



## **Gospel Impact – Part 6**

### **When It Sorts Out Relationships**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

You might remember a sermon not too long ago when I started the message with a question which I hope had provoked some thought. It was a simple question about Christ. I asked you, "Why do you think Jesus had a Judas?" Why do you think Jesus had a Judas? Do you remember that sermon? Nobody. That's affirming. Thank you. No, that really affirms my role in your life. So awesome. (laughing) I'll attribute that to other things. It was a while ago, but we tried to answer that question and look at it in scriptural terms.

Well, let me start with another question that you'll forget. (audience laughs) Why do you think Jesus ... think this through now, why do you think Jesus had a Peter, James and John. Why did he have a Peter, James, John and all the rest and Philip and Andrew and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and ... see if I can get the rest of them now. I started this ... James and Simon the Zealot and Thaddeus. There you go. Thaddeus is always at the bottom of my list. And of course, Judas. This sermon is off to a great start, I just want to let you know. I'm feeling really good about this one. Sarcasm.

Why did he have that team? Right? Jesus is kind of a stud. He went out there and did stuff by himself. Right? He stared down Satan in the wilderness for 40 days. He defeated all that. I mean, could he not have prayed and studied and evangelized and preached and done all the stuff that he did? Right? He certainly died by himself. Couldn't he have done this without those guys? Paul comes along and he says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And he follows this same pattern. It might be more excusable, but man, this guy is super-gifted, he's smart, he's godly, he's indomitable in his approach to what he's doing in the book of Acts. And yet we find him as well surrounding himself with people, other Christians. And tight, I mean, tight relationships.

That pattern I think it's more than a pattern. I think we see it in Scripture throughout the Scriptures in terms of the necessity of that. As a matter of fact, when we had kind of the world fragmenting into all kinds of pieces, I don't know if you remember it. You don't remember my sermon, so I don't know if you remember. But I sat down and I did, I think, 100 and like 43 consecutive videos and dealt with the "one anothers" of Scripture. Just pretend. Just lie to me. You remember that, right? Yeah. "Those were awesome Pastor Mike."

Those videos, I mean, I went past the ones that just said, you know, the "one anothers" like pray for one another, encourage one another. Not just the ones that were worded that way, but all the things in Scripture for over 140 days we were looking at all the things the Bible says that we're supposed to do in terms of networking and relationships and connections. And the conclusion has to be this: that the normative and fruitful Christian life is one that's lived out in teams. Right? It's a team endeavor. And you got to have a team around you.

Paul in circumstances like the one we just got finished reading about in Acts 17 found himself by himself. Right? That's what the text says. He got to Athens by himself. He's in a situation



where he needs to get out of Berea. The guys at Thessalonica, you remember the whole story. It was a mess. And as he goes there to Athens, he's by himself. And yet he sent the ship back and the people who ferried him over there to Athens, he said, go back and get the team. I need my team. So even when he's by circumstances finding himself by himself, he is going to purpose, as we'll see here in the opening of Acts 18, he's going to purpose to find other Christians to not just kind of have coffee with in the morning, but to team with. I mean, he has to have a network, a team.

So as we get in our verse-by-verse study to Acts Chapter 18, I want you to turn to this passage. We are going to look at the first eight verses here, which interestingly enough, have eight proper names in it representing people. And there are more than that who are discussed. But he's got a lot of people here in this passage that Luke is going to name who are important, important people that become a part of his team. Thankfully, we're going to get his team back. They finally made it from Thessalonica and Berea. They're going to make their way down. And it's a red letter Sunday because there's a map. Do you see the map? There's a map on your worksheet there that gets us oriented.

Now, not a long trip, but an important trip from Athens to Corinth. And that's where we find ourselves. And of course, there are a lot of weird names of cities that we find, Berea, whatever, that might have been new to you. But when you hear the word much like Thessalonica and the Thessalonians, you hear Corinth, you know, "I know that city. At least I know the letters in the New Testament that Paul writes back to this city." So this is where he gets to the city of Corinth for the first time in the book of Acts and we hear about what goes on there.

But what goes on there, which I think is important for us today, is to see how Paul is going to intentionally team with other people. We've talked about how the gospel impacts this, that and the other. But I want to talk to you about how the gospel and God's truth should impact your relationships, your connections, and how it should sort through all of those. And I just think this is what is needed and it's a sermon that you think, "Ah, it's talking about relationships. That's cool." This is one that I trust will be and I don't do it for your discomfort, but I trust it will be far more convicting than you think it will be based on the theme. Right?

To talk about relationships, connections, a team that sounds good, right? It's not money. You're not talking about giving or, you know, whatever, evangelism, something scary, it's about friends. This is good. This will be easier, leaning back and relaxing. And maybe that's good. You're not ready for that kung fu, you know, that's about to take place because you're going to get hit right in the Adam's apple with this sermon.

Acts 18 is what I want you looking at. Right? We're at Compass Bible Church. You should have a Bible, you should be on your phone or on your laptop. Bring your laptops, bring your iPads, bring all the stuff you need to study God's word. But we're going to study now the first eight verses of Acts 18. So put your eyeballs on that. I'm going to read it for you with minimal comment in Acts Chapter 18 verses 1 through 8. Are you ready? Let's read it together. "After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth." You've looked at your map in the bottom right-hand



corner of that worksheet, "and he found a Jew named Aquila." That's a dude. That's a guy, right? "A native of Pontus." You can look that up on a different map. It's not here. It's in Bithynia up north. Paul had actually tried to go there. The Holy Spirit prevented him from going there.

"Recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla." Now, you put those two names together if you've been around the block in Sunday school, you go, "Priscilla and Aquila, I know those names." And sometimes you'll find it in Scripture as Prisca and Aquila. Sometimes you'll see Prisca. Prisca is the nickname for Priscilla, Priscilla and Aquila. And what's interesting is Priscilla is usually named first in the list, except for here when we meet her, because we start with the fact that he finds Aquila, who becomes a business partner, and Prisca or Priscilla. And so Aquila is the dude and Priscilla is the gal and these two become important.

How? Why? Well, first we should note Claudius, who is the emperor at this particular time in biblical history, he's the nephew of Tiberius and he is tweaked about... here's a latinized form of a word you should recognize, Christus, he's tweaked about Christus because of the Jewish sect that's all about him have caused concern among the Romans and so he kicks them out of Rome. And this is the clue, by the way, that we're not dealing with just a guy and his wife who he's interested in going to business with. These guys are there because they're followers of Christus, they're followers of Christ, and they're kicked out "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." Well, he didn't like all the warfare and all that was going on between the messianic Jews, if you will, and those who were not.

And so anyway, they're there as refugees, if you will, coming from Rome. "And he went to see them because he was of the same trade." Right? And more than that, they were fellow Christians. And he stayed with them and worked for they were tentmakers by trade. And I should note, "the tentmakers," if you think, "Yeah, I've heard that Paul is a tentmaker" and you think about him making tents. A couple of things you should know about that. It seems like when you read his biography, his autobiographical statements in like Philippians 3, he's this highfalutin up-and-coming Pharisee of Pharisees and he's super smart. And he went to seminary and he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, we learned that. He's a powerful intellect. Right? All that's true.

But you need to know that it's not just like he was a wannabe who had this blue-collar job and then kind of, you know, did night school. It's not how it worked. If you went to study in the elite schools and you were going to become this Pharisee, they taught you in the first century to have a fallback trade. And this was part of their training. And so he had a trade and the trade apparently was making tents, he knew how to make tents. Why that was important and there was a market for that in Corinth, Corinth was a place that hosted what is akin to our Olympic Games today, the Isthmian Games.

And you see, by the way, where it is, in isthmus, you know, a little piece of tag of land stuck between two bodies of water and you got the Peloponnese, the southern Greece and you have more of what was called Achaia at the time in southern Greece and you have a little tag of land there. And so if you think about it, if you going to travel north and south by land, you're



going to go through this little tag here, this little inlet of land. And if you're going to try to travel across and kind of not have to go around Peloponnese, you're going to take your boat, as they had and they had mechanisms. It wasn't a canal like if you've been to Corinth today, some of you have been there with me and you see the big canal that is between the two bodies of water. But they would have the, you know, the hourly workers, the slaves of the day, drag the boats across that little like, you know, we picture the Erie Canal or whatever.

So you had people, the rich people in particular, who would stop and do business there. It became a hub. And I've often said, if you know anything about the ancient world and you compare it to where we are today and kind of the upper middle-class, kind of ritzy Orange County, that's how it is. And I often talk about Orange County being the, you know, the modern-day Corinth. The first-century Corinth was a kind of well-to-do place where people settled, it was nice and the weather was nice. And so it was a place of a lot of money and a lot of money and a lot of compromise. And they talked about Corinth as a descriptor of people who were involved in all kinds of bad things, morally corrupt things, even though it was highfalutin.

So it's not, you know, a place where you'd think, wow, this is like gang warfare. It was like no - wealthy, upper middle class people who were doing business and businessmen, but they were, you know, like we find in our culture today, they were so, you know, highfalutin in their own mind, they weren't interested in adhering to any moral strictures and rules. So this was a morally lax place with a lot of money and the Isthmian Games, that's what I was going to get to, people would travel from all over. Now, if the Olympics come to a city today what happens to that city? A ton of money goes to that city. They build, you know, the soccer stadiums and they build all the places, the Olympic, you know, pools and they build a ton of hotels wherever the Olympics are. It's why all these cities want to have the Olympics, hosting the Olympics.

Well, Corinth was the place to host these big athletic games. And when they did they didn't build hotels. Right? They had tents. And they would have tents because they needed people who were going to travel there. And so Paul was a tent maker. And of course, here's Priscilla and Aquila coming to town, kicked out of Rome, out of Italy, and they're going to go into business together and it's an important thing. That's why Paul, by the way, when he writes back to the Corinthians, you might remember, a lot of his analogies are about sporting events, right? About running, about wrestling, about boxing because of what went on in this city. Was that helpful for anybody? That was like the Bible dictionary, just kind of stumbling out of my mouth.

Where are we? Verse 4. Oh, by the way, why did he not have all this going on before? Well, here's the assumption, and it's probably right. His missionary team who he left behind, particularly Timothy and Silas and Luke and the rest, they were probably engaged in marketplace endeavors to pay for Paul to put bread and falafel in his mouth. He had to have money to eat. And so when he's by himself he's run out of money and I'm assuming he's back to his fallback trade because he needs money to feed himself. So he's going to now have his team show up, which is great but he's engaged in tentmaking at this particular point in earnest because he's in need of some cash to feed himself.



Verse 4, "He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath," because that's what we've seen, the pattern in Berea and Thessalonica. That was what they did. And what was he doing there? Well, we saw it all the way back to Chapter 13 in Acts. He's preaching to them. He's trying to open up the Scriptures and "persuade the Jews" in the synagogue "and the Greeks," the God-fearers, that Jesus is the Christ.

Now, "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia," and there were balloons and streamers, and it's like, "Yay!" The team is back together. "Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus." So even that is a subtle reminder that he can make less tents and not have to worry about that because his team was there and they had money or they were making money so he could at least get by, he wasn't concerned about a nice place to live. You know, he could make his own tent and live in that. But the point is now he's going to turn his attention fully to that. I mean, he was doing it every Sabbath but now he's all about it. Right? Occupy, because that's his thing and that should be your thing. And we've talked a lot about that in the first 17 chapters of the book, which we've been in for decades now.

Verse 6. What are we on? What does the worksheet say? In the eighties at this point. What week is this in Acts? Nobody knows. 88. Was that Maxwell Smart? Was that Agent 88? No, no, no. We don't know. We're so old. We were old enough to watch it. Too old to remember it. But it was funny. And it's not streamed anywhere. I looked for it the other day. I was like I said, that show was funny. 86, Agent 86. Thank you. That was two sermons ago. And that's when I started to get sick. So that was Agent 86. Thank you. Not 88. Worst sermon of the year.

Here it is. What do they do? Well, they opposed them, verse 6. "They opposed him and reviled him, so he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads! I'm innocent.'" We quoted that last week as we thought about the fact that there's a responsibility, he's discharged that responsibility, he's innocent, "Now I'm going to go to the Gentiles." Verse 7. "And he left there he went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God." Now, the interesting thing about that is... By the way, does that sound Jewish to you? It's not Jewish. Right? Here's a Roman, here's a Gentile. And "His house was next door to the synagogue." Amazing.

They said you're no good. Reviled is really the word "blaspheme." They took Paul, who was a very important person, an apostle and a messenger and a missionary and a preacher and an evangelist, and they made less of him, Right? That's what blasphemy is. I've taught you that. Blasphemy is taking something big and important to God and making it less than. So reviled is not a bad translation, but we usually used the word in relation to God or the Holy Spirit or Jesus blaspheming. But they blasphemed him. They made less of him. But they made fun of him. They mocked him. They opposed him. And he ends up now next to the group of people who are meeting and opposing him at Titius Justus' house. Well, that's pretty bold. I'm going to stay at the house right next to the place where they're making fun of me.



Well, maybe this is the reason, verse 8. "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized." Okay. A lot of Corinthians getting saved. A lot of baptisms taking place. Right? Expressing that, declaring that. "And the ruler of the synagogue." You read that because you're in church and you're sensible people and you don't even think about, "Ah yeah, that's cool." Think about the scandal of that, right? We've seen people in the synagogue turn to Christ. We've seen the people in the Areopagus, at least Dionysius who we saw last week, turns to Christ, an important professor. But the "ruler of the synagogue?" I mean, that's amazing, right? That is amazing. If you've got the leader who's now becoming a follower of Christ, it's a big deal. And he becomes an important person to Paul. Right? Of course, he's the fellow seminary grad, the guy who's leading everything, and he becomes a Christian along with a lot of others. And that's a big deal.

All right. There are a lot of people in this passage, Paul's interacting with them. Just remember how this starts. He finds Aquila and Priscilla. And that, I think, is very important. He did not yet have Silas and Timothy there. He is building relationships. He's building connections. He's building Christian teams here. It becomes a part of not only how he's going to earn some money, but these guys become partners. If you look at the end of the passage, verses 7 and 8, we got Crispus, we got Titius Justus there. We've got teams, we've got names, we got people who Paul is going to care for and he's building teams. He's making new Christian connections.

And I think that's important not only when you don't have them, but I think I could speak probably pretty confidently in the 21st century in South Orange County, California and I can say you probably don't have the Christian connections that you need, the kind of Christian connections that are demonstrated by Christ and the apostles and Paul and his missionary team. Those are people that you are teaming with together sharing a commonality under the Lordship of Christ who are approaching life, living life fruitfully together and they are your, if you want to use the modern word, they're your friends.

But they're your real friends, not just friends who you go and watch a movie with, but friends who you really connect with and care about in terms of things that matter beyond just your hobbies and your interests. But people who you're caring about following Christ next to, you want to be a fruitful Christian and normative fruitful Christianity is done as a team endeavor. You need friends, you need connections. So I'm going to say this and I'm going to say it because I don't think many of you are at the place where you've reached your maximum, you've reached the limit. You've reached a place where you're like, "Oh, I'm going to be accused of a man of many friends and "A man of many friends comes to ruin."

No, probably here you don't have a network of people, you couldn't name 12 people like Jesus could that say here are people that know me, I know them, we do life together, we care about the things of God together. Even though there may be a Judas among us. Right? The point is, I'm giving my life, entrusting my life, entrusting my heart and my soul in other people's lives and they in me. And I would say, if you don't have a good group there like you should, then you need to hear this first point of the sermon.



Number one, you should write it down, "Make New Christian Connections." And you probably need to do that because you haven't reached the quota quite yet. You need to go from 3 to 4 or 6 to 7, or maybe just 1 to 2, or you're sitting here going, "Nobody loves me. I don't know anybody." Well, then you need to get started. Write it down in all block letters and then highlight it. You need to make Christian connections, new ones, ones you don't have yet.

And by the way, if you argue, if you're the Sunday Christian, you just come on Sundays, right? You know where this is going, right? That ain't enough. It just is not enough, right? If you go and you just sit chair side-by-side in church and listen to the pastor preach, it's not enough. You have to turn your chairs face-to-face. That's one of the reasons we spend an inordinate amount of money on food at this church. Right? And all of the sub-congregations, we always have food, we got coffee, and if you don't like it hot, we got a cold. And if you don't like it this way, we got it that way. We got coffee bars and we got meals and all the, you know, all the caterers in South County love this church, right? Because we're always eating.

And the reason is not because we're all skinny and we need to fatten up. It's because we know that in Scripture the role that food played it put people face-to-face and in conversation. We needed that. We need to have that. It's why I'm not charging for coffee and donuts out there on the patio. I want you to stop. And that should be a sticking point for you to say, I'm going to have some conversation. I'm not running to my car. Right?

And during the week when we meet together and our chairs go face-to-face, well, we're always going have meals involved in that because in meals you converse, right? It's the social interaction of relationships where we're building relationships. It's where it takes place. It's not, "Hey, do you want to go to a movie?" "Do you want to go to the ballgame with me?" Where you just sit there and you have some other thing. But when chairs get face-to-face and then we turn to God's word and we talk about applying the word, we talk about your life and your work and the things you're dealing with, those are the kinds of Christian connections we need. And Christianity cannot be lived out.

Think about 140 plus, you know, videos I shot just on getting us to see what the Bible requires regarding my life and the "one anothers." When are you practicing the "one anothers?" Right? As you're getting in your car in the parking lot on a Sunday morning? That doesn't work, right? You need to have your life enmeshed and intertwined with other people. And I would say right now, in this day, in this generation, post-pandemic with all the stuff that's gone on, I guarantee you, at least in my knowledge of people, they're probably in two or three people that don't need to hear this as an imperative from God this morning, you need more Christian connections and you need to start this morning.

You need to go out on the patio and you can have an extra donut, right? And you need to talk to people and you need to say, "Hey, let's exchange phone numbers. What are you involved in? Join your small group. Let's get connected. Let's start connecting and building teams. Jesus had them, right? And you could say, "Well, he's a study. He didn't need them." Right? Well, he said, "You need to follow me." Just to quote First John Chapter 2 verse 6. Right? If



you say you're "in Christ," you ought to walk as he walked. You ought to live as he lived. You ought to follow his pattern. And he had a team of people around him all the time. Right?

Did he go to a mountain occasionally to have his quiet time? Sure he did. But then he came down the mountain and he dealt with the people. That was his team. He had 70, a big ministry team, that was kind of his sub-congregation. He had the throngs, he had the people who followed him. He sat up on a hillside and they all listen to him. Right?

You are supposed to be involved in a small group. I don't care if this church is 10,000 people. You understand that, right? Which we have no place for 10,000 people. But if this were full and every seat was full and every square foot of 100,000 square feet of our facility was used to the max and you're trying to find parking spaces and all that. Here's the deal. The church would not be too big because that's not the totality of church. Church means that you're getting connected in smaller groups. And I speak to about half of you who don't even engage in that. I don't know what our stats are. Maybe we're doing better than the average. The average church has probably got 30% involved in small groups. Maybe we're at 60%. That's fantastic. But we need to do better. And it's not just you showing up and sitting there going, "Okay, I did my time." It's like, do you have the kind of connections that you could say are the kinds of connections you put your arm around the person and you care?

What kind of care? Let me show you the kind of care that Paul had for the people he worked with. You can just read all of his letters and see how he talked about, you know, Timothy and Silas and everyone. Here's one Epaphroditus. Turn with me, if you would, to Paul speaking about Epaphroditus in Philippians Chapter 2. How important was this to Paul, the people that he saw as part of his team? Well, here's an example. Let's just see how many people in your life you could say this kind of thing about. Here's Paul about a guy. I mean, we don't even have a letter written to him. It's not like Titus or Timothy. Right? And he doesn't get as much airtime as Silas. Right? But look at how he describes a guy. You probably only heard his name a couple of times because he only shows up a few times in the Bible.

Here's what he says. Verse 25, follow along, Philippians Chapter 2 verse 25. "I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier." Right? Trifecta right there. He's with me side-by-side, part of my team, he's my brother "and your messenger and minister to my need." The guy's a blessing in my life. Verse 26, "For he has been longing for all of you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill." Now we don't have FaceTime and texting back then, obviously. So the news goes out. Epaphroditus is ill and there, Paul has taken Epaphroditus away from Philippi. And the Philippians had heard that he was sick, like really sick. And so they're stressed. Well, Paul's stressed that they're stressed that Epaphroditus is sick. Do you follow the logic here?

So he's like, oh, man, my friends are really stressing about my illness and I've been in the hospital or whatever, so to speak, whatever the equivalent is. "Indeed," Paul says, you know what? "He was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him." Right? That's where I expect a period. But it says, "not only on him, but also on me, lest I should have sorrow," period. No, no, no. Keep reading. Sorrow what? Have you used that phrase lately? No, because that



sounds weird, Shakespearean, like "sorrow upon sorrow." That means, like, really, really, really sorrowful. Duh.

But think about that. Here's a guy we rarely hear about him, but he's a partner with Paul doing a little work with Paul, teaming with Paul. And I just want you to think when he says, if he were to have died, God showed mercy on me. Because had he died, "I would have sorrow upon sorrow." Now, death is sad. You go to a funeral, you know, you tear up, some of you cry. Yeah. But I'm talking about, no, it's someone you say if they were out of my life, this would be sorrow upon sorrow. Now, I think he could say the same of Titus and Timothy and Silas, of course, Luke. Because of my "beloved Luke, the physician." He loves these people.

How does he love the people? You know, it's not like, "Oh, an empty chair at the small group. Yeah, it's sad. I'll probably go to his funeral." That's not it. He is sorrow upon sorrow. I just think you got to test your friends just by that. Like, how essential are they in my life? The connections that we should be having. How many do you have? I mean, think about it. Really? How many do you have like this? If this person were out of my life, I'd feel like I had an arm cut off. I mean, that's what Paul's talking about here. And he wants them to have that kind of it "I all the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men."

And so he takes the letter to the Philippians, Epaphroditus does, and he says, "You're going to get my letter and you're going to see him and you going to have a party and it will be awesome." I want you to have good relationships. People like that, you should have people like that in your life. And I'm just saying, do you have people like that in your life? Some say, "Well, I can't find quality people." Well, you know what? Jesus couldn't find a good peer either, Holy One of Orange County. So smart. You're so godly. You live in that, you know, that cloudy summit up there on Mt. Sinai. I get it. No one's your equal. You're the best. Right? It doesn't matter. No excuses. No excuses.

Who are your friends? You need these Christian connections. Did I land hard enough on that one? I can go more like a dentist. Do you need more? I can go more. (all laughing). You need Christian connections. I don't know how to say it. Jesus has got them. And it's not just that's a good example. We've seen it throughout the book of Acts, Acts Chapter 2, Acts Chapter 4. At the end of those chapters, these great statements about they live, they had all things in common. Look at them. They were so just ... no one had a need. No one had a fear. They were all like, together. It's one for all, all for one. We need that. We need more of that.

All right. Well, verse 4, back to our passage. What's he all about? "Reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived in Macedonia," yay, that was great, the missionary crew was back together, "Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus." Always talking religion. You shouldn't be talking religion all the time. No, that was all he was about. And I just want to say this, though. This passage is about his evangelism. And I want to talk about your evangelism. I want to talk about your connections.



But he's a missionary so those are intentional relationships. But the connections you have, you have many of them that are based on proximity, your neighbors. You have many of them that are based on your work, proximity at your work, you work with them. You got non-Christians in your life. He's got non-Christians in his life. His are intentional. He's a missionary. I get it. That's his job description. But in those relationships, what does he care about? Right? Even in the marketplace, he had relationships based on proximity. I'm sure there were people who he set up to sell his tents or to make his tent, people right next door. He had relationships and all of those relationships, I mean, this is just the pinnacle of it, all it's filled out was, I want you to know Christ, Right? I want you to know Christ.

I like to look at every Christian relationship he had, and he wants them to know Christ better. I mean, all the books we see him write, all the letters we see him write. That's what he wants. He tells the Corinthians, that's what I want for you. And he tells the Galatian churches, I want Christ to be formed in you. That's all I want. I just want that. That's my passion. And so I will say that really here's the thing. It's not just like I need someone that I can call when I'm bummed out. I need to, you know, be a blessing to someone in some way if they need help or, you know, I just need someone to go to the ballgame with. That's not what I'm talking about.

Christian relations are much more important than that. They're much more important because the Bible says things like this and we quote it often that "we're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, we ought to be connecting all the more encouraging one another, all the more as we see the Day drawing near." But what are we supposed to be doing? Right? There's a great word "Katanoëo." It's the word "to think hard," "to consider." That's how it's translated into English. Think. Consider. Strategize. That'd be a good translation, strategize. How to "stir one other on to love and good deeds." That should be the concern that we all have about every relationship.

I put it this way. Number two, you need to "Always Pull Others Toward Christ." That ought to be your concern. I want to make sure that my life is not just like I'm there if you need someone to move boxes when you move into that new apartment. It's like, I want to make sure that my relationship with you, though there will be a lot of that involved particularly if you own a pickup truck, but there will always be this underlying concern, like a magnet that you're pulling people to Christ every day, I trust.

I mean, all the sermons we preach, all the things you know, I'm trying to develop my relationship with Christ. I want to be devoted to Christ. I want to know his word. I want to pray. I want to be connected. Well, every relationship I have on my Christian team, all of my friends at church that I would consider my team, my closest friends, I should always be trying to get them connected to Christ. I want to pull them to Christ. And that's an intentional word "to pull." I want to pull you in the direction that I'm going spiritually.

Let's think of the two categories. You've got relationships based on proximity. Turn with me to a classic passage, Matthew Chapter 5. But it's one we should look at afresh because it relates



to you and your relationship with your next-door neighbor, with the people that, you know, they're parents on the soccer team that your kids are part of, the people you go to school with, the people that you, you know, share the office cubicle with, whatever. Let's think about that. How am I pulling them to Christ?

Well, Paul's there reasoning about Christianity and so we should too. At some level, we need to start bringing up this topic, not being ashamed. And here's how Jesus puts it. Matthew Chapter 5. Familiar verses starting in verse 13. "You are salt of the earth." Right? And I know that's used in all the wrong ways in modern culture. "I'm the salt of the earth, man." You know, it's not talking about like someone who's like a go-to guy or, you know, you can rely on him. We're talking about people that are preserving. Salt was used to preserve things. Salt was used to make a difference. Salt was something that had to have its active, you know, engagement with whatever it was connected with to be called salty.

And it says, "But if the salt has lost its taste," if it's not salt anymore, "how can its saltiness be restored?" Well, you don't restore it, you throw it out. "It's no longer any good except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Do you follow that? So, salt needs to be salty. And that preserving element, I do think that's in view here. People need to know you're there and you're there influencing against what is wrong. You work in an office, you work at a business, you work in some field somewhere, right? They should know you are a Christian. And the things that they would do if you weren't there, they're not going to do because you are there. At some level I hope that's true.

I hope that if they're telling the kind of joke that they would tell, but you walk in and they know that you're a Christian and they know you stand for what's right, there would be a preserving act there. You do understand that every careless word that is spoken will be judged. And if you walk in and as a Christian, even though that's a horrible thing for you to picture yourself as this stick-in-the-mud who can't laugh at a joke. But think about it. If you can prevent that just by your presence, you have a preserving effect. You're really pulling people away from sin, even non-Christians. I don't want my neighbors to run a crack house. Right? I don't want that. I don't want that not just for me. I don't want that for them. Right?

Even non-Christians, they're storing up for themselves wrath for the day of God's judgment. I would like to in some way preserve them from the judgment that is to come. And that means I'm going to have a preserving effect. And the only way that can happen is if they know I'm a Christian, they know I love God. They know I'm following Christ and they know that part of following Christ is that God is a righteous God and he loves righteous deeds. That would be good as Psalm 11:7 says. I want them to know that you just don't do the stuff that we would do if they weren't there. And that's why they exclude you.

As Jesus said, they're going to exclude you and they're going to revile you and they going to snicker behind your back and they're not going to invite you to the Friday night parties or whatever the office is having. Whatever! But you have a preserving effect because you got to be there. You're working. So you've got to be salt. You can't lose that effect. And, verse 14, you got to be light. You're "the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do



people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand it gives light to all that are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men."

So what is that? Well, he's about to define it. It's good works. "So that they may see your good works," and hopefully one day they'll join in the fact that they care about good works and they care about God. They care about the righteous God, the righteous Lord, the righteous king who loves righteous deeds. We want them "to glorify God who's in heaven." So I need to be the guy that you don't want to be, which is I'm the kind of guy that's the restrainer of evil and I'm the promoter of God and good. And I know that that's not the thing you'd like to see yourself as, but you're in the wrong religion if that's not what you want to be. Right? Because that's what God calls you to be. To be a Christian is to be salt and light.

It gets worse and I won't take you to the passage as we don't have time, but Ephesians Chapter 5... Whatever. Let's go there, Ephesians Chapter 5 verse 11. So let's just go there. Hey, when you think about the non-Christians you have to have in your life, you have connections with non-Christians, right? Well, here are some very important instructions for you. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead ..." this is the phrase we could do without. I could maybe handle the first phrase, but God don't lay on me the second phrase, "but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"

Wow. If I said, Go take this flashlight and wake everybody up in the camp this morning at 6 a.m. Go wake them up. Shine a light in their face. You go, "I don't want to volunteer for that job." Too late. This is your job, right? It doesn't have to be the kind of awful picture that you just pictured at six in the morning with a big flashlight. But you're trying to get them to see Christ and trying to get them to see their need, to get them to see they're living in darkness. We want them to see Christ.

What's the next line? Look for opportunities, verse 15. "Look carefully then how you walk," how you live, "not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time." Why? "Because the days are evil." So, you follow the logic here. You have a job, even with your non-Christian connections, to pull them to Christ, to point out truth. That's evangelism. We talk about that all the time.

Think about your Christian relationships. My relationship with my fellow Christians ought to be, and I've already quoted Hebrews 10:24 if you didn't know the reference, Hebrews 10:24. I want to "consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds." That's my job. And so I want to do that. I don't want to be a jerk about it. I don't want to kick him in the shins, I don't want to kick him in the face. But I do want to have, as Bible says, my friend's "sweet counsel." I want my counsel to help them to move toward Christ. I want my conversation to do that.

Proverbs 27:17. You know that verse I'm assuming. It's on the back of the worksheet in terms of our discussion questions. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." That again,



is that "stirring one other up." That word stir, of course, if you've heard me preach on that or anyone preach on that, it's the word to provoke, to irritate. There is that sense of like when iron is sharpening iron it makes that terrible noise. It's like there is that sense in which we are sharpening each other. Our friendship should be sharpening each other to be more like Christ. We want to be conformed to the image of Christ. And I don't want to do that.

It doesn't mean every conversation is an assault on them about what they're doing wrong, what they should do right. Be careful. Right? Matter of fact, you should be "quick to hear and slow to speak." But in your relationships you should have those times where you're understanding the common themes of like First Corinthians 10:13, "There's no temptation that you got except that which is common to man." As Lewis said in his *The Four Loves* book about friendship, he said, you know, it's like the conversation, which gives us opportunity to say, "Oh, we have the same issues, we have the same concerns, we have the same problems, we have the same goals," right? That's what friendships are all about and that we're just trying to help each other get there.

So we're doing in the same sense, what we're doing in our non-Christian friends' lives to get them to see Christ. We're getting our friends to see Christ better. We've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and so we're doing what Peter did in First Peter Chapter 2. We're trying to get them to say, "You've seen that he's good, You've tasted that he's good. So you need to pursue him more. I want you to keep on imbibing in these things."

Let me just give you one example of this before we leave this point. First Corinthians Chapter 1. As long as we're talking about Corinth and Paul in Corinth, he writes them back. There are a lot of converts in this town and here's what he says, verse 4. You can see what I hope this is a big part of your friendships. "I give thanks to my God always for you," First Corinthians 1:4, "because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you are enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge." Right? That's praise and that sounds good. That's encouragement. "Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you're not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end." You're going to make it. You're going to get there. Keep at it. You got this. Keep going. "Guiltless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship of his Son, the Lord Jesus." That's good stuff right there. Right? Paul is encouraging his friends in Corinth.

Now, you've read the book of First Corinthians. That ain't all there is in the book. Matter of fact, verse 10. "I appeal to you," though. Hey, brothers, I love you. You got this. We're going to get there. But I do appeal to you as "brothers, by the name of the Lord that you guys agree." Because I'm seeing right now you're not agreeing. Right? "There should be no division among you. You should be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there's quarreling among you." Right? You can't have that. "I mean, some of you are saying, 'I'm of Paul' or 'I follow Apollos.'" You got to stop.



There is encouragement that should be a big part of your Christian relationships. And there is a correction and that's got to be done. Love, obviously, that should be done because you care. But we are, just like the Apostle Paul, we're following that example of in my relationships I want to team with them and if you see stuff we diplomatically and humbly appeal to them as brothers that they fix those things.

And the book of First Corinthians is all about that. Now, you're not an apostle, so you can't follow the whole example in the book and, you know, torching every issue. But they were asking him questions and he was answering. And that's a big part of our friendships. I hope you're asking questions and I hope they're asking you questions, and I'm hoping that you're pulling each other toward Christ. That's what a good Christian relationship is about. And if all your relationships aren't like that you need to make, go back to point one, make more new Christian connections and find somewhere your commonality is Christ. It's under the Lordship of Christ. You care about Christ and you want to stir and spur and move and motivate each other to be more godly people. Do you have friends like that in your life? You need a few more. You need to work at that.

Back to our passage, verse 6. Acts Chapter 18 verse 6. By the way, this will be the hardest part of the sermon. I'm sad that it comes last but let me just talk about what I talked about earlier just to set this up. In a day of isolation, fragmented relationships, virtual connections, which aren't real connections, they're partial connections, we need friends and some of you in this sermon you probably already thinking, "Ah, I just love that. I think of names. I have friends. I love them, I like cherish them," and so we cling and we love that. And you're saying, "Yeah, this sermon is good because I'm there, man. I got my buddies and this is my team and..." Great. Great.

It makes this next part hard. And that is that you've got to see that the Lordship of Christ not only brings people together. It also directs us to sort relationships out that sometimes need to be distanced and sometimes they need to be dissolved. Now this is an extreme example, but look at the text in verse 6, "When they opposed and reviled him," he ended the relationship, "he shook out his garments and he said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on, I'm going to someone else, I'm going to the Gentiles.'" Sounds like a breakup to me. Does it sound like a breakup to you? Breaking up is hard to do. I could sing it for you. That's hard. Painful. Right?

Now I need to be careful with this but here's what I'm trying to say. Number three, "Let Christ Come Between Friends." That'd be a good point for you to write down. Let Christ come between friends. Your friends should not be so valued that you value that friendship over your connection to the Lord and your submission to his Lordship. There are times when in the Lordship of Christ as it governs what you are all about gets you to look at a relationship and say this relationship needs to change. And in some cases here's someone blaspheming Paul and by extension blaspheming the Christ that he's proclaiming, they are opposing him, and he's like, okay, I'm moving on then. Done.



Let me say it in a very dramatic way. I want you to think of the friends that you have right now, whether it's two or five or 12. Think of the friends you have right now. I know in your sweet little sentimental minds, you want to say, "I want to have these friends for the rest of my life. I'm going to be at their funeral or they're going to be at my funeral. And we're going to be tight to the end."

Here's all I'm saying. You better let Christ come between friends if he needs to come between friends. Those friendships may not be, and I've been in this thing long enough to know he reshuffles the deck sometimes. And it's like that friend who you thought you'd be like the Three Musketeers till the end. It isn't going to happen. And it isn't going to happen because there's an issue that comes up and that issue really comes down to whether I'm going to be faithful to Christ or I'm going to continue to idolize a friendship. And you've got to be super careful about this. You need wisdom in this.

You need to sit in your study or in your house or whatever and just plead before God with God's word open. Like, does this relationship need to be distanced? Maybe you're a crisp thinker like the Apostle Paul. And you're able to, and I don't know how long it took Paul to figure this out, but when Barnabas says, let's take John Mark on this new missionary trip. The second missionary trip. Paul wasn't dissolving a relationship. He wasn't divorcing John Mark. But he goes, no, no. Because as a steward and knowing what God's goal is for what is about to happen here in the evangelism of this place, I'm not taking him. He's not going to be tight here. He's not going to be my Silas. He's not going to be my Timothy. He's not going to be my Epaphroditus. No, no. Right?

And the great thing about the Apostle Paul in this is that I know he didn't divorce him, quote unquote, and, you know, stomp on his name. He was willing at the end of his life in Second Timothy when John Mark had grown and matured and proven his faithfulness he brought him back into the cockpit, so to speak, bring him back. I need him. So this isn't about divorcing a friendship. It's not about you, you know, writing people off forever. But there are times you need to step back and you need to say this relationship cannot be more important to me than the fruitfulness and the goodness of what God has called me to do and be. And sometimes the disagreements between friends we need to say we need some space here.

I just think that has to be an addendum to this discussion, in part because verse 6 is in the middle of this passage where Paul, you know... You could see him for weeks he was reasoning in the synagogue. Do you think he came in and started to know people by name in the synagogue there in Corinth? Sure he did. For weeks he was there in the Sabbath reasoning with them. I'll bet some people he was like, you know, "Hey, hey, how are you?" He knew who they were. He'd say, "Good morning, friend. How are you?" He might have even really connected and they talked about stuff, they talked about travel, they talked about... Who knows?

But when it came to the rejection of the Christ that was most important to him and the reviling and opposition that he encountered, he said, "No, done." There are times to be done. Now, covenant relationships or certain relationships, they weren't made to be easily dissolved. And



I'm not recommending just because you're married to a non-Christian like, "Oh, divorce time." Right? In some covenant relationships there are very exclusive and rare ejection seat, you know, buttons. And we shouldn't be anxious to get in... You know, like you shouldn't emancipate yourself instantly as a result of this sermon. Right?

But there are implications in every relationship. Like when we read Luke 2, when the angels come, verse 14, they say, "Glory to God in the highest," peace on earth, goodwill to men. Well, that's what Jesus... If Jesus is all about my life, then I'm never going to push a friend away. Right? Is that what it really says? No. It's been quoted that way for years on people's Christmas cards. But you do know what it says, right? "Peace among those on whom his favor rests." Right? God says I have people and my people are going to be bound together by my Lordship and I want peace between them.

Matter of fact, keep reading in First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 10. You should be perfectly united in mind and thought, I want you because of Christ to be unified. The problem is when there are problems of theology there sometimes has to be some distance and you have to rethink your relationships in light of Christ.

This is a hard one. I get that. But if you think peace on earth was what it was all about if you loved God, well then you'd never have an issue in a relationship, then you should read Luke Chapter 12 verses 51 through 53. It asks the question as easy as it can be asked and as forthrightly as it can be asked, "Do you think," Jesus asks, "that I've come to bring peace on earth?" Answer? No. And he answers it no. "I tell you I came to bring division." What? I came bearing division. "From now on there is going to be a house," and it'll be divided. "If there are five people in it, three are going to be against two and two are going to be against three. They will be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter-in-law."

If you said, "I'm going to go to church and learn about how daughter-in-law and mother-in-law cannot get along," you'd go, "I don't want to go to that church. I want to go to church about love and about Christ and about Jesus. And that's always going to bring people together." It doesn't always bring people together. And all I'm telling you is that there are going to be issues in relationships of people that you like and that today you call friends who probably will not be your close friends five years from now. And I just want to make sure it's not because of the silly things that are dividing the Corinthian church. "I'm of Paul, I follow Apollos," that should not divide Christians. What should divide friendships is when there's an issue regarding the lordship of Christ where there's a rejection of that, whether it's some sin issue that will not be repented of or whatever it might be related to the gospel and coworkers, there has to be sometimes a parting of the ways.

When I asked the question, "Why did Jesus have a Judas?" That was in a sermon. I know you forgot the sermon, but it was a sermon I was preaching from Psalm 55. It was in that interlude before Acts. So it wasn't another epic, right? It was probably in the 20th century when I preach the sermon. But I was preaching that Psalm series. Talk about David who was being betrayed by his friends. Probably Ahitophel and whatever. We got into all the details of that. But we basically said that the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the betrayal of David by



Ahitophel and the kinds of betrayal we have, it should get us ready to be able to weather those things.

And here's what I find. For some of you here, and I know this feeling. I know it more than you think I do. The feelings of betrayal will sometimes put your suit of armor on and then you think, "Well, I'm going to go it alone. I want to be the stud like Jesus and go into the wilderness. I don't need friends." I want to remind you that David also, I believe I could try to prove or at least give you the evidence, even though it's not a superscription on Psalm 119, he also wrote Psalm 119 I contend, and in Psalm 119 he says this and it is a strong language and it's a great line. And this is the same guy in my mind who wrote Psalm 55. He's betrayed but he doesn't stop. He doesn't stop in terms of friendships and companionship. He says, "I am a companion," verse 63, "of all who fear you," the welcome mat is out, "of those who keep your precepts."

You need to find a team of people who are equally committed to following Christ, fearing the Lord, keeping his precepts. They ought to become investments in your life that you invest way more than you do in Netflix or your hobbies or going to movies or whatever it is that you do. You got to turn your attention in that direction and say, "We are going to live the Christian life fruitfully and we're going to walk through things together." And it's not that I'm in some covenant relationship that can't ever end. I don't want to scare people and say we got to, you know, pinky-swear and blood-brothers. All I'm saying is I want and need, just like Christ did, just like Paul, I need that circle and you need that circle. And it starts with the first point. Make new Christian connections. I hope you might make some more today.

Let's pray. God, in a world of fragmented relationships, I know it is really hard for us in our day to do the work to put in the time. And Lewis obviously spoke about this 70 years ago. It is the sacrifice of time and attention, conversation, as he talked about those days with his close circle of friends as they lit a fire and they sat around and they just talked. God, this is good. You've made us communicating creatures. You've given us the ability to communicate, that we're verbal creatures, that we can talk and share and encourage and prompt. And I just pray all those things would be multiplied in our lives. So please, God, we commit this endeavor to you and pray that we would make it a team endeavor, by your grace.

In Jesus name. Amen.