

Made for Friendship (1) - Genesis 1-3

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[0 : 00] If you turn with me once again to Genesis, those opening chapters of the book of Genesis, about the fact that according to the Bible, you and I are made for friendship.

C.S. Lewis, the Christian author, described friendship as the greatest of worldly goods. And when we take time to stop and reflect on what we have and what we enjoy, then surely friendship is right there as one of life's great gifts to us.

Maybe like me, you find that there was a day you can look back on when making friendships and enjoying friendships used to be so simple. And my brother got married just after Christmas, and my two boys made a really strong friendship with another little boy over their shared love of taking a Lego car and crashing it down some steps.

My best friend in primary school, I knew we were going to be good friends because he had an inhaler and I had an inhaler. It used to be really simple, but now friendship can be quite difficult. And we find that we are a lot more busy probably than we used to be. As people, we tend to be more mobile. We don't stick in the same community. So we're constantly saying goodbye to others and having to think about making new friends.

[1 : 24] And then we've got the sort of disconnection that comes when we live in the digital age and everything is done on screens rather than face-to-face. And it's lost.

The loss of friendship is having a major impact on society. I don't know if you knew that the UK is one of the few countries in the world that has a government minister for loneliness, recognizing the sort of epidemic level of loneliness in communities.

Health studies will show that having friends around will increase the likelihood of recovery, will speed it up, whereas trying to recover in isolation will tend towards decline.

To quote from J.C. Ryle, a pastor from a previous generation, he said, Friendship halves our sorrows and doubles our joys.

And if you imagine experiencing life without friends and without family, we begin to appreciate what he's saying. When you think back to those trials and difficulties that you've had in your life, imagine going through them without having anyone else to turn to.

[2 : 36] Or in those good times, those moments of joy and celebration, how good it is to be able to open up and to share that with others. We discover that friendship is very good for us.

It's very good for our character too, because friends have that ability to shape us. I think one of the reasons the Bible so often tells us to be wise in the people that we spend time with, in the friends that we choose, because we tend to become like those that we are like.

But friends can helpfully show us our areas of weakness and help us to develop in strength. And then there's the Christian understanding of friendship, which is distinct because it includes in it the idea of friendship with God, that you and I are made for community and friendship on this level with one another.

But we're also made for friendship with God. And the Bible would also say that the more that we know God, the more that we spend time with Jesus, the better friends that we are able to be.

If we become like the one that we spend time with, if we become more like Jesus, then we'll be the best kind of friends that we can be. So our big idea this morning is just to remind ourselves or to see for ourselves that the Bible teaches that we are made for friendship and then to think about the fact that Jesus came into the world to save us again for friendship, to restore what has been lost.

[4 : 15] So that takes us to Genesis 1. In the garden, we are made for friendship. I remember sometimes in school, we would have sort of these little group exercises, I think just to get us talking and thinking.

And one of the questions was, what are the things that are essential for life? And you had to make a little list in a few minutes of what you thought was essential. I don't know where you would put friendship.

Would you put it on an essential list or a kind of nice, but it's a luxury sort of thing? Where does friendship fit in our thinking? According to the Bible, it's necessary.

It's true from the beginning. When everything was perfect, God designed us for friendship. Now let's read together in Genesis chapter 1 and at verse 26.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule. Here is God saying, let us.

[5 : 20] Here is a hint of what becomes much clearer as the Bible goes on. That our God is not a solitary being. He is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And what we discover in the Bible is that Father, Son, and Spirit eternally live in this perfect union of perfect love. The Bible says, 1 John 4, God is love.

And that's true of God perfectly and eternally. Some people have the idea that God made the world because he was lonely and he wanted someone to love.

And that's not true because God is not solitary. He is a fellowship, Father, Son, and Spirit. Rather, we are created to enjoy the overflow of his perfect love.

In his goodness, he gives us this opportunity, this invitation to experience his love. Genesis 1 also makes clear that we are made in the image of God.

[6 : 27] And what becomes clear in Genesis is that part of that is that we are to reflect his rule. God is king and he's established us as people to be wise stewards and to rule over the earth.

But also, we are the image of God in that we are to reflect his character and his glory. What do we learn of God in the early chapters of Genesis?

Well, we see that he is a God who speaks, a God who speaks to Adam and to Eve. He's a speaking God. He is a God who is relational. He relates to his creation and especially to the man and the woman.

And he is a loving God. That this God who is Father, Son, and Spirit is love and he creates us in his image so that we might love and that we might enjoy friendships.

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are two different ways of looking at the creation story. Genesis 1 is like the wide angle view. Genesis 2 much more is a zoom lens focus on the creation of Adam and Eve.

[7 : 36] So if Genesis 1 finishes that God saw everything that he made and it was very good, as we zoom in and see the process of creating the man and the woman, we discover something perhaps surprising.

Chapter 2, verse 18, the Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

So focusing on the creation of human beings focuses us on the first man, Adam, and we discover that in the beginning, he was created solitary. He was alone.

And attention is drawn to this fact that to be alone is to be less than good. To be alone is to have a sense of something being incomplete.

This is before sin, but without there being friendship and relationship, there is something incomplete. Tim Keller, a pastor from New York, says, the ache for friends is the one ache that is not the result of sin.

[8 : 38] Adam couldn't enjoy paradise without friends. There is something in us that needs other people. To be human is to be made to enjoy friendship.

We're placed in families. We enjoy friendships in communities. We enjoy connections at work and also in churches because that's how we are wired.

And so as the creation story goes on, we discover in verse 20 that Adam needs, verse 18 and verse 20, Adam needs a suitable helper, but that no animal would be enough.

So verse 21, God creates Eve.

And now there is side by side. Now there is face-to-face friendship. And what we discover of Adam and Eve is that they are called by God to work and they need each other for that.

[9 : 53] They are called to rest and to enjoy God and they need each other for that. They're called to worship. And again, they do that together. For work and rest and play and worship, we need other people.

And now with friendship, now with Adam and Eve, creation can be described as very good. So Genesis 1 and 2 tell us that we are made for friendship.

So let's just think about what that means for us. Well, first of all, a very basic level, we discover that friendship is a gift from God. And so we are to be thankful both to God and to our friends.

When there are people in our lives who care for us, who are there for us, we are to be thankful, not just for them, but also to be thankful to them, to appreciate friends that we have as a gift from God. Also, it's helpful for us to reflect. If God said that in the beginning we were made for relationship, is that something that we are actively pursuing?

[11 : 11] Are we investing ourselves, seeking to be a good friend to others? Am I making this a priority to make sure I have enough time for my family or to be developing friendships within a church community?

Church. Church. One of the functions of church is as a vehicle for friendship, that we're gathered together from different places, different backgrounds, different countries, but we're brought together, and it's an opportunity then for us to develop friendships together.

A church should always be a place where anyone can feel welcome, where anyone who wants to should be able to feel that they can belong, to have a place of community and friendship.

But especially, as we reflect upon the fact that we're not just created for friendship on a human level, that we're also created for friendship with God, church becomes a place where we can develop that deep relationship with God as well.

Again, going back to why do we have community groups that meet together? Why do we have a women's Bible study? It's so that together we can develop in friendship and know God better and enjoy God more.

[12 : 36] So again, an encouragement to you. If you're not part of one of those groups, they're really helpful for Christian development and for developing Christian friendships.

So in the garden, we discover we're made for friendships, but in the garden, in the garden of Eden, we also see that friendship is lost. That takes us to Genesis chapter 3.

Genesis 2 ends with this perfect picture of relationships. There's the man and the wife and they're together and they're naked and there's no shame, but then the snake comes, the devil comes.

In the Bible, the devil is described as the deceiver and the father of lies. He is the destroyer. He is the enemy of God and we see him at work looking to destroy these friendships that God has established.

So he comes into the garden and he tempts the woman and the man. In verse 1, he said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

[13 : 44] Then, here's this questioning of God's goodness, God's generosity. The whole thrust seems to be God is holding something back from you. There is something better that God does not want you to enjoy.

Verse 4, a deliberate encouragement to doubt and mistrust the word of God. God had said, if they sin, they will die. The serpent says, you will not surely die.

And any place is this desire to be God-like in their heads. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God and knowing good and evil.

And all of a sudden, there's this God complex. This is attractive to Eve and attractive to Adam to have that position of absolute rule and authority to leave God to one side.

And what we see is Adam and Eve believe the lie. Sin comes and chaos comes, in particular, in terms of relationships.

[14 : 52] One of the things we discover in the Bible about sin is that sin is going against the Creator's good and wise design. That God made us and He knows how we are to live best.

And sin is rejecting that. And the effects when Adam and Eve reject God's good and loving rule are devastating on friendships. Perfect relationships that God had established are now gone.

Verse 7, what do we see? The eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. This is the beginning of hiding.

Gone is openness, honesty, transparency. There's covering up. There's a sense of shame into their relationship. There's also blaming, accusing, blame shifting.

Verse 12, the man said, the woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. So this, the human relationship is now being spoiled by sin and we see it too in their

friendship with God.

[16:01] Verse 8, the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Not only hiding from one another, now they're hiding from God. Now there is guilt, now there is shame, now there is fear. One of the things that we discover about sin is that it is anti-social. It separates, it isolates, it spoils and breaks. Friendship with one another and friendship with God. And so we find that in this beautiful garden there is darkness, there is devastation, but there is also in the middle of human rebellion God's words of hope.

Genesis 3 and verse 15. As God speaks to the serpent, he says, I will put enmity between you and the women.

[17:05] And then there is this promise between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

A promise of a son, a seed of the women who would come to be God's chosen hero. The one who would defeat the devil and his schemes.

the one who would inflict that wound on the serpent so that we would not be left as people without hope. So that we might know that reconciliation with God is possible.

So that we would know that it is possible to live in community and to enjoy friendship because our God is a God of grace and a God with a plan of salvation.

salvation. But as we think about the friendship that's lost in the garden, we see that sin is damaging to our friendships.

[18:05] And again, as we reflect on that in our own lives, don't we see that it's our selfishness where we want everything to be about us and on our terms where it's our pride or maybe it's jealousy where we're unable to celebrate the success of someone else.

Instead, we want to tear them down so that we might have that play. It's our gossip and the lies that we spread, the anger that we show towards the people that we care for that cause so much destruction in our relationships.

And the question is, what do we do with that? Sin is a reality in all of our relationships. What do we do with it? And the Bible teaches us that we don't cover up.

We don't try and minimize it. We don't try and blame someone else. We don't try and justify it.

Rather, we are to honestly confess it. We're going to focus on this next week.

But we can maybe think about David in Psalm 51. who honestly confess to God his sin. 1 John chapter 1 where we're told to confess our sin to one another.

[19:20] If we are to be reconciled, we need to deal with the sin that separates and spoils. Another point of application is that friendship has been lost, but God is looking to restore.

And one of the ways that he does that is through the church. As a church, as God's people, we are to be on a mission of friendship. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 18, said, God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

So, first of all, God sends Jesus and he takes our sin and he dies on the cross for our sin so that we can have peace with God. And then, that's the message, that's the heart that we bring to the world, into our neighborhood, into our community, into our family.

So, in our friendships, we're seeking to point people towards friendship with God through Jesus. So, as a church, our friendships are significant.

It's also important for us to acknowledge that we will know, to use the words of Tim Kelly, the H of Eden, that we will experience in friendships pain and loss and disappointment.

[20:44] And there will be times where we are perhaps tempted to give up on friendships. It's too difficult, it's too demanding, it's too disappointing.

But again, as we are reminded at the beginning of Genesis that we are made for friendship, we are made for others. So, let's keep pursuing those friendships that God gives to us, even when it's difficult for us.

So, we've seen that in the Garden of Eden, we were made for friendship, but in that same garden, friendships were lost. Now, let's now turn back to Matthew 26, page 997.

because it's important for us to remember that Jesus came to save and to restore.

And here we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and we have a reminder here that we are saved for friendship.

[21 : 50] So, the context for this passage that we read, chapter 26, verse 36, this is the night of Jesus' betrayal, of his arrest, where there will be all sorts of injustice against Jesus until the next day when he will die on the cross.

Two things to look at in the Garden here as it relates to friendship. First of all, Jesus, the perfect man, needed friendships.

We see that in this passage. Verse 36, Jesus went with his disciples, his twelve, well now, his eleven friends to a place called Gethsemane and he said to them, sit here while I go over there and pray.

Jesus wanted his friends with him in this moment. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

Then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.

[23 : 09] So here is Jesus in anguish of the soul, a sorrow so intense that he feels like it's almost killing him and he takes his close friends to be with him.

He values their support and their prayers. He wants them to keep watch and to pray with him. And so we see Jesus in this moment leaning on the friendship of his disciples.

But we also see where else Jesus turns. Verse 39, going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

So again, here is Jesus feeling a sorrow that almost kills him. What does he do? he turns to pray. He wants, he needs to enjoy the eternal love of God the father.

He finds strength from that eternal loving communion he has with his father. And when you read the gospels, you discover that this is a feature of Jesus' life and ministry.

[24 : 36] We find Jesus often spending time alone with God the father in prayer. We also find Jesus praying with his disciples to God the father and we see Jesus living life, sharing life with his friends.

Jesus, the perfect man, is a return to the perfection of Eden. Perfect relationships with people and a perfect relationship with God.

And so he becomes a model to us of the two kinds of relationships, the friendships that we are to pursue. So Jesus, the perfect man, needed friendship, but Jesus also comes as Savior in order to restore friendship.

What causes Jesus such sorrow at this moment? What is it that causes him to ask in verse 39, if it's possible, may this cup be taken from me?

I think we need to understand that it's not just the fact of death, but it's the kind of death Jesus is about to endure that causes him this soul sorrow.

[25 : 54] He talks about a cup, the cup that he wants to be taken from him. What does that mean? Well, in the Old Testament we find the cup, it is used as a symbol of God's judgment against sin.

For those people who rebel and reject and resist God and his purposes, there is a day coming when they will drink the cup of God's just anger against sin.

And now we find Jesus, and he is going to drink this cup, the perfect sinless Son of God. It is about to take to himself the just anger of God against sin as he becomes the sin bearer of the world.

Here is Jesus facing death as a sacrificial lamb, the one who came to turn God's anger away from his people and he will do so alone. And so he asks, is there any other way?

Is there any way that I can avoid the agony of losing the joy of the presence of my Father in heaven? Because when Jesus becomes the sin bearer, he feels abandoned by his Father.

[27 : 16] Jesus feels alone as he dies on the cross. And he's doing that so that we might be welcomed as friends, so that we might be forgiven and reconciled and become friends of God.

But this is something that is hard. It causes him sorrow in his soul. But yet he prays, yet not as I will, but as you will.

He is willing to submit to the Father's good plan because he knows there is no other way for us to enjoy friendship with God. Something must be done about our sin.

The penalty must be paid and Jesus comes to pay that penalty so that we can enjoy once again friendship with God. Now as we think about this section, as we think about what Jesus does all through his life, but especially in his death, I think it's helpful for us to think about Jesus as the kind of friend that if we knew them in our life, we would admire them.

Jesus is the kind of friend that we would want to know. And we would want to be like. Why? Because Jesus was consistently through his life saying, it's you before me.

[28 : 38] Jesus lived a life of self-sacrifice. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for sin. Jesus gave himself to die in order to save his friends.

The greatest demonstration of love we can possibly imagine. And so Jesus, when we examine his life, is the kind of friend that we don't just admire, but we also worship.

Because through his self-giving friendship, we can know God. Next week, as a church, we will share the Lord's Supper together, and that will remind us of the cost to Jesus of our restored friendship with God.

That Jesus dies to reconcile us, and he does that through his broken body and through his blood poured out for us.

And also, as we sit at the Lord's table, it's a reminder that Jesus dies to make a people his family, that we are connected together in our love for Jesus.

[29 : 52] So the Bible says to us, we are made for friendship. And Jesus comes into the world, and he saves us to restore our friendship with God.

And so I hope we can all see that you and I, we need to value deep friendship, meaningful friendship.

And so maybe as we close, we can just think, well, how can you and I this week, how can I be a good friend to someone else? What time can I carve out in my schedule to invest in the life of someone else?

What good questions can I ask to take a friendship further, to get to know someone's heart, to see what causes them joy and sorrow and anxiety and hope? Maybe it's a very basic case of looking around and thinking, I need a friend and asking someone, would you like to have coffee?

Would you like to go for a walk? Would you like to spend some time together? Because we need one another. But more than that, will we enjoy and celebrate being a friend of God through Jesus this week?

[31 : 11] Will we make time to enjoy that friendship, to spend time reading God's word and praying and worshiping because of what He's done for us?

Because of what He's done for us.