

Part 2: The Transformative Power of Intentional Spiritual Friendships

Hebrews 10:19-25

Life is best when shared through Intentional Spiritual Friendships

We can so easily get stuck, stagnant, or sluggish in life and often we try to get unstuck all by ourselves. There is a fierce independence in our culture, “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality, or a get it done attitude that sadly has led to an epidemic of loneliness.

U.S. Surgeon General 2023 Advisory, ‘Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation’

- 50% of Americans have measurable levels of loneliness.
- 61% of adults feel like they are not very connected to others.
- Engagement with friends: 2003 (60 minutes/day, 30 hours/month) to 2020 (20 minutes/day, 10 hours/month)
- Loneliness and isolation are some of the deep struggles of our culture.

Intentional Spiritual Friendships, Hebrews 10:19-25

Struggle of loneliness and isolation of the people in the book of Hebrews

- Hebrews 10:25 “Let us...not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.” We don’t know much about the audience and author of the book but it most likely to a group of Jewish believers. As to the struggle of them not meeting together, this could possibly be due to threat of persecution, a delay of Jesus second coming, their connections to the Jewish Synagogue, or apathy.
- These Jewish believers are forgetting the significance of Jesus and how it changes everything in their lives.

Hebrews 10:19-21, “Therefore”

- In the book of Hebrews, there is rich Jewish imagery of angels, Torah, Moses, the promise land, priests, Melchizedek, sacrifices, and covenants. The author is developing an argument that Jesus is superior to all of these and fulfills them as God’s word, the hope for a new creation, the eternal priest, and the perfect sacrifice.
- “Therefore” – because of all these things, “brothers and sisters, since we have confidence...” – Hebrews 10:19-21
- This is a mind-blowing radical truth. In the ancient pagan religions, the God’s were never pleased and often violent. People felt far from God and often lived in fear. In the Jewish mindset, God is near and makes himself known to people but because of his holiness and majesty, people need to be cleansed through the ceremonial and sacrificial laws, and specific conditions need to be met to approach God. And only the high priest was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies. Now we may enter God’s presence through a new and living way. This is a mind-blowing radical truth and gift.

Hebrews 10:22-25, Three “Let us” (Exhortations, commands)

“Let us draw near to God”

- There is no longer a barrier between us and God. Our first priority in life should be drawing near to God. If the heart is the wellspring of life and God is the only one who can give us a new heart, we should prioritize going to God for the life that is truly life.

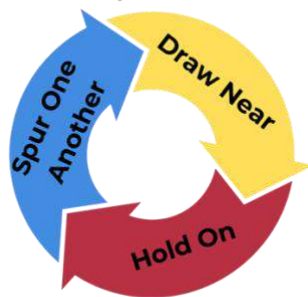
“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”

- By drawing near to God, it changes who we are and what we believe in. It gives us hope for whatever life throws our way. The reality is that all of us are holding on to something in life – money, work, status, relationships, reputation or God. We are grasping for something that give us comfort, value, and purpose. And this is a daily struggle. Are we holding on to our hope in Jesus or something else?

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

- Sometimes we stop after the first exhortations and commands and let it be all about ourselves, forgetting that our faith is made for community and comes from community. Encouragement cannot take place in isolation, we need each other.

Intentional Spiritual Friendships



Intentional Spiritual Friendships - Highway Model of Discipleship, Isaiah 57:14-16

- 1) Prepare the Road
- 2) Remove the Obstacles

Prepare the Road

- To help prepare the road in someone's life, we need to know their story. And to get to know their story we need to listen well. When we listen, we listen to understand, discern, and nurture our friend's life with God.

"Ten thousand true and beautiful words cannot convey love like unhurried listening." – Adam McHugh, *The Listening Life*

"First, God is not merely the Creator of our life. He is also the Author of our life, and he writes each person's life to reveal his divine story. There never has been nor ever will be another life like mine – or like yours. Just as there is only one face and name like mine, so there is only one story like mine. And God writes the story of my life to make something known about himself, the One who wrote me. The same is true of you. Your life and mine not only reveal who we are, but they also help reveal who God is." – Dan Allender, *To Be Told*

Questions to help draw out someone's stories:

- What has been your greatest joy and deepest sorrow?
- Where in your life have you experienced brokenness and sin (with God, others, ourselves, and the world)?
- How have you experienced God's pursuit and healing when you were far from him?

"There will be three primary themes or empowerments you will watch for in order to develop the ever-unfolding story of your friend's life: intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a beloved child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility." – Keith Anderson and Randy Reese *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for seeking and giving direction.*

Core thematic questions in our story: Who is God? Who am I? What am I to do with my life?

Remove the Obstacles

- We are called to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds...encourage one another" and yet there are obstacles (sin, wounds, warfare) in our lives. God is calling all of us to greater wholeness, and through the Holy Spirit in love we can help each other see the obstacles in our lives.
- We do this with great wisdom and sensitivity and a posture of love, first acknowledging our own stuff. "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5)
- And we acknowledge that sin is like poison and will lead to destruction compared to the ways of Jesus which leads us to the way of life.

How do we respond?

- Draw Near – Discipleship Commitment, "Walk with Jesus daily through prayer and scripture." How are we walking with Jesus through scripture and prayer this year?
- Hold On – What truths and promises do we need to hold onto this year?
- Spur One Another – Who do you need to spur on or encourage towards love and good deeds? Who is encouraging you?
- One-on-One Life with Jesus Coaching: <https://greenwoodcc.com/event/adults-one-on-one-life-with-jesus-coaching/>

Resources:

- Greenwood's *Life with Jesus Guide*
- Greenwood's 'Making Disciples' and 'Spiritual Friendship' practice, <https://greenwoodcc.com/life-with-jesus-in-community/>
- *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* by Keith Anderson & Randy Reese
- *To be Told: God Invites You to Coauthor Your Future* by Dan Allender
- *The Forge* Movie (streaming on Netflix)

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- Read Hebrews 10:19-25 again. What sticks out or resonates with you in this passage? Do you ever struggle with "not meeting together" and why?
- Are you currently feeling stuck, stagnant, or sluggish in your walk with Jesus?
- As you look at the Intentional Spiritual Friendship paradigm, how are you drawing near by walking with Jesus through scripture and prayer this year? What truths and promises do you need to hold onto? And who do you need to spur on or encourage towards love and good deeds? Who is encouraging you?
- Do you feel like one-on-one Life with Jesus coaching would be life-giving to you and why?