

“GETTING UNSTUCK IN MY FRIENDSHIPS”  
by Rom A. Pegram (10/13/19)

I’ll never forget when I first got my little red truck. I’d picked it up over in Des Moines, Iowa, brought it home, and hadn’t had time to even try out the 4-wheel drive yet. I was out of town to a meeting (had taken the car for better mileage). In the middle of the meeting, I get a phone call from Jane. She’d been doing yard work. It had rained the day before, so everything was pretty wet. She decided to take load of branches & yard waste (*with the new truck*) to the local dump. Guess what happened. Again, sometime in the middle of the meeting I’d gone to, I get a phone call. Jane’s at the dump ... and she’s STUCK. So, what does she do? She calls and asks me, “How does the 4-wheel drive work?”

Do you guys remember that quiz show called ‘WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE’ ... where one of the options (if you didn’t know the answer) was to call a LIFELINE? That’s what Jane did that day. She called her LIFELINE to find out the answer. She was STUCK. So, how do you engage the 4-wheel drive? I was her LIFELINE that day, sometimes better known as ... a FRIEND...

Many of us know what it’s like to get STUCK in life—especially in the area of life we’re going to be talking about today. And many times, when we get STUCK, we need a LIFELINE. That, folks, is called FRIENDSHIP. Friends are those who are there for us, when we get STUCK in life ... and need to get UNSTUCK. And there is no substitute for having good friends when you’re STUCK...

This morning, we’re going to talk about how to get UNSTUCK in your friendships. And we’re going to begin with our first scripture. This is from Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT): “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. <sup>10</sup> If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.” You see, God wired us for friendship. And when friendship is not present, or when friendships are not handled in a God-honoring way, we get STUCK. And here’s what happens when we get stuck. When I get stuck in my friendships, I experience:

- Loneliness – I feel like there’s nobody around to support me and encourage me; no lifeline. And sometimes I experience...
- Frustration – I get agitated, out of balance, even angry at times. And you know what? Hanging around the wrong people can get you frustrated too (and we’ll talk about that). And finally, there’s...
- Disconnection – you feel disengaged, like you’re floating, like you’re not really centered in life. And sometimes, when you’re stuck in your friendships, you not only feel disconnected from other people; you also feel disconnected from God!

These kinds of feelings can be debilitating. They can lead to loss of focus, wandering priorities, and here’s the truth: without friends, even the most successful life feels like failure. Today, we’re going to talk about what it means to be stuck in the area of friendships & what you can do to get unstuck in friendships in this life. **LET’S PRAY...**

So, to get UNSTUCK in my friendships, I must:

**Abandon unhealthy friendships.** Most of today's message is going to be about making new friends and improving those relationships; but first we need to start with the friends you already have. Whether we want to admit it or not, who we spend time with has a lot to do with who we become...

Here's what the Apostle Paul says about it (1 Cor. 15:33): "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for 'bad company corrupts good character'". "Don't be fooled...." What Paul is saying is 'don't miss this!' Don't delude yourself into thinking that you are impervious to the impact of other people. You see, bad company corrupts good character...

And, there are times in your life when the best thing to do is to break off a toxic friendship. I see some of you are already making a list ... but don't rush to that just yet. Let me encourage you today to take some time and take inventory of your current friendships. Here's how you do it. And all of your friends will fit into one of these three areas, so let's get at it...

Assess your current friends – ask yourself, are they:

- Helpful? Are they helping you to become the man or woman God created you to be? Are they helping you become more like Jesus? If so, you'll want to give them increased association (fill-in). Or are they...
- Not helpful? Maybe this is an old friend, you don't quite have as much in common as you did at one time. You don't necessarily have to stop hanging out with them or talking to them; they're not having a negative influence on you, but you're just not clicking like you used to. Here I might recommend limited association. But, finally, are they...
- Destructive? This is the toughest part of the assessment. You may be here today and as we mention 'unhealthy friendships,' either 'he' or 'she' came to mind. There's somebody in your life that's actively tearing you down. That's the person that, when you spend time with them, you feel nothing but worse about yourself. The more time you spend with them, the more you veer off God's path for your life; they never move you to be more like Jesus. Unfortunately, this is what God's word is talking about when it says 'bad company corrupts good character.' And the only honest solution to these destructive friendships is ... disassociation. To be healthy yourself, in every way, there's come a point where you've gotta cut 'em loose—for your own good ... and for the good of your other loved ones! For some of us, this is why we're stuck in friendships; we're spending entirely too much time with people who tear us down.

So, you've got to assess your current friendships. And there's another reason why assessing your current friendships is a good idea. Because, when you do, it helps you to see what kind of friend you've been to others too. (*Studying for this week's message, I had to call an old friend ... who I hadn't been a good friend to lately...*) But, abandon unhealthy friendships. Next, to get UNSTUCK in my friendships, I must:

**Be a good friend first.** You see, the painful truth is that you might be stuck in your friendships because, if you're honest, you're just not a very good friend sometimes! It's tough to attract healthy, God-honoring friends, when you aren't a good friend yourself ... but I've got GOOD NEWS for you: *there's not a single skill involved in being a good friend you can't develop!* Prov. 12:26 says, "The godly give *good advice* [italics mine] to their friends; the wicked lead them astray." Prov. 17:9 gives us another skill: "Love prospers when a fault is *forgiven* [italics mine], but dwelling on it separates close friends." Prov. 17:17 says, "A friend is always *loyal* [italics mine], and a brother is born to help in time of need."

Be kind to everyone; be that kind of friend! Let your life express that kind of loyalty! And once you've abandoned unhealthy friendships, and you've worked on being a better friend, then...

**Connect with new Christian friends.** Folks, if you are truly pursuing God's best for your life, it's essential you not only make friends, but that you connect with the right kind of friends—connecting with those who will move you along a path toward following Jesus! Prov. 27:17 tells us about healthy friendships. Read this with me: "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." You see, we need more friends in life that sharpen us, don't we? We need friends that sharpen us, hone us, help us to become more like the One we claim to follow—Jesus.

As a pastor, one of the most difficult situations I encounter is when someone starts a relationship with Jesus but fails to connect to the Church. They may come to church for a while. They may develop some godly habits in their personal life, but they never try to connect with other people who are already on the path to following Jesus. And, here's the sad truth: Most of them never reach their potential or see it realized...

But God has a plan. God's antidote to loneliness is, in fact ... the Church! That's what we're trying to do here at Trinity. We're here to create an environment for people to make new friends that will help them be more like Jesus. Folks, God has created the perfect remedy for loneliness in this world: *The Church!* And we're reminded in Heb. 10:24-25 of what's supposed to happen here, when the writer of Hebrews encourages us in this way: "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

The Bible says a couple things about the Church's role in friendship: It's important for us to meet together regularly as a church (people, not the building!); this is one reason we meet together every Sunday—make that opportunity available. Also, we're supposed to be motivating one another to act in Christ-like ways—to acts of love and good works. One of the easiest ways to do that is to get involved in serving here on Sunday mornings—letting your actions be your witness. If you bake, or can help serve food, talk to Patti or Michelle or Cathy or Nancy (Connections Room). If you wouldn't mind helping usher from time to time, talk to Dan or to John—our head ushers. And I'm sure Jason

Ehlert could always find something for you to do—either with the building or through music...

The Bible talks a lot about friendships with one another; Trinity is where that can happen... Hopefully, so far today, you've seen in God's word how you can experience healthy friendships. We first remove unhealthy influences, we then develop our friendship skills, then we connect with positive Christian friends—those who will point us toward a deeper relationship with Christ. And finally, and maybe most important of all, to get truly UNSTUCK in the area of friendship, you've got to get the most important one right...

**Devote myself to my Primary Friendship.** Remember the resurrection of Jesus on Easter—that whole story...

So, at Easter, Jesus was crucified, buried, then he conquered death and was resurrected. By his actions, *each and every one of us has been given a chance to be a friend of God!* And here's what's great for me—hopefully for you, too. This whole idea that I can be God's friend ... just blows my mind! Here's what God's word has to say about it through Romans (5:11): "So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God." Isn't that incredible?

The God of the universe, who spoke creation into being, wants to be your friend! And, needless to say, he's a friend like no other. He's a friend who'll be there when no one else is around. He's a friend who'll be there when everyone else has turned their backs, when everyone else thinks you're off the deep end ... God's going to be there for you! And, here's what's most exciting. The Bible promises (Deut. 31:6) that God will never leave us nor forsake us!

With all this in mind, let me say this: There are basically two groups here today. There're those of us who've already committed to follow Jesus and already call him 'Friend.' And there are those who haven't yet done so. So, if you're here today and you're already a follower of Jesus, here's my challenge to you: Look back in your notes to where the scripture talks about a friend being 'devoted.' Are you truly devoted to your primary friend—Jesus? Remember the definition of UNSTUCK. Have you given God first place in your life when it comes to your friendships—especially your Primary friendship? Is there anything holding you back, in the midst of your friendships, from being all God wants you to be?

Our daughter, Rachel, is one unique individual. She has a lot of things going for her—always has, a lot of very special qualities. But one quality of hers that has never changed over time—that we truly respect—is this: She just won't settle! She never settled when it came to her friends. She never settled when it came to her faith. And, thank heavens, she never settled when it came to relationships—especially who she married. Michael, our son-in-law, is a Godsend. He's a wonderful husband to Rachel ... and wonderful 'dad' to our two grandsons. And, if Rachel were here today, joining in this conversation about friendships, she would be the first to say ... DO NOT SETTLE!

Put your relationship with God first; then put the rest of your friendships in God's hands—so much better that way! Folks, it's time to pray—this way: "God, I'm tired of holding back. I'm tired of 'settling' for second best. Every corner of my heart is yours." DEVOTE yourself to this primary friendship with God! And all your other friendships will soon fall into place...