



MADE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE FRIENDSHIP

Being made in God's image means that we are relational creatures, created for community with God and one another. Humanity thrived when these two communal relationships were in order — everything was as it should be. However, when sin entered into the human experience, community with God and one another broke down at the most fundamental levels. Instead of relating rightly to God and one another, we now use these relationships to serve our selfish desires. In the flesh, we look to restore both community with God and one another, but we fall short every time (Romans 3:23).

And yet, in God's gracious gospel plan, He restores this broken community. Humanity is made right with God by faith and then we are able to live rightly with one another by faith. And since we were created for community with God and one another — it is through this redeemed community that God does His best work. This gospel-transformed, grace-saturated community is now the foundation for all Christian relationships.

The transforming and restoring grace of God becomes the foundation for how we relate to all people. Christian friendship is no longer based on common interests, life stages, or societal norms but on the love of God that has been poured out upon our hearts (Romans 5:5). And because the love of God that has been poured into our hearts, we now love others with this kind of love (John 15:12).

Friendship then is ultimately about helping others know, love, and follow Jesus by faith. This can include friendship with those who do not yet know Jesus and those who do (we call this pre-conversion & post-conversion discipleship). For the ultimate end of every friendship is the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and the good of others (Matthew 22:39-40).

In this kind of gospel-motivated friendship, there is much joy, but joy is the outcome not the engine. The primary motivation of Christ-like friendship is seeing others conform to the image of Christ by faith (i.e. the making of disciples). In this restored community, God is at work in us and through us to display who God is to all people — thereby helping one another become like Christ.

Redeemed friendship then is inseparable from authentic Christian discipleship. *Christian discipleship must not be reduced to a class or a meeting, but is found in enduring friendships that encourage us to keep walking by faith.*

ENDURING IN FRIENDSHIP FOR THE SAKE OF MAKING DISCIPLES

There are many barriers in our flesh to this kind of enduring Christian friendship. Here are 8 Biblical Principles to help us endure in friendship, by faith, for the sake of making disciples.



#1: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP IS SACRIFICIAL

FLESH: Friendship is about me — how I feel, how I'm loved, how I'm cared for, how I'm affirmed, how I'm valued. Ultimately — in the flesh, the ultimate question is, what do I get out of this relationship?

GOSPEL: Friendship is about others — laying down my life, my comfort, my time, my money, my sleep, my preferences for the *gospel good* of those around me.

Mark 3:14 — *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach*

John 15:12-13 — *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

EXPLANATION: Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is welcoming the disciples as friends. He is living with and among them. He is committed to loving them for their good. He is willing to be massively inconvenienced for their eternal good. Then, Jesus calls them to love one another not with the subjective love that the flesh produces, but with the sacrificial love of God in Christ that He has been modeling for them.

PRINCIPLE: You have the opportunity to display the sacrificial love of Christ to others by enduring in friendship when it's inconvenient.

TABLE DISCUSSION: When have you been impacted by someone who showed you the sacrificial love of Christ? How did this affect your growth in Christ?

#2: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP IS HUMBLE

FLESH: Friendship is about being valued. Sharing my experience and wisdom. Having others who agree with me. Feeling respected and wanted in a peer group.

GOSPEL: Friendship is about laying down my life, my preferences, my opinions for the *gospel good* of others.

Philippians 2:3-8 — *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*



EXPLANATION: Christ's example of friendship is defined by looking out for the interest of others. Counting others' interests as more significant than his own. Not being driven by selfish ambition or conceit. But literally laying down his life for his friends. The call then to all his followers is to do the same — *have this mind in you which is yours in Christ Jesus*. This *mind of Christ* is not intellectual but actual — something you live out towards those whom God has put in your life (i.e. your friends).

PRINCIPLE: You have the opportunity to display the humble love of Christ to others — which practically looks like valuing the desires, opinions, and perspectives of others as more significant than your own.

TABLE DISCUSSION: What does it look like to embrace the humility of Christ when we relate to others? What is the impact of this Christ-like humility in practice?

#3: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP ENDURES FOOLISHNESS, WEAKNESS, & IMMATURITY

FLESH: When people are stupid or immature, we remove ourselves from that relationship. When people make too many mistakes, we cut them off (this is even called boundaries by some in our day). When a friendship has no personal benefit, we slowly distance ourselves from that individual or group. After all, they aren't worth my time.

GOSPEL: Friendship is about helping those who are far from Christ draw near to Christ by faith. Therefore, we are willing to endure the foolishness, weakness, and immaturity of others for their gospel-good.

Mark 9:33-34 — *And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.*

Matthew 8:23-27 — *And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"*

EXPLANATION: The disciples were consistently displaying their spiritual foolishness and immaturity. They lacked faith. They lacked wisdom. They were arguing over foolish things and worrying about silly things. Jesus did not cut them out. Jesus did not remove Himself from them. Jesus endured with



their foolishness, weakness, and immaturity. Jesus was concerned with their progress in the faith, and such progress takes time.

PRINCIPLE: You have the grace-enabled privilege of enduring with others as they mature in their faith, just like God endures with you as you mature in your faith. As you endure in friendship with others (just as Christ does with you), you will know the joy of watching others know, love, and follow Jesus by faith!

TABLE DISCUSSION: In the flesh, what things cause you to want to remove yourself from a certain friendship? How might the gospel compel you to remain in that relationship?

#4: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP ENDURES BEING SINNED AGAINST

FLESH: When someone sins against me, I'll give them a second chance (maybe)...but *fool me once, shame on you — fool me twice, shame on me.*

GOSPEL: Because God continually welcomes us even though we continually sin against Him, we get to display the forgiving-love of God in Christ to others when they sin against us. This forgiving-love of God in Christ enables us to remain in friendships for the gospel-good of others.

John 13:36-38 — *Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.*

John 18:25-27 — *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.*

EXPLANATION: Peter had grown tremendously over his 3.5 years of being with Jesus. But Peter was still working out his faith. Peter was in process. Jesus didn't condemn Peter. Jesus prayed for Peter. And ultimately, Jesus restored Peter.

PRINCIPLE: As you help others follow Jesus, you will be sinned against. But as you endure in these broken friendships with the forgiving love of God in Christ, you will



know the joy of watching gospel-power transform you and those you are pouring into for Christ's sake.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Why is it so hard to forgive those that we are loving for Christ sake? Why is forgiving others essential for authentic Christian discipleship?

#5: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP ENDURES AWKWARD

FLESH: Friendships should be natural and easy. It shouldn't be too much work to relate to one another. Healthy friendships are not toxic or challenging, but life-giving and encouraging.

GOSPEL: Because Christ chooses to love me when I'm nothing like Him, I am able to genuinely love those who are nothing like me — enduring awkward interactions and moments for the gospel-good of those God has providentially placed in my life.

Mark 4:24-28 — *And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."*

John 12:3 — *Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

EXPLANATION: Both of these passages provide for us a socially awkward moment. A moment that society would have removed themselves from. A moment that would have left both of these women isolated and alone. But Jesus presses in. Jesus endures. Jesus sees to the heart-level issues taking place and speaks truth to awkward. Jesus is willing to be surrounded by those whom society removes themselves from, for the heart of Christ is truly for all people.

PRINCIPLE: As you are committed to gospel-empowered friendships, God will bring people into your life who are nothing like you but whom you are compelled to love because you know that is what God does for you in Christ.

TABLE DISCUSSION: What relationship is awkward for you right now, but you believe God is keeping you there for the gospel-good of others?



#6: GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP SUFFERS LONG

FLESH: We will endure with one another as long as it doesn't require too much suffering or pain. When we've been sinned against one too many times, we cut them out.

GOSPEL: Christ endures suffering on our behalf (both for our redemption but also in our continued transformation), and now we get to suffer long with those God has placed in our lives for their *gospel-good*.

Matthew 26:36-41 — *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

1 Corinthians 6:7 — *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*

EXPLANATION: Christ has walked with and worked with these disciples for 3.5 years (day and night). In these final hours, they cannot endure in prayer with him. They sleep while he prays. But Christ does not take offense. Christ models what 1 Corinthians 6:7 says — *why not suffer the wrong?*

PRINCIPLE: The gospel frees you from taking sin personally (for sin is ultimately not against you), and since sin is not personal, you are free to suffer long with those you are pouring into for Christ's sake.

TABLE DISCUSSION: How might suffering long in a discipleship relationship be the very thing God uses to produce Christian maturity in those around you?

#7: A GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP OPENS UP YOUR LIFE

FLESH: We will "welcome" others into our lives in a very limited capacity. We are guarded, calculated, and protective. We set unconscious and conscious boundaries. We keep things surface level, all the while — calling it friendship.

GOSPEL: We are free in Christ to move towards others without the fear of judgment or condemnation for we have been declared right with God by faith. Our identity is no longer in how others perceive us or treat us, but in being fully righteous and



accepted by God in Christ. And since we are no longer looking for acceptance in friendships, we are free to open up our lives to all whom God puts in our lives.

Luke 5:29-32 — *And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*

Matthew 11:28-29 — *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Romans 15:7 — *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

EXPLANATION: Christ’s willingness and eagerness to sharing meals with societal rejects is astounding. Christ’s call to those who are weary and burdened down by life’s problems is wonderfully comforting. Paul’s gospel-rich welcome is fundamental to the ethos of Christian friendship. For as we have been radically & completely welcomed by God in Christ, we now get to welcome one another, holding nothing back.

PRINCIPLE: The gospel frees you to open up your life, your home, your family, and your heart to others because you are not looking for their approval or afraid of their condemnation.

TABLE DISCUSSION: How could welcoming others (Christian or not) into your life create opportunities for authentic Christian discipleship?

#8: A GOSPEL MOTIVATED FRIENDSHIP SPEAKS GOD’S TRUTH

FLESH: In order to preserve friendships, we tolerate carnality and we normalize sin. We don’t want to rock the boat or be cut off, so we remain silent on matters that God clearly cares about.

GOSPEL: Because we are fully accepted by God in Christ, we are free to speak God’s truth in difficult moments so that more might learn to walk with God by faith.

Mark 9:42-47 — *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the*



unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell

Ephesians 4:25 — *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

EXPLANATION: When eternity is on the line, gospel-rich friends speak truth. They are willing to say hard things about sin, repentance, and eternal consequence. Even if it costs the friendship, they are compelled to speak the truth in love. It is a lie to stay silent when truth is required. Love of neighbor compels us to speak the truth — for it is foolishness to lie to your own body parts.

This truth in love friendship knows when to overlook an offense (Proverbs 17:9), and it also knows when to help deliver those who are caught in sins snare (Galatians 6:1-2).

PRINCIPLE: The gospel compels you to speak God's truth with both clarity and charity, so that repentance and faith can take place in the lives of those God has put in your life.

TABLE DISCUSSION: How does your identity in Christ free you to speak God's truth in love?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What principle from the Word regarding relational discipleship impacted you most? How should you respond to the Word by faith?
2. How are you guilty of defining friendship in the flesh? What would happen if every friendship was opportunity to help someone become more like Jesus?
3. How are you being convicted by the Word to press into friendships with believers and unbelievers for the sake of making disciples? What is one thing that you could begin doing to walk by faith in this area?



HOME WORK & HEART WORK

Remember — we are asking that these questions be completed with a Christian friend. Preferably someone that is taking this course, but that is not essential.

#1: Talk about a Christian friendship that you've had that was actually good for your faith? What about this friendship helped you grow in Christ-likeness.

#2: Read the 8 Biblical Principles from the notes above out loud, together. Which principle causes you the most questions and why?

#3: Read the 8 Biblical Principles from the notes above out loud, together. Which principle produces the most conviction and why?

#4: What would faith-filled obedience look like for you to open up your life to others (Christians & non-christians)? What would be some practical steps that you could take in this direction?

#5: Pray together for the Good Lord to bring both the conviction and opportunity for you to press into biblical friendship for the sake of making disciples.