

Blessed² Friendship

It is more blessed to give than receive, especially in friendship (Acts 20:35).

The research is clear: good relationships keep us happier and healthier. It is what Paul modeled and taught the elders of the church in Ephesus. We are not just blessed but *more blessed* (i.e., doubly blessed, blessed squared) when we give of ourselves for the sake of others. The way up is by going down, having a heart of a servant in total dependence upon God (Philippians 2:5-7). We find ourselves when we lose ourselves (Matthew 16:25), particularly in relationships. When we make friendships about us, with the intent to control the benefits and outcomes of the relationship, we become increasingly lonely. It simply does not work. But when we give in friendship with deep love, care, and affection – when our mindset is giving rather than receiving – it produces powerful and lasting connection (Acts 20:36-38).

GET THINGS STARTED

Social scientists write that we are in an epidemic of loneliness. Even with the advancement of technology that gives us almost instant, easy access to others, why do you think people are so lonely and disconnected? What makes friendship and healthy community so challenging to find and maintain?

GO DEEPER

1. From Acts 20:35, what does it mean or look like to *give* in a friendship or relationship rather than just receive? Why is giving over receiving in a friendship countercultural and socially abnormal? How do we *serve* in a friendship, with the same attitude as that of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-7)?
2. Why are *two better than one*, from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12? What are the benefits of healthy community? What possibly makes a friendship or relationship unhealthy, and how should we respond to that unhealthiness?
3. What does Jesus mean in Matthew 16:25 when He says *whoever loses His life for my sake will find it*? How does that concept apply to friendships or relationships?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What grade would you give your friendships or relationships right now? How lonely are you? How known and seen do you feel, and why?
2. Do you lean towards being a giver or receiver in your friendships, and how do you know? What keeps you from being more of a giver relationally?
3. Where (or with whom) do you need to give friendship *first*? What is a simple step you can take this week to give friendship?

PRACTICE IT NOW

As a group, take time in an attitude and atmosphere of prayer to ask God to help you be a giver in your friendships and relationships, not just a receiver.

Ask Him for the courage to more fully embrace the idea that blessing is found in being a relational giver. And ask Him to show you where you need give friendship first, no matter what the outcome or benefit may be for you.