**Series Road Map**

**Series Overview:** This year the word we've been focusing on is Essential. So, what is essential in our Christian walk? When we get to the end of our lives and we finally meet Jesus and He asks us "What did you do with the life my Father gave you?" How will we respond? The two greatest commandments boil down to this: Love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. In this series, we are tackling two hard questions: What on Earth am I here for? And, How do I love God and the people God has trusted me to love well?

**Week Overview:** Whether we know it or not, our friends (oikos) are a part of our divine assignment here on Earth, and an opportunity for us to continue living out the second greatest commandment. Why are friendships important, and why is it so important to love our friends?

***Outline:***

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Story of a bad friendship

**Tension (what’s the struggle):** It can be easy in our society to neglect our friendships. What does a good, Godly friendship look like and how do we steward those relationships with love?

**Text: Colossians 3:12; Galatians 6:2; James 5:16; Hebrews 3:13; 1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Romans 12:15; James 1:19; Colossians 3:13**

**THP**: There is a purpose to loving your circle

**Supporting Points:**

1. There is great joy in friendship
2. Friends hold us accountable
3. Friends are there in times of hardship

**Application (call to action)**: Be intentional about building, growing, and maintaining a loving, healthy, God filled friendship with your friends. Pray for a stronger bond with your oikos.

Good evening Northview Students! We are in Week 2 of our series “What On Earth Am I Here For?” Last week we discussed how important it is to live out the first commandment fully by loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This way, we may be able to love the world just as Jesus did and wants us to do. This week, we’re switching gears. We are going to talk about what happens in our spiritual lives once we have cultivated this loving relationship with God.

Let’s pray

There is a word used in Greek that I believe rightly describes the people in our lives, or at least those closest to us. That word is Oikos. And no, I’m not talking about the yogurt brand. A direct translation from Greek to English will tell you oikos means “family” or “household”, but really the word oikos encompasses people beyond the typical family unit. It is inclusive of the 8-15 people in the frontrow of your life, your extended household. These people God has supernaturally and strategically placed in your life to love. To influence. To share Jesus with. These people are your friends, your family, your coworkers, your classmates, your neighbors, etc. Get this: from all believers in every culture and every denomination, 95% of people who have placed their faith in Christ did so because of the primary influence of someone or a group of someones. In other words, the influence of someone’s oikos is why 95% of Christians are Christians. For the remainder of this message, I am mostly going to emphasize those relationships with our friends, but keep in mind the meaning of “oikos” when I mention friendship tonight. **THP:** **There is a purpose to loving your circle.**

First, let’s talk about some bad friendships we’ve had. Raise your hand if you’ve ever had a bad friend. Me too. In fact, one story of mine is too good to pass up and not tell you. You see, I was the epitome of the worst friend picker back in middle school and highschool. If there was a medal for that, I would have one. I innocently allowed myself to be associated with all sorts of different people in school and thought nothing of it. The people that loved me back would be my friends, or so I thought they loved me. Now keep in mind, this was a time in my life where I was straying VERY far from God, I wasn’t going to church, I didn’t pray, I wasn’t in a life group. One of my highschool friends, Katrina, was a bad egg y’all. She was notorious for looking for trouble, and it always found her. One evening, my friends wanted to get together for a low key night at my house in my parents basement. We invited 6 people in total. Six. Just our closest friends from highschool and I distinctly remember telling Katrina not to invite anyone that we BOTH didn’t know. Well of course, against my wishes, she invited two people that not only I did not know, but that SHE barely knew. She had met these people downtown. So they come. And then they invite their friends, and they invite their friends. I think you can see where this is going… It got SO bad, that one carload of people littered beer cans in my neighbors yard, which he happened to witness. That resulted in the cops getting called, and I ended up almost going to jail that night because it was my house.. Here’s how bad of a friend picker I am: As soon as I announced that the cops were coming, my friend Katrina was the first one to bolt out the door and peel out of my driveway. What a good, loyal friend who respected my wishes and was always there for me… NOT. Bad friends tend to have these things in common: A lack of concern for you, or anyone else. A gossiper, whether the gossip is about you or not. And someone who is flat out unkind or rude to their family and friends.

But what about good friends? I wasn’t able to truly understand what a GOOD friend was until God started bringing them into my life. Here is what the Bible says about the characteristics of a good Godly friend:

* They treat you well “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.” (**Colossians 3:12**)
* They help you through the hard times “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (**Galatians 6:2**)
* They pray for you “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed.” (**James 5:16**)
* They point you to Christ “but exhort one another daily.” (**Hebrews 3:13**)
* They forgive when you mess up. “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” (**Colossians 3:13**)

I love how the Bible lays out for us how to choose our friends wisely, but I want us to also look inward at ourselves and the way WE treat our friends. Are we modeling that Christ-like love? Are we good listeners, and do we forgive? When we are nice to our friends, do we expect something in return? Maybe some of us have been on the bad receiving end of a friendship, where you felt like you were trying so hard to be a good friend, and you forgave them often, and you always bought them a gift for the holidays, and you remembered their birthday and you NEVER flaked on plans, but they never returned any love back. The best friendships are the mutual ones. Where both friends are constantly looking out for the others’ well-being.

In **John 15:12-17** *Jesus says “12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.”*

Not only is Jesus telling us how to be a good friend in this passage, but He is letting us know that we are His friends also! When people say, I have a friend in Jesus, they mean it. He laid down his life for us, being the ultimate friend and Savior of our lives. He came not to be served, but to serve others. He expects us to do the same in our friendships.

When I was growing up, and picking bad friends left and right, eventually I got burnt out. I’d go as far to say that I didn’t want friends anymore. My heart was hardened in this area and I truly thought I was better off without any friends and instead place all of my focus, time, attention, and energy into my romantic relationships. But this caused some problems. First of all, there was no one looking out for me outside of my relationships. Although that doesn’t seem like a big deal, it was a HUGE deal. I was mistreated in most of my relationships but no one was there to notice and lovingly call it out in my life!

**Proverbs 27:6** *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”* This verse is saying “Better to be rebuked or corrected by a friend than given a compliment from an enemy” I don’t know anyone that is eager to be held accountable for their life choices, but this is what true friends are there for. It is necessary if we want to grow in our faith, to have someone outside of ourselves that is able to have an unbiased look at our lives.

Another reason for friendship, and what I also lacked when I eventually had my heart broken by these relationships, was someone to lean on. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”* Not only are true friends there for us, but they make us better people. We can laugh with them, and cry with them. There is a uniqueness and a special bond with friendships that are different from other bonds.

I am aware that quality friends are hard to find. I felt as though throughout most of my life, even into my adult years I kept striking out. Admittedly I made mistakes myself, and had to be forgiven as well as forgive others that hurt me. Maybe that’s you tonight. Maybe you need forgiveness, or to forgive a friend that has wronged you. Whether or not you stay friends with that person, this is another way to show love to your neighbor, to your friend.

Last week we talked about how vital it is to have that consistent relationship with God so that we are able to be filled up with His love. Everything I mentioned tonight, about being a good friend, about sharing the good news of Christ with your oikos, it is not possible without God’s help. We really are sheep in need of a shepherd. We can do nothing on our own strength. Our human nature won’t allow it. We are all imperfect people in need of a perfect person, and that’s Jesus. If we are committed to Him, we can be committed to what He has asked of us.

Remember earlier on tonight when I explained the word “oikos” and how our influence is actually the primary reason people become Christians? Short experiment, who in here is a Christian because someone told you about Christ or modeled that Christ like love in your life? Raise your hand, keep it there and look around. Yeah. All over this room. You guys, **THP: there is a purpose to loving your circle**. There is a divine reason why God chose the people He did to place in your life. We are trusted to not only love these people well, but to share Christ’s love with them. Above all, there is no greater friend than one who is able to love you unconditionally and point you back to Christ. There is no greater friendship than a God honoring one. If anybody you know is ever gonna give their heart to Jesus, there is a 95% probability that it’s going to be because of *you* and your love for them. This is how the gospel is spread.

What I find so amazing about God is that He knew it wasn’t good for us to be in isolation, to be alone. He gifted us with friendship, He gifted us with our oikos. And not only did He gift us with our oikos, he ENTRUSTED us with them. Friendships are such an important part of living a healthy Christian life. We were created to be in community with others and to do life together. We were not created to be alone. If you find yourself tonight wondering where that friend is, I encourage you to pray and ask God to bring you one. One that honors Him and loves Him first, but then also is capable of loving their friends well. Or, if you find yourself loving your friends but wanting that stronger bond, I would also encourage you to pray for that as well. But it starts with us. Sometimes all it takes to have a good friendship is to first be a good friend to others. This way our actions will inspire our friends to do the same. Pray together, be there for one another even if it might be inconvenient at the time. At the end of the day, when we get to Heaven, the only thing we can take with us is the love we gave and received from our friends. The people we will see in Heaven will be the Godly friendships we’ve made here on Earth.

Let’s pray.