

The Friend

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! We're going to study this morning the friend.

So the Proverbs, the Proverbs in so many ways, it breaks out wonderfully into subjects. And so that's the way we're going to break it out because we might never get through if we went verse by verse. And so, so the subject, this, the subject of the friend, and that's what we're going to look at. So look with me there in Proverbs 18, verse 24. This is the Word of God. It says, a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

There may be no greater word in the English language than the word friend. I mean, you guys know this. There's nothing like finding a friend. And yet there's also nothing like wanting a friend, needing a friend.

[1 : 33] One of the best, worst days of life is the first day of school, first day of a new school, or maybe the first day of a new job. You know, there's that wonderful buzz of excitement about this new situation, this new endeavor, you know, hence the best part of it.

But there's that awkwardness of arriving and settling into your seat, looking around for someone to talk to, someone to be your friend. Just a couple weeks ago, I started a class at the Athens Chamber of Commerce.

And so I went to that first meeting and had that awkward feeling return to me, you know, like I was in grade school again and trying to find a seat, trying to find a friend, and kind of awkwardly starting a conversation with somebody.

Thankfully, I did find somebody, just in case you were wondering. But, you know, you know how it is when you're in that setting. Once everyone kind of gets settled, you begin to talk to somebody around you. And usually you find a friend.

C.S. Lewis says, every friendship starts with what? You two? I thought I was the only one. And, you know, that's the way it often starts. Maybe you begin and you find out the guy next to you is really into Harry Potter.

[2 : 41] Or the girl next to you in class is really into Junie B. Jones. Or maybe you find out he likes to golf or to run or to read Russian novels or guns or whatever. A friendship starts.

Maybe you find out she has a sense of humor or likes swimming or history or living farm to table or likes pushing essential oils on people, you know? I mean, the friendships start in the most wonderful little ways.

Whatever it is, it's something you share, right? It's something you stand by side and enjoy. And then you're kind of off. You're off to the races. And if you're lucky, it just keeps going on from there.

You know, what begins in something simple like a similar enjoyment of reading or something like that deepens into something more than that. It deepens into a friendship.

And there's nothing like it. You find someone you can relax with, hang with, be yourself around, whatever that means. You know, whether you're 13 or 35 or older, there's nothing like finding a friend.

[3 : 44] You know, one of my favorite things about the Protestant reformer Martin Luther, who in so many ways started what we celebrate this day, some of the theology that he helped uncover, is that he really loved friends.

After work and the writing was over in Wittenberg, Luther's home was filled with people. His table sat 50. I know we grow big families around here, but I mean 50 people.

And often they said his evenings were just a boisterous crowd of friends stretching long in the night, eating and laughing and carrying on. I just love that image of the Protestant reformer.

He was not a white cloth guy that stayed in the tower. He was a man of the people. Another one of my favorite images is of this guy, J. Gresham Machen. If you haven't heard of him, I can give you a speech about him.

I'm not going to do it now. But he just started a lot in the Presbyterian church in the 30s. And he tells this story. I'm reading a quote now. He said, I love the way he's just saying, I just love being there.

[5 : 17] It's my greatest delight to provide a room where that stuff goes on. But do you really need friends? You might think, I have a husband and a family.

I have things to do. I have mouths to feed. I don't have time for anybody else. To be quite honest, I'm fine with that. Or maybe you think, I'm around people all week at work.

I don't need anyone else around to watch the game with. I'm fine by myself. Do you really need friends? Do I really need friends? And honestly, I'd probably say no. I think you need family.

You need someone to look after you and feed you and clothe you and all that types of things. You need romance to some degree. You know, it's not good for you to be alone. One of God's greatest blessings that he gives most people is romantic love.

You need companions. You need someone to do nice things for and people to do nice things for you. But no, you don't really need friends, I guess. But even though you don't need them per se, if you know what the Bible and specifically the Proverbs says about them, you'll want them.

[6 : 36] You will want them. And you'll do whatever you can to find them and keep them. So where we're going in a word is find a few friends and work hard to keep it that way.

You know, find a few friends and work hard to be a friend to them. Find a few friends and work hard to be a friend to them. You know, we're just going to kind of look broadly throughout Proverbs and articulate the importance of friendship.

First is a friend is close. A friend is close. That's the verse I just read a few moments ago. A man of many companions comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. And this verse kind of uncovers one of the greatest blessings of friendship.

This proverb, you notice, is trying to cut a line between companions and friends. You know, companions on the one side and friends on the other side. The actual words are the same. For companion and friends, same word, but the meaning is very different in context.

One is a companion. That's a run-of-the-mill friend, a person you wave to at the restaurant or chat with in the checkout line. Not a bad person, just a companion.

[7 : 43] The other is a friend. They're more than a companion. They're someone who's close. Now, I could say they're a true friend or a good friend, but Proverbs assumes that a friend is a true friend and a good friend.

And so, all my points are not going to have that qualification because a friend, if he's a friend, he's good and true. And so, it's assumed that they're true and good. But the Proverbs teaches, this Proverbs teaches that there's a difference between a companion and a friend, and it becomes clear in trouble.

There are people. There are people. There are people that when trouble strikes. There are people that take two steps back in your life. Those are companions.

There are people, when trouble strikes, that they step forward in your life. Those are your friends. And now, we get to the nub of the matter.

There's a danger, then, in having many companions. There's a danger in having many people who know your name, who slap you on the back and call you friend. And you might think, wait, wait, wait, wait, isn't that what we want to be known to be?

[8 : 48] And cheers, where everyone knows your name. You know, they're always glad you came. And that shows a little old, so none of the kids know it. But, you know, the place where you feel at home. You let your hair down or something like that.

Well, the danger is not necessarily that many people call you friend. It's okay to have lots of friends. The danger is that you begin to believe, because you have many companions, you have many friends.

Does that make sense? The danger is not in having a lot of friends necessarily. The danger is that you begin to believe that because you have many companions, you have many friends.

You know, this danger has been around as long as the earth has been revolving around the sun. But perhaps more than any time in history, most of the people in our lives are companions, not friends.

Our lives are too rushed and frenetic. Like, we try to do too much, keep too many commitments, and leave too little time for friends.

[9 : 47] Many of us have moved away from home. I mean, as a national demographic, many have moved away from the home. They've changed jobs numerous times. So the work and friendships and the relationships, the web of relationships they were born into is the web of relationships.

They're not in any longer. And so we rely on the feeling of friendship we find in social media too much. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not a Facebook hater per se.

Facebook is incredible in how it connects you with all these people. You know, all my friends from high school, I don't even remember them. But they have found me. I've found them on Facebook. And it allows you to stay kind of connected to them, right?

Here's the problem. Facebook focuses on breadth, not depth. It focuses on quantity, not quality. It feeds us a lie that we can stay connected with many, but doesn't help us go deep with a few.

You know, Vaughn Roberts says it like this. In friending, that's what you do on Facebook, in case you're wondering, more is always better. But in friendships, it is quality, not quantity, that matters.

[10 : 51] More is not always better. Our Facebook profile might tell us that we have 464 friends, but how many really know us? How many are there on whom we can rely in times of need?

The proverb says that if you don't have someone who really knows you, if you don't have a friend, you're in danger. You know, sadly, you know, I think there's kind of this distinction between companion and friends.

We often kind of come into it unaware. You know, something, we're kind of just humming along with companions all around. People kind of slap us on the back. Everything's going well. Something happens. Maybe it's something hard happens in your life.

You know, you get in Iraq, you know, a death happens in the family, a tragedy and an unexpected loss. And suddenly you don't see your friends anymore. Or maybe it's even worse, something you do.

Maybe it's you're terminated because of your attitude or sins in your life. Maybe you drink too much. Maybe something is going on in you and then your companion all leave and leave you alone.

[11 : 56] Everyone disappears and you never see it coming. That's the tragedy of it. Right? I was in high school. You know, if you got busted, you went down alone. That's right. Because all the companions, they left you alone.

That was the way the games was played. But this morning, I'm forewarning you. If you fail to find a friend now, it's on you. Proverbs says, whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire.

He breaks out against all sound judgment. If you surround yourself with many companions, that's what Proverbs is saying. You're isolating yourself in your own choice.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, sin demands to have a man alone. It withdraws him from community, from friends. The more isolated a man is, the more destructive sin is. You get the point.

It's so dangerous to be surrounded by many companions because ultimately in the end, you'll be left alone. But there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

[13 : 01] What? Now, what does that mean? Right? Closer than a brother? Like, that's blood. Right? We care about that. Who's closer than a brother? Well, here's the idea. A brother is stuck with you.

That's what family is. It's this safety net that's stuck with you that you can fall back on when you really need it. But a friend is closer because he's different.

He's not stuck with you. He chooses to be with you. Now, that's incredible. He steps forward. He stands by your side.

He refuses to leave and proves himself to be closer than a brother. One of my favorite illustrations of this is Doc Holliday in his fight through pain to stand with his friend Wyatt Earp.

And Doc Holliday has tons of lines in the movie's Tombstone, which I'm not necessarily recommending to everybody. Doc is dying of tuberculosis. He's sweating with fever.

[14 : 02] He's coughing up blood. But he keeps fighting with his boys. After one battle and preparing for another, cleaning his guns for another, one of the gang says, Doc, what are you doing this for?

You should be at home. You should be in bed. Doc says, Wyatt Earp is my friend. The gang member comes back.

One of his buddies comes. Jeez, Doc, I got lots of friends. He said, I don't. That doesn't do anything for you.

I can't help you. You know, that's all I got. I mean, that's a friend. That's a friend. He steps in your mess. He pulls on the waiters, not because he has to, but because he wants to stand with you. Now, if you're married, your spouse should be that type of friend. Make it clear in the way you relate to your spouse that you're not halfway in. You're not weighing the options. You're not business partners in managing the home or teammates in raising the children, but that you're friends.

[15:13] But we need more than a spouse. There are things that's better for men to talk to men about. Same goes with women. One, we need a friend who's close. We need someone who sticks closer than a brother. Point two, we need a friend who's candid.

A friend is candid. A friend is not just close. They're not just in your corner. It's great to have people in your corner. But they may prove themselves to be a companion if they won't be candid with you. A friend sets himself apart by how candidly he speaks to you. You know, a friend, in a lot of ways, knows when to keep his mouth shut. Now, you know friends. I told you the first little story on the first day of school.

You're trying to find friends. You're trying to gain friends. You don't gain a friend overnight.

Friendships take years to build through tough times, but they splinter and fall apart with a whisper. What the Proverbs says, a dishonest man, 1628, spreads strife and a whisper separates close friends.

Now, this Proverbs tells us that close friends fall apart, and it's not a mystery. They fall apart when a friend whispers something negative that they should not.

[16:23] Now, it may be something true. It may be something false. But it's always something negative, spoken in hushed tones behind a friend's back.

Did you hear what she said to Susie? Did you know that he lost his job because of his unreliability, his unwillingness, and inability to arrive on time?

These comments spoken in hushed tones are the things that undo friendship. So what do we do when someone says something negative to us about our friend? Proverbs 17, 9 says, Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he repeats a matter, separates close friends.

One of the greatest gifts you can give your friends when they do something stupid or when they sin against you is to cover it. When they turn and ask for forgiveness, bury it.

Every friendship should have a graveyard where sins and stupidity go to be buried and never dug up. Never repeated. Love how vividly that's worded.

[17:35] Never repeated. Never re-spoken. And if it's something negative about your friend, the first thing you should do when you hear it is to cover it. Don't repeat it.

Don't, more importantly, don't let it pass into your heart. You don't know if it's true. One who stays this case first seems right until the other comes and disproves it. You should go to him privately and ask questions.

You remember the story about, it's a hard to pronounce name, Mephibosheth. I knew how to pronounce it, but I couldn't remember that moment. He was, you know, David had one incredibly close friend in scriptures.

You remember that? Jonathan. He said, Your love is extravagant, far exceeding the love of a woman. So, just this really rich friendship.

In so many ways, our culture doesn't really know how to understand him. Mephibosheth was Jonathan's crippled son. Remember that story in Samuel. So, Jonathan had his son. He's crippled. And David had a loyalty to his friend Jonathan and therefore felt a loyalty to his crippled son, who no doubt in that culture without the loyalty of somebody like that would have been destitute and in poverty.

[18:51] And David, after Jonathan died and David became king, he found Mephibosheth and said, You can always eat at my table. It's just an incredible scene of kindness.

It reminds us of what God has done for us in Christ. And so, he did each day. He ate with David. But when David was run out of town by Absalom, and we studied that throughout the summer, Mephibosheth didn't go with him.

Mephibosheth's servant went with him and Ziba, and he whispered about Mephibosheth. He said he didn't come because he's praising Absalom. He's aligning with Absalom. He's following Absalom. David knows he has to deal with it, but until he does, he keeps his mouth shut. And when he comes back to Jerusalem, comes back into power, he finds him and asks if it's true.

He doesn't just immediately kill him. He gives Mephibosheth a time to talk, a chance to talk, and he finds out Mephibosheth was lied to and was left alone.

[19 : 54] I just find that incredible. If we judge too quickly, we undo a friendship on the untruth.

That's a big deal. A friend, keeps his mouth shut, a friend knows when to speak up.

Proverbs 27, 5 and 6 says, The pain of a rebuke from a friend is better than the temporary joy of false love from a companion.

The pain of a rebuke from a friend is better than the fuzzy feeling of flattery. The idea is that many kiss and flatter and cheer us on while they mean to do us harm and plot against us behind our back. But a friend punches you in the face. Oscar Wilde said, A true friend stabs you in the front. That's a vivid image.

[21 : 04] Why? Because he's faithful. Because he really loves you. He doesn't blow smoke. He really wants to help. He sees something in your teeth, and he doesn't want you to look like an idiot by walking around wearing it there.

He's a true friend. He's really after what's best for you. Gordon McDonald says this very well. He says, There's a certain niceness to a friendship where I can be, as they say, myself.

But what I really need are relationships in which I will be encouraged to become better than myself. Myself needs to grow a little each day.

I don't want to be the myself I was yesterday. I want to be the myself that is developing each day to become more of a Christ-like person.

That's what I'm saying. Just someone in your corner that just lets you have your hair down, they may be your enemy. When it comes to growing and becoming more like Christ, a friend wants you to be better than you were.

[22 : 09] So much they're willing to clash with you. That's what it means by, in 27:17, iron sharpens iron. So one man sharpens one another. This clashing, a friend, or a true friend, is someone who's willing to clash with you.

And I'm not talking about someone who just criticizes all the time and never confesses. That is not a friend you should run from him. I'm talking about someone who from time to time says you blew it because he loves you.

Derek Kidner, in his little commentary, very underspoken. It's a very brief commentary. He says, a true friendship should have both elements, the reassuring and the bracing.

I love the way that's worded, you know. The reassuring, yeah man, good job, way to go. And the bracing, you know, because there is something to that.

If he really loves you, she really loves you, there's going to be a moment where you've got to suck it down and say, okay, what did you just say? You know, and you know, now a friend is not going to just walk up and stab you in the front.

[23 : 14] I mean, a friend, a true friend is a nice person. They're not going to do that. And so you've got to help them help you. No matter who you are, you've got to help them help you.

So don't ask, or don't say to them, ask me whatever you want. I'm an open book. You know, that is so unhelpful. Because the second we start asking about your tax return or something like that, you're like, hey, hey, hey, hey, I'm not that open, you know, or whatever.

And so don't say that. Say something like, I've been having trouble with eating out lately. I've been overspending my budget. When you see me next week, ask if I eat out this week. That's a great one.

I don't know if that applies to you. Maybe you need to confess that this morning. I don't care how much you eat out, actually. But if you care, if you're trying to keep a budget and keep something for your family, then that's what you should do.

Invite them into a detail like that. And when they ask, don't get angry. Because that really stinks. Because they're not going to come back if you get angry.

[24 : 16] Thirdly, a friend is constant. A friend is constant. A friend is not just close and candid. A friend is constant. And in the Proverbs, it says, some friends are fair weather.

And we know that. My wife accused me of being a fair weather fan yesterday. For obvious reasons. Because my heart was being broken. But I did submit and watch that game.

But, you know, fair weather friends are those that come out of the work when you're up high, riding high on the hog. And everything's going well. And they're like, yeah, let's hang out. But then when everything starts going poorly, they split.

And so the wealthy have lots of friends. That's a theme in Proverbs. The wealthy have lots of friends. Many seek the favor of a generous man. We have this for you. And everyone is a friend to him who gives gifts. Wealth brings many new friends.

But a poor man is deserted by his friend. Nobody has more friends than someone with money. Except maybe the one who has a truck. And they have lots of friends, too.

[25 : 15] Because everybody wants to have a friend that has a truck. But the point is, no one has more friends than someone who's needed. But when, from external circumstances, you have nothing to offer, other companions move on.

But a friend is constant. Now, we kind of said this earlier with it sticks closer to the brother, you know, or something like that. Loves at all times. But I think the point is, it's not just close, but he stays close.

He's constant. He sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 17, 17 says, A friend loves at all time, and a brother is born for adversity. A friend loves at all time.

A friend's not fair weather. A friend loves you when you're down or when you're up. A friend loves you when you're happy or when you're sad. A friend loves you when you've been acting the fool. A friend loves you when you're experiencing God's blessing.

A friend does not leave when everyone else does. That's actually why we say dogs are man's best friend.

[26 : 27] They don't leave. J.C. Ryle, this is just too great of a little story. He tells this story about his dog growing up, and he was moved away from his parents' house.

If you don't know anything about J.C. Ryle, he's in the 18th century, but he was a preacher in England. Incredible preacher. He said, Nothing, I think, touched me that morning so much as the face of my old mastiff Caesar, who was exceedingly fond of me.

If you ever had a dog, you can relate. I remember he looked at me as if he did not understand it and could not see why he might not go with me too. Poor dog. For a whole month afterwards, he made his way into the house every morning as soon as the doors were open and went up to my room. There he lay at the door from morning till night, and nothing would induce him to stir. When the sun went down in the evening and it became dusk, he used to get up, sniff at the bottom of the door, whine piteously, and walk down the stairs.

This he repeated every day for a month. At last, it affected the few people who were left in the house so much they couldn't stand it any longer. And he was given to my friend. This is when it gets sad.

[27 : 42] There he was not understood. He was treated as a dog and not as a friend. He became soured in temper, always chained up, and did not live very long. That was a little more sad than I thought it was going to be.

A friend is constant. Over the years, you know, I've actually found that the true friend is not the one I expected.

Or even sometimes the one I wanted. You know, I think this is kind of an area where we messed up when it comes to friends. We make a mental list of all the things we want in a friend, and the list drives us to chase the wrong people.

Really, the people who could make us look good. But the real friend is beside us all along. The one we quickly overlook because they're not hip enough or important enough or whatever.

But they're constant. That's actually the friend. That's who you want to build your relational world on, so to speak. Now, we should look around for a constant friend like this, but the Proverbs kind of turns it on us and says, Are you that type of friend?

[28 : 54] Are you constant? Proverbs 27.10 says, Don't forsake your friend or your father's friends, and don't go to your brother's house in a day of calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.

Don't forsake your friend or your father's friend. The emphasis shifts in this verse. Instead of describing what a constant friend looks like, it urges us to be a constant friend. Don't forsake your

friend or your father's friend.

That's what David was upholding in taking care of Mephibosheth. He didn't want to leave his friend hanging, so he took care of his son. Don't miss the big day.

Don't fail to come around when he fails. Be loyal. You know, some people go on and on about how they want to be a friend or they want to have some friends, but usually it's because they haven't learned to be a friend. That's what I think Scripture's begging.

Are you a friend? Are you constant? Do you reach out? Do you invite a friend over? If it's up to you, how many friends would you have? FDR famously said, right before we went into war with England, I mean with Germany, alongside England, he said the only way to have a friend is to be one.

[30 : 06] It's true. In so many ways. I think it wonderfully shifts it to where, you know, our focus is on being a friend, not on having one in so many ways. And suddenly I think you'll find that you've got lots.

It's just to be the way it works. I don't know about the addition of it, but that's the way it works.

Fourthly, a friend is Christ-centered. A friend is Christ-centered. A friend is close. A friend is candid. A friend is constant.

But most importantly, a friend is Christ-centered. A friend can be close, candid, and constant and still be rotten. You will see it in time.

A friend is aiming upwards. A friend is trying to grow. A friend is trying to change. A friend won't pull you down to be the same person you were before. They'll cheer you on, become a better person, become the person you're supposed to be.

I'll never forget on the last, well, I got saved in August of 2001. And I went back home for Christmas.

[31 : 06] I went to a party. And I was pretty, yeah, I smoked, well, yeah, I was into weed, marijuana, and drinking. And when I got saved, I went to this party.

It was all the old friends, right? And they're all doing this, you know? And that was kind of one of those moments I was kind of trying to fight hard to not smoke that night.

And I'll never forget one of my friends who I grew up with, who I went to church with for so much of my life. He came to me and said, hey, man, come outside. We're going to smoke. And I said, I don't smoke weed anymore.

And what he said haunts me to this day. He said, I wish I could do that. I wish I could stop.

You know, in some ways, he was actually a friend. He didn't pull on me anymore. Never again.

Took Kim to meet him after we got married. Sadly, he was a friend who never got out.

[32 : 08] I was trying to shake so many friends in that season. I realized he was a true friend because he wanted me to get out. There were so many friends saying, come back, man. What about the old days? Memory, loyalty, all that stuff.

So unhelpful. But that was helpful. That was life-giving. Even though he didn't know it. Never told him. But verse 27, 9 says, oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Oil and perfume in a dry, hot climate with no indoor plumbing were a welcome luxury.

That's right. I'm trying to say that so that the guys would realize that oil and perfume are a good thing.

Jesus, they washed his feet. Remember, they anointed his head with oil. That arid climate would do wonders to your skin. It brought a sense of, I think the idea there, it made the heart glad, you know? I don't know. I mean, it brought a sense of confidence and well-being, and things are going to look up, you know? They say that about a fire when you're back country camping. A fire just gives hope, you know? There's going to be a tomorrow, you know, whatever.

[33 : 19] You're out there in the great outdoors. It gives a sense of hope. So, too, the counsel of a friend. That's the parallel there. A friend who counsels you wisely, it makes you happy. It relieves you of anxieties.

It makes you a better person because it opens the way to wisdom for you. And so, it's sweet. It's wonderful.

The reverse is also true. The counsel of a companion or a fool destabilizes you. It brings you down. It turns you away from wisdom and sets you on the path to ruin.

That's why it's so crucial to choose your friends carefully. Now, people have said this. Introduce me to your friends, and I introduce you to your future. You can tell a lot about what's going on in

somebody's heart, what's going on in their life by the company they keep.

The scriptures say that very well. Whoever walks with a wife becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. I mean, just find the wise. That's wonderful. I mean, that's something all of us can do, you know?

[34 : 24] Find the wise, and you'll become wise. Don't be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals. Friends make you better, while supposed friends make you much, much worse.

Now, if you wouldn't let your child or your brother or your sister hang with a friend in your life right now, then why are you? Cut them off.

I don't see any other option biblically. Preach the gospel to them, but cut them off. They're going to rub off on you. I mean, that's what's going on.

Whoever walks with a wise comes wise. Who a companion of fools suffers harm. They rub off on you. They change the direction of your life. They make you different. They make you follow into folly. So find a friend who points you to Christ so that Christ can rub off on you.

Find a friend who's Christ-centered. A book I was recently reading tells the story of an author, Chame Poddock. It tells the story of hearing this author speak. And Chame grew up in a home.

[35 : 28] His mom lived there. He wanted to be a writer from a young age. And he set his heart on it. He pursued it. He said, I'm going to be an author. I'm going to be a novelist. Set his heart on it. Indeed, that's what he did. But when he went to college, his mom said, Chame, I know you want to be a writer, but I have a better idea.

Why don't you be a brain surgeon? You'll keep people from dying. You'll make a lot of money, you know? And he says, no, mom, I want to be a writer.

And that little scene just kept playing out. You know, every fall break, he'd come home, mom.

Chame, I got a plan for your life. You know, I want you to be a brain surgeon. That's where the money is.

You know, forget the writer thing. It's a dead end. You know, it's like being an artist. It's a dead end. You know, same thing after college. Same thing later in life. He just keeps saying this. He says, he just finally blew up on his mom.

She told him again, why don't you be a brain surgeon? You'll keep people from dying. He said, no, mama, I don't want to keep people from dying. I want to show them how to live. A true friend doesn't want to keep you from dying.

[36 : 35] They want you to die so that you can really live. You know, Peter came to our Lord. He said, you must not go to Jerusalem. You must not go.

You'll die there. You'll be killed. What did he say to him? Get behind me, Satan. You're not setting your mind on things of God, but on things of man. Then he turned to us and he said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

And for whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his soul? I think the idea, the way I'm trying to apply that story is there's a lot of friends who will try to keep you from dying.

They'll tell you to organize your life around your dreams and adventures. They'll tell you to plan all your vacations. They'll tell you to spend more time and attention on you, more money on you. But those are not the friends that'll help you live. They'll kill you. There are other friends that'll help you truly live. They won't ask you about what you want to do with your life.

[37 : 35] Now, I know you got to kind of ask that question, but get my point. They'll ask you what you should do. They'll push you down the road of the cross. They'll help you take up more responsibility so that you can lay it down for the cause of Christ.

They'll hold you accountable. They'll make you a better husband or a better father. That's a wonderful measure of a friend. If you come home ready to love your wife more, you may have found a friend. If you come home feeling like somebody is pulling you away, you found a companion because a friend's calling you to die.

So that you can live. So that you can call others to life in so many ways. Find those friends and you find life. You find life by dying in so many ways.

I want to call you to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I mean, that's what comes out in this passage.

There's a way of living life that tries to save your life. And that's the way that's a dead end and leads only to death. But if you're willing to admit it, you're willing to lay down your life, you're willing to say,

I blew it, I did it, you can come and actually begin to live because you can die with Jesus Christ. You can stand there with him, united to him in his death, burial, and resurrection so that you might walk in this newness of life where you're crucified with Christ. Therefore, you no longer live. [38 : 52] That's why you might need to say to some people in your life, get behind me, Satan. But Jesus Christ now lives in me.

The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Find a friend who doesn't want you to live, but wants you to die.

Now, there's some nuances I could throw on that, but I don't have time. My prayer is that we as a church would be those types of friends.

I can't be a friend to everybody in Athens, Tennessee, but I want to be your friend. I want to be your friend. I want you to be my friend.

Ask me anything you want. No. Just kidding, okay? Not because we both like the Vols or something.

[40 : 02] Not because we both like to eat good barbecue or, you know, like to have a fun time or like to hike or like to do this, run or something like that or backpack or something like that.

But because we share Jesus Christ, and we're pressing hard into him so that we might be found in him, not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law, but the righteousness that comes by faith in him.

So let's press on to him together. Father in heaven, we thank you for these few minutes to sit under your word. We thank you for your word. Lord, we praise you for this.

Lord, we thank you. In so many ways, Lord, we want to give you thanks. You have placed friends in our life, and we give you thanks. Lord, I pray, God, that our hearts would well up with gratefulness for a friend that you've placed in our life.

Lord, I pray for anyone that needs to cut off a friend that is not healthy. Give us wisdom and grace, but give us decisiveness as we seek to pursue hard after you and those friends that help us to do that.

[41 : 13] Lord, we thank you and praise you that there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, and that friend's Jesus Christ. He's taken up all our sins and all our sorrows and carried them on his own, suffered alone, that he might be the friend who never leaves.

We give you thanks and praise. In Jesus' name, amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander. Lead Pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, Thank you.