

WAYNE FRANCIS

FOREWORD BY ISRAEL HOUGHTON

MAKE FRIENDS WITH ANYONE

PRACTICING GOD'S DESIGN
FOR REAL FRIENDSHIP
IN A LONELY WORLD

This book will help you make friends. But more than that—it will challenge you to become one. And in a world like this, that might be the most powerful thing you could ever be.

ISRAEL HOUGHTON, seven-time Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter, producer, and worship leader

To know Wayne is to know he has never met a stranger, and so I don't know anyone more qualified to write a book on friendship. What you will read within these pages Wayne has lived out with depth, integrity, and passion. In an age where connection has become more virtual than real, we need help getting back to the true virtues, to being people who include, welcome, and can make friends with anyone. This book is an antidote to loneliness, and its pages provide not just the *why* for more connection but the *how to* for building a life that is fruitful in friendship.

CHARLOTTE GAMBILL, speaker; author; mentor

Wayne Francis is a gem of a human and a credible witness. Having lived and ministered in New York, he well understands that addressing loneliness is a key to bringing the gospel to that city in a very *Jesus-y* kind of way.

ALAN HIRSCH, author of numerous books on missional spirituality, leadership, and organization; cofounder of Forge Global

Anyone who's met Wayne Francis walks away feeling like they've found a new best friend. He's a master at cultivating that type of engagement. But his real genius shines through his new book, where he takes what's intuitive to him and makes it instructional for his readers. *Make Friends with Anyone* gives us fresh language and vivid imagery to reframe

and recalibrate relationships. Wayne not only helps us understand the epidemic of loneliness but also provides us with practical handles and biblical wisdom that pave a path toward building and nurturing the friendships we were always meant to have.

LARRY BREY, associate pastor at Elevation Church

I had the privilege of witnessing Wayne Francis in his sweet spot, his relational gift zone, for years. I've seen the fruit of how he befriends people, makes meaningful connections, and even creates cultures of deeper relationships. Rarely do you find someone who has such a high IQ and EQ working in tandem. It's inspiring. And now it can be accessed and implemented. I'm grateful Wayne is finally sharing these unique insights with us, and I can't wait to draw from this resource he's created to help us more deeply engage in the most valuable thing in the world: relationships.

TAUREN WELLS, award-winning music artist; lead pastor at the Church of Whitestone

Years ago, I met Wayne Francis—a wild, unforgettable, dancing preacher with a real passion for connecting people. We instantly hit it off and became great friends. In his book *Make Friends with Anyone*, Wayne goes straight after one of the biggest struggles people are facing today . . . loneliness. Let's be honest—a lot of people today have followers but no real friends. We're not too busy to make friends; we're just not very good at it. Everybody needs a BFF. If you want to get closer to God, don't overthink it. Start by getting closer to His people.

DAVID CRANK, lead pastor at Faith Church

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NavPress 

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Make Friends with Anyone: Practicing God's Design for Real Friendship in a Lonely World

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FOREWORD

There are some people in our lives whose friendship speaks before they even say a word.

Wayne is one of those people for me.

Wayne understands that relationships don't just happen—they're built. Thoughtfully. Deliberately. With care. When he asked me to write the foreword for this book, he didn't send a quick text or make a casual call. He did what Wayne does—he made the interaction intentional. He gave me a small gift bag with a cassette player and a personal message.

That's Wayne.

That's the kind of friend he is.

Even in the ask, he was modeling the very thing this book is about.

And honestly, that's one of the reasons I love him so much.

Wayne is the kind of friend you can call when you need help. The kind who shows up. The kind who pays attention. He knows I understand that kind of friendship too. I know what it means to be there—to carry, to listen, to stand in the gap.

That kind of friendship is a gift. And right now, it's a necessary one. Because these are crazy times.

We're more connected than ever but also somehow more disconnected than ever. Surrounded by people, platforms, and noise—and still, so many feel alone. A lot of people know how to network. A lot of people know how to stay visible. But fewer people know how to truly know and be known.

Wayne does.

And more importantly, he understands that friendship isn't just social—it's spiritual. It's part of how God designed us to live. This book doesn't just teach you how to meet people; it teaches you how to value them, how to understand them, and how to build something real.

That's what makes friendship matter.

Wayne isn't writing theory—he's writing conviction. He's writing what he's lived, what he's practiced, and what he's given to so many of us over the years. There's weight in these pages because there's truth in his life.

If you've ever had a real friend, you know how rare that is.

And if you haven't, this book will help you find your way there.

Wayne, my brother—thank you. For your friendship. For your intention. For the way you've shown up in my life and in the lives of so many others.

To the reader: This book will help you make friends.

But more than that—it will challenge you to become one.

And in a world like this, that might be the most powerful thing you could ever be.

Israel Houghton

*seven-time Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter;
producer; worship leader*

INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT ROOTS WITH MODERN RELEVANCE

People come into your life for a reason, for a season, or for a lifetime.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

He sure didn't look lonely.

My newer friend and I were walking around the cobblestoned streets of SoHo, the fashion-forward hub of all things trendy in Lower Manhattan. It was one of those days when the sidewalks and crosswalks were so congested that it was impossible not to bump into other latte-toting, mildly aloof pedestrians.

We stepped into a local haunt that is famous for double-patty Wagyu burgers, and my friend sat across from me with eyes that appeared strangely sullen. Now, mind you, this person is upwardly mobile with a fairly prestigious career. He's accumulated accolades in his profession, lives in what is arguably the greatest city in the world, and is tall and boyishly handsome—yet he uttered words that shocked me: “I’m lonely.”

I was taken aback. He was in a long-standing relationship with a woman he was considering marrying, and he was sitting across the table from me! I felt like the Invisible Man for a moment. He went further, saying, “If I died in my apartment this week, it’d probably take about four days before anyone would notice or find me.”

Was he depressed? Was he burned out? Was he dealing with some inner shame and guilt? I thought to myself, *Dude, you go to one of the biggest megachurches in NYC, and eight hundred people live in your apartment complex! How are you lonely?* Puzzled, I kept digging, trying to figure out what would cause him to express such a vulnerable statement. After conversing with him a bit more, I discovered that, though his

life was moving fast in terms of revenue, the pace of his friendship building was extremely slow.

As it turns out, life moves at the speed of relationships.

**As it turns out,
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relationships.**

That night, an after-midnight text informed me that he had gotten home safely and expressed how life-giving our time was—evidencing a level of deep gratitude just for spending some time with me that evening. It struck me then, as it often does, that there really is a rising epidemic in our cities, suburbs, and rural areas. It is an epidemic of loneliness.

If the word *epidemic* sounds too hyperbolic or clinical, I can assure you that it is not a misuse of terminology. Former United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy states that about half of all adults in America report experiencing

loneliness, which results in profound threats to health and well-being. The implications are far-reaching. Dr. Murthy cites being socially disconnected as having a similar mortality impact to smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day and an even greater impact than obesity and physical inactivity.¹ With this type of threat, relationships are not optional; they're oxygen.

Given our societal polarization due to our differences in politics, socioeconomic challenges, education disparities, and more, we are doing a poor job of making friends and maintaining friendships. Many people, like my friend, are traversing life without that high school BFF they swore would be carrying their casket or the best man or maid of honor who raised a glass of prosecco at their wedding reception. Those were the friendships that felt like tattoos—but eventually we realized they're not the kind inked and etched in flesh; they're more like the Cracker Jack tattoos that were once affixed but have been washed away over time.

Maybe as you're reading this you feel like my friend who shared frustration and grief about not having a deep and meaningful cadre of friends to face life with. The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. There is a non-controversial and noninvasive prescription to cure the current epidemic of disconnection.

A STRATEGY FOR CONNECTION

I am proud to say that I am from the birthplace of hip-hop music: the Bronx. Natives like me refer to our stomping grounds as the Boogie Down. I grew up in the 1980s in an ungentrified

context that felt as diverse as a sixty-four-piece Crayola carton. My first friend was a kid named Todd Silverman, who lived in my neighborhood. Todd was white with curly blond hair, blue eyes, and teeth that looked like they were playing tug-of-war in his mouth. We were an unlikely duo. Todd was winsome and fun, and we bonded over playing *Contra*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Double Dribble* on my Nintendo. We enjoyed pizza and sleepovers, occasionally riding our bikes on the dead-end street adjacent to my house.

The first time I can recall feeling a deep sense of friendship with someone, it was with Todd. I can remember vividly the moments when his dad would pick him up from our house to take him back to his own home. Each time, I would fight back tears because I wanted the good times to continue to roll. Even though he only lived five blocks away, the abrupt departure of my friend left me feeling like my brother was being snatched away to a foreign land.

We were too young to talk about the things that were troubling us. It wasn't as though we swapped stories about being annoyed by our older siblings or shared the frustrations we had with our parents not seeing why we needed Nintendo, Atari, *and* ColecoVision gaming stations to be moderately successful prepubescent boys. At that time, the ministry of presence and the bond over similar interests were enough. That relationship with Todd was the precursor of friendships to come later in my life.

Since those grade school years, I've had a couple of other best friends. However, I've also had to outgrow an all-my-eggs-in-one-basket mentality toward friendship. Put simply,

placing too much emphasis on one friend can create a burden. One person is not always equipped to handle every complexity of another individual's personality, to be able to fully meet all that person's friendship needs. As I've matured, I've learned to build relationships with more people—but this does not mean I am friends with everyone! Broadening my connections is part of an intentional strategy that enhances the quality of all my relationships. I've learned to navigate friendships with competence, knowing with whom I should simply be present and whom I should build trust with, take advice from, and even share the traumatized and dark places of my soul with.

That strategy became my motivation for writing this book. Most adults recognize that making and maintaining friendships is hard, especially amid the busyness of our lives. Many lack a methodology for evaluating relationships, appreciating them for what they are, and determining which ones to go deeper with. Every meaningful attempt at friendship has the potential for triumphs, tragedy, and trauma. Some people will help you grow as a person, and others will come close to demolishing you. That's why the best relationships are equal parts rewarding and risky! But at the end of the day, we can't survive without other people. I believe God designed life on a ninety-degree angle. We can't experience the best of God without experiencing the best and worst of each other.

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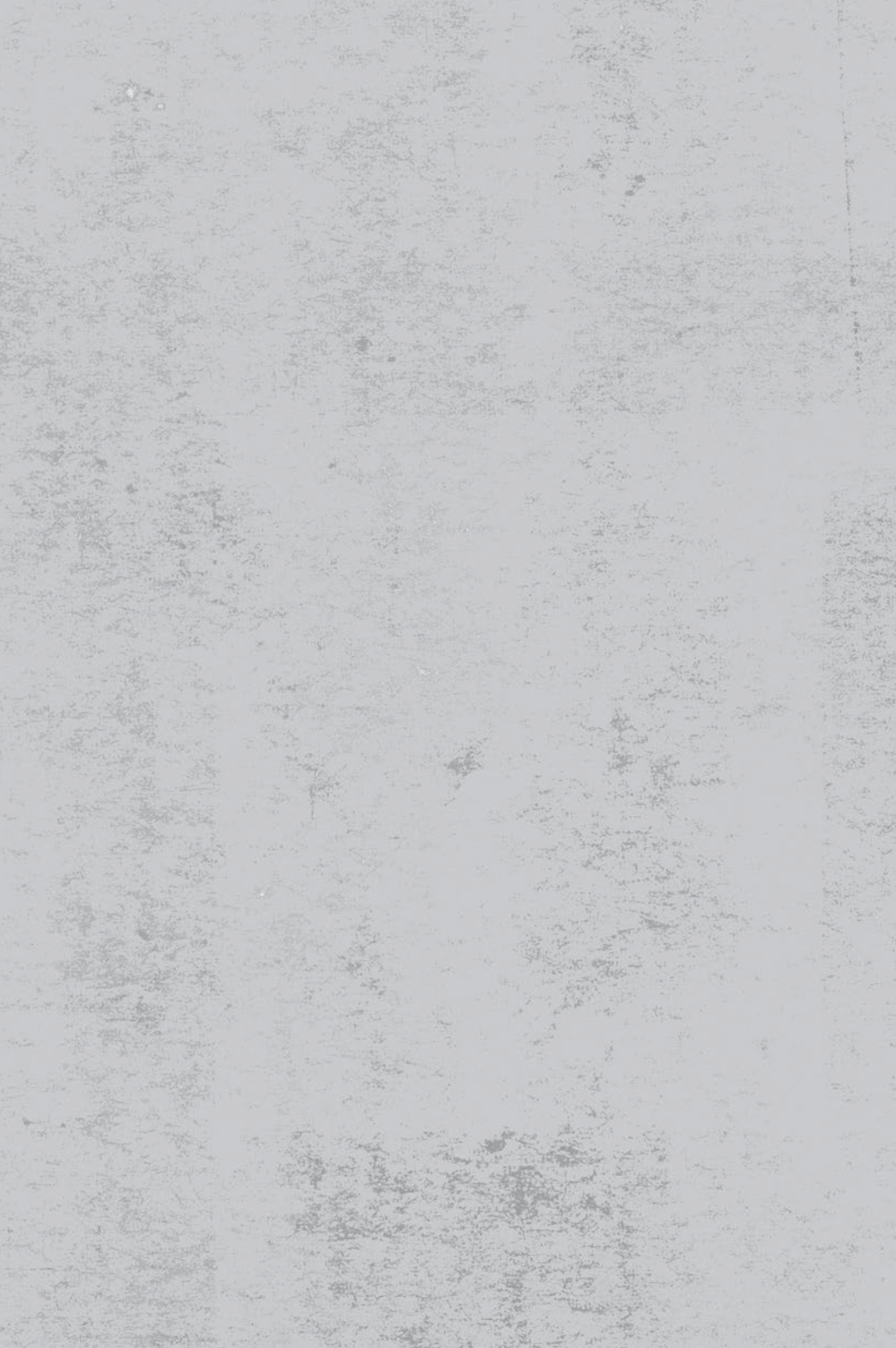
As a pastor, when describing the Christian faith, I call it a package deal. If you want to follow Jesus, the package deal is you, God, and others. There's no escaping relationship. Jesus, God the Son, elevated a theology of friendship at the beginning of His ministry and shared the most profound words and examples to accentuate the importance of human connectedness. Jesus was not aimless in His approach. He had a rubric through which He filtered His relationships that made Him effective in serving others, impacting the world, and carrying out His purpose. What I love about the way Jesus modeled friendship is that He, too, had to deal with the same weird, idiosyncratic issues with His friends that we do with ours. He even had to deal with the most famous betrayal in human history.

Over my twenty-five years in full-time ministry, I have come to understand that most of us can make friends with anyone and in so doing get closer to God. The Trinity has always been in perfect community, and God wants to see us enjoy relationships on this side of eternity that glorify Him. When you're done with this book, my hope is that you'll have a better understanding of friendship and the tools to be a better friend. I think we'll have some fun together along the way!

And I'll be your BFF.

PART 1

FOUNDATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP



THE GOSPEL OF FRIENDSHIP

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

If God on the Cross is God shamming a human tragedy, it turns the Passion of Christ into the Farce of Christ. The death of the Son must be real. Father Martin assured me that it was. But once a dead God, always a dead God, even resurrected. The Son must have the taste of death forever in His mouth. The Trinity must be tainted by it; there must be a certain stench at the right hand of God the Father. The horror must be real. Why would God wish that upon Himself? Why not leave death to the mortals? Why make dirty what is beautiful, spoil what is perfect?

Love. That was Father Martin's answer.

YANN MARTEL

What can be more delightful than to have some one to whom you can say everything with the same absolute confidence as to yourself?

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Have you ever wondered what the very first friendship looked like? Who were the original BFFs? Maybe it was two wildly hairy guys doing their best Chewbacca imitations. I can

imagine them fist-bumping with pride, secretly sizing up whose spear-throwing technique was better. Or maybe it was two brilliant women exchanging tantalizing secrets about how best to court the choicest cavemen while they brewed ancient herbal teas that doubled as medicinal elixirs. Millennia before people had access to entertainment venues or bougie spas, they saw and understood something of the fabric of friendship: that, like tapestries, friendships are usually woven one thread at a time into something that is warm, life-giving, and beautiful.

ORIGIN STORIES

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the first recorded depiction of friendship in literature. An epic poem composed in ancient Mesopotamia around 2100 BC, it tells of the bond between Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, and Enkidu, a wild man formed by the gods. Their relationship is complex, fierce, and transformative—a raw portrayal of what can happen when two lives collide in friendship.

Origin stories are fun, right? Whether it's BFFs, Cruella, Wonka, the Joker, or Batman, we love to find out where our heroes (or antiheroes) come from, don't we? I think we sense intuitively that a thing's origin tells us something of the nature of the thing itself.

Friendship is a topic that is perhaps too little explored and almost certainly too little experienced. C. S. Lewis went as far as to say that because we don't experience friendship, we don't value it.¹

Most of us have people in our lives we would at least *describe* as friends, and yet somehow we've still ended up in a loneliness

epidemic. The consequences can be seen across our society—in schools, workplaces, and civic and religious organizations.² It seems that, for many of us, our friendships are ineffective.

As a society, we struggle to wrap our collective brain around the nature—and perhaps the depth—of the dilemma. What are friends, and why do we need them? What does true friendship add to our lives? How do we measure the strength of friendship?

I believe that our answers to these questions heavily influence who we are becoming and how we interface with and experience the world around us. For our happiness, our health, and the flourishing of our communities, I propose that we need a more robust understanding of friendship.

Let's start by looking at what the word *friendship* means, where the concept of friendship comes from, and an example of the kind of friend we all need. As a Christian pastor, my first move is always to open Scripture (it's kind of in the job description!). That's where I start when forming a biblical worldview on any topic, including the meaning of friendship. In this book, I'll walk you through an origin story of friendship as found in the Bible and then explore a theology of friendship. But before I get too far ahead of myself, let's consider what the word *friendship* means.

ETYMOLOGY OF *FRIENDSHIP*

I find it fascinating to research where words come from. Etymology—studying the origin stories of words—allows us to consider the way a word was understood in a particular moment

and how that has changed over time. To be honest, most of my linguistic curiosity is focused on the root meanings of personal names. So I was deeply disappointed to learn that my name, Wayne, means “wagonmaker” and not “harbinger of coolness” as I (naturally) assumed.³ My disappointment was only slightly mitigated by the discovery of a Christian bookmark that suggested that Wayne may also mean “a lifter of burdens.” Since I’m a pastor, that makes sense, but sometimes I wish it could be applied to the burden of weights at the gym instead.

While the Old English word *frēond* translates to the Modern English word *friend*, it’s perhaps more helpful to look at its verbal form. *Frēon* means “to love, like, honor, set free (from slavery or confinement).”⁴

The Germanic root *frithu-* means “peace,” suggesting that friends may find peace in one another’s presence.⁵

The most common Hebrew word translated “friend,” רֵעַ (*rēa’*) [or רֵעָה (*rē’eh*)], means an “associate,” “companion,” “fellow,” or “neighbour.”⁶ The key Greek word is φίλος (*philos*), which likewise points to a loved one or a close companion.⁷

This etymological triangulation starts to sketch a picture of how the concept of friendship has been understood in different times and places. A friend is one we love and honor—a neighbor or close companion in whose company we find peace and solace from isolation. Rather than pointing to passion or strong emotions, this word, we discover, has a more action-oriented focus—to love, to honor, to set free. Real friendships were thought to be vehicles for movement and action in which friends might liberate one another from the bondage of isolation.

I think these ideas about friendship still ring true.

While etymology can tell us about the origins of words, the Bible tells us about the origins of life. Therefore, it's worth considering what the Bible can teach us about the nature of friendship.

THEOLOGY OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible's Old Testament tells us that God existed from eternity and created the universe and everyone in it. *It's an origin story!*

Genesis is the first book in the Bible. In it we find the account of the creation of the universe and everything in it. It tells the story of early humanity through generational growth and strife. Germane to our questions about friendship, we find a strange claim just twenty-six lines into the book: "God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26).

It's an account of our origin story and our ancestral starting point. But do you notice anything strange? At the time described, when God created humankind, God was the only existing personal and rational being. So who the heck is "us"?

Please sit down if for some reason you're standing as you read this. I forgot to have you sign my waiver of liability, and frankly, I don't think I can afford the lawsuits, but this stuff is pretty wild and may result in mild vertigo.

The Bible tells us that God is triune—that is, three in one. And while a full theology of the Trinity is vastly beyond the scope of this book (and perhaps the ability of this wagonmaker),

it will help us to make one relatively simple, if mind-bending, observation—the one God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, in God’s inner dialogue (“Let us make . . .”), He can use plural pronouns in an exacting and precise way. God is one, yet God is “We.”

That is why in the New Testament Jesus’ very close friend John makes the claim that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). In order to *be* love, one would need to be inwardly relational. This makes sense given that God exists in three persons.

C. S. Lewis is helpful on this point: “And that . . . is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions: that in Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.”⁸

And so it is that friendship existed perfectly before time began. Indeed, the very nature of this pulsating, vibrant, communal God is the driving force behind creation. God was complete in Himself and didn’t *need* anything from us. Like a lovingly married couple who bear children to invite them into the community of family, *God merely wanted us to join His dance.*

If the *inner* friendship of God feels theologically abstract, it may be more relatable to consider the first *outward*-facing expressions of friendship.

Vertical Friendship

In a wonderful book called *Basic Christianity*, John Stott asserts that “our chief claim to nobility as human beings is that we

were made in the image of God and are therefore capable of knowing him.”⁹

Look with me at the conclusion of the Genesis 1 account we started above. On the sixth day

God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

GENESIS 1:26-31

While this book is about friendship, I would be remiss if I did not point out the riches that come from *our origin story*. We are image bearers, yes—but also so much more. Look, God knows us by name! We have dominion over the earth and everything in it. God gave us a blessing and a purpose—to rule and to cultivate. And He finished the story with a benediction—a “good word”: *It was very good*. This is the only benediction in six days of creation that includes *very*. There is something special about the creation of mankind. If you are wondering whether you have dignity or value, whether your life means anything—just look! *You are very good*. If you are trudging through some darkness in your life, remember something all New Yorkers will relate to: You’ve got a guy. *This* God is in your corner.

It gets even better.

We see later in the story that Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8).

The Bible deigns to claim that God’s voice (at the very least) accompanied and was heard by the people He created. We can imagine that they walked with God in “the cool of the day”—which, by the way, is the perfect time for outdoor cardio! (This may be where the notion of ten thousand steps a day came from.¹⁰)

If the dynamic, pulsating activity and drama of the interpersonal Trinity bends your mind, then remind yourself of this: God went to find Adam and Eve in the garden. He wanted to be with them, to walk with them, to speak with them. As Stott tells us, this is, at least in part, what God

means when He calls us image bearers.¹¹ As God exists in relationship, we also were made for relationships—first, for a relationship with God Himself, something we might call a vertical relationship. We are invited to have a heaven-reaching friendship with this God of the dance. This truly is the stuff of nobility.

Horizontal Friendship

In Genesis 2, there is another account of the creation of Adam and Eve, of humankind. One way to understand the second account is to note that it offers more detail than the first. In this detail, we learn that God created Adam before Eve—that even before Eve was made, He put Adam to work in the family business. Adam was participating as a cocreator with God.

The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. . . .

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

GENESIS 2:7, 15

All right, quick trivia: As we've seen, the first man was made from dust. *But from what was the first woman made?* Check this out:

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

GENESIS 2:18-20

Adam *had to be* having a cool time in Eden, right? God would parade all His new animals in front of him, and Adam would rifle off gibberish that memorialized names for posterity. In spite of all the fun, God noted something. Not even an elephant would make a suitable companion for Adam. God knew Adam needed more than beasts or pets. He needed a friend.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

GENESIS 2:21-22

A rib! She was made from a rib! (Reminds me of the old Chili's commercials.)

Adam must have felt the need for a friend, because he woke up from invasive surgery and immediately sang the first song of friendship:

“This is now bone of my bones
 and flesh of my flesh;
 she shall be called ‘woman,’
 for she was taken out of man.”

GENESIS 2:23

Here’s something to chew on: Friendship was so important to God that even *after* creation was complete, after He had declared it *very good*, after He had rested, He saw that something was missing. Think about that. God and Adam already had a great friendship in which they enjoyed creation together and spent time in community with one another. God knew Adam still needed a different kind of relationship in the form of another human—what we might call a horizontal relationship.

Some of us may be tempted to link Adam’s song to marriage only, but I think that misses something important. In God’s eyes, a spouse is more than a friend but is never less than a friend. Marriage, at its best, is understood and lived as a sacred relationship that is the epitome of human friendship. Eve was a friend to Adam, originally and preeminently.

Others may be tempted to think that women are demeaned by God calling Eve a helper, but let’s consider the exact meaning of the word. The Hebrew word עֵזֶר, *ezer*, means “an ally or rescuer, someone who comes running when the people cry out for help. An *ezer* drops everything to save those in need.”¹² In Eve, Adam was given a great and powerful friend and partner, not an apprentice.

So let's review. We see in the Trinity a height and depth of friendship that reflects the very nature of God, and as an expression of His relational character, He wove friendship itself into the tapestry of creation. In the creation of Eve, we see a helpmate—not a servant or subordinate but a partner and companion. And in God's friendship with this first family, we see that when God calls us image bearers, He means, at least in part, that our nature mirrors His relational character. God's vertical friendship is meant to be our first relationship. But without horizontal friendship, God's creation was incomplete.

Pre-Fallen Friendship

In Adam and Eve we see the first horizontal relationship; and in the first moments between them, sin had not yet entered the world. We should see this beautiful friendship for what it was: perfect, transparent, and gushing—so gushing that it prompted a song. This was friendship in its purest, most authentic form. If we look closely, there must be some hint as to what a healthy friendship looks like. So notice,

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

GENESIS 2:25

Adam and Eve were literally naked, but I think God is showing us more than just body positivity in this account of creation. Their nakedness also reflected their emotional nudity—their vulnerability. We see in this sinless moment

that trust and honesty are vital components of friendship. Talk about being in the buff!

Ralph Waldo Emerson highlights this in his famous work on friendship. He believed a true friend is someone you can trust completely, knowing that they will always have your best interests at heart: “A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere,” he writes. “Before him I may think aloud.”¹³

That’s a description of utter vulnerability. Adam and Eve fully saw and fully loved one another. They had each other’s backs. God has this high a view for the potential of friendship.

Alas, creeping around even the parts of the story we’ve discussed so far, sin slunk into God’s creation. And unfortunately, friendship became much more difficult.

The Serpent’s Snare

Adam and Eve, as representatives of the human race, were made rulers over all the earth with one limitation: God commanded them not to eat fruit from one tree in the garden. When a serpent suggested to them God was holding back good things, they disobeyed that one command. In this act, both discrete and symbolic, something emerged in the human heart that God had not placed there—a lack of trust in God Himself. The Bible calls this condition of the heart *sin*. And as a result, the first friends were found bickering over who was at fault for being deceived by the serpent’s snare. They covered their nakedness from one another and hid from God.

So it was that Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden and sent where God’s voice was not so easily heard. Adam and Eve, as our representatives, put a barrier

between us and God (see Genesis 3:1-13). You see, sin separates us from God. With God, we have the fullness of life; apart from Him, well, that's what the Bible calls death. There were other consequences besides this (see Genesis 3:16-19), but this was the worst was of them. "For dust you are," God told them, "and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19).

Sin also contaminates horizontal relationships. Transparency and love are diminished. Friendships require more work, more wisdom, and more focused intentionality. Does any of this sound familiar? Maybe the surgeon general is onto something about this moment of loneliness that we find ourselves in.

But even as the curse of sin was realized, as God explained the damage and consequences caused by our lack of trust in Him, He also cursed the serpent who had tempted Eve. In this curse, He referred to one who would come to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Adam and Eve may not have known who this mysterious hero was, but God was offering them hope alongside justice. He was telling Adam and Eve that He does not so easily abandon His friends.

After sin crashed the perfect relationship that God intended us to have with Him and with each other, everything got messy. Greed, jealousy, and lies marred the beautiful relational world Adam and Eve were meant to enjoy in Eden. There was no spiritual duct tape to patch up the fracture caused by their poor decision. From that moment on, every human relationship carried the ache of what was lost in Eden.

And yet, even in that broken world, the Old Testament offers beautiful glimpses of authentic and faithful friendships,

each one a reminder that God's design for connection refuses to quit. God's people maintained hope that a hero was coming who would set things right. But thousands of years passed.

THEOLOGY OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we shift to the New Testament, we see God continuing to reveal Himself. Notably, there are four history books called the Gospels (after an Old English word meaning “good news”). In these books, we learn of a moment almost too mind-blowing for words. On the first Christmas, a virgin gave birth to a son. An angel had instructed her to name the boy Jesus, making the strange declaration that “he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Just so we're on the same page, the angel was announcing *the* Son—as in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Jesus, God “moved into [our] neighborhood” (John 1:14, msg). God walked with Adam and Eve in Genesis, and He came to walk with us again. This time He dressed up for the party. He put on skin.

When I say that God reveals Himself in the New Testament, I mean that in Jesus we see who God *is*. Jesus authored life at the beginning of time and then came in the flesh to show us how to best live this life. The Bible tells us that though Jesus was tempted, He did not sin. So we know that Jesus lived the way we were meant to live. One of the things we notice is that He had a lot of friends, including twelve in particular, whom He invited into close companionship. In Jesus we see the kind of friendship we need—its cause, its

course, and its currency. And we may learn something about serpent crushing as well.

The Cause of Friendship

C. S. Lewis believed that friendship “arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share.”¹⁴

Adds Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Do you love me?* means *Do you see the same truth?*—Or at least, ‘*Do you care about the same truth?*’”¹⁵ I think this is also what Chance the Rapper means when he talks about doing “the same drugs.”¹⁶

The cause of friendship, then, is not merely to fill a void (like loneliness or boredom) but to complement a conviction or concern. If we want to have a cause for friendship, we must (to some degree) know who we are—what interests, questions, or convictions define us. If we seek friends merely for the sake of having friends, we are unlikely to find what we desire.

The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends. Where the truthful answer to the question *Do you see the same truth?* would be “I see nothing and I don’t care about the truth; I only want a Friend,” no Friendship can arise—though Affection of course may. There would be nothing for the Friendship to be *about*; and Friendship must be about something. . . . Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers.¹⁷

Friendship is discovered where a truth is jointly held. Jesus understood this better than anyone.

The Course of Friendship

When Jesus reached adulthood and His public ministry began, He took a position as a wandering rabbi and began calling ordinary men to His service:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

MARK 1:16-17

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

MATTHEW 9:9

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

LUKE 9:23

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”¹⁸

MATTHEW 28:19-20

As we look at these words of Jesus through the wisdom of Lewis and Emerson, we see that Jesus was offering a course for friendship—a journey with Him. Jesus talked, ate, lived, walked, and shared His life as fully as He could with His fellow travelers. He was modeling the relational nature of the triune God by inviting a ragtag, motley crew of first-century nobodies to walk beside Him. He didn't need them, but He wanted them to join the dance.

On their journey with Jesus, the disciples would learn that He was not only the course but also the truth to which He was calling them. "I am the way and the truth and the life," He told them (John 14:6). Or in our terms, "I am the *course* and the *cause*." We'll see shortly what He meant by *life*.

Through friendship with Jesus, God was calling our names again. Jesus' words recorded in John 15:15 may be the watershed moment that reveals God's desire to restore us to friendship: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." He's asking His friends to be all up in His business. It's a family business. And at the risk of spoiling the story, it's now a serpent-crushing business.

When I was young, growing up in the Bronx, I had a friend who had more names than an Old Testament genealogy. His name was Julius Amadou Obihoma Yomi Pommells. I had four older sisters and no brother, and I badly wanted Julius to be my brother. I remember riding bikes into Haffen Park one day. Julius and I were discussing whether or not we should pierce our index fingers with a pin and mingle

our blood together in order to somehow make our bond more biological. We know now that this is not safe—and not something people do anymore—but when we were growing up in the 1980s, this was something kids did.

Ancient people also practiced blood bonds. Hunter-gatherers and warrior societies exchanged blood and made covenantal vows to one another. In the ancient world, meaningful friendship was a requisite for safety and prosperity. Friendship was built on loyalty and trust. Your life was often literally in the hands of your friends. As in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, friendship was sacred. It was fierce. It was transformative.

I've read about the indigenous Akwe-Shavante people of western Brazil. Parents in this group encourage their sons to develop one or two close friends, their *i-amó* ("my other"), who will be their companion(s) for life. The Bangwa people of Cameroon, mostly farmers and hunters, purportedly make sure that when a man dies, his best friend—*not* his family—pays for the funeral and receives the community's sympathies.¹⁹

This is very different from modern Western sensibilities concerning friendship.

In some ways, Jesus' teaching would have been more intuitive to the audiences He preached to than it is to us. They understood the sacredness of a covenantal vow or a commitment to serve. They may have even understood dying for a friend to be a high act of love.

I think there is something in us that still understands the value of blood—be it shared or spilled on behalf of another. Deep down we know that true friendship leaves a mark on us.

The Currency of Friendship

I hate snakes. Legitimately. Big ones, small ones—doesn't matter. If it slithers, I'm out. One summer while fly-fishing (without waders, mind you), I was half convinced a snake was plotting to swim up and take a bite out of me.

It's no wonder Scripture and even our own language at times connects snakes with deception and danger. As much as I'd love to see every serpent crushed, I'm the first to admit that I'm not the guy to do the job. I can't crush serpents, and honestly, I don't even want to try. But, thank God, Jesus did.

When God speaks to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, He makes a promise wrapped in judgment:

“And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

From that moment, the story of Scripture points toward a coming Son who would end the war begun in Eden. He would crush evil, but not without a cost. There would be blood.

Thousands of years later, Jesus was beaten, betrayed, and nailed to a cross. Jesus experienced the abandonment we deserved by taking our place so that we could enjoy the acceptance He always had. Love Himself was wounded.

But it is here that friendship was reborn. Jesus bore our sins so that we could be brought back to the beginning, where friendship would once again flourish as He intended.

His scars are now the marks of His friendship and the fatal, serpent-crushing blow to the evil one, who made possible the initial fracture in our connection to God and to each other.

In Christ's sacrifice we see the true currency of friendship: tears shared, blood spilled, and a life given for another. In a sense, I think Jesus wanted blood brothers and sisters. His sacrificial blood was offered to connect us back to God. It's no wonder Jesus merged friendship and genetics by saying, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven *is* my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50, emphasis added).

So, in the arc of history, we see the great framework of friendship. Though it always existed, God invited us in. We threw it in His face, and He still gave everything to get us back. Jesus is the friend we've always been looking for.

This is the gospel of friendship. It's incredibly good news.

THE FRIEND WE NEED

At the time of this writing, I have just learned of the passing of Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

In June 2017, a longtime friend of mine, Guy Wasko, was an evangelical pastor and chaplain in New York City working alongside the Catholic diocese. The collaboration was focused on improving the lives of the city's most marginalized and overlooked inhabitants through efforts that focused on their material well-being and issues of social justice.

Guy reached out and asked if I would go to Rome with him to meet the pope and discuss how non-Catholic pastors could raise volunteers to assist Catholic churches in these

endeavors. That was an easy “Heck, yeah!” for me. My only request was to bring along my wife, Claudene, whom I call Classy.²⁰ (There was no way I’d be alive to enjoy any friendship if I went to Italy for the first time without her.) With that request granted, we were a go.

That summer, a small delegation of pastors and key stakeholders met with Pope Francis in the papal rooms of the historic Vatican.

The time with him was surreal and truly special. Now, eight years later, as I reflect on his death, I can remember only some details from those hours together. The thing I remember most is something he said: “The language of persuasion is found in brotherhood.”

I think what he meant, and the reason it has stuck with me all this time, is that *real influence is always rooted in friendship*. Said another way: A big part of what we will one day leave behind from our lives on earth will reside in our friends, those in whom we invested and those whom we served as brothers and sisters. This is a true legacy that can be passed on for generations.

If you are struggling with loneliness, if you feel a personal friendship dilemma, I want to assure you: Scripture says, “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). That means there is a friend for you ultimately in Jesus, and often through the people He places in your life. Like Adam, God did not design you to be alone, and He will not leave you that way.

If you are asking how to be a better friend, that’s a great question. Any biblical overview on friendship would be

incomplete without including Jesus' description of peak friendship:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

JOHN 15:13, KJV

One thing about having God as a friend is that He isn't asking you to do something for Him that He wouldn't do for you—He never calls us to a kind of love, sacrifice, or obedience that He has not already demonstrated perfectly in and through Christ. When Jesus laid down His life for us, He may have been showing us how to love, but most of all, He was loving us.

History tells us that Jesus didn't stay in the grave. He stepped out alive again! Because of this fact, regardless of where you stand with earthly friendships, He is the friend you need most. God's persuasion is found most completely in Jesus Christ, who has given everything to be a friend.

God wants your friendship and has given everything to be a good friend. In Jesus, He is the friend we most need. And because of His blood, we have a shared truth that binds us together in abundant life. That's why we had to start here. But, as in any good friendship, we must continue our journey together.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think about the friendship within the Trinity that existed before time began. How does this reshape the way you understand the purpose and dignity of human relationships and how you should approach forming friendships?
2. What does Jesus' model of friendship offer as a pathway back to wholeness?
3. This chapter mentioned the currency of friendship. What can sacrificial friendship look like in practical terms today, and how might embracing this model challenge or transform your current relationships?