

You've Got a Friend in Me: Enduring Friendships

Harmony in Friendships series #2

by Chris Famisaran

Thank you, Ben. Well, good morning everybody. We missed you. It was not intentional to get sick, but for the most part, we're better and we are here. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to gather together, to talk about some stories, and also, Lord, help us to understand why friendship is so important and to build friends. Be with us now in Jesus' name.

Kary Oberbrunner shares a story in a book, or actually no, it was in a magazine. What about Bob? How that question changed my life. See, Kary Oberbrunner, I think he was actually a minister, but he was at the local gym working out, trying to stay focused on his exercise routine. When he noticed that there was an elderly man sitting in one of the chairs fumbling with his MP3 player, that should be a hint as to how old the story is. And his headphones. And at first, Kary is trying to ignore the guy, just trying to stick to his routine, getting his workout in rather quickly. And he could see that this guy was getting really frustrated, really fidgety. It's almost like he wanted to throw his MP3 player on the ground.

Well, he said, okay, you know what? Let me at least introduce myself. So he goes over, he says, hey, my name's Kary. Can I help you? He says, hi, I'm Bob, and I love jazz, but I can't get this thing to work. And so Kary asked Bob, have you ever heard of iTunes? He's like, "I what?" iTunes. And it was at this point that Kary realized this was a God moment. So he asked Bob, look, Bob, is there some free time, maybe today or in the next week, can I maybe come over to your home and help you set up your MP3 player? And it took Bob a couple of times over the next couple of days, I believe, to finally say yes, you can come over.

So Kary went over to his apartment and he realized that his apartment was crammed with a bunch of stuff. As they sat down, Bob kind of started to share his life. He'd been married, but his wife, unfortunately, had passed away recently. She was the breadwinner. And of course, when she died, there was no money. He lost his home. He had to move into an apartment, crammed full of all of the stuff that they collected over many, many years. And so, in the back, Bob made some space. They sat down at his desktop computer. They got the MP3 player to open up on the computer, and Kary was able to help him install iTunes and transfer music over so Bob could listen to jazz music.

This chance encounter, however, began a wonderful, beautiful relationship. A story of opposites. Kary, 32 years old, young, white, Bob, 71 years old, a black man. And though they had their differences, Kary had plenty of money. Bob didn't have much money. Bob was a convict. He'd gone to jail. Kary had never been to jail. Bob was a widower. Kary was married, in short, complete opposites. Short time later, Kary invited Bob to church, hoping just maybe, just maybe, he might want to learn about Jesus. And after a few invitations, reluctantly, Bob agreed to go to church and sit with Kary's wife. He came by a couple times and realized, this is a place I wanted to be. After the service one day, he knelt at the altar and he told Jesus that he wanted Jesus to be in his life. Bob wept. And as Kary looked into his eyes, he noticed now a distinct peace. that resided in his eyes. Bob changed Kerry's life that day. And the church, he got more joy than ever now that he understood what Jesus meant to him. And every time Kerry would go to the YMCA or hang up a phone with him, Bob would always leave, give my love to your family. And eventually he was baptized. Imagine if Kerry had not stopped to introduce himself and say, hey, can I help you? What a beautiful relationship came out of that chance encounter. How many of you have had a similar experience bar just saying, hey, can I help you? Or hi, how are you? You found your best friend, or maybe your partner for life.

Friendships, friendships are important. Let's get to know each other a little bit better. How many of you? How many of you have a friendship that's lasted at least one year so far? One year. Okay, how about three years? Ten years. All right. How about 15 years, 20 years? How many of you still have a good friend that you've been friends with over 20 years? 25, 30, 35. All right, 40, 50, 60? All right, not to

say. Oh, we got, sorry, I apologize, Pilar, my bad. How many of you have a friendship with your childhood friends still? Still connect with them. It's amazing, right? Thanks to the power of Facebook and Instagram, I was able to connect to my best friends from when my family and I moved from Guam back to the mainland here. And we were able to rekindle, we were sharing some memes and some stories and just reminiscing and looking back and how these individuals were a very formative part of my life.

Friendships, friendships are key. Friendships are important. When we look to the scriptures, what does the Bible say about friendship? Let's go to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 11. All right, we all there? Okay, it says, therefore what? Encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing. What are friends for? Friends are there for in life. When you're lonely for support, maybe to sometimes challenge yourself, even as uncomfortable as that may be. But friends, one of the big reasons why we develop and create friendships is to have friends. We were created in the Middle East for community. And of course, doing so, we build each other up. Would you wanna be friends with somebody who's constantly being negative and always tearing you down and digging into you? No thanks, not interested in that, right? Rather hang out with people who are positive, people who are fun to be with.

But it's also important, as 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 13 also says, 'Bad company corrupts good character.' And so we have to be wise with who we choose to bring into our life and to continue to keep in our life.

Friendships are key; we rely on our friends for support. Again, they help challenge you and potentially help you. There's a rule out there that I recently learned that it takes at least 11 meetings, okay? 11 times where you meet together, probably around three hours each, over a period of six months, where an acquaintance becomes a friend. Do friendships happen overnight? No, because why? It takes time. It takes commitment. It takes similar interests. You, too, there's a common phrase that we probably, when we first meet our friend, maybe it could be over your favorite sports team, your favorite food, your favorite, whatever, name it. Right?

Friendships are also key for our life. One of the things that we have to remember too, and by the way, here's some extra passages. We're not gonna necessarily get to them today, but just for your edification. Distance should not be an inhibitor to your friendships. One of my closest friends is, his name is Ryan, and we lived together during college. And he's from Florida. And he was out here for a long time, and then eventually decided, you know what? I'm gonna go back home. And since then, he's gotten married. He has two wonderful, beautiful kids, and I've never met them, but we still, because Ryan and I are so close, he's like a brother to me, I'll still send his kids gifts. And they say, 'Uncle Chris and Aunt Lisa, they're the best. They always give the best gifts,' even though we've never met. Right? Distance should not be an inhibitor. And although I don't get to see Ryan every day, I don't get to hang out with him, we still get to talk at least every couple of months, make sure we text each other about the Dodgers, be informed. Don't allow distance to be an inhibitor.

Julie Beck writes in the Bitter Sweet Truths about friendships, however, she writes in The Atlantic, as people enter their middle age, as you get older, they tend to have more demands on their time. Many of them are more pressing than friendship. After all, it's easier to put off catching up with a friend than it is to skip your kid's play or an important business trip. And in fact, William Rawling says about this change as well, the real bittersweet aspect is young adulthood begins with all of this time for friendship and friendship just having this exuberant, profound importance for figuring out who you are and what's next. And you find at the end of young adulthood, now you don't have time for the very people who help to make all of these decisions. Bet concludes, it's sad, sure, that we stop relying on our friends as much as when we grow up, but it allows for a different kind of relationship based on mutual understanding of each other's human limitations. It's not ideal, but it's real. How many of you are still hanging out with the same people that you were when you first maybe started college or started working? Some of you, okay? But the majority of us, we've either grown and we've had to move or just life happens, right? And sadly, sometimes that's sad because, you know, you miss your friends, but time, commitment, you don't always get to have that same bond and maybe interest change. That's okay though. You still love them, but everyone's in a while, maybe. Check up on them.

One thing that I've learned over the years though, friends can become family. Friends can become family. How many of you have made a friend where they're not just a friend? It's like they're your bonus brother or your bonus sister. Anybody have that? Okay, where if it's 2:54 in the morning and you gotta call them and you say, you've got really great news or you've received the most heart-wrenching news and you need somebody for support. Do you have somebody like that in your life? Those people are key. Proverbs 17, 17 says, 'A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity.' Sometimes people will come into our lives for the fact that they're there to be there for you during the difficult season of your life who are there with you through thick and thin, through the good times and also the challenging times.

And one of the things that we sometimes forget to realize is that how is friendship, how are bonds really, truly formed? It's not through easy times. It's through hard times. It's sometimes through the messy situations. And sometimes even when you don't even agree but your care and love for one another helps you to overcome. You may not have all of the same interests. In fact, it's probably better that you don't. It's good to have differences. It's good to think differently. But if you have a common bond, that's what happens, helps propel you forward. You help each other, even when there's differences of opinion. If you hung out with the same people, with the same thoughts, with the same ideas, are you truly gonna grow? No, you're not gonna be challenged. And I, for one, I would love to, I love to be able to talk to everybody, even if I may not agree with them, because I genuinely wanna know, well, why do you think that way? Imagine if we could all do that and do that well, just because we may disagree on something. Doesn't mean that we can't care about each other, amen? More on that in a bit.

So is there anybody in your life that you can just call for to share something good, or something horrible has happened in your life? I have a number of friends who are currently, That's the role that they play in their life, my life. You know, my friend Grant, you know, I've known him for, oh, I think right before, at the beginning of college. And so much so that, you know, he's since gotten married. You all know his wife, she's staying here the first day that I came here. So she's my bonus sister in a sense. And they have a beautiful daughter. And I'm a bonus uncle to that child. And we, even though again, you know, we're so busy, they live a little

bit further, but we can always call each other. The latest thing is we're talking about watches. I've gotten into the watch game of, not purchasing watches, but understanding what they are and talking about them and all the little things. And it's another bond, another layer that has informed our friendship.

But probably one of the closest friendships that I've recently been able to build is with my friend, Jordan. And Jordan is from Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma. And he came out here, I think it was in 2016. He was working at a bike shop and I was riding a lot more at the time. And that's where I had my bike, where I would need to get work done. And I think our friendship started with just, I think we went to dinner somewhere. And then he hadn't been out in Los Angeles enough to really see Los Angeles. So I said, hey, I'll take you around. So we went downtown, we drove around downtown, Hollywood. We got dinner at a renowned restaurant. And it was there that was building the seeds of an awesome friendship. So much so that later on, a couple of years later, he had to go back home, but he couldn't fly. I can't remember the exact reason. So he had to drive and one of his friends flew out here to drive back with him. And well, I wasn't gonna get one up. It's like, this is my best friend. So I flew to Dallas because he was there for a wedding. We met, he introduced me to his wife, and Tulsa showed me some of the places that I kind of helped to understand what made him tick and who he was. Obviously, got to meet his parents and his family, and I realized why he was such a great guy. And that journey, I was able to, of course, check off a few states in New Mexico and Oklahoma, because I'm trying to go to every state in the United States. But spending 18 hours in a car, going from Oklahoma to LA. You're gonna have to talk about something. And we just talked about everything. Sharing music. It's good to know that you have similar musical interests. Imagine if I had to listen to something that I hated, and it was his passionate music. It was like, oh. But you know what? I can still overcome that. We went to all of the restaurants that I've been wanting to go to, and, It was just a beautiful trip, an exhausting trip. And there, eventually, I remember the first date with his now wife. I told him, don't mess this up, dude. If she's as awesome as you think she is, don't mess this up. And of course, being able to do premarital counseling with them and officiating their wedding was one of the highlights of my life. These short little windows are something that you build over years. And then when you look back and you see where God has placed people in your life to help you grow, to challenge you, to

help you become a better believer, amen? Now Jordan and I and Grant, we were pretty similarly minded, but there are strong differences, even what we think. And that's good.

So, friends, how do we become better? Friends, spend time with each other, find things that you love. One of the beautiful things though, is not only do you sometimes, some friends become family, but as you meet other people, the bonus of building friendships is you gain other friends over time. I've been able to meet other people through Grant, through Jordan, through Ryan. When Lisa was in hygiene school, some of her classmates, she became very great friends. And some of them, I also was able to develop friendships that even today, I love those individuals just as much as she does as well. And so, again, one of the benefits is, you build friendships beyond the initial friendship. But you have to take a chance, you have to take a risk. You have to say, hi, my name is Chris, my name is Lordus, my name is Pilar, my name is John. Is that scary sometimes? It can be scary, especially if you're introverted, okay? Some of you is like, hi, do you not like people? I don't want to talk to anybody, but yet you're missing so much out. Again, in the Garden of Eden, you had God, you had Adam, and you had Eve, you had community, you had support, you had friendship, you had community.

Now, when it comes to building friendships and relationships, and I realized, I'm sorry folks, we're gonna go a little over, okay? But do you always agree? No. In fact, who here has been married for a long time, and you've always gotten a degree, you've always gotten along, you've never had a fight? Don't raise your hands.

All right, because we know that's not true. You're gonna fight, and that's okay. Conflict, good, healthy conflict is good for you. Unhealthy conflict is bad for you. But in your communication. Now I say assertive and when people say, when you hear assertive, what does that sound like? Oh, that sounds like it's the man, right? That's such a strong word. But essentially when I say be assertive in expressing your feelings and wishes, tell people what you think, tell people what you would like, tell people what you want.

Now, don't be selfish about it. But let's say for instance, you know, I want to go on a vacation to, I want to go on a vacation to New York, okay? And your friend says, well, I want to go to the Grand Canyon. Well, lay out why. Why would you like to go to New York? Why would you like to go to the Grand Canyon? Why would you love to go to Italy? Why would you love to go to Japan? And as you do so, share the why it's important and how it would make you feel.

I've wanted to go to New York because I hear it's a city of lights. It's fast. There's a lot of people there. It's exciting. But there's also some things that I've always wanted to see. I want to see the Empire State Building. I want to see, I would love to see the 9-11 Memorial. There's so many things. There's so many restaurants I would love to. And the reason why, and if we were to do that, that would make me so happy.

And by the way, this applies to all relationships, especially in marriages, amen? Some of you, that was kind of amen. Now we could say all the things that we want, but if the other side, the other part of the party is not actively listening. Have you ever tried to talk to somebody where you know that they're not even listening, they're just taking everything that you're saying and already preparing their measured response if they even wait?

Now, folks, it's 2024. What's happening in 2024? Some of you are getting really scared now. There's the Olympics, but at the end of 2024, they're supposed to be in election. Okay? Oh, Pastor went there. Folks, I'm gonna give some ground rules as far as how we're gonna operate this year. Now, fortunately enough, in 2020, we were good to each other. We were kind, we're loving. And these are principles that in life, we need to live by. Because if there's any indication of the past, what does the past tend to do? It repeats itself.

So how should we listen to each other? Actively listen. Don't try to make up any ideas. Listen to what they are saying. And as you listen to what they're saying, let them know that you care by restating what you heard. So as I said, hey, I'd love to go to New York because I want to go and see the Empire State Building. I want to see the 9-11 Memorial. I want to go and get pizza at all the wonderful pizza places because that would bring me joy and happiness.

Other person? So what you're saying, and you can say this a little more eloquently, is like, you really want to go to New York because you want to go and see all of these wonderful, beautiful things because it's very personal to you, right? When somebody affirms what you're saying and they get it and they know what you're saying, how does that make you feel? It makes you feel like a million dollars, right? Rather than, yeah, I know you want to go over there, but that's expensive, there's a lot of people, I hate people, I'd rather go someplace like the Grand Canyon where nobody's there. Truth be told, there's still a lot of people there, right?

And when you disagree, when there is conflict, when you can't seem to be on the same page, try to work things out together. Give ideas, but also when somebody has wronged you, this is what you do. Do you go and tell everybody about your problems? No, you go to that person directly. Let's go to Matthew 18. Matthew 18. I know we've talked about this, but I gotta bring it back. Matthew 18, and these are the principles that we at Downey Church are going to live by if we ever are in conflict with one another, okay? If we disagree with one another.

And again, like I said, it's not wrong to disagree, it's how you disagree, okay? All right, Matthew 18, verse 15, we are there. Okay, if your brother or sister sins, thank you, go and point out their fault just between the two of you. Now, can I just go and say, hey, that person's messing up in their life, can I just go and tell that person that they're messing up? Should I? Depends. Is that person, is that thing affecting me? Yes, if they're affecting me, obviously, yeah, hey, dude, why do you say all that stuff about me? Why did you do that to me? Go to that person directly.

You don't have to tell your best friend, you don't have to tell the other people over there, why do we do that? Because just maybe that person doesn't even know that they're doing something wrong. And how much more embarrassing is it when everybody knows that they're doing something wrong and they didn't even know they did anything wrong? Do you think that's gonna be a happy resolution? No, it's not. Go to them directly.

And when you can't agree, okay, if they listen to you, you've won them over. But if they won't listen, take somebody else along, or maybe a couple other people so

that every matter may be established by the witness testimony of two or three witnesses. It's always good to have maybe a third party where, they can be objective, they can think about things. Their heart and their minds and their emotions and their feelings are not as invested. They can think more clearly, okay?

And if that's still, if they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they relist listen even to the church, treat them as you would treat a pagan or a tax collector. And you know, now we've already gone over this, but for maybe for those of you who've never heard of this passage, when it says treat them like a pagan or a tax collector, you would immediately think as if Jesus is being super harsh. When actually he's really saying, treat them as if they don't know anything. Treat them, treat the situation as if they're a brand new baby Christian and start from the basic building blocks. So listen to one another.

And again, I truly, if two of you on earth agree about anything that they ask for it, it will be done for them by my father in heaven for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. So my friends, even when we're in conflict, it's okay. As long as we can learn, let's be loving and let's be kind. When we go to somebody, it's because we care, but we're not going there because, oh, I heard a rumor. But if somebody is also, if there's something in their, if somebody is an alcoholic in your life, okay, and you truly love them, are you just gonna let their life idle away? If you truly love them, if my friends, if I saw them having trouble with the bottle, I would say, hey man, I'm concerned for you. And in fact, I've had to do that with a couple of my friends and they realized, and guess what? They got help. It wasn't an overnight thing. It took time, but I've been there for them because why I love them.

And the last thing that I wanna ask, what's the two hardest words to say? I thought it was Worcestershire sauce. No, you got it. I'm sorry. Bill's gonna talk about forgiveness next week, but I'm sorry, the two hardest words to say. The other two words, you're forgiven. Mmm. Let's marinate on that this week. And next week, Bill's gonna talk more about that. I'm sorry, you are forgiven.

All right, so my time is up. It's important that we have friendships because friends are also important for our community. We can't grow if we don't know other

people. We can't grow if we don't talk. If we're gonna pigeonhole ourselves each other based on the party that we vote for or the people that we hang out with or the things that we say or believe, just because we say certain words, automatically we're judging each other. Let's look at the whole context of what people say and not just little tidbits, amen? Amen.

All right, so this week, where are you challenged with keeping friendships and how can you grow? Okay, how can you develop? How can you better reach out? How can you better serve? It's as simple as sending a text maybe or writing a note, simple call. Hey, let's go and get some coffee. Hey, let's go for a walk, spend time. The biggest thing is make an effort to do something. It can be something simple and minor, but it could change somebody's life.

Continue to build up friendships and implement healthy communication principles that we discussed. Be able to share what's on your mind openly and honestly, but most importantly, listen. God gave us two ears and one mouth. Let's listen twice as much before we receive and say anything. Amen?

All right. Father in heaven, thank you Lord, for you are good and your mercy endures forever. Forgive us Lord of our shortcomings. Help us Lord to build healthy and strong relationships, friendships with one another. And that God will help us to support but also be there when challenging times and good times happen. Help us to see all the good things you're doing in our lives, be with the things that are in our hearts and our minds, that keep us up at night, Lord.

And above all Lord, help us to be the faithful stewards, be with the ambassadors that you've called us to be, here in Downey and wherever we go, whatever we do, may we help to reflect you even better. Be with us now, keep us safe until we meet again in Jesus' name, amen. Everybody said, amen.
God bless, grace and peace everyone.