

OCTOBER 2, 2022

LAST METRO SERMON

Our Deep Need for Fellowship and Spiritual Friendships

Acts 21:1-20

We gathered to worship and study the Bible for the first time on a Sunday on January 4, 2004. We met in a high school. I opened our time with the words: *Let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Acts Chapter One.*

Since that first Sunday in 2004 We have opened our Bibles together on Sundays almost 1,000 times. I have counted every one of those Sundays (as well as the same number of Monday Nights) a sacred privilege. I count this 976th Sunday sermon just as great and sacred a privilege as the first — in a way it carries an even greater weight because I won't be standing before you next week — or the next or the next. So I say to you what Paul told his dear friend and son in the faith

2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT) ²You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

I will start Sunday, last, the same way I started Sunday, first: *Let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Acts — Chapter **Twenty-one**.*

Before we dive into **Acts 21** I want to begin by telling you how you that I have been in awe of how you have been so steadfast in your faith in Jesus through these past three years — and especially through our move out of our home on Foothills Blvd. into WPHS. You held on to Jesus through all the craziness and chaos — all of the heartbreak and relational trauma. Our first few months here felt like a battlefield hospital. For a while we all came in limping and desperately looking to Jesus to make us whole — restore us. But with every passing week I watched as the Word of His grace was able to build you up. Even the way you processed the news of Metro coming to a close was amazing! I have been humbled by your sincere care for us and I am honoured to have been your pastor and to have taught you the Word of God.

This morning I want to remind you that the Church (and the church is not some impersonal entity — it is the collection of blood bought men and women) is everything to Jesus — and Jesus is everything to His Church. It is by HIS design that the local church is the primary repository of His provision for each of us for Gospel living.

Ray Ortlund — *There is no churchless Christianity in the Bible. We individualistic Americans need to face that. God is building a new community, and it's worth belonging to.*¹

Dr. Eric Mason — *I find it fascinating that the NT apostles, prophets, evangelists etc. were all a part of a local church. Even traveling missionaries and entrepreneurs like Paul (Antioch), Philip (Jerusalem), Lydia (Philippi) all had local a home church. Why don't we?*

DON'T MISS THIS — No matter where we might be or what we might be going through, the Church — specifically the local church — is where our deep need for Gospel fellowship and spiritual friendship is supplied.

Acts 21:1–20 (ESV) ¹And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴**And having sought out the disciples**, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. ⁷When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and **we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day**. ⁸On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and **we entered the house of Philip the evangelist**, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰While we were staying for

¹ Ortlund, Ray. The Gospel (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches) (p. 35). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " ¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." ¹⁵After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. ¹⁷When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸On the following day Paul went in **with us** to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰And when they heard it, they glorified God....

In **Acts 21:1** we're looking at Paul moving towards Jerusalem. It's an epic time in his life. The events that begin to unfold in **Acts 21** will literally change the course of Paul's life. As rough as things had been for Paul up to this point, hardships are going to be multiplied. He will suffer more in a shorter period of time than ever before — and that's saying a lot, because Paul suffered much for the sake of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit had been showing Paul that he needed to go to Jerusalem — and that when he gets there he is going to be imprisoned and crushed (**Acts 20:22–23**).

THIS IS SO HUGE — As Paul moves towards all of this, and steps into all of this, we can't miss his incredible determination to carry on for Jesus no matter what lay ahead.

Acts 21:13 (ESV) ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

THAT is so relevant to all of us this morning! All of us are heading **out** a context that has been so familiar — into the unknown. I pray we will be filled with a holy determination to carry on for Jesus — would you pray for us?!

We are going to be praying for you!!

Acts 21 contain truths about our life in Christ that are timeless — And I believe they are hugely relevant to every single one of us this morning.

1. Fellowship/Spiritual Friendships are ESSENTIAL for the Christian life and are a MARK of spiritual health and maturity.

Apart from Jesus — the apostle Paul is, without argument, one of the most iconic figures in the New Testament. And in the face of the crushing events ahead of him, we see this icon of spiritual maturity swimming towards the local church where he would find fellowship and spiritual friendship.

Paul's actions prove that to **need** and to **want** community and the **deep** fellowship and friendships waiting for them there is a sign of spiritual health and spiritual maturity. For a professing Christian to not need and not want community and the deep fellowship and spiritual friendships available there is a symptom of poor spiritual health and a cause for concern.

Follow me here! The Bible says that when you're born again you become a child of God (**John 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:23**). The less you want friends - the less you resemble the God of the Bible. The Bible teaches us that there is One God who eternally exists as three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — each fully and equally God. The Trinity is a loving, relational community! Because man was created in the image and likeness of the Triune God, man is hardwired for community. God the Son became man so that He might redeem and reconcile man back to fellowship with God **and** to God's original purpose for us to bear the image of God. TO bear the image of God well involves fellowship; it involves spiritual friendship.

The Bible also tells us that God saved us to the end that we would be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). If you don't want spiritual friendships, you're not looking like Jesus. Jesus is God who became man. He desired friends. He chose 12 men to be with Him 24/7 for three years. If you don't want spiritual friendships, you're not looking like Jesus.

HERE'S THE DEAL — Not wanting fellowship/spiritual friendships is a **vertical** problem **before** it's a **horizontal** problem. We can't fall back on our very real

proclivities and fears (I'm not a social person - People don't like me - I can't handle rejection).

Not wanting fellowship — not wanting spiritual friendship is a symptom that says there is something disconnected between you and Jesus because Jesus desired friendships and modelled fellowship for us.

It's a mark of spiritual health and maturity to desire fellowship/spiritual friendship. The problem is that many professing Christians don't realize how much they need fellowship/spiritual friendships until they're in trouble. Think of it like this: We aren't really thinking about how much we need air until we're underwater — until we're oxygen deprived. As a rule, most Christians don't walk around saying, "I need fellowship/spiritual friends," until they are spiritually and emotionally underwater.

“⁴ And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another.”

That's such a rich picture! They had been there for days. When they are ready to leave, they all, with wives and children are there. Paul and his team were entrenched in the lives of families. And these families ushered them to the place of departure. And they knelt down on the beach and they prayed and they said their good-byes.

“Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. ⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day.”

Think about this: Paul did not plant the church in Tyre. It's believed that the church in Tyre was planted by some of those who fled from the persecution in Jerusalem and came to Phoenicia (**Acts 11:19**).² That means that Paul is most likely meeting Christians he had never met before. In other words — Paul is not

² Robertson, A. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ac 21:4). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

only swimming towards Fellowship; he's **making** friends! Paul had zero history with the believers in Tyre. Yet he seeks them out!

2. Fellowship / Spiritual friendship transcends human affinities or differences

Let me repeat that - Fellowship / Spiritual Friendships transcend human affinities and human differences.

THAT MEANS that you can have fellowship with — experience spiritual friendship with - people with whom you have people with whom you have no natural ties, no personal history, no common affinities — because the substance of genuine fellowship transcends all of that. Fellowship and Spiritual Friendships are built upon our common faith in Jesus!

Because Jesus is the bond that holds them together, men and women can enjoy friendship with and labor side by side in the Gospel with people they have nothing in common with

We don't want to miss this — The essence of fellowship / the essence of spiritual friendship is not *"Do you love me?"*. The essence of fellowship and spiritual friendship is *"Do you love Jesus?"* Fellowship begins with discovering that the other person has met Jesus, trusted Jesus, loves Jesus, is worshipping Jesus. No matter who they used to be, or what they used to do, two hearts that are bowed before Jesus can have fellowship.

I want you to think about this: Whether you know it or not, every one of us walked in today wearing a uniform! Here's what I mean: If you walk around New York City you'll see people wearing uptown uniforms and downtown uniforms, corporate uniforms and creative uniforms. In Southern California, if you're in Silver Lake you see Hip uniforms, if you're in Huntington Beach or Carlsbad you see Surfers uniforms.

No small side note: Outside of Jesus our "Uniforms" say a lot about where we are trying to find our deepest identity.

In the natural, those groups are un-relatable. Some of those groups are literally hostile towards each other. But here's the deal. When you come to Jesus you

don't have to stop surfing or dressing like a “surfer.” But you do stop trying to find your deepest identity in surfing. Now you derive your identity in your relationship and service to Jesus. You stop bowing down to surfing and you bow before Jesus. You stop trying to derive your deepest identity in athletics or hipp-ness. Now you bow before Jesus. **As a result**, friendships that were impossible before meeting Jesus are now possible in Jesus.

Those of us who are old enough can remember the tremendous divide, and even hostility, between the Hippies and the “establishment” in the late sixties. America was imploding. Jesus brought together two tribes that were at war.

SONG: *Little Country Church* —

Long hair, short hair, some coats and ties — People finally comin' around —

Lookin' past the hair and straight into the eyes — People finally comin' around

And it's very plain to see — It's not the way it used to be

Apart from Jesus there was absolutely no way that long haired hippies were going to be sitting down with people in coats and ties because they were cultural arch-enemies. Jesus broke down all of those barriers and all those walls. There was a very radical and real healing of that tear in the fabric of our society during what is now called “*The Jesus Movement*” (because Jesus was moving). Jesus was saving souls. And He was knitting hearts together. Hippies and the “establishment” were united by their common love for Jesus.

Oh how desperately we need to drop this into the radical cultural, ideological polarization we have and still are experiencing today!

Genuine fellowship is never contingent on cultural similarity. You're a Christian first, and you're anything else second. I read this on Thursday morning

I'm not progressive. I'm not liberal. I'm not conservative. I'm Kingdom.

1. Fellowship/Spiritual Friendships are a mark of spiritual health and maturity.
2. Spiritual friendships transcend human affinity or differences

3. Fellowship/Spiritual friendship requires work

“⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” ¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. ¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God.”

Fellowship and Spiritual friendship requires the work of sharing.

Fellowship is the word *“koinonia”* it means - *participation with; sharing; generosity.*

Let’s take inventory of what they shared.

First — At the close of **Acts 20** and the opening of **Acts 21** there was a tremendous exchange of emotions between Paul and his friends from Ephesus. They wept. They embraced. It was a painful parting! Here’s the point: You cannot have spiritual friendship unless you **share your feelings**. That kind of sharing

requires the kind of SAFETY that the Gospel produces and offers. Ray Ortlund came up with this formula:

gospel + safety + time.

In other words, the people in our churches need: multiple exposures to the happy news of the gospel from one end of the Bible to the other; the safety of non-accusing sympathy so that they can admit their problems (feelings) honestly; and enough time to rethink their lives at a deep level, because people are complex and changing is not easy.³

I want us to remind each other, encourage each and pray for each other to be pressing into the kind of fellowship and friendships where we can share from our hearts the emotional waters we're moving through.

I am so thankful for the friends with whom I was safe to be honest about the things rumbling around in my heart.

Second — Here in **Acts 21** we see that the first Christians not only shared their deepest feelings with each other, they **shared their things**.

Before meeting Jesus, we used to worship our things. After meeting Jesus, we want to use our things to worship Jesus. We love Jesus by loving others **for** Him and loving others **to** Him — and we do that in part by sharing our things with those in need.

People opened their homes to Paul and his team. They fed Paul and his team.

On my first missionary trip to England we stopped at the home town of Malcolm Wild, who was the singer/songwriter in our band, and the pastoral leader of our ministry team. He grew up in a place called Kirkby in Ashfield. It was literally a one signal light town. And we stayed in the homes of the handful of local Christians there. I stayed with the Cook family. Dad was a school teacher in the local school. They had a little boy and a little girl. After Sunday service I went back to their house for Sunday tea, their main meal of the day. When we finished the kids were really excited because

³ Ortlund, Ray. The Gospel (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches) (p. 59).

mom brought out this big block of ice cream. They basically cut open the flaps of the rectangular ice cream container. And there it stood - one big block of ice cream in front of us. They cut off some slices. And we were enjoying it. And they asked, “Do you want some more?” I said, “No, thanks. I’m so full. You can put it in the freezer - maybe later.” And they didn’t quite know how to respond because they didn’t have a freezer. In that day homes in England didn’t look like American homes. Their refrigerators looked like one of those little things that we’d stick under a countertop at work. They didn’t even have a freezer. And yet here they were. Ice cream was a precious commodity. It was a special thing because they couldn’t afford to buy it and waste it. And yet they just wanted to share their stuff with me. At that time all the keys in the homes in England were those skeleton keys — and when I left they gave me the key to their home. They shared their stuff with me. They had never met me. We had nothing in common except for Jesus.

Third — In **Acts 21** not only shared their deepest feelings and shared their things, **they shared their faith**. They shared in what they were learning of God and what they were hearing from God.

Hebrews 3:12-14a Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we share in Christ

Christians — you **need** to have people in your life who are so close to you that you can encourage and exhort each other in living out the Gospel. As long as we live between the already and the not yet, we are to be a part of God's redemptive plans and purposes to encourage one another every day so that none of us will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

I am so thankful for the brothers and sisters with whom I was safe to be honest about the deepest things rumbling around in my heart.

HERE’S THE DEAL — God wants to send others into my life to rescue me from me. Other believers are a profound means of grace in my life. Even conflict is a part of God’s grace to rescue me from me. Even the best of friends are going to have

moments of disagreement and conflict. Listen, conflict is God's counter-intuitive way of rescuing me from myself! Did you know that conflict provides us with an opportunity to see our own sin, and provides the other person an opportunity to see their own sin. Those confrontational locations or situations we want to avoid actually can become redemptive opportunities.

METRO — God defines fellowship for us! God informs us that it's not fellowship/spiritual friendship unless you have some people in your life **you authorize** to press you at some time on some subject. That's what was happening in the passage.

They also shared in decision-making. They say (in verse 4) that the Holy Spirit had given them enough insight to know that Jerusalem was going to be dangerous — and in light of that they urged Paul not to go. But we already know from **Acts 20:22** that the Holy Spirit told Paul to go.

This portion of Paul's life has left a lot of people confused because in it we see people arguing with Paul about his decision to travel up to Jerusalem.

¹⁰While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

A COUPLE THINGS WE DON'T WANT TO MISS HERE —

¹ They believed it was their right, and they believed it was the loving thing, to say, "Paul, you're all wrong." They saw it as the role of a friend to get involved with his life, and to get involved in decision making. What's amazing is that Paul lets them.

2. **They** didn't say, *"The Spirit told us you shouldn't go. You are disobeying the Spirit."* **Paul** never said, *"Look. The Spirit told me I have to go, so why are we having this discussion?"* **Paul** never says, *"Mind your own business"* — not even to the Christians in Tyre that he hardly even knew.

God's Word informs us that Fellowship/Spiritual friendship is the key component in the process of *iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17)*. It's a critical part of God's provision for us in discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit. God doesn't want us to make our significant life decisions by ourselves. That kind of isolation is deadly. (By the way — This is an essential component of marriage: Fellowship and spiritual friendship in decisions!) If you're isolating yourself from others in the process of decision making it's usually for a bad reason — because you don't want to be told you're wrong, or you already know you're wrong but you're going to do it anyway. (Please get the resources from our study in *Proverbs 18:1 Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.*)

My dear brothers and sisters — You're not a friend; you don't understand fellowship, if you are unwilling to let people into your business. You're not a friend, you don't understand fellowship, if you continually say, "The Lord spoke to me and you have to obey what I'm telling you." You're not a friend, you don't understand fellowship, if you refuse to let people say to you, "I just think you're absolutely wrong." You have to listen. You have to share decisions.

Fellowship/spiritual friendship involves

1. Sharing your deepest feelings
2. Sharing your things
3. Sharing your faith
- 4.** It also involves **sharing your life**. Let me put it another way — fellowship/spiritual friendship means **commitment**.

"*4 And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*"

“⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey,”

You need to circle **“we”** in verse 4. — You need to circle **“we”** in verse 5.

Then drop down to verse 11.

“¹¹ And coming to us,”

That’s a big one again – circle **“us”** –

“¹¹ And coming to us he (Agabus) took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”

¹² When we” - circle **“we”**

heard this, we” - circle **“we”** again.

urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Paul answered, “What are you doing? I am ready to go up, and not just be arrested but to die.” ... ¹⁵ After these days” — in other words, after all those discussions — **“we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.”**

I had you circle **“we”** and the use of the word **“us”** because those words tell us that Luke, the author, was there in person. Luke was right there. And Luke was actually a part of the **“we”** who were trying to dissuade Paul. And yet, despite the numerous times the people said, *“Don’t go, you’re going to suffer”* — Luke gets up and he goes with Paul.

Luke gets up and goes with Paul even though **he** was a part of the **“we”** that were trying to dissuade Paul.

QUESTION — Why would you do that, especially when you had serious reservations as to whether Paul was right; and especially when the one clear thing that everybody was certain of was that there was suffering ahead?

HERE'S WHY — Real fellowship, genuine spiritual friendship, is not being friends with somebody because they make you feel good about yourself. It's not about being friends because somebody constantly gives you approval and affirmation. Real fellowship, genuine spiritual friendship doesn't come to end because someone stops making you feel good, or stops affirming you, or because they've actually become a drain on you.

If that happens and you say, "I've had it with you," you weren't having koinonia; you were having **ME**-onia! You only loved the love you were getting from them. You were a user and a taker. Our friendships are supposed to be about Jesus, not about, "Do you like me or how much do you like me or do you agree with me?"

Luke was committed. His fellowship with Paul was all about Jesus. That kind of a relationship stands come thick or thin.

Here's what Paul would write to the Christians in Philippi —

Philippians 1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,"

That's a life that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ — people standing side by side, standing firm in one spirit. That doesn't mean that they agree on every point of everything that's going on in the church in Philippi. That doesn't mean they agree on everything as friends. But it means that they're united in their love for Jesus — with one mind they strive side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

You see, that kind of a relationship is willing to march with a brother or a sister into adversity and peril because there are eternal consequences to our fellowship in the Gospel.

Daniel 12:3 And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, wanting to see the Gospel advance into the hearts of men and women who are lost and without God in this world, wanting to see Gospel culture deeply entrenched in the hearts of believers - standing side by side in that has an eternal outcome. The world looks on and sees what it looks like to be reconciled to God; what it looks like to be citizens of His forever Kingdom. Those who don't yet know Jesus are provoked to desire the Good News because they see the power of the Gospel to produce such a life. Turning people to faith in Jesus means that together we'll be shining like stars forever and ever.

Brothers and sisters — Life in Jesus is forever. That means that Fellowship/Spiritual Friendship is forever.

Even this time of parting is marching towards the glorious and forever Kingdom of Jesus.

***1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** ¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.*

I so want each and every one of us to see every bit of our heartbreak and sorrow in the light of this glorious hope: We are going to see each other in the presence of Jesus!

***Jude** ²⁴Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy (look at that! That is where we are headed), ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

***1 Timothy 4:6-8** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Everybody who has had fellowship in the Gospel, those spiritual friendships, that legitimate genuine fellowship that we've enjoyed with one another on this side of Heaven, one day we're going to stand before Jesus, and we together are going to be given the crown of righteousness. That means that there is nothing insignificant that we pour into a Christian friendship. There is nothing insignificant when we invest in true fellowship.

CLOSE

You have heard these things from me so many times from so many places in Scripture. I need you to hear me — I need to hear me: Information ≠ transformation! Biblical information is essential to transformation (Romans 12:2) — but we cannot stop with insight — we need to invest our lives in living out, living in and living from Biblical insight.

If you have been blessed in any way by Valerie and me, by pastor Travis and Meghan — it's because by the grace of God we have from our first steps as believers moved towards fellowship — towards spiritual friendships. We have passed along to you the MANY lessons and truths that God lavished upon us in those relationships — you have reaped the fruit of those relationships.

Let's make our time at the Lord's Table about our friendship with Jesus and our friendship with each other. As we take the bread and the cup perhaps you've discovered that your friendships are weak and carnal because your friendship with Jesus is weak. Be real with Jesus. Tell Him what He already knows; what He's waiting for you to say — That your greatest need is for your friendship with Him to be strengthened. Ask Him to give you all that you need to swim towards fellowship and spiritual friendship that is essential to growing in grace in the knowledge of . Ask Him to show you where He wants you to fit in His church.

May the Lord bless you — and may the Lord keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.