can see that they get that, you know, and that's, of course, the commitment I have to my friends also. So, it can be very costly, you know, to be a friend, because even when your friend dies, you may have continuing obligations if he leaves children, and his children might not be as worthy of your friendship as your friend was.

But that's just part of the cost that you assume when you become a friend, a true friend

of someone. God did that when he became a friend of Abraham, and although many of Abraham's descendants were unworthy of God's friendship, yet he was merciful to them and treated them as he treated no other nation, because of that relationship they had to Abraham and the relationship that God had to Abraham. Okay, a third point about faithful friendships is that they are sacrificial.

And we already read what Jesus said about that in John 15, 13. Greater love has no man than this, but that he lay down his life for his friend, the ultimate sacrifice. Now, laying down your life for your friend does not always mean that you die.

Now, you might say, well, that sounds self-contradictory. It says in 1 John, Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he lay down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Does that mean only that we should be martyrs for them? Of course, it means that if it comes to that, we should.

If we're true friends, we will even make the ultimate sacrifice by dying for someone. But friendships can also require that we die every day in many ways for our person. We lay down our lives in that we choose those things that we would not have chosen for ourselves.

We lay down our prerogatives. We lay down our rights. We lay down our life for our friend.

We serve the desires and needs of the friend at our own expense, and even at great cost if necessary. Even if it comes to the cost of actually physically laying down our lives. It's amazing to think that some people think that they are so noble that they would, if necessary, lay down their lives for someone.

But they won't lay down the smallest right for that person in the present time. They think if it came to it, if the time came when someone held a gun on us and said, what you use it going to be, that you'd say, oh, shoot me and let them go. I have all these heroic ideas about what I would do in a crisis situation like that.

Certainly I'd lay down my life for my friend. That's what Jesus said. It's the heroic right thing to do.

But I'm only deceiving myself if I think I would do that in that kind of a crisis when every day there are little crises in which I can either choose to serve myself or my friend. Every time I lay down my life, it means I'm choosing their wishes and their benefit over my own. And sacrifices have to be made.

The person calls you in the middle of the night and says, I'm broken down 70 miles from home. Can you come pick me up? And you say, of course. Because you're my friend.

Now, Jesus told the story of a neighbor who wasn't a very good friend. His neighbor came

to his house in the middle of the night, knocked on the door and said, I have some guests who've come and I don't have any food in the house. And could I just borrow a loaf of bread? And the guy inside said, no, I've already gone to sleep.

It's inconvenient for me to go in the kitchen. Go away. Come back some other time.

And but the man persisted. And he said, even though the man would not get up and help his neighbor because he was his friend, some friend won't even get out of bed and go to the kitchen to bail you out of a hard situation because he would he would nonetheless give in through persistence as a person. But that's not a very good friend.

But a good friend will sacrifice, will inconvenience himself. And of course, a great passage to show the connection between personal sacrifice and friendship is in James chapter two, verses 21 through 23. James chapter two, verses 21 through 23.

It says, Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith Abraham believed God and it was intended him and he was called the friend of God. The fact that Abraham is called the friend of God is here connected with the fact that he offered Isaac his son upon the altar. Because his relationship with God was so important to him that he would sacrifice everything that was his most dear to him, his own son even, in order to preserve that relationship.

That is what qualifies a man to be called a friend of God. A man who can make sacrifices for a person is a friend, but one who makes no sacrifices or no great sacrifices is not much of a friend. A true faithful friend, like Jesus, he lays down his life for his friend.

So obviously, it's going to cost something. It costs a great deal sometimes to be a friend. However, the advantages and the benefits of having good friends are far greater than the cost, ultimately.

Okay, another aspect of friendship that ought to be that certainly is in the relationship we have with Jesus is faithfulness or trustworthiness. It says in Proverbs 25, 19, Proverbs 25, 19, it says, confidence in an unfaithful man in a time of trouble is like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint. What does that mean? When you're trusting someone in a crisis, and they're not faithful, they're not trustworthy, then it's like leaning on a broken reed, thinking it'll support your weight, but because it's broken, it cracks and it pierces your hand.

That's actually an illustration that was given by Sennacherib to Hezekiah when Hezekiah was trusting in Egypt to spare him from the hand of the Assyrians, or the Assyrians. Sennacherib said, if you lean on Egypt, it's like leaning on a broken reed, which if a man leans on it, it'll break and pierce his hand, and you'll hurt yourself by trusting in that

which is untrustworthy. So Solomon says, confidence in an untrustworthy person in a crisis is like having a broken tooth or a foot out of joint.

Why those comparisons? There are people who sometimes, through abuse of their mouths, perhaps they fall down on their face or something, and their tooth gets an incipient crack in it, though they may not discover it until they really need it to take a bite out of something firm. And then they find that their tooth was broken. And while they had confidence in their tooth to be able to penetrate that apple or whatever, they find to their own extreme pain that that tooth was incapable of living up to the trust that you put in it, because it had incipient weakness, because it was a broken tooth.

You didn't know it was broken, or else you wouldn't have trusted it. But because it was, it brought you tremendous pain, because you thought it could be trusted, you thought you could count on it, but it wasn't able to be. This statement of being like a foot out of joint reminds me of a rather embarrassing situation that I was in.

It's not too embarrassing to tell, but it was rather embarrassing at the moment, because hitchhiking with some friends, a distance of probably about 17 miles one time, and the only car that stopped for us after a long time hitchhiking happened to be a friend of ours who was driving a Porsche. And he and his wife were in the front seats, and there was no back seat, and there were three of us hitchhiking. But there was a little space behind the seats for very small luggage or something, and he said, if you want to try to fit back there, I'll take you there, because I'm going there too.

He was going the same place we were going. So we thought, well, this is better than nothing, because we've been standing out there a long time. So the three of us crammed in the back of his seat with our knees around our ears, you know what I mean? And that's not the embarrassing part, but what was embarrassing is when we got to the other end of that trip, and we all piled out of the car, I leaped out of the car, glad to be able to stretch my legs again, but not knowing that my foot had gone to sleep.

And, of course, when your foot's asleep, you can't feel anything, but also it can't support any weight. Now, I leaped out of the car, and I thought my foot would be normal, but it was like a foot out of joint, you know? I trusted in it, but it couldn't bear any weight, and I just collapsed on the street. I looked like a drunk or a cripple or something, but in fact, I had no reason to doubt that my foot would hold me up, but it was just incapable of it.

It was, my foot had gone to sleep, and it just wouldn't support any weight. And when I think of confidence in an untrustworthy man in a time of trouble, being like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint, you can think from these kinds of illustrations what it means, that it's really a pain in the neck. It's really bad when you think you can trust someone, and you can't.

And, of course, Jesus, we know that we can trust him, and that's in fact the thing we

bank on the most, is that he can be trusted. And none of us would be very confident at all that we were saved if we didn't believe that Jesus could be trusted. I mean, how do we know we're saved? Because Jesus made certain statements, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life, and so forth, which we trust to be true.

But if Jesus were untrustworthy, then we would have no assurance of salvation. We'd be no better off than if he had said nothing, or if he didn't even exist, as far as that goes, because we couldn't be confident that he was telling the truth. But we are confident of that, and that's why we're Christians.

We trust him. We believe in him. And he has never shown himself untrustworthy.

And the Bible says, whosoever putteth his trust in him shall not be ashamed, shall not be disappointed. No one will be disillusioned who puts their trust in Jesus, because he's trustworthy, and we should be that kind of friends, too. And people are counting on us.

We need to be all that they expect us to be, and that we're required to be in that relationship, and not leave them hanging. Although many times our patterns of life in the past have not been to be trustworthy. That's something that needs to be part of our friendship, or else it's not a good one.

And part of the trustworthiness of friendship leads to our next point, which is what the wounds of a friend. And this has to do with the trustworthiness of a friend, also. He is faithful to us enough to wound us, if that's what's necessary.

It says that in Proverbs chapter 27, verses 5 and 6, Proverbs 27, verses 5 and 6, open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. The kisses of an enemy reminds us of Judas Iscariot kissing Jesus.

It was a deceitful kiss. What it's saying here, it's better to be wounded by a friend than kissed by an enemy. In another place, it says, he that flattereth, or he that rebuketh a man, afterward findeth more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue.

And that is chapter 28, and verse 23 of Proverbs. Proverbs 28, 23, he that rebuketh a man, afterward shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue. The idea is that a faithful friend will smite you if you need to be, will discipline you with words, will rebuke you when you need to be rebuked.

You see, in the world, you can't risk that. If you are trying to be accepted by a certain person or group of people, you cannot have the freedom to be critical or to point out their errors for fear that you'll lose their friendship. And therefore, because you are in it for yourself and not for them, you don't tell them the things they most need to know.

And that's often true in Christian relationships too, though it shouldn't be. But have you

ever, for instance, told a person in a public place that their zipper was down or that they had bad breath or that they had food in their beard? Well, I mean, face it, all of us have found people in those circumstances. If you were them, would you not want somebody to tell you? And some of you maybe have told such people such things, but have there not been times when you've kind of looked away embarrassedly and hoped that they would find out on their own somehow? Because you didn't want to be the one to embarrass them.

You didn't want to be the one to make them uncomfortable. I think most of us have been that way. Perhaps some of you have been good enough friends to tell a person about things like that.

But those are only small matters. Those are almost silly things. But what about the more serious things? When a person is offensive and they don't know it because they have a bad temper or because they have a foul mouth or because they have a very offensive habit.

And ordinarily in the world, people who are not friends with such a person will just stop being with them. Because they don't enjoy them, they leave them. And that person may never know why all his friends go away from him.

But if he has a faithful friend, that friend may tell him the thing that he really doesn't enjoy hearing, but needs to hear. The thing that he has to hear. And that is, of course, you've got a bad temper.

And I'm going to have to help you become aware of that. And when I see it, I'm going to confront you about it. Because it's going to hurt all your relationships.

And it's going to keep you from having friends. It's going to hurt your relationship with God too. And while you may not like to be around me because I make that known to you, someone's got to tell you.

And I care about you enough to let you know. When people confront other people about their faults, it's always uncomfortable. I've never found it to be comfortable.

Somebody about their fault. And yet it is a faithful thing to do. To wound a person because wounding is required before healing can take place.

When a surgeon has to cut before healing can be made, without anesthesia, surgery must have been extremely painful. But it was still therapeutic. It was still good.

It was still necessary to derive some better thing, some better result. And so those who wound a friend do so only when they know their friend needs to be wounded. Therefore, such wounds inflicted by a friend are the result of faithfulness in the friendship.

And a person who is a faithful friend will be worthy even to risk the friendship to tell somebody something they need to know. Because you're more interested in the needs of that person than in whatever benefit you might derive by the continued friendship. And of course, a final point.

We could bring up others, but we've run out of time. I'd just turn your attention to Proverbs 27, in verse 14. It says, he that blesses his friend with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.

That's a verse about friendship. He that blesses his friend with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him. What does that say? Does that simply say, don't wake people up early? No, the idea here is, you need to be considerate.

You need to consider what is really going to bless the other person. A lot of times we relate in ways that we assume should bless another person. They should be blessed to have me come into their room at 4 in the morning and say, oh praise the Lord.

And sing praises and say, God bless you brother. But he's not very blessed because he didn't want to get up that early. And to him, in the final analysis, it's more of a curse to him than a blessing.

It's counted a curse to him. The idea here is that we need to be thoughtful of what will really bless other people and not what we want to do and just expect that they'll count it as a blessing. A lot of times our selfish patterns are such that we do whatever we want and we just assume that everyone else will realize our good intentions and will appreciate us.

But what we're doing isn't really a blessing to anyone but ourselves. And I guess this would apply a lot of ways. One way that I think of particularly is in conversations.

There are some friends, and maybe I have to use the term loosely because they're not what I would call best friends, but unconditionally I can call them friends, who whenever you're with them, they're talking a mile a minute and they never take a breath because they have so many things they want to say. And they must be assuming that these are things I want to hear. Or else I'm sure they wouldn't be saying them.

But many times if they would just stop for a moment and say, is it likely that he wants to hear this, they would have to answer themselves, no, it's not likely at all. The reason they're saying it is because they have something they want to say. And it's no part of their consideration whether it will bless me to hear it or not.

It's more they have something they want to get off their chest or they like to hear their own head rattle or something. There's a lot of people who talk without any consideration for what the other person's going to get out of it. And since relationships and friendships are for the sake of nurturing others, tending a plot, when we converse with persons we

should really be considering what is that person going to get out of it.

Is there just a funny joke I heard that I want to tell again because I thought it was neat and I kind of admired the person who told it and I want them to admire me too. So I'll tell it. I want people to think I'm clever.

Or do I just like the sound of my own voice and so I'll just kind of rattle on because I've got someone who's a captive audience and who isn't likely to be rude enough to walk away. I'm sorry to say there are Christian people I know and some of them are not very far from here who seem to pay very little attention to whether what they're doing in a relationship is a blessing to others. They just kind of assume that the other person will either be tolerant or appreciative of what they're doing but they've never really considered whether there's any reason that that would bless another person.

And the concept here of course is to be considerate, to be considerate of what another person's, what will bless another person. And what we might do that would bless us but would curse another person, be counted as a curse by them. And there are times when that consideration would call for a different course of action than that which we've taken in the past.

So these are some of the things that the Bible says about friendship and we can see that every one of them is exemplified in Jesus and therefore the friendships that we have should be patterned after Jesus so that they can be a reflection of him. So that we can love one another as he loved us and so others can see a model. They can see a demonstration of what Jesus is like in our friendships.

Our friendships should not be for self-gratification. Now the other day I was talking about, I think we were talking about marriage or we were talking about boy-girl relationships and I was talking about how it's not really the best thing to choose a relationship with the opposite sex strictly on physical appearance and what and so forth. And I was in conversation with a student afterwards and the question arose, well then should we deliberately choose the ugliest person so that we can bless them? Because I mean an ugly person might not have many options and therefore be more of a blessing to them.

If I'm supposed to be strictly, strictly unselfish in my choice of relationships with persons that I give myself to and so forth, even in the choice of a husband or wife, should I just choose that person who's least likely to find a happy marriage and therefore just sacrifice myself for them? Is that what is expected or is there some other factor involved? And in fact there is another factor involved. It's not simply a matter of finding the hardest road on yourself and taking that one. There is another factor which is called the will of God.

And the main consideration in the choice of a mate or even in the choice of friends at all

has got to be what is the will of God? You see, it's not what is my will and it's not even what is this other person's will, but what is God's will? How does God intend for me to serve this person? And the fact of the matter is if you really find God's will, he's not going to get you married to someone who's offensive, who you can't stand their look. God takes your needs into consideration. You don't have to because God will.

You have to look for his will and you will find in doing his will that your needs are more than met. And that the friendships that you choose, that you might not have chosen for carnal reasons, but you choose them because you perceive it's the will of God for you to befriend this individual. Though you might perceive it to be a sacrifice at first, you'll find that if it really was the will of God, you'll gain far more out of it than you expected.

And that God is using it also to help you in many parts of your spiritual life. That it's not just a one-way thing where you're just giving all in a sacrificial manner. You have the mentality of giving up yourself and dying to yourself, but God has the idea of building you up and making your life fuller and richer and more satisfying and happy.

And therefore, I've never known a case. Well, it's so hard to know in some cases when it was God, when it wasn't. But I'll say in my life, I've never known a case where God led me into a situation with a person that was absolutely intolerable and offensive to me, where I was supposed to be an extremely close friend.

But there were many cases where God led me into important relationships with people that would not have been a first choice of mine from a worldly point of view, but which turned out to be very profitable friendships and relationships for me spiritually, and I'm sure I trust for them also. And that's the main idea. Find the will of God in our friendships.

And that's why, again, you might break off a friendship not because you are being conditional in your love, but you might break off a friendship because you find it's the will of God, so you break it off. Because the purposes of God are not being accomplished in it. So, of course, we don't just run our lives on the basis of a set of rules or a set of principles, such as even the principles we'll talk tonight.

These are not just so many principles that become a mechanical application to our relationships. All of these are simply principles that help us to discern and function in the will of God. And the highest and only really important thing is to know the will of God and do it.

But we know, of course, that it will always follow along the same lines in the pattern that Jesus set. And that's why we even take the time to examine these aspects. Okay, well, that's enough.