Cultivating Friendship (Fellowship)

Seventh and final in the summer series The Primary Purposes of the Church and the first of our September series from Romans 12

# Scripture: Rom. 12:6-16; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-17

# Key Thought: The Bible expects Christians to be loving and caring in relationships and teaches us the skills to accomplish that.

# Intro:

## We need friendship!

* ***“The lack of social relationships constitutes a major risk factor for health that rivals in importance the effects of such well-established health factors as cigarette smoking, blood pressure, blood lipids, exercise and obesity.” July 29 1988 issue of Science journal quoted in the Healing Power of Doing good p. 31***
* ***Popularity of social connection websites like Facebook illustrate sour hunger for friendship.***
* ***An English publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend and received thousands of answers. Here were some of the best.***
  + ***One who multiplies joys, divides grief.***
  + ***One who understands our silence.***
  + ***A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.***
  + ***A watch which beats true for all time and never runs down.***
  + ***But here is the definition that won the prize: a friend – the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out. (7700 #1792)***

# **The Bible’s expectation is that we would be loving and caring toward others – the kind of persons who are good to have as friends.**

## Jesus’ new command: “love one another” is reflected in many related practical commands and admonitions in Scripture. Several are in the three passages from Paul that we read today.

1. Ro 12:10 NIV “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” The Greek word for brotherly love here is the word from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name. It refers specifically to the affection of friendship, like that between close brothers.
2. Eph 4:32 NIV “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” NIV
3. Col. 3:14 NIV “Put on love,” meaning to dress up our lives with the beauty of loving actions.

Each of these reminds us that as the people of God, we should be above all people, the kind with whom people want to be friends.

Martin Luther spoke of the blessings of Christian friends: “Throughout life a faithful friend is a very great blessing (bonum) and a very precious treasure. This is true not only in view of the ordinary dangerous difficulties in which he can offer help and consolation but also in view of spiritual temptations. For even though your heart is thoroughly confirmed by the Holy Spirit, there is nonetheless a great advantage in having a friend with whom you can talk about religion and from whom you may hear words of comfort.” (What Luther Says Vol. 1 p. 527, #1588)

# **Some Key Skills for Cultivating Friendship.**

Each of these key verses and many like them are supported and explained in several other verses.

Many other admonitions in Romans 12 carry this out the admonition to brotherly love - share with the needy – practice hospitality – bless and do not curse—empathize – live in harmony – be willing to associate with people different from yourself—as much as is possible live at peace with others around you.

In Eph. 4:29-32, v. 32 seems like the summary statement. Other directions that help us put it in practice are before it. Don’t say hurtful things, (the Greek word means “rotten”) but say things that “give grace” as the ESV translates it, or in the NIV things that “benefit” and “build up.” The ESV is a quite literal translation. The Greek word would indicate that we are to say things that the hearer recognizes as a gift.

We also here the admonition to deal with our anger so that it does not prevent us from being loving. Eph 4:31 NIV “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” Anger can have legitimate purposes but most of ours doesn’t.

What I would like us to attempt this morning is to summarize much of the practice how-to about friendship that is found in these three passages under just three heads. I would suggest that the Bible is repeated urging us to practice three key skills for cultivating friendship.

## Prioritize people

### Think of what Jesus did.

Wherever he went, he seemed interested first of all in the needs of people. One of the best examples is in John chapter 4. Jesus noticed someone that everyone else would have ignored, the woman at the well. Think also about the many times Jesus noticed lepers, or blind beggars beside the road, or little children, and the disciples wanted him to get on with seemingly more important business but Jesus stopped to meet their needs.

* + *Christ‘s model of devotion to others has three characteristics. It is u*nconditional love, self-sacrificing love, and it is persevering love.
  + In contrast, our love so often demands something first, and finds it difficult to hold out when the going gets rough. Our priorities most frequently revolve around our own needs first.

### In these texts

Rom. 12:10 NIV – Honor one another above yourselves.”

12:13 share with those in need

In Eph. 4:29, what is to be the guiding principle for our speech? Whatever comes into our heads? Whatever makes us look good? No! – What builds others up – thinking first of others.

## Bear with and forgive each other

### In these texts

Eph. 4:31-32 ESV “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Col. 3:12, 13; ESV “ Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Rom 12:14 ESV “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”

Our natural way – revenge - or at the minimum – disengagement and shunning. But God’s summary is in Rom. 12:21 ESV, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Ill. – It is a little like gardeners and rose bushes. One doesn’t work around roses long without getting cut by a thorn. But gardeners don’t quit growing roses. They like to see blooms and smell the fragrances.

People have thorns too. – You can’t avoid working with them and it is going to hurt sometimes – but we like the blooms that come when people grow and bloom so we keep working among the thorns. And one advantage of working with people – often the thorns disappear or become soft as Christ works in their hearts and love over comes barriers.

### How do we follow God’s way?

* ***Focus on gifts, not rough edges.***
* ***When we look down on other’s faults we are not being humble***
* ***Forgive wrongs.***
* ***And listen – often we understand when we stop to truly listen to what the other person is saying and seek to understand their perspective.*** 
  + Mom who recommended a doll that listens (MA-FR)

## Strive to speak well of others.

* ***Eph. 4:29; - no unwholesome words, no rotten words – but building words, grace giving words***
* ***Col. 3:16-17 ESV*** “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Col 4:6 “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”
* ***Don’t verbalize critical or disparaging comments***“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” ***Proverbs 17:9***
* ***Look for opportunities to speak well of someone.***

### Proverbs

Pr 16:24 NIV “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

Pr 12:18 “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Pr 10:19-21 “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

20 The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

21 The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.”

Does your conversation pass the test of the wisdom of Proverbs? Your marital conversation? Your workplace conversation?

# Conclusion:

### Ten Commandments of Friendship

1. ***Speak to people.***
2. ***Smile at people.***
3. ***Call people by name.***
4. ***Be friendly and helpful.***
5. ***Be cordial.***
6. ***Be interested.***
7. ***Be generous with praise, cautious with criticism***
8. ***Be considerate of feelings.***
9. ***Be thoughtful of their opinions.***
10. ***Be alert to give service.***