

# WHO ARE MY FRIENDS?

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I wasn't planning on reading this verse or passage, but it came to my mind as we were getting close to the time of service. If we could go to Hebrews chapter 12. We've read it recently.

I know lately I've been on certain messages related to our spiritual walk and the things of the flesh that get in the way. There are a lot of – we might say – *avenues* that the enemy uses to pull us *off track*.

We've been looking at some of those things on Wednesdays and I pray tonight that it doesn't feel like: well, here's another thing that I'm doing wrong, that I have to watch out for, or maybe another burden for the flesh. I pray that we don't get that feeling.

It is *certainly not* that I have a desire to push something against us or place a burden upon us in any way. And really, if we look at it right, this is actually to make our load *lighter*. This is really to get us into a place where we can be *happier* in the Lord.

There are even a lot of natural examples of this. If we look, for example, at the people who build the roads. It's a hard job building roads. There's a lot of exhaustion, sweat, and hard work. But at the end of the day, we have roads on which we can drive cars, and we can get from point A to point B much easier because of the work that was done to build these roads.

It's the same *in the spiritual*.

If we could read verse 1, I think I already said: Hebrews chapter 12.

Hebrews 12:1

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,*

Especially those he mentioned in Hebrews 11.

He says:

Hebrews 12:1

*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,*

We've talked about sin a couple weeks back, but we also have these *weights*. He says: *get rid of every weight.*

Hebrews 12:1

*and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*

Hebrews 12:2

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;*

Now he gives us an example of how Jesus was able to do what he did.

He says:

Hebrews 12:2

*who for the joy that was set before him*

How did Jesus have *joy set before him*? He had *the Word of God*. He *knew* what was ahead. God had *revealed His Word to him*, and He had even shown him *more* than just what was written.

So Jesus could *look beyond that day*, and he could – we can say – *suffer for the time being* because *his hope was anchored in what was set before him*.

He says:

Hebrews 12:2

*endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Praise the Lord.

I've read this tonight to say: my desire is in no way to look at *this*, to look at *that*, and at *all these things* that may be *issues in our life* to put some kind of a weight on us. My desire is actually that we can *remove these weights*.

Tonight I have a subject. And I pray that the Lord would help me because He knows my desire is not to speak in a wrong way, or to get us to have some kind of an extreme attitude or outlook on things. Rather, I want to say things in a way that's going to *help us*.

The title tonight is: Who are my Friends?

In sermons gone by, I've said things in passing related to our friends, especially friends that we may have in the world. And I've never wanted to say: well, you just have to *cut them off* and have no friends in the world.

I'm not going to do that tonight either.

At the same time, I really believe that we do need to *use wisdom*. I feel that sometimes we may take that a little too lightly. In other words: we don't really think much about *who our friends are*, the time we spend with them, and maybe even the activities we partake of as we have fellowship with them. And really, I believe we should look at that.

Again, before I get started, I'm *not* saying that after service tonight we have to *cut off* our friends. That would be rude since we have already accepted them as friends.

But I would ask, and I believe it would be very good and very wise to begin to think – if we are not already doing so – to begin to think and to pray: what *effort* and what *time* am I giving to these friends?

So, if we could go to John chapter 15, we're going to start in verse 10.

Jesus says here:

John 15:10  
*If ye keep my commandments,*

That's plural. It's *not just one* commandment. And we've seen how in the more archaic language, the word *commandments* many times also includes: *declarations*, which today we might not think of as *a commandment*.

But *if you keep them*, he says:

John 15:10  
*ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*

John 15:11  
*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

John 15:12  
*This is my commandment,*

Now, yes this is one.

In another place he says: *I give you a new commandment*. [John 13:34] And it's the same commandment.

He says:

John 15:12  
*That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

In the day we're living now, this is the only thing some people want to preach. And I'm not only talking about people who have been in our fellowship in the past, but across modern Christianity today, this is one of the biggest points of ministry.

If somebody is out there in the religious world and they say: my title this morning is *love one another as I have loved you*, everybody is going to say: praise the Lord, we're in for a good message!

At the same time, even though people have taken this in a different direction than what the Lord meant it for, *it still is the Word of God*, and it does have *its application for the true church*. Praise the Lord.

So yes, *we are to love one another*. Praise the Lord. *As he loved us*. [John 15:12] Amen. That's one thing we have to know.

And he said: *this is a commandment*. [John 15:12] Praise the Lord.

He says:

John 15:13

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

Now this is getting difficult.

It sounded good when he said: *love one another*. That sounds good. But now he says: *there's no greater love than you are willing to lay down your life for your friends*.

When we go back to what we just read: *love one another*, he was speaking *to those who were following him*, right? Amen. He said: *love one another*. He was actually *not including the world* here. He was *not saying*: love each other, love the world.

He said: *love one another*. Amen. And now he brings in the word *friends*.

Again, I would have us to reflect: *who are our friends*? Are we pleasing the Lord in who we have as friends? And also *the time* and *the effort* we spend with them.

Yes it's natural: we're humans, we want a *social life* for lack of a better term. And again I'm going to say: if we leave here tonight and we start deleting numbers off our phone or something like that [laugh] this is *not* what I'm saying to do. There shouldn't be any drastic shock to our friends tomorrow because of what I preach tonight.

At the same time, it *might be time* for some of us to begin making some changes. Not to please me, but if we can see in the Word, if we can see through prayer and by looking at our life that in some way we are not pleasing the Lord, then we need to start making some changes.

I do have friends who are in the world. I say *in the world*, even though one of them *claims* to be a Christian. I don't know exactly his experience but at the same time, he engages in other activities that I consider completely worldly, that's why I say: *in the world*.

I'm not judging him but I've just always thought of him as: *a friend in the world*, even though he does have a certain knowledge of the Lord.

I have *two friends* [laugh] two friends outside of my brothers and sisters in Christ. My best friends are my brothers and sisters in Christ. Even though, yes *as friends*, I love my two friends who are in the world.

I think I've mentioned this before: I talk with them anywhere from maybe *once to three or four times a year*. I actually have a new friend with whom I talk a little more than that because he lives here in the valley.

But my personal concern is: first of all, I don't ever want a friendship with a worldly friend to begin to push into, disturb, or become something so big that it would *take away from my spiritual walk*.

I also don't want it to become something so big – and when I say *big*, I'm talking in terms of it *taking time* – that it begins to *cut off* or *limit* my fellowship with my brothers and sisters. Because again: it's *the family of God* with whom you and I are going to spend eternity.

Here, Jesus uses the word *friends*. [John 15:13]

Again, I'm *not* telling us that we *can't* have friends who are in the world. But at the same time, I would challenge us: can we find an example of *a friend in the world* that Jesus had? Or that Paul, Peter, John, or James had? If we can, it's definitely *very few*.

I'm *not* saying that they didn't have *any*, but it certainly was *not* a big enough part of their life that we see it when we read the Word.

So I'm praying the Lord helps me to say this right because I don't want anybody to run with this, mess up a certain relationship that they may have with somebody, and then regret how they acted.

We should be *a light*. And I hope we can be.

Now, let's go ahead and see what he says here. In verse 14, he says:

John 15:14  
*Ye are my friends,*

So again, he's speaking to those who are *following him spiritually*. He says: *you are my friends*.

Then he says:

John 15:14

*if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

John 15:15

*Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

Praise the Lord.

Here Jesus is looking at you and me as *his friends*, *if we do what he commands us*.

Let's go now to John chapter 17 and verse 6.

I would like to read all the way down to verse 23, but there's no way I'm going to be able to do that. So I'll just leave that as homework, if you would at least read down to verse 23, and study that.

Starting in verse 6, here Jesus is praying to God.

He says:

John 17:6

*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world:*

So he's very specific here. *The ones God has given him out of the world* are the ones to whom he has *manifested the Father's name*.

He says here:

John 17:6

*thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.*

Praise the Lord.

John 17:7

*Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.*

Materially, Jesus didn't have anything except for the clothes he wore. But what had God given him? God had given him *knowledge*. God had given him *revelation*. God had given him *power*, as He gave him *the Spirit without measure*. [John 3:34]

So we'll continue reading here.

John 17:8

*For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*

He's still speaking of *the men that God gave him out of the world.* [John 17:6]

Now, let's look at verse 9. He says:

John 17:9

*I pray for them: I pray not for the world,*

That's pretty blatant. He says: *I pray for the ones You gave me, not for the world.*

He says:

John 17:9

*but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.*

Praise the Lord.

Now, what I'm reading here is *not* to give us the attitude that we're better than anyone in the world. I've said before: we should *never* take the attitude that we're better than them, that we're *up here* and they're *down there*, or that we're important but they're not.

I have to say: *we are what we are by the grace of God.* [1Corinthians 15:10] Amen.

At the same time, *the Lord is working in your life, in my life, and in all who hear His Word,* and at the end of the day, the world is still the world.

Yes, we should love them, we should be concerned for them and pray for them. But at the end of the day, *we can't go out and save the world,* if you know what I mean.

*Jesus is the one who saves.*

I *can't* save, you *can't* save. I can do my best to be a light but that does *not* mean that I need a hundred friends with whom I spend all my time, and hardly have any time for my brothers and sisters, or even more importantly, for the Lord.

We shouldn't be thinking that we're doing something important trying to shine our light to the world because we're Christians. I have to say: if they want to see the light, they'll see it. Praise the Lord.

We don't need to be running after everybody, thinking: well, maybe one day they'll change. That's in the Lord's hands. Amen.

Now, let's go to James chapter 4, and we'll start in verse 3.

James didn't worry about how his words were going to sound. He says here:

James 4:3

*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

James 4:4

*Ye adulterers and adulteresses,*

Here he's *not* talking about *adultery* in the natural sense. He's really talking about *spiritual adultery*: once we've already made a confession that *we love the Lord and our life is His*.

Praise the Lord.

He says:

James 4:4

*know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

Well, I certainly don't want to be an enemy of God.

We have to read it right: he's *not* saying: if you're friends with somebody in the world, then you're an enemy of God. He said: *if you're a friend of the world*.

But at the same time, if we have friendships with people in the world, those friendships can grow *if we're not careful*, and can lead us to become *a friend of the world*.

We have to remember: when we are in fellowship with our friends, we're communicating back and forth, we're sharing thoughts. The world's way of looking at life is not only different than ours, but they *don't* have the outlook of what a *godly life* is. They're looking at this life *from a natural standpoint*.

So you and I are limited, really, as to *how far our fellowship can go*, because we are looking at things one way – *biblically* – and they are looking at it differently. And if we're not careful, their way of looking at things can begin to affect us.

Now, we always want to say: oh no, *my way* is going to affect *them*, they're going to see how I look at things as a Christian and that's going to help them. Well *in part*, that may be true, but *don't* think that they can't affect you as well.

At the end of the day, *we need to be careful*.

First of all: we need to be pleasing the Lord.

I really believe if we look at this Word right, even what we're reading tonight, we should be able to see that there is a *limit* of what the Lord would want as far as friendship with those who are in the world.

Again, I'm *not* the one who can tell you: oh, it's *this* many friends, or *that* many. Please don't say: well, Brother Jason only has two friends in the world. I have *three*, so I have to get rid of one.

You may have *ten*, and that may be fine. It sounds like a lot to me, but I'm *not* the one who decides that. If you're able to manage that in a way that's pleasing to the Lord, that *He's first*, and your brothers and your sisters are still before your ten friends – I hope you can understand what I mean by that – then that's between you and the Lord.

But if we, for the past two, three, or five years, have not even given it any thought, we just have all these friends we do fun things with and spend time with, it's time to ask ourselves: is that getting in the way of our walk with the Lord? Is that becoming a *weight* that Paul talked about? [Hebrews 12:1]

Let's go now to the book of Romans chapter 12 and verse 2.

Paul says here:

Romans 12:2

*And be not conformed to this world:*

That word *conformed* means: to be – we could say – *molded* or *slowly changed* in a way that is *subject to this world*.

As Christians, we're *not* to go back to being like the world. And if we keep too much company with the world, that's going to affect us and push us to what Paul is saying here: *to being conformed to the world*. It's going to begin to *affect our thinking, how we plan*, and the enemy can use that to begin to *dominate the way we walk this walk*.

Paul says here:

Romans 12:2

*but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

We don't get that *renewing* from the world. We get that *renewing* from the *Word of God* and the *Spirit of God* working in our life. That has to be in first place. Praise the Lord.

Sometimes we will have friends, but we may notice that *we need more time with the Lord*, and we need to begin to spend *a little less time* with – you might say – friends.

Again, I'm *not* talking about cutting them off, but sometimes there are friends who will *push*. They will put *pressure*. And naturally, we *don't* want to offend them.

So we're going to have to *be strong* sometimes. And we're going to have to *ask the Lord for strength* if we can see that He's showing us: it's time to begin to put the brakes on a little bit, and they want to push back.

Again, our human emotion is: we don't want to disappoint. But sometimes we have to learn to *be firm*. Because at the end of the day, we want to please *Him*. We need to please *Him*. And we need to *walk according to His leadership*.

Sometimes people are going to be angry with us. We can read this Word: people got angry at John the Baptist. People got angry with the Lord.

Today we would say: how could somebody ever be angry at the Lord? But if we read it right, it looks like there were more people who were angry with Him than those who were happy with Him. There were also people who got angry at Paul, at Peter, at James, and at John.

At the end of the day, if somebody is going to get angry at me because I'm serving the Lord, I have to say: I'm sorry but I'm serving the Lord.

Of course, I had a lot more to say. But in closing: please, I'm *not* telling us to go out and have a cold heart toward our friends, that we don't talk to them now. That's *not* my point. Please *don't do that*.

At the same time, maybe we have been excessive in spending time with our friends. And when I say: *our friends*, I'm talking about those who are *not our brothers and sisters in the Lord*.

If we pray about that and we feel the Lord leading us, there was a reason for this message tonight: *let's take heed*.

That probably means: we're going to change some things. Give the Lord *His time*. Give our brothers and sisters *their time*. And according as the Lord leads, give our friends *their time as well*.

And use *wisdom* when we're with them, that we're *not* beginning to *think like them*. Or let their outlook on life affect us. That's another sign we probably need to spend less time with them.

So I just pray that I've said this right tonight. I don't want anybody to take this to the extreme. But at the same time, we shouldn't just be careless and think: well, I just have all this fun with my friends, and yes, I love the Lord too.

It should be reversed: I love the Lord so much, and I also have some time for my friends.

Let's go ahead and pray.