

# Growing Closer

## Week 4: Purposeful Friendships

Galatians 6:1-3

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- June 23, 2024

Good morning, Grace. Hey, it's a great day today! We at Grace Covenant Church are spending this summer trying to get closer to God. We're in a series on growing closer to God. And, in light of all He's done to pursue us, what can we do to enjoy Him and develop our relationship with Him more intimately? We looked at Bible study and meditation. We've added that to our daily calendar, fifteen to thirty minutes a day. And last week we looked at the power of prayer—communication—listening and speaking to God Almighty, adding fifteen or maybe thirty minutes a day to our schedule so we can grow closer.

Next week we're going to look at the influence and power of worship, and we have a great application for that one. We're going to have a night of worship next Sunday night at 7:00. We'll enjoy the communion table together and will sing some songs and enjoy each other.

This week we're looking at the power of purposeful friendships. Anything worth achieving is difficult. Anything difficult that you experience, you're going to need a friend, a team, a tribe. When you're trying to get back in shape, it's no secret that you need a gym buddy. You need someone to encourage you, to push you, and to take you places that you wouldn't go otherwise. You need someone when you're whining and you don't want to show up who says, "Not today, Satan," and takes you to the gym anyway. You need help. There's a saying in the gyms that the worst workout with your partner is better than your best workout by yourself.

That's true with working out and getting in shape, and it's absolutely true for our soul and our spirit as well. You cannot get to where God wants to take you without purposeful friendships. You can't become like Christ in all of life alone. And we're designed to have intimacy with one another.

### Aristotle: Types of Friendships

Let me give you a great insight on friendships that I read years ago. Aristotle wrote a book on how to live a virtuous life to his son. And the book is called *Nicomachean Ethics*. And

in that book, he spends two full chapters on how to choose a friend, and then on the types of friends that you're going to have. And he goes over the types of friendships so that we can manage expectations, because different friendships have different purposes.

### A. Friendship of Pleasure

And so, in *Nicomachean Ethics* he says you have friends for pleasure. And that's just people enjoying each other and enjoying something that they mutually enjoy. Think of hobby buddies—your bass fishing buddies. And you guys spend a lot of time together and money. And then you sell the bass boat and you kind of get disconnected. But that's okay. That was the purpose of it. They were friends for pleasure.

### B. Friendship of Utility

He said there's another type of friendship called friends for utility. And friends for utility is when you're getting things done together. You have a purpose. Think at work or some other kind of hobby where you're working together to get stuff done. And when you leave the job or you finish the project, you find yourself getting disconnected from that friendship. There's nothing wrong with it. That's the purpose of it.

Now the first two types of friendship have purpose, but they can't change a soul, because they're not meant to change a soul. That's not their purpose. **M. Scott Peck** says that sometimes when you're involved in those first two types of friendships and you think you have anything more than a deep acquaintance, you're lying to yourself. He calls them "pseudo-communities." In a pseudo-community, a high goal is to make sure that peace breaks out. You're trying not to ruffle any feathers. It's the avoidance of conflict. He's a psychiatrist and wrote this: "**Pseudo-community is agreeable and polite and gentle and stagnant---and ultimately fatal.**" It's fatal because it doesn't have the ability to change a life.

### C. Friendship of Character

So Aristotle, after naming the first two types of friendship, names the third type, and that's friendship for character. And in friendship for character, the point isn't about taking; it's about giving. It's two people trying to build each other up and make their souls well. You usually don't have very many friends of character because friends of character are expensive. They cost

a fair amount of time and an investment of energy. This is what **Aristotle** says in his conclusion to his son about friendships of character: **“Without friendships no one would choose to live, even if they had all other good things in life.”**

King Charlemagne had a tutor, a counselor. And he was teaching the young king how he could rule in a healthy way. And he said that he better get some great friends, friends of character. He said that even the word “friend” comes from a Latin phrase that means “custodian of the soul.” You need to find someone with a commitment of loyalty to keep the soul of a friend intact.

Then you get to the New Testament, and you can see that the New Testament amplifies the power of purposeful friendships and the influence of a friend of character through accountability, encouragement, sometime reprimand, sometime just helping them and moving them along, challenging them. This purposeful friendship is how the rich get richer—in the context of spiritual development.

If you want to get closer to God, you’re going to need to get closer to someone else for the purpose of serving them and being served by them.

What I find interesting is that over the last several years, because of the nature of chemical scientific research, science is now catching up in its knowledge of brain chemistry with what the Bible and classic philosophers have said for millennia. It’s about the power of good friendships, literally, for the good of our bodies. Studies say that with a single purposeful friendship, your performance is enhanced in almost every way: productivity, creativity, energy levels. Even your immune system and your ability to recover from some type of injury is significantly enhanced by whether or not you have a friend.

Two of my favorite studies (I’ve quoted them more than a few times) show this. One is the famous Harvard study, a “Study of Adult Development.” Seven hundred and twenty-four men were studied for over eighty years. It precedes the second world war. And this is the conclusion: “The clearest message that we get from this eighty-year study is that good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period. It’s the quality of your close relationships that matters. Not the quantity.”

Research shows that the connections help us flourish, and loneliness kills. It turns out that people who are socially connected with family, friends, and a community live longer, have better immune systems, and are more joyful than those who are less connected.

I love the Alameda County study that's been going one for fifty-plus years. It started in 1965. It has 7,000 different people that are being interviewed. Half are men, half are women. And what they did is they found out that people who are isolated are three times more likely to die earlier than they should. And they even did this one study that I like a lot, maybe because I like the conclusion. It looked at people who were living an unhealthy lifestyle but were connected compared to people who were living with healthy lifestyle choices but were isolated. And it turns out that the people who were smoking and had terrible diets and never exercised and were excessive drinkers but were connected were far healthier than the people who ran and watched their diet and made sure everything was working but were in isolation. I don't know if you're hearing this, but this is what I heard: that it's better to eat cake with friends than to choke on asparagus all by yourself. That's science. Go get yourself some friends and a cake. That's why we come to Grace—for the truth.

Jesus knew this. If you look at the way He was working with His disciples, He will not allow them to stay at a level of friendship for pleasure or even friendship for utility—even for the kingdom of God. He's not going to just let them do the job of evangelism. He wants them interconnected and needing one another.

Like **C. S. Lewis** says on his chapter on friendship, **“Cats and dogs need to spend time together. It's good for both of them.”** If you look at the disciples, there are cats and dogs there.

He wants them to lead with Shakespeare's “We few, we few good happy men, we band of brothers.” And Jesus is trying to do that in the lives of the disciples, because He knows you can't get where God wants to take you without close friendships.

### **What Does It Mean to Be a Friend of Character: Two Examples**

I hope I have explained and proved the necessity of this—not just being a good friend, but having a good friend. Now I want to show you this. I want to show you just two attributes (there are multiple, but just these two) of what it means to be a friend of character—just in two sentences, by the way. I want to show you the two purposes of having a friend of character. I want to show you the two ways to be a good friend—to be a purposeful friend—to grow closer to God.

## Galatians 6:1-2

**Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person with a spirit of meekness. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**

They're in Galatians 6 in the first two sentences. These two sentences have changed my life. I've had to learn them the hard way. Verse 1, he says, "Brothers and sisters, if any of you are caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person with a spirit of meekness. But watch yourselves, or you may be tempted as well." And then verse 2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

### A. A Friend to Save Us from Ourselves

There are two ways to show ourselves to be brothers and sisters to each other. The first one is that there is a friend there to save us from ourselves. Verse 1 says, "Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore such a person with a spirit of meekness."

What does that mean? Let's look at the details. First, when it says "caught in sin," it doesn't mean *I caught you! I caught you sinning!* The word "caught" there means that you're trapped in sin—those of you who are trapped in sin. That's the key to understanding this passage here. It's a pattern of behavior that is showing itself to be hurting that person, the people around them, and the conscience of God. And the idea of being caught, trapped, is that they can't get out. They're stuck. They're repeatedly doing something wrong that's injurious to themselves and to the people around them. And they can't help themselves. They're caught—like in a bear trap. They've put their foot down on something and it's grabbed hold of them, and they can't find a way to get free. And then in their screeching and their pain, they're needing help, a purposeful friend who says, "How can I help? Let me get you out of this trap in which you're caught." That's what it means to be a friend.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer** says this: "Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."

How easy it is for us to say, “Hey, your zipper’s down,” and the other says, “Oh, thanks. That would have been embarrassing.”

“Hey, your critical attitude towards your children is going to embitter them, and that will be embarrassing.”

“Hey, you’re walking into this interview—I think your slip is showing.” “Thank you. Wow, I needed that as a friend.”

“Your gossip is tearing apart the unity of our team. Your addiction to fear is keeping you from living a real life. Let’s get some help together.”

See, it’s easy for us to correct people and help people when it doesn’t matter. And when it does, that’s the hard part. And we cannot live our lives alone. Every one of us has a bear trap with our name, and we’re either stepping in it or we’re going to. And you cannot get out without a purposeful friendship.

So, with that in mind, Paul is answering three basic questions. When you see a brother or sister who is trapped in some kind of sin, he’s going to answer the question, *Well, who is qualified to go help?* And then, second is, *What’s the goal or the purpose in helping them.* And then, third, he’s going to say, *How do you help them? How can you help?*

So, the first question is, *Who should do it?* Well, it’s the person who’s spiritual. “Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in sin, you who live by the Spirit ...” *You who live by the Spirit...* Did you hear what he didn’t say? He didn’t say, “Hey, if somebody’s caught in sin, then a pastor or an elder or a deacon or a professional counselor needs to get in there and help.” No, no, Paul believes, like we believe, that every believer is a minister, and the nature of a minister is to help their friend when they’re stuck. And so, spiritually, when he says, “living by the Spirit” or “spiritually mature,” he is more than likely, certainly, reflecting back to the list of the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness—those attributes.

If a believer is not willing to help his brother or sister, that person’s not a mature believer, by definition. So, if you’re living by the Spirit, this is a person who is realizing that they’re having to overcome attitudes in their own heart, and they’re thinking, *Okay, I can’t go into this with this feeling of spiritual superiority or spiritual righteousness. I can’t have an attitude that I could never do that, I couldn’t get trapped. I’m not going to be one of those people. I’m just addicted to something else.*

And then, there can't be a spirit of inferiority: *Who am I to do this? You know, people in glass houses shouldn't be throwing rocks.* Nope, sometimes you've got to negotiate your own arrogance and pride and your own insecurities and fears. You who are spiritual need to step up.

Look what he says. What's the goal here? The goal is to restore. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in sin, you who are living by the Spirit should restore that person"—restore that person. That's a very vivid verb. It is used in classical Greek to set a broken bone, to mend a torn net, or to patch/restore a tent. Those are used outside the Bible, and that's what gives us this clarity. What are we trying to do here? What's the point? We're trying to make them effective again and bring them back to a place of normalcy where the tent gets stitched up and it's waterproof again. The net is patched and you can fish again. The bone is set, and you say, "As good as new." The cast comes off and you say, "As good as new."

So, a brother or sister who is Spirit-filled can go and lovingly confront someone and encourage them and strengthen them, and then maybe as a companion, say, "Let's go through this together and make you as good as new." So, that's who does it and how it's done.

The next question is, How should it be done? Word choice again—in a spirit of meekness. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person with the spirit of meekness."

"The spirit of meekness" is sometimes translated "gently" or "a spirit of humility." I love "spirit of meekness" because (I'll go into more details in a moment) meekness is not weakness. Meekness is power under control—a person who is strong and knows how to manage the strength. And if you're thinking, *Hey, these purposeful friendships are really scary.* Yes, the idea of confronting a friend who's trapped in sin is supposed to be scary. It's scary if you go, and let's just pretend, you do everything right. That person could reject what you're trying to do in their life, and you might lose that friendship. And you'll find on that day that you had a friend for fun or a friend for utility when all this time you thought you were involved in a friendship for character. That's what you'll grieve. *I thought we were in this journey together, and I guess not. We were just bass fishing buddies. That hurts.*

So, sometimes it just doesn't work. And then sometimes it does work. And that's scary because now you're looking into each other's eyes and saying, *Well, okay, if that's the relationship we're in, I'm here to help you too. I don't want to be confronted when I'm trapped in sin. I want to give it—I don't want to get it.*

So, either way, it's coming, and it's scary. Let me just review. Who does this? The people who are spiritual. And what's the goal? To bring that person back to good as new. And how is it done? With a spirit of meekness. It's not simple, it's not easy. Again, meekness means "power under control." And when you see someone just going back so many steps into a bear trap, you help them get them out, and now it's time to set this bone, how do you want someone to set *your* broken bone? You want them to be strong—have you seen that happen? And you want them to know what they're doing. It's a person who's not going to drag out this setting the bone, because they have the power to make it right quickly.

The minute I was reading and studying this, I couldn't help but think of a friend of mine who had a smack-dab, head-on collision with a tree not near my house. The tree won. And his right foot went right into the floorboard really hard. So, I went and picked him up and we got to my house. We took off his shoe, and his big toe was not connected to his foot anymore. I said, "We're going to the hospital." We're in the hospital and the doctor said, "Well, the great news is that it's not broken. It's just completely dislocated. And I'm going to put it back."

And I'm holding this friend's hand, and the doctor says, "You want to stay for this?" "Absolutely ... NOT! No, I'm not staying for this. We're not that good of friends." So, I went on the other side of a very thin curtain, and still at night I hear him screeching with pain as this doctor in his strength and his specialty resets and reattaches this toe. But the pain of relocation was greater than the pain of dislocation. But it was the only way to make it right.

The metaphor here? The pain of relocating a person back to normalcy is usually more than the pain of their dislocated "stuck-ness." But it's the only way to help. You've got to be willing to do it.

So, anyway, the last piece of advice that's given on that is that we need to watch ourselves or we could be tempted as well. And if you're not spiritually healthy, these situations can lead to double drownings, when someone who can't swim is trying to help someone who can't swim, and you're not able to help. Watch yourself.

### Application

So, let's apply this need for restoration in our own life and in the life of the people around us, as the Church. Right now in your own life are you caught? Is there some kind of behavior where you feel like you're trapped, and you can't stop yourself?



I can't remember the book—I read it this last week—it's a counselor and he says that ninety percent of people are addicted to something. Then he says, no, sorry, it's one hundred percent. It might be a chemical addiction, but it could be food or television or working out. It's something. We're all addicted. Everybody's caught in a bear trap. And you can't fix it yourself.

And so, here's a couple of things you can do about it in your own life. One is that you can go to your friend and say, "Listen, this is kind of behind closed doors. People don't know what's going on, but I'm trapped. I'm caught. And I need you to help me get out of this." And do you know what? This is probable, or possible. You could go to one of your other friends, a level one or two friend, you know, just a hobby buddy or a utility buddy, and say, "Hey, why don't we go deeper? Why don't we turn this—we've spent three years working on a project together, and we kind of know each other—could we take it to a different level? Could you help me not hurt myself and other people?" "Okay, I'll try."

There are a lot of home groups where everyone in the room are friends of utility or friends for fun. And you could ask one or two of those to do something like in Galatians 6. Let's do that. You could go to our website if you don't have a friend and e-mail one of the pastors and see if we can't get you connected in some way.

And then there's a fabulous ministry we have here called Celebrate Recovery. It's literally designed for friends of purpose and friends of character. And they specialize in people who are stuck, who are caught. And it can be something like a chemical addiction, but it can also be perfectionism or a temper or your addiction to Eeyore, and you're tired of hurting yourself and other people. I would encourage you to consider going to Celebrate Recovery. It's a fabulous ministry with a lot of changed lives.

That's how you can help yourself. And then, let's focus out in this attribute of purposeful friendship. While we've been here today, has God brought to your mind someone that you need to talk to? Someone with whom you feel like you're seeing a pattern? *I think they're stuck. I think they can't get out of it.* And then you could seek and pursue a loving conversation that says, *This is bigger than you, but it's not bigger than God. So, let's go and fix this together.*

And then, here's a way we apply this at Grace. This passage is one of the passages we like to go to that just helps define what it means to be spiritually mature. This is spiritual maturity: when you're able and willing to do this for someone who's stuck or trapped. And if a Bible study leader or a home group leader can just sit passively when someone in his or her room

is trapped like this and just say, “Yeah, we’re praying for you, man,” that person is not a leader. That person is not mature. Who can sit and watch someone in a bear trap and say, “God bless you.”

So, restoring people to spiritual health is a huge priority here at Grace. It’s a high value. And we look for opportunities to do that and to celebrate it when it happens.

I have this jar of rocks in my office, and they’re from the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel. And there’s a church there—the slang name is “The Church of Restoration.” And it’s the place on that shore where they say Peter was when Jesus restored him in a spirit of meekness after he had denied even knowing the Lord three times. And so, He asks him three times, “Do you love me?” And Jesus made him whole again—good as new, ready for ministry.

And so, we brought back some of these rocks so that when people at Grace are restored, we can give them one of those rocks and say, “Put that somewhere. Or just carry it with you. And just remember, you were trapped and now you’re free. You were lost and now you’re found.”

These are mountaintop moments here at Grace, certainly in the leadership. And honestly, here’s why. Because Jesus is asked the question, *What makes the Father jump for joy? When do you throw parties in heaven?* And He starts this series of parables. And one of them is, “Well, there’s this shepherd, and he lost one of his sheep. And he was afraid that sheep would die.” (Because they do that when they’re left alone.) And so, he leaves the ninety-nine with some shepherd buddies and he goes and seeks that little lost sheep out, and he finds it, and he brings it back, and he tells his shepherd buddies, “Hey, we are going to have this extravagant celebration because this sheep was lost and now it’s found.” And all the shepherds, hearing that, were thinking, “Oh, I know exactly that thrill.”

And then Jesus said, “Yeah, I tell you the truth, in the same way, there’s going to be more rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents.” It makes the Trinity celebrate when a person is restored to health.

## **B. A Friend to Save Us from Life**

So, the first purpose of spiritual friendship that you need is this ability to help you save you from yourself. And the second purpose is to save you from life. Look at verse 2. It says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” We were

designed not to be self-reliant. God has made us not to be independent, but interdependent. Life provides ample opportunities for us to need other people. It says to carry one another's burdens, and the word "burden" means "excessive weight"—back-breaking amounts of weight. It's like when a person needs help to do something that they can't possibly do alone.

*Hey, man, you need help moving the piano downstairs?*

*Nah, I got this.*

*What!!?*

Carry each other's burdens. And the picture is of an empath. Are there any science fiction people out there? If you're not, then you can't understand the Bible, so anyway ... In science fiction there's sometimes a character called an empath. An empath comes from the word "empathy." And let's just say I fell on a motorcycle and scarred up and even broke my arm. An empath would grab my arm, and then all the injury that was on me would become part of her body. Now she's scratched up and her bones are broken. And if that weren't supernatural enough, they are able to heal quickly. They are able to endure it.

But the point is that it's like an empath. Part of this process of carrying each other's burdens is like the piano, man ... pivot. It weighs a lot. It's going to cost you to be this kind of friend. It hurts to go along with someone else while they're weeping with grief or suffering because of choices. And you're going there, and you're going to empathically endure it with them. And that's part of the purpose.

Jonathan Edwards has a treatise on this passage, and when he's talking about his example of financial giving, he says, "Whenever I teach on this passage, I say that we need to help each other out. One person's financially needy while the other person can help them. And people say, 'Oh, I'd love to help out but I can't. Because if I did, it would hurt.'" And Jonathan Edwards says, "That's the point of the passage." You're mutually hurting together. You're carrying a piano downstairs. There's no light lifting in this storyline.

## **Galatians 5:14**

**For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

And the whole point of this is fulfilling what Christ has for us in the previous chapter. He says, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one commandment: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

So, when we look at how to do this in our own lives, think about this. Can you think of opportunities to help your brother or sister in Christ when they’re heavy laden? And by the way, I just want to add a nuance here. It’s a Middle Eastern figure of speech that there’s a straw that breaks the camel’s back. And it’s only a straw. You look and say, “What’s going on? Nothing big. They haven’t had a death in the family or unemployment.” Yeah, but it’s a kazillion straws. But you look at their life and say, “How can I help?” And this church is famous for that. If you get connected at this church, if you’re involved in one of our adult communities or our home groups, man, your house is going to get fixed, meals get served, bills get paid, lawns get mowed. You have to get connected.

You need people to ride the storm with you. You need people to say, “I can carry that other side.” And it’s a joy when that happens.

### **How to Apply**

#### **1. Help Someone**

So, part one is to maybe look for opportunities around you where you could help someone. Bear one another’s burdens.

#### **2. Let Someone Help You**

And then, I’d like to say to me and to some of you, you need to learn how to ask for help and receive help. I think one of my most common pieces of advice I give people is that there are two types of people. There are givers and there are takers. And takers ... whatever. But givers have the hardest time receiving. They’re so used to giving, and so when it’s their turn, they don’t want any part of it. This is their backhand that they’ve never worked on. This is their leg day that

they never do. And they need to learn (you guys—I'm shaking my finger) you guys need to learn how to receive. And I'm using that word intentionally because this has been one of my bigger problems in my adult life. And when I was desperately needing help a few times, Ray Anderson, our executive pastor, who is a friend of character for me, just said, "Matt, there are givers and takers. Shut up—you're not a taker. You need to learn how to receive. You're a receiver so that you can be giving again." And I thought, "That's right."

Some of you—I think a lot of you—need to learn how to receive. You know what would be really great for your soul in part of becoming like Christ in all of life? Shed a little bit of that pride and ask for some help. It would be good for you. Just let someone help. Another aspect of this thing is don't take away the opportunity for me to help you. You know, you're stealing a ministry moment from someone who wants to care for you.

*Hey, what's your spiritual gift and how are you using it in the church?*

*Oh, I have the gift of helps, but no one will let me help them.*

*Well, that's not fair.*

So, the application is pretty obvious. Some of our application is for us to look for opportunities to be a family together and to bear one another's burdens. Let's be the type of people who aren't stuck in not asking for or taking help. These two sentences have altered my life. I've had to learn and relearn them, and they have not come easy. Some of it has to do with trust issues and some psychological weird stuff. Some of it has to do with a desire to be independent. But it's changed my life, because there are three times that I have bottomed out and was very close to living in a van down by the river. And the reason I'm not doing that right now is because of friends—friends that picked me up and restored me in a spirit of meekness and put me back together again.

You can't get where God wants to bring you all alone. You need a friend, a friend who is not your mate; a friend of character; a purposeful friendship.

Here's a wonderful quote: "**There is nothing in this world so precious as a faithful friend and no scales can measure his [or her] excellence. A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter, a fortified palace ... this is truly a gift from God and clearly more than we deserve.**" (Gregory of Nazianzus)

A friend is an act of grace from God. And so, it seems very appropriate that we should pray that we would find a friend and that we would be this kind of friend to one another. Do you want to grow closer to God? You can't do it alone.

Let's pray.

*Some of us, Lord, are overwhelmed with a sense of conviction that we have been trying to live the cowboy life, riding fence lines all by ourselves. And maybe it's time that we end that and call it an illness and try to seek You and trust You in a new way to make friends and to be a friend.*

*Lord, I ask that You would cause us to long for the Ruth and Naomi, and the Jonathan and David, the Paul and the John Mark stories that are throughout the Bible; that we would pursue a band of brothers and being part of that.*

*God, I'd ask that You would bring us a friend; that You would help us be that friend, that we might glorify You in our intimacy with one another. Thank You for Grace and the way You've navigated her through the years to become relationally disciplined and, emphasizing this need, I'd ask that we would continue to grow in that way, that we would celebrate like You do in heaven when one sheep is returned to the fold. We pray this in Jesus' name. And everybody said, Amen.*