

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF – WEEK #7  
The Fruit of the Spirit is Kindness – Part 2  
John 15:5-17

**PATTI**

The marks of a supernaturally changed heart, a heart changed by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, are listed in the classic text of Galatians 5:22–23, which lists the fruit of the Spirit.

This fruit includes the traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on. Each week, we're taking one of those traits and looking at it in order that perhaps we could experience more of that supernatural change in our own lives.

Tonight we're into the second week on the fruit of kindness. Whenever preachers are working through the fruit of the Spirit, this particular one is a challenge, because the Greek word translated kindness in the New Testament has a real breadth of meaning. Last week we looked at the aspect of what we called **“practical generosity.”**

And because this trait has a broader meaning even than that, tonight we're going to look at a kind of relationship that combines all the rest of the trait that kindness entails. The sort of relationship that combines them all is **friendship.**

Of course, you can have friends without a supernaturally changed heart, but the gospel gives us resources for this that can't be found anywhere else.

One of the most iconic films about the power of friendship believe it or not, is “Bride of Frankenstein” with Boris Karloff. In one scene the monster lurches into a cottage in the middle of the forest. It's only occupant is an old, poor, blind man.

When the blind man comes to the door, he's not afraid, because he can't see the monster. But he quickly realizes that the monster can't speak. So he says something like, “Are we both afflicted? I can't see and you can'tt speak.

Maybe we could be friends.” So he brings the monster in and treats him kindly, constantly calling him friend.

At one point, the blind man kneels by the monster and begins to pray, “Our Father, I thank thee that in thy great mercy, thou hast taken pity on my great loneliness and now out of the silence of the night has brought two of thy lonely children together and has ... sent me a friend to be a light to mine eyes and a comfort in time of trouble. Amen.”

At the end of the prayer the hermit breaks down in tears, and the child-like Monster sheds a tear, too, compassionately consoling the hermit with a pat on the back. During the prolonged fade out from the scene, a glowing Christian crucifix is the last object to vanish from view.

In the next scene, villagers see the monster and attack the cottage by setting it on fire. The last thing you see in this part of the scene is the Frankenstein monster lurching his way out of the flames pleading, “Friend? Friend?”, but there is no answer.

## **JEFF**

Nothing is more humanizing and life-changing than friendship. John 15 tells us three important things about this unique relationship of kindness.

### **1. What is the nature of friendship?**

At the beginning of chapter 15, Jesus uses a metaphor.

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

Vine and **the branches** have unity because they share a common life and bond.

In verse 9, Jesus shifts into another metaphor.

Here he calls his disciples, not branches, but **friends**.

In both cases, though, he uses the word “**remain**” to describe how the relationship is maintained.

There is the type of friendship that 1 Samuel 18 refers to when it says, “The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

Souls knit together means you have common loves, common beliefs, passions, and interests.

That's why people who simply want friends can never seem to make any. The condition for having friends is that you want something else besides friendship. If someone asks you, 'Do you see the same truth that I do?' and your honest answer is, 'I don't really care about the truth; I just want you to be my friend,' then no real friendship can start. There would be nothing for the friendship to be about.

Proverbs 27 gets at a particular aspect of friendship when it says, "The counsel of a friend is pleasant." The actual Hebrew word means **sweet**. That's important because at the time, people didn't have the capability to sweeten things. There was nothing like sugar back then. You could only discover sweetness in foods that were naturally sweet, but you couldn't create it.

It's saying that friendship can only be discovered.

## 2. How you forge a friendship?

When I say friends are discovered, I mean you realize that you click with someone. **But after that it takes work** to turn a potential friendship into a lifelong bond. It takes two particular kinds of discipline, in fact. And we see them both in John 15.

The first is **vulnerable transparency** (v. 15)

**"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."**

What's the difference between a boss and a friend?

A boss says, "Do this. Do that. You work for me. I don't have to explain myself.." But friends tell secrets. Friends open up. Friends let you in.

Friends show you what they're really like, what they're really thinking, feeling, and planning – and why.

There is an interesting verse in Psalms 25:14. In some translations it says, **"The secret of the Lord is for those who fear him."** **"The secret of the Lord is with his people."** Sometimes it's translated, **"The friendship of the Lord is with his people."**

The translators can't decide which word to use because in Hebrew the same word can mean either "secret" or "friend". All friends tell secrets. You're not a friend if you don't. There's vulnerability. And transparency.

**PATTI**

Transparency in friendship is the ability to take and receive criticism well. We all take and receive criticism. But the key word here is “well.” Proverbs 27:6 in the King James Version says,  
**“Faithful are the wounds of a friend ...”**  
 Isn’t that great?

Proverbs 29:5 says, **“If you flatter someone, you’re not their friend.”**  
 It’s the worst thing for them – to live with an inflated understanding of their character or capabilities.  
**“Faithful are the wounds of a friend ...”**

Then there’s the famous Proverbs 27:17 -  
**“As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.”**  
 If there’s something you need to hear about yourself that you don’t want to hear, you’re less likely to really receive it from a colleague or a family member or even a trained counselor than you are from a trusted friend.

A friend isn’t obligated to you because of work or family ties. A friend has CHOSEN to be with you! That’s why often, only longtime friends can tell you the painful things you most need to hear. And without them, you won’t grow.

**The second discipline is sacrificial loyalty.**

v. 6 – Jesus says: **“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away ...”**

You can’t pull branches off the vine and then put them back again and expect them to be connected again in unbroken unity. Branches have to stay with the vine.

Later on, he says, “Remain in my love”.  
 Friendship is about sticking with people through thick and thin. That may mean simply making time for each other.  
 In today’s busy world, that alone shows true commitment.

To remain means to never give up on people when they’re being difficult or going through difficulties. You stick with them even when you’re not getting much out of the relationship. Because that’s what a friend does.

**JEFF**

Friends always let you in. That's **vulnerable transparency**.  
And friends never let you down. That's **sacrificial loyalty**.

This means that the 50 to 1500 "friends" you have on Facebook don't all meet the biblical criteria. Not even close.

When David's entire kingdom and spiritual destiny were about to crash, Nathan came to him and said, "You are the man." And not in a good way. "You are the man who sinned against God and hurt people and betrayed your kingship."

Do you have a Nathan in your life who can show kindness to you in this way by honestly telling you what you need to hear? That can't be done on social media. It must be face to face, or you'll never listen.

Friends always let you in and never let you down.  
Can you name three people in your life that this definition applies to?  
If not, why not? Are there potential friendships that you are cultivating?  
What step might you take this week toward that end?

### **3. Where does the power for friendship come from?**

Vulnerable transparency is scary and unconditional loyalty is draining. So we have a lot to overcome. We live in a culture that would keep us from developing deep friendships.

First, if you have a job, there's the network of **colleagues**... People that you need to know, spend time with, and be friendly to. These are people you network with for the purpose is career advancement and money.

Then there's your **social network**... the people you watch the game with or go out to eat with, with - people you socialize with or may have a romantic interest in, if you're not married. These are people you party with, and the purpose is fun.

There no sacrificial loyalty because the purpose of these relationships is usually mutually selfish and practical. They have to pay off. Transparency is definitely not part of it, so you're not going to get the things only friendships can give you.

To overcome this, we need power to conquer the fear of transparency and the inconvenience of unconditional loyalty. Where do we get that power to be friends?

**PATTI**

Aristotle said you can never be friends with a god.  
 He believed all friendships had to be between equals.  
 He didn't believe friendship was possible  
 unless you had the same amount of social standing  
 or power or education.

Why? Aristotle knew that friendship is based on commonality,  
 so he said that people of different races, cultures, or  
 socio-economic status could never be friends.  
 And he insisted that people could never be friends with God  
 because that would bring God down to our level.

Yet Exodus 33 says that God spoke to Moses face to face,  
 as a man speaks to his friend. James 2 says, "Abraham was called  
 the friend of God."

Aristotle was a smart guy. He asked, "How could a god become  
 vulnerable? How could a god become loyal to you sacrificially?"  
 You know how. You know why no other religion would dare say  
 that God could be your friend, but Christianity can.

When God came to earth in Jesus and went to the  
 cross to pay the penalty for our sins,  
 it was, the ultimate act of kindness -  
 last week as practical generosity.

And as Jesus himself says in v. 13, the cross is the  
 greatest act of friendship: "Greater love has no one than this,  
 than to lay down his life for his friends."

The cross shows us how a friend lets you in.  
 Jesus' arms weren't just stretched wide,  
 they were nailed open.

How much more vulnerable and transparent do you want him to be?  
 Friends never let you down. How much more faithful,  
 how much more sacrificial, how much more loyal could  
 Jesus possibly be for you than to go to the cross?

In the garden of Gethsemane, he saw all the people  
 he was supposed to be securing the pardon for,  
 all of his so-called disciples. They were betraying him.  
 They were abandoning him. They were falling asleep on him.  
 They were about to deny him.

He knew he could either go to hell for them and take everything they deserve, or he would lose them. So he went to hell.

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

There is the ultimate friend who loves at all times.

## **JEFF**

There is a proverb that says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend ...”

In the case of Jesus, these aren’t the wounds the friend inflicts; these are the wounds the friend bears for you and me.

Where do you get the power to reach out to people?

And to be transparent to them when you might get hurt?

And to be loyal to them when you might be let down?

It’s simple love economics.

**v. 12 - “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. I am laying down my life for you. I am pouring out my love for you.”**

If you were an incredibly wealthy person, and some people around you, whom you like, have an idea for a business, and their plan seems okay, but you’re not totally sure about it, you’re going to invest in them. Why?

Because you can afford it. You like them.

You want to encourage them.

You could afford to lose the money.

That’s the way it is when the friendship of Jesus fills your heart.

You can afford to open up to other people. You can afford to take a risk. You can afford it because you have the ultimate love of the ultimate friend.

Some practical implications of this are...

1. **Christians make friendship the center of relationships between people of different races, classes and nationalities.**

Aristotle was right that, in general, friendships only happen between people who have things in common. The “starter fuel” for a lot of friendships becomes things like race, class, politics, culture, and so on. The bond is common interests, beliefs, and passions.

But if you're a Christian and you meet somebody of a different race, class, gender, nationality, AND politics, but have the same love for Jesus and the gospel as you do, then a deep, lasting friendship is absolutely possible. (Ethiopians...)

The church is not made up of natural 'friends, but often natural enemies. Even among the first disciples you have a tax collector and a zealot, who would normally hate each other.

What bound Judas Iscariot and Matthew together was the love of Christ that turns enemies into friends. Jesus breaks down the walls that separate people of different backgrounds from one another.

## **PATTI**

### 2. Christians bring friendship back to the center of relationships between men and women

American culture encourages us to sexualize our relationships with the opposite gender. Especially singles are encouraged to pursue people that they are attracted to physically and then see if it's possible that a friendship could develop.

But a better and more faithful way is to simply befriend members of the opposite sex. Then if you're single and you fall in love with one of them, you can trust that the love is strong enough to build a lifetime marriage on.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, friendships in Christian community will naturally cross barriers of race, culture, and gender. And lastly,

### 3. Christians bring friendship back to the center of our relationship with God

Lots of people who are Christians obey God in general, but do not actually befriend the Lord. Jesus says,  
 "If you're my friend, you'll obey my commandments."  
 "If you're my friend, you will remain in me."

What does this mean?

He's been vulnerable and sacrificial to you on the cross. So obey him. And not just when it's convenient.

Your sacrifice and vulnerability is about saying,  
 “Lord, I’ll do your will no matter what, even when I don’t  
 understand it or like it”  
 That’s when you start to become a friend to God.  
 And kind toward God in terms of practical generosity.

Secondly, talk to the Lord. A devotional time where you read the  
 Bible, get some ideas, and then pray some petitions is not  
 a friendship. The Lord is speaking to you through His Word.  
 So prayer is as much listening as talking. And pouring out  
 your heart, and sorting through your choices and emotions  
 with Him.

Again, our culture encourages constant busyness  
 so that we can’t possibly have time for this sort of thing.

But we need it. Because we’re all like Frankenstein’s monster.  
 in that our self-image is a bunch of stitched-together contradictions.  
 Some important people in our lives have loved us and some  
 important people in our lives have hurt and betrayed us.

As a result, we don’t know what to believe about ourselves  
 On one hand, we have an over-inflated view of your character and abilities.  
 But on the other hand, we’re way too mired in shame.

What we need is one, overpowering love to heal us...  
 the love of one ultimate friend who will tell us who we are.  
 And this is what we have in Jesus.

Your assignment this week is to meditate on that truth and  
 rest in that truth. And to risk starting or deepening that kind of friendship.  
 What practical step will you take in the next 7 days toward that end?

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for offering us the friendship we most need -  
 friendship with you. Empower us to build the kind of life-giving  
 friendships that cross barriers and make us more like your Son,  
 Jesus, who laid down his life for his friends, and in whose  
 name we pray, Amen.