

Making Friends for Eternity

1 John 1:5-7

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

The most wonderful truth in the world, the most amazing truth in the world, the most marvelous truth in the world is this: God wants to have a relationship with me. When God made man one of the first thoughts that came from that interaction was *fellowship*. God desires our fellowship. **Thoughts of fellowship, companionship, and love were involved when He created woman, too.** He saw that man needed a *companion* and provided for that need to be met. That is almost too inconceivable to believe – **that God would want a relationship with me.**

We were made to be friends of God. The Bible says that you were created so that God could love you. You were made to have a *relationship*. **That is why you are here on this earth.** God *made you to love you.*

But there is a problem. Something went wrong in that relationship. *My sin. And your sin.* **You see, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve decided they were going to do what they thought was best instead of doing what God had told them what was best.** And that sin broke their *intimate relationship* with Sovereign God. **Adam and Eve were representatives of the entire human race,** as seen in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

But God, in His grace, did not leave it at that. He took the *initiative* and **He came to earth in human form,** in the person of *Jesus*

Christ, to show us what God was like, to show us how much He loves us, to stretch out His arms on the cross and die for us so that the bridge could be built back to God and that relationship could be restored. And that, my friend, is incredible, really wonderful, and marvelous news.

The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 2:5, “Jesus Christ is the relationship between God and man.” And in Romans 5:11 we are told, “Now we rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done in dying for our sins making us friends of God.” Notice the words “friends of God.” It is the marvelous truth that God has sent His Son to die for us.

If I were to summarize the Bible in one word, if I were to summarize Christianity in one word I would not use the word “religion.” I would not use “ritual” or “rules.” I would use the word “relationship.” Because that is what the whole Bible and all of Christianity is about. God wants a relationship with you. As mind blowing as that is, God made you to have a relationship.

One day a man came to Jesus and said, “Lord, what is the most important commandment?” We all know the Ten Commandments. Jesus did not quote any of those. He said, “Let me give you the two most important ones. Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. That’s the first one and number two, Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love God and Love your neighbor. He is talking about relationships. If you have your relationship with God in order and you will have your relationship with other people in order, you are doing what God put you on earth to do.

Life is essentially about relationships. The most important thing in your life is not money, status, success, pleasure, or fame. It is people.

There are two problems. One of them is relationships are very fragile. They can be damaged easily so they have to be cultivated

and nurtured. No good relationship happens accidentally. It is intentional.

The second problem is nobody ever teaches us how to build good relationships. You certainly didn't learn it in school. So most of us really aren't that good at it. We just kind of stumble into relationship building.

For the next few weeks we are going to look at "Building Relationships" and we are going to look at improving the relationships in your life. Why would we spend so much time talking about relationships? Because, if your relationships are messed up, life stinks.

So today, I want us to start with your relationship to unbelievers, because I hope you have a desire to share your faith with them. As a believer, what should be my relationship to people who do not accept Christ the way I do? Look at what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:18, "God has restored our relationship with Him through Christ, and He has given to us this ministry of restoring relationships."

You are given a ministry of "restoring relationships." Once you accept Jesus Christ, once you step across the line, you have a new life assignment. You are to become a relationship builder. **Every Christian is called to be a relationship builder in life.** Every Christian. A Christian, of all people, should be interested in relationships more than anybody else. Once God has restored the relationship to us, He expects us to go restore relationships with other people and help them restore a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The greatest thing you can do for anybody else is introduce them to Jesus Christ – sealing their eternity, knowing they are going to heaven.

We have the greatest news in the world. All my sins can be forgiven, I get a new purpose for living, I get a home in heaven and God becomes my friend. What could be better than that? **Name me one thing that is better than that.** It is better than a cure for any disease because it has eternal implications, to know that you have helped

somebody settle their eternal destiny, there is no greater achievement in life, no greater epitaph than “He/She was a relationship builder for Jesus Christ.” We do have the greatest message in the world. But you have to build a relationship to share it. If you just walk up to people that you do not even know and start talking to them about the Lord most of them are going to walk away. But when you take the time to build a relationship, you earn the right to be heard.

How do you build a relationship with unbelievers? I believe these six principles will apply to any relationship. They will give you a better marriage, make you better at parenting, or whatever. But I want to talk specifically about how do you build a relationship with that neighbor, that co-worker, that relative, that parent or child, who does not know the Lord? How do you build a relationship of love between your heart and theirs?

1. Be proactive. That means I need to take the initiative in building friendships with people. Jesus said in Luke 6:31, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Don’t wait for them to make the first move. Take the initiative to reach out to them. There is one thing that is for sure: everyone wants friends, but very few people know how to make them. They simply don’t know how to reach out. They don’t know how to step out.

There is a popular bumper sticker that says, “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk.” I want somebody to make one that says, “Friends don’t let friends miss heaven.”

2. Refuse to wear a mask. That simply means if you want to build strong relationships with anybody – husband, wife, children, unbelievers – you have to be authentic, honest, open. In other words, just be you! The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 1:12, “We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in all our dealings.” Take off your mask and just be yourself.

I don't want to shock you but I want to tell you a little secret. Everybody already knows you are not perfect. I know that is a complete surprise to some of you! **Listen, nobody has it all together!** We are all **imperfect.** So why don't we quit kidding ourselves, and stop trying to pretend before others?

3. Identify common ground. That simply means; if you want to build a relationship with somebody you have to identify **common ground**, discover **what you have in common.** When you are trying to help an unbeliever to understand God's love, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him."

How do you do that? You **look** and **listen.** You see, once you have identified that common ground, then you can to use it to build a relationship, to establish that friendship.

4. Demonstrate God's love. **That means we love people just like they are!** Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Live a life filled with love for others following the example of Christ." **Our goal is to be like Jesus and Jesus dealt with people in love and kindness.** 1 John 3:17 says, "Let us stop just saying we love people. Let us really love them and show it by our actions." We need to demonstrate our love for people.

Everybody has two basic needs and when you meet these needs you are demonstrating love. Everybody needs **acceptance.** Everybody needs **affirmation.**

First, everybody needs acceptance. You demonstrate love when you accept people just as they are. They do not have to clean up their life for you to love and accept them. We are to accept people just as they are in nonjudgmental love.

You might be thinking, "But you don't understand. The people I work with, or my family members or my relatives, they are so messed up. They are into this lifestyle or that problem or that habit. How could I

ever accept them?” You need to learn how to hate the sin and love the sinner. You need to understand the difference between acceptance and approval. There is a big difference between the two. You can love and accept someone without approving of everything they do.

The example on this subject is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ accepted everybody. He loved everybody before they cleaned up their act. The religious people of Jesus’ day could not stand the fact that He would hang out with un-right people. They called Him “the friend of sinners.” I think Jesus wore that as a badge of honor. Jesus hung out with people like the lepers, the prostitutes and He showed them unconditional love. Today, He would be with homosexuals, addicts and AIDS victims.

Then the second thing is by affirming them. Everybody needs emotional support. I have discovered that, sooner or later, the “storms of life” hits all of us. Everybody. Just in different ways. Some emotionally, some financially, some physically, but everybody’s having a tough time. What they need is for someone to give them some encouragement and assurance.

The Bible says, “Bear one another’s burdens.” This is what friendship is all about. A friend is somebody who walks in when everybody else walks out. A friend is someone who will see you through when other people see through you. What most people really need is a friend, not a critic!

5. Realize the fear factor. That means some people may very well have genuine concerns about coming to Church! What they wear; their past or present failures; fear of rejection!

What you need to do is to understand that those fears are real. Be sympathetic to what they are saying to you. Don’t just shrug it off as something minor and of no significance.

6. Expect God to use you. Jesus promised this to His disciples in Matthew 10:19-20, “Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At

that time you will be given what to say for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

How does it happen? You make yourself *available*. And you pray this simple little prayer, “God, use me. I don’t know what to say but I am willing to be used by You to build a relationship and bring someone to Christ.”

I believe, we are running out of time and many people are still unsaved. And people without Christ go into a Christ-less eternity. As long as there is one person within driving distance of this church, who does not know that their sins can be forgiven, that they can have a purpose for living, that they have a home in heaven, and that God can be their friend, we are going to keep reaching out. **But it will take all of us doing our part.**

If you are not saved, why not today?

Please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. Give me the courage to be a friend to those around me as I share with them the joy of my salvation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.