

Friendships and Community

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Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 01] All right, thank you so much, Lisa. A fine good morning to everyone in the room, both those listening here and online. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here at One Harbor, Newborn. So good to be with you.

And so this morning, we're going to continue in a series we've been doing to open up 2024, exploring how we walk in the way of Jesus. So some of the earliest Christians, when you follow Jesus, it was called walking in the way, right?

And so that's how we kind of just want to launch into the year, following him as disciples. And we're really looking at how this shows up through different lenses, right, or different areas of life.

So last week, Jesse took us through what that would look like in solitude. So the quiet and the still and the secret places where we meet with Jesus and he forms us, right?

And today, we're going to talk about what that looks like amongst our friendships. So solitude and now into our community. So how does Jesus, the way of Jesus, affect how we treat each other?

[1 : 04] What responsibilities we have to each other? And how does Jesus use those relationships to help us grow? Like how's that part of discipleship? One of the constant themes you see in the New Testament is that following Jesus is meant to be done in community.

I mean, even in like the most extreme and isolating circumstances, right, when believers are in prison, they're being persecuted. The picture is, even though there's grace for that moment, they are longing to be back with the community that they were with.

In fact, most of the New Testament, we have a large chunk of it because a follower of Jesus was isolated and he was writing a letter to someone, to a body of believers. He was reaching out through that.

It wasn't just like a master's thesis. It was a letter to a people that he knew. And so all throughout this, we see that it's just meant to be done together. But if we're honest, there are some real barriers to that.

Individualism, selfishness, just the busyness of life. Kind of a modern twist on that is, you know, with how our relationships happen online, you kind of have like a mile-wide set of relationships that go an inch deep.

[2 : 22] And then all of us have probably had a relationship in the past that hurt us in some way, right? So whenever you move into a new friendship, that comes back to your mind. On top of all that, I think there's actually kind of a romanticism attached to being a loner, right?

Like if you look at how we portray that in culture and art sometimes, it's like going at it on your own has a certain appeal to it, right? Maybe like cue Whitesnake, right?

Like, here I go again on my own. You know, like that whole thing. That's all you're going to get.

That's all I am. But you get that, right? Like there's a promise of freedom to that, right?

Like the idea that as a loner, I am free to blaze my own trail and I can do that without the obligations that relationship brings with it, right? Like I'm free to pursue my dreams.

Or maybe it's just kind of that pride that goes with, you know, I'm hard enough and I'm tough enough to show this world that I don't need anybody else, right? Like the way of the Lone Ranger does promise, like holds this promise of like freedom and adventure.

[3 : 28] But when we look in Scripture, we see that the actual truth is lone rangers are dead rangers. And that's why becoming this loving community is such a thing we try to cultivate here at One Harbor because we really believe this is a life or death issue.

Now, some of this is just the practical part where life is harder when you do it on your own. In Ecclesiastes chapter 4 verse 9, it says this, Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil.

For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another person to lift him up. And again, if two lie together, they keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two could withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

I mean, life is simply harder when you have to bear the burdens alone. But the Bible goes beyond that and tells us not only is life harder, you actually have an enemy, Satan, who's looking to take you out.

[4 : 41] And so, in Scripture, the picture of a lone ranger that's given is not, you know, this hard and tough person going at life without anybody. It's the picture of a sheep all by itself, away from a shepherd, easy target.

It's a danger to us. Being a lone ranger puts us in that kind of danger. But it doesn't just put us in danger because not only are lone rangers dead rangers, they're also dangerous rangers.

In Proverbs 18, verse 1, it says this, Whoever isolates himself, seeks his own desire, he breaks out against all sound judgment.

So when you decide you're not going to live in any community, you're not going to walk in the way of Jesus like that, the way we direct our lives actually starts to become a danger, not just to us, but to everyone around us as well.

The way you use your tongue, the way you use your resources, the things you lead other people into, you start to cause harm to those around you.

[5 : 49] And so that's, again, why it's so critical, both for us and because we care about those around us, that we learn to walk in the way of Jesus in our friendships, in our community.

So that's what we're going to do today. And if we're going to do that, I think the first question we should probably ask is, okay, what would that look like? Like, what would be the markers of following the way of Jesus in our friendships, in our community?

And I think the first thing I'd say is probably the most obvious. Followers of Jesus love one another. In John chapter 13, 35, it says this, By this, Jesus speaking, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Not by your knowledge, not by the display of your power, but how we love one another. Now, this is probably one of those places where, again, because the word love has such a broad range in the English language, to clarify what does he mean by the way you love each other?

Because there's a version of loving each other that looks a lot like just hanging out, right? Like fun with acquaintances, good times with good friends.

[7 : 06] And there is nothing wrong with that. That is a common grace and a beauty that God has given us. It's kind of like when I go to a football game, right? Like I immediately have 50,000 friends that are sharing in all of my joys and all of my lows, right?

Like I am there. We're sharing common experience. There is a camaraderie that goes with that, and there is nothing wrong with it. I mean, unless maybe you get a little sinful in how you're rooting for your team or something, right? But in general, those are common graces.

But if that's all we ever do, like if that's as deep as we ever go, there's so much that we're missing out on because the type of love that Jesus is speaking about here is really one that goes to your core.

Like it's kind of a settled will that you are going to seek the good of others over yourself. Like a steadfast and faithful devotion, like a fondness for each other that mirrors the way the Father feels about us.

That kind of love seeks out ways to love people around you. And it has some markers to it as well. Like what does that love look like?

[8 : 12] Well, we can start by simply caring for each other. Followers of Jesus care for one another. One of the things you're going to see come up over and over today because the phrase happens so much in Scripture is the term one another.

As a matter of fact, a lot of time it's called one another because it's all the ways in which God shows us how we're to relate to each other. And Scripture is replete with verses of how we care for each other.

Here's just a couple. From Corinthians, we're told to comfort one another. In Galatians, bear one another's burdens. In Ephesians, be kind to one another.

Tender-hearted, forgiving one another as Christ forgave you. Romans, contribute to one another and show hospitality. What do all those have in common?

They are love in action. They are not passive care. It is a love that enters into the lives of the people around you, frankly in a way that might be a little more weighty than we're used to or comfortable with.

[9 : 16] Because followers of Jesus can't be indifferent towards the people around them. That's just not the way we move. Part of doing that is followers of Jesus have to do life together, right?

Like if you wonder again why we're so passionate about community groups is this is it. Because it's really hard to care for someone well if they're a stranger, if you don't know them.

And so we gather in homes. We share meals. We lean into both the lighthearted and the heavy. And in that we're trusting that we're drawing closer to each other so that we can care for one another well and also that Jesus is drawing us towards him.

Followers of Jesus care for one another. Another key element of caring for one another is simply this. Followers of Jesus get along with one another. Now unfortunately I know for many of you, particularly if you've had a bad experience in the church in the past, this one might actually be the hardest to believe, right?

So if I say, hey followers of Jesus get along with each other, you go, ha ha ha ha. No they don't. Kind of further complicating this is the fact that there have certainly been times in a church context where a leader in particular can use an admonition in scripture not to cause division or not to gossip as kind of a pretext for suppressing something, right?

[10 : 41] Like covering up something really ugly like some kind of abuse. And let me just pause for a minute and say that's not what we're talking about here. That kind of thing absolutely should be brought into the light and have accountability.

But at a root level, we're called to be for each other. Like if we look past those difficulties for a second, we're on the same team.

Like we're in the same family if you're a follower of Jesus. And we're called to fight for that kind of unity. And so it's really important that we push back on those types of things like gossip, like division.

That we strive to actually like being with each other. Again, scripture replete with verses. Mark chapter 9. Be at peace with one another.

Romans, live in harmony with one another. Ephesians, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Peter, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

[11 : 44] Romans 12. Outdo one another in showing honor. That's one of my favorite ones and one that I think we do well here at One Harbor. Like if you're going to try to one-up each other, the thing you should try to be one-upping each other is in giving honor.

Like making people feel valued in their place in the body and what God's made them to be. And who they are before him. Outdo one another in showing honor. Aim for restoration.

Comfort one another. Agree with one another. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Now we might not get all that perfect.

But if followers of Jesus press towards that with each other, I would submit we'll start to become the kind of community that everybody always hopes they're going to find themselves in.

One that treats each other like that. I think another outworking of how we do that is followers of Jesus are emotionally present with each other.

[12 : 50] Romans 12.15 says this, Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Now let's just pause for a minute and think about that.

Because honestly, I think that's the kind of verse that you read and it seems really easy to grasp and then you move on. Because on the surface it seems like something you understand really well, right?

Like that's just what friends do. When your friends are down, you feel that. And when they're up, you feel that. But the truth is, that kind of community is probably harder to imagine than a lot of us think.

So like maybe give you an example. How do you, an honest question. How do you really feel? When you find out someone, like someone that's become your friend and you're getting to know them or getting to know them as a couple, their family.

And you come to find out that they make a lot more money than you do. You know like that thing where like you've been for a while and like they finally invite you over to their house.

[13:48] And you kind of, because you've been connecting, you know, and you're driving and then you realize, Man, this is a much nicer neighborhood than I expected to be driving through, right? Or maybe that thing where, you know, you come into an organization, a job with somebody and your friends with them.

And then over time, you see that they are promoted and get success and they move into different circles. Like how do you really feel about that? Can you really rejoice with them?

Or are you self-conscious? Do we get insecure? Does jealousy, envy show up in that? Scott Sauls has this great quote about Romans 12 where he says, You know, when you let envy or jealousy into your life, what you get is actually the exact opposite of Romans 12 where you start to rejoice when others weep.

And you start to weep when others rejoice. Like when they're sad, it makes you feel a little better because you kind of feel good that they're knocked down a peg, right?

And when they have something good, you feel bad because you don't have it. That is a way that will steal our relationships away from us. And the Bible calls us to be emotionally present.

[15:00] Now the good news is this isn't just some 10-step program. Like the way of Jesus gives us a way to do it because we're actually walking with Jesus. And part of that is when you're with Jesus, you start to realize that I've got what I need.

Like my needs are getting met in him. Like I can trust Jesus to give me the best. I don't have to get self-conscious when he gives a blessing to another one of his children because he loves me too.

Like I can lean into that. And so I can be present with him because every blessing someone else gets is not a referendum on me or my success. I can still trust my good father to look after me too. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. When we start to do that, I think it builds the context to do another thing that we're called to do.

And it's followers of Jesus are called to encourage and challenge each other towards Jesus. Now part of this is just we are cheerleaders for each other.

[16:04] We cheer each other on towards the goal. In Hebrews chapter 10 verse 24 it says, Let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works.

Like literally we're supposed to be thinking of ways. How do I help my brothers and sisters around me make it over the line? How do I encourage them to keep going in the Lord?

Again, just imagine what that would look like if you were surrounded by a community of people who were constantly for you and encouraging you to keep going. I think we remind each other of the gospel.

There's this quote that's gone around in church circles for a lot of years. And honestly it's really hard to pin down who might have said it first. So I can't really give credit here. But I do think it gets to the heart of this.

It says this, a friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you forget it from time to time. Followers of Jesus sing the gospel back to each other.

[17:08] Like we constantly remind each other as the things in life that come along to take us out. Who we belong to. What our destiny is. What his good pleasure is.

We sing that gospel back to each other. And that kind of encouragement. Like that kind of building up. Opens us up to do something else. Which is foreign to a lot of people.

Which is we get to be courageously honest with each other. Because part of the goal here is not just to create a community of people that are nicer to each other.

In the way that we might think about nice in culture. The goal is to become more like Jesus. To have that kind of fullness of life. And the Bible speaks to that in language again that talks like sharpening.

Like a little bit of friction to it. Right? So Proverbs there are two verses cut right to this. Proverbs 27.6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

[18:02] But profuse are the kisses of an enemy. Not every word of praise or flattery in your life is a blessing. And not every hard thing is a curse.

Proverbs 27.17 Lisa mentioned this morning. Iron sharpens iron. And one man sharpens another. Again there's obviously a picture of some friction that happens here.

Now here's the trick. That honesty doesn't have to be delivered with harshness or meanness. Like it is courageous honesty in a context of demonstrated love and faithfulness.

Maybe to say it another way. If you just met someone. You probably should consider whether you're actually the iron that's there to sharpen them or not. Right? Like that might not be what you've been sent for the moment.

But one of the pictures we use at One Harbor that I think is just such a great picture of it is. You know if you're going to drive a heavy load of truth into someone's life. You've got to have a pretty strong bridge to drive it over.

[19 : 06] Like you have to have established that this is a place of love and that you are for them. But we are called to love each other in that way.

To not just gloss over things. We confess sins to each other. We fight our weakness together. We bring each other to Jesus. And that's part of being that community that lives in the way.

Jesus did that with his disciples. He said things to them all the time that they did not want to hear. But they didn't doubt that he loved them. So if we're doing those things right.

We're caring for each other. We're encouraging each other. We're strengthening each other. We're just one anothering well. We're singing the gospel to each other. I think one of the most natural things that will start to happen.

Is you'll start to want to bring your friends who aren't believers to Jesus to him. Because another key thing that followers of Jesus do in their friendship is they bring others to Jesus.

[20 : 10] So we've read this story in Mark. We're going to kind of revisit it here today in Luke. That I think really gets to really kind of shows a picture image of this. So we're just going to read this from Luke chapter 5 17.

And so the setup is Jesus is in this house. And he's teaching. And the story picks up here and it says, On one of those days he was teaching. And the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were sitting there.

Who had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed. And they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But they could find no way in because of the crowd. And so they went up on the roof. And they let down his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

And when Jesus saw their faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question saying, Who is this speaking blasphemies? And who can forgive sins but God?

[21 : 06] And when Jesus perceived their thoughts he answered them, Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven. Or rise and walk. But that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He said to the man who was paralyzed, I say to you, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home. And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he'd been lying on. And he went home glorifying God.

And amazement seized all of them. And they glorified God. And they were filled with awe saying, We have seen extraordinary things today. Such a rich story. Such a famous story.

And one that you could honestly preach like 12 sermons on, right? Like there's so many things you could peel apart here. How this man needed both healing and forgiveness. And Jesus met both needs.

You could take a look at, It's really interesting how, you know, The most religiously devoted ones missed what was happening. But this morning I'd like to laser focus on just one key aspect of this story.

[22 : 04] And it happens right at the beginning. And it's this simple thought. But these friends recognized that what their friend needed most was Jesus. Like they said, We have to get him to Jesus.

That was the drive of their heart. Followers of Jesus want to bring others to Jesus. So how do we do it? Like how would we do that for our friends who don't follow Jesus?

Well, I think part of that at minimum would be following Jesus together means being willing to talk about Jesus. There's a pastor I follow in New York who gave this great example.

And again, a very kind of secular place where a lot of the times we let the framework of our faith simply be set by whatever setting that we're in. Right? Like that's the box that you can express it in.

But, you know, in the places I go, if at my work and my extended family and, you know, my acquaintances, if nobody in there knows that I'm a follower of Jesus, that's probably a problem. [23 : 08] Like I like to give the example from marriage, right? Like I don't, you know, go into work like making a big deal about what my family relationships are. But if you're around me for any period of time, like it would be strange.

Eventually you're going to find out that like I'm married and I have children. Right? And that's not because I'm like sidling up to you in like a really uncomfortable way and being like, hey man, like I just need you to know right now at this moment that I love my wife and she's so important in my life and I just need you to know that.

Like I thought we were just getting coffee. I don't, but. I don't have to do it like that. But at the same time, you're going to find out that I have a wife because I can't live life and not talk about her. Right? So it doesn't mean you have to be kind of awkwardly witnessing at every moment, but it does mean you have to be unafraid to talk about Jesus, to live out that reality with wisdom to those around you.

Because followers of Jesus recognize what my friends need most is Jesus. And part of that is being willing to talk about him. Scripture says, how will they hear if we don't tell them?

[24 : 12] I think the other simple thing you can do is just to become more like Jesus. And I think this is one of those places where, you know, we talk about these, you need all of these arenas.

Right? Because I think this is one of those places where what you do in solitude burst out into public. Right? Like the things that God is doing in you in secret, the places where he's growing you become evident to those around you.

Because, you know, if you are a cruel person or a vain person or a selfish person or a dishonest person, nobody is going to care what you have to say about Jesus.

When we move in integrity and treat others fairly and we don't let our anger rule us and people see that we sacrifice of ourselves for others, we become that living testament to who he is that invites people further in.

Right? Like they see that. Where is that coming from? It invites them to ask questions. And may the Father give us grace to do more of that.

[25 : 17] Amen? Amen. Amen. One final thing this morning. So all of these are ways we can one another. And this last one I think is just one that is really helpful to keep in mind as you move forward in your friendships.

And it's simply that followers of Jesus at the end of the day know that their friends aren't Jesus. So it's really great when you have a good community, right?

Like friendship when it's right is really right, right? Like somebody that encourages you, that pushes you to Jesus. But how do we walk in the way of Jesus in our friendships when your friends let you down?

Like when there's a critical moment and they disappoint you. Or they're too distracted and busy in their life during a season to have any time for you. Or they say something harsh.

Or they gossip about you. How do we move in the way of Jesus then? I think it's helpful to realize that Jesus himself wasn't a stranger to this.

[26 : 25] In Luke chapter 22, it's kind of this discourse of things that happen leading up to Jesus going to the cross. And in just this one chapter, it's kind of a textbook exposition of how not to do friendship, right?

So here's like just a little snippet overview. Right out of the gate in verses 3 through 6, it says one of Jesus' inner circle, his friends, is so committed to betraying him that he actually gets possessed by the devil and then goes off to betray him.

So that's how we start. Right after that, Jesus brings his disciples in to this communion meal that he says he's been longing to do, to be with them.

And it says at the end of that, like they're actually fighting about who's the greatest, right? Which is crazy because Jesus is sitting there, right? Like clearly he's the greatest. But they're doing this thing at this moment that Jesus is so special to him and they're fighting.

They walk out from there and Peter, who's one of his closest friends, immediately makes all these promises that he can't keep. They go from there to a place where Jesus is entering the worst moment of his life.

[27 : 36] And if you can think about that, like think if you were facing the hardest thing you could face. Like the thing that scares you the most. And you called your friends around you to say, man, I'm going into something. I am terrified.

Like I'm feeling the weight of this. Can you pray with me? And as you went into that, you found out that actually, no, they couldn't. They couldn't stay awake. They couldn't walk that road with you.

They kept falling asleep. The worst moment of his life. They fall out on him. Right after that, they come to take Jesus and his followers immediately kind of erupt into violence, right?

And this is the kind of thing, like imagine you've been like mentoring and shepherding someone that like this isn't the way. And then the key moment happens and they just fall back to how they've always done stuff, right? And then right after that, Peter, who was again one of his closest friends, after multiple years at this point of sharing life together, experiencing things together, seeing the power of God.

Because he's scared, can't even admit that he knows him. I don't know him. Like it doesn't get much more failing than that. So needless to say, this isn't a great showing for Jesus' friends.

[28 : 49] And it means he knows what it's like to be betrayed and let down and abandoned. Like he feels that. He understands that. But there is one friend in this story that's faithful to the end and that is Jesus.

Because it says, even with all these failures, he loved them to the end. He never gave up on them. Jesus is that one friend who will never fail you. Proverbs 18.24 says this, A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Jesus is the ultimate expression of that. Of the friend that will stick closer than a brother. So it is awesome.

Like this whole message has been about like we need one another and we need community. Like it is vital. But in that community, you can't ask your friends to be what only Jesus can be for you.

That is a weight that they are not meant to bear. And it will crush you and it will crush them. Jesus alone is the one who's the perfect friend.

[30 : 00] And he is willing to be that for anyone here who wants to come to him. So as the band comes up this morning, a couple of ways we can think about responding.

So if you're in here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I would say to you, his arms are open wide. Like if you need a friend and you have none, you can start with Jesus.

If you need healing and you don't know how to find it, you can start with Jesus. If you are confused, he's a soft place to fall into. We say at the beginning of every service that Jesus is the friend of sinners.

That's not because Jesus is a friend of sin. It's because your sin is not enough to keep him away from you. It means he's willing to go through that to get to you.

You can ask him for that today. There will be a prayer in a minute on the screen behind me that you can pray where you're at. If that expresses your heart. We'll also have some men and women over to the left of the stage.

[31 : 02] We would love to invite you into that. If you feel alone, don't leave alone today. Jesus can be that. If you are a follower of Jesus, I think the question to ask is like, what stood out in your heart as we talked about that today?

What did God impress on you? Was it some act of love that the Spirit kind of laid on your heart that you need to go do that for someone? Like some act of love he wants you to give.

Was it maybe to be bolder in how you share Jesus in your circles? To just be a little bit more willing to bear the cost of what it might mean to be associated with Jesus?

Do it. Do it. We can learn that in community together. You don't have to do that part alone either. If you're worried about taking that step, that's part of the family.

That's part of the communion. We can do those things together. Let's go ahead and stand. Amen.

So for those here who are followers of Jesus, we're going to come now to a time of the communion meal.

[32 : 13] And it says, before you take it, you should examine your heart. This is actually a really great morning to examine, to ask God if there's a friendship, if there's something broken in one of your relationships that he wants to make right.

And to ask him to reveal that to you, like a place that you know is broken that you need to go. And maybe ask for forgiveness. Maybe reach out in a way you haven't in a while.

Just to ask him, is there anything he wants to impress? So we give him the space to do that. And after you've had time, there's no rush on that.

You go to the table and you can take the elements back to your seat and partake. And as you partake, I would encourage you to remember this. When Jesus instituted this meal, he looked at his friends and he said, greatly have I desired to do this with you.

And that is his same heart for you as you take it this morning. And greatly do I desire to have communion with you, to have fellowship. And you can ask him, like, make that real to me in a real way.

[33 : 18] Like, nourish me inside in a way that I don't even really understand. He wants to do that. He wants to be with you. Father, we give this moment to you.

Thank you for being with us this morning. Thank you for the friendships you give us. Thank you for showing us what friendship looks like. God, I pray you would remove every obstacle that would give us a hint of doubt that Jesus wants us this morning.

Anything that's in anyone's mind or heart this morning that says, that's not possible, you're too far, Jesus doesn't want you. I pray right now, Holy Spirit, you would remove that.

Help us to see just the friendly and open heart of our Savior, Father. Come and be in this moment.

We ask in Jesus' name.