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JOHN 15:9-17

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, I'm still enjoying the words of that song about worshipping you as a result of creation. Thank you for the prompting that creation provides. Just to be reminded that it's all packaged in this thing called love that you have for us. That is so amazing. We know that your love is a commitment that you have to us that we don't deserve, but we willingly receive. We thank you, Lord, that you love us in good times and hard times, that you love us even when we're not faithful to you. And so thank you so much for that. It's an amazing thing and we're grateful that we always have that ability to come back to you and experience your love. And then to think, Lord, that you love the whole world and that you sent Jesus Christ to die for us. It's also a pretty big thing to ponder. When we think about all of that, we're drawn to worship you. I pray, Lord, that in the course of this week our hearts will be lifted up to you, you'll use the things that we see even outdoors to draw our attention to you. We also thank you for your special revelation, for your word that we can look into today and of course during the week. As we look at John 15 today we ask that you would teach us very specific things about our lives and how we are to relate to you in them. So Lord, we open our hearts now. We want to be receptive to what you have to say. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Lord spoke to me this week and I'm eager to share with you what He's shared with me. I think you'll find it really helpful, so I'm actually kind of eager to share the things that I learned from Him this week. The passage that we're going to look at is John 15. The verses are John 15:9-17. So as a preparation for me to share with you some things that we learned from this passage, I want to read it. So will you stand with me in honor of God's word while I read this passage of scripture to you.

John 15:9-17. Please if you have your own Bibles go ahead and open them up and follow along there. Verse 9 – *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. 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. 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. This is my command: Love each other.*

You may be seated.

In that verse 16 it says – *You did not choose me, but I chose you* and it just reminds me of that seventh grade experience that I had (rather common experience) where we would gather a bunch of guys to play ball. Somehow a couple of the people would be appointed captains of the teams. All the rest of us would line up against the backstop and they would start picking teams. “I’ll take Phil,” and the other guy would say, “Okay, I’ll take Sam,” and somewhere along the line I would get picked. There was this feeling I had inside when I got picked. “Yes! I got picked! I got picked to be on that team!” Hopefully I wasn’t the last person picked because that was a different feeling of kind of embarrassment. Usually I was somewhere in the middle where I would get picked. It’s that same feeling I feel when it says here that Jesus picked me.

He’s talking about His disciples there. And He appointed them to be disciples. But there’s a sense in which it’s true of all of us. He picks us and He chooses us to be His disciples, not be appointed, to be His friends. He’s talking about friendship there. So I want to talk about this idea of being friends.

So I’m going to zero in there first on this part in verse 15 where it says – *I have called you friends*. I think we need to have a talk about this. Because our culture has redefined what a friend is. Especially as a result of the internet and Facebook. To be a friend is a little bit different on Facebook than what God is talking about here. I don’t think Jesus is saying please go to my profile and click “friend” and friend me. That’s not what He’s saying in this passage.

There’s something about Facebook... I mean I like Facebook. I don’t know if I should say I like Facebook. I don’t go on there very often because it’s a love-hate relationship I have with Facebook. But in Facebook we learn a lot. So I went on Facebook yesterday and I saw posts from Jennifer Dammann, I saw something from Neil Hate. Neil’s wife got her certificate. He already told me. He told me that last Sunday. But then I was reminded of that when I connected with him there. My wife is my friend on Facebook. I saw that she had posted some of our Tulip Festival photos on there. So I was reminded about those things. So there are some things that we do on Facebook that I like.

Mainly I don’t think we should call them friends though. They’re really contacts. I look at my list of friends on Facebook. Really I don’t know most of them. I don’t know how they got to be my friends or why I befriended them when they asked to be befriended. That must have been how I got connected with them. But I don’t know a lot of them. I think Facebook is great because it allows us to be reminded of what’s going on in other people’s lives. It’s encouraging sometimes to see the post of other people even that we don’t know. And we get to enjoy things. We go on Facebook a lot of times for entertainment, to learn about other people. Those are things that we do on Facebook.

But Jesus is talking about friendship here that’s qualitatively different. He’s talking about something that’s much deeper than what we sometimes experience. And so I want to talk about that for a moment. Because I don’t want us to be confused with the Facebook kind of friend mentality when we’re seeing what Jesus wants to do for us personally.

So I thought I'd go to a more reliable source than Google to find more about friendship. I did a Bible study this week on friendship that I thought was kind of interesting. So in this case I want to share with you what I learned. I went to several verses that talk about friendship in the Bible. One of the things that I liked about this is that it drew my attention to my earthly friends. Many of you are my friends and other people are my friends, and I start to evaluate me as a friend and those friends. So I liked that. But then I wanted to make the application back to Jesus being my friend. These verses are really helpful to do that. Notice what we have in some of these verses.

In Proverbs 17:17 it says – *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.* So this idea of a friend loves at all times. All times. Not just sometimes. That there's not just a convenient time, but there's this love that takes place at all times. Of course that's what Jesus wants to do with us. He wants to love us all the time. When things are good, bad, or different.

We love that song. I'm sure you learned this when you were a kid if your parents to church and you went to church with them, that song *Jesus Loves Me*. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong." Jesus loves me. But the next verse I learned when I was a kid was "Jesus loves me when I'm good, when I do the things I should. Jesus loves me when I'm bad, though it makes Him very sad." I like that because Jesus loves us, a friend loves at all times and we need this love.

There's some times when we don't feel loveable. There's sometimes when we feel alone. There's some times when we feel like we need something and there's this thing called love that Jesus provides because He wants to be a friend and He's offering in this passage. He's saying hey, I call you friends. I want to be your friends. So this friendship that we can enjoy, at least according to Biblical definition of friendship, has to do with loving at all times.

A second verse that I saw in Proverbs 27:6 was this: *Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.* The idea is that we all benefit from people who are our friends who are willing to speak into our lives and say, "Hey, what you're doing is wrong." Sometimes parents do that with children. Sometimes children do that with parents. Sometimes we do that just with a friend and say, "Look, I want to talk to you because I'm concerned about you here. There's a problem we need to talk about. I'm afraid of what this looks like to other people. Or I'm afraid of what's going on in your heart. I think you're off track a little bit." And so they feel like wounds to us. None of us like to be corrected, do we? But there's this sense in which Jesus wants to keep us on track. So the wounds of a friend, the friend Jesus, are one of those things we cherish because He moves us back into alignment. He centers us. And so there's this idea that this honesty that Jesus has with us is helpful, it's nutritious for us, it's what we look for. And the proverb about friends reminds us of how Jesus is that for us.

This verse comes from Ecclesiastes 4. I'm sure you remember this one. *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.* Yeah I can feel that. You fall down and you go, "I want somebody to help pick me up. I want somebody to help me."

I have a little friend who is three years old. Her name is Madison and her grandma is Joanne Miller. So Joanne cares for Madison over the course of the day so I get to see Madison once in a while. Madison loves to run and we play together and I enjoy that. But if Madison falls down, she doesn't want my help. She wants Nanny. There's only one person who can comfort her. She falls and I say, "I can comfort you." "No, I want Nanny," she says. She knows she can go to Nanny for comfort.

In this idea here is two things. Notice it's labor. When two people are working together they can accomplish more and Jesus wants to do that with us. He wants to accomplish more in our lives and this friendship we have with Him allows that to take place. But He also wants to help us when we fall down. Pity, it says. *But pity anyone who falls down and has no one to help them up.* What a sad place, just being alone. But if you've accepted Christ into your life, if you're a friend of God, if you're a friend of Jesus Christ, you have no time when you're alone, no time for self-pity, no time to be on the floor without getting picked up because Jesus wants to pick you up. He's right there to help you. He is the friend spoken of in Ecclesiastes 4. At least I'm applying it to the friendship that Christ wants to have with us.

Let's go on to another verse. *One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* There when you need them. The first part of the passage refers to unreliable friends. People who say they're your friends, but when you need them, when you've got a problem going on, what do they do? They're gone. They're unreliable. The idea here is that Christ is reliable. He's someone we can come to at any time. That's the friendship we're talking about here. There's something about Jesus and that relationship we have that's reliable and we enjoy Him and He sticks to us closer than a brother.

What He's saying is there's some friends (and I'm sure you know this) that you enjoy that are even stronger than the earthly blood relationships that you have. Blood relationships are important. They're valuable. We enjoy those. But I know that some of the strongest relationships I have are those within God's fellowship in the kingdom. There's a spiritual connection that we share and we enjoy. There's mutual sharing together. There's something good that's going on in that. And in the midst of that, look at Jesus. Because Jesus is this reliable friend that we can come to at any point and enjoy.

Just on this Bible study of friendship, another thing that Jesus does, but describes a friend in general in Proverbs 27:9 it says – *Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.* So sometimes you'll go to a friend and say, "I need some advice." The idea here is Jesus says I want to be your friend. I want to be that person that's giving you advice. I want to be that continual source of input in your life so that you have the things you need to guide you in the right direction. The advice that Jesus gives helps you sort out some of the stuff. Because I think our lives get kind of complicated sometimes. We don't know exactly what to do and we need advice. Jesus is that friend that we can go to for advice.

I'll just share one more of the verses that I found really helpful. It says – *Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.*

This is a negative example. In other words, it's the opposite of what we want to do. The idea I want to point out here is that friends influence you. That's very important. When I was a young person, a teenager, I was told this truth. I've really kept this close to heart all these years. And that is really be careful about an angry person. You want to be careful about being a friend with an angry person (because that's what the Proverb is saying). You want to be careful working with an angry person. You want to be careful partnering with an angry person. You certainly want to be careful about marrying an angry person. Right? Because that can be really challenging. And it starts to influence you and you start to get ensnared in their problems. The idea here is that friends influence you. Choose your friends wisely.

When I talk to young people about friendships, one of the things I remind them is that we all choose friends. Here's how you choose a friend. You choose a friend because there's something inside of you you want to come out. So you like to be with this person because he laughs a lot. Because you want to laugh. And he draws that laughter out of you. You like to be with this person because he listens to you. So you'll spend time with that person because he draws something out, this caring sense. Friendships are developed because you want to be with that person because they draw something out of you.

Now that's especially a problem if you have something in your heart where you want to be mischievous. If you want to be mischievous then you'll be attracted to someone who's interested in mischief. That's dangerous. You must be careful of the friends you choose because if you choose friends that will draw things out you, you can get ensnared. You can get into trouble. If you're drawn to someone who complains, you're going to end up being a complainer. You must choose your friends carefully because it's the friends that are going to influence you. And now of course we go back to Jesus. What better influence can we have in our lives than Jesus as a friend because He draws things out of us that need to be nurtured. He draws things out of us that we want to be out there and growing in our lives.

What I'm trying to do here is give you a bigger picture of a friend and what a friend is and how Jesus is saying I want to be that friend in your life. Another benefit of friends is that friends introduce you to more friends. That's one of the benefits of being part of a church family is when you know Jesus, you have other friends. You just meet someone on the street sometimes, you find out they're a Christian, and you go, "Oh yes! We have something in common!" Jesus has introduced you to another friend. It's one of the beautiful things about enjoying the friendships that God provides for us.

God's church is a great place for us to nurture those friendships and that's why we don't just watch TV. You can watch great sermons on TV. You can worship by listening to Pandora music or Apple music or wherever you want. There's great music out there that you can listen to. But there's something that happens when we're together that's different than when we're just on electronics. There's something that happens in this connection that takes place that's different than clicking a button that I "like" you. Jesus is talking about that kind of friendship, something different that allows us to connect in a more personal relationship. I often find it intriguing that young people will be standing in a group texting each other. I'm going wait, wait, wait. There's

something else going on here. We could be talking together. Jesus is our friend, He wants to be our friend, and that's what we're seeing in this passage.

Let's go back. In this passage here's what He's saying about this friendship. I'm jumping down to verse 13 in our passage. He says – *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

One of the signs that Jesus is saying about friendship that makes it work is that it's sacrificial. Jesus is just talking about friendship here that you're sacrificing laying one's life down and so on. We know that in regular friendship we do that, don't we? A friend calls and needs some help, you put down what you're doing, you sacrifice, and you say yes to a friend. Saying yes is what you do for friends. Right? A friend asks you for something, you say yes. We try to do that as much as we're able. But Jesus is of course drawing His attention to the big sacrifice, the sacrifice that Jesus made to lay down His life for us. Because entrance into friendship with God is this sacrifice of the cross. That Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins.

There's a lot of brokenness that takes place in our lives because of friendships that have gone bad. There's brokenness that takes place in our lives because of relationships that have caused us problems in our lives. And there's some brokenness that exists just because we do the wrong thing. We can call all of that sin, whether that's sin being done to us or that comes from us. We find ourselves in this desperate place of brokenness. It's just so broken. I don't know how to explain it other than that. Just I see brokenness continually and it makes my heart ache many times when I see that brokenness. I know that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the brokenness, for that sin. He died so that I could have some wholeness, so I could have friendship relationship with Him. But it starts with this cross, with the laying down on His life for us.

And so Jesus is explaining to these disciples (we haven't seen Him die yet) and He's saying to them – *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.* And that's what Jesus is doing for them. That's what He's done for you and me. And if you want to be a friend of Jesus Christ, it starts with that, accepting the fact that you have sin in your life and it needs to be addressed and that you need a Savior. We can call Him lots of things. We can call Him Savior, Redeemer, we can call Him friend. But as it all ties together, we recognize that Jesus has something He's giving to us that's much bigger than just a simplistic relationship. It's something deeper because something for our soul is what it is.

He says – *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.* This transparency that we see in Jesus, that He wants to give us information. He wants to give us life. He wants to give us all kinds of things and that's provided for us in this friendship dynamic. So Jesus is describing friendship in a much bigger picture than sometimes we see it in our own lives. You're probably sitting there thinking, you know, I don't think I have very many good friends. I have a lot of friends on Facebook, but real friends are hard to come by. Jesus wants to be that friend and He offers that friendship.

Let's go back to the beginning of the passage. In the passage I want you to see that He's talking about this love and He says – *If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.* The word *remain* there is abide or to live. We want to live in this love.

In the same way that I think we need to redefine friendship from what's commonly taught in the culture to what God helps us understand in our real lives, we also must redefine love. Because the current entertainment culture defines love as kind of this good feeling that you have. This soulmate kind of idea that you connect with someone and there's kind of this supernatural connection. It really is a bunch of feelings that you have and then for some reason after a few years that's gone and then what do you have left? There's this understanding of love that must go deeper than what we see in entertainment today. So redefining love would be helpful.

Notice in this idea the idea of love here He puts together with commands. Keep my commands. Give up your agenda. Don't do what you want. It's not about you being selfish and wanting what you want. It's about doing what I say. When you give up that agenda and you obey Jesus Christ, then there's that love that's being demonstrated and you remain in that He's saying. So this love is different. It's deeper.

Then we come to the next part. I thought about starting the sermon with the ending because sometimes that's helpful. But notice what He says here. *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

I just want you to know, the reason I'm telling you all this thing about friends and love and about commands, I just want you to know why I want you to get this. It's because of your joy. I want you to have joy. This is complete joy.

I think we've got to redefine that too because I think our culture defines joy as enjoyment or pleasure. You can get a lot of joy out of playing a video game, eating a good dinner, going to a show, getting a good night's sleep. Pleasure is in that. That's not what He's talking about. He's talking about something that's complete. He's saying I want you to know all these things. These are really important. Get this. I'm telling you this. You see the word *this* there, right? *I have told you this.* What's *this*? About the commands, about the love, about the friendship. I'm telling you all these things so that you can have this joy inside of you that kind of continues on. It kind of bubbles out.

I'm studying my sermon and I happen to be working with an eleven year old girl this week. And she is always so cheerful. I'm thinking there's something about her cheerfulness and this verse. I'm going to try to connect this. I want to ask her because she's smiling all the time. So I said, "Why do you smile all the time? Every time I see you, you're smiling. You seem to be happy all the time."

She says, "I don't know. I just like to smile."

I said, "I'll bet you that if you're being cheerful and showing you smile helps you to feel better too."

She says, Yeah. I like it."

I think that's true. I think when we're loving, we abide in the love of Christ. When we do that, it produces something that you're not going to find in a video game, or you're not going to find in a good night's sleep, or you're not going to find in whatever other pleasure you might enjoy.

Love in the passage, notice, is the final command. *This is my command: Love each other.* So it's the love of God that we abide in, it's loving Christ, it's this love that He says in the middle there (verse 12) – *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* So there's this love that we receive, that we give.

So when we're doing all this love stuff, if that's where we're living, we're obeying the commands, loving God, it does something. I like the word *complete*. It fills up all those places where pleasure might not be able to go. That we can experience joy even when things are challenging. We can experience joy even when we're down. We can experience joy even when we're in pain. Can you experience joy when you're depressed? I'm sure the answer to that is yes because I know some people are depressed because of some biological thing in them. And when they're experiencing that depression, they're trying to work, eat right, sleep, do all of the things, take medications, whatever they're doing. At the same time they're still feeling down, but they have this joy inside. There's something about this joy that transcends all the other stuff. It's complete. It's a complete joy that Jesus wants to give us. *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* That's what He wants for us. He wants us to experience that joy.

You've probably seen on Facebook or some other place an image that says Jesus wants to be your friend. It's a Facebook image. "Jesus wants to be your friend – Confirm or Ignore." Now there's some things I like about that because you do have to make a decision about Jesus. Is He going to be your friend or not? You're going to confirm or ignore. But there's this other sense in which it's yeah, okay, I'll confirm. I'll just add Him to the list of my other thousand friends that I have. I've just added something to my list. That's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about something that's much, much deeper. That He wants to be this best friend of ours.

Now some people have a hard time with the friend idea because Jesus is King. He's the Lord. He's the one in charge. And if you're too buddy-buddy with Jesus, then you miss some of the lordship, the mighty, the awesomeness of God. And maybe I don't have to do whatever He says because that's what lordship is. This King, He's the boss, so I do what He says. But notice when Jesus is describing this idea of friend, He says you need to do what I command. Do what I tell you to do. Both are tied in here. There's this beautiful picture of friendship that doesn't alienate the lordship of Christ and this sense of Him being so majestic and powerful. He is our Redeemer, He's our friend, He's our King. He's all of these things. But when it comes down to our lesson for today, it's important to recognize that He wants a personal relationship. Not a distant relationship where He's on a cloud somewhere, or He's always in that church, or just when I see ceremony or stained-glass windows or something. He wants to be present with us every day. That personal dimension is something we need. Jesus is sharing that with His disciples before He leaves them that this friendship is so powerful.

So take this to heart, would you? Just think how God would have you apply this to your life. Because if you've never come to a place where you've trusted Jesus and say, "Lord, I want you

to save me from sin. I want you to be my Savior,” that’s where you start. If you made that statement, sometimes our loyalty to Jesus wanes. We need to know He is there, He is ready for us to come back. We just need to come back and enjoy that friendship. Spend time with Him. We need to interact with Him, share our troubles with Him, listen to what He has to say. That’s what friends do. And Jesus wants that personal relationship with each of us.

Would you stand with me and let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we sometimes find ourselves in situations where we’re disappointed or in pain, where we’re hurt or despairing or discouraged. And Lord, I know that in those moments you want to provide something for us that we really need. And it’s in this friendship idea. So Lord, do that today for those who are feeling in those kinds of ways. There’s people, Lord, who are just feeling great today. There can be a tendency for us when we’re doing well to say, “Hey, I’m doing fine. I don’t really need you.” Help us to recognize the importance of relying on you every day. We want to trust you, we want to allow you to be that wonderful Savior in our lives who comes in and rescues us and heals us from sin, but then runs with us in accord with our lives. So Lord, continue to work in our hearts in a special way we ask. We worship you again now. In Jesus’ name, amen.