

Friendship

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- [0 : 0 0] I remember quite distinctly the day I started school. I was four years old. My family was living in Paris at the time. My parents dressed me up in the warm clothes required for school in Paris.
- I had a bright coloured parka. I was the only not French kid at my school. I was pretty nervous about going to school. My older brother had gone before me and he'd been beaten up for basically the first term of school in Paris.
- And so I went with a fair amount of apprehension about what I would find when I got there. And it went roughly as I expected. I would sit in my class surrounded by people that I couldn't talk to or understand.
- The teachers would politely try to interact with me, but they didn't speak English either. And so they would kind of pat me on the head and leave me with paper and pencil to my own devices because there wasn't much else that we could do.
- At lunchtime, I was lucky enough to have my older sister in the same playground, so at least I had someone to talk to briefly. But I do remember just feeling a profound sense of loneliness, just feeling completely isolated, like there was no one who cared or who could care, even if they wanted to, because I couldn't communicate with them.
- [1 : 2 2] And it's not just when we start school or start a new school or go into a new environment that we can feel that kind of loneliness and isolation. I think that for many of us, it's something that can be true of us right now.
- It can be true in a very familiar situation. It can be true in a school that you've been at for years. You can feel lonely in an office that's crowded with people. You can feel lonely, exercising in a crowded gym, sitting on a crowded train, even sitting in a crowded church.
- You can still feel lonely and isolated. And I imagine that in a room this size that there would be some people who are sitting here right now and that's exactly how you feel. You want friends, you want to connect, but you don't feel like it's happening.
- That desire for connection drives us. It's not like we just sit there and feel sorry for ourselves. We spend our lives trying to satisfy that longing.
- We grab onto solutions which usually don't deliver. Deep down, what we're crying out for is friendship. Even if we wouldn't use that word, that's ultimately what we want.
- [2 : 3 3] We want connection and we want intimacy and that's what friendship is designed for. That's the whole point. Friendship is a good thing. Friendship is something we want.
- Friendship is something we need. But friendship is also something that's difficult. It's something that's hard to grab hold of. I've had a number of conversations with people of varying ages within our church family and outside recently who have all lamented how hard it is to make and keep friends.
- Maybe it was easier when you were younger, but as you get older, suddenly you have a smaller pool of people, you have less opportunity, you get busier. And so we feel the pain of loneliness and isolation.

And yet friendship is good. Friendship is desirable. Friendship is needed. So what wisdom does God's word offer us in dealing with this loneliness?

Well, firstly, I think it's worth us understanding a bit about the nature of friendship. We sometimes like to blur the lines between the different relationships that we have in life.

[3 : 40] We collapse all the categories down into friendship. And so, you know, my wife is my friend. My barista is my friend. My hairdresser is my friend. My siblings are my friends.

My friends are my friends. And we kind of just roll them all up in one category, even though there's clearly a distinction between the way I relate to my wife and the way I relate to the person who cuts my hair.

There's a difference in connection. There's a difference in interaction. And yet we sometimes treat them like they're just one. Now, friendship is going to be probably part of all those different relationships.

But there's something that makes friendship friendship. There's something unique and specific to friendship. And as we dig into Proverbs, we need to understand what that is if we're going to actually get better at doing friendship.

Now, it's helpful if you think about friendship as journeying. As walking side by side, as being on a journey towards a destination together in partnership.

[4 : 42] When we think about romantic relationships, we think about being face to face. But friendship is that sense where rather than being obsessed with one another, you have a common interest. You have an object of your friendship.

You have a foundation or a connection point. And this is what Jimmy talked about last week. When we were looking at friendship, Jimmy said that all friendships have a connection point. They have a common interest. They have something that drew you together, whether it's your work or a hobby or something.

And if you take that basis away, you effectively remove the friendship. Unless you can replace it with another common interest, if you take that common thing away, the relationship is gone.

The friendship is broken. And what that means practically is that you can't create a friendship. You can't manufacture one.

I mean, friendships are discovered. Because if it's an interest or a passion that connects you, you discover that somebody shares that. You can't fake an interest or a passion in order to get friends because it doesn't really work like that.

[5 : 50] It might work for a period, but soon the energy will die out. You won't put the effort that's required in and suddenly the relationship begins to break. Friendship is the result of passions.

Friendship is the result of interests. Friendship is the result of the things that you hold to be true when you discover those same things in someone else. So if you chase friendship, if as a lonely person your solution is I just need a friend, and you go after somebody to be your friend, you'll probably find people that are willing to spend time with you, maybe because they're caring or generous or nice.

But without that common point of interest, that relationship is going to be like a fire without oxygen. It can never actually spark. It can never actually be a friendship where you guys share something because you don't have anything to share.

You just want a friend. Friendship is about journeying to somewhere. It's about getting to a destination. And it's the result of connection points.

It's something you stumble upon. It's not planned neatly. There's either something to connect you or there's not. The foundation either exists or it doesn't and you cannot manufacture it.

[7 : 11] But that said, discovering a friendship is not enough either. True friendship needs to be, once it's discovered, nurtured, invested in, built.

And Proverbs gives us the picture of what that might look like. You can think of this as almost like a checklist of what a good friendship will require, what a good friend would look like.

And I think Proverbs points us to at least four characteristics. There could be more in there, but I want to focus on four tonight. The first one is good friends are constant.

Proverbs 17, 17 says, A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity. Friendships take time to grow. That's normal.

All relationships take time and take investment and good friends give you the time so that the relationship can grow. You might click with somebody and just, it feels like you're the exact same person, but if you never see each other, if you're never there with one another, the relationship doesn't have a chance to develop.

[8 : 17] Now, it's easy to surround yourself with the friends who love to gain something from you, friends who benefit because maybe you're an entertaining person to be around. Maybe you're generous financially.

For that person, you're just a means to an end. That's not the same as a friend. Proverbs 19 tells us that many curry favor with a ruler and everyone is the friend of one who gives gifts.

When there's benefit, great. But when there's not, verse 7, the poor are shunned by all their relatives. How much more do their friends avoid them? Though the poor pursue them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

See, fair-weather friends, fake friends if you like, love the benefit of a relationship that you have. But they disappear when being a friend will start to cost.

When being a friend will involve some sort of sacrifice. See, friendship requires the constancy that isn't dictated to by circumstance. Friendship requires being there in the good and the bad.

[9 : 18] The up and the down. And when we're struggling, we need friends more than ever. And those friends are the hard ones to find. When life's good, people will hang around. They'll gather. It's great. But what about when you're not much fun to be around?

What about when you're feeling depressed? Now, I think there's two sides to this challenge. Because most of us would probably say that we are the kind of friend that would be there. We would say that we're happy to do what's required.

We even verbalise it out loud. We make offers like, is there anything you need? Is there anything I can do? Let me know if I can help in some way. But often that's where it stops.

Just at words. Offers. Because either we're the fair-weather friends who go missing when there would actually be the requirement to follow through on that promise. You know, we've got things going on in our own life.

We've got our own struggles. We assume maybe someone else is helping them. Maybe someone else is better equipped to help them. And so we just kind of fade into the background and hope they don't notice. Or we're sure we would be there in the hard time.

[10 : 23] But we weren't there in the good time. So we don't know that it's a hard time. We're not actually close enough to know what's going on for someone to be able to put a hand up and offer help. Because people aren't walking around with signs saying, I'm doing it tough right now.

You need to have the close relationship where you've spent time in the good and easy period to know that things are maybe not as good as they have been. Constancy means the good, the bad, the up, the down, always around.

Because what constancy gives us is its training for those extreme difficult times. It's the little acts of helping that are training us for the significant acts of sacrifice.

So it's the little act of buying someone dinner because they just needed to hang out with someone or their wallet was empty or whatever it is that prepares you for then sitting with somebody next to a hospital bed. The little acts train us for the demands that will come, which means we need to be there when only little acts are required as well.

Good friends are constant friends. I had an older pastor give me some helpful advice a few years ago when it comes to caring for people in need. I had a friend who was dealing with the grief of losing somebody that they loved and I didn't really know how to engage them.

[11 : 39] They were a friend. I knew they were in pain. I knew they were struggling. I'd said all those things. I'm there for you. Is there anything you need? But they didn't have the space to answer that with any substance. And so I just didn't know what to do.

And the advice was just turn up. Knock on the door. Be okay with them sending you away and saying, I can't handle your company right now, but at least move the question of, are you that constant friend or was it just words?

Show them that you are there. Prove your availability. Turn up and be there in whatever way it is that they need. Maybe the first step for us, the first struggle for us in getting good at friendships is that we need to put our money where our mouth is and just be with the people that we care about.

We actually need to make the decision to clear the space. We're all busy. We're all pressed for time. But to say these people matter enough that I'm going to sacrifice something else to be available for these people. Friends are constant.

Secondly, friends are also careful. Let me show you what I mean. Proverbs 25, 17 says, Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house.

[12 : 52] Too much of you and they will hate you. Now, I just told you to just turn up, be there all the time. And now Proverbs is pushing slightly in the other direction and saying, don't turn up too much or you'll be annoying.

And that's not going to build a good friendship. Don't be the friend who overstays their welcome. We've got to understand that God has created people differently. That there's not a one size fits all model of how to do friendship.

We all need friends, whether we're introverted or extroverted or somewhere in the middle. We all need friends. But what friendship looks like with different people will be different. Some people can hang out 24-7, night after night, day after day, and never get tired of one another.

But some other people who genuinely love their friends also need a bit of time to withdraw and be alone. And carefulness is the wisdom to recognize what kind of friend you have.

Carefulness is the investment in them to not just want to hang out because you want to hang out, but to want to do what's going to best benefit them. What's going to be a blessing on your friend?

[14 : 02] A friend knows their friend well enough to be able to provide that which best fits the individual. Verse 14 of chapter 27 says, If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

Blessing sounds like such a good idea, but if you're not a morning person and somebody knocks on your door just to tell you how great you are and that they love you, you're going to want to punch them. Have the wisdom to recognize who it is that you are friends with, to understand what it looks like to bless them.

Now, this carefulness is like an emotional investment in your friend. It's a connection between friends where your happiness and your sadness are impacted and even almost somewhat dependent or affected by the happiness and sadness of your friend.

You're so connected to them and the way that they're journeying but that it matters to you. You carry each other. When they're sad, you feel that sadness. You carry that weight. When they're happy, it lifts you up, even out of a difficult and dark day.

It's at the point where it's almost like you can't be happy when your friend is in deep, deep pain. Proverbs 25 says, You might have that person in your life who doesn't read your emotions very well, who doesn't have the awareness or doesn't care enough and just rubs their good days in on your bad days.

[15 : 39] Just celebrates their wins regardless of what pain you might be walking through. That's not how friendship works. That's not good friendship.

Friends carry your emotional weight like it's theirs. Now, and this is important. This is why it's actually hard to have a lot of friends.

It's good to have lots of people that we are friendly with, that we know, that we see regularly. But this kind of friendship takes a real commitment and investment.

And it would be unwise to take on a whole bunch of these friendships because you would drown in carrying the struggles of all the people that you had committed to. It's actually good and right and okay and wise.

to have a few rich, deep, connected friendships, which I think for a lot of us is more than we have right now.

[16 : 42] A lot of us might not even feel like we have the one person who fits this bill. Friends are constant and friends are careful.

And because of that, friends can be candid as well. There's a temptation in relationships to only ever affirm the person that we're in a relationship with.

We have this fear that, you know, being harsh or being too direct might somehow push them away. But I'm assuming that if you have any friends at all, at least some of them annoy you some of the time.

They have at least some annoying habits. They have at least something that they do that you just despise and it irritates you. Maybe, you know, it could be anything from insisting on speeding whenever they drive and making you feel unsafe in the car with them.

It could be gossiping about somebody who is not their friend but you care about. I don't know what it is, but we're all imperfect people and we all have annoying habits and there's a good chance that those you call friends irritate you sometimes.

[17 : 46] The question is, have you had the uncomfortable conversation with them about it? Have you said, I don't like it when you do this? Or if it's something illegal like speeding, it's probably not a great idea for you either.

And don't get me wrong, this is uncomfortable. I'm not saying if you're friends, you should just be able to do this and it's easy and it's happy and everyone smiles while you tell them that there's something bad about their personality. It's like Ali was sharing earlier, you know, when you get that harsh word of criticism or feedback, it can be painful.

But it's that sort of constructive honesty that friends give. Proverbs 29 tells us that those who flatter their neighbours are spreading nets for their feet.

I don't know if you guys have been watching the beginning of X Factor that's just started again. I watched the encore on last night and it amazes me every year. It shouldn't because it always happens, but it amazes me every year some of the people who get up and can't sing but have been deluded by unhelpful friends who have told them that they can sing all the way to the point of being ridiculed on national television.

These people walk onto a stage in front of a huge room full of people, let alone thousands and thousands of people in their homes watching and as soon as they start, you know that this has got to be some sort of joke.

[19 : 09] You just assume this is a prank. Someone's put them up to it. But then, you know, the judges are giggling but you see at the end, they're upset. They genuinely believed they were an amazing singer and the reason is because when they walk off the stage, there's family and there's friends.

Now the judges don't know what they're talking about. You don't give up your dream. You're going to be a famous singer. No, you're not. You cannot sing. That doesn't make you a bad person. Not everyone can sing. It's okay.

Just tell them. It's not loving. It's not good. You're not helping them. You're setting them up for a fall. When we have friendships where all we do is just, you're great and just affirm even bad things in those that we care about, we actually set them up for a fall.

We set them, a trap for them. In chapter 27, we hear that wounds from a friend can be trusted but it's the enemy who multiplies kisses. If all you do is flatter your friend, you are not a friend.

Now they are wounds. The truth spoken even in love can wound but that's part of being a good friend. That's part of desiring what's best for your friend rather than just what's easiest and most comfortable for you.

[20 : 27] There's truth in the line that Oscar Wilde said, a true friend stabs you in the front. We might struggle to speak the truth when it needs to be spoken but equally, we might not be the friends who've earned permission to speak the truth in the first place.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted but part of what makes them trustworthy is that you're the friend, is that you have the careful, the constant relationship, that you are connected enough to not just speak into somebody's personal space but to actually open up and share your own as well.

To actually be vulnerable and candid and share your weaknesses and your fears and your failures because it's much safer to be challenged by somebody who you know struggles just like you.

It's much easier to hear rebuke and correction from somebody who you know is walking the same road with you rather than somebody who's sitting in the grandstand and hasn't actually let you know and they're just pointing into your life.

Just love to let you know where you're failing and where you're weak. Friendship needs to be open and honest and vulnerable because from that place it's safe to be candid.

[21 : 44] It's safe to speak the truth in love. Friends are candid. Friends are constant. Friends are careful. And lastly friends give counsel.

Last week in Roxy's Kids Talk we were reminded that bad company corrupts good character. That for good or for ill your friends are influencing who you are. You're becoming progressively like them caring about what they care about doing what they do.

And Proverbs encourages us because of that fact to choose our friends wisely. Remembering that there's an end game. Jimmy read out for us chapter 27 verse 17 as iron sharpens iron so one person sharpens another.

The point of relationship is to be sharpened. It's to move forward. It's not just to sit there roughly the same doing the same stuff. But the question is what kind of friends do we need if we're going to get sharpened?

What kind of friends do we need if we're going to grow if we're going to move forward? Who has the capacity to give the good counsel? Well when we're choosing friends I think we need two things.

[22 : 54] And just to clarify I've already said you can't make friends you can only discover them but when you're figuring out which ones to invest in having discovered some foundation you need two things. You need both affinity and you need friction.

Now the affinity is going to take care of itself. I mean we only ever begin friendships with people who are like us in some way. From the same background they're into the same hobby whatever it is we gravitate to the same people and that's good and right but what about friction?

Now the image of iron sharpening iron implies friction. That's how sharpening happens. It's almost like the image of God refining us in fire like gold. There's a bit of pain in there that you can hear but it's good pain.

It's pain for an outcome and now the friction is not the same as opposition. It's not wise to go and pick friends who hate you and who want to cause you trouble and pain.

That's not what I mean by friction. You do need friends who as well as being like you in some way are also different to you in some way.

[24 : 00] I have a friend in Singapore named Roger. I've done ministry with him on and off over the last eight years. We both love Jesus. We both are pastors and that's about where the similarities end.

Roger's from a different country. He's got different cultural heritage. He speaks different languages. We don't like the same sports or music. We have different philosophies even of how to do ministry as pastors and yet often after spending a couple of days with Roger I come home really refreshed because what he does is he speaks fresh perspective into my life.

He looks at my life without all the blind spots that I've built up. Without the blind spots that people who are just like me will also have when they're looking at my life. He looks at my life and gives me wise counsel and advice.

He challenges my assumption and it's our difference that actually makes our friendship strong. Now this totally works against everything that is built into the way you have learnt to do friendship in your life.

Basically from birth you are herded into like groups. When you're a baby you're put in a bubs group with kids that are born in the same month. Like we start really early on.

[25 : 21] You go to school and you are limited to people in the same age as you and generally you'll sit on tables with kids of the same gender as you because you don't want to mix too early on until you know what you're doing.

You grow up and then as an adult you get a job with people who like doing the same job as you and you do hobbies that are exclusive hobbies that by definition attract people like you because you both like the same thing.

This is the wonder of the gospel. It totally ignores that and goes in the other direction. The gospel draws people together who are nothing alike and connects them for eternity because of Jesus.

Friendship is completely reimagined, reunderstood, redesigned because of what Jesus does in the cross. And so the challenge for us as followers of Jesus is to not only invest in the people here who also happen to be similar to us.

The key connection point is Jesus. If you are following Jesus, if you're a Christian, you are already eternally connected to every other person in this room who is also following Jesus as an inner Christian which means you have the foundation for a friendship.

[26 : 39] Consider that discovery and it means that you can invest in anyone who fits that bill here and there is the potential for friendship but the trap we've got to be careful of is we go, fantastic, here's a room full of potential friends because of Jesus, now let me find the ones who also like the same music as me, happen to be in the same life stages as me, happen to speak the same language as me, we take the Jesus bit and go, yeah but you know it would be really helpful if they were already just like me.

But what if God has designed a friendship that will bless you incredibly with the not obvious person in this room? What if God has put together somebody who is nothing like you so that by building a friendship you could gather incredible wisdom that you would never discover if you're just surrounded by people who echo exactly what you think?

There could be rich friendship on offer in this community with somebody who is no one like you but eternally connected to you at the same time.

Proverbs paints a pretty incredible picture of friendship. friends that would be constant, friends that would be careful, friends that would be vulnerable with us and candid with us and speak the truth, friends that would give counsel but I wonder how that picture makes you feel.

Does it make you grieve the fact that those aren't your friends? Does it make you grieve the fact that actually as you look around maybe you don't have anybody that even fits the category friend?

[28 : 22] Lots of people you know, people you spend time with but nobody who fits into this kind of deep connection. Or do you look at this picture and feel insecure and inadequate in your own friendships?

Like are you nervous sitting here because you think that the friends in the room are suddenly holding you up against this standard and you know you don't measure up? both of those responses are probably completely appropriate.

Your friends won't fit this bill. Even in their best attempts they won't be perfectly constant, careful, candid and neither will you.

But there is hope for friendship. friendship. Jesus offers us a friendship that fits this bill and more. Friendship is one of the words that is used to describe the way that God relates to those who follow him.

When Jesus forecasts his death in John 15 he says greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. Jesus calls friends those who follow him.

[29 : 32] Jesus chooses friends not because they're good friends, not because they're faithful friends, not because they fit those four characteristics. Romans tells us that while we're still sinners Christ died for us. Jesus chooses enemies and makes them friends.

Jesus sits on the receiving end of dodgy friendship and yet remains faithful and constant and careful and candid. And because he loves you at that point, because he's your friend at that point, he gives you security in his friendship to say that he is going to be there always.

If he is there while you are his enemy, there's nothing that's going to make him walk away. And so you can be secure. That deep, awkward, uncomfortable, painful, lonely feeling can be dealt with here, can be satisfied in Jesus because he says, I love you, I forgive you, I've drawn you into friendship with me and nothing can change that.

Jesus is the friend who knows us at our worst, knows our deepest secrets and yet remains constant in his love, his goodness, his patience, his graciousness, his rebuke and his discipline.

Now, loneliness is real and it hurts, but Jesus died so that you didn't have to be lonely.

[30 : 53] Jesus died so that you could have him with you always, even in your deep, dark failure moments.

And the reality is he's the only one who's constant and careful enough, who's candid enough to actually satisfy that longing that you feel. Now, it's not to say that our friendships with one another are unimportant, they have their place, but they can't stand up under the pressure of meeting that need that you have that drives you to seek friends.

If you expect your friendships to satisfy that longing, you will crush your friends with expectation. You'll crush them with a pressure that they can't stand up under.

Even if they try really hard, there will be a time when they're not there and you need them. Even if they try really hard, there will be a time where they totally miss some dark season that you're in and steamroll over it with the joy that they're experiencing in their life.

They're not trying to be harsh, but they're just not perfect. They're going to fall short. If we expect our friends to meet this need in us, we will crush them. And then we'll crush ourselves with the disappointment that comes.

[32 : 16] But Jesus will never fail. Jesus will never leave. Jesus will always love and in him there's hope for our friendships too. When we have him as foundation, when the longing for connection and love is already met because Jesus loves us constantly, then we get to release our friends from the pressure of having to meet that in us.

And suddenly we can enjoy and be blessed by their versions and their attempts of being constant. Even though it's not the perfect constancy we crave, we've already got that in Jesus.

And so suddenly a friendship that fell short a few moments ago can be rich and deep and satisfying because they're a fellow journeyer with us. They are equally in need of grace and forgiveness.

And because of Jesus we can give it. Because we're not alone anymore. Because we don't have to be driven by that fear anymore.

Jesus enables us to give forgiveness and find comfort even when friendships break down or end. When we have him as our constant friend, there's hope for our friendships here too.

[33 : 32] Now just before I finish, I want to say something about friendships with non-Christians. Where does that fit in all this? We've talked about Jesus being the foundation, the sufficient connection point for amazing friendships with people who are nothing like us, but we don't connect with non-Christians around Jesus.

We connect around a sport we love or music we enjoy or whatever else it is, and they're good things, they're valid. So where does this non-Christian friendship fit in here? Let me say two things.

Firstly, friendship is good. And so if you find a friend who is constant and careful and candid and gives you good counsel who doesn't know Jesus, then that's great.

If that friendship is beneficial in your life, that is good. And thank God for that. He gave it to you. But I would say that Christian friendship or spiritual friendship where Jesus is the basis of our connection has built into it the capacity to be better.

I'm not saying if you've had a friend since you were born who's a non-Christian that the Christian that you start developing a friendship with today is going to suddenly be on par. You know, time's a big factor in this.

[34 : 49] But my point is the capacity for this friendship to be amazing is far inferior to the capacity of this one. Because for those who are a Christian, God is what matters most.

God's glory is what matters most. Now I know we fail at that and we struggle at that, but that's what God is doing. He's growing our heart to love him more than anything else. For the non-Christian, I don't know what matters most.

It could be different for different people. But in a relationship between a Christian and a non-Christian, necessarily what matters most to you will be different.

And that means no matter how much other parts of your life that you share, a huge part of you will always be removed. from that friendship.

A huge part of you cannot be shaped and guided and encouraged in that friendship. It's not to say don't have non-Christian friends, but it is to say if you're a Christian, you need Christian friends.

[35 : 58] You need them. They're the ones who can shape and guide you. They're the ones who can encourage you. They're the ones who have the constant eternal context for a friendship that Jimmy talked about last week. They're God's gift to you.

All that brings us to the very final challenge. If we want these friendships, if we want friends who we're blessed by and who we can be a blessing to, but we don't have them, what do we do?

How do we move from here? Well, if you want friendship, you want intimacy, you want connection, wisdom and the Christian says, be a friend. Find someone else who's following Jesus.

That's the discovering a foundation bit. Hot tip, this room is full of them. Once you've found them, invest. Be constant.

Be careful. Be candid. Give counsel. Be honest. Be vulnerable. Speak the truth in love. Walk the Christian journey of failing and finding grace again. The ups and downs. Invest.

[37 : 06] Making friends is scary because we don't know if the investment is going to be matched or if we're going to try really hard and at the end still be lonely. But because of Jesus, we're released from that fear.

Even if we don't get the investment reciprocated, even if the end point is we don't have an amazing friendship with this person, the worst case scenario is you are eternally loved by the saviour of the world.

Worst case, you eternally have the best friend that there is. Can you see how the fear is kind of removed there? You don't have to feel lonely anymore.

It doesn't mean it won't be hard if a friend rejects you or if a friendship breaks down. But because of Jesus, you're released to be the one who takes the first step, who makes the first move, who takes the risk and invests.

Invest in a brother or sister in this room, outside of this room, someone who loves Jesus and see how God might bless you. Invest in someone who's nothing like you but who shares the most important thing in common and see how God might bless you.

[38 : 25] God will love you. Let's pray. Father God, we want to acknowledge that for many of us the pain of loneliness is something that we experience with a harsh reality each and every day.

We want to admit that often we are hurt by our imperfect friendships. Often we go looking for the loneliness to be met in places that are not you.

God, we want to thank you that in Jesus we have absolute confidence that you are constant, that your love is constant, that your grace is sufficient. Father, we pray in those dark moments that you would open our eyes to see all that you are, to be conscious of your presence with us and your goodness to us.

Father, we pray that you might fill us with the security in your love and in your friendship that we are able to be released to be good friends, released to invest and sacrifice and make the costly decisions to be a blessing to those that you place in our sphere.

God, I pray that if there are people in this room who right now would sit and say there's not a single person who I would call friend, God, I pray that you would open our eyes to see one another, to see the opportunities that are in front of us and to step out and be a friend.

[39 : 46] Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for his incredible love which surpasses any loss or inadequacy or need within us. God, so fill us that we might be a significant blessing on all we encounter.

Amen.