

Authentic Friendships

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[0 : 00] I don't think I've actually struggled to write a talk as much as I have this one tonight. Friendship is, I think, a massive subject. I think as I've been thinking about it probably for the last three weeks, I'm conscious that it's a real blessing, isn't it, to have good friends.

Everybody needs good friends. But also struck that friendship is very difficult. It's very difficult to try and nail what is a good friend.

It's very difficult to keep good friends. Friendship is very difficult. So they say when it comes to Q&A; and there's no questions, there's four options you can believe.

Number one, everything was so clear that no one has any more questions to ask. Number two, it was so far above everyone's heads that they didn't understand anything and therefore have no limit to ask questions.

Number three, it was so confused that people don't know where to start asking questions. Or number four, any of the above three that you like.

[1 : 06] There was a fourth, but I forgot it. So we'll just go for that one at the end. Yeah. Relationships.

I have a PowerPoint to help us. Relationships. And tonight, authentic friendships. What is an authentic friendship?

You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours closer than you yourself keep it.

But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo. Anyway, there it is.

We know most of what Gandalf has told you. We know a good deal about the ring. We are horribly afraid. But we are coming with you or following you like hounds.

[2 : 01] That is what Merry Pippin and Samwise Gamgee say to Frodo just before he embarks on this great journey that will take three massive books in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings.

It's a lovely quote, which I think gets us somewhere to thinking about what is the essence of true friendship. People with you through thick and thin who are prepared to face great adversity for you. And the only option that they don't leave him is that he's going to go to Mordor alone. Or on the Monday after Christmas, I was in Asda at the Jewel.

Something I hate at the best of times, but the Monday after Christmas, horrendous. But over the tannoy came the song by the Rembrandts, I'll Be There For You, which was, of course, the theme tune to that great soap opera, Friends.

And Friends, it's said, is always being shown somewhere in the world so popular was it. And as I was walking around Asda pushing my trolley, I was conscious that everybody was singing along.

[3 : 10] That this song has obviously captured people's imaginations. That when we think of Friends, we think of the Rembrandts and we think of this song, I'll Be There For You. When I think of that, I think of a very weird time at university where the very last episode of Friends where Ross and Rachel might finally get together.

I was watching this program called Friends in a room full of strangers that I did not know. I was only there because somebody had a TV license and I didn't. It was very weird watching Friends around a group of strangers who, once the program was gone, everyone just disappeared.

There was not even a cup of tea. It was most disappointing. Yet we are constantly aware in our lives that our friendships don't often live up to what the Hobbits describe, or that which was experienced and shown by Ross, Rachel, Chandler, Joey, Phoebe and Monica.

In fact, in a recent study, Britain was shown to be the loneliness capital of Europe. It came 28th out of 28 countries that people in Britain are lonelier than anybody else in Europe.

It was measured on people in Britain are the least likely to know their neighbors and the least likely to have anybody they would describe as a good friend.

[4 : 38] We come absolutely bottom. Let's bear in mind, some of that is Eastern Europe and I don't find those people the friendliest. And we come bottom. And let's also be clear that we're in Edinburgh, which has this reputation of being cold and a little bit austere, far in contrast to our dear countrymen through in the West.

It's true that anything good, anything bad can be wonderful with friends and almost anything good can be terrible without them. Yet we live in a society where friendship is minimized, it takes a back seat, and it comes a country mile behind the way we pedestal romantic love and family love.

No one ever buys a glossy magazine on a Saturday to find out who's friends with it. Because we're so geared, we're so honed in looking at romantic love and family love.

And so pedestalling that, that friendship comes a long way behind. In days gone by, it was said, friendship seemed to be the happiest, most fully human of all loves.

The crown of life and the school of virtue. To the modern person, friendship is diminished and largely disregarded. I realized this week that in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, this central love between Arwen and Aragorn doesn't even make it into Tolkien's proper book.

[6 : 13] It's always in the appendix. It's only when Peter Jackson and Hollywood get a hold of it that they put this romance right at the center because they don't think to the 21st century audience that friendship will be able to hold the story together.

Isn't it interesting? How what Tolkien wrote needs to be reinterpreted and reinvented for our 21st century diminished. Diminishment of friendship, um, eyes.

Even in the Christian world, friendship is the most important, least talked about relationship in the church. I've never given a talk on friendship before, that might be obvious already.

It's not something I've particularly thought of very much. But I was also stunned how few books have been written on friendship. I think this is perhaps the first sermon I've ever preached where I think I've read a vast majority of all the books written on a subject.

And I'm still pretty clueless about how to do a talk or how to tell people about friendship. Yet despite it being detrimentally overlooked, we all know, feel, understand and yearn to be good at choosing, forging and keeping terrific friendships.

[7 : 29] Put your hand up if you think you've got lots of too many good friends. Put your hand up if you'd like a few more good friends. I certainly would.

We all feel the need, the yearning. We all know the benefit and blessing of having good friends. On a church level, I think it is accurate to estimate that church satisfaction is gauged on two planes.

Number one, the quality of the teaching ministries and services of the church. Do you like what the church does? And number two, I think we assess our satisfaction with church with the ability we have to forge good friendships within that body of people.

If we have appreciation for the ministries and we have friendships with the people, we'll be satisfied, I think, generally in church. So therefore, friendship for us and in our church is extremely important.

What will make our church stronger is if we're better friends and have deeper fellowship one with another. C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Four Loves*, which is a cracking book, which I think everyone should really read.

[8 : 42] He writes a chapter on friendship. And his chapter on friendship is basically about the weirdness of friendship, the otherness of friendship.

He writes, friendship is, in a sense, the least natural of loves, the least instinctive, biological, gregarious and necessary. Without eros, romantic love, none of us would have been born.

Without affection, familial love, none of us would have been reared. But we can live and breed without friendship. Friendship is unnecessary.

Like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself, for God did not need to create. It has no survival value. Rather, it is one of the things that gives value to survival.

It is one of the things that enriches our lives. As a 12th century Cistercian monk, I told you that there's very few books on friendship. This is about one of six.

[9 : 41] And he writes a book on friendship and he says that there are three different types of friendship that we experience. They're at different levels, at different depths. And as we go deeper, they get fewer.

He says the first one is we have a carnal friendship. And he would describe a carnal friendship as people whom we mutually pursue pleasure with. People whom we mutually pursue pleasure with. People we hang around for the sake of mutual fun. And I dare say we've all got friends like that. Then he talks about worldly friendships. Friendships that people maintain because it brings mutual advantage.

So this might be friendships in the workplace. If you are friends with your workmates, it will go better for you at work. It might be your teammates. If you're friends with your teammates and are looking out for them and ready to do things for them, then that will only have benefit to the scoreline at the end of the game.

But he says the third type of friendship, the deepest type of friendship is a friendship bounded, grounded in mutual commitment.

[10:47] Where you think the same as the other person. Where you start sharing about your life and they go, oh, that's how I view the world. That's what I think.

Oh, you too. I thought I was the only one. There is a mutual foundation. A set of core beliefs. A common pursuit which binds people together.

And Aelred of Reveaux would say that was the deepest kind of friendship. And obviously he's then going to go on and explain that friendship between Christians, where they're bound together in their mutual pursuit of Jesus Christ, is the most conducive foundation to build strong, deep, rich and fruitful friendships.

He writes, That actually Jesus is a wonderful person in enabling others to forge deep and rich and good friendships.

So a great goal in all our friendships is to make them spiritual friendships. By deepening and centering our friendships with Christians on Jesus, and by pursuing and being great friends to non-Christians, in order that they might trust Jesus themselves, so you can pursue him together.

[12:25] Last bit of wiggling on the T. Augustine writes in his Confessions, Many people, Aelred and Augustine, both say that Jesus is a wonderful starting point for building and maintaining and growing friendships.

But it seems pertinent then to distinguish the difference between fellowship and friendship. They are very different. Fellowship might be described as that special sense of companionship and love among believers based on our unity in Christ.

That's what fellowship is. That is, all those that know and love and have trusted the Lord Jesus, we're brought together as family. That in Jesus we're not only reconciled to God, but we're reconciled to each other.

There's a family bond. I know, I'm sure we've all felt this, where you're in a foreign place, you meet a Christian brother or sister, and after a little while you feel like you've known them their whole life. So one of the wonderful fruits of the gospel.

It's a wonderful thing, fellowship, and fellowship intrinsically paves the way towards spiritual friendship. Friendship, therefore, in a spiritual sense, is that fellowship taken to the next level and applied more personally, given added depth, refinement and detail through active investment in one another's life.

[14:09] So we have fellowship altogether, but it's going to take investment. It's going to take spending time. It's going to take sacrificing.

It's going to take hanging out. It's going to take us encouraging each other and spurring each other on in our pursuit of Jesus if that fellowship is going to deepen and become deep, rewarding fellowship.

So this evening I want to talk about friendship in just three quick titles. The why of friendship. Why do we need friends? The what of friendship. What are good things to look for in friends.

How can we be good friends? And then the how of friendship. If friendship is so difficult, does the Bible have anything to show us or tell us or teach us about how to make it a little bit easier?

So, the why of friendship. Why do I, why do you, why do we have a deep-seated yearning to have friends?

[15:10] Where does that come from? Why can't we just say that every man is an island and I am Ibiza? Why do we need to have this connectedness? Well, I think the Bible's clear answer is that friendship starts before the beginning.

Friendship starts before the beginning. In Genesis 1.26, God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness.

Note those plurals. God talking to himself in plurality. That even before the beginning, God exists in trinity.

That God forever has been one God in three persons. who forever exists in and of himself in a loving friendship.

God is intrinsically community. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it is in this image that we're created.

[16:12] This relational image. The image of the eternal relational God. God. So by the time we get to chapter 2.18, and us getting a few more details about how Adam and Eve were created, we read that the first not good thing about Adam and creation is that he is alone.

He has no one to relate to. Just imagine being Adam in the Garden of Eden. He has the best quiet time. 24 hours a day. He has unhindered access to God.

We read in chapter 3 that they used to walk together in the coolness of the day. What a beautiful picture of friendship that is. And yet the first not good thing and in other ways perfect creation is the aloneness of man.

There is no one like him whom he can be a friend to, he can relate to, he can share with. Part of being image bearers of God is to pursue, develop, nurture, and maintain human relationships.

Therefore, friendless living is both a rejection of God's good purpose for us as his image bearers, and also a dehumanizing tragedy. That as humans made in his image, one of the things that marks that image bearing out is our ability to maintain and grow and have friends.

[17:38] So no wonder when Eve shows up in 2.22, Adam knows friendship and the not goodness of that creation becomes very good.

Because suddenly Adam can be fully human as the image bearer of God. Adam even sings a song. I'm not sure it translates that well. He says, this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

I think if I sung that to Aileen, she'd look at me a bit weird. But, but the eye of Adam now becomes an ass and a wee. And there are they together.

That they are interacting together. They are sharing together. That as image bearers of God, when Adam and Eve can share and be friends together, they reflect God's image better than Adam ever could alone.

But this picture of completeness is then shattered categorically at the fall in Genesis 3. The usual evening stroll with God in the coolness of the day is forsaken for running, hiding, and isolation from the Creator.

[18:48] Sin has spoiled man's friendship with God vertically. And as we read, as Adam goes on this self-justifying exercise in Genesis 3 verse 10, when he said, it's the woman's fault.

It's this woman that you gave me. He then ceases to be a we and a they. He becomes an eye. And that friendship, that relationship is tarnished forever.

A fracture of relationship at Genesis 3 and a fissure of friendship is now seemingly irreparably forged at the core of fallen humanity.

That when sin shows up, friendship becomes more difficult. Martin Luther observes that sin curves us inward on ourselves and left unaddressed causes us to become increasingly self-focused.

Nowhere is this more poisonous than in our friendships. And don't we see it that when I becomes big, friendship becomes difficult. When I am self-obsessed, it inhibits my ability to be other person focused.

[19:52] And so readily we get what's the definition of a boring person, somebody who talks about themselves when you really want to talk about yourself. And we start to evaluate friendships.

We interact with someone and we think, do they like me? What do they think of me? Will they hurt me? How can I make them like me more?

Not that any of these questions are wrong, but it's amazing how me-focused friendship can so readily become as fallen human beings in a fallen world. And so this side of the fourth, friendship is difficult.

Friendship is hard. Friendship is tough. But still, as image bearers, it is intrinsically worthwhile.

Friendship with God is hard as holiness and sinfulness cannot coexist.

In the Old Testament, as far as I can see, there's only two people that are explicitly described as friends of God. Moses in Exodus 33, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one would

speak to a friend.

[21 : 02] And also Abraham in Isaiah 41, also picked up in James 2. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham, my friend.

It's not just friendship with God that is affected, tarnished, and inhibited, but also friendship with others. So Proverbs 20, verse 6, many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person, a faithful friend, who can find?

Why is friendship important? Because as those created in God's image, we are hardwired for friendship. Friendship with God and friendship with others. But due to the fall, friendship is now hard, messy, and spoiled by sin, though still absolutely necessary, and the longing for it ever present in everyone's lives.

And yet God's plan of salvation is designed to restore our vertical relationship with God, as well as our horizontal relationships with others. Why friendship?

Because that's how God designed us. But what about the what of friendship? What do good friendships do? What are some marks of authentic friendship? What can I do to be a true friend?

[22 : 18] Well, I was encouraged to see that the Bible had more to say on this than you'd believe. And there's one book in particular that has loads to say on friendship, the book of Proverbs.

Hugh Black in a classic work says, the book of Proverbs might almost be called a treatise on friendship. So full is it of advice about the sort of person you should consult with and the sort of person you should avoid.

It is full of shrewd, prudent, and wise counsel. There is no book that so exalts the idea of friendship and is so anxious to have it truly valued and carefully kept.

Proverbs gives us practical wisdom on how to live skillfully in the world, how to live well. And it says three big things about friends. Number one, true friends are rare.

Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can fight. The writers of Proverbs would also say, bad friends bring ruin.

[23 : 18] Proverbs 22, 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.

But the Proverbs would also say, friends are integral to gaining wisdom. This famous proverb, iron sharpens iron as one man sharpens another.

That is, we interact and share together. Good friendships make us sharper and better. Proverbs goes further, though, and paints a very vivid picture of what good friends look like.

I think Proverbs gives us four foundations, four building blocks of true friendships. Here they are.

True friendships, true friends are there, they are aware, they dare, and they share.

Perhaps we might say that together, stop us drifting off. True friends are there, they are aware, they dare, and they share. Let me explain what I mean.

[24 : 26] Firstly, true friends are there, they are constant, they are with you for better, for worse, they are like the hobbits, as they relate to Frodo, we're coming with you no matter what.

They are in the ups and downs, in the triumphs, the trials, and the tribulations. Proverbs 17, verse 17, 17, a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

A man of friends, Proverbs 18, a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

This is written in a society where family is of paramount importance. And so for the writer of this Proverbs to say there is a friend that is better than a brother is shocking.

But I think it is very wise. There is a friend, a good friend, good friends can be better than brothers. Why? Because in adversity, family members out of loyalty may lend you a hand.

[25 : 35] They're almost expected to. But they may not like you. Whereas a friend, voluntarily compelled by love, says I'm sticking with you.

I'm sticking. This word sticks is the Hebrew word cleaves. It is a commitment out of steadfast love that friends give voluntarily to others.

Proverbs lists examples of fair-weather friends, not the friends you want. Friendships that are there in the good times, but scarper. I know you're all my good friends because you came out on a night like tonight.

Whereas the fair-weather friends thought it was a little cold and a little wet. Proverbs 19, wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friends.

Proverbs 14, the poor is disliked by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends. Fair-weather friends are only in for the benefit they can glean for themselves.

[26 : 40] If you want an example of that, the prodigal son. He spends all his father's inheritance, he's surrounded by loads of people. When it runs out, he quickly finds himself alone in the pigsty because he's just got fair-weather friends.

True friends are there, they are committed, they're constant. They're there when the chips are down and also when the ship comes in. True friends are there.

But they are also aware. They're careful with you. They know you and they know how you feel. They are emotionally connected and they get you.

They get you. Proverbs highlights very powerfully the danger of people and friends that are not aware, who speak unthinkingly, behave unsympathetically and act uncompassionately.

So Proverbs 26, like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, I am only joking.

[27 : 46] Proverbs 27, whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing. Proverbs 25, whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day and like vinegar on soda.

Proverbs 25, let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you. The common threads of all of these Proverbs is that these people are not connected.

They don't have the emotional savvy to work out what is really going on. So, in the first one, there's the individual who plays a trick, who maybe is sarcastic, but he doesn't know you well enough to know how you're going to take it.

So, when it all goes badly, they just go, I'm only joking. So, we know that many a true statement is hidden in jest. They're not careful with you.

They're not aware of what makes you tick. Or the man who has good intentions of blessing his neighbor, but has not thought that his early morning hollering on the garden lawn might be detrimental to his sleep.

[29 : 03] It's a good intention, but he's not connected. Or singing songs, these are intrinsically joy-filled songs, singing joy-filled songs to the man with a heavy heart.

Someone crippled with sadness doesn't want you to start the chorus, I'm H-A-P-P-Y, I'm H-A-P-P-Y, I know I am, I'm sure I am, I'm H-A-P-P-Y, it's insensitive.

Or the person who doesn't know when to leave. He's not connected enough to know when they've maybe overstayed their welcome. Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house lest he has his fill of you and hate you.

True friends are aware. They're emotionally connected and they care about what is done and said and how it's going to impact you. They're careful. There's an emotional connectedness.

Thirdly, I think proverbs say they dare. And I think this balances perfectly with the awareness points. It's not that they just tread on eggshells around you, but they're not going to hurt you unnecessarily.

[30 : 12] that true friends do tell people what they need to hear for their good. They're emotionally connected to you so they're entering into this problem with you.

But they do love you enough to tell you. Haven't we so often thought, oh, we can't tell them that because we love them. But what we're really saying is we love ourselves so much that we don't want to put ourselves through the emotional ordeal of having to tell people perhaps things that they don't want to hear.

True friends don't do it in a vindictive way to harm, but in a loving way to help. There is a candidness amongst true friends. Say Proverbs 27 verse 5, better is open rebuke than hidden love. Better to confront people with the truth they need to hear than cover it over in an act of self-preservation and conceal seal that you love them.

Proverbs 27, faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy. Proverbs 28, whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue.

[31 : 29] Good friends are not yes men. Good friends are people out of love for you, want the best for you, and are therefore prepared to share what might otherwise be difficult.

Someone famously quoted, true friends stab you in the front. Fourthly and finally, true friends are there, they are aware, they dare, and they share.

There is a transparency to true friendship. There is a sharing of life. There's not a stiff upper lip, rubbing shoulders, this far but no further, there's an openness.

You can share with them, they can share with you. There's a two-way transaction going. Don't we find it so disarming when somebody shares their problems, and suddenly we think, oh, I could share my problems.

Proverbs 27, verse 9, oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel, his earnest counsel, his heartfelt openness.

[32 : 47] He lists two things that are incredibly precious, oil and perfume, and he says when somebody shares of themselves with you, that's equally as precious, if not more. That in true friendship, there's a profound openness, a deep sharing of life that is incredibly precious.

To have friends with whom you can share your toughest predicaments and darkest secrets in confidence and safety in order to gain help, support, assistance, and accountability is incredibly precious.

If we have people who are like that for us, we are truly blessed people, and it's something we all need, so we've all got to work at it. Proverbs 25 gives us the flip side, argue your case with your neighbor and do not reveal another secret, lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end.

Someone who's not transparent with their own life, but absorbs other secrets and then openly shares them with everyone else, and it's incredibly hurtful, incredibly dangerous, and as we betray the trust of others, no one will trust us.

Like people that criticize people all the time, I find myself so ready for them, so readily disposed to them, that actually if you criticize two people, they think, well, when I'm not in the room, they must criticize me.

[34 : 14] We're very caged towards our friendship, and people's track record really does have an impact on whether we trust them or not. So Proverbs says, good friends are marked by these four qualities.

Good friends are there, they're constant, they're aware, they're careful, they dare, they're candid, and they share. There's a counsel, there's an openness.

If you want two instead of four, Tim Keller comes up with these, good friends always let you in and never let you down. Good friends always let you in and never let you down.

I don't know how you respond to those four things. Are you someone who is there, who's aware, who shares, and who's daring?

As I responded to these four things, let me tell you what hit me. The first is this, a real longing. I became conscious of both my lack of and need for good friends.

[35 : 29] True friends like this. I'd say I'd have a lot of acquaintances, very few really good friends. It's a sad fact of life that friends are harder to make the older you get.

School was easy. Conquers seem to be this perfect thing for making friends kick around the football field. University quite simple, work harder, unless you invite your friends to come and work with you. I dare say the trajectory continues into later life. Friends are harder the older we get. Also, that friendships are taken away faster than we can forge them.

Making really good friends takes time and people's mobility makes forging good friends difficult with work and opportunity taking people away the minute you think you're just on the cusp of good friendships.

Time pressures. Friendship takes time and we live in a world that is so frantically busy and hectic. And the pedestalling of family life, the protection of time inhibit our friendships, the deception of Facebook, he knew it was coming, the deception of Facebook and social media and email that deceive us into thinking we have a broad matrix of spectacular friendships, when really we have a disconnected list of strangers, well-wishipping acquaintances, all in place of flesh and blood face-to-face friendships.

[37 : 12] We also spend a lot of time on one-way friendships, where we expend emotional energy as we bond with sports stars, actors and other icons, or reducing our ability to make good friends.

All these things, though maybe increasing the quantity of our relationships, definitely reduce the quality of our friendships. So as I thought of what is a true friend, I had a real longing to have better friends, not that my friends are not good friends, but to have deeper friends and stronger friendships.

Secondly, as well as a sense of longing, this study in true friendship created a sense of conviction. It revealed that I am not always a very good friend, and I think as a general rule of thumb, good friends have good friends.

people that are there, who share, who dare, who are aware, find that there's other people in their lives who do the same for them. So it is, I think, as I go on from here with God's help, I seek to exhibit these qualities to others, that a hope will find them reciprocated to me and my friendships deepened.

we need to raise the bar of friendship. So many of us are looking for people around whom we can be ourselves, but the true genius of true friendship is that true friends make us better than ourselves.

[38 : 49] People that are always encouraging us, particularly in a Christian sense, people that are always encouraging us to pursue Jesus more. Proverbs 13 verse 20, whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Which brings us into land on the how of friendship. How can we be better friends? Well, the answer, I think, is that universal Sunday school answer, Jesus.

Some remarkable things about Jesus. They crucify him because he's friends with the wrong people. Always being told, why are you friends with them?

Why are you hanging out with sinners and tax collectors? Why are you their friends? Jesus known as the friend of sinners. Jesus who's open, who shares his life, who tells people what they really need to hear, who is very careful with people.

In John 15, something remarkable happens. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love is no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

[40 : 15] You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know 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.

Do you see Jesus lets us in? He lets us know his business, not just his business but he tells us about the father's business as well. That he never lets us down, even when it cost him his own life, he willingly went all the way for us.

Jesus always lets us in and he never lets us down. It's remarkable as friendship with God lost at the fall, only seen twice in the Old Testament, is now available to you and me through Jesus Christ.

At the start we said that sin spoiled relationship because it focused us on ourselves and yet in Jesus and his sacrifice for us we have one who dies for us to disarm the power of sin and self in our lives and liberates us to be good friends.

We have one who gave up his eternal Trinitarian friendship so that our friendship with God and others could be restarted. At the cross the God's head's friendship was ruptured so that our friendship could be repaired.

[41 : 44] And his wounds are ultimately the wounds of a friend. wounds that he doesn't afflict on us but wounds that he takes in our place. Crucified for being friends with the wrong people, sinners and tax collectors, you and me.

Jesus is a wonderful friend. He comes so far to be friends with you and me. It dissolves this idea that we can only be friends with people like us.

Jesus is not like us at all. There's no one less like us. And yet he comes and he befriends us. The ultimate friend who does make us better than ourselves.

Jesus is the ultimate friend who liberates us to be a true friend and pursue true friendships. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends.

Than the greatest friend is the one who laid down the most for his friends. Jesus is the ultimate friend, a divine friend better than any other friend. The friend who is always there, promising to be with us to the very end of the age.

[42 : 57] The friend who is slow to anger, who is thoughtful and tender, who is eternally trustworthy, who will never let us down. One who shares our pain, comforts us in sorrow and sympathizes with us in weakness.

He rescues us from our great trouble and liberates us to ripple his friendship of loving us to death out to others. He is the ultimate friend who is constantly working to make us better than ourselves and from one degree of newness to another.

It is right to conclude what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Here's the big lesson of the day.

How can we be better friends? By having a deeper friendship with Jesus Christ. And as we befriend him closer, he rubs off onto us, which enables us to be the kind of people that others love and benefit and grow from being friends with.

How do you become a true friend? Look at love and imitate the Lord Jesus who is our ultimate friend forever. Let me pray.

[44 : 22] Father God, thank you that you don't call us servants. Father, we weren't even worthy of that. Father, but you call us friends.

That in Jesus, our ultimate friend, the hope of friendship, the benefit of friendship, the glory of friendship with you is possible. And so our prayer is that you would make us more like the friends that Jesus has been to us.

That we would be friends that are constant, friends that are careful. Father, friends that are candid. Friends that are continuously encouraging each other to be more like Jesus.

Father, we don't just want to rub shoulders. Father, we don't want to just stop at fellowship and think that that's enough. But Father, I pray in our church we would have deep and rich and fruitful and edifying friendships that would help us in our journey of faith pursuing your son Jesus.

In whose name we pray. Amen.