

REACHING OUT TOGETHER
Friendship First 4
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During the next 2 Sundays we're looking at two things. One is deepening the sense of friendship within our church family, reaching out to the community around our church family. We're learning to build stronger relationships in our church and reach out in relationships of love to those around our church. The reason we're doing this is because the Bible says we're better together.

God has a plan for your life and cannot be fulfilled on your own. God said, "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" God hates loneliness. So He wants us to be in community with each other.

You don't need a hundred friends but you do need three or four or five or six that are really there with you. The tragedy is most people today don't have a single intimate friend. They've got a lot of acquaintances but they don't have anybody looking out for their spiritual growth, who's helping them, who's saying I'm going to be there no matter what happens in your life.

Why does He want us to do that? Because God wants everybody in His family. God has never made a person He didn't love. God has never made a person He didn't have a purpose for. God has never made a person that Jesus Christ didn't die for. So God wants us to share that good news. But you're not alone. God wants you to do it with other people.

In the book of Philippians Paul says this. "*You are standing together, side by side with one strong purpose – to tell the Good News.*" Circle "standing together" and circle "telling the good news." That's what we're looking at today. How do we do it together? How do I share with my friends that God loves them? And how I do it in a partnership with other people? How do we do it together as a small group? Because we are to reach out together.

The next verse of the same chapter says this "*You've been my partners in spreading the Good*

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News about Christ.” Circle “partners.” We’re going to look at seven ways to partner with other believers, with other people in the family of God, to help reach your friends, your relatives, the people you care about most with the good news. We’re going to look at it in a little acrostic I spelled out PARTNER, How to partner to share God’s love.

How do we use these groups, these 3000 groups to reach out and show love to our friends, to our family, to people we care about that we want so badly to know the love and grace and goodness of God? Here’s how you do it. You partner together. PARTNER.

P – Pray together

The first thing you do is you ask your small group to pray for your friends, for your friends who haven’t stepped across the line. Who are still considering the claims of Christ. Who don’t really know God in a personal way yet. You ask them to pray and you pray together. You can’t force anybody to love God. But you can pray for them. And prayer can do what God can do. Prayer can melt hard hearts. Prayer can warm up a cold heart. Prayer can activate and arouse an apathetic heart. And prayer can change a stubborn heart. I have seen it done thousands and thousands of times. Prayer can do whatever God can do.

People can reject your arguments. They may refuse to listen to your logic. But they are powerless against your prayers. It goes straight to their heart.

Colossians 3:4 says this “*Pray for us that God will give us the opportunity to tell people His message.*” So we pray for God’s opportunity to share with our friends and our loved ones and people we care about the great news about God.

So here’s the first action step in sharing the good news. Make a group prayer list then share it with each other. I want you to ask everybody in your small group, “Name one person that you would really like to know the Lord. They don’t know the Lord yet. We’ll all share those names. We’ll make a list of six names or seven names or ten names or whatever. Then we’ll start

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praying for each other's friends, each other's family." There's power in that.

A – Appeal. Appeal to common interests.

Before you can share the good news with anybody you have to establish a relationship with them. Before you can reach them you must relate to them. You find out, What do we have in common? What do we like to talk about? Common experiences, common interests, common needs, common hurts. Do we like to fish, to golf, to cook, to shop, to sleep. Do we have kids? Are we interested in soccer or baseball or basketball or whatever?

“Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. I do this to get the Gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ.” 1 Cor. 9:22-23 (LB)

That's finding common interests of people they'd like to do. So you pray together, you appeal to common interests...

R – Reach out in love.

Why? Because you have to have the right motive in reaching out to your neighbors and friends. Jesus said, *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* You know the old cliché. People don't care what we know until they know we care. So everything we do is out of love.

What is the good news? Here it is in a nutshell. The good news is this – you're not an accident. You were made by God and He has a purpose and plan for your life. You were made to last forever. But He wants you to get to know Him here on earth. He knows and loves everything about you and He wants you to know and love Him too. Jesus Christ came to earth so you could get to know what God is like. He died on the cross and paid for all your sins so that everything you've ever done wrong is completely wiped out and forgotten and forgiven. He gives you a purpose for living in the present. And He gives you a home in heaven in the future.

That's good news! Where else am I going to hear that kind of news? It's not like we're trying to

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give people rabies or something! This is the best news in the world. Everybody needs to hear it.

So that's the first reason why we focus out on the community, not just on us.

Here's the action step: Ask God to give you a deeper love for other people. Write this question on the bottom of your outline: How can I pray for you? One of the best ways that you could show love to a friend or to a family member or to a co-worker who is not a believer yet is to simply ask hem, How can I pray for you? That's not offensive. Even people who are atheists don't mind you praying for them. They say sure, I can use all the help I can get. Everybody wants to be prayed for. Everybody. In fact, they're grateful for it.

Everybody wants to be prayed for. Just say, "Tell me what's going on in your life. What are you facing right now that I could pray and ask God for help in your life?"

There is a fourth way that you and I can partner together to let people know how great God's love is. That is...

T – Tell your stories.

Do what the Bible talks about in 1 Peter 2:9 "*You are God's instruments to do His work and to speak out for Him and to tell others of the night-and-day difference He has made for you.*" Tell your story. In fact, the most effective way to let other people know about the great things that God can do in their lives is to tell them the story of what God has done in your life. That is what makes a difference.

The great thing about telling stories is, you are the expert on your story. You may be an expert on some other things but there is one thing that all of us is a world expert on. That is your story. What God's done in your life. I've found over the years that people want to hear your story. What they don't want to hear is your *stoory*. Fifteen minutes into the story and you're still five years old. That kind of story. People just want to hear the readers digest version. We owe it to them to take a few minutes to think it through so you can tell the story of

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what God's done in two and three minutes not two and three hours. Tell the story.

Jesus said, "*You're to be My witnesses.*" That's a great picture. When I hear the word "witness," I think of a courtroom. Most of us do. It's a perfect picture of what God's asking us to do to make a difference in the world. We're to be His witness. He doesn't ask us to be the attorney, arguing the case. He doesn't ask us to be the judge, judging other people. He says, I want you to be My witnesses.

What does a witness do? A witness just says, Here's what I've seen, here's what I heard. A witness just tells the story of what God's done in their life, to other people. I think a lot of us can think of a lot of different stories that we have, a lot of different things that God has done in our lives.

But one of the things we struggle with a little bit is how do I get into it? How do I start to tell the story in a natural way so it doesn't seem fake or phony? There is no one way. It depends on the circumstances. It depends on the situation. But we would like to give you a couple of pictures of how this could work in a natural way, as a part of everyday life. Our skit guys are going to come out and give us an example of some ways this could work. What's the best way of getting into telling your story? Two or three ways. One way is to listen for problems that Jesus has helped you with. When you find a problem that Jesus has helped you with, you use that to help other people. You can say God helped me with that, maybe He can help you too.

You can do that. Just listen for ways that God helped you. The truth is every one of us we have dozens of stories, maybe hundreds of stories of the things that God has done in our lives to make a difference.

There is another way you can do this. You can also sort of relate to a current event, something that's going on that everybody's facing. Maybe everybody's struggling with and you see in the newspaper or TV. So you relate to a problem in your life that somebody else has faced or a

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current event. Or there's another thing you can do. Sometimes there's someone, you've known them for a long time but you've never told them what God's done in your life. You know how you get to the point where you don't want to tell them because you never have told them and it's almost embarrassing. What do you do then? A great way to start then is an apology. Just apologize for never having said, "I've never told you the most important thing in my life, my relationship with God, with Jesus Christ."

Friends don't keep good news from other friends. You tell them the good news of what God has done in your life.

The fifth way to help other people experience God's love is...

5. To nurture friendships.

Just build friendships with them so you can build a bridge between your heart and theirs and Jesus Christ can walk across. This step takes a little bit more time and effort. It takes a little more energy to build a friendship. You don't just do it overnight. But the Bible says in Romans 12 "*Be friendly with everybody. Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people.*"

I said earlier, very few people have a true friend in life. Everybody's looking for a true friend. I'm not talking about acquaintances. Everybody's got acquaintances. I'm talking about people who are there with you when you need them most. Who do you build those friendships with? The people who are already in your life. They're the people you work with and you go to school with, you live with. They're down the street, the people on the speed dial on your phone. They're all around you. As I said, God has put these people in your life specifically so you can share the good news with them. If not you, who? You are the only Bible some people will ever read. You represent Jesus Christ to them.

One of the best ways to build a friendship is a biblical method that I love – *have a party!* Did

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you know that much of Jesus' ministry was done at parties? Read the gospels, read His life. You'll read that He often did ministry at parties. In fact He was such a party animal that the religious leaders of that day, the Pharisees, called Him a glutton and a drunk. They called Jesus a glutton and a drunk because He was always at parties. Why? Because that's where the people were that He wanted to share the love of God with. But let me clarify, Jesus was neither a glutton or a drunk-because he never sinned-but he did attend a lot of parties-to reach out in love. He even taught His disciples to do this. One of His disciples named Levi (not the jean guy but another guy!) whose name was also Matthew "*In his home Levi, also called Matthew, gave a big dinner party for Jesus and many fellow tax collectors and other guests were also here.*" Why does it say, many fellow tax collectors? Because that's what Matthew was. He was a tax collector. He called up the office and all of his buddies and said, Come on over. He had an office party for Jesus.

Some of you can do it right there at your place of work or with your family.

Here we're talking though about a party. I would encourage you to have a Matthew's Party. What's a Matthew's Party? No agenda but fun. You just bring some people over who don't know the Lord and who you want to get acquainted with and build friendship and show love to.

Expect God to act.

I don't know if you realize this but God works in people's hearts when we expect Him to do so.

The Bible says, "*According to your faith it will be done unto you.*"

The greatest pastor of the nineteenth century was a guy named Charles Spurgeon. He was the pastor of the largest church in the world at that time in London, England. He'd often speak to about ten thousand people. Many people came to know Christ through his life. One day a young man came to him and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I don't understand it. Whenever you talk to people about the Lord they always tend to open up their lives. They tend to accept Christ. When I talk

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to people about the Lord nobody's interested. Nobody comes to Christ. What's wrong?"

Spurgeon said, "Young man, you don't expect people to come to Jesus Christ every time you talk about Him, do you?" He said, "Of course not." Spurgeon said, "That's your problem."

I don't know how it works, I really don't. But I do know this. God has a will for your life and the devil has a will for your life and you have a free will to choose. Every moment of your life you're choosing either God's will or the devil's will for your life. When you choose your own will it's certainly not God's. So you're going in the wrong direction. I don't know how it works but I do know that when I pray and expect people and pray for people, what happens is it makes it easier for them to choose the right way. God will never force anybody to choose Him but it makes it easier.

Here's the point. Never give up on anybody. You never get discouraged. Nobody's hopeless. You trust God. The Bible says this in Hebrews 11:1 "*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" Some of you, you've been praying for some time for your boyfriend to become believer, or your girlfriend to become believer. Or you've been praying for your husband or your wife or your parent or child or somebody you care about, a relative, a worker, a good close friend. You've been praying for them and you don't see any evidence that two years later they're any closer in their journey to God that they were two years ago. You just don't see any difference. What do you need to do? You need to start praying in faith expecting God to act. Faith is certain of what we do not see. "God, I don't see them warming up to You at all, in any area of their life. But I'm going to pray and expect that You're working in their life even when I can't see it."

Here's the last way to help bring your friends to know the Lord.

R – Represent Christ with your life.

The Bible says, "*Whatever you do or say let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus.*"

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Whatever you do or say. We need audiovisual Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk. They do it and they say it. They live it and they share it. They communicate it and they demonstrate it. They are show and tell Christians. You need both. You need to live it in your life and you need to share it with your mouth.

The Bible is very specific about this. 1 Thessalonians 4 *“Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business. Do your own work. If you do people who are not believers will respect you.”*

The fact is God specifically put people in your life and you are God’s representative to them. If not you, who? God put you there, why would He put two there. He put you there to share with your relatives, your loved one, your friend, your co-worker. How will the people know unless we tell them? Your friends who need the Lord, who need to be shown how to get to heaven, God isn’t going to write it in the sky for them. He’s not going to send them a telegram. He has sent you. He’s sent you to tell your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your family, whoever. He’s sent you. So here’s my challenge to you. Eric and Deb Johnson joined the church a few months ago-What they are passionate about is saving the lost. They are looking for a few good men and women to work with them to establish evangelism explosion group here at ECC! Get involved-I have invited Eric to give the closing invitation and prayer of dismissal.