1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20 September 16, 2018

Pointers, Part 3

Pointers – Choosing our Friends 9/16/18

Gary Rebok

This morning as we continue in the sermon series “Pointers,” and how our lives point to Jesus as Lord and Savior. The topic for today is how choosing our friends points to him and where friends influence our lives daily that either encourage us to pursue a closer walk with God or discourages us from following Christ. In a review of the past few weeks, we are learning how our lives point to Jesus as our Savior and as our Lord. First, it means that we should recognize we are sinners in desperate need of a savior if we want to live in Heaven with God. Secondly, we should acknowledge that without Jesus to take the penalty for our sin, we have no hope of being saved. Third, Jesus is that substitute, and He is the only substitute who could die in our place because He was without sin. Fourth, we have put our full eternal confidence in what he did for us on the cross, suffering and dying in our place so that we could live free from being slaves to our sin.

Finally, we believe that three days after the crucifixion of Jesus, he rose from the dead, thereby, bringing forth a newness of life here on earth that culminates in the glories of heaven. As Meagan said, for Jesus to be our Savior means all of those things, with no gray areas. Confessing Jesus as Lord acknowledges his power over death and oneness with God. For the church to succeed, we are to praise his lordship, adopting a regular system of values to build our lives on, trusting Jesus as our best friend and mentor that will bring all things to their fulfillment in him (Eph. 1:10). Before unpacking today’s message, let’s take a moment for a time of prayer.

So, what do we need to know about understanding friendship important to God and the levels of friendship that hold influence over our lives? The first level is an acquaintance. The second level is a casual friendship that discovers common interests or activities. The third level is a close friendship of fellowship, reflecting oneness of spirit sharing the same life goals. Finally, the deepest level of intimate friendship based on a commitment to generously invest in one another’s lives with the goal of helping each other mature in Godly character. As I think about the deepest level of intimate friendship, let me begin by submitting to his Word in marriage. Jesus pointed His followers to God’s plan for marriage. Marriage is a relationship where two people, joined to each other and God: listen and talk to each other; pray and worship together; share work and ministry in the world, and create and raise a family together.

This weekend pastor Meagan had the fantastic opportunity to preside over the marriage of her niece, and I know what an honor it is to be asked to unite a family member in the Christian hope of unity to live as one. Within the context of marriage, I am reminded by Jesus that we are choosing a friend for a lifetime for if one falls, the other can help to lift the other up in times of need. If chosen correctly, there is a source of companionship, love, joy, and encouragement. A marriage is based on grace, as well as mutual friendship. No marriage will last unless the couple is first and foremost friends. In other words, your wife or husband should be your life-long friend that is a spiritual picture in the image of God, reflecting a life full of joy and love. But if chosen incorrectly, there is a disappointment that can bring you down that leads to an inspiration of ungodly traits. The same thing applies to pick friends that drive you away from the lord.

I remember the days of my youth and the times that were wild and free with not a care in the world and things were mostly unobserved. I admit that I chose my friends not based on careful wisdom as iron sharpens iron, but on careless, selfish needs under peer pressure as a fool to get into trouble. It wasn’t until I decided to follow the Lord more closely that I began to think a bit more clearly about the company I chose as casual friends. I am not saying that is not wrong to have friends who do not know God, but foolish to copywrong behavior. Life has not been easy in regards to breaking off relationships with individuals morally deficient or contrary toward Christian values. Quite frankly, the same applies to members of our biological families, and I struggle with this every day. Nothing is ever viewed as clean or polite breaking away from negative groups or family members, but making new friends who identify with Jesus will elevate you to higher standards and help you reach the potential God desires for you.

Recently, I watched an interview with Amy Grant. The other week we sang one of her songs titled “Thy Word.” She too had veered early in life, hiding the fact she snuck around and did not understand the fullness of life. She was sixteen when she began singing professionally. But later she recalls appreciating the fact of her journey to understand the love of Jesus fully. You see, Amy was invited to sing at Billy Graham conference in Minneapolis, and she was so troubled with the point in her life that before taking the stage, she went privately before Rev. Graham. She told him about her sin, and that life was falling apart in divorce. In reply, Rev. Graham said to her, “I have a lot of children, and some kids just have to take a long way home.” Life can derail anybody, but in getting older, Grant learned about the love of Jesus, and Him finding her as life was falling apart. Amy learned that by choosing Jesus, she moved into a new level of friendship and her experience had not gone to waste. When asked about what she would want her legacy to be, she said, “I just want to be known as someone who led others to explore the companionship of Jesus.” Our lives have not gone to waste when we find Jesus as our Lord and Savior, who is there to take away our sin.

When I met my wife Pat, I had this sense about her moral character of loyalty, and her trust in Jesus as a Christian, even though she was Catholic, a Patriots, Red Sox, and Notre Dame Fan. The Bible tells us that we get to decide whether we’ll walk with the wise or flounder with fools in how far we will go in life. In the end, the choosing of Pat as my lifelong friend and mate in the intimacy of marriage, she has impacted me for the better rather than for, the worse. And so, it does matter which friends you select, either as a mate for life, or someone to have around as a friend. I would only hope and pray that I could have a similar legacy as Amy Grant, that in my friendships, I too can lead others to explore the companionship of Jesus as a friend.

The book of Proverbs is full of instructions concerning how we can do well and become successful, including instructions on how we should choose our friends. Proverbs 13:20 instructs us “that he who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (NIV). The apostle Paul affirms: “Do not be misled: bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor. 15:33). Paul addressed three critical issues in his letter to the church in Corinth: peace within the church, holiness in the world, and fidelity to the gospel. Paul identified that groups within the church perhaps had no knowledge of God, but more importantly, they knew nothing about God’s character and caused Christians to argue fiercely. Paul was eager to tell the church they must avoid blurring the boundaries between itself and the broader world.

Consequently, Christians within the church had chosen friends who were terrible company and Paul was aware that some within the church had denied the bodily resurrection of believers. Without the resurrection of believers at the coming of Christ, there is no atonement for sin and no future hope for the Christian. Brothers and sisters, as believers in the gospel, calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the health and unity of the church, we must choose our friends according to the character of Jesus, and church, friends of Jesus love one another just as He loved us (John 15:12-13; 17).

Author, professional speaker, and Pastor John Maxwell has written many books, primarily focusing on leadership. Maxwell writes, “A leader’s potential is determined by those closest to him,” calling it the principle of “The law of the inner circle.” During the earthly ministry of Jesus, Jesus had an “inner circle” that included His most trusted disciples (Peter, James, and John). Jesus also called His disciples His friends (John 15:15). But even among Jesus’ disciples, not everyone was included, and he was careful about whom He chose. As a side note, a couple of things I did not know about Maxwell is that he holds a Master of Divinity degree from Azusa Pacific University and a Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Theological Seminary.

When I came looking for a church, I knew that I had to associate with someone who was trusted and respected as a pastor and as a friend. I remember reaching out to your pastor with a message to see if we could get together and have a chat. She was aware of my spiritual difficulties and replied in a text, “hello friend.” You have no idea of how that made me feel for her to consider me as her friend. In saying hello friend, Meagan’s message sent an encouraging word to stay faithful in the task before me; to remain obedient to God’s plan. When we seek friendship, we should be looking for positive relationships as a solid, godly example as iron sharpens iron so that in unity we will be able to contribute to the lives of others.

We live in a melting pot of cultures. If you have a Facebook account or access to the internet, you know what I mean. Teens and adults attract themselves to the world and veer themselves away from Jesus. Don’t get me wrong; the internet is a fabulous resource if used correctly. But when we choose our friends according to the world of Facebook, are we choosing them correctly? Here is what Jesus said about friends. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 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 have learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13-15).

Friends are of like mind. A friend is someone that you can confide in with complete trust and as someone once said to me; “just be yourself.” A friend is someone you respect, and that respects you, not based on worthiness but based upon a likeness of mind. The Apostle Paul defined a true friend. “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man, someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates his love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:7-8).

We need a vertical friendship that begins with our Creator and God. We need a true friend that will listen when you speak and understands how you feel and what concerns you. Because Jesus is our friend, He hears us talk to him. A true friend puts others first and is unselfish in doing so. Genuine friends put their interests aside to help the one who needs their friendship. Sometimes God brings special friends into our lives who have much in common with us. I genuinely believe this and the reason I am here.

In closing, because Jesus sought common ground by becoming one of us, He limited His power as God and took upon himself the form of a servant to endure every possible frustration and pain that we face. Jesus overlooks our faults and accepts us where we are. Jesus does not condone our sin, but He wants to take your sin away, and He is the only one who can clean up your life. Friends bring out what is best for us and encourage you and me to do our best. In my personal experience, I have prayed continuously for friends that will help me grow spiritually and stand with Christ in friendship. We are praying that for you as a church, that you are allowing God to help you choose your friends and for the companionship of Jesus to influence your life. Jesus wants us to grow spiritually, and his highest expression of love was His death. Oh, what a friend we have in Jesus. Amen