

## Chapter 8 (Friends first)

What if I said “friends first” and salvation second?” In Christian circles that seems so wrong. The great commission specifically states that we are to offer the world the gospel. John 3:16 graciously pronounces that whomever believes in God will be saved. The process is very robotic if we take it literally. Just offer and “if” they accept it then they are saved. ‘If’ they reject it then they are not. Simple right? Just dust off the soles of our shoes or rejoice with the angels in heaven. Yet, those who are offered a choice are people aren’t they?

As Jesus hung on the cross, he asks one more thing from his Father in heaven “*forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*” Forgive people? From Genesis to Revelation, it’s about bringing unworthy people home. Why don’t we have in-depth dialogue on who Jesus is and what God does in his spare time? It’s because the Bible is focused on people. People that God wants in his house. People that don’t have a clue what is really going on.

There is not really a celebration moment in the Bible. The thief on the cross does not shout out in joy. The centurion and his family don’t hold a feast. I would like to know when the disciples first believe and were baptized? Matthew 28:17 says some of the disciples were doubtful of Jesus. Mark 16 reports that these disciples heard the news twice and did not believe it. Jesus even appeared to the disciples and rebuked them for their lack of what: faith! Luke 24 says that they remembered his words after he died. Why? It’s because they had not remembered his words before he died.

I mention all this to say that Jesus was with these men for three years. I feel some of them might have known him longer. Yet, they were not at the tomb waiting. They had locked themselves up behind a door frightened of the authorities. I suggest that until Jesus returned, they did not truly believe. So, what am I getting at? Again, Jesus spent three years with these men. They talked, laughed, and cried together, I’m sure. They went hungry and were stuffed to the

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gills as brothers. Yet, after Jesus died, our gospels are clear that this band of disciple brothers did not get the gospel until Jesus returned. Jesus' focus during those three years was to build a strong base. Strong friendships with who? People!

These disciples are a fantastic example of what I call friends first. Not once did Jesus baptize them with either the Spirit or water until his return. He never asked them to speak a pledge to God. Instead, Jesus was a good friend offering them his wisdom while helping them to see God the Father more clearly. They said he was the Christ but deep down in their hearts: these men just were not sure who Jesus was. Even Peter (as bold as he was) denied his friend Jesus in his greatest time of need. Thomas doubted. Luke fled naked. Judas realized far too late.

Why on earth does Jesus tell Father God in heaven to forgive them for they know not what they do? It's because Jesus is truly a friend first. Salvation takes time. Far too often we meet with people for a reason. We are concerned for their well-being. Quite honestly, we just want to speak first and listen second. In Christian circles we offer salvation first and friendship second. The most daunting problem with this logic is time. Every single person we meet needs "their" time to let what "they themselves" know, become what "they" believe.

Peter refused to let Jesus die. He pointily says "never Lord." Jesus snaps back "get behind me Satan." Peter's response? Oh, right there isn't one. Yet, we miss that whole scene before this. Jesus asked all of them who they think he is. Of course, Peter jumps right in and says the messiah. The one that the Jewish nation has talked about for thousands of years. The one he learned about in Sunday school. Jesus had led them to believe he was this Christ, savior, and king. Peter knew that.

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I can certainly imagine why Peter became quiet. He most likely was an uneducated fisherman. He only knew a few things. Jesus rebuked him on what Peter actually thought he knew. That Jesus could save them all. “How then could he die” thought Peter? Jesus, as a friend does challenge Peter’s beliefs. Jesus does seem harsh. Yet, not long after this Jesus places Peter at the head of the church. Why? This uneducated outspoken fisherman was Jesus best friend.

It’s because that’s what real friends do. They love in two ways. One is in keeping a friend on track. The other is by a hug or a kind word. Yet, within all this is friendship that never fails to seek the best of another. Half the time in Christian circles we are using a sin meter. Making sure they are saved. Is this someone “I” can live with. Do they make me look holy or dirty? Come on people, you know it’s true. We have a sin meter.

This gage measures who we spend time with. It measures our mirror. What do we look like in their company? We judge our own actions. We judge the actions of others. All along it’s less about friendship and more about ourselves. What can we say or do to appear more holy? Who do we spend time with to seem more holy? Jesus never once did that with Peter.

It’s directly why this weird phenomenon happens. Some people fight a certain cause. Then we find out they are hypocrites doing the very thing they are fighting against. In the news I have seen Senators fight the gay movement only to be gay themselves in secret. A rich celebrity fighting for the rights of the poor only to be caught stealing. We are a weird creature. We sin a certain way while trying to mask that very sin within us. How do we hide it? With good words and good people. They are our mask. Just ask Judas.

It’s how we roll. A Christian only looks saved with the saved. To spend time with the lost seems to suggest that we too are lost. We’re just not as clean as we pretend to be. So, when we

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meet those who live dirty lives it's not about friends first. No, it's about making them appear as clean as us. We call it saving a friend, but were really keeping our area clean. Let salvation first roll around in your heart. Are you trying to build the kingdom or build a clean life? Think of Nicodemus and Zaikais? What about the centurion and woman at the well? All of these people made Jesus look less than stellar in public. Jesus made friends first.

Maybe we are sincere. Our goal is to save people for God. I am calling the church out on this one. Why does God have grace? Why does he have a church? Seriously, why not save us directly to heaven? Why the struggle down here? It's all about time. We all need a certain amount of time to grow. To see what God sees in us. However, that is not what we allow in others is it?

There are two things I'd like to talk about, and they're both related to discipleship. We tend to believe that discipleship is time sensitive. It begins with the relationship between mentor and student. If we are to disciple someone it is meant to grow them in Christ to (at least) our level. I had a pastor friend who met with me until we hit the friendship level. Then he began to distance himself from me. I was a project and not a friend. It was time to cast me off. On to the next project.

Some churches have a discipleship program. You are paired with someone you did not chose. I don't have an issue with it. Most churches have no discipleship program at all. Yet, I am conflicted. What about those who God puts in our path? I tell the story of trying to evangelize a friend. He was resistant. Yet, to the side of us was his friend agreeing with me. I had offered my friend to come to church, yet I never asked his friend. Why? Because I was doing the discipleship thing.

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I was so focused on saving that man. He needed saving. Yet, God had another willing man looking for salvation. I didn't really care about him. I wanted my guy saved. Sometimes we overthink salvation. What if arguments and strained tension between church and the lost is what it is. If God draws us to him then why are we so hell bent in drawing resistant people to God? It's because we believe in salvation first. Clearly, we would not entertain the thought of being friends first. Many of us have on the horse blinders of salvation first.

Here is a second thought on friendship. We assume that discipleship means we are friends. Yet, we are always looking for the next project. We can claim that the offer of salvation is love. We care enough to walk them through it, but there is another side to this. What happens when they pass you and appear to love God better than you? What then? Is the discipleship done? Do we feel stuck ourselves? Equally, what happens if they resist? What happens when these seeking men and women try and walk away? They still love a joint now and then. They still go to the bar? What then? Discipleship over? Friendship over?

Imagine living your life in a good Christian home. Let's say you were home schooled. As you turn eighteen, you decide to join the army. Off you go to the other side of the world. There you are within a band of blue-collar fighters. Interacting with people from other nations with different customs and beliefs. Then, in time, your tour of duty is over. You come home. What would your Christian parents think of the man or woman who came through their door? Would you still be as they left you?

That's it really. A Christian only knows what they are taught. From church to home life is all we have. God on the other hand has more to teach. How does God work on the streets? Where is God in a Muslim country? In the company of soldiers on a Saturday night? Your pure Christianity teaches us to save people. It does not focus on knowing people in their world. To be

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friends first. Imagine how much a Christian soldier would change in two years? What would that do to his Christian upbringing?

As a new believer comes through a church door for the first time, they bring in their world. If they make a declaration to Jesus, these new believers then leave the church trying to reconcile what they now know with what they believe. Numbers in a church cannot quantify that journey. The reason only 1% of a Billy Graham crusade were saved is because they have to take this new view of the world home to the old world, they live in. Honestly, that world is the only one they know. Salvation can't navigate this struggle between worlds, but a friend can.

So, why do all this? Why create an atmosphere to save people at church? Why look at the numbers and read books like church for dummies? It's to save souls through the great commission. You know the one. *"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."*

Real friends and real love have eye focus. We focus on the person. Who are they? What do they love? My friends work, play, and dream. Do I know what they believe? I'll say this. My friends feel free to disagree with me. They know I love them no matter what! I do not know how many friends I have. The only reason 100 people might show up to your funeral is because they know you loved them. You can't hold a number to that. Our eyes need to be focused on the person and not the number.

Church numbers are not tied to friendships. I wish they were, but they're not. People who pass through a church door are tied to the great commission. Church has attached drawing people in to salvation. Increased numbers mean more are saved. That's how it works. Yet, people are

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given a number as saved. Church attendance went up last month by fifty. Forty-five of them were baptized too. The great commission is filled and the church is healthy. Then they start going once a month. These new believers on average give about 1% of their income. Is that how we should grow a healthy church?

Here is where I will lose some of you. I have read the gospels. Jesus traveled outside the church. For the most part he moved around Jerusalem. Yes, he preached in a few synagogues. The real Jesus had his eyes on one thing: friendship. Friends with the disciples and friends with the Father in heaven. No patrick, Jesus was bent on saving souls. Really?

There is an odd story in Matthew 15 between a woman who is not Jewish and Jesus. They have a friendly banter about who Jesus is helping. In the end Jesus is impressed with the woman's tenacity. I love that exchange. Yet, we tend to miss how Jesus talked to people. He challenged them. Jesus let them try harder. He was never preachy or asked them to recite the Lord's prayer. People love to say "we have a friend in Jesus." Why say that? It's stories like Matthew 15 where we see that across religious and cultural differences, Jesus made friends. He accepted people as they are and where they are. How about Peter, the woman at the well, or Matthew the tax collector? Jesus was a friend maker.

Jesus was all in on friends first and salvation second. On the cross Jesus had a seemingly small discussion with a thief. Notice some things. In Matthew it briefly says in chapter 27 that both thieves hurled insults. In Luke 23 it states that one hurled insult and the other defended Jesus. What gives? Timelines in the Bible are not that great. Sometimes we think a chapter happened in one day or in one week. I'm betting that both men hurled insults. I'm betting one thief noticed Jesus asking the Father to forgive them. He noticed Jesus offering his mother to the disciples for care. I bet that thief noticed Jesus being a friend to those around him till the end.

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Jesus then hears the thief respond in Luke. Our savior (hanging on a cross) then gives this repentant thief salvation. That's what friends first does. It looks, listens, and responds in love.

What gets lost in love ministry is love. Love is not trying to save you. At church, we organize love to save souls. We entertain to save souls. Yet, people do not attach themselves to church like they used to because church is crafting love to draw them in. They're heartfelt actions (like Jesus on the cross) are missing. We don't make time to love them as people first. To know them. All we want to do is boost the salvation numbers. The healthy church numbers. Can you see that the thief responds after he witnesses Jesus' love for others?

I knew a couple that gave people three chances to accept Jesus. After that these people moved on to the next. What about that pastor that I met for a month or so? I loved those talks. I sent him a card thanking him for his care and friendship. I never met with him again. He distanced himself because he was trained to preach, not trained to love. These pastors were instructed to not let relationships in church get close. Did we have a friendship? Oh no, it was all salvation business.

It's all about salvation first and friendship a very distant second. Oh, we have people over. We spend time with them when they give us hockey or football tickets. I spent money on a men's retreat night for my pastor. I thought I was being kind. However, that was the one night a week he claimed to spend with his kids. He was tormented between ministry and family. However, this pastor was not tormented the other 6 night a week. I picked the wrong day to offer him.

I mention this because his love for family is booked in his calendar. His time with ministry is scheduled. He has no time for quality family time. No time to make deep friends. Again, those



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two men who I mentioned renouncing their faith from ministry found time to love outside of church when they quit the faith. One of those men wrote two books on finding the right mate. He not only divorced the faith but he divorced her as well. Oh, the web we weave trying so hard to save souls, creating entertaining church, yet we miss out on real love.

Our eyes are on salvation. Patrick, our eyes should always be on salvation. I will say it slower. Jesus was all about friends first. Who could stand the rough stock outspoken Peter? Who loves tax collectors and prostitutes? Oh, Patrick, Jesus had compassion on them. Did that compassion lead Mary to cry at his feet or buy expensive nard? Did it compel Peter to jump out of a boat twice for Jesus? Did it spurn Thomas to declare Jesus as his God? No, the love and care of a friend did.

Jesus, spent time with them. He allowed them into his inner life like in the transfiguration. He offered his mother to them. That friendship let those guys participate in miracles. They got to witness Jesus talking to a segregated women and freeing people in bondage from demons and disease. Do you really think Jesus did not laugh, hug, and wrestle with those boys? Was it all just a program devised by God to bring 12 men to salvation? How does Peter go from fisherman to the letter of Peter? Think about it. "Get behind me Satan" to "my dear brothers." What a change!

That pastor I mentioned visiting with me a bunch of times made several statements one day to me. He said "church is a revolving door; we are there to for those who come in; and many come and many go." Is that the point of salvation? To invite people in and ignore them when the dust leaves their feet? That same pastor asked me for a meeting at Starbucks. He had noticed we had not given in a year. He wondered if we still considered his church home. My God, we had not attended there for a year. He never noticed. He was too busy watching the revolving door swish around until the money stopped. Even that took a whole year!

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In a church of 10,000 how do you make deep friends with them all? Some say we split them up into a few small groups. Hire more pastors to segregate the masses. Maybe, some people just think you can't. How can someone say they have a friend in Jesus when Jesus died 2000 years ago? I knew a lovely guy who had a party thrown for him. He was stunned by people he had never met coming up to him and calling him a friend. How do you be a friend without ever talking to them? Just like Jesus, it's found in your person. It's found in how you treat people: as your friend.

'I just like him or her.' That's what we say sometimes. Is drawing someone to Jesus for the purpose of salvation a goal? What about friendship? Oh, there are so many weird needy people. I have to keep some professional distance from the congregation. Really? Patrick, otherwise I will burn out trying to please them all. Ah, that is it isn't it. Your version of love. Friendship and love to you is pleasing, entertaining, and giving. Good friends don't need to hold hands all the time. Real love is not visited once a week.

Yet, the attendance numbers are intoxicating. Rule of thumb: more people equal more money. Yet, that is just not true. A healthy heart and a feeling of friendship equals money. It equals attendance. Friends first will always make your church more entertaining. It will always draw in the masses. Really? Yes, really!

When the numbers fall and the finances dip, what then? Those things will always fluctuate. What is the first thing a pastor does? He asks himself and God what he could do better. Many times, they change ministry and move money to another program. Why? Is it to bring numbers back up or build friendships? I know you get me. Church says it's based on love. Yet, it's really based on a moving target. Where are the people found to bring the numbers up? How do we

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increase giving? Church has rarely been based on friends. It's about where the people are and what we need to do to draw them in.

I have another question. If a church fails, or a pastor leaves his position. How many people stay friends with that pastor? In most cases the people and the pastor move on. I knew a pastor that wiped out all his Facebook friends. Why? He had moved on to a new church and new friends. Is that really how church should work. Is that how salvation should work. Does God move on after your saved? Does he move on if you refuse him? Oh, that is a question.

The church I attend has a main focus. Create friendships. This church is called Connect. It's their foundation to get everyone into life groups. On merit, I love their idea. It's not new. Many churches do small groups. I have been in three small groups that have all crumbled. Seems like it was me and not the group. I had four couples in one group divorce. In another group there was infighting and sexual problems. Another group had the leader leave the church altogether.

Does that mean small groups don't work? No, I don't believe that. Yet, something was hindering their friendships. On paper, people getting together to study the Bible or play board games looks right. Meeting in the church community beyond Sunday feels good. However, church is not that highly attended consistently. Life groups are not fully attended each week. They say only about 5% of any church tithes. What gives? Our lives are divided by other pursuits.

I believe with all my heart that attendance, numbers, giving, and passion for Jesus are directly affected by what we call a friend. Two famous ministry leaders renouncing their faith will probably not be the first or the last. I knew a guy who was deep, deep into porn and sexual acts. Yet, within a life group he was encouraged to be baptized. He took the course with a pastor and

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was baptized. None of them knew about the porn. Was their relationship with him about baptism, salvation, or friendship? Deep friendship would have sensed something was off. I wonder if those two pastors would still be in ministry if some has sensed something was off?

A friend is not a warm handshake although that is a good start. A friend is not the same faces week in and out at church or in a small group. Our definition of friend is not that far from entertainment. We have been schooled and conditioned to be entertained. That includes church. My pastor is a rock star. He is the best speaker I know. He is a nice man and his intuitive nature of understanding culture and sin is admirable. That man can talk a great talk. Yet, how many real friends does he have?

Don't get me wrong, he is a wonderful Christian man. He probably claims to have many friends. Yet, he is no different than you and me. It's all about content and entertainment. I know he watches the numbers. Far more than he should. What's the big deal? Patrick, he is very loving. I'm sure he is. His church (is growing) but I know it's a revolving door. Trust me, his entertainment (in the end) will only go so far. People's attention will always waiver when it comes to being entertained. Because numbers don't make friends. Love makes friends. Does he realize that his entertainment is on par with bowling?

What is a friend? A friend is someone who we like, admire, and spend time with. Sure, a friend probably is so much more. The dictionary says a friend is: *"a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically exclusive of sexual or family relations."* True, I believe that. Yet, one thing is missing in that definition: trust. To call someone a friend is based on trust. If you are raped by a friend, are they still your friend? Oh no, trust is given and earned. It can be broken too.

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I'd like to call Taylor Swift a friend. I loved her writing and music. Of course, I have never met her and never will. Then came her recent album "Lover." I don't like the music or the message. I realized all of a sudden that she had a leash. She was a pet. I only let the leash go so far. I had a connection based on mutual love of writing and music. That has changed. I realize now that I never really knew her at all. Same with Tiger woods and Madonna. They are not idols or friends. The harsh reality is: they are just entertainment.

To my pastor. Take away your rock star status and your gone. Not everyone would abandon you, but the harsh reality is that many would. If you don't entertain in a new way each week, would giving go down? I don't want to pick on him. I really like him. Yet, am I holding a leash with him too? How far will I give him rope to preach or hang? A friend does not get a leash (mostly). I have an uncle who dislikes my politics and religion. A brother who hates me for our past. An Ex who said I do and I don't forever. Are we friends? Enemies? All these relationships are based on feelings and entertainment, not love.

My uncle is my friend even though we see life differently. Why? It's because there is something within each of us that says "I am your friend no matter what." Did I say that to him? No, but in our actions we sure did. He asks me religious questions. I ask him for climate change info. Do we agree? Not on your life, but we respect each other. In a way we both trust each other and have each other's back. I would never intentionally talk down to him or about him. Were friends.

Let's go back to the garden of Eden to define a friend. I think the garden of Eden is a great example of friendship. Adam and Eve are with God. He walks among them. God is disappointed in them. In the distance of history, God is still looking for a way to bring them back. God sacrifices something dear to him for the friendship. He sacrifices holiness with grace.

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Gods accepts a payment for our sin with his son's sacrifice. God even forgoes his reputation to have us call him his children. Why love someone who does what you hate? It's because grace makes bridges in love before judgment. It just does.

What is the goal of ministry? To save souls. Wrong! Just plainly wrong! The goal of ministry is to be Christ-like. What is the gospel really? It's to share that God loves you. He (not I) has made a way back to God the Father. Did church make friends during the inquisition? Did church make friends burning witches? Did church make friends in the gay community? Did we offer judgment or bridges to salvation? Be honest here!

How to build a church? We got it all wrong. Entertainment and programs do not save souls. Saved souls (in essence) save souls. Clean PK kids do not make clean pastors. What they make is pre-saved souls that don't know how to connect with un-saved souls. Listen to this saying again "I have a friend in Jesus." We seek Jesus because of his person. Even on a cross, someone noticed the grace of Jesus. The unsaved need to notice the saved.

Was the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden to build a kingdom? It's yes and no. This expulsion was needed to learn grace and love. Some people will never learn grace and love. The goal of church is to build the kingdom through the person of Christ. What did Jesus' return to heaven for? To prepare a place or build a kingdom? This is hard thinking but hear me out.

Jesus went to prepare a place for us to be with him. Isn't that exactly why Jesus is a friend? From the cross to heaven, Jesus is still preparing a place for those who sin. Imagine a friend like that. A friend who hates sin but provides grace. Jesus eyes are not on numbers. They are not on ways "devised" to wow them. He is not caring about how it looks. No, he cares about

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those who call him Lord, Master, and yes, a friend. Is your version of Jesus tapping his fingers on the throne watching our sin? That's not our Jesus, he is too busy preparing a place for us.

How does salvation come to the lost? It's all in our focus with the eyes. They say that whatever God has in front of you is your focus. That is not easy when shiny objects are all around us. What kills the numbers in church is the creation of shiny objects. Entertainment and pizzazz do not make the gospel look better, just shinier. Since the dawn of humans, God has had a very simple Gospel. *I will show you how much I care. What love really looks like.* Peter Got it. The thief on the cross got it. I believe Mary Magdalene got it. Think of the murderous blind Paul confused on the Damascus Road. Even a man like that got it.

The church needs to focus on two things that have worked for thousands of years. Friends first and salvation second. Ask yourself, why did the early church make baptism a three-year project? To know someone takes time. To know without a doubt your sister in Christ believes takes time. My friend who was baptized while having a porn problem is twofold. One is that he needed time to change. Secondly, the church needed time to see him more clearly. Is he saved? I just don't know?

In Acts 2 the community sold off and shared stuff. We think that's a model of the perfect church. Again, it's yes and no. Yes, they cared more for everyone than their own stuff. I get it. It's also no because they did not have much. They were a small community. Be real, a perfect commune is small, tight knit, and segregated. Why segregated? Persecution! Just try and replicate that in New York with high rent, cell phones, and so many other shiny objects to catch our eye.

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What is the essence of 1<sup>st</sup> century church? They loved each other. I suspect they loved each other because they were friends first. Did they care if they were fishermen or tax collectors? Just read Acts 2:46-47 *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

Did you catch the last part? *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* We live Christ-like and God adds to our number. In English: be a good friends and God will take care of the numbers. What is a healthy church? It’s being Christ-like to all. Some will say that it is to tend to the sheep only. My goodness! Read John 3:16 as many times as you must. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* God loved the world (not just the believers). That he gave (everything he loved). So that whoever (anyone who does not already believe) will be saved! Split that in half. Friends first and salvation second. We love and they will want to be saved.

Try and save first and you will lose the friend part. They just become numbers on a white board. A new program is judged on success in numbers. Funny enough my daughter was surprised when I stated that the one lost sheep was a believer. Uh, isn’t that symbolic of Jesus saving the lost. Wrong again! Listen to Jesus again. *“My” sheep hear my voice. “They” know my voice.* Sheep? They are his followers. The one who went astray is what? One of his believing sheep. Ahh, the perfect friendship example. One Christian who goes astray. Jesus brings him back into the fold.



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What does corporate church do? It builds bigger revolving doors. It expands its ministry, budget, and service times. Deep down we believe that bigger success equals God's blessing. Success really equals having a congregation that notices a sheep missing. The church should go and find him or her. A congregation should give more than they need to. That is, it: willing to sacrifice reputation to know people. To love those who are not sheep yet. To sacrifice time to be friends first. Success does equal a gutsy church group that puts friendship higher than salvation. Puts friendship higher than reputation, appearance, and productivity.

In essence, we hold salvation high like a goal. It's a good thing. Yet, to get there is something greater. The love of a friend. Why is Jesus such a good friend? Such a good reason to accept him as Lord. 1 John 4:19 "*We love because he first loved us.*" We are saved because God first loved us. People will come to church and be saved because we first loved them. Love is not salvation. Salvation is a byproduct of the love of God. We love because God first loved us. God does save people. Salvation is paramount and important. How will God achieve a strong and lasting salvation? Through love first. Friends first.

Look, my board expects numbers. My denomination leaders expect numbers. I say give them the numbers. Just reverse how you get the numbers. Build a church based on people first. Risk your reputation and time to be a friend to anyone. Risk your mental state to love first. To listen first. Most people just need a few minutes to know they are loved. Preach care. Show care by being in the community.

When the church doors open Sunday chose to love first. Make a friend. To the pastor: do not speak one word without knowing you're in the friend first making business. Love everyone because you can. To the congregation: shake a hand and smile because God loved you first.

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Show grace to the lost. Real salvation takes time. My porn friend needed time to grow. That church forfeited that for the sake of numbers saved.

Our eyes should be on friendship. We should share with all who are in need. Be Christ-like to anyone who is against you. To look holy or gain credence with God? God no! Pretend you are on the cross between two sinners. Each of us find ourselves there for different reasons, yet there you are side by side. What will you do with what you have been given in that moment? Friendship or condemnation. Unjustly crucified or sharing in pain. What will you be to those who find themselves beside you? Friend or judge? Remember after the thief responded to Jesus in kindness (nailed to a cross) Jesus then gave him salvation. Friends first!