

# The Best of Friends

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Preacher: Phil Knox

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning.

It is absolutely brilliant to be with you. It's brilliant to be with you for loads of reasons. First of all, it wasn't absolutely wonderful to lift the name of Jesus up together. It's wonderful, isn't it, to do that?

Secondly, it's brilliant to be with you because Scotland, I can sense that many of you are thinking he's not from round here. But Scotland is my spiritual homeland because my family's destiny was changed during World War II when my grandfather was stationed on the west coast of Scotland and an army chaplain shared the gospel with him.

And as a result, he shared his faith with my dad and our family's destiny was changed as a result of that. So it feels like in some ways I've come home to some extent this morning. But it's also, isn't it great to be together, to be good news people in a bad news world?

I don't know about anybody else, but my news feed at the moment is just about as bad as it's ever been during my lifetime. And yet if we know Jesus this morning, we are good news people in a bad news world.

[ 1 : 13 ] And this morning, as Cal has introduced, great to be with you. Thank you for your generosity and encouragement, Cal. Great to be with you. As Cal has introduced, we're going to be talking about friendship this morning.

But before we open God's Word, I wonder if I might infuse you with something I'm really passionate about and invite you to do something really important. I work for the Evangelical Alliance. And I wonder if I could invite you, if you're not yet a personal member of the Evangelical Alliance, I want to invite you to become one.

Let me tell you why that matters and what you can do about it. Well, first of all, lots of people ask me, what's an evangelical? Well, an evangelical is a good news person in a bad news world. Evangelical comes from the Greek word evangel, which means good news.

What else? We Evangelicals, we're people of the Bible. We don't change the words of God to accommodate our culture. We won't see our culture transformed with the words of God. Secondly, we Evangelicals are people of Jesus.

We believe that his life and his death and his resurrection was the most important moment in the whole of human history. That he's our God, but he can also be our friend. Thirdly, we're people of conversion. We believe that the most important decision anyone can ever make is to choose to follow Jesus or not.

[ 2 : 19 ] So we want to see every single person in the United Kingdom come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour. And fourthly, we Evangelicals are people of activism. We want to see the world become more like the kingdom.

That's why it was Evangelicals who were at the forefront of the abolition of the slave trade. More recently, that's looked like Christians Against Poverty, food banks, street pastors, toddler groups, whatever we can do to see hope come to hopeless people.

And who we are as the Evangelical Alliance is we're an alliance of Evangelicals. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is that the church might be one so that the world might know.

And so we've existed since 1846 to unite the church across streams, denominations, backgrounds and stories, good news Christians around the gospel. But also, we want to speak up at the highest levels of government on issues that really matter to Christians.

Why? Because first of all, churches like yours are doing an incredible job to bless communities. Bellsville is different because this church exists. And so we tell government that story of what churches like yours are doing to make a difference in communities like this.

[ 3 : 23 ] Secondly, we speak up on really contentious issues like free speech. Why? Because it shouldn't be a hate crime to declare that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. One example of that, there was a bill going through Parliament recently that would have enabled Ofsted to come into every Sunday school and youth group in the country and essentially vet what was being said.

We thought that sounded more like North Korea or Saudi Arabia, government controlling private religion. So we spoke up. And I'm delighted to say that as a result of that intervention, that bill has been kicked into touch for the time being.

Isn't that good news? But here's where we need your help. Because the strength of our voice depends on the size of our membership. And the government asks us regularly, how many members do you have? Now we are 600 organisations, around 3,000 churches, and around 26,000 individuals.

And increasingly, it's the individual membership that really matters. And what's really good news is, in the last kind of year, in the last few years, membership's massively on the increase. So about this time last year, we were about 21,000.

It's now 26,000. The hope over the next 10 years is to get to 50,000. Why 50,000? First of all, 50,000 is about the size of the part of the political membership of the Liberal Democrats. Bear with me.

[ 4 : 31 ] We're not a political party. We speak on behalf of the church. But if you're bigger than the third largest political party, it means that when a new prime minister comes in, they need to talk to us, rather than the other way around.

But secondly, the reason 50,000 is significant is it's kind of common wisdom in terms of representation. That for every one member you have, you represent about 20 people. Then we can genuinely begin to talk about representing millions of good news Christians, not just hundreds of thousands.

So if you're able to join us, please come and see me. I've got a little kind of table of dreams over there. Please come and see me at the end of the service. I'll give you a little form like this. I've got a little form somewhere. If you can fill in a few details, it costs just three pounds a month to join the Evangelical Alliance.

If you're part of a couple, please tick the box that says join as a couple. It counts as two. It's still only three pounds a month. And if your spouse isn't here, please tick the box anyway and tell them later. If you join us today, we'd just love to give you a few things just to say thank you.

Just give you a little box like this. Frankly, it's the least we can do for lending us your voice. In the box, there's a few things. First of all, I'm about to speak to you about friendship. The reason I'm passionate about friendship is I had a terrible pandemic.

[ 5 : 38 ] Two things got me through. Faith in Jesus and friendship. So I began to reflect on it and I reckon friendship is just about the most important, least talked about relationship in the world and in the church.

So I wrote a book on it. Would love to give you that if you join us today. Second thing we'd love to give you is this. It's called Speak Up. It tells your rights and responsibilities when sharing your faith in community and at work.

Do you know, we have more gospel freedoms in this country than almost any other nation on earth but if we don't use them, we'll lose them. But we also need to know about them. And loads of people say you can't share your faith at work. You can't. You just can't abuse a position of authority over an employee.

Loads of people say you can't wear a cross at work. You can. You just can't wear a life-size one because of health and safety hazard. And finally, if you join us this morning, and for some of you this might swing the deal, in the box is an Evangelical Alliance key ring.

I know, I know. It's got on the end of it one of those detachable pound coins which means next time you go to the supermarket and you need a pound coin for your trolley in an increasingly cashless society you will thank Jesus the day you joined the Evangelical Alliance.

[ 6 : 40 ] So if you're able to join us, please do. Let's pray, shall we, that the Lord would speak to us this morning as I have oversold in his house. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for your word.

Thank you that you love us. Thank you for this brilliant and beautiful church. Thank you for those who will speak up on behalf of us today. And we pray across the UK would your kingdom come and will be done.

But right now, we pray that you would speak to us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Now before we read this morning's passage, I wonder if I might frame it by talking to you about my commute.

See, I live in Birmingham. Can everybody say Birmingham? That was an exceptional effort from people from Glasgow. Well done. And I, but my office in London is down in, my office is in London.

So what I frequently do is get the train down from London, from Birmingham on a Tuesday morning, stay overnight on the Tuesday night and come back on the Wednesday. And because I'm quite cheap, I refuse to pay for a hotel.

[ 7 : 41 ] So what I do is I've got lots of friends with whom I stay on a Tuesday night. But so I don't outstay my welcome anywhere, I rotate the friends with whom I stay on a Tuesday night. And so a few months ago, I was staying at a friend's house.

And it's one of those friendships, I don't know whether you have these, where I know him far better than I know her. So I was at university with him, really good friend, been friends for a while, but I'd only met his wife a couple of times.

And so with her, I'm in that really awkward no man's land, I don't know if you know this, where you're somewhere between a handshake and a hug. Do you know what I'm talking about? It's a really awkward stage in a relationship, isn't it, in a kind of friendship.

And so I decide, as I'm staying with these people and I'm staying at their house, I decide it's time to take my relationship with my friend's wife from handshake to hug. And so if you will picture the scene with me, I'm sat in the living room watching TV with his kids.

He's in the kitchen making dinner and she comes down the stairs. And so I decide, so there's no awkwardness to leave her in no uncertain terms, we're going for a hug. And so as she comes towards me, I embrace her and I say, thank you so much for letting me stay at your house.

[ 8 : 53 ] And it's fair to say that my enthusiasm for this embrace was far greater than hers. It was a little bit like hugging a lamppost. And then what happened was, there was this, I'm cringing telling you this moment because then I stood back and the blood drained from my face because with horror, I realised that the woman I just hugged was not the wife of my friend.

She was looking at me with utter bewilderment. And we did this really British thing where we looked at each other and we said with our eyes, we will never speak of this again.

Just because we have proximity doesn't mean we have intimacy. just because we have a thousand connections on social media doesn't mean we have any true friends we can call when the storms hit the shores of our life.

Just because we're in the house of the Lord doesn't mean we have a friendship with him. And what I've realised over the last few months as I've researched friendship is that we're facing a disconnection in our world.

Do you know one in three men in the UK say they have no close friends? It's not much better for women. And it's also not much better for young people. 40% of 18 to 24 year olds, by the way, the most connected generation in history, say they always or often feel lonely.

[ 10 : 19 ] And yet I really believe that the Bible is good news for connection with the living God and with one another. So if you've got a Bible, I would love you to turn with me to John chapter 15.

And I'm going to read some words of Jesus that speak somehow into this crisis and epidemic of loneliness. And my prayer is that they would encourage us this morning to be connected in our friendship with him but also in a world that so desperately needs friendship today.

Jesus says, John chapter 15 verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. apart from me, you can do nothing.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love.

[ 11 : 28 ] If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

This is my command, love each other. As the passage so beautifully communicates we were created for connection with him the true vine and with one another and we need friends.

[ 12 : 34 ] We've got music and movies on demand. We've got the world in the palm of our hand. We've got fun trips, internships, play scripts and hair snips. Film clips, fish and chips at the touch of our thumb tips.

Need to lead or breed or feed your cat? Well it turns out there's an app for that but we need friends. We've got computers for a fiver, cars without a driver.

We've got louder, further, faster, more, a bigger network than ever before but we need friends and friends are amazing. See friendship is atomic.

From the nursing home to the coffee shop, from the boardroom to the playground. It's relational connections that make the world go round. See, we were created to know and be known.

It's better to eat kebabs with friends than salad on your own. And yet, we trace in populous places. We're strangers in rooms of familiar faces.

[ 13 : 31 ] We crave deeper meaningfuls but experience anonymity. We dance superficially around the promise of proximity and we need friends. And quantity is no substitute for quality.

We need 5G, HD, 24 carat friends. Lifelong, fight strong, tag along, forgive all wrong friends. Friends to talk through our problems personal.

Friends to call when the cancer's terminal. When it hasn't been your day, your week, your month, your year, you just remember what your old pal said. We get by with a little help from our friends.

And look to the one who made friendship possible, whose nail-pierced hands bridged a chasm uncrossable. His scandalous invitation follows the most glorious of amends. There is no greater love than they that lay their life down for their friends.

So, celebrate with me the ship most worth sailing. And follow the example of the friend unflinching. May we raise our game and drop our cover.

[ 14 : 34 ] Invest our energies in one another. May we still be there when the rain starts to fall. And accept the most important friend request of all. because we need friends.

What I'd love to share with us this morning is not only the heart of God for friendship with him, with believers, and with those who don't yet follow Jesus, but also three characteristics that I see Jesus speak about in this passage that I think are as relevant now in 2025 as they were when he spoke them.

And the first is this, that great friendship is sacrificial. Do you know just about the most powerful cultural story in our world today, the story that people read when they open their phones up, the one bombarded at us by the media, is what's called expressive individualism.

You might not know it by its name, but I bet you know it by its mantras. The mantras of expressive individualism are you do you. Follow your heart.

Be your authentic self. Be true to your desires. The story of our culture tells us to express, to discover and create an identity inside us and express that in the world.

[ 15 : 51 ] And yet as followers of Jesus we don't do that. Because Jesus says there's no greater love than they that lay their life down for their friends. That we live, he gets to choose our identity.

He gets to choose and say who we are. and we get to be connected to a world around us that is living lives of expressive individualism. And I wonder maybe we're so lonely and fractured because in a world of self-promotion and individualism we've lost the heart and the art of preferring others' needs above our own.

And for some of us that might mean dropping everything to be there for those who need us. For some of us that might mean spending time with people who are different from us.

For me it's all of those things and more. But the person I've seen this sacrificial friendship most recently worked out in is my mum. I mentioned I had a terrible pandemic.

See I'm an author and my first book was published in March 2020 which as many of you will recall was the week all the bookshops closed. Never been more discouraged or disappointed.

[ 17 : 06 ] But then far more tragically a few weeks later we found out that my mum's cancer was terminal. So I spent the first few weeks of lockdown sat at the end of her driveway watching her physically deteriorate.

But you know this was a woman who'd given her life to Jesus as a young girl. It was like throughout her lifetime she'd invested in a spiritual bank account and in those final few months was withdrawing its dividends.

Because as she physically deteriorated it's like I'd never seen her so spiritually strong. And then she did something amazing. When she had every right to be thinking of herself in a world of expressive individualism she did something I recommend we all do if we know we're going to be with Jesus soon.

And that is she took her iPad and recorded a message that afternoon to be played at her funeral. She always wanted the last word did my mum. And she talks about in this message to her camera that her faith in Jesus that she's had since a young girl had meant forgiveness for her past, God's presence in her present agony and hope for the future that when her earthly body gave way she would be reunited with Jesus and spend eternity with him.

And eventually on the 8th of June 2020 her earthly body did give way. And we weren't able to have a physical funeral it was at that time when the restrictions were in place and we did it on Zoom. And there were like 200, 300 screens that turned up.

[ 18 : 38 ] It was a really moving afternoon. And we got to play my mum's message. But because she wasn't around to stop me and I'm an evangelist, I had the last word. And I gave people the opportunity to pray a simple prayer to say that they wanted too the forgiveness that my mum knew.

They wanted too for God to be in their heart so that they might know him with them every day. And they might know the same hope and assurance. And at the end of the call we clicked leave on the Zoom call and I got a text from one of mum's friends who she'd prayed for for many years to meet Jesus.

And it simply said this, Phil I prayed that prayer with you. I believe Jesus died for me. Isn't that amazing? Why does that happen? Because a woman where she has every right to think of herself lays down her life for her friends.

Great friendship is sacrificial. Secondly, great friendship is intentional. Jesus said in this passage, you didn't choose me but I chose you.

Now that's not what normally happens with disciples and rabbis. Normally disciples would find a rabbi they wanted to follow and they would choose them to follow and become like that. But Jesus flips the norm.

[ 19 : 53 ] He intentionally chooses a bunch of disciples to spend time with and invest in. Causing some commentators to speculate that the feeding of the 5,000 wasn't Jesus' greatest miracle.

Jesus' greatest miracle perhaps was having 12 close friends in his 30s. But what Jesus not only then does is, is he's got kind of an outer circle of 12 friends, but then he's got an inner circle of three friends.

I don't know if you've noticed this as you've read the Gospels, but there's a few awkward moments, like really awkward moments. Can you imagine for a moment being in this situation? Jesus is around with 12 disciples and then there's a couple of moments where he says to Peter, James and John, boys, you come with me.

Can you imagine being Thomas or Philip? Well I feel particularly sorry for James the lesser. Can you imagine being James the lesser? James you come with me, not you son, you're James the lesser. James brother of John, I want you.

I feel even particularly sorry for Andrew, because Andrew's Peter's brother and Peter gets to go with Jesus. And James and John, the other two brothers, they get to go with Jesus.

[ 21 : 00 ] But Andrew, he must be waiting for his name to be called, but it never comes. Do you know what's even worse? It was Andrew who introduced Peter to Jesus. The particular special place in heaven for Andrew.

But what it shows is that Jesus is particularly intentional about who he spends his time with. And as I've looked into the kind of the latest science around friendship, what I've discovered is this, non-Christian anthropologists have asked the question, how many friends can you have?

And they found you can have about 150 friends. Now don't worry if you've not got 150 friends, that's your upper limit. But if you think you've got 2,000 friends, because that's how many connections you've got on Facebook, you haven't because your brain's not big enough.

But then these anthropologists have looked at how many good friends can you have and how many great friends can you have? They found you can have about 12 good friends and three great friends.

And as I read this from these complete non-Christians I'm like, that sounds really familiar. It's almost like Jesus had help. Because when the Son of God came from highest heaven to lowest earth 2,000 years ago, he was intentional about his relationships.

[ 22 : 11 ] And I want you to, I want us to think about all of us this morning. How intentional are we with how we spend our time? Because not only do we need friends, but others need friends.

And sometimes the gift of friendship is one of the greatest gifts we can offer someone. But there's a second jaw-dropping moment in this passage where Jesus says a couple of times, for example in verse 15, I have called you friends.

Now when Jesus said this to the disciples, they'd have said, say that again Jesus, you've called us what? Because there's no other record in the whole of the first century of any other rabbi calling their disciples friends.

There was like a relational distance between them, like kind of teacher and pupil today. And yet Jesus is intentional about calling his disciples friends.

friends. The theologian A.W. Tozer says this, that what comes to our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

[ 23 : 16 ] And it's no surprise, is it, that God's word gives us lots of different lenses through which we see our relationship with God. That somehow when we come to get our head around what it is to be in relationship with the all-creating, all-consuming God, the Bible gives us some human lenses to think through.

So he's our creator. He's our saviour. He's our judge. He's our lord and our king. He's our provider.

Our sustainer. But don't miss this this morning. God is also your friend. Isn't that amazing? Jesus is intentional about choosing to talk to his disciples and us as his disciples today.

About we're his friends. Now we need to be really careful that he doesn't become the Lord Almighty more than the Lord Almighty. But friendship is an important lens through which we see our relationship with God.

And I want to encourage you this morning that if you don't yet know Jesus as your friend, then the best news in the whole universe is that you can. And if you do know Jesus as your friend, my deep encouragement to you today, I want to urge you to make that friendship the most important thing in your life.

[ 24 : 36 ] At the beginning of this passage, Jesus says, I'm the vine and you're the branches. If you remain in me, if you make this thing the most important thing, you will bear much fruit. But what he says next is sobering.

He says, apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

Too many followers of Jesus are putting other things in front of their relationship with Jesus, their friendship with him. Never let your sports team or your job or your patio, your house conversion or your salary or whatever else fills your life, never let that get more important than your friendship with Jesus.

If you remain in him, you will bear much fruit. But if you do not remain in him, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Be intentional with your friendship with others.

But also be most intentional about your friendship with him. It's a great friendship sacrificial. Great friendship is intentional. And finally, great friendship is invitational.

[ 25 : 45 ] As Jesus in this passage extends his invitation of friendship to his disciples, he invites us as those who follow him to be invitational with that friendship towards others.

Jesus says in verse 16, you didn't choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit. We are appointed to bear fruit and fruit that will last.

And there's lots of ways in which we bear fruit. We bear fruit by becoming more like Jesus. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

We bear fruit by doing good things. By serving the poor, the last, the least, the lost. By loving those around us. But we also bear fruit by inviting others to know the greatest friendship the world has ever known.

And I want to encourage you this morning, especially around friendship and sharing faith with friends. Now hear me really well on this. We don't become friends with people to convert them.

[ 26 : 57 ] We become friends with people because we're made in the image of the relational God. And he's created us for relationship with him and with one another. And the greatest command is to love our neighbour as ourself.

After loving God with all of our heart, body, mind and soul. But we also recognise that it's through friendship that God so often does his best work. My job at the Evangelical Alliance, I'm not clever enough to speak in parliament on behalf of Christians.

But my job is that I try to understand the pathways by which people become Christians. So I study how people are becoming Christians. And did you know that when people become Christians, when we ask them, who was the most important person on the journey?

Sadly for people like me and Cal, it's not people who are paid by the church to do Christian work. The most significant people, when we ask people who's played the most important part, is a friend, a neighbour, a colleague or a family member.

Which means that if your friends are going to come to know Jesus for themselves, you are probably going to play the most significant role on the journey. And what I've observed at the moment is that in our world, I think people possibly more than ever in my lifetime are searching for hope.

[ 28 : 13 ] I found out recently that the Collins Dictionary word of the year for 2022 was perma crisis. It's a nice word, isn't it? Perma crisis. It refers to an extended period of instability or insecurity brought on by a series of catastrophic events.

Feels like we've lurched from a global pandemic to a cost of living crisis, threat of World War III. And yet we are good news people in the bad news world. And I think the weight of hopelessness is weighing heavily on people.



And as we've talked to people who've become Christians recently, they talk about the crisis within their hearts, often brought on by the heaviness in the world. And we are those who carry hope and carry good news to people who desperately need it.

I've seen this recently in a friendship of mine. My friend Adam is over there. He's not my minder. We've been friends for a very long time. But we had a friend growing up at school called John.

And John doesn't yet know Jesus. But I realised that we are those people who carry hope. When John reached out to me a few months ago, I got this text from John.

[ 29 : 21 ] I'm going to have it up on the screen. If someone texts you this, they're asking for prayer. He says, got any time over weekend? Need a word with the top dog big man if you can help, pal? If your friends text you that, they're asking for prayer.

And so we met up, as you can see from my reply, I'm really classy, and so we met up at Wetherspoons for breakfast. Other areas, other spaces to eat breakfast are available. And I said, John, what's going on?

He says, mate, I've had a text from my brother this week. He's got a suspected brain tumour. And he's called me to look, asked me to look after his kids when he dies. What do you say?

To be honest, I didn't know what to say, and I'm not very pastoral, to be honest. And so I said, the only thing that came to mind, which I said, we should pray, shouldn't we? And he said, what now? I said, yeah.

So in the middle of Wetherspoons, surrounded by very badly behaved West Midlanders swinging beer at 9.30 in the morning, we prayed for him and for his brother. And so I checked in a little bit later, I checked in the next day of the week, and then on the Tuesday, I get this text that simply said this, no brain tumour.

[ 30 : 28 ] Thanks for your work, pal. Do you know what? John is still not yet a Christian. He's still not given his life to the top dog big man. But do you know what?

He might be a bit closer. And I thought it was really interesting that he didn't reach out to any of his atheist friends to search for hope in that situation. We carry hope.

And so my encouragement to you this morning is to think about your invitation to those around you. If you've not yet got a list of a few people who you're praying for regularly to become Christians, I want to urge you to write one down and start praying.

I've been praying for John. We were at school together. I've been praying for John for almost 30 years to come to know Jesus for himself. We also, by the lives that we live, by bearing fruit, we draw people to come to know Jesus.

Some of my best conversations about faith is sometimes when friends have said, you live differently. Why do you do that? But also, in Peter it talks about always being prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have.

[ 31 : 39 ] If you've not given thought to what you might say, if someone said, why are you a Christian? Why do you go to church? I want to encourage you to think about that. Think about being able to tell your story. If you're not yet, Christian friends ask you why you are a Christian.

But I want to encourage you that in the perma crisis world, many are reaching out to hope. And we are those who carry hope to a world that desperately needs it.

We are good news people in a bad news world. So this morning, may you know the friendship of Jesus. May you know that the stars, the hands that flung stars into space reach out to you in friendship.

May you know that in an individualistic world, great friendship is sacrificial. May you know that great friendship is intentional, that God has been intentional with us. And so we need to be intentional too.

And finally, may we each be invitational to a world that needs hope. And may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever he may send you. May he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.

[ 32 : 42 ] May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you. And may he bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors. Amen. As Cal said, we're going to reflect now.

So I wonder if wherever you are, you might like to bow your heads. And just ask that God, by his spirit, would burn on your heart that which he is saying to you, whatever whatever he's saying to you through his word this morning.

Perhaps this morning, the Lord wants to encourage you to think about your relationship with him. Maybe you feel far from God this morning.

Maybe you've never had a moment where you've accepted God's offer of friendship. I want to encourage you that his hand is outstretched towards yours in friendship this morning.

that he loves you. That Jesus died for you. And rose again for you.

[ 34 : 00 ] And he asks each of us to repent and believe. To turn away from our own individualism. And turn towards him. Who loves us and knows what's best for us.

And can offer us forgiveness. His presence today. And hope for the future. So just in the quiet, reflect on that. If you're far from God, know the offer of friendship today and say yes in your heart.

And know that God hears you. And accepts you. But also some of us know that with our friendship with God, some other things have come first.

And the Lord gently asks us this evening, this morning, to remove those things. And put him in the rightful place again. As we reflect, maybe the Lord is bringing to mind things that you know have taken first place ahead of friendship with him.

And he invites you to take them off the throne of your life.

[ 35 : 25 ] And put him in first place again. And then finally, I wonder whether when we think about our friends, the Lord has just brought to mind people this morning.

People who we need to be intentional with. And people who we need to be invitational with. Who are the people the Lord is calling you to pray for?

To reach out to? Father, I thank you for this brilliant and beautiful church.

Thank you that you love every heart. Would they be encouraged today?

Would they be connected today? And would your kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven? In Jesus' name.

[ 36 : 42 ] Amen. Amen. Thank you.