# Still Standing//Message #7//Friends-R-Us//Proverbs 18:24; 17:10

Go ahead today and jump to the end of the sermon... at the end of today's message we are going to give you a chance, at all of our campuses, to join up into one of our small groups. **That's not the only application for today's message**, but it is one of the main ones.

I am going to show you today, from Proverbs, why friendship is so important, why it's so strategic in our lives for the purposes of God, and how you can have and be a good friend. Then, at the end, I'm going to direct you, at all of our campuses, to sign up for one of our small groups. That's not the only application of today's message, but it's one of the big ways we do friendship here.

You see, we believe that approximately 82.7% of what God wants to do in your life He does best in a small group, and that if your main experience with Christianity is hearing a weekly religious lecture and singing some God songs then you are only experiencing only a fraction of what God wants to do in your life. The heart of Christianity, and the heart of this church, is in our small groups—that's where all the best stuff happens.

Obviously, we have grown big... last weekend, we had nearly 4000 people on our campuses. You see, but at the same time we grow big, we want to grow small, and small groups is how that happens—it's how you know each other, how you discover your ministry gifts, and how you take off in your walk with God. Our goal is we want everyone in one. Right now, we have about 1/3 of you in one... which is a lot—well over 1000 people. But we want all of you in one, and today we're going to take a huge step in that direction.

Before I get into it, real quick, little preview of next week... I know next week is Labor Day, but you may not want to miss this: we're going to look at what Proverbs says about sex. (I'll go ahead and warn you... not the week to bring your grandma to visit our church... we're going to talk about sex, baby. As I have been studying, I was surprised to learn that Solomon saved his most sultry sexual images not for Song of Solomon but for Proverbs.) Hebrew Delight, baby.

Intro: When I was making my list of what I wanted to talk about from Proverbs I put friendship on it because it comes up so

much in Proverbs... but I was a little bit nervous because, honestly, it felt kind of lame to talk about friendship... felt like a "Mr. Rogers neighborhood" kind of sermon where we'd all "get in touch with our feelings" and "be vulnerable with each other" and close by hugging and holding hands and singing "friends are friends forever"... And I know that for some of you, that sounds appealing, but, for a lot of us, especially some of us guys, that sounds about as appealing as a proctology exam. So, that's going to be my first point:

### I. Friendships are very, very, important in the Bible

- Throughout Proverbs, Solomon talks about how essential friendship is for life.
- Proverbs 18:24: A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
   Sticks is the word "cleaves" in Hebrew. Gen 2.
- o **Proverbs 17:10** Do not forsake your own friend... nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a friend nearby than a brother far away.
- What's interesting in both of these passages is that Solomon is saying that *friendship is more valuable even than family*. See that? That's pretty remarkable when you consider how family-oriented Hebrew culture was. Family was everything to them.
- He's saying, Friendship will bring some things into your life that family can't bring. Some things that marriage will
  not really bring.
- Friendships, unlike family, come from mutual choice... you don't choose your family and they don't choose you—but you choose your friends and they choose you and that choice has to be mutual—otherwise it's awkward... ever have someone that chooses you for a friend that you don't choose back? Hey buddy... I didn't really choose you. Cable Guy.
- Friendships in Christ can, in some ways, can be deeper and more meaningful than family.
- Interesting: When you look at what Jesus' talked about with His disciples right before He died, it was friendship. (You'd think right before His death He'd be talking about what was important to Him).
- In His last prayer for them, John 17, Jesus said, "Father, let these disciples be one as we are one." In other words, one of the primary goals Jesus had in His death was to create a community of friends that, in some ways, would resemble the Trinity itself.
- You see, the doctrine of the Trinity—that God exists eternally as one being in 3 person—means that God has exited, eternally, as a community of friends.
- (This is one of the things that makes Christianity different from other religions: other religions teach that God created us because he was lonely and bored and needed a buddy... But the doctrine of the Trinity means, "No, God has dwelt in perfect friendship for all eternity... He created us not because He was lonely and needed us, but so He

- could to share His love with us.)
- So, when we experience friendship we are experiencing a dimension of God, and, on the flipside, to be isolated without friends is to be very unlike God and how He created us to be.
- In fact, you remember the first time "not good" is used is in the Bible? It's when God looks at man and says, "It is not good that man should be alone." So God made a little naked friend for him. Man and wife were the first community, the first little nudist colony. We had community with each other and with God. But then, because of our sin, we were cursed and went back to being alone... living primarily for ourselves and protecting our own little interests. Not good.
- o So, one of the primary goals of Jesus' work on the cross was restoration of the friendship we were supposed to have with each other and with God.
- I want you to catch this, and not miss it: The essence of Christian love is expressed in friendship.
- A lot of times we think "Christian love" and we think about giving money to little kids in Africa or whatever. But Christian love is best expressed, first, in loving our friends.
- o Jesus said, "By this will all men know you are my disciples, by your love for one another." This is the distinguishing characteristic of my people: they are great friends with each other.
- In the NT there are 58 "one another" commands... "love one another," "care for one another," "pray for one another," "encourage one another," "share with one another." Jesus died to create a community of friends who would do these things with one another. That's the vision of this church: not a huge audience, but a community of friends that do all 58 of these things with one another.
- And one other thing while I'm on a roll... Christian mission is essentially making friends of people on the outside! A lot of times I say "Christian mission" and you think of giving money to kids in Africa, or taking trips to serve soup to homeless people or build huts for Guatemalans and then rushing back to the hotel and Purelling our hands... think Jesus. His mission was to come to church and make us His friends.
- Some of us like to think of ourselves as involved in the mission of God, but we don't any non-believing friends. That IS the mission of God. To make friends with people who are far from God, whether those are people in Africa or across the hall.
- So, friendship is very important; it is at the heart of the Gospel. Before I move to the next point... we should note that friendship is not really valued much at all in our culture, at least not compared to things like romance and sex. Just do a computer search on friendship and compare it to what you get back on sex...on second thought, probably not a good idea to do a computer search on sex.
- Think about how much more movies, music, and magazines talk about sex and romance than they do friendship.

- o Or, celebrity news... No one cares 'who is friends with who' in Hollywood, but they care 'who is sleeping with who.' "What? Ben Affleck is friends with George Clooney?" Give them combined names like "Beorge."
- Here's why: sociologists for the last 30 years have talked about what they have called the commodification of relationships. A commodity is something that you buy and sell... when you do that, you enter into a relationship with the person called a "consumer-vendor relationship."
- That relationship is not based on your enjoyment to or commitment to each other, but on what you're getting out of the relationship. For example, if you have a local grocery store you really like to go to—you like the people, and they like you—great, you may even know their names, but if the quality of the food goes down or if the prices go up or you see rats running around in the store, then you quit going; because ultimately the relationship is just a means to an end of getting something... and if you're not getting that something, then you just walk away.
- o Sociologists have noted that for Americans, we have slipped the concept of commodity into somewhere it's never been before: our social relationships. I enter into a relationship because of something I need to get from you, and if I don't get it, then I walk—whether that's marriage or church or friendship. People are just a means to an end.
- o Well, the more that happens, the less we talk about friendship. Because real friends are not really a means to anything. They are the end. You know and enjoy them just for themselves.
- And, when that happens, we lose something important God has for our lives.
- About 50 years ago C. S. Lewis said this in The Four Loves, Because we don't really value friendship, friendship is the
  first relationship that is squeezed out of our lives. We continue family relationships, work relationships, but not
  friendships. Especially men. Over 30, no friends.
- Now, I want to show you why that is so detrimental...

### II. What makes friendships so important

*Friends form us:* Prov 13:20 says: "He who walks with wise men will be wise; but the friend of fools shall be destroyed." Not saying that God will destroy you, but that you will destroy yourself.

- Years ago I heard a guy say, 'if you want to see what your life will look like 5 years from now, look at the books you're
  reading and the people you are hanging around." This is what that verse is saying.
- Why do our friends have such an incredible power over what we become? Something sociologists call the power of
  the need for acceptance in our lives. We have this internal need to be accepted and it is so strong that it makes us,
  sometimes unconsciously, conform to the people around us.
- o I was watching one of those "punk video" shows where they play pranks on people... one of the greatest shows I'd

seen...but in one of these shows they filmed this unsuspecting guy as he gets onto an empty elevator. As it goes up, people get on one by one on different floors... but they all face the rear when they get on (they're in on it). Well, after the fifth person faced the rear, the original guy also faces the rear.

- o In another one, an unsuspecting guy walks into a doctor's office and one by one everybody in there does something strange. They get up and tear off a page from a calendar. The original man gets up and tears off a page as well.
- In the best one, everybody sits quietly for a while, then stand up and undress down to their underwear. Unbelievably, the guy who didn't know what was going on did it, too.
- One more: Years ago scientist were trying to decide why fish swam in schools. They had isolated the part of the brain that caused the fish to swim in schools so they took one of the fish and did a partial lobotomy on it. They put the fish back in the water. Sure enough, he could still swim but he swam all by himself and not in a school. Do you know what happened? The rest of the fish followed that fish. A BRAINLESS FISH leading the pack. I read that and I thought: that's an explanation for how fads start in high school: one guy turns his hat around sideways and for a while everybody's like "weirdo" and then one by one everyone does it because they want to be different like everybody else. Then somebody in France says, "The new cool thing is to put a safety pin through your nose." All right...Why not?
- The power of the need for acceptance over us. Now, you can do two things with that...
- You can say, "Don't be influenced by peer pressure, don't bend to your friends, you're your own decisions..." and that is certainly important.
- Or, and this is just as important, you can get new friends around yourself so that the natural, internal gravity pulling you to be like the people around you is going the right direction. This is what Proverbs is saying... "He who walks with wise men will be wise; but the friend of fools shall be destroyed."
- I've never seen a kid make a decision that it did not affect his friendships. I tell them... if you're serious, you'll change your friends.
- o But shouldn't we be friends with outsiders? Yes... but here is how that works:3 circles
- o Parents, I want you to think about this... **Prov 13:20 TEXT**. If this verse is true... then the most formative thing about your kids is the community they are around.
- If you want to see who they will become, look at who they hang around. I don't want to beat you up... but your kids play 15 different sports and spend the rest of their time at a public school... aren't involved here at church, they don't have much of a relationship ith you... and then they grow up and want nothing to do with God, and you're like... "I didn't raise them to be this way." Yes you did. You may not have taught them to be that way, but you allowed the most formative influence in their lives, their companions, to

be fools.

- Interesting, the word in Hebrew for "friend" is the same root word as "neighbor" or "companion" are all the same. Who they are neighbors with, who they spend the most time with, is who they will look like. Friends form us!
- **2. Friends save us from self-destruction: Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
- Won't talk about this a lot since we covered it a few weeks ago, but a friend can usually tell you when you're about to
  do something stupid and you can't see it. Listen... we all have blind spots. All of us need someone who can look us in
  the face and says, "Bro, you're blowing it!"
- o **Remember the path principle?** Where you end up in life is determined by the path that your decisions place you on and not on your intentions... if I intend to go to Myrtle Beach but get on 1-40W then I'll never get there, no matter what I intend... in the same way your decisions are placing you on a path that is taking you somewhere whether you intend to go there or not... here's the thing: your friend can usually see where the path you are on is taking you before you can. Everybody has BLIND SPOTS. That's why God gives us friends, who can plainly see what we are blind to!
- **Hebrews 3:13**, "But exhort one another every day... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Hardened is the word sclero... sclerosis... hardening. Doesn't happen all at once: drink shalack or a bloomin' onion. Our spiritual heart is the same way. You and I are hardening and our friends break that up.
- o For many of you, your lives are going bad because no one is close enough to speak into your life. Your blind spots are killing you!
- o "Not me, I don't have blind spots." How do you know? "Well, I just know. I can't see any." That's why they are called blind spots, moron. That's why we need friends who will tell us what we can't see.
- o "Things in a secret garden almost always grow mutant." **David Powlison**
- Pastors who have fallen into adultery: all had this in common... they had gotten so removed from people around them that no one could look into their life and speak honestly into it. Not that they weren't having a qt or quit memorizing verses.

### 3. Friends take care of us when life falls apart

- Not if, but when...
- In other other book Solomon wrote right after this one, he has a very interesting and, I would say, culturally
  inappropriate way of making this point: Ecclesiastes 4:9–11, Two are better than one... For if they fall, one will

- lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? When you lie down in life's cold, you need someone to spoon with.
- Seriously: C. S. Lewis: when you go through pain, it's not theological reasoning you most need, it's the slightest touch
  of human sympathy. Studies have shown that women without a close friend are 10x more likely to be
  depressed.
- o **Proverbs 18:24**: A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
- When that day comes, what you need is not a bunch of facebook friends, but one that really loves you. On facebook I have something like 1700 friends but if I have a birthday party, most of those people are not getting a blower and a hat... Most of these people are not close to me and can't see the sinful, hardening patterns developing.
- I need deep, real friendships... people who are close enough to you to look into my life and speak into it. To see when sinful patterns develop, and to spoon with me in the cold (metaphorically speaking).
- We provide a vehicle for that here (not for spooning)... for those relationships to develop: small groups... Here at the Summit, we want to do life together... we want to share our joys. (Life is so much better when you can share your joys with someone. Old Hebrew proverb: Paradise without inhabitants would be hell.) We want to share each other's joys and shoulder each other's pain. Because life is just better when done in community and you can do that in small groups.
- College students... I would encourage you to while you are here to be an active part of a multi-generational church, in addition to being a part of a campus ministry. I want you in campus ministry... (not all your time here). But you also need to have the opportunity to benefit from the wisdom of people that are older than you and have been down life's paths a little farther! That's one of God's gifts to you in a church.
- Here's the thing with some of you guys... you are in the time of life when you are making some of the most significant decisions of your life... and for many of you, you are only surrounded by people who are your age. Ever read "Lord of the Flies?" That didn't turn out to well. We want to give you the chance to be a part of a Christ community here. Join, volunteer... we even do this thing where a family can adopt you... and you can make them take you to dinner, do your laundry, and glean from their advice.

### III. How to be a good friend (and what to look for in a friend)

- Genuineness
- Proverbs 19:4 Wealth brings many new friends...

- O When you have something of means, a lot of people want to act like they're your friend... but, of course, they're not really your friend. They're just using you for something they really want that they think you are the gateway to—power, influence, popularity, money, a job.
- Real friendship is shown when you're in poverty... wealth may bring many new friends, but poverty shows you who you're real friends were. Some of you have went through a tough time and you never realized how good a certain friend was until you saw how committed they were to you when you had nothing.
- A real friend walks in when everyone else walks out.
- o You need to make sure you are smart enough to recognize when someone is using you, and when you find someone who loves you for you, you need to prize that person as a treasure of invaluable worth.
- BTW, some of you girls especially need to be careful about this. Because you're giving and generous... high maintenance, abusive guys are drawn to you who will use you for that... he doesn't care about you... and that's why he abuses you and treats you like dirt. But when he thinks he's about to lose you, he'll make a big deal over you, he doesn't want to lose his sugar mama... but all you are is a means to an end.
- Constancy
- o **Proverbs 17:17**: "A friend loves at all times..."
- o For a friend to love "at all times" means that he loves you when you're unlovable, because no one is lovable all the time. Friends walk in when everyone else walks out.
- Dependability
- Proverbs 25:19 Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips. Most of you don't think about your feet when you walk, you take it for granted. When your foot slips, it just feels wrong—not only do you dislocate your groin, because something you depended on, even took for granted, suddenly wasn't there. When a friend is undependable, that's what it is like.
- You tell them something, and you take it for granted that they won't repeat it. But lo and behold, it ends up on twitter or facebook. That's one reason I never like to trust people who say, "Now... I promised so and so I wouldn't say this..." because I know whatever they promise me they won't say, they won't be dependable to keep it secret either.
- o Real friends are dependable when you have a need whether it is convenient for them or not. I have a lot of people who like to be my friends on their terms... but when I have a need, don't ask them.
- I have this thing called "the moving test." My 1700 friends...
- Honesty

- o **Proverbs 24:26** *An honest answer is the sign of true friendship.*
- o Friends tell each other truths even when they are painful... Again, won't spend long on this one, but... **Someone who won't do this is not really a friend.** If your friends have never told you something that ticked you off, they are not your friend. You are not virgin born. A real friend cares enough to speak truth into you.
- o If you see something in someone else's life that is killing them and you think, "Oh, I care too much about them to hurt their feelings like that, what you are really saying is, "I care too much about myself to put myself through the pain of telling them that."
- A lot of times I'll hear somebody say, "Yeah, I know they're my friend and I know they're making a big mess of their life but... you now, it's none of my business." Friends make it their business.

### Empathy

- Empathy = Feel with someone. Em (into); path (feelings). A real friend feels with you; enters into your feelings.
- Again, Solomon has a great way of talking about this: Proverbs 27:14 He who blesses His neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him.
- A real friend is always aware of your emotions, and matches their emotions to yours. If they are going to "bless" you by speaking words of truth to you, then they realize that it hurts... and so they don't do it in the morning, when you're in a bad mood. If they are going to tell you something that will hurt you, they are going to hurt too... they are going to enter into that emotion. That makes all the difference when they tell me something hard to hear.
- Sometimes, what your friend most needs is not advice, but someone just to hurt with them.
- I've had to learn this in my marriage...flat tire; AAA: she doesn't want me just to fix the problem; she wants me to relive the experience with her.
- In labor, I slept... I didn't see anything logically I could do.
- Sometimes my wife need me just to hurt. Didn't need to me bless her with a loud voice in the morning time.
- Empathy: When your friend hurts, you hurt. When you rejoice when they rejoice. Someone can be happy when you
  are sad is no real friend. That's why it's hard to be a real friend because you tie your emotional wellbeing to
  theirs and you can't be happy when they're sad.

### Boundaries

- o **Proverbs 25:17** Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.
- o This is the friend who never knows when to go home... they are clingy: always saying you need to wear matching sweatshirts, ride a tandem bike, and do everything together.
- o Like a golden retriever, their tail is always wagging and they've always got a stick in their mouth, and they are always

ready to play. If you make this kind of person your roommate, then your life is over. These are the kind of people who send an email, then a text message, and then call 30 seconds later to make sure you got those. You're like, "Listen, I can't return every phone call within seven minutes; I can't answer every email." (not that I'm talking about anyone I'm thinking about). These people have deep worship issues. Their life is so out of whack with God and they are expecting you to be their surrogate God, and you've just got to tell them: I can't be all places in all times and meet all the deep needs of your soul. Me-shaped vacuum.

**6** ways to be a good friend. Now, I've probably discouraged some of you. In these 6 things you see you're not as good of a friend as you thought. Where do you get the ability to be this kind of friend?

- When Jesus was talking to His disciples about friendship in John 15, he says, 'As I have loved you, love one another."
   The real ability to be a friend comes from experiencing Jesus' friendship to you.
- Jesus did all those things I just mentioned:
- Jesus love was genuine; he gave it all up for us.
- o Jesus love was constant; he loved us when we were at our most unlovely.
- Jesus' love is dependable; if he didn't leave us at our lowest, he won't leave us now.
- Jesus love was honest; He told me what I needed to hear even when it made me mad enough to crucify Him.
- o Jesus' love was empathetic; He not only entered into my pain and wept when I wept... He actually took my pain upon Himself
- What a friend we have in Jesus! When you experience that... you'll become a good friend. You won't have to use
  people anymore, because the thirst of your soul for eternal love will have been quenched... because you are loved by
  the God of the universe, you are accepted and approved by the only One whose opinion really matters anyway.
- And you'll have learned how to love a friend. When people let you down, it won't devastate you as much. You'll see
  that God accepted you as you were, screwed up as you were, and you will be empowered to now love others that
  way.
- Real love is to be known and loved. To be known but not loved is rejection; to be loved but not really known in sentimentalism.
- o That's what Jesus did for us. Jesus knew us completely and loved us thoroughly. The Gospel is that we are more wicked than we even realized yet more loved by God than we've ever dreamed, at the same time.
- Having been loved this way, we can love others. Real friendship is the expression and extension of the Gospel.

IV. How to Make Friends at the Summit Church: Small Groups

### "I'm too busy... I don't have time... it's another night of the week."

• Based on what I've shared with you today, I'd like for you think that you don't have time not to be in a group. All the things that are most important to you in life would be radically helped by being in a believing community. Without that community around you, you very well might shipwreck your own life, your marriage might fall apart because there is no one around to support you guys and watch over you; your kids may go astray because they grow up around the wrong community; and when you go through tragedy you'll go through it alone. Don't have time not to! It takes a whole lot less time than picking up the pieces of a marriage does, I promise you that.

# "I don't want people knowing my business."

- Here's the deal on this one: God already knows your personal business. If that troubles you less than the idea of a fellow sinner who has baggage of his own knowing your business, you have a huge misunderstanding of the holiness of God. If your personal business is sin, the worst thing you can do is keep that junk between you and the devil, hoping God doesn't find out or doesn't care. Plus, nobody is going to ask you about your personal business this week in your small group. These are not interrogation groups. To my knowledge waterboarding has never been a part of any small group experience.
- If you had a close friend, you wouldn't mind sharing your personal business with them right? So small group is the place to build friendships, and when you're ready, you can share what you want.

# Guys: "Any form of a small group circle is lame. I have no desire to sit around and be vulnerable. Pass the wings and the beer."

• Really sensitive to this one because I feel like most churches are designed for women. The praise service sounds like you're singing songs written by the Jonas Brothers where you invite Jesus to hold you in His arms and blow in your face and then some guy in a sweatervest gets up and sits on a stool and talks about his feelings for a half our and then encourages you to do your quiet time every morning and go to a small group where you can do prayer and share. And I hate that. Church is also for men here at the summit and small groups are too. We aren't asking you to gush your feelings all over the place, we are asking you to have a friend, and to be a friend. Sharing life together is only "girly" to those men too insecure about their manhood to talk about anything other than sports and beer. So, if you are afraid its too girly, the truth is you are probably the girly one and need to get in a group so you can learn what being a man really looks like.

## "I have kids and can't afford a baby-sitter"

We provide childcare for EVERY small group. Either your group will take care of it at your meeting, or you can use our
voucher system where we will reimburse you for the majority of your childcare expenses each week. We think it is
THAT important.

# "I had a bad experience with a group in the past."

- Well, obviously if not at the Summit, then you need to try ours. Small groups 2.0. We have the MAC version of small groups here. They don't crash as much.
- If at the Summit, then why don't you lead a new group?
- Or, what if we use this biblical understanding of friendship to alter how you look at small group, realizing that God's grace ministers to lame, dysfunctional people of all types, including you.
- News flash: some people may think you are lame. You probably aren't as cool as you think you are. Get off your self-righteous hiney and live in grace, you Pharisee.

# "I don't need one, I've already got friends."

Really? Are you intentionally investing into those people? Growing together. A small Group is not a social club. Its Acts
 2 biblical community.

# "Because they are all in English" "Porque son in Ingles!" Jan no mas!

Not true anymore! We've got them in Spanish right down the hall!

# Bullpen:

- Friends who use you! 19:4 Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.
- This is how we live missionally, we become friends with the unsaved. Many of us don't know any poor people

### "Friends to avoid"

### How to Find a Friend

- 27:17:
- Common, higher goal.
- o Lewis: Erotic lover are always together talking about their love for each other. Friends rarely talk about their friendship. It is always friendship around something they have in common.
- Lovers are face-to-face absorbed in one another; friends are side-by-side facing a common interest.
- O What makes a friend is not "do you want to be my friend", but "oh, you too?"
- Real friendships form naturally. Running and you look to your side and there is someone going the same direction. (This is also good dating advice)
- I love sitting down with people of common passion (men have no higher passions than themselves).
- The advice is not go get friends, but develop an intense passion for a higher calling and friendships will naturally develop!
- Lewis/Keller on friends
- •
- Friends are trustworthy: doesn't end up on facebook or twitter