

DAY 1 (week starting 19th November 2018)

Read - John 15:9-17

We are living in a day and age that increasingly is teaching us to go it alone. More and more people are working from home. More and more business is done on the internet and on line. Schools are increasingly teaching via emails and Universities communicate by email. Assignments are emailed and replied to the same way. Have you ever tried to *speak* to your bank manager? Does he exist? More and more we are becoming numbers in a system

And this is so contrary to the biblical model. If the truth be told there is no such thing as a solitary Christian, and the reality is that, as God's people, we long to belong! We long for personal contact, we long to be recognized, affirmed, cared for, supported and loved! for friendship, and especially God's friendship.

Everyone needs to belong. It's the way God has made us! God made us for community, for friendship with Him and one another. God made us to be sociable beings. He made us for relationships, for friendship, for acceptance. And, above all, God made us to be in community with Himself! And if God needs to be in community why on earth would we want to be alone? It simply doesn't make sense!

John 10 paints the very beautiful picture of the shepherd and the sheep, a picture of the security, protection, support, fellowship and love that is found in the flock! And therefore, if the church (the flock) is functioning at its optimum, God will smile, and we will be blessed.

Lord give me a deep spiritual sensitivity to my need for friends and friendship

DAY 2

Read - John 15:9-17

So, friendships will be relationships where we are fed, where we will grow, where we will be in fellowship. A Godly friendship is about caring and sharing, and of love and of protection. Why would we want to live apart from this kind of community? In simple terms, we need to belong.

FIRST Friendships inspire us. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul describes the church as a collection of people, all different, coming together in community and bringing their individuality and gifting into the community for the benefit of the whole. You see, we *are* special. When God made us He made us unique, and so we bring our own individuality into a friendship that only we can bring. There is something inspiring about the realisation that I am special, that I belong, that I have a place where my gifts and talents are not only recognised, but affirmed and celebrated!

God has made us to be in fellowship and to be in friendship with one another, AND to be in fellowship and friendship with Him! The one single thing that unites us as Christ-followers is our sense of belonging, and of friendship with our God and one another.

Think about what I've just written, WE are the ones who tell the God story by the way we live our lives, and in the friendships we enjoy and nurture and grow. We are the ones who show the world what it means to be a friend. And the world is crying out for friendships and direction and purpose for their lives, *especially* friendship with God. And our friendships are the mirror we hold up of *our* friendship with God.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.

DAY 3

Read - John 15:9-17

SECOND Friendships unite us. Think about this - God exists in community (friendship) with Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, if God Himself needs, or wants, to be in friendship within Himself, how much more does He desire that WE should be united and in community and friendship with one another?

The Latin phrase on our nation's coat of arms reads "*Ex Unitate Vires*" or "Unity is Strength" and however much we may question our founding fathers I think they got it right. Unity/Friendship IS strength. So the question for us this week is, how are our friendships doing? Are they transforming us? uniting us? How rooted are we in our friendships, especially in our churches? and in our families?

And so, how do we develop our friendships? Grow our families, grow our churches? Where do we go to nourish our friendships? Well, are we part of a Bible Study group, or a cell group? Are we part of the various other groups we have around our church? The support groups, prayer groups, men's groups, ladies groups. Do we play our part? And do you know that this is not just for the sake of others, *as much as it is for our OWN sakes. We need our friendships, and we need to belong.*

Jesus wants us to experience the joy of belonging to a caring community that is rooted in friendship and love. Barbara Streisand was right, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."

Help us to help each other, Lord, each other's cross to bear. Let each his friendly aid afford, and feel his brother's care. MHB 717

DAY 4

Read - John 15: 12-17

Robert Putnum in his book *Bowling Alone* reports the following, that over the last 25 years, civic club memberships are down 58%. (Rotary, Lions etc) Families eating together have dropped from 50% to 34%. Inviting friends over to your house has dropped 45%. We have quickly become a generation of people who live cocooned lives, tethered to our home entertainment systems, barricaded behind our electronic alarms, isolated from one another even in our own homes.

And yet the Bible says "It is not good for people to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). We are created for community. John Wesley said, "If your heart is as my heart is, then give me your hand". Paul said, "In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for all of you are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Where friendship abounds, it's no longer about me. Where friendship abounds, nobody has to be perfect. Where friendship abounds, position is eliminated. Where friendship abounds, differences are accepted. Where friendship abounds, God is glorified. Where friendship abounds, unity is possible.

THIRD Friendship and belonging helps us help others. Communism says, "What's yours is mine, I'll take it." The Greek word "Koinonia" means fellowship or sharing or community, or "what's mine is God's, let's share it." Friendship and sharing here was not a matter of legislation; it was a matter of love and liberty. How good it is to belong to a community that reaches out in a spirit of sharing and caring and fellowship. *Everyone needs to belong!*

Brother, sister let me serve you. Let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

DAY 5

Read: John 15: 9 – 17

Now, one of the best ways to show our friendship is to pray for each other. Jesus spent a good deal of time in prayer. He prayed for His mission and He prayed for His disciples. The added bonus of praying for others is that it keeps us in a close relationship and friendship with Him.

In Matthew 11: 25-26 and Luke 10:21 Jesus gives thanks that all people, not just the elite, can know God and become part of the Christian family. All people can share Jesus' close relationship and friendship with His Father, because God likes it that way - it is God's initiative.

Jesus prays before raising Lazarus. "*Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard Me. I know that You always hear Me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that You sent me'*" (Jn 11:41-42) Jesus prays that the gathered crowd, on seeing Lazarus return from the grave, will have faith in Him.

Other prayers that you can look up are:

Jesus prays that God will be glorified.- Jn 12:27-28.

A prayer of Jesus – Jn 17.

Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane - Mt 26:36-44,

Mk14:32-39, Luke 22:46.

Jesus prays on the cross - Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34,

Lk 23:34,46.

In this one act - dying on the cross - the whole of humanity is offered a fresh start - a new relationship and a new friendship with God.

DAY 6

Read: 2 Corinthians 5: 1 – 21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they have become a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...

The main topic for this week has been: "A Transforming Friendship" Let me say that God desires our friendship greatly, and He has gone to extreme lengths, in fact, as we know, He has gone to the ultimate length to encourage our friendship out of His great love for us. But He has done this not for His sake but for our sake. God is completely and utterly self-sufficient; He does not need anything at all from us. Everything God has done, does or will do for us is purely for our benefit.

Having a personal relationship and friendship with God begins the moment we realize *our need* for Him, admit we are sinners, and in faith receive Jesus Christ as our Saviour. God, our heavenly Father, has always desired to be close to us, to have a relationship with us. Remember that before Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), both he and Eve knew God on an intimate, personal level. They were friends. They walked with Him in the garden and talked directly to Him. Because of sin we became separated and disconnected from God.

This personal relationship and friendship with God is not as hard to find as we might think, and there is no mysterious formula for getting it. As soon as we become children of God, we receive the Holy Spirit, and we enter into this amazing friendship with Him, and He will begin to work in our hearts.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.