



# SONG OF SONGS

*A Biblical Vision for Marriage, Sex, and the Body*

## Song of Songs: This is My Friend

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### Song of Songs 5:10-16

Good morning, Doxa. Today we'll be reading out of Song of Songs, chapter five, verses 10 through 16. "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves besides streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon choice, as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, and he is all together desirable. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Thank you, Emma. Hi, Doxa. How are we? If we have not met, my name is Donald, one of the pastors on staff. I oversee communications, arts, music, and liturgy. And then every six to eight weeks or so, I get to be up here and to open up God's word and to share with you what God is doing through these passages for us and for our church. I know here at Doxa, we love our Bibles. We love our theological treatises and our Romans Roads, and we love our expository preaching, you know, walking through the text and saying what the text is saying. And those are all good things. I love that about our church, truly. If you were to go on Amazon and buy a commentary or a study resource right now for the Song of Songs, when that arrived and you started to read through that resource, you would undoubtedly run into someone warning you that you should never preach Song of Songs to a church. And that's awesome.

Here we are. So, cool. There's a couple reasons for this. Number one, it's the genre of the text. Most of you are aware. We've got 66 books in the Bible, all written by different authors. But that process overseen sovereignly by God, and the Song of Songs falls into a genre of text for us

in this scripture known as wisdom literature. But this one is largely poetry. And so it can make some of the application piece and preaching it in a traditional exegetical format pretty tricky. So we've got some shelves to build along the way, but I think you guys are up for it. I think it's worth it. I believe in Second Timothy, when we read that all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching and rebuking and correcting and for training us in righteousness so that the people of God are complete and equipped for every good work. I believe that the Song of Songs is included in that, right?

And so that's why we're going through this. Lastly, I believe that the family and the home is just a key building block in society. It's certainly one of the primary spaces that we actually make disciples, which is why we're here. And so it's certainly worth our time and attention to help singles that are in Doxa to think about how they want to pay attention to their own discipleship as they look forward to potential marriage in the future, as well as minister to the marriages that are represented here in the room.

What we're going to read and see today is what most scholars believe is a dream. And despite the poetic nature of it, despite the fact that it's a dream, I believe there's something in here for us. I believe that if you pay attention to this passage, you could deepen your understanding of who God is. You could perhaps finally give yourself permission to move away from relationships in your life that are harming you. You might even start to see your marriage turn a corner and see new levels of depth of intimacy or friendship in your marriage. These are all really good things.

I will say upfront that when you read the text, and we'll get into the details on this in a moment, there's really two storylines that are happening at the same time. And one of them is pretty racy. And you probably will find yourself going, is this actually what this passage could possibly be saying? And the answer is yes. So, we've kind of warned you over the course of this series, the Song of Songs, that some of these messages are PG-13. Today is no exception, but I don't want religiousness or prudishness to get us in a spot where we can't actually receive what God is doing in this text.

The passage has, as I mentioned, this brilliant double meaning. And perhaps it should not surprise us that as the author sits down to write this, as he's inspired by God, that there'd be a stroke of literary genius, that this incredible creative writing would happen, and this double meaning gets, as I said, pretty graphic. We're not going to camp out there, but it also feels dishonest to not share what most scholars believe is happening in the passage.

Lastly, in addition to my own research and commentaries and prayer and preparation for this message, I sent a few questions over text to a few of my longest friends and asked them a few things about friendship, about my relationship with them, and about marriage and friendship. And so I'm going to share with you today some of the things that they shared, because I think some of their responses are really helpful for us.

Let me pray for us. Jesus, thank you for your word. Thank you for this passage. Thank you for the ways that you are working in marriages around Doxa right now. We know there are many marriages that are struggling, and so we pray for you to be our rescue. We pray for you to be rebuilding and restoring. We pray for you to minister to our singles in the church that you would be protecting their heart and allowing them to truly have you be their first love so that they are better equipped to know how to build relationships in the future. And so, help me as I preach that this would be clear and would be useful to you as you help us make disciples here at Doxa. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

Alright, so as we've seen over the last few weeks, there's really three primary characters in the book of Song of Songs. There's the husband, the man, there's the wife, the woman, and then there's this sort of outside audience that are watching their interactions that they call out to from time to time. And we're going to see all three of them in today's passage.

The woman in chapter five, she's falling asleep and she's still kind of thinking some thoughts and feeling some desires. And as she's falling unconscious, she feels desire for her husband. You know, she's feeling a certain kind of way, and she hears a knock at the door. And this is where the brilliant double meaning piece kicks in. And to be clear, I don't think it's option A or option B, and our task this morning is to figure out which one is correct. I believe that the author and the Holy Spirit intended for us to look at both of them. And it's part of why this is such an interesting passage.

So we'll start with storyline one. Storyline one is she hears a knock. She's hesitant to get up because she's already taken off her everyday clothes. She's in her underwear and she's washing her feet before entering the bed, which is the custom. She's tucked in for the night. She hears a knock, and her hesitation doesn't last very long because she sees through the dim light this hand come through the latch at the door. So she pops up to unlock it. And at this point, either from the man or maybe from her bedtime routine, the married men in here know that when we say we're going to bed, that's a pretty quick commitment. The time from saying that sentence to being in bed-very short period of time. When a woman says she's going to bed, that is the inauguration of a whole ceremony of many things.

Anyway, so she maybe has some kind of bedtime routine happening. And then she has oil on her hands. And so there's oil on the latch now from somebody touching the latch. And then the time it takes her to get the door open, the door swings open and she doesn't see anybody. He's gone. Something has interrupted his waiting.

Storyline two. This version of the story depends on the fact that in the Hebrew, and again, I believe this is intentional, all three of the body references have double meanings-feet, hand, and heart. So the woman is ready to fall asleep and she realizes that she's in the mood and she's weighing the pros and cons and asks herself whether she wants to go through the hassle of having to wash herself again after being intimate. The Hebrew word here translated feet, "rag la yin,"

also refers to genitals. The words for hand here, "yad" is used other places in the Old Testament, like Isaiah 57 to refer to men's genitals and even specifically, sexual potency. And again, as Pastor Eddie shared last week as Christians, we all sort of cringe a little bit when we hear that. We talked last week about how the culture worships sexuality, but that at times the church, capital C, has avoided talking about these things in sexuality, and we want to do neither of those things. Neither of those things are helpful.

Lastly, she refers to her own heart. Now, in Western understanding, for you and I, when we think of the heart, we think of the left side of our chest. This is where our heart lives, right? But in Jewish understanding, this word for heart really refers to anything external or internal from the stomach or womb down. And on top of that, it carries a meaning of where our deepest desires reside in our body, including sexual desire.

So if you translate feet and hand and heart in those ways, which I believe again are implied in the text, and you reread verses three, four, and five, this is probably the most provocative scripture I could think of in the whole Bible, and I'm not kidding. So I'll let you do that on your own time. Now, importantly, again, both versions of the story in the same way, a disappointed and lonely lover is now embarking on a search for her partner, just like we covered a few weeks ago in chapter three.

So she goes out hunting for him. She's beaten by some watchmen, which I couldn't find a single scholar that had anything helpful to say about that. She asks these women; she pleads with these women, rather to help her in her search for her man. The women are saying basically, why should we help you? She launches into this detailed five star Amazon review of her husband's physical features. And then at the very bottom, things sort of turn...interestingly, the language that she uses to describe her man are all of the source materials that were used commonly in the ancient Near East to build statues. And so she's essentially saying, in short, that my guy is built like a handcrafted statue. My wife has never said those words to me, not even once. Anyway, all the way down at the very bottom, she says something really profound, and it's easy for us to miss in verse 16. In begging for help and trying to get these ladies to understand why they should drop what they're doing and help her find her man, she says, this is my love, this is my friend.

We're going to come back to that later. Now, the Song of Song series here at Doxa, this is a series on marriage and relationships. And so it'd be really silly for us to not take at least some time and talk about friendship because whether we would say that we have a lot of friends or whether friendship is really hard for us and right now is a particularly lonely time, these things have a massive impact on our lives. And again, by way of the passage, if you don't know, here at Doxa we typically walk verse by verse through the books of the Bible and preach those things, and I love that. This idea of friendship, it pops its head up a few different places across the book of Song of Songs. And so I'm going to be today borrowing from some other places in the scriptures, particularly the Proverbs that give us some good wisdom around friendship.

Friendship is something that I have enjoyed for most of my life. It has also at times felt elusive. I'm not a friend expert. I have failed my friends at various times. My friends have failed me at various times. So I'm not a pro by any means. I am happy to share what I believe that the Bible teaches us on this subject because I think it's helpful for our discipleship as we talk about marriage and relationships. Now, much of what I share today will certainly apply to all friendships, but I hope to bring some specificity to the nature of friendship in marriage as well.

So let's dive in. Let's start by framing what we mean when we say the word friendship. What is friendship? Well, Tim Keller describes what he calls the four marks of true friendship. Again, he's bringing a lot of this out of the Proverbs and gives us four C's. Of course, it's Tim Keller, and I think that they're just remarkably helpful. So I'm going to dive right in. Number one, true friendship requires constancy. That's availability. It's being there when the chips are down. It's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. This isn't a, hey, call me if you need something. It's actually showing up in the need. Keller describes a friend from the Proverbs as one who always lets you in and never lets you down.

Tim Keller's colleague, Rapper 50 Cent says that friendship is the most important relationship, and it is only when you become comfortable with someone in friendship that you become comfortable with the commitment of friendship. That's pretty smart. Constancy. This is the friend that may not make your problems disappear, but they won't disappear when problems arise. So true friendship requires constancy.

Number two, true friendship requires care. Care means that you know what's meaningful to your friend. You can read their emotional temperature. This is captured in Proverbs 25 when it talks about how if you sing happy songs to someone who is really struggling, it doesn't land super great. This is someone you can tell bad news and they don't feel compelled to one-up you with their own bad news. I think we've all known that person. This is someone you can tell good news to and they don't feel threatened or jealous. They can truly enter into celebrating whatever's happening in your life. That's what care looks like.

Number three, friendship requires candor. The Hebrew word for friend is super close to the word for secret, and I love this idea. In John 15, Jesus says, you are no longer called servants, but friends. And so much of the context of that passage is because he has invited them in and shown them and told them everything, right? Again, Proverbs 27, wounds from a friend can be trusted. A friendly wound is necessary, but maybe a difficult thing that we need to say to a friend. And being honest can absolutely be tough. I get that part. But if you say, either for yourself or hear someone else say, I love them too much to be honest, what you're actually saying is I love myself too much to go through that with them. Friendship requires careful and considerate honesty. And I'll say this right now, two sort of side notes for folks on the east side- number one, the more financial resources you have and the more authority and power you have in your organization, the harder it is to find true friends that will do both care and candor with you. And number two, most of us in this room know right away that we love care and try to avoid the candor part, or we like the candor part and avoid the care part. So there's room for us all to grow in this, I believe.

So, true friendship-constancy, care, candor-and lastly, counsel. Counsel is when we confide in someone else who is also open and being vulnerable themselves. It is mutual, two-way vulnerability. And I'll say this because I've seen it pop up so many times in my time at Doxa since we started in 2015. In the church in particular, we confuse transparency for vulnerability. Transparency says, here are all the things that are hard about my life. Here are all the ways that maybe I'm even broken inside. Here are the places in which I struggle. Doesn't that stink? That's transparency. Vulnerability says, here are all the things that are hard about my life. Here are all the things that are broken inside me. What do you think I should do? It's very different. It's very different. And we commonly confuse the two.

One is simply a decoration of sort of like spilling our guts. The other one is an invitation for someone to actually speak into those spaces. And you can see why we would avoid it, because it is a vulnerable position. When you're talking about the most fundamental broken things about your life, it's hard to find a trusted person that you're willing to open that up to and say, what am I missing? What am I not seeing here? What do I not have right? Transparency, vulnerability-not the same thing. So counsel is sharing the deepest parts of us with a select group. It could be one person.

And interestingly, I'm thankful for the ways in which counseling and therapy have lost some of the negative stigma in the church in the last 10 to 15 years. I think that's a really good thing. I think it's a wonderful thing. But a therapist can't be your friend because it can't be two-way, right? It's professionally inappropriate for a therapist to be open and vulnerable on their side. If you have an emotionally unstable friend that's constantly venting but never listening, that's not it, right? That's still not the two-way vulnerability. Friendship requires mutually beneficial openness and invitation. This is the heart of iron sharpening iron.

Okay, so we got those four C's, constancy, care, candor, counsel, and you might hear that and say, that's awesome. I want that. How do I track that down? Where do you find this kind of friendship? And again, I think Keller is really helpful here. He talks about something that I think I've misunderstood in my life, and maybe you have as well, and it pertains to where we find friendship. The Proverbs describe friendship, like something sweet. This happens multiple places in the scriptures. And this is an interesting metaphor because sweet food in the ancient near East was not produced or created. It was discovered. They couldn't make sugar. So they had to find something with sweet properties.

And Keller makes a point that this is why honey and sweetness are such a great metaphor for friendship, because you can't force it. You can't manufacture it. Friendship can't be created. It must be discovered. C. S. Lewis echoes this exact same sentiment in one of my favorite books of his, *The Four Loves*. He says, this is why those who talk of wanting friends rarely find them. The condition for having friends is chasing something other than friendship. There would be nothing for the friendship to be about. Those who have nothing can share nothing. Those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travelers.

I think that's just very intriguing. Lewis, in the same chapter, says that every friendship begins with this moment in our heart when we say, wait, what? You too? I thought I was the only one. You like hiking and photography? Hey, me too. I thought I was the only one. You're stuck watching your kid play soccer all year round? Hey, me too. You like working at Microsoft and avoiding as much human interaction as possible? Hey, me too. These are the spaces where friendship can be born.

When I asked my friends about the key ingredients of friendship, this same idea came up over and over and over again. It's a shared activity. It's a common interest, right? And so those of us who would like to enjoy more friendships, we have to be willing to show up in these kinds of spaces where it can be discovered. And we also can't quit just because we don't find any friendship treasure on the first dig. Friendship cannot be created. It has to be discovered.

Now, let's talk about marriage for a moment. Because friendship is unique from other loves in marriage. For really, as long as I've been a pastor, which is about 20 years, I have really focused on the counseling side of things and doing a lot of premarital counseling. Like there's probably a few couples in here that I have officiated their wedding and walked through premarital counseling with them. And one of the things that we talk about are the three kinds of love that we see in the New Testament. You actually see the same general idea in the Old Testament as well when you look at the Hebrew words for love and the Greek words for love. And I use the analogy of a tripod.

You all know what a tripod is, right? It has three legs. And if you only have two legs extended and you set it down, what happens? Falls over. That's correct. And so I talk about these three loves in marriage. And there's the physical love-eros. There's the friendship love-phileo. And the commitment love of agape. And marriage really taps into all three of these legs. And the legs are connected, but they're not the same. And that's really important. There is a difference between eros and phileo, for example. And physical intimacy and friendship are not the same. And they can combine to make something really powerful, but they're not the same. And I have observed that the most endangered marriages are the ones that silently agree to forego one of those three legs. And the strongest marriages are the ones that know how to lean heavily onto the other two legs when one of the legs is broken or bruised or fractured or struggling.

And so friendship is a huge, huge part of marriage. Why is friendship so dang hard sometimes? Well, I think there's a few things that play into this. Number one, finding all four of those Cs is hard, and it takes time. I mean, you can see how dangerous it is to do candor without care or to care for someone without that candor piece. And this is why, in part, why friendship is uncommon. And, you know, friendship, true biblical friendship, requires a really significant investment, which incidentally, for those who say they have a thousand friends, those are the people who actually don't have any friends at all. Because you can't do this kind of relationship across a thousand places. That's impossible.

Secondly, you know, we find ourselves certainly in a cultural war right now around a lot of the topics from this series, like sexuality, and marriage, and gender, and love, and hate, and justice,

and the way that we use these words as God's people and the way these words are used by the world have grown so far apart, so fast that they're hardly recognizable. And so there's a real war of words. And I think one of the words that's been hijacked by our culture in this last season of maybe say, the last 10 years, is the word friend. That word doesn't seem to mean the same thing that it used to. I mean, you can make a case that it really started with a social platform launched in 2004 called The Facebook. Remember when it was called The Facebook?

My experience has been the younger a person is the looser that they use this term friend. And church, just because someone shares a class schedule with you does not mean they're your friend. Just because someone works in the same industry as you does not make them your friend. Just because you see someone regularly does not mean that they're your friend. And coworkers, and classmates, and colleagues, these are all great things, and they enrich our lives. Nothing wrong with that. But to call these people friends when we're not looking at something that's close to these four C's I think is a misrepresentation. We've reduced this word to something that doesn't look like the biblical concept at all.

So friendship is tough because we confuse and misuse the word. Friendship, biblically, is a protected, a reinforced place, not a place you gain by clicking a button on the website. Friendship is an exclusive place of significant connection, not something that can be shared across hundreds of people. Friendship isn't defined, and this is a big one, you can imagine where we can go with this one, friendship is not defined by the facts that we know about a person, but by our shared experiences and the time that we spend together. So I think that can make friendship tough.

Additionally, I think friendship is tough because of our mobility. Raise your hand if someone you care about, somebody you love, has moved away or relocated in the last five years. Yeah, same response last service by the way. Almost everybody. You know, mobility, our ability to pick up our whole lives, I think it's a really good thing if you want to work for a company or somebody who doesn't have local offices in Seattle. But when it comes to long-term, healthy friendship, it's pretty tough. Our ability to get to other places, it's a gift, but it works against us in this way. I think friendship is tough because we have less hours than ever before. There's all kinds of study that shows how even with all of our technological advancements, we have less hours together. Our schedules are packed with activities and expectations. I mean, if you're over about 25 and you try to get a group of three or four friends together, how hard is scheduling that? It's tough. I think we've all felt that. There's not a lot of empty space for relationships.

Lastly, why is friendship with our spouse sometimes hard? And again, I asked some questions of those in my life that have done these four C's with me and have done these things with their spouse for a long period of time. And I asked them what makes marriage friendship difficult. And I think some of their answers will potentially speak to you. Here's what they said. Miscommunication creates potholes that you eventually drive over. It's easy to take your spouse for granted and at times hard to make time just to have fun. The close proximity always



exposes your selfishness and your less lovely characteristics. What's difficult emotionally for one partner may not be for the other, creating a gap. Husbands often try to fix instead of listen. Women often nag hoping to change their husbands. Husbands emotionally detach to avoid things in their wives they don't know how to face or handle. Unhealthy expectations can sort of suffocate the relationship. If one of the partners neglects their walk with Christ, the need for that worship and adoration still arises in the heart and so they move on to the next one in line, which is usually their spouse. We spend less time with our spouse because of commute times and job demands and endless activities offered to our kids and digital distractions in the home. Does any of that ring true for you?

I think we can see why genuine friendship in marriage can be challenging. So what do we do? What do we do? Well, let's first talk about just a few really, really practical things. And some of this I know sounds so obvious, but when I think about the times in my own marriage and the things that have helped us reset and get back to a good place, it is often the basic things. So super practically, and this list will actually be available to you in the discussion guides this week on the app so you don't need to feel any need to write this stuff down, but again, if any of this feels helpful to you, you can find it there.

Number one, spending quality time together. There's just no substitute for that. And again, this is true for all friendship, right? But particularly true for friendship in marriage. Number two, communication and talking about everyday life. Number three, being honest and loyal, finding common interests, having fun with one another, laughing together. The Gottman Institute is a leading research and counseling center for marriages in America. And it's interesting, when they did an exhaustive study, they found that laughing together indexed way higher than they expected for healthy marriages. They say if laughter is what makes us human, then humor is a necessary tie that binds us to one another and reminds us that our relationships are designed to bring joy. I love that. Trying new things together, setting goals together, prioritizing and respecting your spouse, cheering on each other's successes. Has your partner in the last year had something really significant happen? And have you celebrated that? Being considerate of each other, and lastly, being forgiving of each other because grudges are poisonous.

So I think that's a pretty good practical, you know, playbook there. Husbands, if things in your friendship in your marriage right now are cold, here's my advice. I think you take your wife out on a date, you go someplace where you're going to enjoy the food. You share a few things that you appreciate about your wife in this last season, and then you ask this very important question, which is, what is one thing you'd like to see me work on? I did this fairly recently with my own wife. I know the temptation in these conversations is to be defensive. But if you really listen, if you don't get hung up perhaps on the delivery, you listen for the heart behind the feedback, if you believe fundamentally that your wife desires more connection with you, it's far easier to hear her response. So do that this week and then look at this list. You could do one or two of these things in the next couple weeks. Give them a whirl. So how is friendship going for you?

Many of you know first week of July I was playing pickleball and I tore my Achilles. Had a full tear of my Achilles. And so you probably see me on a boot. Couple months ago I was scooting around church. That's not something I ever hoped for. And in fact, I'm probably supposed to be wearing my boot right now, so don't tell my physical therapist. But the recovery takes a long time. It's about six months. So I'll be back to normal around Christmas time, which still feels so far away. When you tear your Achilles, when I went to the emergency room, they immediately administer a diagnostic test called the Thompson Test. And they take their hand and they stick it on your calf muscle and they squeeze it really hard. And if nothing moves on the bottom of your foot the way it's supposed to do, that indicates a full tear. Okay? That's how the Thompson test works.

And God gives us a bit of a Thompson test in the 10 Commandments, right? He says, well, if you think you don't need God's help, let me give you these 10 simple rules and see how far you get. Can you keep these for any substantive amount of time? And the answer of course, is a resounding no. When we look at friendship, I think there's a Thompson test in these four C's. So let me ask some questions around that. Let's talk about Constancy. Do those who would call you friend know that you'd actually show up when there was a need? Do you move toward your spouse when things are tense or when conflict arises?

What about Care? Can you get past the surface level topics with your friend group, especially for you men? I feel most of the time women are far, far better at this. For you men, do you ever talk about more than work projects and football scores and weather and things like that with your guys? Do you know who's hurting in your friend group? Who's struggling? For the married people in the room, are you willing to do something about the needs that you know your spouse has right now?

Candor. Do you have a friend that's wandering or chasing idols? Do you feel like you can lovingly step into that and speak up? Do you graciously speak up when your spouse is out of line? And lastly, Counsel. Do you offer more than a hey, praying for you for your inner circle? You obviously can't do that for again, hundreds of people, but for those in the tight circle around you, can you give them more than that? Do you yourself open up and offer vulnerability when your closest friends or your spouse offers vulnerability? My guess is that at least a couple of these are tough.

Many of us we're just simply not great at being a good friend. And it's helpful for us to face that fact because we can't move forward and invite the Spirit to do work if we can't at least be honest about where we're at in some of these spaces. Going back to Song of Songs, do you remember how chapter five ends? The woman she begs for help from these women to find her man. And she describes all of his physical features, and then she gets down to the bottom and she says, this is my love, this is my friend. And I think it's super interesting that the women don't decide to act until she closes it that way. And then they drop what they're doing and they help her. They get it. They know why it matters. Let's go find this guy.

Now, for the married people in the room, it might be hard for you right now in this season to look your spouse in the eyes and to truly say those words, this is my love and this is my friend. It's possible that your friendship is really struggling, but I want you to know that God wants that for you. And because God wants that for you, he's going to help you out. He's with you in that friendship. He's with you in your marriage.

And so how do we do this? How do we restore the friendship in our marriages? Well, you're going to have to start by looking at the one who looks at you now, and has always looked at you and said, this is my love, this is my friend. The night before Jesus dies, he redefines his relationship to the disciples. He says, you are not my servants, but you are my friends, in John 15. Doxa, Jesus is the ultimate friend. He's the only one who has done these things perfectly for you. He's the only one who's done these things perfectly to you.

And the best part is you don't have to be nailing it for Jesus to be your friend. Matthew and Luke both call Jesus the friend of sinners. If you read the gospel narratives of Jesus, look at how many times he gets in trouble for being friends to the wrong people. Jesus is the friend of sinners. He loves you on your worst day. Most days are not your worst day, but he loves you on your worst day. How do you think he feels about you when you're just doing okay? There's so much affection and adoration in his eyes. I mean, think about the four C's. Is Jesus constant? Yes, he is more constant than anyone or anything that you know. Is he caring? He's more caring for you than anyone you've ever known, including your parents, your spouse, and your best friends.

Does Jesus offer us candor? Does he shoot straight with us? Yes. You know what the best part is? When Jesus tells us things in our life and talks to us about the things that are hard or perhaps places where he wants to see us grow, you always feel more loved on the other side, not critiqued. Does Jesus offer us counsel? Well, the most famous Christmas passage ever in Isaiah nine, for unto us, a child is born and he will be named wonderful counselor. Jesus is the perfect friend.

So how do we find friendship again? How do we restore the friendship in our marriages? You start by recognizing and enjoying the friendship of the Savior. I've got to tell you, it's incredibly freeing to be a friend to Jesus. It simultaneously allows you to know how to be a real friend. You just got to follow his lead. And it also frees you from suffocating your relationships by demanding that they hold your whole life instead of Jesus. So freeing. Jesus looks at you today and he says, this guy, this lady, he's mine. She's mine. This is my love. This is my friend. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for your friendship. I ask for your forgiveness for the times that I have neglected our friendship. I recognize that there have been times when I, and I'm sure many of us, have looked to other things to supply those things, those needs in my heart. Thank you for your faithfulness to me. Thank you for constantly chasing after us, even when we're distracted or too busy. Thank you that you care deeply about the marriages represented in this room.

Thank you that you care deeply about the singles in this room, that long for not just friendship, but future marriage.

I pray that you would minister to all of us, strengthen us. Give us courage for the ways in which we need to frankly stretch the things that we are comfortable with to pursue these things. Help us find spaces and places where we can form new relationships that are centered on you. If you are encouraging us, your spirit is asking us to say perhaps a difficult but gentle word to someone in our life, give us that courage now. Let us commit to do that this week.

If we have been harsh or brash in our feedback to others and need to seek forgiveness and instead really lean on the care, would you help us do that? It's how you talk to us. It's how you interact with us so help us for that as well. We pray you'd continue to work in our marriages as we walk through the series as a church. We need you. Marriage is tough. Friendships are tough. Relationships are tough. So please help us. Thank you for your kindness towards us. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.