



**Good Shepherding-Part 2**  
**Providing Godly Encouragement to Your Friends**  
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Recently a New York Times article tried to tackle the topic of friendship. What was interesting about this article was that they had a difficult time defining what they meant by that. And they admitted that they had trouble defining what they meant by that. They couldn't quite get their arms around what it meant to have friends or what the concept of friendship was all about, including more than hanging out with people. From the man on the street who they cited and the Princeton University sociologist that they were referring to throughout this article, they couldn't quite get their arms around it but they agreed on this one point, and that it is important and it's good to have and people should have them. And they also lamented that the problem with this concept of friendship that goes beyond our work relationships and our home relationships is that today we're worse at it than ever before.

Particularly here in the West in the United States. We're just not having those interconnected, mutual relationships of mutual support and concern for one another like our forefathers. Speaking of Ivy League schools, Harvard did a study I read about that was tracking hundreds of people over 70 years, a long study, just looking at how friendships in those lives affected how they went about their lives and how they lived. And they tracked these people for over 70 years and they came to the conclusion much like the folks on the street and the Princeton University sociologist that is important to have friends, you should have it and they tried to quantify why you should have these relationships that go beyond your work associates and your family members because they said that you will ultimately be better off in just about every area of your life regardless of your income or your business successes or your personal setbacks. When it comes to people reporting contentedness and a sense of well-being, and they even said a better overall health that they had and even they, I mean this one's easy to quantify, that those who reported that they had these interconnected mutual caring relationships in their life literally live longer, statistically longer, than those who did not. Now it's almost as though those two articles were giving a sense to the reader that this is what we are designed for. Of course they didn't put it that way. But those of us who are Christians and if we're biblically literate of course we know this is how we were designed and our Creator has said you need friendships, you need relationships beyond just your marketplace associates and beyond your family relationships.

You need this other third sphere of relationships, which of course for Christians is found within the church, people who share our commitment to the Lordship of Christ and who these are critically important and they need our attention and they need cultivation and they need our focus. It's all over the Bible. Just consider the New Testament for instance. Let me read you 14 passages from the New Testament. Are you ready for this? It'll go quick.

Welcome one another.

Greet one another.

Be kind to one another.

Honor one another.

Pray for one another.



Serve one another.

Bear one another's burdens.

Instruct one another.

Submit to one another.

Forgive one another.

Live in harmony with one another.

Show hospitality to one another.

Care for one another.

And the most oft repeated "one another" in the New Testament, love one another. Well, that's just 14 quick texts that as you read the Bible they hit you all the time saying, listen you need to know that you need people, that you need to give your life to cultivate relationships with, be interconnected, mutual support, mutual encouragement. You need all of that in these relationships that extend beyond your work life and beyond your domestic life. I mean it's all over the New Testament.

It's a "no-duh" situation for us when we read articles like this. Of course that's what God expects of us and most people don't have it.

At least they don't have it like they used to have it and even in the church, unfortunately, as we mirror our culture we seem to be worse at it than we used to be as well. We need to get serious about this. We cannot be who God has called us to be. We can't function in the world the way God designed us to. Of course it's not just so that he can have us be dutiful little subservient Christians, it's because he knows this is good for us as that Harvard study certainly pointed out. I mean our sense of well-being just as Christians and people, we were designed for these relationships and we need to focus on them. In this short series that I put together as we ramp up to Easter, one of things I wanted to talk about last week is the concern that we should have for the people in our home which is obvious. But we need to get to the place where we recognize, to put it in the words of the Bible, that we need to be our brother's keeper and we're not talking about our biological brother.

We need to be our neighbor's keeper so to speak and by neighbor I mean those that we live life next to particularly those people who we would identify as our friends. I hope that you can as I preach this message this morning identify your friends. You have a sense of the circle of people that you know that you say these are my friends and I bet it isn't the way it ought to be and I'm not trying to throw out a mandatory number here but when Jesus showed us what a group of friends was like he picked 12 people. I hope you have more than just one or two people you call your friends. People who you really feel like you're walking through every stage of your life with, these are my friends. And as you do I think there's a great passage to motivate you and encourage you in this. It's found in First Thessalonians Chapter 5. This very important, essential part of our lives. I want you to look at this text with me just four verses in First Thessalonians Chapter 5. Call this passage up, verses 11 through 14. Now I know I print this for you on the worksheet every week. It is available digitally to download every Friday afternoon by about 5:00 o'clock. You can download it if you use your tablet



or whatever your laptop here in the service which is great. But just know that I don't want you just to use that printed text there which is our preaching portion when we're here in the service you need to go to the text itself because we need to see things in its context, particularly today. We need to look all around this text to figure out why this passage is here and what these words actually mean in their context. So if you have a Bible open it up, if you've got an app or something open it up so you can see the surrounding text. But let's just look at the text, verses 11 to 14, we'll read them and we'll seek to apply these passages, these statements, these verses, these sentences as it relates to your friends, which I hope their faces are moving through your mind throughout this morning's message.

Look at verse 11. Let's start there to add two more "one another's" to the list. "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up just as you're doing." Now he could say that to the Thessalonians because apparently this church is pretty healthy, people are doing what they're supposed to do. Maybe that's said of you but I would say if it is said of you and God could look at your life and say, well you're doing that then that's great.

But most of us need a little encouragement in this. We may not be pulling in "A" in this particular department. So let me encourage you to start doing it or to do it better or to do it more or to invest more heavily in it. If you are doing it let me remind you this morning why it's worth it. And your time and your investment is certainly worth it.

You'll see in verse 12 it seems like we changed the focus, at least of what's going on in verse 11 because it's one another. Well, he's now going to look up at leadership. He's going to say well the one another, at least in terms of your leader, let's start with them. And I'm not wanting to apply these verses this morning directly but I will use verse 12 and the first half of verse 13 as a template. We'll see it just at the bottom of our message this morning if you look at the outline in the verses next to the blanks in your worksheet. We will get to this at the end but we'll just use that as a template and not directly apply it because it's all about your relationship with me and the pastors and I'll let a guest speaker talk about how you ought to love and respect me. But let me not preach that directly but listen please read it. OK? "We ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you," your preacher, your teachers, "and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

Now in the middle verse 13, now we're back to speaking about among yourselves. We're going to look now horizontally in relationship. It says be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you brothers admonish the idle. Now I not going to be at peace if we're out of step with one another so it may be that we're out of step because one of us is not walking in step with what the Bible says. As he often points out in First Thessalonians, there's a problem there in a faction of the church who were idle, they were lazy, they were busy bodies, they weren't busy about work and they were using eschatology as an excuse for that, the coming back of Christ, and so he's trying to say correct them when they're doing that. So be at peace among yourselves. These phrases go together. And we urge you admonish the idle. And we get another part of this, different group now, they're not the wayward but in bottom verse 14, encourage the faint-hearted, you may have someone who is faint-hearted or weak, help the weak. And certainly when we're dealing with faint-hearted or weak people you might become impatient with their weakness or their fainting, so he says be patient with them all. Let's read that again. Verse 11, therefore encourage one another and build one other up just as you are doing.

We ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among



yourselves and we urge you brothers admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. Now let's start in verse 11.

This simple verse to encourage one another and build one another up with a contextual historical reference to the Thessalonians who are doing it. And it says, just as you're doing just keep doing it. But it starts with a very important word that whenever you hear a preacher preach on a verse that starts with a "therefore" you'd better make sure he checks the context and leads you to check the context. Because I can't start a verse with "therefore" and not get the context because I don't even know what encourage and build up means if I don't know what the reference is and I got to go back to the beginning of this passage to know what he's talking about. Well it starts, if you glance back up or scroll up to verse number 1, you'll see it starts with a reference to the return of Christ. Now follow this and we'll just read these ten verses now real quickly. "Now concerning the times and seasons brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you." Jesus said you won't know the time or the season when I'm coming back. That's a reference, that's the phrase that Jesus used about his second coming and he says, no we don't need to talk about that. "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." In other words, stop with all these prophecy conferences that are going to tell you when Christ is coming back because you're not supposed to even know when he's coming back. He's going to come back like a thief in the night.

Now a thief is a bad analogy because I don't want the thief coming to my house tonight. So he speaks of those for which this return is not going to be good. And he says "while people are saying 'there's peace and security,'" the world, they're sitting around just carrying on like Noah's generation before the flood, giving in marriage, doing their thing, going about their business and "then suddenly destruction will come upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape." But, it's not bad news for us. It's good news for us. You're not in the darkness, you're not like them, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. No, you're not going to be surprised. Wait a minute I thought were going to come like a thief. Verse 2. It is going to come like a thief and the only way for you not be surprised by the coming of the thief is to always expect the thief. And that way you're ready and that's all he's saying about us. We're always anticipating the coming of the Lord, at least we should be. The world, they're not even thinking about it, they don't even believe that it's true. They don't even think, you know, this Christmas thing, whatever, that's nice, it happened years ago. I doubt anything relevant and modern is going to happen in terms of that Christ baby. Well of course were saying he is going to come back in power and authority and glory. He's going to change everything when he arrives and they're not thinking that way.

We are thinking that way and I hope you're thinking about it and in your heart as you're crying out Maranatha every day. Come Lord. We want him to come back.

It won't surprise us because every morning we get up praying that, your kingdom come. We want that to happen. Verse 5. Why do we want this? Because we're children of light.

We're children of the day. We're not of the night or of the darkness. So then let's get practical. Let us not sleep, I know this is steeped in analogy but here is an analogy about the way I'm living my life. I'm not like the people out there just going about my business, not caring about the future, about the coming of the kingdom. I'm awake. Let's not do what others do but let's keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep they sleep at night. They don't think anything important going to happen, they're not thinking about the thief. Those who get drunk just live for themselves, self-indulgence, all the pleasures and conveniences of the world. They get drunk at night. They think it's no big deal. I don't have to go to work right now, just do my thing. But we, no, we belong to the day that means we're always working, we're always sober, let us be sober, let us have it put on, now a



new analogy, the breastplate, this protective gear of faith and love. I trust in God, I trust in his promises, I'm willing to love, that's an active verb. I'm about the business of loving God and loving people. And for a helmet, I'm ready when the thief comes so to speak. In this case he's my savior. I have the hope of salvation on, for God hasn't destined us for wrath.

No, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. I know I'm saved. How come? Verse 10, because he who died for us, this Christ has done so that whether I'm awake or asleep, now he's a little mixing of the metaphor, right, whether I'm living now in the day or whether he didn't come back until I die, which is a metaphor, a euphemism that he's already used for death. I may die in this world but still I'm going to live with him when I know that because Christ has died for me. Therefore, now I'm wrapping all that up, encourage one another and build one another up.

So this isn't just about being a good friend and saying you know go get them and you're a great person. This is about directing someone in the direction of what this whole context is about. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up. What am I trying to do? I'm trying to get them to be the good Christians that God calls us to be, sober thinking, filled with faith, filled with love, active about the work of the ministry, looking forward to the return of Christ, living for that kingdom and not for this world. All of that mentality, encourage them. Help them, build them up.

Number one if you're taking notes, let's think about how we're to do that. Were to strategically cheer them, that's your friends, I hope you've got a circle of Christian friends in your mind, cheer them on to do good. And I mean that in the most biblical sense. To do good, to go about the work of God like Jesus went about doing good, working while it was still day. We need to go about doing good. Living for the kingdom, seeking first his kingdom. We go to our work, we see it as an opportunity to glorify Christ. We go to our homes, we go to our workplace, we go to all these situations and commitments we have in our lives, all to represent Christ as his ambassadors. We live for the glory of God. That is what this passage is all about.

Now the two words that are important for us to note are "encourage" and "build up." Now, Paul loves that word, "build up."

Let's start with the word that we're familiar with that I often talk about. The only reason I ever give any Greek terms from the Greek New Testament is when it reveals something in an illustrative way that is helpful for us to remember. So I always like to give you this Greek word when we hit it. Sometimes it's translated encourage, most often, but sometimes other ways. But it's the word *parakaleō*. Do you remember me giving you that Greek word? *Parakaleō*. The only reason I give you that word is because one of those words, verbs, that's connected with a preposition and Greek prepositions are helpful because they're direction words. They show us in relation to something else. *Para*, the first part of this means alongside of, *para*, "next to." *Kaleō* is the Greek verb "to call." And so I've used this before if this is familiar to you because I've done it just call this verb to mind again. *Parakaleō* is to be called in alongside of, to encourage. I want to encourage you would be I'm going to come alongside of you and shore you up. When I blew my knee out on the church softball team, that was a fun memory, I'll tell the story another time. Dislocated my knee. I went to the hospital had the X-rays, did all that. And then of course they put me in a knee brace. The brace as I often say in illustrating this is that material and I had some, you know, steel things on the side. All of that was called alongside of my knee now that was all wobbly and swollen and weak and all those, you know, ligaments and tendons were all messed up and so that was brought in there to shore up my knee. Encouragement. Now encouragement, you may think about teddy bears and flowers, I don't know what you think of it. Think of it much more mechanically because the word is





very illustrative to give us that sense of I'm called in alongside if my friend is wobbling a little bit, I'm coming alongside to help them. I want them to be sturdy and firm and have the kind of Christian life that looks like the first ten verses of this passage, ready for the coming of Christ, living for the next world. A godly, good, righteous, sanctified Christian moving in the right direction. I want to help my friend be that.

And if you have eight or nine or six or seven or 10 or 12 friends in your mind, that's your role. To come alongside of them in life, to live like a neighbor next door to them so to speak as you walk spiritually through. You're to help them, come alongside and strengthen their lives, and then Paul loves this word, to "build up." No need to give you the Greek word here because build up in Greek is build up in English, it just it's like building something. If I want to build a fireplace with bricks you put the bricks in place you build it up. If you want to build a house with bricks. That's the picture. The stonemasons of the first century. This was their word, to build something stone by stone, put it in place. In they're lives, you can see the first one might be defensive, they're wobbling, I need to keep them in place. This one seems very proactive. They're here I want them to move on and be better and grow. And so it has that forward progress. That sense of moving forward in the Christian life. So I want to keep my friends from moving backwards in the Christian life. I'll be a support to them. I don't want you to fall. I don't want you to stumble. And I want to move them forward, I want to spur them on, as Hebrew says, to love and good deeds. I want them to be more of what God wants them to be. That's a very selfless way to look at my friends but I need to think that way.

You need to strategically think that way and if you really took me seriously in the sermon so far you're thinking of your friends and you're saying, OK, the Bible says I need to encourage them and build them up, keep them from moving backwards and help them progress forwards. How do I do that? I'm so glad you asked that question. Let's look at the context. We just read through some things the apostle Paul did to encourage the Thessalonians. Let's just learn from that. How does he help the Thessalonians, encourage them and strengthen them? Look at verse 5. Let's get our first one here. He says you are all children of light. You think they didn't know that? Well of course they knew that. We're Christians, we're children of the day. We're not of the night, we're not of the darkness. Here's who you are. Here's a good way to encourage your Christian friends to keep them from moving backwards and to help them move forward, here are two words. "Biblical identity." They need to know their "biblical identity." The Bible is constantly reminding Christians of who they are. You are citizens of heaven. You're strangers and aliens on this planet. You're children of the King. All these situations about who I am, of course, I'm a new man. Old things pass away. New things have come. The concept of biblical identity, when it comes to my moving backwards in the Christian life or moving forward, the battle is right here in my brain. And so much of it is how I, in the mirror of my thinking, see myself. Who am I?

And I need to remember who I am. And if I'm surrounded by eight, nine, ten friends of mine who periodically are reminding me through subtle, direct, indirect ways, here's who you are in Christ, that's very helpful. Child of the King. You're a servant of the Lord. You do your work as unto the Lord. There are a million different directions to go with that, but I love that, you're children of the light, you're children the day. Drop down to verse 9. Here's another source of encouragement. You're not destined for wrath but you're destined to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. When he looks to the future, now I know the context is the return of Christ, but he's saying look at where we're going, here's two more words "promised future." If the first two words are our "biblical identity," here's the next two, "promised future." Do you know how much the Bible is constantly getting us to look forward? I try to do that all the time from this platform. I mean because so many passages take us there but you do understand that we need to be thinking more about there and less



focused on, stressed out about, anxious over, worried about the here and now. I know things are going to be great here because Jesus promised in this world you will have "fun"?

You remember that verse? No, that's not how it goes. In this world you will have "great times"? Everything will go... In this world you have "tribulation." But take heart, it won't be as bad as you think. No, he doesn't get them to think about... No, take heart, I have overcome the world. This place is going away. As Peter put it, under the inspiration of God's spirit, we're looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. We're going, we're moving forward, we're praying every day. I hope we are. Your kingdom come. We're praying Maranatha. We're looking forward. He encourages them with their biblical identity, he encourages them with a promised future. I camped on this a little bit in verse 10. Let's get another reminder. You want to know how to encourage your Christian friends? Biblical identity, Promise future. How about this one? Who died for us, speaking of Christ, so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

We might live with him.

We watched one of our CBC'ers die this week. The comfort that I derive by knowing that all of Christianity in this life focused on the reality of the next life through the portal of this thing called death. The sting of that death removed. I mean to know that the finished work of Christ makes that possible. "Finished work of Christ," there are four words for you. And I want to encourage my friends with biblical identity, promised future and then the finished work of Christ. When it comes down to it, most religions don't understand this.

Even those who claim to be, you know, good theologically Christian biblically based they start telling you stuff like, "well, when you die you won't go to heaven. I mean you got to spend some time kind of burning off your sins in this other place. Let's just call that purgatory, gonna purge you for a while." I mean what a damnable heresy is that? See, if you were the worst criminal in the world and you transferred your trust and put it in the death of Christ, he could look at you and say, "today you'll be with me in paradise." Why? Because Jesus paid it all.

And the reality of us saying, listen, I don't care how bad it gets, even if you die, that's his euphemism, asleep, you will live with him. You're not going to be suffering in the flames of purgatory. You're not going to hell. The reality of it all is it's based on what Christ has done. He finished it on the cross.

Let's go further in this passage. Good down to verse 24.

Speaking of all these things and all that staccato list of commands that he gives and they're great. After all of that, in verse 23, about sanctifying, keeping you blameless till the day of the coming of the Lord. Look at verse 24. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. How about this one. "God's faithfulness." So if you go to the bookstore you look for an encouraging card, a lot of them are focused on the faithfulness of God. Look for a little plaque, a little verse, a lot of them focused on the faithfulness of God. That strategic. Nothing encourages Christians more than to remember it's really about his faithfulness, his reliability, his trust with us. We transfer our trust to him, not to ourselves, we transfer it to him because he is trustworthy. He does what he says.

He always keeps his promises. He's faithful. He's going to do it. If he promised it he's going to do it. His batting average, in terms of keeping his promises, is 1.000. He does it every time. Remind people of God's faithfulness. How about this one? You want encourage your friends? Look at verse 17.



He tells these people what to do. Pray without ceasing. About what? Dropped down to verse 25. Here's one thing he wants them to pray for. "Brothers, pray for us."

You want to encourage your friends? Put this word down. Prayer. Prayer. Encourage your friends with prayer.

Pray for them, pray with them, remind them of the privilege they have to pray, remind them of the power of prayer. I think of that great passage. I love this passage in Deuteronomy Chapter 4 verse 7, when they sit back and they recognize how privileged they are to have God as a responsive God dealing with them when they pray. He says what other nation, what other nation, has there their gods near them the way our God, the real God, is near us whenever we call on him.

I mean the power and privilege of prayer.

It's a good one, I didn't put on the back of the worksheet. But I mean the Power Through Prayer by E.M. Bounds or any anything E.M. Bounds writes on prayer. That old timer who used to remind us we just don't pray like we should. You want to encourage your friends. Pray. Call them to prayer, remind them of the privilege of prayer, engage in praying with them.

It will certainly build them up and it will certainly encourage them. How about one more, verse 20?

Do not despise prophecies but test everything, verse 21, and hold fast to what is good. Now here's the problem in the first century they were preaching in the New Testament without a New Testament.

Think that one through.

They were preaching in the New Testament, this is one of the earliest books of the New Testament, First Thessalonians, in terms of time. So the New Testament canon, the New Testament library was not yet written through the apostles and prophets. So they would get up and they would not be able to exegete a passage and have someone exposit it from a platform and tell you what the Lord says about New Testament truths. They had to rely on the Old Testament and then they had to have prophets who were moved by God to speak New Testament truths that were accurate and true. That's the prophetic gift they would get up without a Bible. They might quote Old Testament texts but they would have to now talk about the coming of Christ without any New Testament text. So these were prophets. We don't have prophets anymore. The church was founded on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And now it's built upon by the evangelist and the pastors and teachers. Why? Because now we have the written codified word. And while they had to rely on prophecies and then stand up and say "is that right, is that good, is that true?" Like Bereans, they had to say, what Paul said, does that match with what the Old Testament promises say? They had to check that out. Now we have a Bible, we can check it. We have it.

And by the way when Paul wrote the Romans he said that nothing's better than the encouragement of the Scriptures. I mean the scripture is a key to the encouragement and the building up of your friends. That's why a lot of stuff you will find in our bookstore is about... If you want to buy your friend... Get him a passage of Scripture. Text your friend, put something up on their page or tell them here's what God's truth is all about. Nothing will encourage a real Christian more than being reminded of the truth. Why? Because the battle's in our brain. Either I'm going to move back or I'm going to move forward. With the battle in my brain I need to know who I am, I need to know where





I'm going, I need to know what Christ did, I need to know that God is faithful, I need to know that I have the privilege of prayer and I love to pray with my friends and I have the truth of Scripture that should be filling my mind and cultivating my spirit. I mean there are six things right there. So if you're sitting here really tracking with what God I think would want you to get from this sermon that, yes, I need to strategically cheer my friends on to do good. There are six examples from the context of how you can do it.

Now, bottom of verse 13. First Thessalonians 5:13. If I were going to be on the committee to put verse numbers next to these verses which was eight, nine hundred years ago, I would have put verse 14 starting with the beginning of the sentence "be at peace among yourselves and we urge you brothers admonish the idle," but I wasn't there. I'm not THAT old. No one asked me. And they're not changing them now so I can't do anything about it. But I hope you can see logically as you read verse 12 in the first half of verse 13, you've got three basic statements there in terms of respect those who labor among you, they're over you in the Lord, they admonish you and esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Well, that's them, that's the leaders, that's the teachers, that's the pastors. Now be at peace among yourselves and we urge you all, brothers, to admonish the idle. So we've changed subjects in the middle verse 13. So let's start there, I told you we'd get back to 12 and 13a but let's start with 13b and 14a by saying what's going on here? Be at peace. Now I already said this. If you are walking with Christ and your friend is walking with Christ everything's hunky dory.

We're called in Psalm 119 to run in the way of God's commands. And then as it says there in Psalm 119, I'm a companion of all those who fear God, of all those who keep your precepts. So, if I'm walking and following Christ, which again I can't see him, but I got his word, I got his truth, I trust in what he has done and what he says and I going to do what he says, as soon as I'm walking on that path, then you want to come alongside of me and walk with me, all is fine.

But we're going to have problems in our relationship, if I'm walking with Christ then you take a left turn, then we got some problems. We're not going to be at peace anymore. I want to maintain that peace among ourselves because we're both walking down the path. Now, sometimes if someone's not walking down the right path you've got to admonish them, get them back.

Number two on your outline, you need to biblically correct them, that is your friends, when they stray. Got those six, seven, eight, nine, ten people in your mind? Those faces rotating through your imagination right now? Those people, when you start to see them go down the wrong path, you need to reach out and correct them. When I was in Dubai with Pastor Lucas we were visiting our missionary, Eric Zeller, and I was teaching in the seminary as you know and dealing with some training and preaching in the church out there.

We took a couple of breaks one night to visit the new city, which is, you know, like any modern city in America.

It's not America, obviously, but if you know about Dubai. Go look it up. It's crazy. Money everywhere.

But then there's the old city. And one day after I was teaching, Eric took us down to the old city and took us through the tour. And that's a lot like a lot of the Middle Eastern cities that I've been to, that Lukas has been to and so we're familiar with, but we weren't familiar with the area that Eric was taking us to. He was going to take us downtown, take us to lunch, show us some sights. And so it's a lot like those ancient, you know, near eastern cities I'm sure like modern Middle Eastern cities



where you're going through these narrow ways and there are shops and there are people wanting to sell you stuff and you know how that is. The problem was I didn't know where in the world I was. Interesting sights, interesting smells and we're following Eric because for Eric this is his home town, this is where he lives, he knows this place like the back of his hand. But we're dependent on him. We're kind of walking after our shepherd there down the street. Now, if all of a sudden Lucas decides to just wander off the path and go down some little alleyway.

He and I aren't going to get along very well because I'm going to follow Eric.

Matter of fact I'm going to hope to bring Lucas back. If I love him I will do that and say, hey Lucas, that isn't going to end well for you, come back this way. Come with us. Let's follow Eric. He knows where he's going. He's eventually going to get us to the airport and get us back to Orange County.

So please come with us. And I want him to follow along. We're going to be at odds if we're not both walking with the shepherd. See, that's the basic idea here.

Be at peace among yourselves. Why wouldn't you have peace?

If someone is being disobedient to the word you need to get them back. If they're straying, then get them back. Now be careful with this. Some of you love this kind of command don't you? Oh great. You were the hall monitor in junior high. You love this command. You want to correct them. There are some of you who hate this command and you've never done it and you don't want to do it because you really idolize people's view of you and you don't want anybody... You don't want a tarnished reputation. So how do I deal with both of you in one sermon, this is hard. But let me start with this. Those of you who love this, you're inclined to this, you feel like, you know, like you're the spiritual narc, so to speak.

You watch what's going on. Is that a bad word? I don't know. And so that's your role. I just need to warn you. I'll leave you three warnings real quick. There's a lot of correction that goes on that damages relationships, ends friendships in our church because there is, let's put it this way, two words, "unnecessary correction." "Unnecessary correction." Why would anybody correct someone if it wasn't necessary? Because they confuse God's command with their preferences. And that's a problem. Jot this reference down if you want a good example of this, Matthew Chapter 15 first 10 verses. Matthew 15 verses one through ten. Here you have Jesus being confronted. They were trying to correct Jesus and the apostles for not washing their hands before they ate. Now this wasn't because they're worried about germs. This was the Pharisees saying you don't do what you're supposed to do and what they thought you were supposed to do is what the tradition of the Pharisees was. And Jesus responds by saying, you guys are crazy. You're trying to correct us about something that is not a biblical command. And he starts quoting Isaiah 29 and he ends the quote with this line. They are teaching, now this is a slam, as doctrines, right, biblical truth, the commandments of men. In other words they're not God's commands they're your commands.

And so here was a confrontation of the Pharisees with Jesus and the apostle. It was completely unnecessary and caused a friction between them, it wasn't like it wasn't already there, it was there. But why? Well because you didn't do it our way. You didn't do it the way we thought you should do it. It's not our traditional way.

Now as we were walking along following Eric down the twisty downtown old city streets of Dubai near the fish market down there, it may be that Lucas doesn't follow Eric the way that I follow Eric but as long as we're on the path if he wants to spin around or do cartwheels, you should see Lucas



do a cartwheel. OK. Eric didn't say there was anything against cartwheels here. He didn't say we're going to offend anybody with cartwheels. You can do that. We're still following the shepherd. But you know what I think it's dumb to do cartwheels, Lucas. I don't think you should do that. I didn't do that. I never do that. I can't do it. I wouldn't do it. I don't think you should do it. Hey Lucas, stop doing cartwheels as you follow Eric. If I start making those kinds of corrections, now that's a stupid illustration, but you know what I'm talking about. There are people who confront people of all kinds of things that have nothing to do with what God commanded but how you go about following Christ.

Please don't fall into unnecessary corrections. Here's another one. Let's call this "defenseless corrections." "Defenseless corrections." Defenseless. You don't have a defense. What do I mean by that? Galatians Chapter 6 verse 1. Let me just quote this for you. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in a trespass," that's a sin, "you who are spiritual" you're following the shepherd, "restore him." You be like an under-shepherd. Now you go out, you take the straying person and you restore him in a spirit of gentleness. You don't need to pull out the megaphone, you don't need to smack him on the head, just gently, diplomatically bring them back. Now here's the warning.

Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. Now think about this. How does that work?

I want to correct you but I haven't really built a good biblical defense as to why you need to be corrected. I just have some kind of conscience problem and I go and I didn't really research this, I didn't look at what Scripture says. I don't really know. So I go and I say, well I really don't think you should be doing that.

And I go and I try to correct that Christian and they start rationalizing and justifying their behavior and then they start even negotiating with you as to why you think that's wrong and they start hitting you with a barrage of arguments as to why that's not a really bad thing after all. And you get convinced and then you get tempted and you say I guess we can go down this pathway. I know I thought it was the wrong way but I guess it's the right way. And then you're tempted to do the same thing. You didn't go in with a strong biblical defense in your own heart. Before you start correcting people you ought to know why it's something you shouldn't do, or they're not doing something, a sin of omission, why the Bible says you ought to do that.

You ought to make sure no matter what the argument coming back, they may be the best debater in the county but you're not going to fall to them, because a lot of people when they're caught in a trespass they get real good at trying to convince you why it's not sin after all. If you're not careful you can be negotiated into compromise in your own life. So no defenseless corrections. How about this one? It may be the one you thought of first. Matthew Chapter 7 verses 3 through 5. How about this one, "hypocritical correction."

This is more of an issue that God has with your heart. And I know everybody knows the beginning of this chapter when it says don't judge, lest you be judged. And I know our non-Christian friends like to quote us on that, because they don't want anybody tell anybody what to do so they say don't judge lest you be judged. Well here's the context. Don't judge lest you be judged. Why would that be bad? If I say to you that you shouldn't go out there and do that bad thing, that sinful thing, you've walked off the path, why would it be bad if that person said well you shouldn't do that either. Well you're right, I shouldn't do that. I'm not doing it. Well what if I am doing it? If I am engaging in the same thing that you're doing and I try to get you back on the path then I am a hypocrite and he says this: take the log out of your eye, then you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's. In other words, this is a passage about judging and we are to judge with righteous judgment as Jesus



said and righteous judgment is to make sure that before I tell you that you shouldn't be doing that, that I myself am not currently doing the same thing. It may look a little different, it may have a different expression in my life but really I'm compromising the same way you're compromising, but I'm here trying to correct you. That's hypocritical correction and the Bible's all about you correcting a straying friend but first make sure you are not currently doing the same thing. And by the way Satan would love when we talked to you who don't like to do any of this correction.

You don't like to go after straying Christian friend. Let me say this. You will use the excuse, well I did that at one time or I used to do that. It doesn't matter what you used to do. Doesn't matter that you did that at one time.

Just make sure you're not currently doing the same thing. You've dealt with this before God, you've called sin sin you've confessed it and you've moved on from that. I don't care if you did that for years. You could have been divorced five times and you got your friend who is going to split on his wife for no biblical reason.

You have every right to step up and say you should not do that.

And if he wants to throw it back in your life, "well look at you." Doesn't matter. Right now I am committed, I'm not divorcing a sixth time, this is a bad illustration, but you get what I'm saying here. Right? Doesn't seem like there isn't a lot of moral authority there but there is. If you're quoting scripture and saying listen, I've done this so wrong so many times. But right now I'm doing it right. I've confessed my sin.

I see the problem. I want you to get right with the Lord. And by the way, if you're so concerned and idolize your reputation in the mind of all your friends that you wouldn't dare do this you need to know you love yourself more than you love your friends. And I don't think that sounds good does it? Jesus said you ought to love your neighbor as you love yourself and you wouldn't stick your hand into the mouse trap, right? If your friend's doing that you better stop them. It's not good when they take that left turn down that narrow alley way. They're not following Christ. Love your friends enough to correct them. But be careful when you do. No unnecessary, defenseless or hypocritical correction. Biblically correct them when they stray. We'll get more on that next week in a little broader sense, a little different theme. But we'll look at that from James Chapter 5. Let's move on, verse 14, second half. Encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. Encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. Now you can underline the word encouragement, that's the same word, parakaleō, the same word we have going on, you are to encourage them.

And you are to help the weak, move them forward. You know, I just look at my Greek New Testament right here. It is not the same word. It is a cognate, same preposition. Correct that. Same English word obviously. Different flavor of that but the idea of coming along side of to lift them up as opposed to just called in. Now, I supposed to help them. If their faint-hearted I'm going to bring them strength. I'm going to bring them that sense of coming along side and I'm going to help them if they're weak, if they're falling, they need a hand up, I'm going to pick them up. And because it is easy for me if I'm strong in my Christian life to see someone who seems so weak, I can be impatient with him, I'm going to need to be patient with him so I put it this way, number 3. Patiently cheer them up when they're down. I'll just use the word down to encompass both the faint-hearted and the weak. And there are lots of reasons people can be down. And you need to identify who those people are. Patiently cheer them up when they're down. Patiently cheer them up when they're down. Now, if I asked you in your circle of friends who's down I hope you would know the answer. But if you're



like a lot of Christians it might as well be me asking the question who's down in this auditorium right now?

I mean hundreds of people in the auditorium and if I said who is down in the body of Christ at this church you wouldn't know.

You could only guess. But, see, I hope you have a circle of friends who you actually know how they're currently doing. Are they weak? Are they wobbly? Are they faint-hearted? Are they in some way lacking strength? Well you should know that because you know them more than just the surface circumstances of their lives.

A lot of people don't know the state of the people in their circle of friends because no one knows them. You'd be surprised how many people I ask who really know you? I ask that question often and have people answer me. No one. Or just this family member of mine or just this one person. I hope you have six, seven, eight, nine, 10 people in your life who really know how you are doing right now. They need to know you and that's one of the keys to you learning to connect with how they are doing. Paul by the way, who I'm sure was much more spiritual mature, in fact I'm absolutely confident of it, than the people he wrote in Corinth, had no problem in Second Corinthians Chapter 1 saying "I need you to know what's going on in my life and right now I'm hurting, I'm down." He put it this way in Second Corinthians Chapter 1 in verse number 8 he says I do not want you to be unaware brothers. He puts himself here with the Corinthians even though you know he's an apostle and they're a church that has a lot of problems. But he said we want to know what's going on. The affliction that we experienced when we were in Asia. How we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength. Talk about weak, we were past that and, look at this, emotional despair. We despaired even of life itself.

Indeed, we felt like we had received a sentence of death. We thought our lives were over. We were just done. Now why would the Apostle be so open with them?

Well certainly that was what he saw in terms of his connection with people. He wanted them to know him and certainly he wanted to know them, a lot of that going on in Second Corinthians.

He is interested in the real state of people's hearts who he loves and cares for and I hope that's what's going on for you. Do you know those people in your circle of friends? How are they doing? And he didn't just say it to say it. Two verses later in verse 11 of Second Corinthians Chapter 1 he says you must help us by your prayers. Help us. We need for you to pray for us. That's just one of the six things that I shared in First Thessalonians Chapter 5 of ways that you can encourage someone who is down. Patiently cheer them up when they're down. You're in first Thessalonians Chapter 5? Scroll up to chapter two. Turn to First Thessalonians Chapter 2. Do you want to know the number one way for you to encourage someone who's down, faint-hearted or weak? Here it is. First Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 17. "But when we were torn away from you..." Does that give you a sense that he didn't want to leave them?

Yeah. He didn't want to leave them, but apparently there was circumstances that made him have to leave. "Brothers," there it is again this term of equalizing their relationship, "for a short time in person but not in heart." Now, we had to leave you, it wasn't for long but our bodies were gone but our hearts, our minds, we were thinking of you, we cared about you. "We endeavored the more eagerly with great desire." Now there's purpose. There's resolve, "to see you," here's a great phrase to bracket, "face to face."





What did Paul want? To just write another letter to the Thessalonians? He wants to be there. You want to encourage someone, here's what I like to say, encourage them with your presence. Get in their presence. Get to the place where you are now, as this text says, "face to face." And with that in view in the margin or on your notes you might want to jot down Second Corinthians Chapter 7, because after he shares in Chapter 1 that he despaired even of life, here's what he said looking back on his affliction. He said when we came to Macedonia our bodies had no rest. We were afflicted on every turn and now here's verse 6, second Corinthians 7:6. He says "the God who comforts the downcast..." You're down.

God wants to lift you up. "Comforted us with the coming of Titus."

A Christian showed up, his presence, face to face, we were encouraged. You need to get face-to-face with those who you have in that circle who are weak or faint-hearted. You want to apply this passage this week, just look at those six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12 friends who you have and say, who is the most down in that group. I want to spend some time with them this week. I'd like to get to face-to-face with them. Let's just do a meal together. Let's do an early morning breakfast before we go to work. Let's do a lunch together. Let's have them over tonight for dinner or for game night or something.

Let's get face-to-face with them because the presence of God's people together, face to face, has that strengthening, encouraging effect. By the way, you still have Chapter 2 open? Verse 18. Because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again but you need to know it's a spiritual battle. God wants to comfort the downcast, guess what Satan wants? He doesn't want your face-to-face encouragement. Satan hindered us.

Now think about that. If you say, well I know my friend is hurting but if I... I don't know. I don't know if I have time. I've got this project, I've got this work, I've got this issue, I just want to relax tonight, we got dinner we were going to make, I don't want to go over there. I know what your concern is but just know this, there's an enemy who wants to put something in front of your mind, your agenda, your priorities that keeps you from being face-to-face with those who are faint-hearted and weak. Because the best way you can encourage them, the best way you can help them, the Bible says, is to get face-to-face with them, one on one.

How about this? Paul is writing them a lot of words, is he not, in this book? He's encouraging the people in Thessalonica and they were doing pretty well but in second Corinthians 7 I quoted for you verse six.

The God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus. Listen to a verse 7. Listen carefully to this. And not only by his coming were we comforted but we were also comforted with the comfort that came by you when he told us of your longing and your mourning and your zeal for me. So when he brought words to me from you, Corinthians, I rejoiced even more. So I was cheered up when I was downhearted and despairing and I was cheered up because Titus showed up and God used the presence of my friend to cheer me up. And then the news that came through him, because there was no texting back then.

We got the message from him that you guys were caring for us. You were hurting with us when we were hurting, you mourned over us, you were longing, you had zeal for us, you had a concern for our well-being. I was rejoicing even more.

So not only do you encourage by your presence, you ought to encourage with your words. This is



why I don't care right now at all if you spent the rest of the sermon on your phone texting people who you know, in your circle of friends, texting them something encouraging because if you can't be there right now you can encourage them with words. If they can't get together this week then you can encourage them with your words. Words in the Bible are elevated to a place of either having great destructive power or having great restorative power to take your friend and pull him up when he's faint-hearted. To take your friend and pull her up when she's weak. Words do that. Jot down these two proverbs, they're great. Proverbs 16:24. Gracious words are like a honeycomb. Now you haven't sucked on a honeycomb this week unless you're from somewhere else.

But I bet you ate a piece of candy this week. Did you eat a piece of candy this week?

Second service is when I start thinking about food. When that goes in your mouth, honeycomb. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul, not to the mouth, and health to the body.

Harvard researchers say what about people who have good close friends with inner dependent, inner-connected, mutual relational support. Why? Because they're probably getting a lot more of this Biblical avenue of strength and encouragement. They're getting stuff that is sweetness to the soul and health to the body. And statistically they report overall better health and they live longer.

Interesting. The Bible again is proved to be true by the atheists at Harvard. Proverbs Chapter 12 verse 25. "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down."

I picked that verse because again you've got a friend who is down, they're anxious, they're worried, they're faint-hearted, they're weak. Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word, just the right sentence, and it lifts him up.

Makes him glad. Encourage with your presence and encourage with your words. Christians of all people ought to be using their words, ought to be using e-mail, ought to be using handwritten letters, ought to be using texts to encourage their friends. If you want to know what the content should be, then go back to the first point and the six sub-points I gave you. Just work with that. Biblical identity, faithful God, future promise, privilege of prayer, the truth of Scripture. When they're down those things are critically helpful if you can't be there face-to-face and if you are there face-to-face bring some of those things in your physical mouth and speak the truth to them and encourage them. Lastly, as I said I'll use verse 12 and 13. Here's just a quick template. A template, although I don't want you to think about esteeming your pastor highly in love because of his work. I mean, I wouldn't mind that but not right now, I don't want you to think about that. I want you to think about how this provides us, in your relationship with each other, how you can take this paradigm at least and say OK, well this works in my relationships too. "We ask you brothers to respect those who...", here's the key word, "labor among you who are over you in the Lord...", that's their position, "and they admonish you," that's what they're doing, faithfully discharging their duties, "to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

Number four on your outline, let's put it this way, you need to thoughtfully commend their strengths. Thoughtfully commend their strengths. Thoughtfully because both these words, by the way, if you're a linguist, if you like word studies, both the word "respect" in verse 12 and "esteem" in verse 13, both have as their root in the Greek language the concept of thinking. Think about it. Hold them in a certain place in your minds. And that gives its expression through the action of love and how you love them and how you commend them and how you give them that kind of encouragement. That's helpful. Your friends are doing some things right, even if they are not down,



you just want to encourage them, encourage them by commending their strengths.

Now the reason I had you write down the word commend is I want you to look back at this work sheet when you find it, you know, tucked away in your Bible or you lay it on, you know, the nightstand or whatever and you're down the road, you look at it and you see the word commend. And I don't want you to think that I'm a heretic, but if I wasn't thinking about the future I would have given you this word instead because you know what the word commend means, right? To commend someone means to praise them. And if I didn't fear that you'd think I was a heretic by putting that down on the page, I used the word commend but really all that means is praise. And I know you're too spiritual to praise anybody but if you're too spiritual to praise someone you're sinning against God.

What? And I know you know this. I mean certainly if you've ever been to a women's conference, women, or been married, surely this has been quoted to you, Proverbs 31. And it says, "charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be...", here's a word usually used in connection with my worship of God. She is to be "praised." It doesn't mean I worship her, bow down, she's the goddess.

It doesn't mean that at all but it does mean praise. Commend them.

A woman who fears Lord is to be praised. If she does something that is righteous and good, if she has something of a virtue of godliness, I ought to praise her. She is to be praised. Therefore if I don't praise her than I am sinning by omission. "Hmmm, I don't like this one, Pastor Mike, praising people." I'm just here to preach, I didn't write it but I'm just telling you the Bible makes it very clear. You are to praise them, to have respect and high esteem and to love them because of their work. The outflow of that, to encourage someone in that regard, is to praise them. Without, by the way, all the spiritual qualifications and the asterisk next to it. And you know what I'm talking about.

We don't really want to praise them without a footnote because the footnote will help us really keep our image intact. What? I don't think we're good at praising other people because we are prideful. And what it'll do to me if I put you on a pedestal is to make me feel like I don't deserve that place. It'll actually make me think you're better than me and I don't like thinking you're better than me. So I don't really want to praise you without the asterisk. The asterisk will be OK because if I can say, hey, you did a really good job, you're really great at this, that or the other. And I start to praise you for that as long as I can put this little phrase, something like, but I know it's the Lord and the Lord uses you and it's just the Lord working through you.

Yeah, just the Lord. I don't want to praise him because, you know, I don't want them to become prideful.

You know it's not your job to keep your friends humble, you know that? Your job is to be obedient to the scripture and the scripture says you ought to start by having a respect and a high esteem for people when they do things that are worthy of that. And you ought to praise them for that without all your silly little caveats as to why you shouldn't praise them, because it is your pride that keeps you from really sincerely praising them. Because your pride wants to keep you on even footing or it would be better if I could look down at them. It would be like you being a singer and having a singer on a stage singing a great song and you going up and saying something good because really we're all trying to live the Christian life out. And if your friend is a great hardworking, sacrificial mother who goes the extra mile for her kids and you are her friend and you say, hey, you're doing a great job as a mother I just really...



Well, you're a mom too and what does that say about you? So I'll just say because I know the Lord is strengthening you and using you. No, I understand the Lord strengthens you... You can't get out of bed unless the Lord strengthens you. But the Bible doesn't tell you to try to keep them humble or remember the connection they have to the dependency on God. Praise them for the work they do.

Hold them in very high esteem. Because of the love that you have. Because you look at their work and you recognize, I need to respect that person for that.

Three things here the first one let's just build this one a little bit. Respect those who labor among you. Now I know we're talking about teachers and leaders who work hard but let's just think about your friends that work hard at whatever they're called to do. If they work hard. This is not the normal word for work. Down there in the middle of verse 13 when it says because of their work, that's the normal word for work. This word, that's translated labor, it's a synonym but it's a much more serious word. It's laboring and toiling and working really hard to the point of sweating. When you see your friend working hard at something that's legitimate and good, that they are called to do, whatever, with their working in the marketplace, they're caring for their family, praise them for their hard work. Secondly, bottom of verse 12, who are over you in the Lord. Now again this is the paradigm. You have your preachers, I hope, who you are seeing work hard and you are to respect them because of the role that they fill, well you need to give respect and praise for people who you know, your friends, for the roles that they fill, the kind of jobs that they do. What kind of benefit do they give society, what kind of role do they play in their families? Are they doing that well? Is there any kind of fear of God and virtue and godliness in how they...? Praise them for that.

For their labor, for the roles they serve. Or how about this? When it says they're over you in the Lord and admonish you. That's the hard part of preaching, admonishing. There are a lot of things that your friends do that are hard to do that they're tempted to compromise.

Tempted to be slack, to be derelict in their job and they didn't. They didn't care about what people thought, they didn't care what people said, they cared about pleasing the Lord. And when you see your friend carrying out whatever role they have in the world and their families and your relationship they do something and they do it well, even the hard stuff, then you ought to praise them for their faithfulness.

Praise them for their hard work. Praise them for the important roles that they fill. Praise them for their faithfulness. Thoughtfully commend the strengths of your friends. That's what God expects of us as we cheer them on and cheer them up, correct them when they need it and commend them for what they do that's right. I know you have work associates and you can rotate those faces in your mind, your imagination and I know you have your family members you live with and you can rotate those faces in your mind.

But that third circle is one that is not by necessity because you have to earn a paycheck and not because you're genetically connected with them and you're under the same household. But these are a group of people who you choose. And you choose them if you're a Christian within the confines of the church because they share with you a commitment to the Lordship of Christ because, after all, what fellowship does light have with darkness. So we have our commitment to our friends who love the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our group and we have them and we build them and we choose them. And that's a group that we ought to be committed to. It's not only a privilege to enjoy the benefits of that, it is a responsibility to discharge the duties of it.



So I need to be a faithful friend who encourages them. That's what this sermon is all about. I like the word neighbor, as I said, because I'm living my life alongside of some people who are not connected through the marketplace or my home domestically. There are people who I decide to walk alongside of in my life who are my friends and they are my neighbors. And I'm to love my neighbors, as I love myself and, guess what, I'd like to be cheered on. I like to be commended. I need to be corrected. I need to be cheered up when I'm down. I want those things and I should give my friends, I should love my neighbor as I love myself.

Speak of neighbor I ran across a video clip of Mr. Rogers this week. Mr. Rogers. Won't you be my neighbor? Remember Mr. Rogers? Well maybe you don't know this but that's not his real name, Mr. Rogers, it's not. I know you think his name is Fred Rogers. You can look it up on Wikipedia, Fred Rogers. Mr. Rogers. Mr. Rogers is not his real name. His real name is Reverend Rogers. He was an ordained pastor. Graduated from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He took his ordination seriously. He preached.

He cared about people from a biblical perspective. I can't vouch for all his theology. I don't know all his theology. But I know this, when it came to his life he sure was distinctive of other people who you might meet on television.

I know this because there are glimpses of him. In this one particular clip, it's very short, that I got to see this week of him in 1997 receiving a lifetime Emmy Award.

You know the Emmys for all the TV stars, in 1997. Mr. Rogers. Won't you be my neighbor? He got up there and he gave a speech that's very unlike what a lot of his peers and colleagues give when they get awards. Oh, they thank people, I know how that goes. But it rings hollow often, doesn't it? These people who are self-aggrandizing. They're very much up on the platform doing this. Sometimes the guy in the tux has to come and get them off the stage. Reverend Rogers gets up, aka Mr. Rogers, and he receives his reward and he gives a very short speech. Look it up on YouTube this afternoon. And instead of just talking about himself he immediately starts to talk to the crowd. And his typical Mr. Rogers voice. He starts talking about, knowing the expectation that he's going to get to thank his friends who made this possible, and he starts talking to them about their friends. About people who have cared for you, about the people who invested in you, about the people who have encouraged you. And he started preaching to these people basically in the soft tones that Mr. Roger has. And as he did, he said I want you to think right now about those people. These interdependent, mutual relations of caring and help and encouragement who have helped you be where you're at. And he said I want you to really think about them. Look this clip up. He says I'm going to give you 10 seconds. I just want those..., as I put it this morning, I want those faces that come through your mind.

The people that you really are grateful who encouraged and helped you. And then they sat there in silence and the camera pans to the crowd.

People start to tear up. He had them there and then he said this. Convicting statement. How pleased they must be to know the difference that you feel they've made in your life. How pleased they must be to know the difference that you feel they've made in your life.

And of course the tears start to flow from people. Because, of course, even as I heard that I thought, well, I wonder how much my friends know the difference I feel they've made in my life? Then, of course, I can flip that on its head and think about the sermon. What kind of difference am I making in my friends lives?





I wonder what kind of encouragement, help, care I'll bring to my friends this week.

I hope you recognize the importance of this very simple concept of friendship, that sociologists can't define, men on the street have a hard time defining. It's essential, it's necessary, it's important and you and I need to step it up. If you're too busy to cultivate good Biblical friendships then you're too busy. You got to cut something out and you need to invest here. Don't be like the rest of the world, increasingly going to the dark corners of their individual, autonomous lives being less social than they've ever been before. Be a good shepherd to your friends. Provide godly encouragement to them this week. Let's pray.

God help us take this part of the Christian life seriously. We know something like friendships, it seems extra curricular, it seems optional but let us recognize from a passage like this that these are commands to encourage and build up those around us just like we would do with our leaders. To see the roles that they fill, to encourage them and praise them for that. When they're straying, to help bring them back, when they're down, to help encourage them and lift them up, to cheer them on this week. Let this be a serious exhortation for us as we become more of the kinds of people you want us to be. God drive this truth and the application of this text deep into our hearts. Let us not ignore it, let's not be hearers of the word and not doers of the word. Let it manifest itself as we live out our lives and schedule our priorities this week. In Jesus name. Amen.