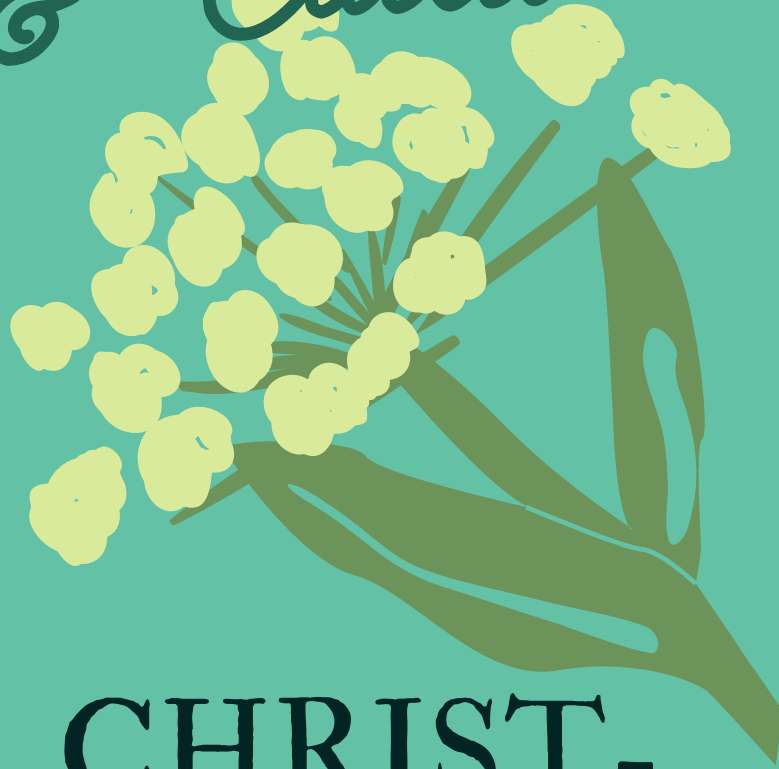


6 WAYS TO

*Create
& Cultivate*

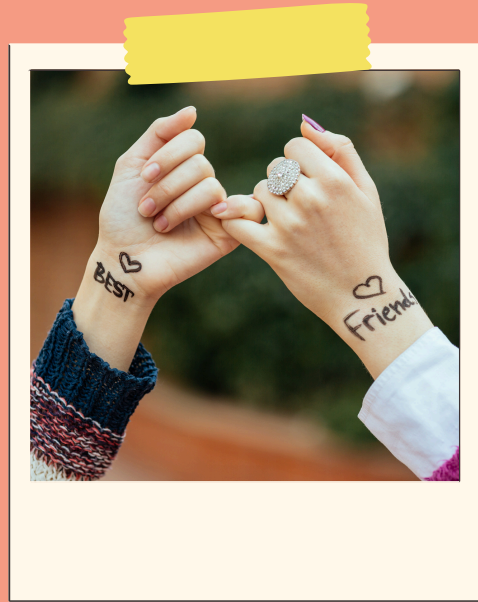


CHRIST-
CENTERED
FRIENDSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

We were designed and destined for companionship, from the very beginning. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is not good for man to be alone, which tells us that our Father never intended for His beloved children to do this life alone, in isolation.

Our God, in His infinite love, first seeks a relationship with us (Deuteronomy 6:4, John 17:3). Those words sound easy to say (and even write), but ponder that for just a moment. Our God wants everything to do with you and me! He seeks after our hearts, minds, and souls while giving us precious promises to cling to and an instruction manual that lays out how to live and love others.

God cares so much about our relationship with Him and others because He is a relational God (John 17:3). He even offers us a beautiful depiction of what our relations should look like, according to His will, when we read His Word. He calls us to submit to Him first, and then to faithfully serve our spouse (Ephesians 5:21-33). He asks us to responsibly raise our children (Proverbs 22:6), and to honor our parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). He also has much to say about friendships, knowing that “sweet friendships” refresh our souls (Proverbs 27:9).

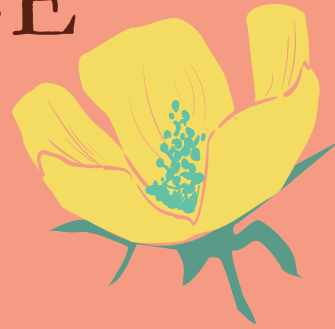
Dear brothers and sisters, fellowship is not optional, it is essential for us to live a full and abundant life. But, while we may know this to be true, it isn't always so easy to create and cultivate Christ-centered friendships, especially since they are still marked by two imperfect people.

Perhaps, you find yourself navigating a treacherous season of loneliness or enduring a friendship that comes with a little confusion or heavy conviction. God often puts us in various seasons in life, so that we can solely rely on and trust Him (Proverbs 3:5-6). It also gives us room to grow and learn more about ourselves and others.

So, no matter where you find yourself today, I invite you to settle your heart and calm your soul by clinging to Jesus' powerful words. Let's learn what He has to say about creating and cultivating friendships that focus on love.



I OBEDIENCE TO JESUS



JESUS IS ...

If we want to emulate Jesus in our friendships and find those types of friends, we must know Him and what His Word has to say on the subject. Loving people was His ministry. His mission showed and shared compassion while serving others. Our Savior exuded kindness, spoke truth (John 16:33), and was utterly selfless (John 3:16).

JOHN 16:33

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

JOHN 3:16

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.



2 THE QUALITIES OF A CHRIST-LIKE FRIEND.

Christ-centered friendships know their place and do not ask for more or less than God intended them to be. A faithful friend will respect and honor priorities and commitments while inspiring you to be a devoted husband or wife, loving parent, and compassionate son or daughter. Even more importantly, they must encourage each other to lean into our most trusted friend—Jesus!



“SO ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER AND BUILD EACH OTHER UP, JUST AS YOU ARE ALREADY DOING.” - 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says that a true friend will encourage and build you up. They are there to lend an ear and offer their love and support.

“CONFESS YOUR SINS TO EACH OTHER AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE EARNEST PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON HAS GREAT POWER AND PRODUCES WONDERFUL RESULTS.”

- JAMES 5:16

James 5:16 tells us that friendship grows through vulnerability as we share our struggles. While this isn't always easy and comes with a certain level of trust, when we are real and raw with the messy parts of our lives, it allows us to turn to God and seek Him through prayer. These friends are your prayer warriors!



“MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, CONTINUE TO SHOW DEEP LOVE FOR EACH OTHER, FOR LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS.” - 1 PETER 4:8

1 Peter 4:8-10 shows that friendship is about a beautiful exchange where each contributes their time, energy, and gifts, investing into the relationship. It's about reciprocity.

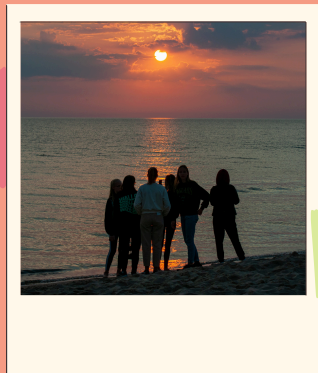
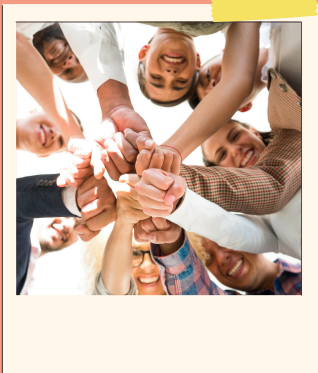


“A FRIEND IS ALWAYS LOYAL, AND A BROTHER IS BORN TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED.” - PROVERBS 17:17

In Proverbs 17:17, Solomon shares that a genuine friend will love at all times, even during difficult times and places. Even if it's hard, they will point you back to the Truth!

“AS IRON SHARPENS IRON, SO A FRIEND SHARPENS A FRIEND.” - PROVERBS 27:17

Proverbs 27:17 says a good friend will make you a better version of yourself. They know your blind spots and will call them out (gently), but all in an effort to grow you and make you more Christ-like!



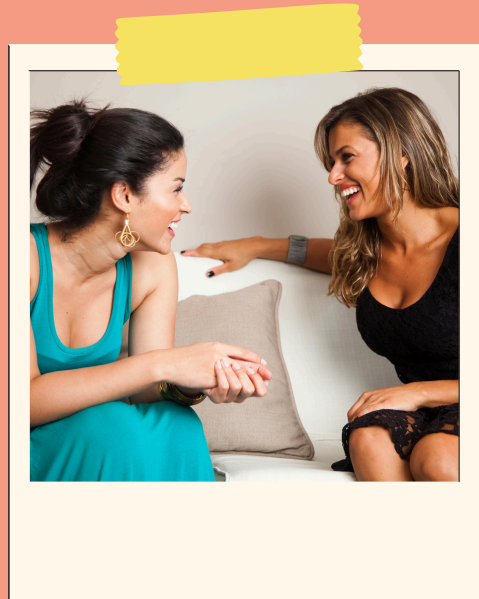
A friend who loves Jesus will love you. This is a call for us to do the same. What a beautiful interaction!

3 INVEST IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

So, it begs the question: Is all this work worth it? I can truly understand that sentiment, especially in a season of unending, demanding, and unceasing stress due to raising a family, tending to an elderly parent, and juggling a career. It sometimes seems like a stretch of the imagination to even create space for another relationship that is just going to need more energy and effort.



But, in these precious relationships, the bottom line is that you will reap what you sow. If you cast out seeds, while striving to be the kind of friend you want, in God's perfect timing, you will begin to see something truly special blossom and bloom.



These relationships take time and do need tending to. However, that said, Ecclesiastes 3:1 states that there is a time and season for everything under the heavens. This is so true when it comes to our friendships. Some friends will come and go, while others will stay for a longer duration of time, but we must choose to see them all as a blessing and treat them as such. The investment is so worth it and will fill that longing that God has created in our hearts that yearns for connection.

“FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON, A TIME FOR EVERY ACTIVITY UNDER HEAVEN.”
- ECCLESIASTES 3:1

4 LEAN INTO DISCIPLESHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY



“YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO GUIDE MY FEET AND A LIGHT FOR MY PATH.” - PSALM 119: 105

Christ-centered friendships are about having a gospel-centered mentality. The heart behind these friendships allows us to use God’s Word as our guide (Psalm 119:105). We realize that Jesus is our best friend, and we are all ultimately His disciples. How neat is that? And because Jesus loved His disciples, it welcomed in a new kind of love, a “friendship love.”

This kind of friendship love, also known as phileo love or brotherly love, is referred to in the New Testament (John 16:27) and shares how our connection with Jesus draws us closer to the Father. When we humbly submit and follow Christ, together, we seek accountability that enables us to grow and become more and more like Him. This phileo love is vital to our relationship with Christ as it holds us accountable, for every choice, action, deed, or word. Our fellow disciple friends can help us when we veer off track or get lost in the pit of our sins (Galatians 6:1-2). Then lovingly guide us back to Christ in the process (Matthew 18:15-17).



TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING VERSES:



“Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” - Galatians 6:1-2

“For the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.” - John 16:27

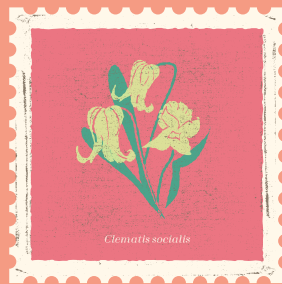


“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.” - Matthew 18:15-17

5 LOVE AT ALL TIMES.

“THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT: LOVE EACH OTHER IN THE SAME WAY I HAVE LOVED YOU.” - JOHN 15:12

What does it really mean to love at all times? Proverbs 17:17 depicts a Godly friendship that is based on dependability, loyalty, compassion, and persistence to be intentional and present. Love shows gentleness and kindness while extending grace and granting forgiveness. Regardless of the circumstances, a friend who loves at all times loves as God commands us to (John 15:12).



Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and branches to show that our relationships are meant to grow in love but can only do so if we abide in Him. He is the vine, we are the branches, so without Him, and apart from Him, we are nothing. In the context of loving, this means we cannot love like Jesus unless we seek Him with our whole hearts. This will then make room for Him to help us love according to His purpose.

A booklet is a small printed publication typically containing a limited amount of information or content. It is usually compact in size and consists of a small number of pages, often folded and stapled together. Booklets are designed for specific purposes, such as conveying information, instructions, or promotional material in a concise and easily distributable format.



“BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT PRODUCES THIS KIND OF FRUIT IN OUR LIVES: LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL.” - GALATIANS 5:22

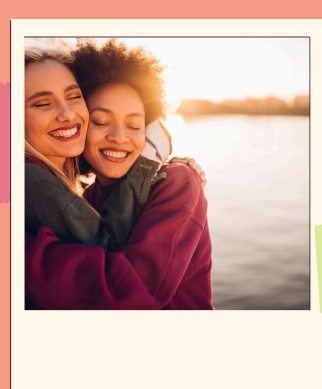
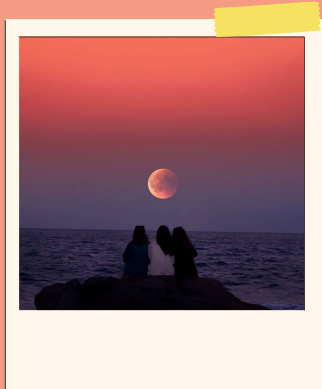
Jesus tells us that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. So, as we strive to love our friends at all times, let's cling to the vine. Then we will bear fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

6 EMBRACE SERVANTHOOD.



Jesus was the epitome of a servant's heart. If we want to cultivate Christ-centered friendships, we must embrace servanthood. Besides seeking Jesus with our whole hearts, this has got to be the most crucial moment and a tipping point in a Christ-centered friendship. Maybe this purposeful action causes us to become selfless like Christ.

The point is that we can strive to be a good friend, invest our time and energy, hold our friends accountable, and even love them with sincerity, but that means nothing if we don't put ourselves aside and humble ourselves in service.



Jesus asks us to follow His lead and example by loving others with a gentle sense of compassion and a heart that shows gratitude, just as He did when He washed the disciples' feet (John 12:12-16). Jesus shows us that service and friendship must go hand in hand. It forces us to put the to-do list away, step away from the daily distractions, and set our minds, hearts, and eyes on those who truly need a hand of compassion, a gentle spirit, or a thoughtful gesture (Philippians 2:3-5).

TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING VERSES:

“The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, “Praise God!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hail to the King of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

“Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem.

Look, your King is coming,
riding on a donkey’s colt.”

His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.” - John 12:12-16



“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.”

- Philippians 2:3-5

Being a faithful and humble servant to our friends, allows Jesus to divinely move as it opens our eyes to see others the way He does. It's creating space to meet with a grieving friend and hear her heart. It is bringing coffee to a brother struggling in his marriage. It's praying with your friend who is battling a health issue. It's making time to essentially "wash the feet" of your friends, meeting them where they are, and loving them all the same.

A PRAYER FOR FRIENDSHIP

Father,
We thank You for the gift of friendships and ask that You help us create and cultivate these precious relationships so that we can honor and glorify You.
Amen.

