

Discipleship Series
50+ Class – All Saints Presbyterian Church
Fall 2020 – November 1, 2020
Week Eight: The Friendship Journey

Questions to start the conversation ...

- What are the characteristics of someone you call a “best friend?”
- Have you ever experienced a friendship when the other person always wanted to be in control?

Proverbs 18:24 (NIV)—A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 20:6 (NIV)—Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?

Proverbs 27:5-6 (NIV)—Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)—Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

John 15:13-15 (NIV)—Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ 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.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)—And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Webster's Dictionary Definition—

Friend (noun) 1a: one attached to another by affection or esteem: She's my best *friend*. b: acquaintance
2a: one that is not hostile; Is he a *friend* or an enemy? b: one that is of the same nation, party, or group;
3: one that favors or promotes something (such as a charity): This trend has alarmed *friends* of the liberal arts. 4. a favored companion to be friends with.

Friend (verb) 1: to act as the friend of : befriend; 2: to include (someone) in a list of designated friends on a person's social networking site.

“On that last day I met C. S. Lewis at the Eastgate for lunch. We talked, I recall, about death or, rather, awakening after death. Whatever it would be like, we thought, our response to it would be ‘Why of Course! Of course it's like this. How else could it have possibly been.’ We both chuckled at that. I said it would be a sort of coming home, and he agreed. Lewis said that he hoped Davy and I would be coming back to England soon, for we mustn't get out of touch. ‘At all events,’ he said with a cheerful grin, ‘we'll certainly meet again, here—or there.’ Then it was time to go, and we drained our mugs. When we emerged on to the busy High with the traffic streaming past, we shook hands, and he said: ‘I shan't say goodbye. We'll meet again.’ Then he plunged into the traffic. I stood there watching him. When he reached the pavement on the other side, he turned round as though he knew somehow that I would still be standing there in front of the Eastgate. Then he raised his voice in a great roar that easily overcame the noise of the cars and buses. Heads turned and at least one car swerved. ‘Besides,’ he bellowed with a great grin, ‘Christians NEVER say goodbye!’”

—Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (1980), p.125

Note: Quotes in sections 1–10 are from Mary and Jerry White, *Friends & Friendship: The Secrets of Drawing Closer* (1982)(emphasis added)—

“Loneliness...Pain...Crying...all are vestiges of broken friendships. Yet no one can have a meaningful existence without love and friendship. They are the substance of our emotional life. We seek them constantly, but they often elude our grasp or else disappoint us. Sometimes we offer them to others only to have them rejected. ... We desperately need and want deep relationships, but all too often we find it difficult to develop that ideal friendship. We all experience brief tastes of deepening friendship, and know more is possible, yet the process of actually developing and deepening those friendships is frustrated by lack of time or mutual interest. When they do develop, we puzzle over how to maintain them, and how to overcome the discord which inevitably occurs in regular interaction.” (p.10-11)

“The very word friend implies giving. The root of our word friend is the Old English *Freon*, which means ‘to love.’ Loving in the biblical sense means to give freely by concentrating on the needs, desires, and pleasures of the one loved. If either friend concentrates only on himself, the friendship will weaken and die. One person cannot bear the entire responsibility for the loving maintenance of a friendship.” (p.91-92)

2. Definition of a Christian Friendship

“A friend is a trusted confidant to whom I am mutually drawn as a companion and an ally, whose love for me is not dependent on my performance, and whose influence draws me closer to God.” (p.13)

3. Being and Finding an “Ideal Friend” (although no one can fulfill all these characteristics)

[E]ight prominent characteristics of the “ideal friend” (p.14-31)—

- A. **Loyal.** “We all want friends who are loyal to us. No one wants a fair-weather friend who disappears at the first sign of trouble” A mainstay of loyalty is unbroken confidences. Loyalty means defending your friend. Loyalty means supporting your friend in difficulty.

Proverbs 19:4-7—Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him. ⁵ A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free. ⁶ Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts. ⁷ A poor man is shunned by all his relatives—how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

- B. **Shares deeply.** “Sharing deeply is an important characteristic of friendship....”
Listening is essential to communication between friends. Speaking is important too, but done in moderation, with thought and concern. Large doses of accepting of the other person. Acceptance is not approval or agreement with everything. “I accept you for who you are, though I may not agree with what you do or say.” We seek understanding of what is being said. We listen to understand first, before we speak.

James 1:19—My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry....

Proverbs 25:11—A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Proverbs 15:4—The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Ephesians 4:29—Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Proverbs 2:6—For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

- C. **Fun to be with.** Friends have fun together. “What a dreary relationship it would be if fun were not a part of the friendship. Have fun together, share experiences together.

- D. **Stimulating.** “Because we are not alike, we stimulate each other mentally and emotionally. “We shouldn’t force ourselves on our friends, but instead just be ourselves and offer that part of us that can attract and enliven their own lives.

Proverbs 27:17—As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Hebrews 10:24—And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

- E. **Encouraging.** “We can build up our friends and give them hope by our attitudes and our words. We do it by sharing Scripture or praying together, and by lifting their loads in times of pressure. We encourage by being loyal, by sharing and allowing others to share deeply, but having fun and by stimulating our friends.”

Hebrews 3:13—But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

- F. **Self-sacrificing.** “A true friend gives sacrificially to meet the pressing needs of another person. Though we may not be asked to give up our lives for our friends, we will expend energy, time, and personal resources to help them. We should give of ourselves regardless of the cost to us.”

John 15:13—Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Phil 2:4—Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- G. **Loving.** “The *agape* love of the Greek New Testament must undergird our friendship. This love is self-sacrificing, expecting nothing in return.”

- H. **Spiritually challenging.** “Friends drive you to or from God. Therefore it is vital that many of your friends share a strong view of the Christian life. God must be a part of your friendship—both in what you do and in what you talk about.”

1 Corinthians 15:33—Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

Proverbs 13:20—He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

Other characteristics that apply to “best friends”—Shares the same truth. Goes the distance. Listens well and counsels well. Keeps confidences. Can say hard things. Knows being there is enough. Celebrates rather than compares. Forgives. Makes you a better person.

4. Our Ultimate Relationship & Friendship—with Christ, our Friend

“[A] relationship with God gives a new and deeper meaning to friendship. It provides Jesus Christ as our role model, and he gives us instructions on our relationships and on our motivation for friendship.... Christians have a different basis than non-Christians for building friendships because their role model is Jesus Christ and they have his resources to draw on.... In our search for fulfilling friendships, then, we should apply this principle: The first and most fundamental friendship of life is with Jesus Christ. Two levels of this friendship are relevant at this point. The first is initially entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ—the birth of the relationship. The second is developing into a committed disciple of Jesus Christ—the growth of the relationship.” (p.29)

“A personal relationship with Jesus Christ forms the foundation for (all) friendships.” (p.30)

“When a person’s foundational relationship with Jesus Christ is fulfilling and satisfying, his friendships with others will begin to fall into place.” (p.31)

Colossians 2:6-7—So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

5. Levels of Relationships and Friendships (p. 32 – 42)

Level of relationship	Definition of the relationship	Number of these relationships that we can handle at one time.
Acquaintances (these people are not friends)	Acquaintances have transient relationships with us in the normal course of business. There is no commitment on our part to acquaintances. We never intend to pursue them as friends. Acquaintances are “commercial” relationships or relationships of convenience, in the “normal course of business.”	We can have hundreds of acquaintances at any one time. Acquaintances will move in and out of our lives almost without notice.
Level One: “Casual Friends”	Consists of people we see regularly in the normal course of life. We know them by their first name and occasionally initiate social contact with them. A person can be lonely in a crowd of casual friends. We want and need more from our relationships with others.	Casual friends may number from 20 to a 100 or more. These casual friendships may last a few months or for a lifetime. Casual friends may also include a few relatives with whom we only maintain casual contact.
Level Two: “Close Friends”	Consists of people we chose to have or have had a high level of commitment to. We develop these close friendships over time. There are several groupings of close friends: Associate friendships: co-workers, neighbors, church relationships, relatives. Close personal friends: these people tend to remain close for many years, we have a close relationship by mutual choice. Mentor: A person who contributes to your life in a significant way by teaching or guiding.	The number of friends in this level may range from 10 to 30 active relationships. Another 30 or so can be inactive due to distance. The initial close friendships still remain and revive with little effort when the opportunity arises.
Level Three: “Intimate (Best) Friends”	Consists of people we want to draw into the inner circle of our lives. This is the level on which the “ideal” friends (8 characteristics) operate. We designate this person as intimate or best friends. These are people to whom we pour out our souls, sharing our deepest feelings and hopes. They meet us at the point of our deepest need, we look forward to being with them above all others. A lasting quality that remains over the years.	We can’t maintain many “best” friend relationships. The author believes that few people have or can maintain more than 4 active and intimate friendships at any one time.

6. Principles of Friendship

“Friendships grow, change, decrease, and get stale. No friendship remains constant. ...we must allow for an ebb and flow of our friendships. If we try to force their growth, we’ll end up smothering them instead. Part of the beauty of a friendship lies in its freedom to grow and change. Friendship does not grow naturally if we force ourselves on others.” (p.38)

“Close and intimate friendships take time to develop. Friendships will ebb and flow in intensity over time. ... Everyone has a limited capacity for friendship, but that capacity differs with each individual in the number of relationships he or she can sustain or emotionally tolerate.” (p.39)

“The key is to live within your capacity and develop to the fullest those friendships...God gives you.” (p.40)

“Assess your capacity for intimate friends. If it is two or three, be content, but if you have no friends at the intimate level, ask God to fill that void to capacity. You need this kind of friend. ...Every person has the capacity to develop intimate friendships.” (p.41)

1 John 4:7—Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Proverbs 17:17—A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

“We can expand our capacity for intimate friendship by focusing on a few good friends rather than many casual friends.” (p.42)

“Most of us find it easier to wait for someone else to make the first move.” (p.52)

“We need to leave the door open to new friends, for their benefit and ours.” (p.53)

“God does not intend that every friendship we attempt to initiate should develop.” (p.56)

“Rejection of friendship advances does not equal rejection of the person. Many other factors are involved.” (p.57)

“We have found that men and women tend to have different expectations for friendship. Although both place great importance on the element of deep sharing, in practice men tend to be satisfied with a lower level of sharing than women look for. Women may be less tolerant, therefore, when the friendship doesn't live up to their expectations. ...Stay flexible in your expectations.” (p.64)

“Developing couple-to-couple friendships is more complex than developing individual friendships.” (p.71)

“...for Christians, deep and intimate friendships are with other Christians. Although we should also have friendships with non-Christians, they cannot attain that qualitative strength that binds Christian friends together. ... When the central focus of a relationship is not one another, but Jesus Christ, the friendship reaches depths impossible without the spiritual dimension. ...as both friends draw closer to God, they also draw closer to each other.” (p.74)

“When both friends focus on pleasing the Lord, the Holy Spirit begins a work that flows into their friendship. Friendship centered around Christ gives fellowship its full meaning.” (p.75)

“We can't be friends with everyone. No one has the emotional capacity or the time to develop deep friendships with a wide range of people. And because of personality and special interests, we will naturally be drawn to certain people for close friendships.” (p.88)

“...friendships are worth the adjustments it takes to spend time together. Everyone can find unproductive activities to eliminate or ways to simplify living. ... Friends don't need preparations and plans to be together. Spontaneity is one of the great joys of a strong friendship. When busy schedules crowd out friends, simply draw friends into those schedules.” (p.90)

7. Why We Need Friends But Often Avoid Initiating Friendships

Benefits of Friendship—Emotional encouragement. Help in trouble. Personal stability. Spiritual help and counsel. Freedom of expression. Protection from loneliness and isolation. Love and acceptance.

Opportunities to give ourselves to others. (p.45-47)

Improper Motives for Friendships—To exploit the position or power of the other person. To use the other person to advance our goals. To get money. Selfishness, to use the other person for my gain. (p.47-49)

Healthy Motives for Friendships—To be built up personally (my growth). To grow spiritually. To give to another person. To have a mentor. To be encouraged. (p.49)

Why We Avoid Initiating Friendships—Fear of rejection. Shyness. Judgmental attitudes (erroneous first impressions). Poor self-image. (p.55-60)

8. Making and Keeping Friends

How to Make Friends—Initiate the first step. Be yourself. Form reasonable expectations. Create a sociable environment. Look for common interests. (p.61-71)

How to Keep Friends—Ingredients of lasting friendships: Spiritual stimulation. Prayer. Accountability. Encouragement. Affirmation. Helping. Serving. Fun together. Teamwork in spiritual battles. (p.72-85)

Hebrews 10:24-25—And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

2 Peter 3:1—Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

Definition of Accountability – “A close Christian friend has the right and responsibility to hold us responsible for our actions. Who else will point out things that might be offensive or wrong? ... A friendship must gain stability and depth, however, before either friend achieves the right to move into the life of another. We should speak ‘with wisdom’ and provide ‘faithful instruction’ (Prov 31:26). We can’t rush in correcting and exhorting all of our acquaintances, or we would have no friends at all. We need to know a friend well enough to determine if what we see is a small irritant or a deep-rooted problem or sin. ... Friendship is not a hunting license for special weaknesses. When correction occurs, however, this exchange between close friends will strengthen rather than threaten an already strong friendship.” (p.78-79)

9. Character Traits & Other Obstacles to Friendship

Character Traits: Shy. Bossy. Overscheduled. Betrays Confidences. Anger. Negative. Critical. Demanding. Possessive. Unrealistic Expectations. Unwilling to Reveal Self. Proud. Intolerant. (p.99)

Other Obstacles: Failure to recognize our need. An over-busy lifestyle. Intolerance. Selfishness. Criticism. Insensitivity. Jealousy. Frequent moves. Unrealistic expectations. Betraying confidences. (p.88-100)

10. Healing Wounded Friendships

“Friendships are fragile.... It seems unfair that a friendship made at a great cost of time and emotional energy should crack and split in a moment, but it happens. A harsh statement, an unfair criticism, or a thoughtless action can create a chasm of hostility and hurt feelings which results in separated friends.” (p.101)

Causes of Conflict—Pride. Anger. Envy. Gossip. Indifference. Neglect. Jealousy. (p.103)

How to restore a broken friendship—Determine the source of conflict. Initiate restoration. Keep short accounts. Go in an attitude of humility. Allow time to heal. Above all, pray. (p.105-110)

“We need to be willing to confront and forgive again and again and again as our friends, and we, go through the maturing growth process God intends for us in our friendships.” (p.108)

11. People Aren’t Projects

Sections 11-12 are from Brad Roth, “People Aren’t Projects,” *Christianity Today* (June 28, 2017)—

“I was working so hard to fix the congregation and community that I was turning them into projects. My fixit spirit didn’t stop with the congregation and community. I wanted to fix people too. I wanted to take hold of people’s lives and do a little spiritual chiropractic. Crunch them into shape. Maybe if I could get that divorcing couple to sit down with me, or counsel the young man who was slipping into gang life, or incisively—yet gently—point out the doctrinal weak spots in the theology of those folks who rarely showed up in church, things would work out. All these people needed was for someone to apply a bit of spiritual elbow grease. And all I wanted was to save a few lives.

I thought I had to engineer all the changes I wanted to see. But the deepest changes can’t be imposed from outside. They come about slowly, through the patient alchemy of the Holy Spirit. The most important changes happen because of the cross. My theology lacked a practical cruciformity. Instead, I had adopted a fixit theology.

It wasn’t that I was doing the wrong things. Most of what I did was alright in and of itself. The problem was the spirit in which I carried out my ministry. I didn’t recognize it at first, but I was working so hard to fix the congregation and community that I was turning them into projects.

“Converting people and place into projects is a risk in any ministry. We pastors see ourselves as results-driven professionals. We cast vision. We work toward goals. We count. That’s what I did. We think that useful ministry means getting results, and we become a cross between an organizational consultant and a church growth guru. It can happen anywhere: in the concrete jungle, along the emerald suburban lawns, or out in the sticks.”

12. Helping Others is an Issue of Motive

“It began to dawn on me that while I had gotten quite good at analyzing brokenness and concocting plans to fix it, I had failed in the one thing needed. I had failed to love.

“Love can be a slippery word. Sometimes we use *love* as synonym for *niceness*. Love can become a way for us to avoid the hard work of confronting, the thankless work of setting boundaries, and the vulnerable, exposed, soul-chapping labor of leading God’s people. We don’t always know what we’re saying when we talk about love. For instance, what does it mean to claim love for the crotchety guy who cut his fingernails during your sermon and left the trimmings in a little heap in the pew? What is love for the gang members tagging up the town with their spray cans? We have to learn to love in concrete and practical ways.

“Jesus spoke of love in concrete and practical ways when he used the language of “friends.” In fact, the word for “friend” in Greek comes from one of the words for “love” used in the New Testament: *philos*. On that night when Jesus was betrayed, he told his disciples in the upper room that he would no longer call them servants, but “friends” (John 15:15). No doubt Jesus’ declaration put the disciples off balance, just as when he tied a towel around his waist and washed their feet (John 13:5). Through friendship, Jesus was pushing the disciples beyond a relationship of usefulness. They shouldn’t bother trying to form power alliances with him (Mark 10:35–45). The first shall be last, the last first (Matthew 19:30). Theirs wasn’t to be the Graeco-Roman friendship of privileged men, meant to enhance their own self-sufficiency and personal power. Jesus was teaching and modeling a different sort of friendship. It was about love (John 13:34). And it wasn’t the least bit *useful*.

“I was slow to learn the useless practice of a Jesus-shaped ministry of friendship.

“For a season, I connected with a semi-homeless man in our community. He would drop by the

church and use our microwave to heat up his favorite food: frozen lasagna. Sometimes, I would sit with him while he ate, and we would talk about life and faith. I occasionally helped him out with practical challenges he faced. One afternoon in the church basement, he looked up from his lasagna and paid me what I'm sure he intended as a compliment. "You know," he said, "you're the most useful pastor I've ever met."

"I suppose I should have been flattered. He handed the statement to me like a badge: *Most Useful Pastor*. But I realized in that moment that he was right, and that it was no compliment. I was useful. And useful was not the same as loving. Useful was not the ministry that he—or my community or congregation—most needed. Useful was only good for locating moving boxes or picking up trash or heating up lasagnas. Useful did not show forth the cruciform love of Christ. I had to discover this. I had to discover friendship.

"I've become convinced that friendship is the vital component so many of us are missing in our ministries. Our calling to preach and teach, to lead and dream and celebrate the sacraments among God's people, must be rooted in the Jesus way of friendship. Friendship is perhaps our original vocation. By this I don't mean that we're to buddy up, as if we have permission to be chatty and purposeless so long as we project a generally friendly demeanor. I mean cultivating friendship as Jesus demonstrated it: a cruciform friendship rooted in love (John 15:13).

"It's this sort of friendship that positions us to minister to people as human beings. Friendship allows us to accept people as they are rather than converting them into projects to be fixed. Friendship gives us the courage to abide and listen and be vulnerable. And it's this sort of friendship that is especially vital in rural places, for it instills in us a patient love for congregations and communities. They may not live up to our dreams of growth and vitality. They may even die. But our ministry is not about success—not as we conceive of it, anyways. It's about friendship.

"It's the ministry of friendship—reclaimed through the humble practices of listening and abiding, solidarity and kindness—that we're called to live out..."

"Love is the root of the ministry of friendship. As Daniel Janzen, another pastor I interviewed, put it, what we have to learn is to "really be people's friends without wanting anything." The ministry of friendship is the ministry of not wanting anything, which comes down to 10,000 acts of kindness and Christlikeness on behalf of people and place."

13. Henri Nouwen

From Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Love, Henri: Letters on the Spiritual Life* (2016)—

"Henri took friendship very seriously. In one case, at least, he made a formal request of friendship, and the other person took five years to say yes. It was not because he didn't want to be friends with Henri; he simply knew that friendship would mean being available at any time, being completely open with his inner life and giving and receiving love, support, encouragement without limits. This style of friendship was not for everyone, and there are many people for whom it was simply not sustainable. ...In a journal entry from his last year he wrote: 'Friendship requires trust, patience, attentiveness, courage, repentance, forgiveness, celebration and most of all faithfulness.'" (p.56-57)

"What I most want to say to you is that living a deep and intimate relationship with your Lord Jesus will allow you to be a source of healing for many people as you walk through life full of contradictions, conflicts and violence. I also want to say to you how important it is to be surrounded by good, caring friends who will hold you close to Christ by their affection, their care and their encouragement. Finally, I want you to fully trust that when you stay close to Jesus and to those who in the name of Jesus will embrace you with their love, you cannot be other than a source of life to others." (p.317)

"...suffering from a heart attack in a hospital...Henri bid his friend, Nathan, 'Goodnight,' and added: 'I think I'm going to be OK, but you never know. So if I die, just tell everybody that I'm grateful, that I'm enormously grateful. Make sure you tell everybody that!' ...early the next morning, this profoundly passionate, struggling man entered through the portal of death into the infinite hospitality of his God.

Home at last! It was September 21, 1996.” (p.346)

14. How Friendship has Changed Over Time

From Liuan Huska, “How to Keep Your Friends When Life Happens”, *Christianity Today* (June 10, 2016) (based on an interview with Wheaton College communications professor Emily Langan)—

How Friendship is Different from our Grandparents’ Time?

“Our lives are more fragmented. My grandmother had a weekly bridge club. Those ladies met for years. They saw each other through major events and were part of each other’s ins and outs. Nowadays, there are book clubs and things like that, but we just don’t have those casual, continual relationships like we used to have. Families also fragment and demand time in different ways than they used to. We’re running around and picking up kids from soccer and camps. Adults with emerging families in particular structure the demands of their time around their families and a portion of whatever is left over is given to their friends.”

“Technology has also changed friendship—in good and bad ways. We mostly pick on the liabilities of technology, especially social media. We say that they are superficial and fake and shallow. But the technology itself doesn’t make that happen; it’s the way that we use it. But the reality of that is that you have a persistent friendship that is less full or less embodied than it used to be. You’ve got casual friends that you meet up with on Facebook or over the Internet that in a previous era would have gone away.”

I have wondered why I keep in touch with people from high school and pre-high school through social media when it is completely unnecessary for me to know what they’re up to. Can you talk more about letting relationships “time out,” and if it’s even possible to do that anymore in the social media age?

“There are two different meanings to ‘timing out.’ In the parenting lingo, we can say that friendships take a ‘time out,’ and, in another sense, friendships ‘time out’ in that they are done. Both are valid expressions of friendship. Friendships are cyclic and seasonal. Somehow we think it’s a friendship failure if we’re not friends any longer: ‘We have the platform. We have the ability. So why aren’t we friends?’ The average life expectancy of a friendship is somewhere between five and eight years. It’s not 30. That’s not the norm.

“Friendships are based on voluntariness. As a result, once you stop acting on that commitment, do you cease being friends? I think you do. I see friendship as an active labor. It gets complicated because in our digital age you still have a footprint—you still have a Facebook friendship or an Instagram connection. You still have a weird tether to those relationships that, on the one hand, is really unnatural. When you’re done and moved away from certain hobbies or activities, why are you still following them? I have friends —high school and otherwise—that I’ve timed out and moved away from. I stop following their status updates or they friend me, but I don’t accept it.”

Your research highlights how friendships are based on affinity and liking, but that makes friendships across racial, generational, or other social lines really challenging. How can we be intentional about those kinds of friendships, especially in the church?

“Diverse friendships are absolutely an underrated resource. If you think about the places you find yourself—the work that you do, the neighborhoods you live in—they often are very homogeneous. At its best, the church crosses those boundaries—at least of age. Unfortunately, the American church struggles with diversity unlike almost any other institution. However, it becomes a problem when you have to check multiple boxes to make a relationship count as a diverse friendship.

“You might say to someone, “You’re older than I am by a decade. But you’re the same race, religion, and marital status. You don’t count as a diverse friend.” That’s not true. Is it more beneficial to have multi-faceted diversity? Of course. But I wouldn’t want us to eliminate those areas of diversity that are

just one box. Start with something that is race, age, or even gender. In the church we have exceeding problems with recognizing cross-sex friendships. We are stuck in men's ministries and women's ministries, and by default that means men's friendships and women's friendships.

"Crossing generations is also an interesting place to start. I've got an older man in my church who lost his wife last year. He said to me, "I'm lonely and want someone to meet up for coffee and go to a movie with." I said, "I can do that." He's older, a widower, and in his 70s. That's a valuable friendship to cultivate. The church could do a lot more of that."

15. Forever Friends—some relationships endure, others fade, and new ones begin

From Michelle Van Loon, *Becoming Sage: Cultivating Meaning, Purpose and Spirituality in Midlife* (2020)—

"At midlife, many of us discover we're downsizing and moving into a brand-new neighborhood, so to speak. The relocation strips us of the things that formed our network of relationships back in the old neighborhood.... Women have shared stories with me from their new neighborhoods. I've heard descriptions of anchoring relationships that have continued... I've heard reports of new friendships blooming in the soil of life change. ... But I've also heard many, many accounts of loneliness. Women have shared with me their struggles to find and maintain friendships.... The lament in these stories highlights how important friendship is. Our friends sustain, support, and strengthen us. At midlife, as our nest empties and our family relationships shift, our friendships can take on new importance in our lives." (p.90-91)

"God has built us for relationship with Him and one another... We do not select our families, but those we call our friends reflects a powerful chosen love... friends are people who cherish one another, sticking 'closer than a brother' (Prov 18:24). The best kind of friendships create safe zones that allow us to reveal the truth about ourselves (Prov 27:5-6) Friends provide mutual support (Eccl. 4:9-10). (p.91-92)

"Lack of friendship in our lives carries with it a cost far higher than most of us may ever realize. Loneliness, that sense of isolation or abandonment, is a serious issue with far-reaching physical, social, and spiritual consequences. You can be lonely in a family, a church, or a crowd... more and more us find ourselves living alone in America. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that about eight million Americans over age 50 do not have a spouse or children, a key source of companionship and support as we age." (p.93)

"At midlife, how can we cultivate...silver and gold relationships in our lives? Some...are blessed with a few longtime relationships that are comfortable, steady, and grounded in shared history. The challenge with these relationships is continuing to find time to connect in the midst of the busyness of daily life. The trust built into the history of these friendships allows many of these relationships to absorb separations of time and distance. Those in true gold friendships are able to pick up right where they left off.... However... not all old friendships make the transition into midlife without some alchemy that changes the nature of the relationship. This friendship may reveal itself as less than the pure gold you once assumed it was. That revelation doesn't negate the worth of the relationship, nor does it necessarily mean...at some point in the future there may not be a fresh rekindling of it... Recognizing and grieving those changes is a necessary journey toward healthy acceptance of what the relationship is at this point of your life." (p.96-97)

"We may risk reaching out to a potential friend only to discover that person isn't interested in reciprocating. Not everyone will make space in their social orbit for us. We won't click with some people." (p.98)

"There is one form of silver friendship that can flourish in the rich soil of our second-half lives: mentoring. A mentor is a more experienced person who coaches a less experienced person in a relationship that is focused on passing on specific skills or knowledge..." (p.99)

“As we move into the second half of our lives and consider the friends we’ve had, the friends we lack, and the friendships we hope to form moving forward, those becoming sage recognize that whether for a specific season or for a lifetime, God uses each one of our relationships to for us for eternity.” (p.101)