

## UPSIDE DOWN RELATIONSHIPS

Title: Part 4 – “Love Shows Up”

Date: October 11, 2026

While everyone is saying “Hi” here in the house I want to say “Hi” to everyone joining us online or on our app! We don’t think of you as an audience, we think you are a part of our church family, so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you in any way that we can. You can always reach out through the Care & Prayer tab on our app.

Got a question to get things rolling today, and be honest here, how many of you have ever intentionally avoided a friend at a store or restaurant because you just didn’t have the time or bandwidth emotionally to talk, raise your hands if you have ever done that. I think most of us have done that at some point, you see them out of the corner of your eye, but you know if you stop it’s gonna be a 5-minute conversation—which normally would be OK—but you just have too many things to do so you duck down a different aisle and pray they didn’t see you. Right? Now, be honest again, how many of you have ever seen me in public and avoided me, be honest!

We live in an interesting relational moment I feel like, and that’s what we are going to wade into today. **SO**, if you have a Bible or the Bible app on your phone, join me in the Gospel of John. **John 15** to be exact. In John 15 we find Jesus the night before Jesus dies. He is hours away from the cross. He’s in a room with the men He’s spent three years with, and He knows one of them is about to betray Him and the rest are about to run. And out of everything He could have said with the clock running out, this is what He chose. John 15, starting in verse 12:

<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

Turn to your neighbor and tell them, “I have called you friends.” Now turn to your other neighbor and tell them, “You did not choose me.” *...some of you said that a little too enthusiastically.*

We’re in week four of a collection of messages called **Upside Down Relationships**, and it’s all about what to do when you’ve tried everything else AND here is where we’ve

been. Week one, we didn't talk about a single one of your relationships with other people. Instead, we talked about our relationship with the SELF, your three best friends, me, myself and I. We started there because humanity has one disease that causes every other dysfunction in our lives and that is the SELF at the center, the SELF turned in on itself, the SELF trying to be God.

So, 2,000 years ago Jesus came and said if you want to find yourself you first have to what... surrender your SELF. And then out of a self that's finally safe in God's hands, self-giving love overflows into everything else.

In the second week, we look at how this plays out in marriage, we said self-giving love doesn't keep score. Then last week, we said parenting is where the self hides the best, so we put our hands out and handed our kids back to the God so that we can love them from a place of strength and not insecurity.

If you missed any of this, as always, I encourage you to invest some time on a jog or during your lunch break to get caught up on our app—because this is way more than we could ever fit into a single message.

NOW, as we shift to today, and since I asked you to be honest a minute ago, I will be honest now. The past two weeks are people I'd take a bullet for. I'm not saying self-giving love is always easy at home, but I would lay my life down if I had to for Cheryl and the girls. But today, we're talking about the relationships that don't come with a ring or a birth certificate. Today we are talking about your friends, your extended family, the people you are not legally, biologically, or romantically obligated to love. And can I tell you something? Maybe it's the only child in me, maybe it's because I am naturally introverted, but this is the week that exposes me the most. Because when nothing forces me to show up... I find out real fast what my love is actually made of.

So, today I want to preach a message (mostly to myself) called:

## **Love Shows Up**

What does love do, everybody say, "Love shows up."

Here's the tension. I know I sound like a broken record, but it is true. We have more connections than any generation in history but fewer friends than our grandparents did. Today you have followers, you have a phone full of contacts, you have a group chat that has been going on for four years and none of you live in the same city. You know what your college roommate's kid looks like and you have not heard his voice since 2014.

And we're dying from it! I mean that medically! The U.S. Surgeon General put out an advisory a few years back on what he called an epidemic of loneliness leading to a risk of premature death, about as much as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day! He said there is

a 29% higher risk of heart disease, and a 32% higher risk of stroke. Among people 15 to 24, face-to-face time with friends in real life has dropped about 70% in the past two decades. Seventy percent! We didn't decide to stop having friendships, we just quit showing up!

Somewhere along the way we demoted friendship. I mean think about how our culture treats it. We have a whole industry for weddings, we have a card aisle for mothers and fathers and graduates, BUT there's no ceremony for friendship. Nobody throws you a party for 20 faithful years with the same friend. We treat friendship like a garnish, nice if it's on the plate but nobody sends their meal back over it.

So, friendship became consumer-grade; low cost and high convenience. We keep people while they're useful and let them go when they get awkward. And your extended family? They get the leftovers of the leftovers. You didn't choose them, so they feel optional. You'll see them at Christmas... probably.

AND so, what happens? There's usually no fight, nobody storms out, you just... don't respond to the text for a few days. And then it's a couple of weeks. And then you're the one who owes them a call, and it's been long enough that calling now would be weird. And so, you don't. And a friendship that took years to build just withers and dies of neglect. No funeral. No divorce papers. It just slowly runs out of oxygen while you're both busy being tired.

Sadly, I've done that to people, and you have too. We are not so much losing our friends as much as we are neglecting them to death. Aren't you glad you came to church today!

BUT into that dynamic of friendship Jesus speaks, go back to verse 13:

**13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**

Greater love He says, not decent love, not adequate love. The greatest love in the universe, and Jesus aims it at... friends. Really? The relationship we treat as optional, Jesus calls the highest. Upside down again!

But what have we done? We've made the relationships we choose cheap, and the relationships we're given optional. So, let's talk about what it actually costs to lay down our lives for the people not living in our home. If you're taking notes, write this down and then I will explain it:

## **1. Take off the robe.**

Some of you are like, if any of my friends tried to undress I would be the one taking off! But this comes from maybe the best picture of true friendship we have in the Bible. It is

from 1 Samuel 18, and the scene is David has just killed Goliath. Now, he's the most famous teenager in Israel. And he's standing in the palace talking to King Saul, and Saul's son—the heir to the throne—is standing there listening. His name is Jonathan and look at what it says in verse 1, this is from the Living Bible:

<sup>1-3</sup> After King Saul had finished his conversation with David, David met Jonathan, the king's son, and there was an immediate bond of love between them. Jonathan swore to be his blood brother, <sup>4</sup> and sealed the pact by giving him his robe, sword, bow, and belt.

Again, who is Jonathan? Jonathan is the crown prince, he is the king's son, he is next in line for the throne of Israel. He's also a war hero in his own right; go read chapter 14, this guy climbed up a cliff with one armor-bearer and took on an entire Philistine outpost. Jonathan is not the sidekick. Jonathan is the superhero!

And everybody in that room knows what David being there means. The prophet Samuel has already anointed David. The women are already singing songs comparing David's kill count to Saul's. Jonathan is watching his replacement get introduced to the king's court.

SO, what does he do in that moment? Verse 4 says he sealed his allegiance to David by taking off his robe, sword, bow and belt. Listen to me, that is not a swag bag from the palace tour! That is not Jonathan being a nice guy. In the ancient world, the robe was not clothing. The robe was the office. The robe said I am the heir. Add the sword, the bow, the belt, and what Jonathan just handed over was the entire visual identity as the crown prince of Israel. Jonathan gave David the very things that made Jonathan, Jonathan.

AND in case you think he didn't understand what he was doing, jump to chapter 23. Years later. Saul is hunting David like an animal, and David is hiding in the wilderness, and he is done. And listen to who shows up. Verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> “Don’t be afraid,” Jonathan reassured him. “My father will never find you! You are going to be the king of Israel and I will be next to you, as my father is well aware.” <sup>18</sup> So the two of them renewed their pact of friendship; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan returned home.

He knew the whole time, and he went out into the wilderness to find the man who was taking his throne, and he did not go to negotiate. He went to strengthen and encourage him.

SO, can I ask you a hard question this morning? What's your robe? Because everybody has one. It's the thing you'd have to take off to genuinely celebrate somebody else. Your position. Your reputation. Being the one who's got it together. Being the one people come to. Being the funny one, the successful one, the one whose kids turned out. What's your robe?

Here's how you know what your robe is. It's whatever makes it hard to be happy for the friend who just got the thing you've been praying for. Ouch, right? We call that jealousy. **AND jealousy is what self-giving love looks like when the SELF hasn't been surrendered yet.** It's love with the robe still on!

But when your identity is already safe in the hands of God, when you're not the one holding you anymore, you can hand somebody your robe and still know exactly who you are! You can clap for the person who passed you! Jonathan could give away the crown because Jonathan knew he wasn't the crown!

So, you want to make this practical? Think of one friend or family member who has something you wanted and this week, take off the robe: call them, text them, look them in the eye and celebrate the thing you wish was yours. It will cost you something, but that's the point. Amen?

Here's my second takeaway today:

## 2. Spend the hours.

Jonathan handing over his robe is dramatic, but most of us won't get a moment like that. At least not very often. So, let's talk about what laying down your life looks like in the daily things. Go back to verse 13 one more time, Jesus said:

**13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**

I'm totally going to butcher this, but when Jesus says "Lay down one's life" this is {TITH-ay-mee tane psou-KAYn} tithēmi tēn psychēn. Say that 5 times fast. But the last word is one we have met before in week one. Mark 8:35, "whoever loses their life will find it." Not biological life, right? Jesus means your soul, your SELF, the YOU-ness of you.

Jesus is not just talking about dying for a friend if you guys get jumped one night. He's talking about spending yourself. Laying your self down. Same verb He uses in John 10 when He calls Himself the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus keeps using the same vocabulary as He talks about laying the self down.

Most of us will never be asked to die for a friend BUT all of us are called to spend ourselves for one. And here's the currency. *A researcher at the University of*

**Kansas** named Jeffrey Hall wanted to know how long it actually takes to make a friend. So, he studied hundreds of people and put numbers on it:

- 50 hours – acquaintance to casual friend.
- 90 hours – actual friend.
- 200+ hours – close friend.

Two hundred plus hours!

AND get this, Hall found that hours spent working alongside somebody barely counted. It had to be the other kind of time. Hanging out, playing, goofing off... the stuff that has no agenda and isn't on your calendar.

So, let me do some pastoral math with you. If you have not made a close friend since college, it is probably not because you got less likable. It's because somewhere around age 23 the two hundred free hours disappeared! You spent them, on good things, mostly. A job, dating, marriage, kids, maintaining a home... But friendship is not built out of intention. It's built out of hours, and hours have to come from somewhere.

Which means "lay down your life for your friends" usually shows up as: cancel the plans and go sit in the hospital when they need someone. Answer the 11:30 pm phone call. Drive the U-Haul. Take the Saturday and go play golf. Nobody's writing a hymn about you helping somebody move a sectional up two flights of stairs, but I'm telling you that IS the greater love! That is you laying your SELF down one hour at a time!

AND let me show you what those hours can actually do, because there's a night in 1931 that changed 20th century Christianity. It was September 19th, 1931 in Oxford, England. A 32-year-old professor named Jack has two friends over for dinner. One of them is a colleague named Hugo Dyson. The other one you've heard of, J.R.R. Tolkien, who at this point is just a guy who teaches Old English and is messing around with some stories about short people with hairy feet.

But their friend Jack is stuck. He believes in God at this point, but he cannot get to Jesus. He loves the old myths, the dying-and-rising-god stories, but he thinks Christianity is just one more of them, and he can't make himself care about it.

So, the three of them go out walking. There's a path behind the college called Addison's Walk, and they walk it and they talk. About myth. About metaphor. About whether a story can be true and they just keep talking. And talking. Tolkien finally goes home around three o'clock in the morning. Jack and Dyson stay up until four.

But at some point in those hours, Tolkien said the thing that broke it open for Jack: what if the reason all those myths move you is that they're echoes... and the story of Christ is

the one that actually happened? Jack wrote to a friend a few weeks later that this was it. That Christianity was a myth working on him just like all the others, with one tremendous difference: it really happened!

Nine days later, Jack—we know him as C.S. Lewis—came to faith in Jesus Christ riding in the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle on the way to the zoo.

Now think about everything that came out of that. Mere Christianity... Narnia... Millions of people, a hundred years later, still walking toward Jesus because of a man who almost didn't make it there himself. AND it happened because one friend didn't go home at 9:30!

Church, you have no idea what's on the other side of the hours you're not spending. Somebody in your life is nine days out from something, and they need a friend who'll stay up! SO, stop saying, "We should get together sometime," which is the most useless sentence in the English language. NO! Book it like it's a doctor's appointment where they will still charge you if you cancel! Amen?

Spend the hours! Say, "spend the hours!" Spend the hours because every one of them is the SELF slowly bending from being turned inward to outward. Give your life and you will find it!

Take off the robe, spend the hours and, number 3:

### 3. Let somebody see the real you.

Anyone squirm in their seat a little when they read that on the screens? I almost left this out, because it's the one I like the least BUT I am committed to teaching the full counsel of God's Word so I can't avoid it.

Everything we've talked about so far is about giving. Giving your robe, giving your hours, giving of your self... But there's a second half to friendship that's harder for a lot of us, and it's this: ***you cannot be loved if you will not be known.***

Look at verse 15 again, Jesus says:

<sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

As I was studying this it dawned on me. Do you know the difference between a servant and a friend? Disclosure. A servant gets instructions while a friend gets let in. Jesus says the reason you're My friend is that I told you everything. Right?

And then He does something that I think is one of the most powerful moments in the Gospels. A few hours after this conversation, He walks into a garden called Gethsemane with three of these guys, and He says to them, Matthew 26:38:

<sup>38</sup> “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Guess what word “soul” is? [psoo-KAY] Psychē. Same word as week one. Jesus laid down His [psoo-KAY] FOR His friends that Friday. But on Thursday night, He opened His [psoo-KAY] TO His friends in the garden. The Son of God, hours from the cross, told His friends He wasn't OK and asked them to stay up with Him...

He didn't say, “I've got this.” He didn't say, “I'm fine.” The strongest person who ever lived let His friends in when He was at His weakest. AND some of us have never done that, not even once.

We have gotten so good at, “How you doing?” “Good, busy, you know how it is.” And we'll do that for 15 or 20 years and then wonder why we don't have a Jonathan. You can't have a true friend that you won't let see you. All you'll have are really long acquaintances.

C.S. Lewis—Jack from 1931—wrote about what it costs to protect yourself from all that:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable... Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”

Lewis is saying you can absolutely protect your heart from ever getting hurt again. It works, but the cost is that it stops being a heart that feels anything at all.

AND listen, I know why the casket is tempting. Somebody got in before, past our defenses, and used what they found. I'm not naive about that and neither is Jesus; He opened up to 12 guys; one betrayed Him and the rest ran when He needed them most. Jesus gets it!

But hear me, a self that's been surrendered to God can risk being seen! You are not managing your reputation anymore; God is holding your identity! You don't have to be impressive; you get to be honest! Because the moment you stop performing is the moment somebody can finally love the real you!

I dare you to answer honestly this week when one of your friends asks how you are doing. I dare you to tell them one true thing. You don't have to unload your whole life in one text; you just have to crack the casket. Amen?

Alright, last one. And this is where your extended family walks in the door:

#### 4. Love the ones you didn't choose.

Everything we've talked about so far has been about people you picked. But maybe the truest test of self is the family you didn't pick. The brother-in-law with the opinions, right? The estranged parent who's never once said the thing you needed to hear. The sibling you love BUT cannot spend two consecutive days with. Are we all on the same page?

Look at verse 16 now, Jesus says something to these men that reframes all of this:

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you...

Here's the upside-down thing. You did not choose your family. **BUT you did not choose Jesus either!** He chose you. And He chose you knowing everything about you down the darkest motives of your heart no other human being knows. So, when you show self-giving love to somebody you didn't pick, you are doing the single most Christlike thing because that is exactly what He did for you.

AND I know we live in a day in time where therapist are saying you have to cut off all contact with your family if they every put your diaper on too tight or painted your room the wrong color. So, hear me clearly. Selflessly loving your family does not mean you have zero boundaries, BUT it does mean you get to have them without bitterness. You can honor them without idolizing them. You can show up without disappearing. You can love somebody all the way and still not hand them the keys to your SELF because your SELF is not in your hands; it's in God's! Amen!

- Honoring your parents does not mean you have to agree with them. It means you speak about them with respect whether or not they've earned it, including when they're not in the room.
- Honoring your family does not mean you attend everything. You are allowed to leave at eight. You are allowed to stay at a hotel. But you show up.
- Honoring a relative does not mean you pretend nothing happened, sometimes the most loving conversation the two of you can have is, "That really hurt me, but I still want us to be in each other's lives." Right?

Because here's the counterfeit, thinking that keeping the peace at all costs is love. It isn't! Keeping the peace is often just self-protection. It's avoiding the hard conversation because YOU don't want to feel the discomfort. That's still the SELF at the center! Real self-giving love is willing to be uncomfortable for somebody else's good!

This is why I am serious about going back to week one if you missed it, a surrendered self to God is the only self that can handle a difficult family. When your worth isn't riding on your father finally saying he's proud of you, you can go to Thanksgiving free! You're not there to collect anymore! You're there to give! Because the person who ISN'T collecting is the person in that house who's actually able to love!

I wrote this in my notes; I'll be honest with you—I wrestled with putting this in my notes because I knew I'd have to do it too. But here's the challenge, I wrote: ***Pick one person in your extended family***, (someone you didn't choose and wouldn't have) ***and this week do one small thing for them with zero expectation of a response***. A call, a note, an invitation, a little crack of daylight... no scorecard, no return required. I don't know, I'm thinking about it.

BUT as I was wrestling with how to bring all of this to a close today, I kept being drawn back to the story of David and Jonathan. AND I had a crazy thought of what would really make this real for us and not just a nice sermon and a smile and see you next week Pastor...

So, what if we did this, it might take you 30 minutes, but:

***Name your Jonathan.***

Who has shown up for you in the past? When you get a name, what if we did this, actually tell them! Like, this week! People die with a thank-you still in their mouth; don't do that. Who has been a Johnathan for you, tell them this week! Then:

***Be a Jonathan.***

This week, one costly, inconvenient act of friendship. And it can't be a text. It has to cost you time or comfort or pride. How could you selflessly give this week? AND:

***Crack the casket.***

One honest answer to one person. When a friend asks, how are you doing, instead of talking about the baseball postseason or the NFL, let them see one deep, true thing about you.

Name your Jonathan. Be a Johnathan. And crack the casket.

AND one more thing. I believe God spoke this to me. Some of you have been sitting here listening politely but you are miserable on the inside because you don't think you have a Jonathan. You're not sure anyone would show up for you. You are lonely and isolated. And if that is you just keep looking up here.

Jesus said—and remember when He said it—the night before He died, hours before His arrest. He looks at a room full of men who are about to abandon Him, and He says, ***Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.***

Jesus wasn't giving them a proverb. He was describing what He was about to do—and He was describing who He was about to do it for. Not His fans. Not His followers. Not His flock. He said I call you FRIEND!

The God of the universe went to the cross for you and He called it friendship! He laid down His SELF for you! And He did it before you ever called out, before you ever showed up, before you ever once deserved it, because you did not choose Him, He chose YOU!

Some of you are looking for a friend today. The best Friend you will ever have already took off His robe, already spent the hours, already showed you His scars and told you the truth! He is the One that Scripture says sticks closer than a brother!

If you are lonely, let Him in today. If you are lost, let Him in today. If you are looking for Someone, your search is over. Would you bow your heads with me and pray.

**[PRAYER TIME]**