

# The Christian Man

## Session 6: Friendships: Finding and Keeping Godly Friends

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 11. Let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. We have a group called Men on Mission. They're a brand-new group. They've just started meeting. There are 15 of them. They're meeting on Sundays at 7:00 PM at Eric Spano's home in Roanoke, Virginia. Men on Mission, Eric says, "Our group's purpose is to reach and disciple men, clear, to the point, and crucial." I wonder if you would join me in welcoming on Men on Mission with a very warm and rousing Man in the Mirror hand clap. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. We're so glad to have you join us.

The series is the Christian Man. Today, we're going to be talking about friendship, finding and keeping godly friends. There's something special about male friendship. I was driving down the road the other day and there was a Porsche GT3 RS. 511 horsepower, naturally aspirated, doesn't need any special exhaust system. It just sits there and goes [rumbling sound]. I pulled up next to it and my windows were shaking in my car. Car took off when the light turned. I went home and told Patsy about it. I said, "You wouldn't have believed it." She said, "I can't believe it either. I can't believe that he would do that, that he would peel off from the line like that. It's so dangerous."

### THE GOSPEL OF FRIENDSHIP

We're going to talk about male friendship today. Let's start with the gospel of friendship. Here's the situation. A young man comes on the scene and his desire is to conquer the world. That is unless the world has already conquered him, flattened him out at an early age, but he finds that the world is a relentless juggernaut that is constantly crushing his dreams, his plans, and his relationships.

I had a dream once. It died when nobody cared. Then, sometime, maybe in the 30s, the offenses and the absurdities and the insults and the trivialities, they begin to accumulate and the rejections and the banalities of life, the trials, the snarky remarks, the rude remarks, the crude remarks, the unethical situations that one finds oneself confronted with, the illegal things that take place, the felonious hearts of other men, our own felonious hearts. Something along the way just gets gutted. Our faith in humanity tends to get gutted by all of these accumulated things. When I meet men, which I do, I love to do. I love to meet with men. You've heard me mention these seven inner aches and pains before. They're the foundation for the book Man Alive. Guys will tell me, "I just feel like I'm in this alone. I don't feel like God cares about me personally, not really. I don't feel like my life has a purpose, feels random. I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me back down. My soul feels dry. Most of my relationships, they're not so healthy. Finally, I just don't feel like I'm doing anything that's going to make a difference and leave the world a better place."

Guys can come to a meeting like this even and feel very alone. You can feel alone in a crowd. What happens is that if a man is alone in a crowd, then he will, because of this accumulation of things that are happening in the world, he will feel crushed, he will become fragile, he will find that he is easily offended, that he's less resilient than he thought he could be. Often, he will feel like there's something inside of him has just died. It's kind of like this. Just picture that deep in the middle of an Amazon rainforest there's a little plot of land cut out in the forest, 10 feet by 10 feet, and that's your plot of land. It has beautiful St. Augustine grass and the perimeters are perfect. It's a perfect square. It's been trimmed out and perfectly manicured. That's your little plot of land.

Then, what happens is that huge Amazon rainforest begins to what? Take over. You're fighting it back and you do the best you can. Then, you're fortunate, hopefully, that perhaps you have a wife that you can share the burden of trying to maintain this little 10 square feet piece of land as this forest, this living, breathing forest just continues to force itself on your little 10 foot square piece of land. Wouldn't it be a comfort to know that you were not the only little plot of land in the forest, that there were other men who also had little plots of land about the forest? Wouldn't it be helpful if there were little trails, three or four trails that connected your plot of land with some other guy's little plot of land so that you could share in this experience of trying to beat back the forest that wants to conquer your little piece of land? Well, that's the way that God has structured humanity. He's decided to put us into communities. I want to show you how God solves this problem that I'm talking about this morning about the world basically crushing you.

You know, it's very easy for men to become so bitter about the world itself that they really are not able to make the progress that God wants them to make. I'm going to show you how God solves this problem through friendship at John chapter 11. Beginning at verse 38 is the story of Lazarus. It says that Jesus was deeply moved and he came to the tomb. He said, "Take away the stone." Martha had said there's a dead man, my brother, in there. It's been four days. There would be an odor. Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe that you would see the glory of God?" They took away the stone and Jesus looked and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

This man, now, this was a real story, but this man as a metaphor who has been basically overcome by the world. He feels dead. He feels alone. This accumulation of offenses against him and irritations and disrespect has just overwhelmed him. He's basically given up. His only hope, the only hope for that man, whoever he is, it could be you, I doubt it, hopefully not, the only hope for that man is that Jesus Christ, who is the friend of sinners and tax collectors, will be his friend and raise him from the dead and arrange for some friends to remove his grave clothes. Notice in this text that Jesus Christ resurrects men from the dead. He resurrected this man from the dead. Metaphorically, there are a lot of dead men, not physically dead, but dead men who have lost their hope in the world today because of all the things this juggernaut that I've talked about. He's rolling along and crushing dreams, crushing hopes, crushing relationships. Jesus Christ is in the business of resurrecting those men from the living dead. Notice in this text that he doesn't do everything for men. It is part of God's order of things to put us in communities where we can help each other.

Lazarus comes out of the tomb and he's bound. You know, I don't really ... I didn't study it. I probably should have spent a lot of time. I just kind of pictured this guy wrapped up, his arms and legs relatively

immobile. Why didn't Jesus go ahead and do everything for him? He didn't. What he did was is that he said to his friends, he said, "You help him take off his grave clothes." Friends are not part of God's plan B. Friends are part of God's plan A. Friends, gosh, you know, so much could be said here in this thing today, but what I want to do is I want to give you a big idea that basically is a metaphor for the math of friendship. This is the math of friendship. Shared joys are doubled and shared sorrows are cut in half.

One of our area directors was meeting with a group of men. They broke into groups of three and four. He said, "Look, why don't you share with each other what your baggage is? We've been meeting for a while. Why don't we share our baggage with each other in groups of three and four? Why don't you share with the other men, a few other men, the thing or the things that have been holding you back?" In other words, he didn't say this, but why don't you help each other take off your grave clothes? One man who had been rather quiet in the group for the very first time opened up that 65 years ago his five-year-old younger sister had been raped and he felt responsible. He had never, ever once in 65 years talked about that with anyone until that day. Our area director said that after that meeting, this old man's persona completely changed because he had a few men help him take off the grave clothes. A shared sorrow was more than cut in half. The Big Idea today; **The math of friendship. Shared joys are doubled and shared sorrows are cut in half.**

#### **WHAT DOES A GODLY FRIEND LOOK LIKE?**

Then, let's look at what a good friend looks like, a godly friend looks like. On the backs of your handouts today is a friendship quiz. There are a number of questions on there. I'm going to read a few texts to you. Those texts are also at the end of the questions and the friendship quiz. I must tell you that I tried to do some matching of those texts to the questions, but that's a fool's errand. Basically, it's all the text applied to all the questions. Listen, just listen. This is Proverbs 17 verse 17, "A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity." When you have adversities, there are men who were born to be your brothers in those situations. 18:24, "A man of many companions comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Proverbs 27:6, "The kisses of an enemy be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend." Verse nine, "The pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel." Then, famous verse 17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Let's take a look at this **Friendship Quiz**. Galatians chapter six verse one, "If anyone's caught in a sin, those of you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Galatians 6:2, "Carry one another's burdens." Look at some of these questions on this quiz. I want to go through them out loud with you for two reasons. Number one is to give you the picture of what godly friends do and then hopefully to inspire you or renew your commitment to find and keep godly friends. First question, do you have a friend who would do anything for you, the kind you can call at 2:00 AM? The text there is from the Jonathan and David when Jonathan's father, King Saul, is trying to kill David. They meet. They have a deep affection for each other. Jonathan says, "Whatever you want me to do I will do for you." Do you have a friend like that?

Number two, do you have a friend you believe you can trust that if you share confidential thoughts they will stay confidential, a faithful man? Do you have a man that you can trust? Faithful and trust, synonyms. Number three, when things go sour and you really feel lousy, do you have a friend that you can tell without risk of condemnation? Four, do you have a friend you can express any honest thought to without fear of appearing foolish? I didn't say that you aren't foolish, but without the fear of it. When you're vulnerable and transparent, are you convinced he will not think less of you? I've had a few friends like this. Ken Moore was one of them. For 32 years, Ken Moore and I met once a week for lunch. We

brown bagged it. Every idea that I've ever had which our ministry has acted upon or not was first heard by Ken Moore. Some of those ideas were so harebrained and so ridiculous, looking back, I don't know how he was able to keep a straight face, but there was never any condemnation. Because there was no condemnation, it freed me up to be transparent, to make myself vulnerable. There were many other areas of course.

Number five, do you have a friend who lets you talk through a problem without giving you advice or criticism, someone who will just be a sounding board? Job's three friends are often criticized for all of the dumb advice that they gave him, but in the text, that's listed here, Job chapter two verses 11 through 13, should be 13, when they first came and saw Job having lost his family, lost his business empire, lost his health, sitting in a heap, scraping his body with a piece of pottery, his three friends were horrified. They just sat with Job for seven days and didn't say a word. I mean, don't be so quick to criticize Job's friends. Do you have a friend who would be willing to sit with you for seven days, feel your pain and not say a word?

Six, will your friend risk your disapproval to suggest you may be getting off track in your priorities or using poor judgment? This is kind of a funny example. Jim Seibert was also a weekly friend and movie buddy. Jim used to be the administrator here at the Bible study for 17 years and, for about 20 years, Jim and I went to lunch and a movie every Friday after the Bible study. One day, as our friendship was developing, Jim asked if he could talk to me about something. I remember where we were standing, in front of a movie theater. I said, "Sure." Jim was trembling. He said, "Pat," he said, "when you are speaking at the Bible study, you have a habit of wiping your nose with your shirt sleeve." I said, "Wow. I can't tell you how much I appreciate knowing that, complete blind spot." I do have severe allergies. I'm allergic to everything, I guess.

Now, I carry 24/7, because of Jim, I carry a Kleenex. You probably have not even noticed this before, but some of you have and now you'll notice it because I've mentioned it. I often will pull that out because my nose is starting to run because of these allergies. I was completely unaware that I was doing it. He cared enough about me to mention it. Here's the thing. Here's what's interesting. This is part of the problem with friendship. Because when we do the things that friends do with each other, sometimes people take it the wrong way and relationships get destroyed. It seems like such a small thing, but he was afraid the friendship was going to end over this, but he was willing to risk the friendship to do the right thing.

Seven, do you have a friend who will take the risk of telling you that you are sinning? Wow. This is really ... Are you aware that there are churches where their sexual immorality is known and tolerated, accepted, where single adults hooking up is accepted? It's true. Part of being a friend is being willing to call out somebody when they're doing something sinful. Now, calling someone out for disagreeing with your political views, that's not calling people out for sinning. Eight, if you had a moral failure, do you know that your friend would stand with you, that he would help you carry your burden? Number nine, do you have a friend or a small group of friends who meet regularly for discipleship, fellowship, prayer, possibly accountability? That's the iron sharpening iron concept. Then, verse ten, do you have a brother or group of brothers with whom you are doing life together, talking honestly about the struggles unique to men and helping each other take off the grave clothes? One of your discussion questions is just to think about what is the difference there before nine and ten.

When you have a friend like this, then the math of friendship begins to add up. You find your shared joys get doubled and your shared sorrows get cut in half.

## FRIENDLY ADVICE ON FINDING AND KEEPING GODLY FRIENDS

Then, just finally, because this is ... Finding and keeping godly friends, some friendly advice on that. A lot of things could be said, real quickly, along the way. Most friendships are found along the way. There are some friendship websites. I don't know if any of you have ever tried them or not. If you have, let me know because I'd actually like to know if any of those things work, but it does seem, from my perspective, my friendships have been along the way. In other words, there was a shared interest. Maybe it was something that our children were doing together, a sports activity, and we became friends, a Bible study at church. Perhaps the greatest place along the way most men make friends is at work.

The issue of compatibility. I don't think you can, in the same way when a man and a woman are trying to figure out if they can be a couple married, one of the big issues is do they have compatibility. I think that's another issue in friendship too. You know, if you just, for whatever reason, have a personality let's call it a conflict or whatever you want to call it, and it doesn't seem that you enjoy someone's company as much as another, well, that's part of the calculus of being finite. I wouldn't worry about it, the physics of finitude. Then, this little formula that I developed a long, long time ago. ARTT. It's perfect for finding and keeping godly friends. ARTT. Appointment, Relationship, Trust, Task. Men are task-oriented so let's turn our relationships into tasks. If you are task-oriented and not relationship-oriented, you can turn your relationships into a task. The relationship is the task. Appointment, relationship, trust, task.

Let's just say Daniel, you know, "Hey, Daniel, I'm looking for a new friend. I'm looking for somebody who will be faithful, who will be vulnerable with me and be transparent. We can share the deep depths of our hearts. We'll help each other take off our grave clothes. It's going to be great. It'll be so transparent, be friends for life. Our families will get along. We'll share and we'll go places together. We'll meet regularly. Daniel, would you be my best friend?" Well, what I have just done besides freak Daniel out? I've just violated the process of relationships. There is a process of relationships, appointment, relationship, trust, task. If I wanted to see if Daniel might be a friend, what would be a better way to do that? It would be to see if I could get an appointment, "Hey, Daniel. Hey, you want to grab a cup of coffee sometime?" Well, I might have all this other stuff in the back of my mind, but what I want to say to Daniel, because of the fall and we're managing against the fall, "Hey, Daniel. Would you like to catch a cup of coffee?" He said, "Nah, sorry. I'm busy." Alright. Well, we'll go on to the next guy.

Appointment then relationship. You get together one time and then it goes well. Then you maybe say, "Hey, why don't we get together again in a couple weeks? I'd love to get to know you a little bit more about your family," or something like or, "Hey, we share a common interest in golf. Why don't we catch a round of golf?" Something like that and the relationship begins to build with these multiple meetings. Then, at some point, you come to the conclusion that you can trust him. He concludes that he can trust you. Then, you ask the question on the task, "Hey, what would you think about if we started meeting on a weekly basis?" He says, "Yes." Well, there's a process to that. I'd encourage you to use the process. Don't rush faster than people can take in.

By the way, I think the weekly meeting's the way to go. I think that if you want to, in terms of keeping godly friends, the best way to keep a godly friend is to calendarize it. I calendarize. Ken and I were calendarized. Unless one of us were out of town, we met. There were no other meetings that ever got scheduled over that when we were in town, just didn't happen. Same way with Jim Seibert. It was just inviolate on the calendar. When Ken passed away, just so happened that my father-in-law, Ed Cole, moved to Orlando. For the last seven years of his life, we became best friends and weekly lunch buddies

replacing Jim, but it was on the calendar every week. Howard Dayton, some of you know Howard Dayton. Howard Dayton and I have been friends for 45 years. We were in a small group together when God gave him that crown material. It was crazy.

He'd come into the meetings and hand out the material. He'd say, "Hey, would you look this over and tell me what you think?" We were all new Christians. I'd say, "Hey, that looks great, man." Anyway, that became the crown material. He and I still meet once a quarter for lunch. It's calendarized and that's the only way these things actually in busy lives seem to. Then, in terms of the other thing, the final thing on keeping is just, look, if you want to keep a friend, you have to be vulnerable. You can't ... There was a very prominent doctor whose father was a raging alcohol and basically destroyed the family. This doctor had never talked to anybody about that, but his life changed on the day when in the small group he finally decided to be vulnerable and cut his sorrows in half. In fact, it doubled his joys as well. That is the Big Idea for the day; **The math of friendship. Shared joys are doubled and shared sorrows are cut in half.** Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, our dearest Father, thank you so much for each of these men. Thank you for the gift of friendship. I pray that as ... I already know that about half of men have a good friend, about half of men don't. Pray for those men who do have good friends that what we've talked about here would further stimulate their imaginations on how they can even be taking that friendship to the next level or friendships. Then, for those of us who are in a deficit in this area, Lord, I pray that this might be something that would inspire us to take a step to put our toes in the water to see if we might be able to develop a friendship with somebody who could help us cut our shared sorrows in half and double the joys that we have. We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.