

## Finding Friendship in the Church: A Starting Place

Kole Farney

Recently I read a clever question on social media: “When are we going to talk about the miracle of Jesus having 12 close friends in his 30s?” It was meant to be humorous, so I smiled, but inside I was frowning because the comment hit a nerve.



Was Jesus’ experience of close fellowship with others limited to him alone or should we have some expectation of a community like that?

I don’t think that the kind of relationship that Jesus had with the disciples runs exactly parallel to what we might enjoy with other followers of Christ today. The disciples left everything to travel with Jesus for three years. He was their savior, their substitute, their teacher, and their Lord. But make no mistake, they were his friends (Luke 12:24, John 15:13-14).

For those who believe in the Son of God, friendship finds its place in redemptive history in the community of faith—a new group of humans called the church who have been recreated together in Christ. Here there are no barriers of class, economic standing, or race, but one unified collection of people forgiven in Christ.

If that is true, we ought to have blossoming friendships, right? But do we?

It seems that many things are against us in this fight for meaningful relationships. The distance we live from one another encourages isolation, the individualistic mindset we grew up with erects walls between us, our activity schedule leaves no time for others except immediate family, and even the structure of our church meetings can make it seem like community is all about quietly listening to a few speakers.

We have created, or at least bought in to, a culture that consistently cuts us off from one another. But there is a way forward for the church. We can pursue the Lord *together*.

## Believing the gospel together is the starting place

For many, believing the gospel is a private matter. It is something that *I* did. Something that *I* am doing right now—applying the truth of Christ and his cross to my life individually. We act as if believing the gospel isn’t something you do with other people.

But what if the gospel is bigger than our “Jesus and me” mentality? What if the gospel includes the whole universe, every tribe and tongue, and all the believers we fellowship with in our churches?

In defense of the necessity of personal conversion (which I believe is absolutely worth defending), we may have blurred the reality of a gospel-birthed community. If we believe that the gospel is only focused on how we relate to God, rather than how we relate to God *and* other believers, the beauty of God-given friendship and community will be lost, and we will remain disconnected from one another.

As you read the following familiar verses, notice these four words—*us*, *we*, *our*, and *together*.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (Eph. 2:4–5).

Paul is explaining the reality of Jew and Gentile alike being made alive *together* with Christ. He is convincing the Gentiles especially that they have been saved by grace (you=Gentile believers) by including them with believers who were born Jews.

The gospel then is more than a message that brings us to God, it is a message that brings us to God *together*. Believing this means that we are truly united with other Christians in our local churches, no matter how different we appear to be from one another. It means that what God has done in bringing us together in Christ ought to take first place in our hearts when we consider who we spend the bulk of our time with. It means that what did have the power to keep us isolated and alone has now been done away with at the cross, leaving us free to find friendship as we believe the gospel together.