

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

05.26.2023 | Wisdom for Friendship | Proverbs 18:24; 27:5-6, 9, 17 | Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Proverbs chapter 18. Proverbs chapter 18 is where we're going to begin. We're going to read one verse from Proverbs 18, and then we're going to read a few more verses from Proverbs chapter 27. We are going through a series throughout the book of Proverbs, which we've entitled Wisdom for Life. After a month of kind of laying the foundation of what Proverbs is all about and understanding the nature of wisdom, we've now spent a month looking to wisdom for different areas of life, and we've not really said it explicitly, but kind of the way I designed the series was for this month of May to really be focused on these different relationships that we have, this kind of wisdom for interpersonal connections. Next month in June, we're going to still be in Proverbs, and we're going to turn a little bit more personal to see what kind of wisdom the book of Proverbs has for us as individuals. And so what we've done throughout May is we've considered interpersonal relationships. We've talked about marriage and parenting and sex, and today we are talking about friendship.

What wisdom does the book of Proverbs have for friendship? So we're going to read from Proverbs 18 and then a few Proverbs from chapter 27. Proverbs 18 verse 24 says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." And if you flip over to Proverbs chapter 27, we'll pick up in verses 5 and 6, read, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Perfuse are the kisses of an enemy." Then to go down to verse 9, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel." And then down to verse 17 of Proverbs 27, it says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." I don't know if you have heard, but we are in the midst of a loneliness epidemic in our country.

Sometimes when we think about something like a loneliness epidemic, we might think that it's a little bit lighter than an epidemic based on a disease, a pandemic that we've just been through. But in actuality, I think something like a loneliness epidemic can have just as great of consequences to our lives and to our society. I mean, the U.S. Surgeon General has published multiple reports and findings and written great warnings because he feels like he has seen something very concerning in this loneliness epidemic. Studies have shown that social connection has been declining for the last few decades with an accelerated decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, Americans are spending less and less time with friends. In fact, over the last 20 years, it seems like time spent with friends has been cut by about two-thirds. So if someone used to spend, let's say, an average, an hour a day with friends, they now usually spend about 20 minutes per day with friends. Most Americans, or about half of Americans, I should say, say that they have three or fewer close friends. And the loneliness epidemic seems to be hitting probably the younger generation, somewhere between people who are maybe 15 to 24, maybe the hardest, as they are struggling to find connection. They are struggling to spend time with friends.

I think we really need some wisdom for friendship. In our society, I think we don't always prioritize friendship. I mean, we as Christians, I think we should probably know how important friendship and relationship is. We don't need a bunch of studies to tell us we've been created for a community. But studies have shown this. I mean, not only does loneliness and isolation and a lack of relationships and friendships affect our society, meaning the ways that we treat one another and the ways we trust one another, but loneliness and lack of friendship can actually affect the individual in profound ways. The U.S. Surgeon General said that loneliness is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. Loneliness, lack of relationships, has a profound impact on us because we were created for community.

But let's be honest, I think that even we as Christians who know this and studies reinforce this, we don't always prioritize friendship. I mean, when life gets busy and our schedules get full, I think one of the first things that we cut out is time with friends. I think friendship and time with friends is often seen as a good thing, kind of a luxury, but not a necessity in our lives. A few decades ago, C.S. Lewis wrote about friendship, and he talked about the kind of tendency of modern people to not prioritize friendship. It was in a book called *The Four Loves*, and he devoted one of his chapters to discussion of the love of friendship. And he discussed the way that friendship is maybe in a sense the least natural of all of the loves. He says it's the least instinctive, least organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary. It has least commerce with our nerves. There is nothing throaty about it, nothing that quickens the pulse or turns you red and pale. In other

words, there's kind of this lack of attractiveness about friendship in certain ways. Like, yes, we know that we have biological connections, and so family relationships feel very natural and necessary. And we live in a culture that, as we talked about last week, prioritizes sex and sexual relationships and romantic relationships. But I think because of that, there is a diminishing of the necessity or the highlighting of the goodness of friendship. There's nothing that makes us excited about having friends at times, and so it gets lowered on our priority list.

And so I think today we need some wisdom for friendship, and Proverbs has a lot to teach us. What we're going to see today is only kind of a small picture, but I do think it's a helpful picture for understanding some realities of friendship. And I want to begin by unpacking the realities of friendship by helping us see why friendship is such an important part of our lives, why it is such a blessing. And so the first part that we're going to discuss is the unique blessing of friendship. If you're taking notes, that'll be the first blank that you can fill in in your notes, but mostly I want us to consider why is friendship so necessary? I mean, aren't family relationships and romantic partners enough? Why do we need friends? The Bible says that there is something unique about friendship, that friendship is a gift given to us by God, and is a blessing offered to us by God, that we should not just see as a luxury, that we can make time for friends whenever life isn't so crazy, but that we should prioritize friendship because it is a unique blessing.

Go to that first verse that we read in our study of Proverbs today, Proverbs 18, 24. We read that a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So think about the way that proverb is constructed. There's this kind of contrast here. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, this contrasting between companions and a friend. This word for companion in the Hebrew sometimes can be translated friend. Sometimes it's translated as neighbor, but I think the connotation is that there's some casualness to this relationship. There is maybe some friendliness, but it's probably a relationship that is built a little bit more on convenience. Being friends or friendly as it is helpful to you, as it is easy for you, but maybe not through all the difficult and the hard times. I think so often when we speak about friends today, we might just be speaking about companions.

So often we talk about friends that we have on social media, friends that we have maybe at work or through other kind of some common interests, and really those might just be friendly people, acquaintances that are convenient, that we would agree on some things with, but maybe they wouldn't be people who are there with us through thick and thin. He says that we need something more than this. Proverbs says, "Even if you have many of these companions, it will not protect you when life gets difficult. A man of many companions will come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." That word for friend, it can be translated almost as lover. And sometimes I think we would feel uncomfortable with that, to equate a friend with a lover. And I think it's because we live in a society that again, prioritizes romantic and sexual love, but it does not prioritize friendship. It does not prioritize the love that is shared between two friends. So many times when we talk about loving someone or being close to someone, we automatically might go to a romantic relationship. As C.S. Lewis talks about in that eros, that type of love. But there is needed in friendship, a type of love that is close, that is a companion that is not just convenient, but is close to you, is a true friend. And he says this type of love between friends allows this friend to stick closer than a brother.

That idea of sticking is sometimes translated in the Old Testament as cleaving in the old King James Version, or holding fast. Almost the language of marriage, this type of commitment in a relationship. And you have to consider that when he says a friend can stick closer than a brother, this was written in a culture in which familial relationships were prioritized. I mean, you were associated by who is your family. It wasn't such an individualized culture in this ancient Hebrew world. You are very much a part of your family. And he says there is a unique blessing in friendship that a friend can actually be more committed to you than even a sibling. You contrast that with what he says in one chapter earlier, Proverbs 17. This is what Proverbs 17, 17 says. A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. What I think Proverbs 17 is saying is, it's not that your brother was meant to bring adversity into your life. I think what he's saying there is a brother or a sister is going to be there for you in adversity. That family members are going to be there for you when the going gets tough, because there's blood relations, there is a connection there. But the reality is, your family members, they didn't choose you. I mean, in reality, your family members might love you more than they like you sometimes. So let's be honest, right? Like, there is a way that your family is going to be there for you in difficult times. But what he is saying is, there is this unique blessing in friendship that goes beyond even the closest family relationships. That you can have a friend who not only loves you, but likes you. You can have a friend who chose you, who chooses to stick by you even in

the difficult times. But there is something that maybe even a romantic partner, even a family member can't bring, that a friendship, a true friendship can bring into our lives.

True friendship is a great blessing. And maybe as you hear it described, you would wonder, well, how do I have that type of friendship? How do I have that type of friend? I think in a sense, this type of friendship has to be discovered. I think in a way, you kind of have to find that type of person. You have to find that person who is going to be your friend in this way. C.S. Lewis actually spoke about this. He said that so many times, a really deep friendship is around a really common insight or a common interest. He said this, he said, the typical expression of opening friendship would be something like, what? You two? I thought I was the only one. So many times, a friendship begins when we find someone who shares a common interest. You thought you were the only one who cared about comic books in that way. But then you find someone else who likes them as well, and a friendship begins to form. He says that there's this thing that brings us together, this common interest, this shared vision. In fact, it's almost like friendship is kind of being able to walk alongside someone on a journey. C.S. Lewis says that so many times, we would probably depict lovers as being face to face, kind of infatuated with each other, always staring at each other. But he said the friendship love isn't face to face, it's side by side. He said you have a common insight, a common interest, and therefore you are walking alongside somebody as you are sharing in this shared vision together.

And so in some ways, you kind of have to find this person, these people, who are going to be this friend who have this shared interest. Now, as C.S. Lewis is referring to there, you can find, I think, that common bond in lots of things. People find it around sports or entertainment or hobbies or things that you like to spend your time doing. Lots of common interest can bring our friendships together. But I do think this reminds us of the need for good Christian friends. That if we really think about the call to follow Jesus, that that is our vision for life. That we want to follow where Jesus leads, we want to be transformed into his image. It makes a lot of sense that we would find others who are sharing that vision, who are following Jesus also, who are growing to look more like Christ, and we would walk alongside of each other. Now, it's not to say we should not have friendships outside of the Christian community. I think we should. God didn't wait till we were Christians to be friends with us, right? We should be friends to people who are not part of the church or the Christian community. And so many times, I think, common interests and shared bonds can bring us together in those friendships. And I'm not saying that we have to be best friends with everybody who is in the church. I mean, some people will be more compatible and have more shared interests than others. But what I'm saying is, I do think we need to have this shared vision of walking with Jesus together, following Jesus, being transformed into his image, and we need friends to walk alongside of us. But that kind of relationship is going to be discovered as you are moving in that direction. You are going to find people who I think are moving in that direction with you. Just as you are going to find friends, again, around that common bond or that interest, I think you're going to find godly friends as you are pursuing Jesus and you find the people who are also pursuing him as well.

C.S. Lewis said something that sounds a little harsh. So I'll just remind you that these are his words and not mine. He says, "There are certain pathetic people who seem to always want friends but can never make any." He said, "The problem is that they're just wanting friends." He says, "The very condition for having friendship is that you actually want something more than just friends." Like you have this desire, you have this insight, and that's where the friendship is found. The community is not found in just looking for people to depend on, but rather it is in this shared vision or this shared interest that you discover these friendships. So again, this is why I would say it is when you are walking with God, it's when you are studying God's word and you are doing that in a community of people like the church, that is when you're going to see those bonds begin to form. You're going to find people who say, "Oh, you like to study that as well? Let's study it together." "Oh, you struggle with that as well? Let's meet together and encourage each other in this journey." We have to discover these types of friendships, and I think especially in the church, they're going to be discovered as we are following Jesus and are being transformed into his image.

But as much as friendships need to be discovered, I think they also need to be built. Every relationship takes work. Friendship is no different. So the second reality is that we need to understand, I think, what are the building blocks of friendship. So this is the second part, if you're kind of following along, is we can discover these types of people that share some insight or interests that are hopefully following Jesus together. But the question is, what do we actually do to build this relationship stronger? What do we actually do? What are the blocks that we use to kind of build this friendship up?

And I think Proverbs offers a lot of them, more than I could cover today, but let me offer you four building blocks of friendship that I think we should both look for and also seek to exemplify in our own lives and our own friendships.

The first building block of friendship that I want to point out to you is consistency. One of the things that we need to have a strong friendship, to have a strong relationship, is to be consistent, to be there for each other. The Proverbs that we've already read in Proverbs 18 and even the one that we saw in Proverbs 17, I think, speak to this, that a friend loves at all times, that a true friend sticks closer than a brother, is there with you in good times and bad. A true friend is consistent. They are there with you through all seasons of life. And you know that you can call on them at all seasons of life, at all times of the day. Now, as we think about this, there's probably a lot that I could say, but I just want to mention very hopefully practically one resource that I think we have for consistency and then two obstacles that I think we have for consistency in our day. So if we want to be a friend who is there for people all the time, who is consistently there with them in every season of life, one resource that we have right now in our lives is technology. We have a way to communicate with other friends that past generations didn't have. That even when someone is traveling or far away physically, we can FaceTime with them. We can send them a text. We can stay in communication with them. In past generations, it might have taken months to get word. Even farther back, we might have ever been able to speak to someone again when they've traveled more than a hundred miles away from you. But now we can stay in contact with each other. Use technology to be a consistent friend, to be in communication with your friends. But at the same time, I would say be careful about becoming too reliant on technology. I do think sometimes technology can create some thin relationships, if you will. Sometimes it can feel like we're keeping up with people just because we see their posts on Instagram or Facebook. We feel like we know what's going on in their lives, even though we haven't talked to them. Sometimes we might feel like we're communicating with them, even if it's only by text, but we haven't looked at them in the face in quite a long time. Let's be careful to use technology as a resource, but not to become too reliant upon it. So there's our resource for consistency.

Here's two obstacles that I would just point out to you that I think are especially unique to our context. One is our busyness. Everybody is busy. Sometimes people reach out to me and they say, "Pastor, I know you're busy." I say, "Everybody's busy." Especially in San Francisco, I feel like everybody's busy. People work a lot of hours. There's a lot of friction sometimes in the city just of getting schedules to align. Our busyness can so often be an obstacle to being a consistent friend. Don't believe the lie that it's going to get easier in the next season of life. Sometimes you think, "Well, if I could just get through this hard season of work, I got to meet this deadline, but then after that, I'm going to have time for friends." Well, once the kids get a little bit older, things won't be so crazy, then I'll have time for friends. Don't believe that. I've found in my life and just my short years of living, but then observing other people, life doesn't get any less busy. Make time now. Prioritize being a consistent friend. Carve out time in your schedule to be with friends and to spend time with them.

So one obstacle I think that we face is our busyness, and the other one is our mobility. We move around a lot. I mean, you'll have friends that travel. We have some church members that want summer hits. We may not see you until August, right? You have friends that travel for work. You have friends that travel for vacation. You have people that move. I mean, we live in a very transient city. So many times you feel like you're really starting to build a relationship, and then somebody's gone. Here's what I would say about meeting that obstacle of mobility. One, maybe sometimes don't wait so long to build a strong relationship. We used to live in Las Vegas, and just outside of Las Vegas is a big Air Force base. And what I found was that these Air Force families, they're always being moved around, you know, by the government and the military. It's just the way their life was. And they would show up to church, and they would say, "We're going to be here for two years, and then we're going to move." No question. That's how long our assignment is. So we want to plug in for these next two years, and they would jump right into relationships, to serving, because they knew that they only had a certain amount of time there. Sometimes you know that the city's transient. People might move. Don't wait so long to build a relationship. Don't wait so long to form some deep bonds. Begin to walk with one another in real ways, quickly. But also, maybe think about putting down roots in San Francisco. I mean, I know there's a lot to consider as you are thinking about what's for the next season of life, and so many times you have to think about your job, and you have to think about cost of living and so many other things, but maybe you would consider putting down roots and continuing to invest in relationships here. But recognize that consistency, a friend being there at all times, is an important part of building a strong friendship.

The second one that I want to point out to you that I think Proverbs speaks to us about is honesty. A true friend is someone you can be honest with, and they can be honest with you. A true friend is someone you don't feel like you need to impress anymore. You don't always have to have everything sewed together. It's also someone that can just speak to you in a way that you need to hear. A friend can tell you things that maybe you don't always want to hear, but you need to hear. We see this in Proverbs, chapter 27, verses 5 and 6. It says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profused are the kisses of an enemy." I love this kind of contrast in verse 6. It's like there's these loving wounds and these hurting kisses, these wounding kisses. It's like that there's this fact that people can say things to you that seem really nice and flattering, but they're actually just hurting you. They're not helping you. It'd be much better to have someone who is honest with you direct with you, tell you what you really need to hear.

Maybe in our culture we especially need to hear this word about honesty. I found a letter, you can find it online, that MIT has sent or made available to their international students. It's about American friendship because they recognize that people coming from different cultures might run into some obstacles trying to be friends with Americans. They use this analogy. They said, "You might come from a culture that's a lot like a coconut, really hard on the outside, kind of hard to break in if you're a new person, but you'll find that once you break through it's really sweet and it's really nice." They said Americans tend to be more like peaches. They tend to be soft on the outside with a really hard core. They described Americans as being polite but private people. And so they said you'll often find that Americans might say, "Oh yeah, let's get coffee, let's get lunch," and then never talk to you again.

They said, "Don't be offended by this. It's just the way Americans are." Well, maybe that's the case, but maybe we should be better than that. Maybe we should really be honest with people about our intention for the relationship. Maybe we should be honest with people about being friends with them. But can we say that I think this honesty often only comes when there's consistency. You ever heard the old saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"? People don't really want to hear your honesty if they don't think that you love them. How many times you need to have been there with someone through the good times and the bad, showing consistency that you really care about somebody before you can just wound them with your words, before you can just know what they need to hear and what you say. The other part of that, I think, is that we need to recognize what do people actually need to hear, what is helpful for them. And that leads to the third building block, which is sensitivity. A friend is someone who doesn't just tell you what you want to hear but what you need to hear, but I think they're also aware enough to know what do you actually need to hear. They are someone who is sensitive to what is going on in your life. Nobody wants a friend who's just like a bulldozer, always telling you what is honest and what is truthful, but not what you need to hear in the moment. The question just can't be, "Is it truthful, but is it helpful in these moments?"

We see this idea throughout some of the other Proverbs that I didn't read this morning, but I'll highlight them for you now. Proverbs 25:20, it says, "Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda." A vinegar on soda is kind of confusing. I think there might be some translation issues there, but taking off a garment on a cold day, you can tell, is not a helpful thing. So what he's saying is, singing songs to a heavy heart is not a helpful thing. Meaning, it's not helpful to be a friend who's just always chipper when your friend is down. It's not always helpful to be a friend who just quotes Bible verses when your friend just needs you to listen to them. Sometimes something might be very true, but it may not be helpful in that moment. You could be sensitive to what people actually need to hear, sensitive to how they relate. I like this one in Proverbs 28 verses 19, excuse me, Proverbs 26 verses 18 and 19. "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, I'm only joking."

Do you know somebody like that who loves to make fun of someone and say, oh, you just can't take a joke. Maybe you don't know how to tell a joke. I mean, maybe you need to be sensitive to what is actually funny. What is actually going to be helpful to somebody? Be sensitive to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Can't always just be, well, what is true and what's honest, but what is sensitive to what they actually need in this moment? Also, I think probably need to be sensitive in your consistency. Maybe you need to be there for people in good times and bad, but maybe you don't always need to be around. Listen to what Proverbs 25 says, verse 17. "Your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you." In other words, don't overstay your welcome. This is why you need to read the whole book of Proverbs. We just highlight a few, but if you're to build your whole friendship around one proverb, you'd miss the bigger picture. Proverbs is the same, be there for one another, but don't always be around. Be

sensitive to what is helpful in the moment. Read the room. Be considerate of people. And this happens as you get to know people. You'll know how to be sensitive and what they really need when you actually know them and they know you.

To go back to Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 9. It says, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel." I love this. What makes a friendship so sweet, he says, is the earnest counsel. That's a tough phrase to translate, but if you look in the original language, I think the idea is that it's words that come from the soul or from the heart. It's when someone knows you and you know them. There's this counsel that comes from them that's really opening up who they are. Because listen, you might go to a therapist or a counselor, you might go to a pastor, and you might seek counsel for them. And you can't always expect them to open up every part of their life to you. You're there to receive maybe hopefully some good advice, some wisdom from them. But a friend should be different. I mean, a friend should be a two-way relationship where you know them and they know you. And they're giving you this counsel from a place that comes from their soul that you know. And they know you, which leads us to the last building block of friendship, which is the fact that friendship is built around intimacy.

The last part I would say about building a healthy, wise friendship is intimacy. And again, sometimes we can feel awkward with that word in our culture. Because in intimacy, we think of a romantic partner. But there is this intimacy that is required for having a true friendship. No one can really know what you need to hear unless they really know you. You can't know where their words are coming from, that earnest counsel, unless you know their heart and their soul. As we read in Proverbs 27 verse 17, "Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another." You just think of that analogy for a second. Ironing, sharpening, iron. Iron sharpening, sharpening, iron. You got two pieces of metal. If they stay really far apart, there's not going to be any sharpening that's happening. So many times we come to church and we keep people at arm's length. Sure, we'll talk to them about sports or the weather or the basic things of life, but we don't let them in. There's no way we can be sharpened without getting close to people. For iron to sharpen iron, they have to come into close contact with each other. Now they have to come into close contact in the right way. Sometimes they can come into close contact in the wrong way and there's more damage than good. That's why we need to be honest and we need to be sensitive. But we are not going to be able to sharpen each other. We're not going to be able to grow together unless we truly know each other. Unless there's a level of intimacy.

So you have these four building blocks. And I thought Tim Keller summarized them well when he just put it like this. A friend always lets you in and never lets you down. A friend is intimate. A friend is open. Always letting you in. A friend is always there for you. Telling you what you need to hear. A friend never lets you down. Let's be honest. How many times have we thought we found this friend? Only for something to change. How many times have we thought that we found someone who would always let us in and all of a sudden something changed? I mean maybe it was just seasonal. They moved. Something changed in their lives. Or maybe they just grew cold to us and they quit letting us in. Maybe in some way they let us down. They said something that was really insensitive. They hurt us in some way. They weren't there for us when we needed them the most. How many times have we been that friend? How many times have you let someone down? Sometimes you didn't mean to. Life just got busy. You just dropped the ball. Sometimes you did it on purpose because you're working from a place of hurt. Let's be honest. Sometimes we don't have the friendships we want. Not because we're mobile and we're busy but because we're not the type of friends that would build a good friendship.

Where do we draw comfort during these times? Where do we draw encouragement and empowerment? I would lastly want to point you to the true and better friendship. There is a true and better friendship that Proverbs is ultimately pointing us to and the Bible is constantly leading us to. Now listen, if you hear my preaching on a regular basis, you'll probably find that there's this kind of typical thing that happens. At some point in the sermon, we're going to turn our attention to Jesus into the gospel. Oftentimes, it's probably going to happen to the end, towards the end of the sermon. But I would hope it would never just be in a trite or cliché way. I hope it's never just a Jesus juke just to get us to the cross. I hope that it's in a really meaningful way. And I think when it comes to the nature of friendship, it is. Because where do we find comfort when friends let us down? Where do we find the ability to forgive the friends that have hurt us? Where do we find encouragement when we've been a bad friend? Where do we find the ability to love when it's hard, to be consistent when it's not convenient? It is from this true and better friendship that we have. If you look throughout the Bible, God has these special relationships with people.

For instance, he would have this relationship with Moses and it said that he was talking to Moses like a friend would talk. But when Jesus came, he said something to his disciples that was really profound. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, he said this in John chapter 15. This is my commandment starting in verse 12. That you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you. Jesus says I don't view you as servants, but as friends, because I've revealed to you everything the father has given me. What is Jesus doing there? He's letting them in. Jesus is revealing himself to them. He is making himself vulnerable, even though knowing that one is going to betray him, that one is going to deny that others are going to abandon him in his moment of need. He's letting them in. And of course, Jesus is not going to let them down. He says the greatest love that someone could show is that they would lay down their life for their friends. That's what Jesus is about to do. He is not going to let his friends down, rather he is going to lay down his life.

And he is now not just speaking this to these disciples, but to us as well. That no longer does he merely see us as servants, but as friends. Now, I think it's important in some way that we would see ourselves as servants of Jesus. There is this respect that we need to have that he is king and that we are not. That we are going to obey him and follow him. But as we might see ourselves as servants, we need to be reminded he sees us as friends. This is actually what we celebrate as we come to the table this morning. That we have been united with Christ in such a way that we are his body. As we take of the body and the bread, we take of the blood and the cup, we are reminded that we have been brought into communion with him. That we are friends of God. I know that sounds kind of cheesy, but do you think about how profound that is that you are a friend of God? Aren't we so often impressed when people are friends with very powerful or very important people? Like, oh wow, you have that person in your contacts. You are friends with that person.

You are a friend of Jesus Christ. He calls you friend. You are a friend of God. Does that comfort you in moments when friends let you down? Does that equip you to be a good friend and think about what Jesus said there? In this night when he is going to be betrayed, as he is calling them friends, he says, "Love one another as I have loved you." In other words, be good friends to one another. Just as I am being a good friend to you in these moments, love each other. Be good friends to each other. And he can command us to do this because he has accomplished the work for us to do this. Again, this is what we celebrate as we come to the table. The reason we come to the table together, the reason we eat of the bread and drink of the cup all at the same time is because we are celebrating not only communion with God, but communion with That we have been reconciled to God and to each other. That we have been brought together in this great friendship of Christian community. So he says, "Love one another as I have loved you." So as we come to the table this morning, and then as we go from here, I would encourage you to value that relationship that you have with God. Value that friendship that you have with God.

Maybe you are here today and you are not friends with God because you have not trusted in what Jesus has done. To know that you can base your life on that. I encourage you to be reminded of that great reality each day. Communion with God as you study his word. Communion with God as you spend time in prayer. Don't think of these as spiritual disciplines you have to do, but time that you get to spend with a friend. But then go and be a good friend to others. Maybe that means you need to forgive someone for something that they have done to you. Or that they did not do for you. Maybe that means you need to go to someone and ask them for forgiveness. But I would encourage you, let us be friends to one another. Friends to those outside the Christian community. That people would see what God has done in reconciling us to himself and to each other. And they would say, "I want that." That those who are struggling with loneliness would know that there is a place that they can have a true and better friend. And that they can experience real friendship within the church.