

# ACTS

PART THIRTEEN: ACTS 20-21:16



God's Mission | God's People | God's Power

## SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."  
 - Proverbs 27:17

### Acts 20-21

"When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."  
 - Acts 20:36-37

"What does this tell us?...To need and to want deep friendships is not a sign of spiritual immaturity, but of maturity. It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of health."  
 - Tim Keller

### 1. Friendships are Necessary - and Available to Everyone

"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....This is my command: Love each other."  
 - John 15:13;17

### 2. The Centre of Spiritual Friendship

#### Acts 20:7-12

"On the first day of the week we came together to break bread."

**First day of the week:** This is the regular, weekly gathering of believers - and 'first day of the week' shows us that the Jesus -Community had been structuring their meeting time around the resurrection of Jesus, not the Jewish Sabbath anymore. The resurrection has shifted how Christians meet to worship - the flow of life is now restructured around Jesus' death and resurrection.



**Break bread:** This refers to both an actual 'meal' that the church would share together, and to the practice of "remembering Jesus" through the Lord's Supper. So this community is birthed out of, and bound together, by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So are we. The basis of who we are as a people is rooted in the God who comes for us, who dies for us, who rises and now lives for us.

Paul cared enough about the glory of Christ and the people he's meeting with that he will explain the Gospel of Jesus and what it means with his friends even if it means being up the whole night.

### **Ephesians 4:15: "Speaking the truth in love..."**

To address this barrier to deep, spiritual friendship we must recognize that the good news of Jesus is not only about gaining freedom from sin and closeness with God – those things are true of course – but also the serious business of being transformed into the very likeness of Jesus in our character.

God has given us each other as a major source of movement toward Christ-likeness.

### **Live It Out:**

1. Are there friends that you need to make an effort and reach out to? Get creative and do what you can do in this moment, rather than focusing on what you can't do.
2. If any of you have a friendship to repair, this is the time to do it.
3. Maybe you need to get rid of all the self-consciousness – the hurt feelings and fussiness.

**"Our friendships are supposed to be about Jesus, not about, "Do you like me? How well do you like me?" There shouldn't be all this intrigue. There shouldn't be all this awful self-consciousness."**

**- Tim Keller**



### **Life Group or Personal Reflection Questions**

In a recent conversation with my wife, Kathryn, she mentioned how it seems many of us are in a sort of "holding pattern" with friendships. We are waiting until we can meet 'properly' – in person, without restriction – and until then, are not actively engaging our friendships.

Talking about this in staff meeting, Gerald mentioned how he is seeking to "Live in today." That "we're not guaranteed tomorrow; we don't actually know what the future will look like. So don't wait for perfect time for connecting."

### **Reflect on this:**

1. Take a few moments to think and pray about how you can reach out and cultivate some of those significant, spiritual friendships this week.
2. Perhaps there is someone that God is laying on your heart to reach out to – perhaps who particularly needs a call from you today? Take time to pray for people and ask God for his Spirit's prompting and leading in this.

**Life Groups** are not only to be a place of care, study, and prayer but are to be a sort of “mission-team” as well. This Acts 20-21 shows us that these ‘friends’ shared their faith in Christ and their focused on seeing the Kingdom of God advancing in their world.

1. Are there ways that you can encourage your spiritual friends, or your Life Group, to engage in your work settings (personal mission) and as a group in sharing the love and news of Jesus with others?
2. Take some time to pray and then talk about what that could look like to deepen this focus.

**Read Acts 20:32-37**

1. What action of deep affection do you see in vs.36-37?

Certainly, the notion that Paul would never see them again made this moment particularly emotional. However, notice the level of affection and concern that we see here. This reflects the way Paul speaks of the fellowship of believers in other places (See Phil1:8; 2 Cor 13:12).

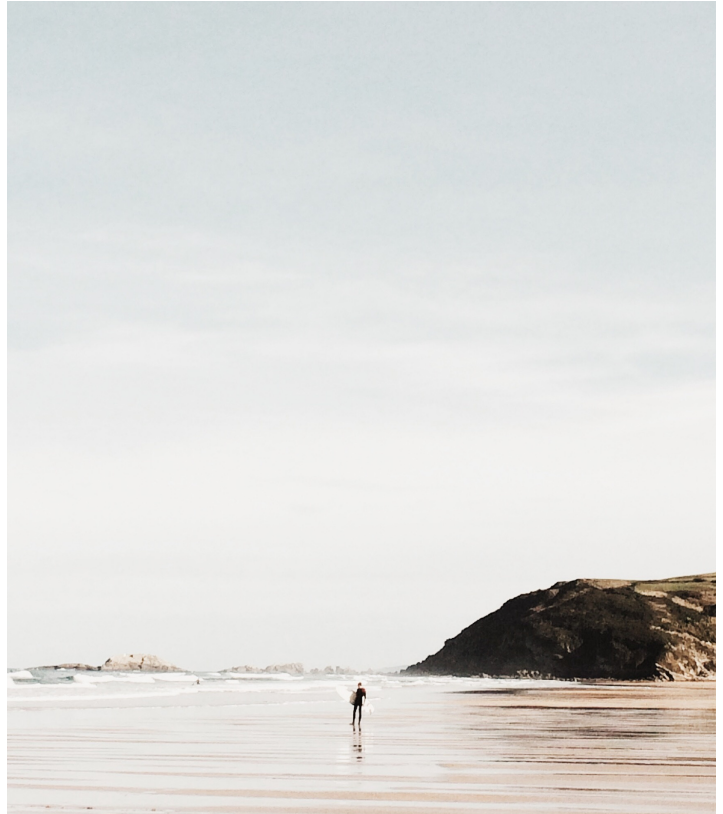
1. In what ways could you deepen the level of ‘affection’ that you express to your friends?
2. Too often we ask: “How are you doing?” more as a typical greeting than a legitimate question. How might you deepen the way you ask your friends how they are doing?

**From the sermon we learned that "spiritual friendship" includes the challenging, sharpening element as well -** read and discuss the following quote:

“If you don’t need people...  
 If you’re afraid of accountability,  
 if you’re afraid of people looking inside,  
 if you’re afraid of people nosing into your business,  
 if you’re afraid of love...the less you want friends,  
 the less like God you are.  
 Don’t you realize?  
 What is the purpose of creation?  
 What is the purpose of redemption?  
 What is the purpose of everything God has done since  
 creation?  
 To make us friends.”

**- Tim Keller**

1. What happens when we realize that God’s goal for us is to make us more like his Son Jesus as we read in Romans 8:29? How does that change the way we view spiritual friendship?



2. Are there some friends whom you need to give permission to “speak the truth in love” to you – so that you can grow? How might inviting them to do that look for you?

**Prayer:** Take some time to thank God for friendship – with him and with others. Ask God to make you a better friend to others – to deepen your concern and your level of commitment to ‘sharpening’ and being ‘sharpened.’

**Pastor Dave**