



BEFRIENDING OTHERS • PROVERBS 17:17; MATTHEW 9:9-13 • 7/24/2022

MAIN POINT

Pastor Chuck will be focused on Friends and influences (Prov 13:20, 17:17, 18:24, 27:5-6). This lesson will focus on how we must be intentional about developing relationships to the point where we can share Christ meaningfully and effectively.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who were your closest friends growing up? How would you characterize your friendships with them?

How do your friendships today differ from your childhood friendships?

Between childhood and adulthood, we go through a lengthy process of maturity, well, at least some of us. Part of that maturity might include being more discerning about our relationships, but it should also include more intentionality on our part, recognizing that our friendships can and should serve a purpose. As Christians, we shouldn't be self-centered in our relationships, seeking to get what we can from associating with others; rather, our relationships with others should be about giving of ourselves in order to bless others—giving the blessings of love, encouragement, and especially, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PROVERBS 17:17.

What does it look like for a friend to love at all times? What actions would characterize such a friend?

What are the responsibilities of a friend who loves at all times?

Friends are typically ones who will drop just about anything in order to help out one another. They encourage, support, and even challenge one another, but this should always be within the context of a mutual love and affection. “The wounds of a friend are trustworthy,” Proverbs 27:6 says. Friendships should be built on honesty, or truth with grace. What greater demonstration of this ideal friendship than to share the truth of the gospel of Jesus with those we call our friends? Sharing the gospel will involve some “wounds,” as we explain sin and our need for a Savior, but if we are truly friends, even these “wounds” will be trustworthy and seen as faithful love.

How do we build these types of friendships, ones with honesty and grace?

How can we earn the right to be heard?

Share a time when you were honest with a friend, but you lacked grace and love. How did your friend respond? What did you learn from this experience?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 15:12-13.

How did Jesus show His love for His disciples?

Why would self-sacrifice be the greatest demonstration of love for a friend?

Does self-sacrifice necessarily entail one’s death, or can we “lay down our lives” in other ways, too? If so, what are some of those ways?

We earn the right to be heard while sharing the gospel with friends because we make it our aim to live like Jesus “at all times.” Jesus commands us to love one another, and that involves a self-sacrificial kind of love—laying down one’s life for the sake of the other. It is doubtful we will be called upon to die for a friend, but we can sacrifice for our friends in all sorts of ways—preferences, time, money, forgiveness, etc. If we give of ourselves sacrificially in a friendship, we are demonstrating the greatest kind of love, and this will mean we have earned the right to be heard when sharing the gospel, because the necessary “wounds” that will follow will be in the context of a friendship characterized by great love.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 9:9-13.

What is the general opinion of IRS workers in our day? Who are some types of people who would be labeled as “sinners” in our day?

Why did Jesus welcome and spend time with people who were considered “lower” on society’s scale?

Jesus willingly and graciously spent time with the outcasts of His own society—those labeled tax collectors and sinners. What’s more, Jesus was derided for these associations when Pharisees would call Him “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19). Yet Jesus was pleased to be ridiculed in this way because it was part of His mission. He intentionally sought relationships with sinners in order to show them mercy, to give them Himself. If we are to live like Jesus “at all times,” then we will follow in His pattern here. We must be intentional about our relationships for the sake of sharing the gospel. Genuine, faithful love toward others points people to the ultimate Lover, Jesus Christ.

What efforts are you making to love the “unlovable”?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some ways we can demonstrate our love for our friends “at all times”?

How can we begin to show love to the outcasts of our local community and society as a whole?

Are there specific situations that God has laid on your heart for sharing the gospel with a friend or acquaintance? How can we encourage and pray for one another to show love in sacrificial ways?

PRAYER

Father, we pray You would renew in us our joy and gratitude for the friendship that is ours in Jesus. We also pray for the strength and boldness of Your Holy Spirit to be intentional in our relationships—to give ourselves to others as Jesus did, and to share the good news of Christ’s finishing work on the cross.

COMMENTARY

| PROVERBS 17:17

17:17 The purpose of a brother is to uphold a family member in a difficult time. The Hebrew word can be used generally of relatives (Gen 13:8; 29:15; Jdg 14:3). An unlikely but possible interpretation is that a friend is better because he loves at all times, not just in difficult times.

| JOHN 15:12-13

The “commands” to be obeyed (15:10) are reduced in this verse to a single command. We are to love each other and to do it in the way and to the degree that Jesus loves, namely, as I have loved you. Jesus’ love for His followers sets the standard for His followers’ love for one another and furnishes the motivation for practicing mutual love. Having set His love as the standard for the disciples’ mutual love, Jesus described the highest manifestation of love. Willingness to lay down one’s life for others is the supreme test of love. Jesus’ saying no doubt referred primarily to His death as proof of His love for the disciples (“as I have loved you,” v. 12). Having mentioned “friends” as the ones for whom love prompts the giving of oneself, Jesus gave the qualification for people being His friends. The “if” clause in verse 14—you are my friends if—identifies the singular requirement for being His friend: doing “what I command.”

| MATTHEW 9:9-13

9:9. Again Matthew showed Jesus violating a cultural taboo by associating with a tax collector. The Roman Empire’s practice was to recruit tax collectors from among the people they had conquered. These natives worked for the hated oppressor. This made them traitors and outcasts among their countrymen. But it was common practice for tax collectors to demand more from their countrymen than was actually due in order to line their own pockets. If the people refused to pay, the tax collector had the threat of the Roman military to back him up. Tax collectors, in general, were known for their greed and lack of conscience, so they were thought of as the lowest form of humanity.

Not only did Jesus speak to such a vile sinner, but he invited Matthew, a tax collector, to become one of his closest followers. Implied here is the ultimate in forgiveness and unconditional acceptance. Matthew’s conscience must have been in torment for him to accept the Master’s invitation to spiritual cleansing and restoration, giving up the wealth and privilege of his position. Again the Messiah-King manifested the compelling authority of his word—turning the worst of sinners into disciples.

This brief passage is Matthew’s only mention of himself. It is natural that he should hold up—as an exhibit in his case for the identity of Jesus as Messiah—the key turning point of his own life. Matthew placed this account at the heart of Matthew 8-10, possibly as the crowning miracle authenticating the authority of the Messiah-King. This passage also links directly with 9:1-8, because it demonstrates the king’s authority to forgive sins.

9:10-11. Jesus proceeded to violate the cultural standards of acceptable behavior even further by visiting Matthew's home and by eating with him and many of his tax collector friends as well as many other sinners. Eating together was the deepest form of social intimacy. Normally no "sinner" was welcome at a righteous man's table, and no "righteous" man would consider eating at a sinner's table. Jesus had no such misgivings; he displayed his unconditional acceptance and impartiality by participating in this meal.

The Pharisees did not address Jesus directly. Perhaps they were trying to use the disciples' limited understanding to drive a wedge between them and Jesus. Their use of the title teacher may have been sarcastic. It was generally assumed that such a righteous man as a Jewish teacher would refrain from associating with society's undesirables. Their question was mocking and critical.

9:12-13. When he became aware of the question, Jesus rose to confront the hypocrites and their self-righteousness with righteous indignation. Jesus portrayed himself here, in the context of so many healing miracles, as a doctor for the human spirit. He defended his lack of association with the Pharisees (the healthy) by alluding to the fact that they saw no need for spiritual healing in themselves. He was not implying that the Pharisees were righteous, but only that they saw themselves that way, and so were not open to receiving his healing (forgiveness). It is safe to read some irony into Jesus' use of the word healthy in referring to the Pharisees.

Jesus also defended his association with the tax collectors and sinners by their own self-awareness regarding their spiritual illness (sin) and their hunger for his healing (forgiveness).

Also implied in Jesus' words was an affirmation of the basic equality of all people, a truth the Pharisees failed to grasp. This basic lack of understanding is why they needed to go and learn the lesson of Hosea 6:6. This Old Testament passage does not belittle sacrifice, but it elevates right treatment of the poor above it. By quoting the Old Testament, which the Pharisees knew well, Jesus shamed his opponents by confronting their misunderstanding of the spirit of the Lord's Word. The word sacrifice here represents all the religious motions and rituals the Pharisees observed that were meaningless and empty. But accompanied by a heart after God, particularly a heart of mercy and compassion, righteous deeds take on positive significance before God (Matt. 6:1-18).

Compassion or mercy is an attitude toward a need that is compelled to take action to meet that need. A compassionate and merciful heart finds it impossible to remain neutral when it sees a need of any kind.

Jesus was not blind to the faults of the sinners with whom he dined, but his mercy caused him to withhold judgment. The Pharisees had no right to exercise judgment, since they were just as sinful themselves. They should have been the first to withhold judgment and accept the other sinners. But in their pride, they were unmerciful, demonstrating they had no grasp of Jesus' statements in 6:14-15.

Finally, Jesus clarified his "physician" analogy by saying, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Again, we can read some sarcasm and irony into his use of the word righteous when referring to the Pharisees. They were not truly righteous, but they saw themselves as such. Thus, they were not willing to accept his forgiveness and respond to his call. The sinners, on the other hand, were aware of their sin (Matt. 5:3, "poor in spirit") and hungered for forgiveness. They responded to his call to true discipleship. Jesus' disciples were not perfect, but they accepted his forgiveness with humility and moved on toward maturity.