**Eyesight – Week 4 – Friends**

**May 25-26, 2019**

**Alright, I’ve got a dry erase board here: I want to start this message off by creating a list. Here’s the question: what are the qualities of a good friend? Just shout them out! (Leaders Note: Compile list by interacting with crowd and shouting out responses or write them down on stage)**

As a group, we’ve just compiled an ideal list of what we want from our friends or what we LOOK FOR in a friend. I think we’ve made a pretty good list, but I want us to think about this in a different way: how would your life be different if you looked at your friends the way that God does?Proverbs 18:24 says, *“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”* Guys, I believe that every person should have very strong friendships. Just look at the last part of that verse: “a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Could you say that about any of your friends right now?

This series that we are in, Eyesight, has focused on a specific prayer for our THP: God, help me to see \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as You see \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Today, I want to challenge us with this specific THP:

**THP: God, help me to see MY FRIENDS the way You see MY FRIENDS.**

As we talked about last week, the most important part of having the same perspective as God is to use Jesus’ life as an example. Jesus was very generous with his time with people because he hung out with ALL KINDS of people! It didn’t matter to Jesus who they were, what they had done, whose family they were a part of: he was there to show God’s love.

There’s one particular example where Jesus befriends a man named Zacchaeus. Now Zacchaeus was a tax collector…otherwise known as the most UNLIKEABLE person in the town! Who wants to hang out with someone who cheats people out of their money and is only looking out for themself and their own personal gain! You would think Jesus would try to set this guy straight and tell him how terrible he has been to people. Think again! Let’s read Luke’s account of what happened:

Luke 19:1-10: *“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

Jesus sought out a friendship with Zacchaeus and he didn’t let Zacchaeus’s past prevent him from forming a friendship. However, Jesus had one goal in mind with Zacchaeus: to show him God’s love and help him realize that there was a better way to live his life. See how quickly Zacchaeus offered to give people back the money nearly 4 times the amount. Do you think he would have done that had Jesus not gone out of his way?

Here’s another example: the 12 disciples…Jesus’ closest friends. They were with him all the time. He spent the most time with them. They left everything from their previous life and followed Jesus and

then Jesus invested in them, taught them, challenged them.

Here’s a story of Jesus calling some of his disciples in Matthew 4:18-22: *“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were 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.” At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

**Now what do these two stories have to do with seeing our friends as God sees our friends? Jesus saw his friendships as OPPORTUNITIES...OPPORTUNITIES to SHARE God’s love!**

As middle school students, you have the opportunity to be very intentional with your friendships. You have the ability to share Christ with those who don’t know him and you have the ability to SURROUND yourself (just like Jesus did) with people who are ALSO following Christ. We need the right balance.

Here is the challenge with living life like this: ultimately, there will be two groups of people in your life: people who point you TO Jesus and people who point you AWAY from Jesus. Jesus’s example instructs us to have friendships with both groups, but how do we do that? I’ve got some things that can help you.

**Be an influencer to those who need Christ.**

Guys, we need to reach out to those who aren’t Christians and share God’s love with them. Whether it’s through our conversations, setting a good example, or MAYBE even simply not participating in things that they are doing so you CAN be a good example.

**Surround yourself with Christian friends who you can “do life with.”**

The most important friendships you can have as a student are those with your Christian friends. All of us want a group of friends where we feel like we can belong. Think about how many places or times where we don’t belong. It’s hard, isn’t it? Put it this way: in your greatest moments of need, who will you turn to? Someone who believes Jesus Christ is at the center of their life and follows after Him? Or will it be someone who does not believe that but you have a lot in common with them? If we are going to live our lives for Christ, we need to see our Christian friends the way that God sees them and God sees them as a gift! Just like the disciples were to Jesus, they were close friends and they followed after God TOGETHER.

Check this out from 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.”* These people did life together as Christian believers and people were so drawn to it and became Christians!

**See every person as someone who bears the image of God.**

This is huge. I’m going to be really honest with you…we can be really mean. Our words, our actions, the way treat each other. How do you treat your friends? How do you treat them when they’ve wronged you in some way? Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples, denied ever KNOWING him 3 different times right before he died…and how did Jesus respond…he forgave him! We should see our friends with that same type of love and forgiveness.

**Pray this prayer every day this week: God, help me to see MY FRIENDS as You see MY FRIENDS. Share Christ with those friends who don’t yet know Him and cherish your friendships with other Christians. Let’s pray.**