

To Love One Another

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] Let's read together. We're going to read from the New Testament, Acts chapter 2, and from various proverbs. And so, Day Spring is going to come and read for us.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved.

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who confides. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy. Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

We are working our way through our vision and value statement and looking at the passages from which it comes. And in Acts chapter 2, we read the very end of Acts chapter 2, Day Day did for us. And there, the Holy Spirit has come down upon the city of Jerusalem, and then Peter preaches the very first sermon to the first church that's gathered. And immediately, there's repentance in the lives of people. There's baptism. There's conversion. And a new community arises, a community with a new ministry, a new vision, a counterculture.

And so last week, we looked at this little cameo that Luke offers in verses 42 to 47. It's dense. It's tightly packed. It's an encapsulation of everything that the first church was all about. It's pregnant with meaning. And you can come back to it again and again and again to really ask the question, what does a healthy church look like? What are we meant to do here in the local church? And so there are five vital signs of a healthy church and five ministries that we see right here in this little cameo that Luke writes. The first church, they worshiped, they were praising God together. And it says that they witnessed to other people, that they had favor with everybody in the city. And so day by day, people were coming and joining them through conversion. They had theological depth. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They were all about the scripture ultimately and understanding all that God has taught in it. And they showed mercy. They shared everything and they shared with anybody in the city that had need. So there were people of compassionate mercy.

[2 : 50] And then it says that they had fellowship, community, deep love for one another. And so we said last week that it's about being balanced, about being all five, never just one, about embracing the call to do all five of these ministries and that anytime a citywide movement of the gospel, anytime a movement of the Holy Spirit is happening, the church will return to these ministries and take them up afresh. And in a time where there are not that many Christians in a place, in a city, this is exactly what we return to. We do these five things and long that God would move throughout the city of Edinburgh and many other places in the United Kingdom. That's our prayer here. And so let me read our vision statement one more time. One more time. We seek a citywide movement of the gospel by helping people find and follow Jesus. That's our longing for people to experience conversion, repentance, baptism through witness, to love God worship, to love one another, the ministry of fellowship, and to seek the peace of the city, compassionate mercy, all because of our commitment to the theological depth that's offered us in the Bible. So there's the five ministries right there built into our vision statement. And today we're thinking about fellowship, the love of one another that we're called to have, the community. And so let's do that. We're going to talk, we're going to see here in Acts 2.42 in the Proverbs we read, the fact of fellowship, the life of fellowship, the practices of fellowship, the barriers to fellowship, and the power we need to really have it. That was five, not three, five things. How will we do it? We will. Five things, okay? Let's think about it. First, the fact of fellowship.

So the word that's used in our passage in verse 42 is the word *koinaniah*, and it simply says that they were committed to the fellowship right there in verse 42. And then if you just look throughout the passage, the rest of it, it says right after that they were together.

And then it says they were together day by day. And then it says they had everything uncommon and that they shared their stuff. And then it says again, they ate, they sat at the table together with joy. Now, in some sense, it's just very simple that what this passage tells us is that when the Holy Spirit came down upon the first church, they loved being together.

They were together. They were physically in the same spaces and they loved, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined it, sharing life together. And in some sense, it's as simple as that.

That's the main point today. We could say it like this, that as soon as the Holy Spirit comes into the lives of this community, the very first thing we see is real hospitality because of friendship between Christians. It's hospitality in the midst of friendship.

[5 : 51] That's what the first church had together. And we read from the book of Proverbs, if you look across the Bible at this theme, hospitality because of friendship. One of the probably most consistent ways from Genesis to Revelation that the Bible talks about the community of believers is through the lens of friendship. And we read just a tiny sample, but friendship is all over the book of Proverbs. And it's right here in the midst of Acts 2, 42 to 47.

And one of the Proverbs that Dave read for us is, many a man professes loyalty, but who can find a loyal friend? Who can find a loyal friend? The simple point, we need friends.

Christians need friends and we were made for friendship. And you've got to have a friend, you've got to get a friend, you've got to be a friend. You've got to be intentional about friendship in the life of the church. C.S. Lewis, it's going to sound like I'm contradicting myself here. C.S. Lewis, he said, friendship is unnecessary. Like philosophy, like art, it has no survival value. And that's exactly right. Like philosophy, like art in your home, art has no survival value. In other words, you don't need it to live. What are the relationships in our lives that are survival relationships? There's got to be husbands and wives. There's got to be babies. There's got to be children for the human race to carry forward. That's a survival relationship. There's got to be employers and employees. We need that to survive for the market to move, right? There's got to be pastors and congregants for the church to exist. It's part of the way Jesus structured it. But friendship is one of those things that you don't have to have. And what happens in a time like ours, the 21st century and the year 2024, we are all very busy, busier than we ever thought we would be in life.

And the very first thing that goes for us is friendship. It's the very first relationship that we set to the side because it's not survival relationship. And Lewis goes on, he says, friendship has no survival value. Rather, it is one of those things that gives value to your survival. Like art, like philosophy, you know, you don't need art, but boy, what would life be like without it? And you don't need friendship, but yet you have to have it to thrive, not just to survive. And the Proverbs tell us many a person professes loyalty.

You know, you have lots of Facebook friends. That's professional loyalty. But who can find a real friend? It's very difficult. It's very difficult to find a real friend. And I don't think it's ever been harder. Taylor is not singing very many songs about friendship.

[8 : 48] They're all about romance. Romance is the thing we talk about, not friendship, but friendship is the thing from the beginning that we actually need the most. The best marriage is a friendship.

Brothers are at their best not just by family bonds, but when they're friends. Sisters are at their best not when it's just familial, but when they're friends. Friendship is the relationship that gives the most value to all of life. And so Acts 2, 42 to 47, it is the normal program of the local church to be friends. And I think the thing we're learning here is that we all need a friend. We all need intentional friendship building. So get a friend. It's that easy. Get a friend. Read the Bible together with a Christian friend.

Stay with one another and for one another and talk to each other about your Christian lives. It's the normal program of life in the church. It's where the most pastoral care in the most discipleship should take place is within the bounds of Christian friendship.

Secondly, let's back up just a little bit and think about the life of fellowship. What does fellowship in general look like? Just to take one step back and then we'll come back to the specifics of friendship. Koinonia, this famous word, the fellowship. The very first thing we see here in verse 42 is they devoted themselves to the fellowship. And the reason the word the, the definite article is there, we mentioned this last week, is because it's referencing the gathering of the Christians on a Sunday. The fellowship.

It's the formal gathering in worship in this space right here. We're doing it right now. Back, number one, we've done it. We're here at the fellowship. And so that means that the very first thing we learn is fellowship is the commitment to being together in worship and then letting everything else flow from that. So the very first thing, the way a Christian structures their whole life, the first church did is out of this space. Sundays is the starting point for everything, for the meaning of your week and the meaning of all relationships.

[10:57] It starts right here. That's the very first thing we learn. It's a bit cheesy to us, I think, but when you read the rest of the New Testament, the way that Paul talks about fellow Christians is he says, brother and sister. And I think there's an invitation here. You might, you might have to break through a cultural barrier to turn to somebody and say, brother and sister. But that's exactly the way the New Testament talks about it. Now I'm not saying you have to walk around at the end of the service or in tea and coffee and say, hey brother, hey sister. No, but say it in your heart. Say it in your heart. That's the invitation I think we're being given here. Secondly, a four general things. In verse 44, it says that in the fellowship, they were together. Everybody who believed was together.

Now this word, when you look at the word that's used here together in the rest of the New Testament, including in the book of Acts, it typically doesn't just mean physical presence, though that's very true. It's referring here to being together with the same vision. So it's talking about shoulder to shoulder togetherness. And that's where friendship really arises is when you find somebody that will stand shoulder to shoulder with you, looking out at the same object, looking out at the same thing, pursuing the same vision and the same hope. And so fellowship, real fellowship is being shoulder to shoulder and for one another, for one another, because you share a similar vision and mission. You long for the same things to take place.

And so in Acts four, just a couple of chapters later, this happens again in the exact same way. The spirit comes down, a citywide movement of the gospel starts, and then Acts four, verse 32, the full number of those who believed, and here's the word, were of one heart and mind. That's the word, same the same concept as together. They were together because they were focused on the same goal, the same vision, they were shoulder to shoulder in it. And here we learned that they were so together that they weren't precious about their stuff. In other words, friendship arises Christian friendship and real fellowship when you share a mission that's way beyond the two of you. A vision so great that you live for something so big, the mission of the kingdom that you turn to the person and say, wow, we're for the same things. One of the reasons I really miss having Derek around is because we were unlikely friends. You know, this is exactly Derek is the, if you're new here, Derek is the former minister and Derek is an older man relative to me, right? Scottish. I'm a younger man relative to him at least. And I'm American. You might have picked up on that. And I loved working with Derek because we were friends. You see, when you're standing shoulder to shoulder looking at the same vision, the same mission, you become friends with one another for something much bigger than yourselves. And that's exactly what we had in exactly what our staff team now has as well. The third thing is a coin in the word the fellowship and the rest of the New Testament. What we see if you just do this in 30 seconds, if you look at this idea throughout the rest of the New Testament, real fellowship, real

Christian friendship breaks through all the normal barriers in a culture. And so in the book of Galatians, Paul writes to the apostle Paul writes to the Galatians about the apostle Peter. Peter had had table fellowship and friendship with the Gentiles. And he had broken that. And Paul says, you who once sat down in friendship with Gentiles now refuse to do so. And he's saying, you know, you had a racial barrier, a religious barrier, a cultural barrier, and you've forgotten that that real fellowship is breaking through barriers for unlikely friendships. Who would imagine that Derek and I would have ever been friends in another life? And in the same way, you may have experienced that when Christ comes into your life, the call to fellowship and friendship is to break through barriers that you didn't expect older and younger together. Different races that would have been separate in the past at times together, different classes together. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul gets on to the Corinthians, some of them, the rich ones, because they were coming to the Lord's

Supper and eating the Lord's Supper and forgetting about the poor. And he said, rich Christians and Corinth, you are eating the Lord's Supper and the poor being neglected, not even being allowed to the Lord's Supper, to the Holy Feast. And he said, you've forgotten what real fellowship is. Fourth and finally, in verse 46, it says that they received their food. They came to the table together and they had glad and generous hearts. Here's a way to summarize it all. Real Christian fellowship, loving one another, expresses itself in sitting around the table and laughing together. Real fellowship is just friendship that results in laughter because of a shared vision, the mission of God, the mission of the kingdom.

[16:18] They got around the table together and they laughed. Now, we all need this. There's a cosmic dimension to this. There's a reality that this friendship, the friendship between believers is answering the question, who am I and what am I for? And there are undoubtedly some here today, all of us at different times in life that have struggled with loneliness.

And it's important just to say, not being able to spend too much time on loneliness today, what we learn here is that this is exactly what we were made for. In the very beginning in Genesis chapter two, God created Adam and then he said, it is not good that Adam should be alone. And so he created Eve. And that wasn't simply for romantic relationship.

That wasn't just for marriage. That was a statement that there's not a single one of us that was made to ever be alone. We were made for friendship. And one writer puts it like this, Adam wasn't longing for a companion. Adam was not longing for a companion because he was imperfect, but because he was perfect. The ache for friends is not the result of sin. The ache for sin, for the ache for sin, the ache for friends, for table fellowship, for laughter, to walk beside one another is exactly what you were made for. We need friends.

We need deep meaningful friendship here. Third, the specific practices of Christian friendship. Let's dive a little deeper into that. This fellowship, what does it look like? And I'll just list these for us because they're really apparent, really obvious, I think. First Thessalonians 5:11, Paul says, encourage one another and build one another up. The first thing we're told here is encouragement. That's what a Christian friendship looks like. Secondly, first John 1:7, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another. That's a little more subtle, but what John is saying is that we need Christian friendship and fellowship to keep us walking in the light. We need somebody who will come alongside us and speak the truth to us in love, to keep us walking in the light. And the only person that can do that for you meaningfully, really, is a close friend, a Christian friend who has walked alongside you for years. We need that. We need somebody to help us walk in the light. Galatians 6:2, bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. A Christian friendship is somebody who bears the weight of your burdens with you, who weeps with you when you're weeping, who celebrates with you when you're celebrating. And so here's the formula. What does a Christian friendship look like in the life of our church? What do we long for here? We long that every single person would have a deep relationship with somebody else, maybe here, maybe in another Christian community where you would get together regularly and intentionally, pray for one another, encourage one another, comfort one another and bear one another's pain, celebrate with the other person when they're celebrating, and that that should be totally normal, the normal pastoral care and practice of the life of the local church. A friend, Proverbs 7:17, we read, David read for us, a friend loves at all times, but a brother is born for adversity. Let's sum it up like this. A friend loves at all times a brother is born for adversity. Family is born. Family is there for when you're struggling, for when bad circumstances come your way. A good family runs to you whenever you're really struggling, whenever the terrible news comes into your life. A brother is born for adversity. A friend loves at all times, meaning what? As one writer puts it, friends are people who actually like you and want to be around you. That's what that means.

A brother has to be there when that person in your life, when you lose that person, when the news comes, when the cancer hits, a brother is born for those times of adversity. That's blood, but a friend is a person who actually wants to be around you, who actually likes you. Friends are always there, and that means that you have in a friend a band of brothers, a band of sisters who actually want to come together and walk with you closely, day by day, intimately. Jonathan loved David as his own soul, he said. Their souls were knit together.

[20 : 54] Great relationships are friendships. And so friendship elevates every relationship we have into maximal goodness. Brothers to brothers, sisters to sisters, wives and husbands, and just people who are friends. Friendship elevates every relationship. Not easy to find. Proverbs 18, 24, how modern is this line from the book of Proverbs? A man, a person of many companions will come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. A person will, of many, many friends will come to ruin. A person who relies only on online relationships.

A person who counts on the many, many followers they have on Instagram or TikTok or wherever. A person who has tons of companions, but nobody walking close with them, they will come to ruin. But a friend sticks closer than even a brother does. That's what Proverbs tells us. Fourth, the barriers. Let me give you four quickly. How does this happen? We've looked at that, but how does this get ruined? The first, I think, is that we can ruin the possibility of real relationships here by being closed off to friendship from the get-go. Remember, how do you develop Christian friendship? You stand shoulder to shoulder with the same vision, the same hope, the same goal, the same mission in front of your eyes. We can be closed off if we're not walking together in the same mission, the same vision. In some sense, one of the first things to say is just to mortify, to crucify, to put away passivity and to say,

I need a friend. I don't have yet in my life this type of friendship, and I want to pursue it. I want to look for it. The second thing that kills the possibility of friendship is competition. I don't know if you've read the book *The Count of Monte Cristo*, one of the great stories of the modern age, Alexander Dumas book, and in it, Edmund Dantes. He's due to be married in the morning to a woman named Mercedes, and by the evening of the same day, he's locked away in prison for life in solitary confinement in the Chateau d'If, in Island Fortress, all because his two closest friends were jealous of him. One because of his love of Mercedes, the other because he was going to be promoted to be the ship captain of the ship that they both worked on. And from in a 24-hour sequence, they destroyed his life. They said, we were friends, but they became Judas, and the book is about the utter rot of envy that can crush all relationships, that can take everything away from us. Proverbs 14.30, envy makes the bones rot. And so one of the things that can destroy relationships in the life of our church is jealous competition, is envy. And one of the things we can do is realize, boy, that inclination is deeper in every one of our hearts than we realize.

It's there to some degree. And envy is simply wanting what God has not given us that we see in the life of another person instead of wanting both God and their good. It's sacrificing our love for God and our love for our friend because we want what God has not yet given us but given them. And envy can make the bones rot. It can take away the possibility of all relationships in your life. The third, what kills friendship? What kills fellowship? The sins of speech. So if you look across the rest of the New Testament, particularly the book of James, James chapter two and three, it's the sins of our mouth, our tongue that can crush relationships and friendships. In Acts chapter five, just a few chapters after this, Ananias and Sapphira lie to the apostles in the first church. And they spread a lie throughout the community of faith and they're judged for it and they're condemned. And God shows you that a lie can actually rip a church apart. And gossip can destroy, slander can destroy. And one of the things that's amazingly helpful is if you open up the Westminster Confession of Faith, larger catechism, this is the confession that our church subscribes to our elders and our deacons, questions one, 23 and following on the 10 commandments. Let me just read to you a few of the things that it says the 10 commandments cause us towards and our relationships to one another. These are amazing. When talking to older, more mature Christians in the room, the confession says express love and tenderness toward the younger and the new believers like the tenderness that you would have towards your own children as biological parents. Always before them. And then it writes on the duties of all of us to one another, have reverence and honor and word and behavior, pray for one another, thank God for every person in the church, rejoice. How about this one? Rejoice for each other's gifts and achievements in life. Be ready to bear with the sins of others and be reconciled to all quickly. Preserve and promote the good name of one another. Show charitable esteem for all loving, desiring and rejoicing everyone's good qualities. Fourth, what kills friendship? Contempt. Grudge-bearing.

Holding grievances, letting sinful anger and hatred, frustration to be buried and buried until it spills over and breaks relationships. And so lastly here, Proverbs 27, 17, as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. How? How does one person sharpen another person in the life of the local church? Proverbs 27, 6, blessed are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. It's saying it's much better, far better, to have a dear friend in your life who will cut you with the scalpel of truth because they love you so much in order to heal you and pursue your good than to have a thousand kisses on your cheek from an enemy. That enemy's flatter, but real friends speak the truth and love.

[27 : 30] That's the paradigm we see. All right, let me summarize. Let's bring it home. Friends are much, much harder to have than enemies. It is so easy for us to have enemies. And in the modern world, there's never been an easier time to multiply enemies and never have a real friend. I don't know if you've come across this term. It's a little shocking, a little gripping when you first hear it, but the New York Times writer in 2009, Tim Crider coined the term outrage pornography. And he defined this concept as the narcotic drug of always needing to have an enemy. And this is what he said. He said, in a time of an overload of bad news, there's an addiction to finding something always to be angry about.

And a Harvard Business Review article that was written after that said that outrage makes a ton of money. And it is the main driver of returning to social media day in and day out. We don't realize it, but the urgency to find our next enemy. The next thing to be mad about, the next thing to be outraged about is more of a driver than friendship in the modern world. The Christian life is the opposite to love one another. Slow to anger, abounding instead fast love, never in a hurry, a lifelong relationship of discipleship through friendship, encouragement, patience, trust, persistence, commitment, bearing with one another. Where will we get the power? Where will we get the power to have relationships like this in the life of the local church? I think I would be remiss if I didn't mention the greatest friendship in all of modern literature before we come to a close. It was Frodo Baggins' birthday last week. I don't know if you knew that. And the greatest friendship in all of modern literature is the friendship between Samwise Gamgee and Frodo Baggins. Frodo and the Lord of the Rings was in deep despair. And he said, in a time of depression, lowliness, he said to Sam, I can't do this, Sam. I can't carry the ring to Mordor. And Sam said, I know, it's all wrong. By rights, we shouldn't even be here, but we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered, full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't know, you didn't want to know the end because the end, how could it be? It could never be happy. How could the world go back to the way it once was when so much bad has happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass, Mr. Frodo. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clear. Those were the stories, Frodo, that stuck with you. They meant something, even if you're too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, now I do understand.

I know now, folk in those stories have lots of chances to turn back, to give up. Only they didn't because they were holding on to something. What are we holding on to, Sam?

Frodo asked, that there's some good left in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for. Great friendship is when somebody in the Christian faith comes alongside you and says, the darkness, the shadow is passing. There is still something worth fighting for. Keep the faith. You need a friend. And the only way that we can be friends like that is to see the great examples of friendship in the Bible. And as we close, let's think about this. There are great examples of friendship between women in the Bible, like Ruth and Naomi. Ruth clung to Naomi. An unexpected friendship, a big age gap, and said, where you go, I will go. David and Jonathan clung to one another. One of the moments of that first Samuel 18, Jonathan was meant to be the king after Saul because he's his son.

By blood, it's Jonathan's throne room. It's Jonathan's throne. And in first Samuel 18, Jonathan, the heir of the throne, the true son of the king. He took off his royal robe.

[32 : 05] He took off his belt. He took off his sword. And he laid it down before David. And he said to David, I will give my kingship to you. I will give away my right as son of the king to be king because I know that God has called you to be king. And David's soul was knit to Jonathan. In John chapter 15, Jesus Christ looked out at his followers, his disciples, his apostles, and he said, today in the shadow of the cross, I no longer simply call you my servant. I'll call you a friend. What is friendship? Jesus said, greater love has no one than this than to give your life away for a friend. That's friendship. That's true love. Just before that, Jesus has said to Peter, Peter, will you give your life away for me? And Peter said, yes, I will. I would love to give my life for you. I would love, Peter said, to be your friend, Jesus. And you remember what happened in the Garden of

Gassimini. You know, Jesus said, friends, will you stay awake and watch for me so I can pray? And they fell asleep. And then right after that, as soon as he was taken to trial, Peter ran away. And every single one of them ran away. Now look, it is one thing to be a friend of somebody like Jonathan, or Jonathan to David, David to Jonathan, Ruth, Naomi, Naomi to Ruth, somebody who clings to you and you cling to them and they say, I'm for you, I'm with you, I'm not going anywhere. That's one thing. Jesus Christ turned to a bunch of treacherous men, cowards they were, and said, today I call you friend. It's one thing to be committed to somebody who's committed to you. But Jesus was so committed to call friends to people who rebelled against him, who ran away from him, who hated him, who left him to die. What a friend we have in Jesus. Where do you get the power to be a friend like that? Do you want a friend like that? How could you become a friend like that? It's only when you're able to say, I was not the friend of Jesus Christ, but he said, you are my friend. It's only when you look up at the cross and realize in that moment, I ran away, but Jesus said, I want to be your friend. That's where you'll get the power. The power to be a community more and more that lays down our lives for one another and loves one another, deeply is this. What a friend we have in Jesus.