

# Series: Reboot

## Sermon #4

### The Power of Purposeful Friendships

1 Timothy 4:7-10; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Dr. Matt Cassidy – January 30, 2022

Well, good morning, Grace. You've come to the right church, haven't you? Our men's ministry is helping the guys with a father/daughter Valentine's Day, age appropriate. My daughter is around sixty and I would love a little packet that would help me succeed on Valentine's Day this year—one in a row.

Hey, good morning, anyway. We're on a quest together. This series that we're doing is about changing our lives to glorify God. That's the nature of our existence. A life fully lived is to the glory of God, and so we're in a series and we're setting goals for ourselves, body, soul and spirit. And we're working together, with each other, to change. I've got some physical goals. I kind of have an identity as an athlete and things went pretty well for me this week. I hope it worked for you. I was eating right and got some exercise cycles in there. And then—*Ding dong!*—I go to the door and there's this little thing at the door about this tall, and she has pulled a wagon up on my porch. And she was cute enough and everything, but she had all her lines memorized. And I don't remember exactly what she said, but here's what I heard.

She said: "You know who I am. I own you. Now get out your wallet."

And I said: "I'm an athlete now. I don't want you at my house anymore." But I only said that in my mind. And so, what I did say is, "I'll take two boxes of those caramel coconut things." And I looked at her and her mom and I said, "Don't come back here again until next week."

The girl was a little rattled by the experience, but the mom was laughing. And as they went away, I looked at those two boxes and thought, *What am I doing with these? You know what, it's cheat day. Once a week you get a cheat day.* And the whole thing is a true story—I ate the whole box—the entire box, because it's a cheat day. And I thought, *Now I'm an athlete that is exceedingly good on cheat day.*

So, anyway, starting tomorrow ... new week. True story—I was that close to having a week in a row.

The series is called *Reboot*. We're restarting and thinking and we're living biblically inside the culture. We're not afraid of the culture; we're going to go into the culture and we're going to live that way courageously. We're in our fifth week of a seven-week series. The series is becoming more and more practical. It was philosophical at the beginning, and now it's brass tacks kind of stuff. As a matter of fact, if you want to learn how to apply even today's lesson, you can go across the hall to our old auditorium and there will be discussion groups on how to apply today's lesson.

Next week the Central Teachings Team is going to be part of that. You don't have to RSVP—you can just go to that next week. At 11:00 our Central Teachings Team will be in the auditorium applying the passages and the lessons that we've learned so far.

### **Goals for Body, Soul, and Spirit**

Today we'll have a more purpose-driven, application-driven sermon. We're going to look at starting our goals and what those goals look like. And when we talk about body, soul, spirit—just for the record, we're using “body”—we're not trying to get the church in shape. But what we find is that way of having physical goals and reaching those physical goals is a metaphor for soul and spiritual goals. The Bible does this. It uses the body as an example so that we can demystify soul change. Sometimes we over-spiritualize how we can change our soul and spirit. And so, the Bible comes in and says, *No, you can set physical goals—yeah, sure. Lose some of your COVID weight or run a half marathon ... right.* What you're going to need to for that—let's look at soul. Soul goals would be becoming less critical and judgmental towards other people, overcoming some old memories or some old programming—like fear. There's nothing that sucks the life out and happiness out of life faster and more evasive than fear. Where does that come from? Find that source out and see how you might change that.

And a way of looking at goals—I have found myself to ask this question: what would I look like without fear? Who would I become? In the context of spirit: one thing that nags many of us is pride. What would I look like without pride? Who would I be if I had the humility of Jesus Christ absolutely playing His way out?

Another goal that I have—at least for the spiritual part of my life—is that I want to hear God’s voice and I want to respond to that.

And so, before we move on the big blackboard here, the question is, Do you want to get well? It’s right out of the Bible. Do you want to get well? Do you want to change your life for the glory of God? Here’s how. This is where we pick up from last week.

**Three Layers to Try and Change a Life**

**Outer layer: Outcomes**  
**Middle layer: Processes**  
**Inner layer: Identity**

This is our little helpful tool about how to change a life. It starts with the values that there are three layers of change. The first layer has to do with goals. And the goals are what you get. So, you could have a goal to –I don’t know—have enough money to buy a bike. If this is the way, then you’re going to save enough money to buy the bike, and then you’re done. But there’s no life change.

A second layer of change is having hope in systems or disciplines—the means of getting that done, doing those things; the disciplines of things like going to the gym. But if you’re just trying to do that and you’re ending with systems and it doesn’t end in life change ... You can see this in college athletes, right? They lift weights, they work out, they do their sport for four years, they’re committed to the discipline of that, they graduate, and then they let their bodies go completely. Gone. And why is that? Because they weren’t an athlete; they were a college athlete who was committed to the systems, the disciplines, of staying in school and maybe even keeping that scholarship.

And then the third inner circle is intrinsic. It is inside working its way out. And the most effective way of life change is to start from the inside and work out. As a matter of fact, one of the most effective goals is getting your goals is not to start at your goals, but to start at this. And this idea is identity—the word is “identity”—who you are. You start there and go to who you want to be, who do you ascribe to be, and then how you’re going to get together.

The metaphor was athlete: I’m going to be an athlete, I’m going to eat like an athlete, I’m going to drink like an athlete, I’m going to work out like an athlete. I’m going to do these

systems and achieve these goals. I'm not working towards the goal, because if I hit the goal, I'll stop doing the discipline. I'm stop being that identity.

So, to work from the inside out is the way to get things done. So, this idea of three levels or this inside-out sort of thing is in a great book called *Atomic Habits*. A couple of examples that that author uses is when he talks about how someone tries to quit smoking cigarettes. He goes up to a person and says, 'Would you like a cigarette?'

"No, I'm trying to stop." That was their goal—to try and stop. The person that understands the power of intrinsic motivation working its way out says, "No, I'm not a smoker. Non-smokers don't smoke." And so, this line that this person is repeating back and forth to themselves—"I'm not a smoker, therefore I don't do these things"—this person is just hoping to get through another day without a cigarette—and just living for those goals.

He uses the word "savings"—"I want to have some money" This person is just trying desperately to do the systems; this person says, "I'm a saver, not a spender."

When you start convincing yourself—unfortunately, neuroplasticity and psychiatrists and psychologists are saying that you can talk yourself into believing a lot of different things. For example, pain doctors will say, "Quit telling yourself you're in pain all the time. Because you're convincing yourself that's your identity."

So, working your way from your identity outwards ends up getting you the goals. But the goals keep getting better and better, because you've developed a whole different personality. So, the point is, the most effective way of achieving goals and developing habits is to start from the inside working its way out. Now that's great in psychology but ... it's been part of the Bible plan all along.

## **I. Identity (Romans 1-8)**

In the Bible it starts right here with identity. And we're looking at Romans, particularly chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. It starts with identity, because in chapter 12 of Romans, verse 1, it says: "Therefore ..." And "Therefore" is based on everything that you've heard in Romans chapters 1 through 8, but particularly 3 through 8, where it just says, *Look, this is who you are.*

## **Romans 8:15-16**

**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.**

In chapter 8, it says, **“You have not received a spirit of slavery that brings you back to fear. No, you’ve been given a spirit of adoption that has your soul crying out to God the Holy Father and calling Him, ‘Abba! Daddy!’”** As a matter of fact, the spirit calls out to your spirit, that you’re an heir. You’re a co-heir, a fellow-heir with Jesus Christ Himself. He is declaring that to be true. That’s just a fact. That’s the way things work. That’s the way they are.

## **II. Think Right**

And so, the rest of your Christian life is trying to live up to what’s already been declared true. And how does that happen? Well, it happens by trying to convince yourself in the way you think—thinking. **“Do not be conformed”**—that’s Romans 12:2. That’s what we tend to do. We tend not to believe this. **“Do not think about the things of this world, but rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** And we’re renewing our mind to believe that we have this identity.

And so, like it says in Corinthians, we are demolishing arguments. We are taking every thought captive so that we can obey the declarations of who we are. Every thought is contributing to this identity—or it’s not.

## **III. Behave Right**

Another way the Bible teaches us to validate our identity that’s already true is behavior—how we behave. Romans 12:1 said **“Therefore by the mercies of God, my brothers and sisters, present your bodies”**—this— **“As a living sacrifice.”** Show the world—prove to

yourself in your actions and the way you behave that is validating and encouraging the identity that already exists. And so, you just do it.

I know, some of you might be thinking, *Oh, so what you're saying here is that you fake it until you make it.*

No, I'm not saying that, because there's no faking. You are declared a child of God, perfect, no condemnations, fully justified. That's the truth: now do it. I mean, if there's a fake it until you make it, then you're behaving sinfully and that's a lie.

Aristotle said that what you practice, you become. There's some truth to that, but what the Bible would say is, *You've already overcome that. You are that. Now practice what you'd become.* Not what you practice is what you've become; but you've become that, now practice that.

So, the power of this model here is that it builds on itself. What you contribute to how you behave and how you behave to how you think. And it just keeps going on, all around the identity. Every thought you have is a vote towards your identity. Every behavior you produce is a vote towards—it could be a micro-vote—it's a small activity, but it's a vote towards the identity that you're a part of.

And the power of this movement is that all you have to do is hope for a one percent change over a period of time. And it keeps compounding—one percent over three, five, ten, twenty years—you're becoming like Christ in all of your life.

But the warning is (and you should be afraid of this) that it can go the other way, too. It feeds on itself in both directions. If you think poorly, you'll behave poorly. If you behave poorly long enough, you'll think poorly. And none of this is contributing to your identity. And when people have their doubts about who they are in Christ or even have doubts about their salvation, you look at their lifestyle and ask, *How are you thinking? How are you behaving? What's going on in your life?* No wonder. All of those micro-votes and maybe some of those big votes were contributing to something that's not true, grieving the Spirit of God and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ for all that that accomplished.

#### **IV. The Power of the Spirit**

So, we're still in review. We mentioned that and how it can go either way, and then we said, *Well, wait a minute. There's something going on here—God's not leaving us alone just with*

*this. He's given us the power of the Holy Spirit.* If you remember, this is one of the most important passages in the New Testament, but mostly ignored. The way you become a child of God is the same way that you become God's perfect child.

**Galatians 3:1, 3**

**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?**

It says in Galatians chapter 3, **“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to achieve your goal by human effort?”**

**“Are you trying to perfect yourself with the flesh,”** other translations say. That doesn't work. It can't work. Because that would end up giving you the glory for life change—and by the way, you're up against things that you can't overpower. And so, the power of the Holy Spirit is going to spin this, if you listen, if you're hearing His voice, if you're obeying His call for your life. Then that can help you start thinking right, and if that's not working for you, you can call upon the Spirit to help you behave right. And this cycle, this flywheel (if you know what that is—automotives) just keeps spinning more and more. The more you do it right, the easier it becomes in many respects.

I'll just share with you some of my stuff in my body, soul, and spirit goals. I doubt that you care about this, but one of my physical goals is to start practicing more diligently the physical therapy that's required of me because I had my balance nerve cut. And so, I've got to do certain skills. But one of the things I keep saying poorly (and you can talk yourself into anything, because you find yourself in these ruts) is that I keep telling people, “I'm dizzy all the time.” *Well, quit saying that, because you're convincing yourself that you are. No, no, I'm getting better every day.* That's true too. I'm getting better every day because I'm going to practice these things and I'm going to think right about it. It's petty—I'm just using that as an example for other stuff.

On a soul level, what I'm going to work on with identity and thinking and behaving is that maybe it's time for me to get a lot deeper in dealing with the grief of my father's life and my father's death. It's kind of showing up and it's time to go deeper still. It's scary, and so my

identity in Christ as a new creature is going to help me think right and behave right as I work through it.

One of my spiritual goals is the humility of Jesus Christ who lives within me. He's trying to get out. So, I should be able to confess and take responsibility for sin and ask forgiveness more easily. One of the things I'm going to work on and I'm going to have that identity in Christ that I'm justified and there's no condemnation; and so, I'm going to think that way and I'm going to behave that way, and I'm going to think that way. I'm going to ask the Spirit of God to energize this and empower this.

I'm just using those examples because those are the ones I know. The question for you is: Do you want to change? Do you want to get well? This is a way of doing that. This is a biblical way of changing life.

### **The Power of Purposeful Friendships**

There's one more factor that we haven't talked about. It's right here. Friendship. Friends. I would say "friends for purpose"—the right kind of friends. The friends can spin this along with the Spirit of God. It's the idea of community and camaraderie.

We looked at a passage last week, and I want you to remember that Paul is doing what we're doing today. And that is that he's going to try to take away the mystical nature of soul and spirit change and he's just going to coach Timothy—this is a pastoral epistle, and so he's coaching him like one of his players—I was going to say "students"—but one of his players. But look at the vocabulary he uses. It's all physical. And then he flips it and says, *No, no, no, so much more so for soul and spirit issues.*

#### **1 Timothy 4:7b-8, 10**

**Train yourself in godliness,<sup>8</sup> for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come ...<sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.**

So, here's the passage in 1 Timothy 4: "Train yourselves in godliness, for while physical training has some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise both in the present



life and in the life to come ... For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

So, Paul is using—I don’t know what you would you call it—violent words? “Train”—that word in Greek is gymnasium. He says “physical training,” which means in our vocabulary “train until you have muscle memory.” And then he gets ugly. He says, “Labor, toil, strive.” And then, finally, he leaves with “agony.” It’s going to lead to agony. If that’s true in your physical transformation, he’s saying how much more is your metaphysical transformation. Your metaphysical transformation is so much more important. It’s good for this life and in the next, but it’s probably going to be a whole lot harder as well.

I’ll tell you this—if you want to change physically, you’re going to need a partner. You’re going to need to join a team. You’re going to need to be part of a tribe, a people, that are trying to physically change in the same way. The secret weapon of getting in shape is to team up. That’s all there is to it. If you want to get in shape and stay in shape, you’re going to need to be around people that will encourage you to keep on running, keep on pushing. You’re going to need a group of people that, when you want to quit, they don’t let you quit. Whatever works for you. Me? They make fun of me and they don’t let me quit.

So, at least in lifting weights or working out—whatever it might be, whatever sport it is—you’ll find this to be true. It’s a saying: The worst workout with a partner is better than the best workout all by yourself. Because when you work out by yourself, you plateau, you stall, you give up. You don’t challenge yourself. So much more so for your soul and spirit. You plateau, you stall, you give out. You can’t be left alone.

Look at this one video clip of a small point guard changing the life of his center at UCLA. *[Short two-second video of UCLA point guard coming alongside a UCLA center and gently pushing his chin up.]* The center has missed a rebound and the other team got two points. And this little point guard comes over to him and says, *No, no, no*. Do you know what he’s saying? He’s saying, *Hey, you’re an athlete, and here’s one of the things about athletes. They learn to lose and they learn to forget. They learn from that loss and they move on. You need to get back in this game. The team needs you.*

That’s a basketball lesson—that’s a life lesson. He’s teaching him how to live. *Get your head back up. Let’s go*. That’s what it means to be part of a team. When you can’t do something

by yourself, you need to find people that will do it and then join that tribe, that group, that team, that friendship. That's how life works.



Here's kind of a funny story. It was a long time ago, 1991. I was a youth pastor here. There were a number of guys that said, "Hey, we want to get in shape."

And I said, "Go join a gym."

And they said, "Yeah, we've never been to a gym and we're kind of embarrassed. We feel like we need to get in a certain amount of shape before we can go to the gym."

I said, "I completely understand. I did it myself when I was your age."

So, we all pooled our resources and we bought a bunch of weights and I opened a gym—Matt's gym. There it is. If you look closely you can see that we never had a leg day—not once. One of my life goals is to go fifty years without ever doing a single leg exercise, and that was part of our gym motto.

And the point of it was that we encouraged each other. We yelled at each other while we were in Matt's gym lifting weights and we took people to places we wouldn't go. If they didn't show up, guess what? We yelled at them then too. Yelling was our love language to get in shape. The point is, do you want to get in shape? You join a team, a tribe. You find some friends that will do that with you.

Training in godliness—how much more than that? How much more important is this? How much harder is the toil and the agony? Here's what the New Testament says: friendships of accountability, mutual encouragement, confession, reprimands, challenge—it's indispensable in training in godliness. Most of what is going to need to happen, based on your identity in the context of behaving, is going to be scary. You're going to have to overcome fear. It's going to be humiliating. You're going to have to overcome shame. And sometimes your thoughts aren't there and your behavior wants to be there, and you just need someone to push you off the high dive.

Have you ever pushed anyone off the high dive? It's not necessarily shameful. You just push them off the high dive, they come up, and they say, "I did it!" And you say, "Yeah, you did, didn't you!" In the context of maturity, you just pull out a phone and say, "Here's the phone. Now apologize." And then they do it, and they say, "I did it. I apologized!" Right. Someone had to push them off the high board. Someone had to dial the phone. Someone had to call them every two days—"Have you confessed that yet? No? Okay, don't make me call your boss, because I will. Friday at 3:00 and then I'm calling."

And then they call at 2:50 and say, "I did it!" And you say, "You did, didn't you!"

That's how it works. Training in godliness sometimes requires a push off the board. Simply put, you can't arrive at the destination that God has for you to become like Christ in all of life without a friend, a friend with purpose—friends with that same purpose.

**Proof #1: You are a product of what you read and who your friends are.**

One of the wisest professors I ever had, in 1985 said, “You are a product of what you read and the friends that you have.” It's very difficult to argue with that—it's what you read and the friends that you have. And he said this, for good or for bad: “Because what you think”—he's talking about this—one of the things he's mentioning here is friends can spin you this way, can't they? How many proverbs in the Old Testament are written about choosing the right friends? Birds of a feather ... What you read and who you befriend ... He would say, “I'll tell you what your future looks like.”

Now I want you to see what that means today. That was 1985. What does that mean today? What do you read? Who are your friends? What do you read the most? Newspapers? Nah. People don't read newspapers. It's how much time you spend in some kind of media tweets, twitters, websites. You become what you read, and that becomes your friendship group. That becomes your tribe, your bubble. Because of the algorithms that are pushing it toward you, it's constantly reinforcing. And you start having these cycles like this, but it's going the wrong way. It's so prevalent now that psychologists have a name for it. It's called “faction friendships.”

It's when you start generating—think about people who were super vax—*Everybody needs to get a vaccine, regardless of their health or what their doctor says.*

Or people that are anti-vaxxers: *No one needs to get this. It kills everyone.*

Right? How do those people get that way? Well, I'll tell you how. They get in a faction friendship that keeps reinforcing their values.

*Masks—they solve all the problems in the world.*

*Why is anyone wearing a mask? That's stupid.*

How does that happen? How does it become so divisive? Because the nature of faction friendships is “us and them.” And psychologists will tell you that the problem with faction friendships is their power. They're dangerous because they cause a community to form. And now it's us and we all believe the same thing now. And it gives them a purpose--community with

purpose. Then they start getting an identity based on that. They're especially dangerous because they are seriously, extraordinarily dedicated to their conformity. And so, you are one tweet, you are one text away, from getting kicked off the cool kids' table. If you just kind of come up and say, *Wait a minute, maybe sometimes it's good* or *Sometimes it's not bad*—then it's like you're off the shelf.

Guys, we see this in churches, we see this in home groups, where they get in these faction groups. And you can tell that they're listening to the same group of people, they're all starting to sound the same, it's all starting to become "us and them." Because you're a product of what you read and who you befriend. And if what you read is tweets and twitters and these feedings, then you're not part of a church anymore; you're part of a faction clique. We have literally prayed for some groups that are at a tipping point: too many perfectionists and idealists in one home group. And they just start feeding on negative stuff, just the things that aren't working, how the church isn't serving them in the last two weeks. And we just pray, "Dear God, break at least one or two of those off." And they'll be banned by the group—sure—but they'll be free.

Friendship for goodness is so obvious, but I feel like it's the secret weapon for godliness. It is the primary means, in many respects, of what makes people happy or sad. Because the power of community for good can absolutely change lives.

## **Proof #2: Health Benefits**

So, if you want to change your life, you certainly want to change in the context of what we've done before. That's last week: identity, behavior, thinking. But if you want to change your life, you've got to change your friends. You've got to change your tribe, the group you hang around with. Dozens and dozens of studies have proven this to be true. Non-Christian, secular [studies] as the day is long have proven that if you're in the right group of people, performance goes up, creativity, problem-solving, energy levels, immune systems.

Can I just tell you that three of the most effective organizations in the world right now—Alcoholics Anonymous, Celebrate Recovery, Weight Watchers—do you know why they have such a huge success rate? Who's your \_\_\_\_\_ --- fill in the blank. Who's your \_\_\_\_\_ --- anyone? Who's your sponsor? There are community-driven and they sit in a circle together. They all have the same goal, body, soul and spirit—CR, Celebrate Recovery—same soul and spirit goals. And then they have friends of accountability that are going to spin them in the right direction.



*I want to do something stupid. --- I'm not going to let you.*

*I'm thinking stupid thoughts. ---- I'm going to stop you. I'm going to remind you who you are in your identity in Christ.*

That's why they have so much power. Even secular atheists think, *Wow, I'm going to have to send you to Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't believe like they do, but boy, they work. Boy, do they work.*

### **Proof #3: Benefits of Friendship**

#### **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

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

**<sup>10</sup> If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!**

**<sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?**

**<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

The wisest man in the Old Testament says this about friendships: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend is able to help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep each other warm. But how can one keep warm all alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

## Application

So, I hope I've explained to you the power of friendship. I hope I've proved to you the need for purposeful friendships for the good. What I want to do now is tell you how to become and find a good friend.

### 1. Stop Bad Friendships

One: stop bad friendships. Stop being bad. You're going to have to pray about this. Stop bad friendships and stop being bad. The hardest part is to start anew. Negativity is absolutely contagious. Again, that perfectionistic criticism and unhappiness is infectious. Fear spreads like a virus. But so does optimism. So does love. And so, you've got to surround yourself with people that bring out the attribute of Christ that are already in you. And to do that, sometimes you have to make a clean break. And to make that clean break, you better pray. It's going to take an extreme amount of courage to change. It's going to take courage to change and move out, especially if you're in a faction. It will only last about a week. They'll kick you out and not take your mail again.

### 2. A Period of Loneliness

The second step is loneliness. It doesn't always follow breaking up and finding new friends, but quite often when you break away, it does. Nothing works without a relationship, and there are no relationships where loneliness is not involved. Loneliness is like a tuition that you pay towards great friendships. It's this in-between wasteland that you must endure to be by yourself, to be refined, to be the type of person another godly person wants to spend time with. You're learning how to be alone without being lonely. You're learning to absolutely depend upon God, independent of other people. There's a real coming-to-Jesus moment here. And being alone in a crowd makes it so much worse. And in that moment, it's the nature of discipleship—in that wilderness, like Israel coming out of Egypt, you're going to have to decide if you're going to reflect back on your memories and say, *Wow, I wish I were back in Egypt where we had free food and it was fun.* And when people are in this context of making a change and choosing new friends, they think back and say, *Man, I'm going to miss those old times.* All you're remembering are the times without costs. You want to go back to Egypt? No.



The other thing that happens in loneliness --- it draws you to dependence on Christ—but on the down side it makes you want to go back to Egypt—and another one is just this feeling of pain and suffering. What sometimes hitchhikes onto loneliness is depression and guilt. You kind of say, *Well, I deserve to sin. If I'm going to be here and I can't find a friend ... It's been two weeks. I'm going to do whatever I want.*

But that's part of the refining—not going there, not starting the cycle in a bad way.

Elisabeth Elliot says, “That’s where faith begins ... in the wilderness, when you are all alone and afraid, when things don’t make any sense.”

One person said, “Pain ...”---and I would just insert “loneliness”—is proof that your prayers are being answered. Pain is proof that your pains are being answered.

So, I'd say, part two, loneliness—you'd better pray. You need to pray through that winter. The loneliest times I have ever had, just crying myself to sleep for months on end, led to four of the best friends that I've had for life—when I was in grad school. And that was the tuition that I paid.

### **3. Identity: Start Thinking and Doing Good**

The third thing is that you've got to remember your new identity and start thinking of doing like that. You recalibrate and say, *This is the new me. This is the way the new me thinks, this is the way I'm going to behave.* And here's why. Because friendships are made along the way. Let me just say this again. Friendships are made along the way. You don't sit at home and say, *Friends, come to me.* You don't go to places and hope a friend comes up to you. Here's how they work. You're doing the work that you would be doing, and then someone is just running a parallel track with you. In other words, you just start serving. And guess what happens? You start serving, and part of your identity is being a generous person with your life, and you start serving in the children's ministry. You know what you're going to find in the children's ministry? Other people that are really generous with their time and they don't have a lot of pride. They can get on the ground and play with the kids even though they run a company or something. It doesn't matter what their level of wealth is, it doesn't matter what their status somewhere. Maybe they run an entire school district. But they're down there playing with a kid. That's a good person to be around. Not a pompous person. So, you start behaving, you start

doing those things, you start serving, you start caring, and you're going to run into friends that are caring, serving people, and they think the right ways.

And here's what C. S. Lewis says in his book *The Four Loves*. One of his types of love is friendship. He says it just kind of happens. You're talking to someone in the context of service and you say, "What, you too? You like those things as well? Well, me too. Let's go grab lunch." Next thing you know, you say, "I want to change some of the things in my life. I've been living without any kind of significant friends for goodness in months. I feel like maybe God might have brought us together. Let's consider life together. We'll do this together."

You look at examples of one of the most famous friendships in the Bible, Jonathan and David. Jonathan wasn't looking for David; David wasn't looking for Jonathan. Forgive me if you don't know the story. But David is just telling the story of him killing Goliath, and Jonathan is thinking, *Oh, dude. I want to be friends with you.* Because Jonathan has war stories himself. They were just doing life together, two great warriors proud of their nation, but even more proud of Yahweh their God. And they just look at each other like, *Let's be friends for life.*

Pity the man who doesn't have a friend who can pick him up. But you know what? If you fall down, a friend will pick you up. Jonathan picked up David, multiple times.

Ruth and Naomi—how did they find each other? They were just living life together. And then "Your family is my family, your people are my people, your God is my God." It just happens.

In the Bible, Old or New Testament, find a thriving saint that did it all by himself or herself—a long ranger. You find that person and I'll prove to you that Joseph is the exception that proves the rule. There are no lone rangers. And if you can get to the destination without being part of a tribe, a group, a couple of very good friends with purpose, you're mistaken. That's not God's plan for your life. You can't get to where God wants you to go without going with someone else.

So, here's how we apply today. Have you defined, have you believed in the new identity that you have in Christ? Study that. Think on those things. Have those thoughts compel your behavior. Have the behavior compel your thinking. Bring in the Holy Spirit in the midst of this living the life that Christ has for you. And now, choose friends. Go to where those righteous people are. I would highly recommend that you join an adult community, that you join our men's ministry, our women's ministry, our youth ministry. I would ask you to significantly consider

serving in some way. If you're just holding a door open, you'll be standing next to someone else who couldn't care less about being a doorman or doorwoman for the glory of God. If you go to a church and serve, you're already in a group of people that love Christ and His bride and want to serve in any way possible. *You're cleaning toilets too? Me too. What kind of gloves do you use? I use these rubber gloves. Well, me too! Maybe we should go to lunch and find a way to live life together.* There it is.

If you go to the Connections desk out in the lobby, right outside, go out the door and do a U-turn—boom, there's someone to talk to you about that. This is the call to action. Do you want to get well? It's not a mystery. It starts from the inside out about what's already taken place. And now it's just thinking and behaving by the power of the Spirit. There ought to be miracle stories in your life. This is a God thing. And I'm surrounded by a band of brothers who will pick me up when I fail.

So, what's your prayer today? Where do you start? Well, let's start with prayer.

*Lord Jesus Christ, we lift up this to You, and we ask, first of all, maybe for an epiphany. Maybe some members here just don't understand the power of friendship. And they've got good friends, but they're not great friends. And they're not friends of purpose. They're not friends that want to help them, like knocking them off a high board to help them become like Christ in all of their lives. They won't confront them or encourage them in the Lord. So, Lord, I'd ask that we would see that need.*

*And then, second, Lord, there are some people here that are in the wilderness right now. They've chosen to follow You and they're doing their time in the wilderness. Lord, give them patience, longsuffering, endurance. And I'd ask that they would see the friends that will come their way if they do not grow weary in being lonely. Lord, bring people to them soon.*

*And Lord, there are some people here that are strong in their friendships, and maybe they need to expand and look outside their little cubby of four people and make it a cubby of five. Maybe they need to bring someone else in. Lord, I'd ask that You would open our eyes to the people on our row, down the aisle, in the lobby, that Your Spirit would speak to ours, and we'd go make a conversation start, that we might be that friend, that Jonathan, that David, to that poor soul that's come in the door, that wants to start over. Let's be a church, a people with open hearts to new friendships.*

*Lord, bless our church for Your glory. Help us change our lives for Your glory. Help us glorify You by living a life that's fully alive, full of laughter and tears, but full of joy. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*