



Friendship

Adapted from *Made For Friendship* by Drew Hunter

*"Friendship is the ultimate end of our existence and our highest source of happiness. Friendship—with one another and with God—is the supreme pleasure of life, **both now and forever...**"*

—Drew Hunter, Author and Pastor

For centuries, the Church fathers, ancient philosophers, and theologians have all agreed that friendship is a necessary component of living life to the full. Intentional friendship is defined as friendship mutually governed by Godly (agape) love and is a reflection of his devotion and character. The Bible is filled with great examples of extraordinary friendships involving personal sacrifice, deep intimacy, and incredible joy. Unfortunately, though, our culture is quickly losing the value of friendship. It has become a button on a social media page or a means to climb the social ladder. We all crave deep connections but have lost the art of finding and cultivating true and lasting friendships.

Below is a guide meant to help remedy this problem; it also has several questions throughout for you to reflect on as you read. We often think that friendship just happens, but as Drew Hunter demonstrates, in order to recapture the art of friendship, it will take wisdom, work, and a bit of weeding. By doing so, we can restore the profound joy and deep connections that authentic friendships bring to our lives.

Wisdom

1. Give Your Friends a Promotion

The first bit of wisdom begins by dispelling a common myth about friendship: you are too busy. When friendships falter, it's often due to unbalanced priorities. While homework, your internship, and rest are essential, overemphasizing them can crowd out time for intentional friendships. We always find time for what we truly value, so it's worth examining how we spend our leisure time and considering if we can allocate some of it to nurturing friendships. Prioritizing friends may require sacrificing other enjoyable activities.

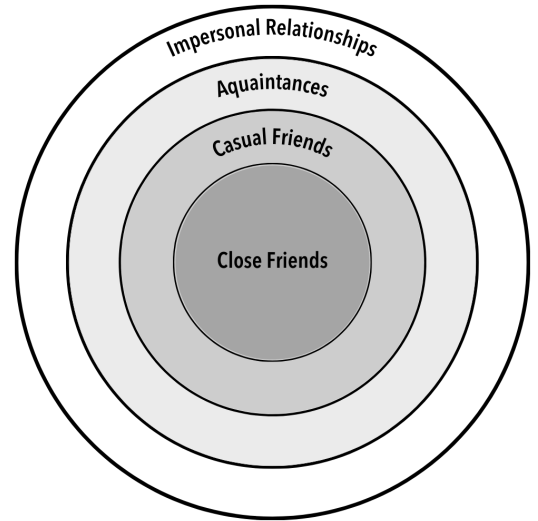
- a. *If someone looked at how you spent your time this past week (where you were, what you did, who you spent time with), what five things would they conclude are most important to you? How highly do your friendships rank?*

2. Take a Dose of Realism

A second myth about friendship is that we can have a lot of close friends. Since deep friendships require significant time, it's unrealistic to maintain close bonds with everyone. Trying to do so can result in having no close friends at all. Most people we call friends are actually acquaintances. It's important to value these acquaintanceships without feeling guilty about having only a few deep relationships. Meaningful friendships will naturally form with only a small percentage of the people we know.



Jesus exemplifies this. He had an especially intimate bond with John, often referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus also prioritized his relationship with Peter, James, and John, revealing a bit of his divine nature to them at the Transfiguration. Beyond these, Jesus had the twelve disciples with whom he spent considerable time; living alongside and teaching them. This tiered approach to relationships shows that even Jesus, God incarnate, prioritized deeper connections with a few while still maintaining meaningful, albeit less intimate, relationships with many.



- a. *Why is it unrealistic to try to maintain close bonds with many people, and how can this effort actually hinder the development of meaningful friendships? Reflect on the example of Jesus' relationships and think about how you can discern and prioritize your own deeper connections.*

3. Realign Your Expectations

Friendship requires flexibility in how we perceive and manage relationships. Not everyone has the same expectations for a friendship; when these expectations conflict, they can lead to incredible pain and strife. Let's use an analogy. Picture yourself driving down a multi-lane highway, and each lane represents different levels of relationship. We may see someone as a close friend (in our passenger seat), but they might not feel the same way and think of us in their left lane instead. Adjusting our expectations to match theirs is crucial to maintaining the friendship without forcing them to conform to our views. Conversely, if someone sees us as a close friend, even if we initially don't feel the same, we can choose to embrace and honor their perspective. Friendships evolve over time, with people moving between lanes or exiting the highway altogether. This fluidity doesn't negate the commitment inherent in friendships but reflects their dynamic nature, allowing for changes and growth. These changes can be difficult, but recognizing that they are normal can lead to healthy expectations and more joy-filled relationships.

- a. *Reflect on a time when you and a friend had different expectations for your relationship. How did this difference impact your friendship, and what steps did you take (or could you have taken) to adjust your expectations and maintain the relationship?*

Work

1. Talk Face-to-Face

Friendships thrive through meaningful conversations, especially face-to-face. Unhurried, in-person dialogues are invaluable; as John Calvin noted, "If only he lived close by, a three-hour talk would exceed a hundred letters." While text messages sustain friendships, phone calls bring us closer by conveying more of our personality, and nothing beats the completeness of face-to-face interactions. In his letters, the apostle John writes, "Though I have much to write to you...I would rather not use paper and ink."

Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face-to-face so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12; 3 John 13-14).

Conversations should be open and honest, with trusted friends having access to our deeper, more personal truths. Effective communication involves both asking thoughtful questions and actively listening. Friendships suffer if one person dominates the conversation or if there is a lack of engagement. The best friendships balance serious discussions with light-hearted moments, ensuring a mix of levity and gravity.

- a. *Think about a recent face-to-face conversation you had with a friend. How did this interaction compare to your typical text or phone conversations in terms of depth and connection? What did you notice about the value of in-person dialogue?*
- b. *What practical ways can you pursue more face-to-face time with friends?*

2. Do Things Side-by-Side

Friendships flourish through shared experiences and spending time together. To build such experiences, invite friends into your existing activities, like watching shows, walking, or shopping. Creating regular rhythms, such as biweekly coffee or weekly dinners, helps maintain these connections. When regularity is challenging, spontaneity and sacrifice can sustain friendships. Ultimately, the essence of friendship lies in being together, regardless of the activity.

- a. *Think about a recent shared experience you had with a friend. How did participating in an activity together impact your relationship? What did you learn about your friend or yourself during this time?*
- b. *Consider the idea of creating regular rhythms, such as biweekly coffee or weekly dinners. What regular activities could you establish with your friends to maintain consistent connections? How would these routines fit into your current schedule?*

3. Encourage from the Heart

Encouragement is vital for sustaining friendships, akin to oxygen for the soul. Like thin air at high altitudes, relationships suffer without affirmation and encouragement while thriving in an atmosphere thick with support. The apostle Paul exemplifies this practice, often affirming individuals in his letters. Although initially uncomfortable, affirming others becomes more natural over time and can transform relational cultures. Written notes are particularly powerful tools for encouragement, providing ongoing support and affirmation, and you can return to and reread them at any time.

- a. *Think about a time when you received encouragement from a friend. How did it impact your relationship and your personal well-being? What specific aspects of their encouragement were most meaningful to you?*



- b. Reflect on your own habits of affirming and encouraging others. How comfortable are you with giving genuine affirmation? What steps can you take to make this practice a more natural and regular part of your interactions?*

Weeding

Once we've applied wisdom and put in the necessary work, we must address detrimental elements in our friendships. Like weeding a garden, we must also uproot negative influences to maintain the health of our relationships.

1. Burden

Be mindful of inconsiderate behavior in friendships. Proverbs warns against actions that can burden rather than uplift. *"Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing (27:14).* Such gestures, while well-intentioned, may have bad timing and be perceived as inconsiderate. Also, avoid causing friendship fatigue by not overwhelming friends with excessive time together. *"Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house lest he have his fill of you and hate you (25:17)."* While spending significant time with friends is important, smothering them can lead to resentment.

2. Gossip

Gossip is a poison within friendships, capable of easily dismantling the trust painstakingly built over time and ruining relationships. Proverbs cautions that even the faintest whisper can drive a wedge between the closest of friends (16:28). Such talk corrodes the very essence of friendship by sowing seeds of doubt and apprehension, making people wary of sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings. Indeed, the cornerstone of authentic friendship lies in the sacred trust shared between friends—a bond forged through years of shared experiences, vulnerabilities, and confidences. To breach this trust through gossip is to cause incredible harm and fracture connections that are difficult to mend.

3. Self-focus

Every behavior that chokes out true friendships stems from a focus on oneself rather than on fostering healthy relationships. A self-centered attitude leads to a tendency to dwell on how others have wronged us rather than reflecting on our own shortcomings. True friendship requires a posture of repentance, where we acknowledge and address our own faults. By extending grace to our friends and accepting imperfection, we create an environment where authentic friendships can flourish.

- a. Which of the three relational weeds do you see most prevalent in your life (burden, gossip, or self-focus)? What are some ways you can uproot it?*



Relevant Scriptures

Deuteronomy 13:6

1 Samuel 18:1-4

Proverbs 16:28; 25:17; 27:14

John 15:15

2 John 12

3 John 13-14

Recommended Reading

Made For Friendship by Drew Hunter

Made for People by Justin Whitmel Earley

No Greater Love by Rebecca McLaughlin

