



## **Pastoral Friendship** **By Dave Kiehn**

Do you have friends? It is a simple question but often a hard one for pastors to answer. It is not hard because we do not know the answer—It is hard because we don't want to admit it. I recently stood in a room of pastors and asked that simple question, "Do you have friends?" Only half raised their hands. On March 2nd, 2019, comedian John Mulvaney started his opening monologue on SNL with this quip: *"It's hard to make friends when you're an adult. I think that's the greatest miracle of Jesus. He has 12 best friends in his thirties, and they weren't his wife's best friends' husbands."*

It is hard to make friends when you're an adult and it's especially hard to make friends when you're a pastor. It may be hard, but we need friends. JC Ryle wrote,

A friend is one of the greatest blessings on earth. Tell me not of money: affection is better than gold; sympathy is better than lands. He is the poor man who has no friends. This world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place. It is a lonely place. It is a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend. Friendship halves our troubles and doubles our joys. A real friend is scarce and rare. There are many who will eat, and drink, and laugh with us in the sunshine of prosperity. There are few who will stand by us in the days of darkness,—few who will love us when we are sick, helpless, and poor,—few, above all, who will care for our souls.<sup>1</sup>

On July 1, 2012 I preached my first sermon at Park Baptist Church as the Senior Pastor. Coach Pic, my mentor and friend, drove twelve hours from

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, Practical Religion (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2013), 317.

Chicago to sit in the pew and encourage me. Friendship halves our troubles and *doubles our joys*.

I started my PhD in October 2014 and I defended and passed my dissertation in October 2021. I walked out of the building and told my wife—my best friend—that I finally finished the seven year journey. I wept with joy and relief. Friendship halves our troubles and *doubles our joys*.

Someone came to me with a credible allegation of child abuse against one of our elders. I stood before my church family and told them the tragic news. The next day, I sat before a friend who lived two hours away and came to have lunch with me. *Friendship halves our troubles* and doubles our joys.

I believe friendship is one of the greatest blessings and gifts God gives us on earth. It truly halves our troubles. It makes them bearable. It does not make them seem so hard. It also truly doubles our joys. It makes good days, great days.

My prayer is for you to see friendship as one of the greatest blessings in life and to pursue it as one of your greatest needs as a pastor. Friendship will help you sustain the ups and downs of ministry. It will indeed halve your troubles and double your joys as a pastor, but it will bless your soul. Jesus came to give life and life more abundantly. Biblical friendship helps us experience life more abundantly.

## **The Foundation of Friendship**

I want to ground the conversation about friendship in the cosmic story of redemption. Tim Keller writes, “The entire history of redemption—in a sense—is a giant, cosmic act of friendship.” Brothers, if you are in Christ, you are friends with God. Jesus communicated his friendship to his disciples:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you

friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:12-17).

The foundation of friendship is love. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Jesus Christ laid down his life for his friends. Brothers, we can be good friends because we have become friends with God. He did not forsake us, but died for us. You do not have to fear losing him because he is your friend. Jesus is the foundation of all true, biblical friendships. And all friendships are meant to point us beyond ourselves to our greatest and best friend, Jesus Christ.

True friends will help you love Jesus as your truest friend and Jesus will help you be a true friend, which will help you point your friends to Jesus as their truest friend. This is the circle we want in our friendship.

### **The Characteristics of Friendship**

Do you have friends? To answer that question, it would be wise for us to know what a friend is. We use 'friend' for many people who are more like acquaintances. In *Made for Friendship*, Drew Hunter provides this definition of friendship: "Friendship is an affectionate bond forged between two people as they journey through life with openness and trust."<sup>2</sup> Here are some essential ingredients that make up true friendship.

### **Mutual Love and Affection**

Jesus begins his brief teaching on friendship with, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." Friendship must be built on a mutual love for one another.

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<sup>2</sup> Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship: The Relationship that Halves our Sorrows and Doubles our Joys*. Wheaton, Crossway, 2018, 80.

### ***Transparency and Vulnerability***

Real friends must be honest with each other. Jesus said “I no longer call you servants, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” Jesus revealed himself to his friends. Brothers, if you want true friendship, you have to reveal yourself to others.

### ***Candor***

A true friend speaks the truth even when it hurts. Thomas Goodwin writes, “Simplicity and plain-heartedness is the truest and rarest jewel in friendship.<sup>3</sup>”

### ***Empathy***

A true friend knows how to meet their friend's emotional needs in an appropriate way. Proverbs 25:20, “Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.”

### ***Loyalty and Trust***

Friendship is built on trust. You know this if you have ever had your trust broken or if you have ever broken someone's trust. It cracks the foundation of friendship.

### ***The Challenges of Friendship as a Pastor***

There are many challenges to friendship. Satan hates friendship and deep community. He hates friendship because he hates God and God is God of friendship. The worldly system is set up against friendship. If friendship is one of the greatest blessings on earth, of course the world will be set against friendship.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol 7 (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 220.

### ***Busyness***

Our fast paced culture makes it challenging to find time for friends. There will be unique time constraints in every season. As pastors we are often overlooked as potential friends because of our perceived busyness. And sometimes as Drew Hunter notes, “Every time you or I tell a would-be deep friend that life is busy, we’re really saying that we’re too full for friendship.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Technology***

Technology often robs us of deep friendship. We too often ignore the person in front of us because of the beeps and buzzes coming from our phone. We are satisfied with digital communication rather than fighting for deep communion.

### ***Mobility***

Friends move away. People we love and are deeply rooted to leave and it is hard to maintain deep community over distance and the work required to rebuild deep community is often overwhelming.

### ***Insecurity and Fear.***

We are too often wise in our own eyes. We are afraid of being transparent with our struggles because we are afraid of what others may think of us. We are insecure in where we are at in our ministries and we do not want to admit our church is not as strong as we want it to be. I believe this is uniquely true for pastors. We are afraid to be honest with other elders or church members because of what they may think of us.

### ***Laziness***

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<sup>4</sup> Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship*, 31. Busyness, Mobility, and Technology are all laid out in Hunter’s book as reasons friendship in the modern world are challenging.

We are just lazy. We do not make the effort for friends because we would rather watch Netflix or the ball game or read about theology. We don't have friends because we don't try to have friends.

### ***Tired and fainthearted***

We may have been hurt by previous friends. We may be discouraged and weary in ministry. We may have moved from 'we get to do ministry' to 'we have to do ministry.'

### ***Self-centeredness***

When we meet with other pastors or friends, we only talk about ourselves. We don't have friends because we are so focused on ourselves. This is a product of our individual first age that we must be away.

There are a number of other challenges for pastors to make friends, but in the end, they are excuses. Pastoral ministry is hard, but we don't always have to talk about how hard it is. It is hard for adult men to make friends. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what are your challenges for friendship and fight against them.

### **The Charge of Friendship**

Do you have friends? Are you a good friend? Pastor make friendship a priority.

### ***Make time for your Friends***

Friendships need time if they are going to grow. Build time into your schedule to be with friends. Invite your friends to do ministry. Men typically enjoy more shoulder to shoulder time with each other over face to face. Invite

them to do a project with you at the house. Eat together. Friendship takes intentional time together.

### ***Give your mind to your Friends***

It is not enough merely to be together. You must take advantage of your time together. Think about questions to ask before you gather. Ask about their family and their souls. Work to get to the heart. One of the ways I have built and maintained friendship over the years is when the Lord brings someone to mind is to send them a quick text or give them a quick call and tell them something I am encouraged by them. Encouragement is one of the most powerful tools to develop a deep heart to heart connection.

### ***Model friendship for your people***

Most men in their 40s have very few close friends. Most pastors have very few close friends. We cannot be best friends with everyone but we are called to be examples to the flock. Jesus no longer calls us servants, he now calls us friends. Pastor, take your eyes off yourself. Love people. You need friends. Your people need friends. So be a good friend and model what a good friend is to your congregation. Model how friendship is one of the greatest blessings in all of life.

### ***Be a friend with Jesus***

The greatest friendship in the world is one we cultivate with Jesus Christ. Jesus wants to be your friend. He wants you to share your heart with him. He wants you to spend time with him. The Creator of the universe wants to be your friend. He wants to be with you. He is a friend that sticks closer than a brother; the friend that loves at all times.

Pastor, you are not alone. Jesus is with you. He has given us the true picture of friendship. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. This is the kind of friend we have in Jesus and the friend God is calling us to be.

Our friends are God's gift to us. They are tools to help us become wise; to become like Jesus Christ. Our friends have been chosen for us by God. God has given you friends to make you wise. Cultivate them. Be a true friend by walking the Truest Friend, Jesus Christ. Friendship halves our troubles and doubles our joys. Jesus has shown us true friendship, now let us go and do likewise.