

## II. Wisdom for Relationships: Parenting, Friendship, and Marriage “Deep Friendship”

Proverbs 17:17, 18:24, Ecclesiastes 4:7-12, John 15:13-15

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So today's a day to talk about friendship. I'm going to start with Ecclesiastes chapter four, verses 9 to 12, which is the kind of the burst of what the Bible has to say. Then we'll turn to what Jesus says in John 15, describing himself as our friend. And then I'm going to read a few verses from Psalm 27.

This is God's Word from three places. Ecclesiastes.

*These first two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can get him up or help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up, also have to lie down. Together they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? The one maybe overpowered two can defend themselves in a court of three strands is not easily broken.*

And then Jesus describes himself as our friend in John 15.

*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends. If you do what I command, 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.*

And then from Proverbs 27 a string of teachings about relationships and wisdom in them.

*First, say better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses, the flattery of an enemy. Verse nine. Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness or the could be translated. The pleasant aroma of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Do not forsake your friend or your father's friend, that is to say, a multi-generational friend. And do not go to your brother's house in the day of calamity. Better is a neighbor friendly neighbor who is near, then a brother who is far away.*

Let's pray together, Lord, your word has so much to say about companions and friendship and true friends and false friends. And Lord, you are the friend of Israel and the friend of the church. And I pray that together we might hear what you have to say to us about your friendship with us and what it means to be a true friend to each other and also to you. Grant us wisdom and grace by your word. We pray. In Jesus name, Amen.

So friendship is our theme. We'll talk about what a friend is for a couple of minutes first.

So a number of years ago, when I had a young children, we had just moved to Saint Louis and my youngest child had a very strange accident, which I will not describe to you because it involves a lot of blood and unpleasant things. But she had to go to the hospital right away. She had to be operated on immediately. She's fine. No lasting effects of any kind. But we were new to the city, and we told one friend that our daughter was going in for surgery now, and that one friend called a few other friends.

Just the right number, if I may say so, to keep us company without making us overwhelmed. Some sat with us quietly. Another couple came and their children were a little older than ours, and they shared when something similar to happen to them, and they left, and somebody else came with some food because they thought, maybe we don't want to step away and miss a report from the physician. It was it was perfect. It was perfect, in part because we lived about 800 miles from our family, and they weren't going to come because the surgery was happening. You know, half an hour after the action occurred, there was no way a family could come. Now, of course, some people do have family nearby. This is a family ish city, I think. But sometimes family is close and sometimes it isn't. And when your family is not close to you, then you need friends to play the role of family. As some of the proverbs we just read said to us, there is a friend who loves at all times says Proverbs 17, and a brother is born for adversity. So we need brothers and we need friends.

The good life has both brothers and friends. And then Proverbs 18:24 says, A man of many companions, friendly ish people may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So we're thankful for family. We're also thankful for friends. Friends make life better. I don't know about you, but maybe your friends have some nice traits. Maybe they're athletic and esthetic and iconoclastic and energetic. And you like to hang around with people like yourself, and they make life feel better because you're esthetic and athletic and energetic and whatever. That other word I used was, we like people like ourselves, warms life up a little bit. Let's not just talk about human friends. We could talk about God as our friend just as well, because Jesus calls himself a friend of sinners and a friend to his disciples. And God is a friend of Abraham and a friend of Moses and a friend of Israel. So we need to have that in mind. Now, when the Bible talks about friendship, because it's deeply aware of the problem of sin. It talks more than I expected, actually, when I prepared the sermon about false friends or mere companions the Hebrew word for there are two words for friend. One is someone who loves you and the other's just is a word for a neighbor or a companion or a friend. Depends on the context and by using the same word for good and bad friends, it reminds us that not all friends are equal. In fact, there are quite a few statements about false friends in the Bible. We need to hear that as well. We also have to reckon with the fact that the church doesn't spend enough time or attention on friendship. In my opinion, that's two reasons for that. One is that we're so intent on discipleship and that's superior to inferior, that we don't think enough about peers. And then, on the other hand, we want to talk about fellowship and everybody loves everybody. But friendship is I love a few people. So the church is a little bit uneasy with friendship because it could become a click right? Maybe the biggest reason why we don't talk about friendship is because the love of friendship, which in the New Testament is called philia, seems clearly inferior to the love of God, which is called agape, which is love of sinner, love of enemy, love of a neighbor.

Just because he's the neighbor to a friend is somebody that you know and you want to stick close to them because you favor them. And God's love isn't like that. Let me give you a couple of contrasts. Agape is indiscriminate, but friendship philia discriminates, says, you're my friend and you're not. And agape, it goes to everyone who crosses your path.

And philia describes people who make sure their paths cross. Hey, when are we going to get together? And agape is inclusive and friends are exclusive to say to one person, you're my dear friend, is to say to somebody else implicitly, you're not. That's why the church is uncomfortable with it. And of course, God's love is the model and the source of agape and human attraction to people kind of like us is the model and source of philia.

So, so friendship seems inferior. And the truth of the matter is, the love of friendship is inferior to God's love. And it's probably somewhat inferior to the loving, a good and healthy family. Because families last for generations and friendships. Even if you say somebody's BFF, which by the way, means best friends forever, we kind of forget that BFF. Actually, a lot of BFFs are more like 7 to 10 years than forever. Unless you're with the Lord forever. So friendship is a little bit, inferior, less weighty. But the Bible does commend it. And there are reasons why you pay attention to it. For example, that, you know, the pencil you read that, somewhere between 33 and 40% of all adults aged 18 or 20, depending who's doing the survey. So 33 to 40% of all adults are single. That includes people who've never married and includes people who are divorced, includes people who are widowed. So where are you going to turn? The answer is you turn to your friends. You need friends if you're divorced or widowed or never married. So we need to hear what the Bible says. We need to be friends. Now, when you look at the experience of friendship and also the Bible, friendship has, a couple traits that are very godlike. But there's also what people sometimes call a third thing, that is to say, some trait that brings people together. Jesus said, you're my friends. If you do what I command, that is to say, Jesus' friends have this thing they share. And that is a desire to live God's way and to make a difference in the world for the kingdom of God. That's what believers share. But unbelievers have a third thing, too a man named Frederick Buechner, who's a pastor who, wrote a variety of wonderful books, a few years ago, said my first friend was a lot like me. We were both 12, and we had both lost our father already. We were both plump, unathletic, bespectacled, intelligent, and smart mouth enough that a lot of people didn't like us. And when I found my friend, I said, oh, there's more than one person like me in the world. That's how friendship feels sometimes. C.S. Lewis said, friendship begins when you meet someone who has an insight or a passion or an interest or a cause that not many people share in the open and comment with a friend is what you two? I thought I was the only one. We share a third thing. So basketball friends believe together that defense is more important than offense. Getting back on defense is the number one rule. And the second rule is if you get a rebound, look for an outlet pass. And the third rule is pass first, shoot second unless somebody is really hot and parenting friends believe things in common, they might believe something like, massive numbers of scheduled activities are bad for kids. We got to leave time and space for them to climb up in a tree and stare at bugs and wander off. I'm not quite sure where they are all the time. I know I just lost some friends by saying that, but I made some friends to.

Now, in the Bible, God is the archetype of friend. He's the source. He's the model of all friendship, and it's good to pay attention. Doesn't say a whole lot of times, but it does say that Abraham and Moses and Israel and Jesus 12 disciples are friends. Those are the four. We'll talk about three of them. So God's a friend of Abraham, and he shows two traits helpful presence and self-revelation. That's what friends do. They help each other. They're present to help. And they reveal their heart, their mind, their convictions to each other. That's what God does with Abraham. Abraham, as you know, was a man who wanted of a child, was promised a child and was not having a child. And then God helped him have a child. Even though he and Abraham were very old, God gave them a child, and he announced that the child was coming through the angel, Lord.

And as he said, I am coming through for you now. I've given you my covenants. I'm you're walking my ways. You're going to have a child. And then he said, shall I hide from Abraham? What I'm about to do and what God was about to do was bring judgment on those singularly wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. And he said, no, I'm going to tell him. I'm going to reveal myself that I'm a God of justice, and there's a level of iniquity that I cannot tolerate any longer. But then Abraham said, well, what if there are 50, 40, 30, 20, 10 people in that city? Will you still will you sweep away the righteous and the

unrighteous? And God revealed himself again and said, if there are ten, my mercy will spare the entire city. Ten could not be found. So God's a friend of Abraham by revealing himself and by helping. Same thing with Moses. Now Moses, as we know, was called by God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And that means then, that God helped Moses with manna falling down from heaven and part in the Red sea and various miracles. God helped Moses with his task, but he also revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 33:11, it says, the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. He said, this is, this is who I am. And Moses was pleased, but he also said, tell me more, reveal your glory to me.

And so the Lord said, I am the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God. So he said, this is who I am. That's what friends do. They reveal themselves not all at once, but they gradually reveal who they are to each other. And again, there's a third thing with Jesus. Jesus says, I have called you my friends, and you are my friends. If you do what I command, that is to say, if we're together in this mission to proclaim the kingdom of God in this world. Now talk more about Jesus as our friend at the end. But let's just remember a little bit. If you're a typical Briarwood person, you probably know your Bible pretty well. If you're not a typical Briarwood person, you don't know the Bible well we're so glad you're here today. In fact, if you've never opened a Bible in your life, we couldn't be happier that you're here. But if you're from Briarwood, you probably know the model friends that appear in the Bible. For example, there's Ruth and Naomi, and they were brought together by marriage. Ruth married Naomi's son, but the son died and they stayed together, both single. They stayed together, living their life, trusting, caring for each other. That's what friends do. And then another exemplary friendship is between David, who was anointed by God to become the king, taking the place of Saul. So Saul's the king. His line has been rejected by God. And David's going to be the next king. But Saul has a son named Jonathan who would be expected to be the next king. Until you would think that Jonathan David would be rivals, but not at all, because they both shot God's will and God's purposes. And Jonathan knew that David was to be the next king, and he was not. And he pledged his loyalty to David, in fact, saved David's life a couple of times because his father was inflamed by insane jealousy of David. They're true friends, helping each other pledged to each other.

These are model friendships. The Bible also describes friendships that aren't models. Now, there's a place in Proverbs - I think it's one of the one of the signal proverbs that set up many others that says this, and I quoted it to my children often when they were at home. It's Proverbs 13:20 – it says, *he who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers sorrow. He who walks with the wise grows wise. A companion of fools suffer sorrow.* So I would say to my children often and I say it to you. Choose your friends wisely. If your friends are fools, you are apt to be drawn into folly. And if your friends are wise, they're going to have a good influence on you.

The Bible talks about bad friends. We'll do that first, and then we'll talk about good friends. False friends. In Deuteronomy, it mentions a friend who invites you to turn away from the Lord. That's a false friend. The Bible warns about superficial friendships. It talks about talented people a number of places. It says, the pure, the gifted and well-spoken, attractive person is likely to have the king as his friend. It says, do you see? A man is skillful in his work. He will have the king for his friend. People are drawn to talent and they're drawn to money. The rich have many friends, Proverbs 14:20 says, but they will flee when he runs out of money. People are drawn to wealth and to skill, and they shun. They run away from poverty. It says in one place that a poor man calls out to his friends. But the interim answer is roughly, we know we don't want to have anything to do with you anymore. We're not your true friends. They

might as well shout. In fact, it says this *A man of many companions will come to ruin. But there's a friend sticks closer than a brother.* That's Proverbs 18:24. Men of many companions will come to ruin. Now the term companion, a man of many companions, means something like, a convivial fellow, a friendly guy, a man who always has a coke and a joke for you. Someone who is just fun to be around. It's your fishing buddy, your golfing buddy. Your hunting buddy, your mow the grass buddy, your gardening friend. They're just fun to be around, but they're going to disappear when things get rough. Don't count on them. Don't count on them because there's no substance there. On the other hand, there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. That's not to slander brothers, but as good as a brother is, they may be far off. And your friend may be more like you than your brother is. True friends are rare. Stay close to those good friends.

Proverbs in various places, especially chapter 19, warns about people that are that are superficial or reckless. They walk carelessly. They care nothing for the Lord. Early in chapter 19 it says, and then it says, wealth brings many friends. A poor man is deserted by his friend. Wealth brings many friends.

There was a baseball game in in Birmingham. Did you know that? Just what was it, Thursday or something? It was famous enough that my friends in Saint Louis said, hey, Dan, you go to the game. I said, the tickets were gone in 12 minutes several months ago. So no, I did not get to the game. And then it was kind of implied. So you mean you don't want to be friends yet? Well, I don't have any friends who are corporate sponsors who got gobbled up all the tickets right away. there's there's a kind of a friend. I mean, if you had tickets to the game, if you had four tickets or eight tickets to that game, you probably had a lot of friends all sudden. Hey, friend, I heard you have extra tickets, but when the tickets dry up, or the money goes away or the favors disappear, the patron, the person who's putting on the big meal suddenly doesn't have any friends, or not as many friends as they used to. Those people that hung out with you, they're your associates. They're not your friends. They were their equal opportunity party attenders. And if you're offering a party, they'll come. But if somebody else's offer a party, they'll go over there. So the Bible says people run away when a man becomes poor because they were never really friends at all.

Professionals. Notice this. I've read and heard a number of times that, you know, if your career begins to go the wrong direction, you're the friendly people and your field may go away. I've heard that baseball players in a slump will find that the rest of the team kind of wanders away from them, is it? There's some stench or some sticky substance that they'll catch if they get too close to the person or a musician that's, you know, popular in producing albums that are, that are listened to, not purchased anymore, but listen to on Spotify and, and then this next one is just not as good.

And everybody drifts away because that's the nature of a superficial friend. Proverbs 19: 6-7 says this: *many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. A poor man's friends hate him. How much more sorry his brothers hate him. How much more do his friends go far from him. He pursues them with words, but he cannot find them.* So it goes.

Now, of course, the cure for that is for us not to stop being generous, but for all of us to be generous in the proper way, in fact, Jesus commends the proper use of wealth to make friends. He says this in one place. He says, make friends for yourselves by using unrighteous money.

You say, why would Jesus say a thing like that? Well, he says a thing like that because it's true. Because you can make friends. If you use money, you think, well, that doesn't sound right. No, but it's true. Let's talk about peaches for a second. So we moved, you know, we moved here to Birmingham about 3 or 4 weeks ago and our neighborhood has some very nice people from Briarwood because every neighborhood has people from Briarwood and, and some people knocked on the door and said, here are some Alabama peaches. They were really good. They're my friends now. I want to be their friends forever. I want to, or at least until you tell me where you bought those peaches.

We can become friends by eating peaches and plums. And you don't buy a friend. But you can become a friend. You can end up in a conversation, and then it goes from there. And sometimes a benefactor, not the negative kind, but a benefactor who really plans things like maybe, giving a gift to a campus worker or giving a gift to a student who's about to run out of money, doesn't just give the gift.

They also inquire, they say, to the Christian workers trying to raise money, so I gave you some money, but how's it going? How can I pray for you? What are your obstacles? And you can become true friends that way, a mentor, maybe a peer. You can give somebody a book because they said something. You think, they'd like this book and they do like the book and they say, well, you know, I really like the book you gave me. I'll give you a book. It starts with a small gift, and it becomes a friendship. There is a godly way to give or use money or use your presence. There's an ungodly way and a godly way to be generous, and that might and might not lead to friendships. So we're talking now about the benefits of friendship and the passage that describes us most clearly as Ecclesiastes 4.

We're going to put the verses up in just a moment. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is what we'll read. And I'm going to use the ESV part of the time. And sometimes NIV, it's all going to be ESV up there. Don't worry about it. I'm just giving a slightly different translation at moments. But the first benefit of friendship is effective work together, effective work together.

This is what Ecclesiastes says:

*Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil.* Because, you know, there's some jobs you really can't accomplish by yourself. In fact, there are a lot of jobs. Can't start a company very well together, for example, or a nonprofit. You need a set of complementary or supplementary skills. Verse 8... *friends help each other in the hour of need.*

If one falls down, his friend can help him up. Pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. That's obvious. We all stumble. We all fall. We need friends to pick us up. That can be literal, or it can be a metaphorical spiritual number. Three friends comfort each other in the cold, dark nights of life, literally, again and metaphorically. If two lie down together, they keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? This was more potent in the days before HVAC systems and in Israel you know they warm places by fire, and if it's cold outside, it's probably cold inside. And a lot of people, like shepherds would sleep outside. And you stayed warm by sleeping close proximity to each other, literally.

But then it stands for physical and spiritual proximity. We stay warm when we're low. When life is going against us, then we keep each other warm. Finally, friends shield each other from life's blows - that's verse 12. It says this two can defend themselves in a court of three strands is not easily broken. Three people stand together can accomplish great things.

Now, what that means is that friends give and receive help. Remember I said friends show helpful presence. That's what God does. That's what we do. But you also have to be willing to receive help. And there are some people who like to give help and they don't like to receive help. They want to be strong. But of course, if we're if the gospel is shaping all of our life, we understand that there is a fundamental way in which everyone here needs help.

Now, that's partly because we're finite and partly because we're weak of mind and body, and we don't read the situation well. But it's also because we commit sins and we are prone to sin. Now, if you meditate on it just a little bit, you realize, not only do I commit sins, but I'm very likely, even if I'm the Lord's child, very likely to continue to fall into certain sins, then I know I'm someone who needs help. I need God's help first, but then I also need the help of others. So we give and receive help. Let me give you a concrete example. Some years ago I was talking to a man, a very successful surgeon, and, he was, let's say, one of the main surgeons in his small city. And people respected him a lot. And, and his relationship with his wife was kind of. Fading a little bit because they had a lot of kids and they were little, kind of little and made a lot of demands and noisy and loud and so forth. And he found himself staying at work. Longer than he should have. And his wife would say, why are you always home so late? Oh, I'm working, working, working. But he told me I'm also working and hanging around, to be honest with the people who admire me as a surgeon, because I'm an important person at the hospital and people laugh at my jokes, they want to hang around with me. And when I get home at night, my wife is always wearing that. Where have you been lately? Frown. Doesn't matter when I get there, I'm always there at the wrong time. My kids are noisy. They're hungry. It's just more pleasant to stay at the hospital. Who do you talk to about that? Well, obviously he talked to a pastor.

You want to talk to your wife about that? Yes, but after you've sorted it out with a friend who knocks you on the head a little bit and says, I get it, I get it. But this is a self-defeating approach to life. This is not the way forward in your marriage. I'm glad you're facing it, my friend, but you got to change.

You got to get home earlier. Now, the Bible talks about this when it says things like faithful are the wounds of a friend. Faithful the wounds of a friend. Bible says, don't listen to a flatterer, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. A friend utters a warning. A friend says things like, I love you too much to not tell you how dangerous your behavior is right now.

How, how false that path is that you're taking now, one person said. Keeping the truth yourself is kind of like winking at a girl in the dark. Doesn't do anybody any good. Doesn't help the winker. Doesn't help the winky.

If you have a word you need to say, you got to say it. It's hard to do five or 6 or 7 weeks ago, I'm not sure. We had a, gathering at my house in Saint Louis before my wife and I came down, and there were a lot of people there. And after the meal, some soccer broke out in our backyard, and there was a young man kicking a soccer ball with my grandson, Jonah, who's seven now. Jonah's very athletic. And, you know, he kind of plays above his, age level, we might say. And he's not a goalie when he plays. He's a midfielder or four, but he wants to be a goal. And so he's talked one of the young men and, trying to score on him. And the young man's trying to score and he's failing. Jonah's saving one ball after another. And the young man doesn't exactly like that. And so he starts kicking harder. And I notice this. And then he kicks one ball. It's a little high school's screaming over Jonah's head, and I'm about to say something. It's right over it. It's, you know, it's right over there. But dad is there. Jonah's dad is there, and he seems to be seeing what's going on is not saying anything about it. So I'm thinking, I don't want to be the

nebbish or Papa who says, hey, guys, I know dad's right there, but he doesn't care. For some reason. You got to stop kicking the ball so hard. And I kept it to myself and about, I don't know. A minute later, there's another shot on goal, and Jonah blocked it, but it was kicked really hard. Hard enough to sting his arm a lot and leave a bruise and leave a little boy in tears. And I thought I should have said something. I saw it, but I fell silent because I didn't want to interfere. I got to say faithful. The wounds of a friend. You got to speak up. You got to say the word. It's an act of love. It's not an act of hate to tell somebody I love you too much to be silent. And I had to repent. I had to ask Jonah, and I had to ask his dad, his mom, to forgive me for not saying the word. It needed to be said. No, I'm not advocating mumbling and grumbling and criticizing and complaining and tearing people down. I'm talking about the rebuke that's needed. So I read to you a little from, Proverbs 27, the sweetness or the pleasant aroma. It could be translated of a friend comes from his earnest counsel that I see the sweetness is not sugary sweet. It's the pleasantness of well scented oil or something along those lines.

I've experienced that in the positive in my life, and I have friends who moved away to another state, and we went to visit them. And this woman, so it's Robin and Carol and Carol is obviously the wife. And Carol and I both share similar allergies. And so we went to visit them. And Carol wants to tell me that she's found help for her allergies. And I need to listen to her because her allergy help is going to be my allergy help. And it's something about macro diets and eating large amounts of rice, chaff and in wheat husks. And I'm trying, you know, I don't know, I'm just trying to endure this counsel that which I don't believe in and never will believe in. and so she's talking and I'm trying to think, how do I get her to stop? I mean, I love her, but I want her to stop. And so I said, you know, Carol, I just don't think that oat husks and wheat tassels are going to come riding to the rescue for me. I'm glad it works for you. She looked at me. She said. I know what you're doing. It's what you always do when you hear something that you don't like and you don't want to come out and say it. And so you make a little joke like you always do, and your Jedi mind tricks are not going to work on me. You need to listen to me. It just might help you. And I thought, I mean, her eyes are blazing and I thought, now that's a friend. She's wrong. Rice husks are not going to save me from allergies, but she's a friend. Don't forsake your friend or your father's friend. That long term faithful friend who's been with your family or with you for a long period of time. Give thanks for that now, that rebuke that, willing to say something to a friend that might not be welcome initially is a mark of a true friend, and it also keeps us from the dangers of friendship.

C.S. Lewis said one of the problems with friendships is become a cadre of snobs, a little bit too self-assured, that you're doing things the right way and it can be a mutual admiration society. But when you add that biblical component of godly correction, then it's blessed indeed. That's a true friendship. Now, of course, the best friend of all is Jesus.

And I read to you earlier about Jesus, who says that he is with his friends and he helps us friends. He said, I lay down my life for my friends and Jesus. Of course that's the best help we could ever get. And Jesus, of course, was with his friends for three years, living life together, walking around, sleeping on the ground and all the rest.

Jesus was present with his friends and storms and trials, and he was giving them help. But he also says, we need a third thing. The third thing is, you're my friend if you do what I command. Which means that a real friend is not just someone who gives you presents. A real friend of Jesus is not someone who just has Jesus in their life in some vague sense, or someone who thinks maybe Jesus died for them and rose for them.



Something like that. A real friend is someone who actually is committed to Jesus' commands. Now I'm reading a book. I'm always reading a book. You probably are too, about the year 1776, which was a signal year in so many ways. One of the things that happened in 1776, it's an amazing number of things that happen is that David Hume died. Now, you may or may not. Who know who David Hume is? He was the first great openly atheistic philosopher. He was a scandal in Scottish and English society because he was a good man and a thoughtful man, and he tried to argue against miracles and against the resurrection. And in 1776 he was about to die. He did die.

And a man named James Boswell, who was a cultural Christian at the time, went to visit him and said, okay, you're about to die. surely now you're thinking about God and eternal life. And Hume said, nope, not at all. I'm going to die. And that's fine with me. And Boswell was shocked and outraged that Hume had no thought of eternal life, was perfectly happy to die and cease to exist.

Now, the problem is that Boswell's testimony, he wanted to tell him you had to believe in eternal life and ask God for eternal life. Boswell's testimony was impeded by his life. Boswell was an inveterate extreme gambler. He was fantastically egotistical and a stupendous philanderer who broke up dozens of marriages. And here he is, a man who says, I believe in God, who's whose testimony has no credibility whatsoever because he doesn't follow the commands.

So, of course, it was easy for David Hume to turn away from him. His culturally Christian friend. Now, of course, I'm not just talking about 1776, because throughout the world, not as much today as in times past, it's still very possible to be a cultural Christian and to say, I believe in God in some general sense, that he gives eternal life and he did important things, and I hate his teachings to some degree.

And I go to church once in a while, but I'm not actually a friend in all three senses. Right? Receiving helpful help from God, they might say, yeah, I do that. And but are they really present with the Lord? And do they follow his ways to be, we don't earn our salvation. We don't earn our status as friends of God, but a friend of the Lord loves his commands and his ways.

So I need to ask you if you call yourself or consider yourself a friend of God, are you really? Or are you maybe a cultural Christian? Now, if you're a cultural Christian, I'm always going to tell you I'm glad you're here. I am glad that you're here today. But if you know deep down that I'm not truly a friend of Jesus, this is your day to make it right, if you will. Or maybe this month, maybe you might want to think about it a little bit. Maybe pray about it, maybe talk to a Christian, a truly Christian friend, about this matter. You can be Jesus' friend. He could be your friend. You can, and most of you are. And I'm glad for that. But if you're not quite sure where you stand, let me say get sure this is your chance.

And if you're sure you're the Lord's friend, then make use of it. Noah's commands spend time in his presence. Receive his help. Commit yourself to his ways and be a friend to others. That's what the Lord wants. He's shown us how to be a friend. Let's be friends first of the Lord, then for each other. Let's pray.

I do pray for the friendships that we have here. Human friendships, couples and couples, singles and singles, widows and widows. Work friends. Sports friends make these friendships that are perhaps a little bit shallow. Go deeper if it's a good time for that. I do pray, Lord, above all, that we would be your friend, that we would know you, that we would be present with you, even as you would be present and are present with us. Your children. I do ask, Lord, that we would heed your commands and show that we're truly your friends, not just saying words. Jesus is my friend, but believing it, living it, receiving your

aid, and giving ourselves to your cause. Show us, Lord, one by one and as a community, how we can grow in these things, how we can be your friend and you can be ours, and how friendships can give us a deeper and richer life together.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.