

*Men of God:
A Roadmap for Spiritual Growth*

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Session 4: Friendship
and Community

February 21, 2023

Outline

Week 1: Men of God: Hindrances and Helps to Growth Part 1

Week 2: Men of God: Hindrances and Helps to Growth Part 2

Week 3: Men of God: Time and Priorities

Week 4: Men of God: Friendship and Community

Week 5: Men of God: Thoughts and Feelings

Week 6: Men of God: Home and Family

Week 7: Men of God: Work and Play

Week 8: Men of God: Money and Stewardship

Pursing Biblical Friendship

“Companionship is... only the matrix of Friendship. It is often called Friendship, and many people when they speak of their ‘friends’ mean only their companions. But it is not Friendship in the sense I give to the word... Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden).”

(C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, New York, NY: Harcourts Books, 1960, p. 64)

Pursing Biblical Friendship

Four in 10 (41%) women report having received emotional support from a friend within the past week, compared to only 21% of men.

(<https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/>)

Pursing Biblical Friendship

“Sin taints out motivations before we even pursue someone else. Do they like me? Can I make them like me? Will they accept me? Will they love me? What will they give to me? What are they expecting from me? Will they hurt me? These questions are not inherently bad or evil, but notice how they are all utterly self-referential. Me, me, me- God and his purposes are woefully absent.”

(Jonathan Holmes, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*, Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2014, p. 23)

Pursing Biblical Friendship

“Biblical friendship exists when two or more people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, pursue him and his kingdom with intentionality and vulnerability. Rather than serving as an end in itself, biblical friendship serves primarily to bring glory to Christ, who brought us into friendship with the Father. It is indispensable to the work of the gospel in the church and an essential element of what God created us for.”

(Jonathan Holmes, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*, Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2014, p. 27)

The Importance of Friendship

A 10-year Australian study found that older people with a **large circle of friends** were 22% less likely to die during the study period than those with fewer friends.

(<https://jech.bmj.com/content/59/7/574.abstract?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=friends&andorexactfulltext=and&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=date&resourcetype=HWCIT>)

The Importance of Friendship

In 2006, a study of nearly 3,000 nurses with breast cancer found that women **without close friends** were four times as likely to die from the disease as women with 10 or more friends.

(<https://ascopubs.org/doi/full/10.1200/jco.2005.04.2846>)

The Importance of Friendship

“Turns out, there was one—and only one—characteristic that distinguished the happiest 10 percent from everybody else: **the strength of their social relationships.** My empirical study of well-being among 1,600 Harvard undergraduates found a similar result—social support was a far greater predictor of happiness than any other factor, more than GPA, family income, SAT scores, age, gender, or race. In fact, the correlation between social support and happiness was 0.7. This may not sound like a big number, but for researchers it’s huge—most psychology findings are considered significant when they hit 0.3. The point is, the more social support you have, the happier you are. The Grant Study (which followed a group of men for their *entire lives*) found that “the capacity to love and be loved was the single strength most clearly associated with subjective well-being at age eighty.”

(cited in <https://time.com/14296/6-secrets-you-can-learn-from-the-happiest-people-on-earth/>)

The Importance of Friendship

In a six-year study of 736 middle-age Swedish men, being attached to a life partner didn't affect the risk of heart attack and fatal coronary heart disease, but **having friendships did**. Among risk factors for cardiovascular health, lacking social support was as bad as smoking.

https://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Abstract/1993/01000/Lack_of_social_support_and_incidence_of_coronary.7.aspx

The Importance of Friendship

Close to half (49 percent) of Americans report having three or fewer friends. And 12 percent say they have no close friends.

While most Americans report having a best friend, **forty percent** say they do not.

(<https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/>)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“Adam was not lonely because he was imperfect, but because he was perfect. The ache for friends is the one ache that is not the result of sin... This is the one ache that is part of his perfection... God made us in such a way that we cannot enjoy paradise without friends. God made us in such a way that we cannot enjoy our joy without human friends. Adam had a perfect quiet time every day, 24 hours. He never had a dry one, and yet he needed [friends].”

(Timothy Keller, *Spiritual Friendship*, cited in, Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, p. 42-43)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” (John 15:12-17)

The Development of Christian Friendship

1. Love for one another begins and ends this section of Jesus' teaching.
2. The paradigm that is to give fundamental shape to our relationships is the self-giving love of Christ for us at the Cross.
3. True Christian friendship involves three things: sacrifice, vulnerability, and intentionality.

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Romans 12:9-10)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Romans 15:4-7)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” (1 Cor. 13:11)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:1-2)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

(Eph. 4:2-3)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing”

(1 Thess. 5:11)

The Scriptural Paradigm of Friendship

“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” (Proverbs 18:1)

How to Make Spiritual Friendships

Why We Lose Our Friends as We Age: The act of choosing friendships is what gives them value, Isabel Fattal cites Jennifer Senior who noted that:

“the fact of our *choosing* friendships makes them both fragile and special: ‘You have to continually opt in. That you choose it is what gives it its value,’ she wrote. But that’s also what makes friendships harder to hold on to as our lives evolve. It’s hard but not impossible. Senior notes that when it comes to friendship, ‘we are ritual-deficient, nearly devoid of rites that force us together.’ So we have to create them: weekly phone calls, friendship anniversaries, road trips, ‘whatever it takes.’”

<https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2023/02/friendship-aging/673026>

How to Make Spiritual Friendships

78% of Protestant churchgoers say they have developed significant relationships with people at their church, including 43% who strongly agree. Fewer than 1 in 10 disagree (8%), while 14% neither agree nor disagree.

<https://research.lifeway.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-of-ten-without-discipleship/>

How to Make Spiritual Friendships

Fewer than half of churchgoers (48%) agree with the statement, “I intentionally spend time with other believers to help them grow in their faith.” This includes 19% who strongly agree. The same number (19%) disagree.

<https://research.lifeway.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-of-ten-without-discipleship/>

How to Make Spiritual Friendships

35% of churchgoers attend a class or small group four or more times in a typical month. Fourteen percent attend two to three times a month.

Almost 4 in 10 (38%) Protestant churchgoers do not attend a class or small group in a typical month, while 13% attend once a month.

(<https://research.lifeway.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-of-ten-without-discipleship/>)

Practical Suggestions

1. Choose

“Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.”

(Proverbs 22:24-25)

Practical Suggestions

2. Commit

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24)

Practical Suggestions

3. Get Real

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

(Proverbs 27:6)

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Eph. 4:15)

Practical Suggestions

4. Be Intentional

What are you thankful for?

What are you learning?

What can we pray for?

Link to Men of God Series

<https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/series-index/men-of-god/>