Friendships beyond Facebook

## Grace for The Family

## By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** Romans 12:1-16

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### Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

We are continuing our series, "Grace for The Family," and I think we would all agree we need grace to relate to one another through the challenges of life and today we are going to focus on "Friends beyond Facebook." That's right, we're going beyond the Facebook. This is for those who are single as well as those who just need to grow in how they relate to friends, family, coworkers, in other words, all of us. We all need to think about how to be a godly friend.

Well, think about who the ideal friend for you would be. Would they know your favorite Starbucks drink? Would they always like everything you post on Facebook immediately? Would they be there at the drop of a hat to help, to comfort, to console you? Would they always be excited about what you're excited about? And would they never, ever, ever, never, ever, never, ever forget your birthday? What's the ideal friend for you? Well, if we're honest, sometimes the ideal friend is a mirror image of us. Often they would do things that we like or they would serve us in a way that we prefer and oftentimes in our culture we struggle with real, genuine friendships. I wonder how much of a challenge is because we oftentimes look for someone just like us? Do we embrace friendships that would be challenging? That require grace? That require us to show grace?

I have a little video here that I think captures the idea of fellowshipping with those who are not just like you. Take a look.

[Friends Forever Android commercial: Unlikely frolicking animal pairs: orangutan and dog, kitten and baby chicks, baby lion and dog, dog and cat, rhino and sheep, sheep and elephant, dolphin and dog, dog and elephant, cockatoo and dog, dog and deer, monkey and horse, horse and goat, turtle and gopher, baby lion and meerkat, tiger and bear.]

Roger Miller Singing:

"Robin Hood and Little John, walking through the forest
Laughing back and forth at what the other one has to say
Reminiscing this and that and having such a good time
Oo-de-lally, oo-de-lally, golly, what a day.

"Never ever thinking there was danger in the water
They were drinking, they just guzzled it down
Never dreaming that a scheming sheriff and his posse
Was a-watching them and gathering around.

"Robin Hood and Little John, running through the forest
Jumping fences, dodging trees and trying to get away
Contemplating nothing but escape and finally making it
Oo-de-lally, oo-de-lally, golly, what a day.

"Oo-de-lally, oo-de-lally, golly, what a day."

That's right, be together, not the same. That's an android commercial. I know in part that's a dig on iPhones but I think the point is helpful and it's just fun to watch orangutans even if they're terrible at playing tag. But the point is: connect with those who are different than you. I think oftentimes our view of friendships is just the opposite and we end up being disillusioned, disappointed and disenfranchised with our friendships.

I think it's also helpful for us to consider how did Jesus approach friendships? How did he go about this idea of relating to people? One of the most remarkable things about Christ is that he was constantly moving towards those who are different than he was. He was a friend of sinners. How much more different can you get? Creator and sustainer of the world in perfect holiness and righteousness. Us, sinners. And he left heaven and came to dwell among us to redeem us, to be with us. There is nothing more different than how God approaches people.

So I think one of the things that marks biblical friendship is a willingness to move towards those who are different than you, particularly in the body of Christ but also in our community. I want everyone to ask themselves the question this morning: am I the friend, am I the kind of friend that Jesus wants me to be? That begs the question: what kind of friend does Jesus want me to be? How does God want me to function in the body? How should I relate to those who are different than I am both inside the church and outside? Ultimately, how can I be a friend that pleases God? A friendship whose relationships are marked by grace?

Well, in order to have a biblical view of friendships, let's take a look at Romans 12. That's on page 126 in the Bible under the chair in front of you. We're going to look at this wonderful example of how a group of people devoted to God are supposed to function and relate to one another so we can begin to develop a biblical view of friendships. Again, that's Romans 12 on page 126. We're going to start in verse 1.

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your [here it is] spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

The important thing to start our time is to look at the context and the context of relating to one another is worship. Verses 1 and 2 focus on how we are to worship God. That is to be our focus and therefore God honoring relationships are an act of worship. The previous 11 chapters of Romans focus on our need to be saved, the process of being saved, how we should view ourselves in light of God's grace to be saved, and now Paul shifts gears a little bit in Romans 12 and how to worship him. How to relate to him. Then that flows out of how to relate to other people and it all is an act of worship. And to do that, we must "not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind," in other words, we can't approach relationships based on what we want or think is best for us. But what does God want? And how can I go about doing that as an act of worship? What is his will for the way I worship him by relating to other people?

With that in mind, let's consider 5 ways our friendships can be worshipful and marked by grace. Well, the first one is about thinking humbly about yourself. If we're going to worship God in the way we relate to other people, it's going to require humility. Paul models humility even in his instruction. In verse 3 he says, "through the grace given to me," that's the basis he gives them instruction. He recognizes, "It's only by God's grace that I am in a position to even speak to you and write you this letter." He humbly recognizes it is only God working in his life for him to speak into the life of somebody else. He models humility.

Notice in the text the focus on thinking for everyone. Everyone must not think of himself higher than he ought to think. That's what the text says, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Did you see how "think" was related 3 times? "Think. Think. Think." How you think about yourself is going to have a huge impact on how you relate to other people. If you think very highly of yourself, you're going to be so selective in who you hang out with because you don't know if they are worthy to be in your presence. Or if you're hanging out with somebody and you find yourself being critical and critical and critical, well, being critical is just an opportunity to think highly of yourself. "I would have done it better, differently. They don't know what they're doing." As we renew our minds, we need to think rightly about ourselves. That's what it means to have sound judgment or sober thinking, contrasted with pride and hubris.

Notice, that humility comes from thinking about how God even allotted you the measure of faith that you have in the text, "have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Now, it's true that some people are simply more trusting than others but even that can be a source of pride. "Can you believe it? Look at my faith. Look at how much I am trusting God right now." Or conversely, it could be an issue on the other side of it, you could become bitter, stumbling over things, just wishing things were different, wishing things were easier, wishing that you had more faith, that you didn't have to struggle with doubting or trusting God's goodness in the midst of a trial. Just thinking to yourself, "I wish this was all just easier."

Well, do you recognize that even your faith is a gracious gift from God? And do you understand that in the Bible there is often a tension between God's sovereignty and mankind's responsibility and that tension is a really good thing. It tells me, "I have a responsibility. I have accountability, but God is the one who is sovereign, who is ultimately in control." It helps me not be fatalistic and lazy. It helps me not be prideful and self-sufficient and it keeps me out of both ditches and keeps me focused on what's true about God and then what's true about me because of what he says.

But the point here is that even your faith should point you to your need, point you to God's gracious gift. It should lead you to humility rather than boasting. There is going to be a theme here of the things that God provides should lead you to humility and that humility should impact how you relate to your friends, to those that are different than you, to those who are in need.

Humility is really the tool that helps us grow closer together so whether you have a lot of faith, a little bit of faith, whether it's easy for you to trust in him or whether it's a battle, I think it also helps you approach someone who struggles, someone who is really struggling believing. Instead of saying, "Why can't you just figure this out?" recognizing that even your ability to come to God and trust him is a gift and helps you move toward someone instead of saying, "Well, you're on your own. It's tough for you. Too bad." It helps us grow closer together. Humility is the tool that cultivates godly friendships to grow because it brings us closer together.

And friendships that are focused on worshiping, well, they are going to be marked by humility, particularly in how you think about yourself. I hope everybody here will evaluate how they approach their friendships. Is it in a humble way or in a prideful way? How do you think when you're around your friends? How you think about yourself has a lot to do with how you identify yourself. How you worship God in your relationships also has a lot to do with your view of your identity. It says in the text, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." We are one body in Christ. If you have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, your identity is a member of his body. Someone who is in Christ, that is your identity and your identity is to govern how you interact with other people. It is very hard to have a genuine relationship with someone when you are finding your identity in that relationship. It is very, very difficult because you are constantly going to be wanting something from them. You're going to want to constantly change them to be more like what you think this relationship should be like or conversely, you're going to be constantly conversing yourself or conforming yourself to be what you think they want because your identity is in this relationship. Instead, if you view yourself as one body in Christ, if you have trusted Christ, your identity must be secure in Christ so you can love and serve them rather than demand love and service from them.

We are so different from one another. It's futile to think we can find our identity in our relationships with one another and, moreover, God says we are to find our identity in him. In 1 Peter 2:9-10, he says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." That's your identity. "So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Is your identity secure because you are someone who has received mercy? You are God's possession. You are his people. You are drawn into his marvelous light because he called you out of darkness. Is that your identity? Is that how you view yourself and does that govern how you think about yourself and then how you think about interacting with other people?

That is security, "I am his." That is security. That identity allows us then to embrace what is different; many members and we do not have the same function. You know, what does that look like? How do we embrace what is different? Well, I think it just start simple: who do you sit with in church on Sunday morning? Do you sit with the same folks every time? Or do you make it a goal to get to know different people who may be different than you: different age, different vocation, different ethnicity, whatever it is? Do you move towards those who are different because you celebrate the body and the diversity that God has called people of many different walks of life into his marvelous light and you want to be a part of that and knowing how the marvelous light has worked out in many, many different circumstances?

The Bible celebrate our differences. If you read Ephesians 4 you see that all the different parts of the body need to work together so that the body might build itself up in love. It's a beautiful thing but it requires us to interact with each other and move closer to each other. It means you need to listen to folks who maybe don't think just like you. Maybe someone else has different concerns or interests than you and are you just going to tune out when they talk about something you're not interested in or are you going to seek to say, "This is an opportunity to build up the body in love and learn more about another member of the body of Christ or learn about somebody that maybe I can share the Gospel with so that they can be a part of the body of Christ." If you are secure in who you are in Christ, you can interact with people who are different and not try to change them, not try to change yourself but you can both see how God wants to use the differences to bring us together to his purpose. That ultimately helps us see that, "I'm not going to conform you. You're not going to conform me. But our differences, God is going to use to conform us both to become more like his Son, the one we are all to be growing to become more like." That allows us to embrace what brings us together. In Christ is where we are connected. That's where we are one body. We are members of one another. One body in Christ.

True friendships have a level of intimacy, a level of connection, a level of awareness of what is going on in each other's lives. Members of one another means you know a bit about each other. You are connected beyond hobbies. Connected beyond vocation. And we are all created to be in these close types of relationships and those relationships involve risk and transparency because I don't know what you're going to do or say about me if I open my life up to you but it begs the question: where do I find my security? Where is my identity? Can I take risk and be transparent if my identity is secure? For the building up of the body of Christ?

Those relationships are only possible if you have come into a saving relationship with your Creator. You can't approach friendships like this unless God and you are reconciled such that your relationship is now one of friends. We are all by default God's enemies, rebelling against him, not wanting to go his way. If you read John 15, he says, "Greater love has none than this that a friend lay down his life for his friends." And he says to his disciples, "I no longer call you servants because I have revealed everything to you. You are now my friends." Do you know that you can be in a place where God is your friend? It's not just your sin separates you, that his blood covers you and your relationship can be connected at a level that God would say, "You are now a friend of God." Have you trusted the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ so that now you can be in a position where you are a friend of God and that can govern and control your identity and your security so you can engage in relationships to love and serve others that requires risk and transparency? Are you in Christ? Do you have a secure identity by which to approach friendships?

Then you can worship God. You can worship God from the place of a secure identity and you recognize all the things he has given you that are blessings, namely your gifts. You can then as an act of worship use your gifts to serve others. This is a hallmark of biblical friendship, using your gifts to serve other people. Look at how body life is to be described, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." There is a diversity of gifts in the body and it evidences God's grace. Again, there you go again, going back to grace. We have a need for grace and our need for grace and our focus on God's grace really is the path of humility. "I need God's grace and the gifts that I have is because of God's grace." God gave you your gifts. The things that you are good at: your hands, your mind, your feet, whatever it is. The things you are skilled at doing, you are good at that because God gave that to you. Why do we use that as a source of pride and of separation to try to higher ourselves above one another? And the point of the context is: use your gifts for the betterment of the body.

Friends don't focus on what they can get out of others but what they can give. Think back to your childhood for a moment. Was there any stereotypical instances of, okay, here's a rich kid and everybody wants to hang out with him because he has the coolest stuff? Was there always that opportunity to find out, "Do people really care about him or do they just like the Xbox he has?" Or think about the smart kid, "I'm going to go and hang out with So-and-so because I need to pass my chemistry exam so I'm going to use them." What about the athletic kid? "I want to attach myself to him or her so that my popularity will rise because I'm friends with him or her and they're good at such and such." We're looking at using one another instead of, "What has God given me that I can bless someone else and celebrate the diversity of the body of Christ?"

Friends use their gifts to build up the body instead of selfishly hoarding their talents to serve themselves. Gifts like serving, teaching, leading. How about the gift of exhortation? Speaking into other's lives, challenging them to live wisely. We all in the body need to develop this gift and grow in this gift. It requires risk and transparency because if I'm going to speak in your life, you might never talk to me again. Where is my identity? Is it in our relationship or is it in Christ? Consider this passage, it's a fascinating passage that I think helps us have a more biblical view of friendship. Proverbs 27:5-6 says, "Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." Do you see the word "friend" and "wound" in the same sentence? That's fascinating. In other words, real friends stab you in the front. Real friends will wound you, they will stab you in the front. They are not so insecure with their identity that they won't say anything that's very challenging, that you might perceive as hurtful if they know ultimately they want to please the Lord and it's going to help you.

I think one of the ways you can tell someone is your friend, if they'll point out your sin. Not all the time, okay? Not every opportunity they possibly can get. Not to manipulate you but in a spirit of gentleness and humility, recognizing their sin as well. But their concern for your relationship with God is more important to them than if you like them or not. That's a friend. That's the kind of friends I want to speak into my life even if it means I get cut a little bit because it's going to help me grow.

Do we view friendships like that as valuable or do we just want people around us who think we're awesome, think we're great, think that everything we do is perfect? What do we value? What you value in your heart will have a huge impact on how you approach friendships. If you have read Amy Baker's book "The Heart of Friendship," that's her thesis. "The Heart of Friendships" is all about your heart and how you approach friendships. What do you value? Proverbs 27:9, later on says, "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend." What's valuable? Is it going to be speaking truth in love to your friends?

Again, it's all about using your gifts for others. You know, gifts really also include using your resources for the body. A lot of you were here for Mulch Madness and it was so cool seeing people bring their resources out and say, "Do you know what? This is going to help the body. It's going to make things lighter." People brought trimmers. They brought wheelbarrows. They brought their rakes. They brought their tractors and they just wanted to use their gifts in a way to bless the body. And some folks on that day, we recognize, they are just really good with foliage and they are good with growing things. Some folks walk by plants and they just grow. Some people look at plants the wrong way and they just die.

Are you thankful for the gifts and do you use your gift to bless others? How about mercy? Mercy is helping those going through trials but not viewing it as a burden but cheerful, showing people mercy and being cheerful, bearing burdens with them.

Those are just a few of the gifts. This is not an exhaustive list but it's a way about thinking about your gifts in light of others. I would encourage you even right now, write down something you're good at. Just write down something you're good at like woodworking, organizing, photography, design, working with kids, Serve 15. I'm sorry. I just kind of had something in my throat right there. Budgeting, doing different things, working car maintenance. If you're good at something, write it down and ask yourself the question: when was the last time I used that to build up the body? When was the last time I used that to bless my friends? Using the gifts God gave you is an act of worship and it's his will that you would use what he gave you for his glory by blessing others.

Worshiping is also about loving one another genuinely. Verse 9 says, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." In other words, loving is more than just being nice. Love without hypocrisy is about clinging to what is good together rather than saying, "Well, I just like our time together and so I don't want to allow anything to jeopardize that, even if I'm going to cling to something that is evil rather than something is good for the sake of what I get out of our relationship." Have you ever had a friend who is just so much fun to be around? They just make you laugh all the time. They always want to do something fun and they're just always up for something exciting. But what if they treat their wife in an incredibly disrespectful way? What if they are obviously unethical in their business dealings? What if you know he or she is involved in pornography and you say to yourself, "That's none of my business. Well, if I say anything, he's not going to want to hang out with me anymore and I love being with him or her." Friends, that's not love, that's hypocrisy. That's, "I want something from you and I enjoy our time together because of what you bring to the table. I don't want to serve and love you even when it's hard." It's about clinging to what is good together even if sometimes that is painful and difficult. It's not about wanting something from you, it's about loving you. That's what biblical friendship is all about. It goes back to not having a high view of yourself and using people: financially, socially, sexually, but wanting to serve others.

We need to recognize that using people even if it's just to get the praise of them is wicked because our identity is not to be found in them, it's to be found in our God. That's where our satisfaction lies. That is what is good. And when we love somebody in this way, my goodness, it takes energy and work. It is hard. When you read this passage, don't you get tired? Because it's tiring to read this passage, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." It takes energy and work and oftentimes your energy and your work makes a mess and it takes more energy and work to fix the mess because if you're stabbing somebody, you're going to make a mess. It's not, "Oh, you just stabbed me. Thank you so much. We're now best buddies." It's going to be like, "That hurt. I'm not going to talk to you for a while," but you have to get back to where your foundational relationship is, where your security lies. Relationships are messy. There is actually a book called "Relationships: A Mess Worth Making." It's a wonderful book. They take work, sacrifice, humility and that's going to happen when you're devoted in brotherly love and when you're devoted in brotherly love, it reveals your devotion to the Lord. Serving the Lord. Loving one another this way is a reflection of how you serve the Lord.

I went to Purdue and I studied engineering and I didn't know a soul on campus and I got to know my roommates, freshman orientation and then I began to join every club I could: the waterski club, the rock climbing club, the roller hockey club, the high 5 club. Do you know what I mean? There is not a high 5 club but if there was, I would have joined it for sure. I wanted to be active but I longed for real genuine friends. What I found was that everybody was up for doing something fun but really getting involved in your life, not so much. "Oh, you want to go bowling at 2 AM? I'm in. Ah, you're struggling with depression, anxiety and homesickness. I have to study for a test that we're going to have some time this semester." Distancing rather than just wanting to be with what's fun.

It wasn't until I trusted Christ at Elliott Hall music, between my sophomore and my junior year and then I got discipled here in this church where I connected serving God with serving others. Pastor Aucoin, men like Joel T. and Peter T., some of you recognize those names. They poured into me, spent time with me. Why? Because it's really fun spending time with a self-focused college student who will eat you out of house and home? No. They were serving the Lord and they loved me. They didn't really get a whole lot from me. I was pretty self-focused but it showed me what friendship is really like and those men to this day are dear to me.

Do we view friendships as opportunities to serve the Lord in genuine love for others? If we do, it's going to involve hope, tribulations and prayer. Rejoicing in hope. Persevering in tribulation. Devoted to prayer. It means you're not going to give up on people who are struggling. It means you're not going to say, "You've got baggage and I travel light." Do you know what I mean? It means I'm going to actually entwine myself in your life a bit knowing it's going to be a bit messy and it's going to involve hope that God can work and things can get better. It means there are going to be tribulations, maybe I'm going to engage in a difficult relationship knowing it's hard but trusting that God is going to make it better even if I'm simply longing for heaven, I'm going to persevere. And it means you pray for one another instead of getting bitter against them.

You know, we get very devoted to our smart phones. Are we as devoted to prayer? Maybe we need an app that just pops up and says, "Pray for your friends. Stop looking at whatever you're looking at and pray." They actually do make an app for that, it's called Prayer Mate. I'm not kidding you, it's called Prayer Mate and maybe one of the things you can do is put your friends in there to remind you to pray for them because you need to be more devoted to prayer to be a more godly friend. Pray for those who know the Lord and who don't. Pray for those who are going through tribulations. That also helps you then actually meet people's needs and practice hospitality because you've been praying about it.

Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality, knowing what people's needs are. In the time of Paul, one of the biggest needs was for people to spread the Gospel. They needed to travel and they couldn't afford lodging and food and so they would stay in the houses of other believers because they had a need. And hospitality was so important because the Gospel message was so important. Hospitality and brotherly love are really important because it really shows the Gospel. Our love for one another is on display when we practice hospitality and look at the evangelistic component of that. John 13:35 says, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." It's all about meeting each other's needs, knowing each other's needs.

Practicing hospitality is not simply making someone a meal, although it oftentimes includes that but it's really about welcoming someone into your life and getting to know their needs and seeking to meet them in a hospitable way. Knowing their needs so that you can both function together with the purpose God has called you to, namely, to exalt the person and work of Christ, to spread the Gospel. Do you use hospitality knowing that it has a Gospel impact? Friendships that understand what the body is all about, well, they don't foster cliques. They practice hospitality with those they may not know very well yet. They foster an environment of worship where there is always room for one more or 2 more so that you can ultimately send a message to the world that Jesus is known by our love for one another.

And when you start loving in this way, you're going to encounter fellowship across blessings and trials and boundaries. So fellowshipping in a way that worships God involves blessings, trials across boundaries. Look at verse 14-16, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation." Well, let's just look at "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Fellowship involves giving good counsel. Friends don't allow you to simply gossip about your spouse or about your boss but they encourage you to bless them instead. What if a friend stops you from gossiping? You're talking and you're talking, "My boss is terrible. My boss is terrible." They say, "Whoa! We're not pleasing the Lord right now." Wouldn't that hurt a little bit? Would you think, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, he's helping me stop gossiping and not worship my God?" Or do you think, "That hurt. I don't like you anymore"? Would you stop somebody from gossiping, wounding them a little bit? Knowing that that is fellowship, that is genuine love, that is friendship that pleases God?

When Paul says "bless those who persecute you," he would have had historic data because he used to be a persecutor of the church and now he's running to the church, blessing them and calling for them to bless those who persecute. We all have individuals in our lives who make our lives more difficult, the question is do we bless them? One day they might be your good friend and God might even use your blessing to be a part of the Gospel witness for them to come to know him as Lord and Savior and they may one day be your good friend.

Well, as you get to know somebody, you become entwined in their life and you're going to know the good things going on in their life: their successes. This is hard. This is hard because it means you're going to have to battle envy, competitiveness, covetousness because, "I don't really like to see you living life awesomely when I'm not living life awesomely. It just kind of reminds me of the things not good in my life and so I don't want to rejoice with you when you're happy. I kind of like it when you're miserable because I feel better about myself, thank you very much." That's not biblical genuine friendship. It involves sharing your successes knowing that every good gift is a gift from above and God is the one at work blessing somebody and I can rejoice in the work of God, that I am privy to seeing a front row seat to because they are my friend.

In addition to that, fellowship includes sharing your heartbreaks. We always want to speak the truth in love. We want to give wise counsel but sometimes we just need to cry together. Sometimes you just need to weep with those who weep because just my being with you, just loving you and not trying to fix it, just letting you know I'm here, I love you, that's friendship instead of, "I've got to get to something else that's more entertaining right now."

It involves sharing others heartbreaks and fellowship also requires humility. Paul comes back to his first point when he says, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation." Humility fosters unity. Paul says that this is part and parcel of being a member of the body of Christ. Humility says, "Be of the same mind toward one another," in other words, fellowship with all sorts of people, not just the ones you think are best for you or that you think you're going to enjoy the most. "Don't be haughty in mind, associate with everybody." I love the fact that there is great diversity in the body of Christ where professors and students can fellowship with the old and the young, people from Indiana, people from India, can come together. But the bottom line is you are not going to have genuine relationships unless you are walking a path of humility. There are simply too many reasons, prideful reasons, to separate yourself away from people if you're not walking a path of humility.

One commentator put it like this, "Those who are humble show genuine love towards all people regardless of their rank or station in life." If everybody is humbled by their common need for a Savior, their common need for the Gospel, they can then band together around the common goal of proclaiming the Gospel together and knowing all their different gifts are going to be able to facilitate that even better. We all want to have good, faithful, godly friends but if you want to have a godly friend, you first need to focus on being a godly friend and we see in Romans a picture of how we are to relate to one another. Don't spend your time and energy focusing on what you are longing for, use your time and energy to worship the Lord in how you approach friendships by thinking humbly, by focusing on your proper identity, by using the gifts God gave you to serve others and by loving genuinely and fellowshipping with blessings and burdens and across boundaries with all sorts of people.

So here are just a couple of takeaways. A couple of takeaways, first, evaluate your friendships and ask what they are marked by. Is it pride or humility? What do we need to change for my relationships to be more worshipful? Maybe your first step is to come to know God as your Lord and Savior so that you can have a relationship with him that would govern all your other relationships. Maybe a step for you is to pray for your friends more faithfully, more regularly. Maybe that means you need to be with them by being in adult Bible fellowship, by getting more connected to the body by coming to Introduction to Faith, May 6. By just taking steps like that to rub shoulders with people instead of being in your own little world. Maybe that's a step you need to take. Maybe the step you need to take is actually taking a physical step, looking for people who are by themselves and saying, "I want to move toward someone and get to know them and bless them today," at your workplace, in church, wherever it is, looking to move toward other people.

Well, I think we would all agree that to be a friend that we talked about, we are going to need grace, upon grace, upon grace and it's available. It's available. If we say, "I want to be a more godly friend," God will give you the grace in your time of need to grow in these areas.

Let's pray and ask him to help us do just that together.

*Lord, we recognize that to live in a way and relate to people in a biblical friendship sort of way is going to need grace. Lord, we recognize that you have provided that through the person and work of your Son and you make it readily available as we come to you because you have a throne of grace. Lord, help us recognize that even as we ought to admit our need, we worship you. And Lord, I pray that we would view our friendships as worship opportunities that require us to be humble, that require us to find our identity regularly in you, that would help us to see our gifts as coming from you to be used to bless others. Lord, help us love genuinely even if it means hurting somebody, knowing that we want to love them and help them grow closer to you. Help us be wise as we do that. Lord, give us the grace to do that wisely. And Lord, help us to fellowship through blessing, through burdens and no matter what the differences we have together. Help us do that to the praise and glory of your Son Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.*