

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Friends: Risks and Rewards

Unedited Transcript

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Proverbs 20:6, 27:6, 9, 17; 17:17; 18:24; John 11:43-44; 15:9-15

Good morning, men! My wife and I were out in the car the other day and we pull up to a traffic light next to a Lamborghini. It's just sitting there rumbling, making our windows reverberate, and then the light turned green and he hit it! Zoom! I said, "Wow! Can you believe that?" My wife turns to me and she says, "I can't believe that guy would do that!" I'm thinking we will never see eye to eye on certain things! That's why we need to have some male friends! We're going to talk about friendship today. We talked about wives last week and we're going to talk about male friendships today, all kinds of friendships really, but especially male friendships this morning. For those of you who are not married, this of course will be of more particular interest.

Before we do that, let's do a couple of shout outs. The first shout out today goes to a group called Himprove of The New You Church in Orlando, FL. I love that! 10 men who have been meeting for 3 months at the Pastor's home on Sundays at 7:00 PM using the Video Bible Study. Led by Dario Brito. Pat Leupold is the Area Director for the Orlando, FL region.

The second group is the Men's Group of Potomac Baptist Church in Potomac Falls, VA. 8 men who have been meeting for 12 years. They currently meet at members' homes on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM using the Video Bible Study. Led by Grady Wortman. We are looking for Field Staff for this region in Virginia. So I wonder if you would join me in welcoming these two groups to The Man in the Mirror? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're really glad that you're here!

So today's message is Friends: Risks and Rewards. I have had the honor and the calling to meet with men in one-on-one conversations. I've been doing that for forty years! Wow! Probably doesn't come as a surprise when you look at me. So when I say I have literally met with thousands of men in one-on-one conversations, whether that's breakfast, coffee, lunch, whatever, when you take the forty years and add it up, you can see that doesn't have to be an exaggeration to get to thousands of men literally. I love doing it! When men do want to meet with me, often there is some sort of an issue. Over the years I've catalogued what these issues are, these inner aches and pains that men have. There are seven things that when a man tries to describe what's going on in his life that inevitably are the reason.

Number one, I just feel like I'm in this alone.

Number two, I don't feel like God cares about me personally, not really.

Number three, I don't feel like my life has a purpose. It feels random.

Number four, I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.

Number five, my soul feels dry.

Number six, my most important relationships are not healthy.

Number seven, I don't feel like I'm doing anything that will make a difference and leave the world a better place.

It's so interesting to me, and the first one is I feel like I'm in this all alone, it's so interesting to me how many of these issues resolve when we have friends. When we have a group of brothers we're living life with, when we're not living in isolation. Isolation is the number one strategy of the enemy. He knows that if he can get you culled out from the group, you're vulnerable. You're vulnerable to loneliness, and really all those seven things.

The beauty of friendships

What I would like to begin talking about this morning then is the beauty of friendships. Ecclesiastes 4:9 and following says this:

⁹Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:

¹⁰If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.

But pity the man who falls down
and has no one to help him up.

¹¹Also if two lie together they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone (just think about that culture where this was written in, and it becomes so cold at night)?

¹²Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

I've been blessed with a number of really close friendships. I'm not talking about the kinds of friendships that we would refer to as our circle of friends, but close friendships. One of my first adult friendships was with a man named Tom Skinner. He was a speaker, and I heard him talk about the power and the importance of relationships. In fact, he used to always say the most powerful force in the world is a relationship, and the first time I heard him, he challenged the group. He said, "If you want to change your city, don't organize some big mission to change your city. Instead, find one other man and become to that man what you would like your city to become. That will create a model that will be so attractive that other people will be drawn to it."

I got excited, and I came back and was looking around my church, and there was a man with which I had always had some instant chemistry with, his name was Ken Moore. He used to lead that table right back there. He was thirty years older than me. So I walked up to Ken and I said, "Ken! Why don't you and I try to become to each other what we would like this city to become?"

He said, "Yeah, that sounds great!"

So we met together once a week for thirty-two years. Literally, everything I've ever done, whether in business or in ministry, I ran it by Ken first. He was my friend, my confidant. He would give me counsel. He would tell me when my idea was really stupid. I've never met an idea I didn't like. Basically, God has created me to be un-encumbered by seeing why an idea wouldn't work, so I just think every idea is great! So I need friends to keep me on track. Perhaps you do, too.

It's interesting that there are a lot of threes in the Bible. There are Jobs three friends, Jesus had Peter, James and John. Here you have a cord of three strands is not easily broken. I think three is a very interesting number. There's no law, but I think as a principle, three is a very interesting number. In fact, I rode up on a plane to Indianapolis this week with Ben Carson. He was speaking at a Man in the Mirror event we had at Indianapolis, so I was drilling him on friendships. He made the comment, "I really believe a man would be fortunate to have two or three really close friendships in his entire lifetime."

I said, "What about you?"

He said, "I have a man that twenty years ago had wrote me a letter and said he admired my work. He lived in Pittsburgh and said if I was ever there, come by and see him. So I went to Pittsburgh once, and I did. There was this instant connection! And so we both have been friends for twenty years!"

I said, "Well what does that meant?"

He said, "It means our families vacation together, and we have spent every Christmas together as families for twenty years."

Isn't that amazing? Listen, most of you can get together six men to be your pallbearers, but how many of us have a friend that we can call at 2:00 AM? So here's the Big Idea for today: **Three 2:00 AM friends can make up for a multitude of disappointments.** There's a huge difference between a friend and an acquaintance, and I think everybody knows what that is. There's also a difference between a close friend, and those people who are in your circle of friends, and probably, there are many of us here who we consider ourselves to be each other's friends. I know I consider many of you to be friends, but I've never been in your home. I don't know the names of your children, you see? So we're in a circle of friends together, we love each other and we care about each other, and I would rush into a burning building to save you. Yeah, I would, but we're finite. There's just not enough time to have intimate, close relationships with fifty people, it's just not going to happen. So, the idea of having a few people that you can really invest your lives in deeply, that's the kind of idea that we're talking about today.

What do friends do?

So what is it that friends do? Turn with me to Proverbs. From Ecclesiastes that's back a little to the left. Chapter 20, verse 6. What do friends do, or we might call this the value of a friend. Chapter 20 verse 6 says this:

⁶ Many a man claims to have unfailing love,
but a faithful man who can find?

Or a trustworthy man who can find? So the first thing that a friend is is that he's faithful to you. You know the familiar fair weather friend. You have sick patient friends and well patient friends. Well patient friends are your friends when things are going well and they want to be around you when things are

going well, but when things are not going well, they don't really want to be around you. But there is this faithful friend, this friend who will stick with you. Let's take a look at what faithful looks like, continuing in Proverbs. Go to chapter 27, verse 6. 27 is the chapter that deals a lot with friendship issues. Verse 6 says:

⁶The kisses of an enemy may be profuse,
but faithful are the wounds of a friend.

We just said that a friend is faithful and it says here faithful are the wounds of a friend. So what does faithful look like? It looks like accountability, it looks like holding your feet to the fire. If you are winking at truth, if you are flirting with another woman and your friend knows about it, if he actually is your friend, he's going to call you on it. He's not going to let you wonder off into the woods. Chapter 27, verse 9, three verses down:

⁹...the pleasantness of one's friend
springs from his earnest counsel.

You have people you go to for advice and you give them about two or three sentences of the problem and they say, "Oh! Let me tell you what you need to do..."

That's not counsel! That's somebody wanting to hear themselves talk. A counselor is somebody who actually listens to the entire problem and sometimes lives with you through that problem for maybe months on end. Sometimes it's a problem that goes on for years and there are men here in this Bible Study that have dealt with problems for years! And they've had faithful friends who have walked with them all the way through that! That's the kind of friendship we're talking about! That's what real friends do! It's what true friends do, it's what close friends do. Look down at verse 17:

¹⁷As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.

True friends disciple each other! That's what iron sharpening iron is all about! It's disciplining each other, it's helping each other come to full spiritual maturity in Jesus. If you are someone's friend and you really care about them, you want them to grow, you want them to be all that God has created them to be. You want them to grow in spiritual maturity and their relationship with Jesus. Turn back to chapter 17, verse 17:

¹⁷A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.

Life is hard! Life is tough! A true friend, a close friend is somebody who will stick with you when you go through bankruptcy, when you go through a divorce, when you are addicted to drugs or alcohol, or when your child is off the path. When you change jobs! I remember when I changed jobs from business to ministry. I had been on the UCF foundation board. I had been the president, but when I went into ministry and changed jobs, they dropped me. They didn't want me anymore, because they were not really my friends. We had a shared goal or interest. You've had friends like this, they are situational friends. Some situational friends can last forever. In fact, most of our relationships organize either around work, children or some kind of a shared interest. Then one or two or three, hopefully a handful

of those, will then extend beyond that into a lifetime of friendship. Let's look at chapter 18, verse 24. I can already see I'm running out of time to talk about all of these, but I want to talk about this one:

²⁴ A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer to a brother.

There's a loyalty in a true 2:00 AM friend. A 2:00 AM friend has all of these attributes: he's faithful, he holds you accountable, he gives you counsel, he helps you in your discipleship, he's there during adversity, and he's loyal. Okay, one more! John 11:43. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, one of the greatest miracles of the New Testament, of the whole Bible. In verse 43 he says:

⁴³ Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "You take off the grave clothes and let him go."

God has designed us for relationships. God could do everything in your life that needed to be done if he wanted to, but he has chosen instead to put us in communities, to put us in relationships, to have a few brothers who will help us unbind each other, unloose each other, take off those grave clothes. He'll raise your friend from the dead, but then he wants us to be involved in each other's lives to help us become free in Christ, to experience our freedom in Jesus. It's a beautiful picture! This is what friends do!

There's a little friendship pop-quiz in the book *The Man in the Mirror*. I'm just going to give it to you. Some of you are looking it up, it's on page 165. Ten questions:

When things go sour and you really feel lousy, do you have a friend you can tell about that?

Do you have a friend you can express any honest thought without fear of appearing foolish?

Do you have a friend you can talk through a problem without giving you advice? Someone who will just be a sounding board?

Will your friend risk your disapproval to suggest you may be getting off track in your priorities?

Do you have a friend who will take the risk to tell you that you are sinning or using poor judgment?

If you have had a morale failure, do you have a friend who would stand with you?

Is there a friend with whom you feel you are facing life together? A friend to talk over the struggles of life that are unique to men?

Do you have a friend you believe you can trust, with whom confidential thoughts will stay confidential?

When you are vulnerable and transparent with your friend, are you convinced he will not think less of you?

Do you meet with a friend weekly or biweekly for fellowship, prayer, and possibly accountability?

That's what true friends do, that's what authentic friends do with each other. The Big Idea: three of these 2:00 AM friends can make up for a multitude of disappointments. Life is hard! Life is a struggle! We have to do our work while feeling the prick of thorns. We have to manage against the fall, and we can't do that alone. We're not designed to do that alone, we're designed to do that in relationships with 2:00 AM friends. Is there anybody that you could call, right now, at 2:00 AM? I'm guessing that for most of the men in this room, the answer is yes, but you also should know that for most of the men in the world today, the answer is no, they really don't. There's quite a bit of statistics out there. I'm not quoting them this morning because I couldn't find one that I felt confident in the scholarship of, but there are a lot of statistics out there that say the vast majority of men do not have a friend, especially if they're over thirty.

How you can make some true friends

Finally, how can you make some true friends? Two things. First, you have to take the initiative. Why? Because most men don't take the initiative. Men are very passive when it comes to making friends. They are! I'm just telling you the truth. I've watched this now for my entire business and ministry career, men just don't take the initiative in friendships, generally speaking. So you're going to have to do it, and there is a process of building relationships that I'm going to tell you that will empower you to do this, to take this initiative. There is a process in building relationships; here it is: I saw Patsy walking down the street, I walked over to her and I said, "Hey Patsy! How you doing? Would you like to get married?"

Probably not, right? No, I walked over to Patsy and I said, "Hey Patsy! My name is Pat. How you doing? Would you like to go out on Friday night?"

She said no, and that's a story for another day, but the point is I persisted, and the point is the task, whatever you want to do together as friends... Here's the formula, I'm just going to give it to you, it's A R T T. Appointment, Relationship, Trust, Task. So if you want to have a friendship, marry a woman, have a buddy that you can go to the NASCAR races with, whatever it is! Whatever that task is, that will not happen unless there is trust. Trust will not happen if there's not a relationship, and a relationship cannot happen unless there's an appointment, unless you get together. So the first step in this process of relationships is not saying hey Eric, I am looking for a true friend, a close friend, a faithful friend, somebody that I can be authentic with and we can have personal vulnerability and transparency and really build a life together and be lifelong friends, and rush into burning buildings for each other and die for each other. So I was wondering if you would be that friend for me? I think that might violate the process of relationships! No! So if you want to initiate, the first step is just to ask somebody for a cup of coffee and just see if the chemistry is there, and it might be there for one person and not the other. This is part of the fall, okay? So it might not be the first, second or third guy, but you have to start by taking that step of going for a coffee or breakfast.

Second, when there is this chemistry, then a relationship begins to build. So you guys hit it off and then you decide you would like to get together again. So in a couple of weeks you get together for a second time. And that goes well, so you decide to get together again, and before you know it, you're just sort of friends, because there's a point in every relationship where trust begins to filter in. When I was dating Patsy and I would tell her things, I could tell she didn't exactly trust me, because why? Because she had been lied to before. So it took time to develop that relationship into trust. Then, when trust came to full bloom, I popped the question and she said yes. So this is the process of relationships. Don't violate the process of relationships.

Finally, the other way you can make some true friends, in my opinion, is to be in a small group, and here you are! Be in a small group with some other guys where you have a... Let's call it a structure, already prepared for you to become part of something that does the A R TT, that gives you a place where you can gather. It's on your calendar for crying out loud! What's better than that? Than having a place where you can build some friends over time on your calendar every week? An appointment, a weekly appointment to build these friendships.

I was talking to one of our Area Directors this week and he has become part of a small group. They are going through *Man Alive*, and they were working on chapter five on destructive behaviors and the baggage that we carry around. He got the men into small groups together, 3-4 men, and just encouraged them to open up about what is the baggage that's been holding you back? What is the thing that's been eating you that you haven't been able to share with a real friend? We've been together as a group for a long time, let's open up with each other a little bit here. One man, one old man whose sister had been raped when she was five years of age, and he was her older brother and in some ways felt responsible for what had happened to his sister, in sixty-five years since that had happened, he had never ever once talked about that with anybody. My friend, Clark, said that when he shared that with the group a few weeks ago, suddenly, something lifted. The grave clothes came off, he was set free, because the other brothers had helped him, and he said his entire persona has changed. What did he say? I have it in the notes here, let me get it. He said this, "He has been dramatically freed, and he has been touched. He has been able to talk through this in a way that has brought healing."

Another man in the same group is a prominent doctor, and he grew up in a home with a father who was a raging, angry alcoholic, and he had never told anybody about it. That day he told the other men what was going on and they helped him take off the grave clothes, and he too has had his life profoundly changed. You can have your three 2:00 AM friends right here in your small groups, all you have to do is open up. The Big Idea today: three 2:00 AM friends can make up for a multitude of disappointments. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our Father in heaven, Lord, we come to you humbly. Lord, we don't want to be alone and we don't want to be lonely either. We know that you have created us for relationships. Lord, help us to take the initiative. Help us to find those 2:00 AM friends that can help us overcome this multitude of disappointments that we all go through in life. Lord, may the beauty of friendship look attractive this morning, and we've also helped explain what friends actually do. Help us to be that kind of friend, help us to find those kinds of friends. Lord, for those of us who already have friends like this, maybe today is the day that we just say to our friend thank you so much for being my friend. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!