

**SERIES: A FEAR-LESS CHRISTMAS
PART 1: HOW TO HAVE AWESOME RELATIONSHIPS**

Merry Christmas, everyone. I am so excited to share this most wonderful and hope-filled season with you. There is always a Grinch at the Christmas season who wants to steal the joy that God has for you. Just as the Grinch had animosity at Christmas because of how he was humiliated and shamed as a child, many people experience a profound sense of loneliness, hopelessness, guilt and an overall disease emotionally because of their own hurts, pain and fear.

This is why I am starting our Christmas season with a focus on our most important relationships. Today I want to talk with you about HOW TO HAVE AWESOME RELATIONSHIPS. Next week we will look at FIGHTING FOR AN AWESOME FAMILY. On December the 18th we will look together at HOW TO HAVE AN AWESOME MARRIAGE. That just happens to be Kathe's and my 39th anniversary. That is a very special day for us. Then on Christmas Eve, which is a Saturday, we will host 3 very special services entitled HOW TO HAVE A FEAR-LESS CHRISTMAS. There will be special music, a drama presentation and an encouraging message that will prepare your heart, mind and relationships for the special celebrations you will be involved in. Please be praying about who you will invite. 80% of people who want to go to church are waiting for an invitation from you. Let's be a warm accepting inviting faith family for our culture this incredible season. I had a friend tell me that a guy said to him, "I don't have time for friends right now in my life; I'm just too busy for relationships." My friend looked at him and said, "Then you're too busy." Because life is all about relationships, and you will regret this later on in life.

One of the most important tasks in life is developing and building great friendships. And if you don't build them in the early and middle stages of your life you run the risk of ending up later in life pretty lonely. Most people in our culture experience great loneliness and emptiness because they haven't taken the time to build relationships. Since God wants us to learn to love, it's one of the key things God put you on earth to do is to build deep friendships. If you're

thinking to yourself, “I don’t have the time right now for my friends--because I’m just too busy with my work, my assignments, homework, family life” or whatever, I want to remind you of five reasons why every one of us needs awesome friends in our lives. Let’s look at five reasons why God designed you to need friends and the 3 golden rules of friendships.

I. Why you need awesome relationships (friends)

A. For spiritual growth

It is impossible to grow spiritually and become more like Jesus Christ by yourself. There is no other way but through relationships with other brothers and sisters. You must have friends in your life to accomplish God’s purpose for your life. God’s purpose for your life includes deeply connected relationships. Romans 1:23, Paul states to the church in Rome, **“When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encourage by yours.”** The Bible best expresses this lifestyle in the 59 “one another” verses in the Bible. The Bible says we’re to live in peace with one another. **Don’t grumble with one another. Be of the same mind with one another. Accept one another. Be gentle, patient and tolerant of one another. Bear with and forgive one another. Don’t complain against one another. Confess your sins to one another. Love one another. Serve one another. Speak truth to one another. Don’t lie to one another. Pray for one another. Be hospitable to one another. Comfort one another.** Encourage and build each other up. This isn’t the complete list, but you can see you cannot grow in all of these virtues without other people in your life. It is impossible. You need close and intimate relationships with other to grow spiritually.

B. For emotional support

Life is a journey and you need companions. There are two kinds of people. I call them VDPs and VIPs. **VDPs are Very Dependent People. And VIPs are Very Inspirational People.** VDPs tend to drain you. You need fewer VDPs and more VIPs in your life. People who inspire you, bring out the best in you. The 59 “one another” verses can only be experienced in friendships that inspire

you. Galatians 6:2 says, **“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.”** The way you fulfill the law of Christ that Paul just mentioned is to emotionally support, encourage and build up your friends. Just a hint, this is imperative for a marriage to be successful and any relationship.

C. For better health

Science has just caught up with what the Bible has taught for over 6,000 years. You live longer and healthier if you have healthy connected relationships. If you don’t have healthy friendship you’re going to die sooner than you imagine. People without friends don’t live as long as people with deep friendships. One of the reasons is friends give you a place to unload your negative emotions. The Bible says in James 5:16 **“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”** Please circle the word healed. When you pray and ask God to forgive you He does immediately. But if you want to be healed from the damage and hurt of your own sins and the sins of others against you God says you must confess them to another Christian and have them pray for you. There is a great recovery phrase that says, “The revealing of your feelings is the beginning of healing.” The habits you don’t like and the character defects that you struggle with--you will never break through them on your own. Many people are sick because of the unhealthy relationships. Healthy, loving, forgiving and accepting relationships actually can impact your health for the good.

D. For social enjoyment

You need friends for social enjoyment. Life is meant to be enjoyed, not merely endured. Did you know that the Bible says that friendships are the bedrock of a satisfying life? You can make all the money in the world and have all the achievements in the world and have all the pleasure in the world, but if your relationships stink, life stinks. Nothing, loved ones, can compensate for the lack of good relationships. Genesis 2:18a says, **“It is not good for the man (a person) to be alone.”** God hates for His people to live their lives alone. That is not His plan or design for you. Proverbs 27:9 says, **“The heartfelt counsel of**

a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.” Friendship is meant to add pleasure and enjoyment to your life.

E. For relational strength

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 **“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.”** We are stronger, healthier and happier when you take the time to build loving, caring close relationships. You’re only as strong as your relationships. One of the best places to find these kinds of relationships is here at church. I tell you, we have a relational goldmine here at CVCHURCH. The more I get to know many of you I am so impressed with who you are and your past and your experiences and how you want to see our culture change through the Good News of Jesus Christ. I want to look at for the remainder of our time together how do you and I develop these awesome relationships. I want to share with you the 3 GOLDEN RULES OF FRIENDSHIP. There are more but I don’t have time today. I highly recommend the book by John Townsend **HOW TO BE A BEST FRIEND**. Also the book by Townsend and Cloud called **SAFE PEOPLE**. They describe in detail what safe and unsafe people look like. As I read this book I saw many of the traits of being a safe person, but it hurt when I identified that I had some unsafe characteristics, and I have gone to work on those to turn those into strengths of being a safe person.

II. Three golden rules of friendship

The keys to developing awesome relationships are given to us by Jesus in what has become known as the golden rule. Please read Matthew 7:12 out loud with me. **“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”** In order to have great, deep, meaningful, lifelong friendships it’s rather simple: Be the friend that you would like to have. You will not have those kinds of deep friendships unless you’re that kind of friend, because you will attract what you are, not what you want. You don’t attract in life what you want, but you attract what you are. If you’re a shallow person, you’ll attract shallow people. If you’re

a loving person, you're going to attract loving people. If you're a gossip you will attract gossips. If you're a bitter person you will attract other bitter people who complain about everything. You attract what you are.

A. Invest the time

Please hear me, loved ones. True, authentic friendships are costly. It involves your willingness to invest your time, energy, effort, and finances. In other words deep friendships are not accidental, but they are intentional and developed purposefully. Long term friendships never just happen. If they go the distance it is because all of the parties involved have heavily invested themselves in each other. Proverbs 18:24 says, **“There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.”** In the KJV it says, **“A person that has friends must show themselves friendly.”** The Bible says you're not going to have friends unless you put forth the effort to be friendly. I believe this is incredibly important for us as a church in our history together. Stop waiting for people to be your friend. Show them how to be a friend by being a friend to them. You make the effort. Friends who only show up because they need something are not true friends. Friends show up whether they need you or not. They don't need a reason to show up. Philippians 2:4 says, “Don't look out only for your interests, but take an interest in others, too.” I guarantee you, dear friends, if you will do what this verse says you will have more friends than you can imagine. Listen, true friends show up. You can't be a friend without your presence. So please write this down in your notes. **SHOW UP.** Your physical presence is essential to having a long-term, deep, friendship. Not just an acquaintance. I have seen this in my own small group experience and observing others as well as those who say CVCHURCH is their church. Those who get the most out of their small group and this church show up. They show up every week to their small group and they attend our Sunday services as well as events like our four yearly **Worship Nights** where we worship together for an hour and a half. They show up to our **Easter Egg Hunt**. Last year we had over 1500, and they come and served. They show up and invite their family and friends to our **Explore Bethlehem**. Parents make sure they get their children to all of the different and exciting events that our **Kid's Place Ministry** hosts. Parents make sure to get their youth involved in all that our **EPICC**

Youth Ministry is hosting. There are some very exciting things happening in these ministries, and your children will greatly benefit by you having them show up.

B. Earn their trust

Whenever I ask anyone what is the number 1 characteristic they're looking for in a friendship, a business partner, a team player or a marriage partner it is always the same. I need to be able to trust them. Please hear, feel and see me on this one, friends. If you want to build friendships you've got to earn their trust. Trust is what makes a friendship a friendship. Without trust there is no friendship. This is the difference between an acquaintance and a friend. You talk to acquaintances, but you trust your friends. Let's see what the Bible says about this most important aspect of friendship in Proverbs 20:6 "**Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is truly reliable?**" How many of you would agree with this verse? It's pretty rare to find someone you would say "I would trust you with my life, my family, my possessions." I consider myself to be an extremely wealthy man in friendships, because I have quite a few friendships which I have been able to say that. I have looked them in their eyes and say I feel I can trust you with my life. Many of you have said that to me. The Bible says that there are at least **3 ways that you can earn another person's trust.**

1) By being reliable

You earn and build trust by being reliable. You're predictable in a good way. You can be counted on because you're not fickle or wishy-washy or hot and cold or erratic. You are dependable. Please hear me: Reliability is the difference between a friend and a flake. We all have flakes in our lives. But friends are reliable. The Bible says it like this in Proverbs 17:17 "**A friend is always loyal.**" Please circle the word loyal. The greatest ability in life is dependability, and the Bible says it's hard to find people who are reliable, trustworthy and dependable. You earn a person's friendship first by being a person of integrity who is reliable.

2) By being loyal

Loyalty is a term we don't talk about much these days, because very few people are loyal to anything but themselves. There's no such thing anymore as brand loyalty, loyalty to a company or loyalty to a church. People are not very loyal any more. It's more a matter of what have you done for me lately. But church, loyalty is a commitment that says I'm going to put you before myself at this point. Loyalty is actually the opposite of self centeredness. Loyalty is the opposite of narcissism. Loyalty and reliability is the opposite of being, it's all about me. Loyalty says I'm going to help you right now instead of help myself. That's loyalty. 1 Corinthians 13:7 in the Living Bible says, **"If you love someone, you'll be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best, and always stand your ground in defending them."** This is what Jesus did for you and me. Even though we betrayed Him, hated Him and acted as if He doesn't exist. Romans 5:8 says, **"But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."** The 1st golden rule is that you invest time in the persons you're building a friendship and community with. The 2nd golden rule is that you earn their trust, and you do that by being reliable, loyal and...

3) By keeping confidences

Every one of us needs a person in whom you can say, "This person is safe. I can share anything with that person. They're not going to look at me as if I am bad. They're not going to reject me. They're not going to dump me for someone else but they're going to be there for me." They're so safe you share your worst fears, the worst things you feel about yourself, your doubts and experiences that have caused you great shame. You can share these things and know that it will remain confidential with them. This is essential, loved ones. That what is said in your small group stays in your small group. You send the message to your friends, **"Your secret is safe with me."** In the group the message is **"Your secret is safe with us."** The mark of a true friend is they know how to keep a secret. If you really want people to trust you, you cannot be a gossip. If you're wondering why you don't have any deep relationships you might look at whether you gossip or not. Proverbs 11:13 says, **"A gossip goes around**

telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.”

The Bible says God hates gossip, and it is regarded as one of the seven things God hates. If you want to have solid relationships you must be able to keep confidences.

C. Accept their flaws

The truth is we all have faults. We all have defects, failings, weaknesses, sins. No one is perfect. Romans 15:7 says, “Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you.” That doesn’t mean He approves of everything you do. It means He accepts you. This means you’ve got to accept people the way they are, not the way you want them to be. If you’re married or you have friends and family, they all have some characteristics that bug you a lot. The truth is for the most part those who truly disturb you won’t change. So it’s important that you make the decision I’m going to accept them or am I going to be miserable the rest of my life? There are some things you just go, there are so many good qualities in him or her, there are so many good qualities in her or him. I’m just going to overlook this weakness, this flaw, this flub. That is what the Bible means by acceptance. It says, as God accepts you and doesn’t demand that you be perfect in order to get into heaven. He shows grace to you, God say you need to do that to other people. Proverbs 17:9 says, “**Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.**” In other words the way to destroy your friendship, your marriage, your family is always pick at them. When you criticize, condemn, judge and gossip about them, you will destroy the relationship. Where acceptance, love and forgiveness rule you will find relationships will flourish.

I want to encourage you to take your notes and look them over everyday and prayerfully reflect and plan how to engage the friends and family in your life. Let’s be a church family that invests heavily the time necessary to encourage and build up our friendships. Let’s commit to earning each other’s trust by stepping up by being reliable, dependable and loyal, and become people who desire to keep each other’s confidences, and if you gossip, slander and say things about people you shouldn’t--that we all make a commitment to stop it. Commit to developing your spiritual, emotional, health, enjoyment and strength,

and be developing awesome relationships during this incredible Christmas season.

Communion: Mark 14:17-24 “In the evening Jesus arrived with the twelve disciples. 18 As they were at the table eating, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you eating with Me here will betray Me.’ 19 Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, ‘Am I the one?’ 20 He replied, ‘It is one of you twelve who is eating from this bowl with Me. 21 For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays Him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!’ 22 As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take it, for this is My body.’ 23 And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, ‘This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many.’”

Romans 3:23-25a “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.” Romans 4:25 “Jesus was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us right with God.”

Let’s pray.