

How to Make Friends

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Date: 06 February 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, hello, hello.

Welcome to Providence Community Podcast. My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church here in Lenexa, Kansas. Coming to you this morning.

Actually, no, it's not this morning anymore. The day has flown by. Coming to you today to talk about friendship, specifically the post-recess approach to friendship, an approach to friendship that's post-playground.

Let me explain what I mean. Let's get into it. So one of my earliest memories surrounding friendship was, I don't know, probably fourth grade or something like that.

It's not that I didn't have any friends before then. I just remember this one. And I think they all kind of happened in the same way. I was playing on the playground and some other kid was playing near me.

[1 : 0 1] We were, I don't know, we were alone. We didn't know each other. It was my first day at a new school. I think it was maybe his first day at a new school as well. And we struck up a friendship and started playing together.

And then we were friends. And we were friends for a few years. Things were so much simpler back in the day. Even when I went to college, one of the very first days of college, I was walking around out on the quad.

You know, there was this big, beautiful, grassy area at the campus. And some guy walked up to me with, you know, just a total nerd.

He would agree. And he walked up to me and said, you ever build a kite? And I was like, well, yeah, I think I've built a kite. He said, you want to build a kite?

I was like, yeah, that sounds good. So there we were, two 18-year-old, you know, perfectly straight human males standing outside of a college campus building and flying a kite.

[2 : 0 8] And we became friends. And we were friends for a number of years after that. And what I want to do today is talk about kind of, OK, that's how we learned about friendship.

That's probably something similar to that is, you know, is how you made friends and how I made friends. But I don't think that anyone ever kind of speaks openly to those who are, you know, out of high school and college about how things change when you're an adult.

And people are left a little flat-footed. They really don't know how friendship works in the adult age. And we're also in this, you know, highly isolated stage of our culture.

You used to be able to, you could go to a bowling alley. You could go, you know, somewhere and you could meet a friend. It just doesn't happen that way much anymore. And so I thought I would talk about building friendships.

And I'm going to start by just like how to find a friend. Now, you can just skip over this podcast if you think you're good at it. I don't want to appear to be condescending.

[3 : 19] But I also have learned over time that, you know, to speak specifically about particular issues, especially if they're important, and leave no stone unturned as best as I'm able, can be helpful to some people.

So what I'm going to do today is just assume, you know, maybe you don't know how to make friends. And before I get into the details, let me add one more thing. If you're having trouble making friends, and you find an inner dialogue inside of yourself that consistently blames clickiness, you just don't, you know, circumstances, there just aren't a lot of people that have anything in common with you, and so on and so forth.

Well, just hold on. Hold off your blame game there. And circle back with me, because those things are not ultimately issues to people who know how to make friends.

So if you're seeing them as issues, trust me, they're not as big of a deal as you think they are. I'm thinking of Nacho Libre, you know, where they say, I can't, you know, we can't believe that we haven't been invited to the Wrestle Jam or whatever.

And Eskeletor says he's political, obviously. And, you know, the blame game is always, well, there's, there's, everybody else is at fault for my inability to find friends.

[4 : 44] Let's, let's assume that that's not the case. And so if you, if those are things you've thought, well, then listen into this, because maybe I can be of some help to you in that regard as well. Let's just start off with a, with a couple basic principles that apply to lots of areas of life.

As a Christian, we are really involved in the ora et labora of, of the human life for us is an ora et labora kind of thing. What does that mean?

Well, ora et labora means pray and work. Pray and work, pray and work. And so anything that, you know, anything that's good and lawful that we've decided we would like to have in our life that we would like to do and so on and so forth.

Well, for the most part, uh, you don't need to spend a ton of time overthinking it. If it's, if it's lawful, if it's for the, for the good of you and for your neighbor and, you know, it leads to human flourishing and all that kind of stuff.

Uh, you probably just need to, you know, figure out how to do it. And that breaks down into basically two parts for the Christian life. And that is you have not because you ask not.

[5 : 50] So, uh, we want to ask the Lord. We want to ora. We want to pray and we want to work. We want to do the work necessary, uh, assuming that God is going to work through our work.

Oh boy. My numbers, my, my scripture number memory isn't great anymore, but there's a Psalm that is praising God. And it says that, you know, we thank God for, we praise God because he's given us, uh, oil to gladden the face of man and bread to satisfy his stomach and so on and so forth and wine.

And I read that a number of years ago and I thought, well, no, he didn't give us those things. Um, he gave us olives and we crushed those into oil.

He gave us grapes and we go through a whole thing to make wine. He gave us, uh, he gave us wheat and we do a whole thing to make bread. And then I, it really, something clicked in me, uh, to understand means at that point.

I was like, oh, oh, okay. Okay. God works in us to will and to work his purpose. And, uh, he does some kind of level of provision apart from us.

[6 : 59] And then he does a lot of provision through us. And that's kind of like, that's how the world works. So we're in the aura at labora business. We pray and we work. And if you want friends, that's what we do.

We, we first of all, ask God. Now, uh, I love the quote from C.S. Lewis. I believe this is from the four loves where he says in friendship, we think we have chosen our peers in reality, a few years difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university instead of another, the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting.

Any of these chances might have kept us apart. But for the Christian, there are strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work.

Christ, who said to the disciples, you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you can truly say to every group of Christian friends. You have not chosen one another, but I have chosen you for one another.

And so this speaks to obviously the sovereignty of God and God's providential working to provide you with friends. And that's something that starts with asking God, just saying, God, I would like some friends and to sincerely ask him and pray him, pray to him for them.

[8 : 21] So from the aura, we go to the labora, the work. And this, I think, is really where people struggle. And not only in the issue of friends.

A lot of Christians tend to bounce back and forth between two ditches. And the one ditch you might call quietism.

What is quietism? Well, quietism is actually like a thing. It's actually like a formal, like a theology, I suppose you could say. But it could be summarized in the sort of let go and let God.

It sort of eschews human effort. It has a way of painting all human effort as effort in your own strength. You know, if they were consistent with their quietism, they would never have any bread.

They'd just eat the wheat kernels. I mean, they'd have to pick those. So I'm not sure how that would work. But so people tend to bounce between quietism and pragmatism.

[9 : 21] And you can just say pragmatism is just an overemphasis on what you do. I'm guessing that some people who are listening to this podcast would know about pickup artists and that whole thing.

And, you know, this all happened after I was, gosh, I'd probably already been married 20 years when this started to become a thing. But, you know, it's super dark, in my opinion, and full of sinful sort of practices.

What that really is is just essentially forgetting, pretending I don't need God and I don't have God, but I want to get, I want to have sex.

Okay. If there's no God and God's not for me, but I want to have sex, how do I get that done? That would be a really good example of really stark pragmatism.

On the other hand, there's stuff in the middle. You know, a book like How to Win Friends and Influence People has some pragmatism in it that I would not recommend. But there's also enough in a book like that that might be worth reading.

[10 : 36] The point is, is that if you want something in this life, you have to ask God for it. You have to assume that, assuming it's lawful, God is for you. And then you've got to do the work.

I'm going to start talking about friendship as friendship farming. And the reason that I want to talk about it that way is I really, really want to get away from what I think is the most default understanding of friendship.

And that would be finding friends. So you could have friendship foraging or you could have friendship finding. You ever hunted mushrooms?

I figured something out about this. First of all, I love wild morel mushrooms. I remember one time, you're going to go along.

I'm feeling very attention deficit-y today. So you're going to go along for some rides watching this, listening to this. I remember one time when I first started preaching here in Kansas City.

[11 : 37] And then, you know, I would drive back to St. Louis because I still live there. And it was in the spring. So it was pretty close to when I was going to move here.

Anyway, I drove along I-70 all the way back through, you know, Missouri. And it was just like the right day for hunting mushrooms. And I remember this was so cool.

I trained myself as I drive. I always scan the edges of the woods because that's where, you know, you see deer, especially at particular times of the day. Anyway, I'm looking on the edges.

And I just would kind of get close to a town, but I still wouldn't be in the town. Anyway, I would just see people walking out in the woods along I-70. And it's real rural out there in the middle of Missouri.

And they were foraging for mushrooms. Anyway, so that's a side thing. All right, so what I'm getting at is that, like, my sense is that the playground model, the childhood model of friendship is mostly kind of like foraging.

[12 : 40] You just kind of maybe even aren't completely looking. It just kind of happens. Because kids have so much free time and so little guile.

They're so open to trust and so forth. It's really just sort of like finding a friend fits perfectly when you're a kid. That seems to be, you know, a good way to talk about it because that seems like, yeah, I think that's what we're doing is we're finding friends.

Well, what I want to suggest is that in the end, there's a pivot that happens in adulthood and we just can't live the foraging lifestyle any longer when it comes to stuff that's important.

We have to create systems. We have to create habits that produce outcomes reliably over and over and over again. One of my favorite quotes from the book Atomic Habits is, you know, you don't rise to the level of goals, your goals.

You fall to the level of your systems. And so I wanted, if I could do one thing, kind of a paradigm shift for people who are having trouble making friends, I would want to point them toward, you know, get out of the mindset of finding friends and get into the mindset of farming friends.

[13 : 55] Create a system, a way of approaching people and life that will reliably over and over and over again produce friends.

Put the work, put the responsibility on your intentionality and develop a lifestyle that is consistent with the developing of friends.

Trying to think of Bible verses, one just popped to mind. I know there are at least a number of times when we're told to make friends. Trying to think if I could think of any that talk about finding a friend.

Anyway, my commendation to you if you're struggling with friends is, first of all, let's be done with the blame thing. Second of all, let's ora et labora this sucker.

Let's pray. Let's ask God for help. And let's also figure out a system. Let's start moving away from, eh, friendship just kind of randomly happens. It's a magical thing.

[14 : 57] Let's build a system. So what does that system look like? Well, it really looks a lot like farming in the sense that it's just a lot of dead ends, a lot of things that don't work out.

And even the stuff that does work out doesn't necessarily stick. And sometimes the things that you get excited about wind up breaking your heart.

And meanwhile, the stuff that's really going to pay off takes a long time to pay off. So I've lived a while on this earth and have had to think through some of this stuff.

I have not had, you know, I've not had some of the disadvantages that some folks have. Like I haven't been, I've been fairly emotionally intelligent.

I haven't, you know, I wasn't born with or grew into like an Asperger's type situation or something like that. But I have had to think about this a little bit because of moving and, you know, different schools and so on and so forth.

[16 : 05] And also it's kind of my job to try to grow in friendship in general, which I still feel like I need to do so much better than I do. Anyway, in all of that, I've realized like, yeah, it's just, this is really more of a system.

It's really more like farming than foraging. So the big principle there, once we kind of decide that's true, I think it's true.

Once we decide that's true, then we've got actually quite a bit of biblical data to go by. Because once we get into the farming analogy, the farming metaphor, yeah, there's a lot of verses about that.

And a lot of principles that we can apply. And the first one is whoever sows sparingly reaps sparingly, right? So, or don't grow weary in doing good, Galatians 6, for you will reap a harvest if you don't give up.

So the idea that I first want to commend to you is we've prayed and asked God. We've taken responsibility for a system. And what does that system look like?

[17 : 13] Well, that system really looks like friendliness. And it's a habitual daily practice of being friendly to others.

Now, what do we mean by friendliness? Well, on Sunday, this is just the best coax here I've had in a long time.

On Sunday, we talked about the definition of friendship. So let's start there. The definition of friendship would be something like, a friend is a person willing to invest themselves in your good.

Friend is a person willing to invest themselves in your good. Okay, let's say that's what friend is. Well, then what does it mean to be friendly?

It would mean to sort of indicate either, you know, with smaller gestures across a wider context of social interactions.

[18 : 17] It would be kind of an indication, a posturing of your willingness to do that for them. Essentially, what you're doing, and I think of it as like sowing friendship seeds.

Essentially, what you're doing is you're sending signals out by what you're asking and what you're talking about that indicates to them that you're not self-absorbed, that you are interested in them to the degree that you would be interested in potentially investing in them.

It can sometimes just mean, you know, little acts of service. One of the things that I've tried to train myself over the years is to pick up trash in the parking lot or put a cart away or hold the door open, smile at people when I see them and so on and so forth.

And that's making me increasingly weird, by the way, in the eyes of others. I really definitely reached the point where I don't care. I'm convinced I'm right. But to be a friend is to invest yourself in someone else's good.

So to be friendly is to sort of send out sincere vibes to others that you have that figured out, that you know how to be a friend.

[19 : 44] And that you're interested in investing yourself in them, so on and so forth. Now, what happens from there? Well, what happens from there, man, your mileage may vary, as they say.

We can go to another Bible passage that I think is actually really good to think about. And when it comes to any time, you're aura et laboring.

Whenever you decide to stop blaming others and try to do something about what you'd like to see happen in your life, this parable in Matthew 13, I think, is pretty good.

I think it's a pretty good way to sort of understand how the next chapter of this renewed effort will unfold. So, okay, so you've got this idea of like, let's sow what I want.

I'm going to sow seeds of friendliness to reap a friendship. Okay, well, that's good. That's one of the early steps. Well, let's say you start doing that.

[20 : 51] What happens then? All right, so let me read Matthew 13, 3 through 9 to you. This is Jesus telling the parable of the sower. And he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell among the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil.

When the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some 100, some 60, some 30.

He who has ears, let him hear. All right, what does that have to do with friendship? Well, it has to do with anything. It honestly just has to do with the decision to, like, follow God into some project that requires aura et labora.

When it comes to your effort, this parable will really give you the proper perspective to understand what's going to happen after you start trying.

[22 : 13] And what's going to happen is that you're immediately going to be met with failure. Now, you know, I'm generalizing. Sometimes, this almost brings a tear to my eye, sometimes God is just super nice to you, and he doesn't make you go through, honestly, what everybody has to go through.

Sometimes you just get a pass. You probably won't. I don't usually. Maybe you will, and if so, just be happy. But for the most part, whenever you really start getting after something, and you start sowing seeds, whether that be seeds of friendliness, or you start sowing, you know, seeds of obedience in some area, or giving, or whatever, anytime you start sowing seeds, what you need to understand is the first seeds that you will notice are the ones that get eaten by the birds.

Birds have a way of appearing out of nowhere when they see seed. My backyard's getting super patchy, and I do not want to do all the work necessary to fix that, especially with a dog that just loves to gallop.

But I was thinking the other day, I was like, man, it would be so nice if, you know, I could just throw a bunch of seed out there because the ground's so soft.

But, you know, sure enough, the first thing you do when you do that, there'll be birds appear, and they'll pick up a lot of those seeds. So when you start making an effort, I mean, a pretty good chance, the first thing you'll see is rejection.

[23 : 53] You just flat out anti-reciprocation, perhaps even. The next thing that could happen in the idea of this parable is that you may see some early success that appears to be too good to be true, and it will turn out to be too good to be true.

You might have some early bites on the line, and suddenly now you think you have a friend. Well, in the parable of the soil, the first bunch of seeds, they get eaten by the birds, which are representative of Satan.

And then the second batch that blooms is actually the batch that doesn't have any roots. So a seed has so much energy to expend before it has to, you know, get more energy from the sun.

And the first expenditure of energy that a seed exerts is to go down into the soil. But if the soil's super rocky, it can only go so far, and so it will shoot up.

So the first production you wind up seeing from an effort is often a false flag. It often winds up being kind of hollow victories.

[25 : 17] The problem, you know, knowing that is good, because the problem is that the next thing that happens is disappointment. You know, you've made this effort, you've seen some rejection, and then you saw some success, and that rejection made you think like, yay, finally it's working.

And then you find out, no, this didn't work either. You'll think that very often there can be people who are like this in their lives. And so when you meet those people, they're almost kind of eager early adopters to lots of things, and they have no root.

They have no depth. And so they might seem effusively happy to be your friend, or there might be a bromance that emerges.

But in the end, you know, I think I try not to pay too much attention to all the, like, narcissism stuff that gets spread around people that are just fundamentally incapable of self-examination and understanding that most people that talk about narcissism are narcissists.

So I try not to pay attention to that, but sometimes I do. You hear this concept of love bombing as if it was some kind of strategy or pathology. It's like, no, these people just don't have any depth.

[26 : 39] And so they sprout up. They don't grow down. There's nowhere inside to go. So love bombing isn't typically some kind of manipulative tactic.

It's just what shallow people do. They're excited about lots of things. I had a neighbor. I don't want to dishonor him. He's passed. But he was about my parents' age.

And this guy was capable of doing anything crazily well for about a month. And he didn't just pick hobbies.

He excelled at hobbies. This guy was crazy. This is just a fantastic human being. I mean, in the sense of someone to marvel at.

He got really into taekwondo and breaking bricks. And like, I think maybe he did it for a year. I don't know. It wasn't very long. And then the next thing I know, he's on national TV breaking the world record of breaking bricks.

[27 : 42] He got into snakes and started raising pythons in his house. And I remember him feeding live rabbits, you know, to these pythons.

He got super into that. He got super into baseball cards and just all sorts of things. So that's kind of, you know, you'll meet people like that. And you'll think, I made a friend. And it's like, no, you found a flake.

And that's okay, because that's just part of the process. Jesus says that there's another kind of soil seed situation. And that is, you know, it's going okay.

But then it gets choked out by the cares of life. And sometimes you'll meet people that are, you know, there's a legitimacy to their sincerity and so on and so forth. But they're busy.

They're not thinking about maybe the most important things. They're not putting them first. And so you'll maybe see some success there. And you'll think, eh. And then we get to the final category, which are the successful friendships that take root.

[28 : 45] And here's the thing you need to understand. By this time, you're exhausted. You saw the one group, you saw some of your efforts just go completely rejected. You saw a second group that was like, hey, this looks like something.

And it turned out to be nothing. You saw a third group, hey, this looks like something. And that turned out to be nothing. And by this time, you're like, okay, this is all stupid. I'm out.

I'm going to stop trying. Because what's really going on is there is fruit that's going to happen. This is Galatians 6 again. We will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Don't grow weary in doing good.

But so what will happen is you've just gotten so done with this at this point that you're ready to be done. And yet some of the work you've been doing this whole time, it just hasn't been appearing to you.

But it has been something that's been happening. Well, you know, maybe you stick in the game long enough where you realize, oh, wait, I see some green over there. And you come out the next day and you're like, oh, I see quite a bit of green right now.

[29 : 50] Huh. You know, is it possible that some of these seeds were growing? And I didn't realize it. But here's the thing about that.

You have to endure a whole season, literally, a whole season where there's no reciprocity between you and your crop. You've planted the seeds and all it is is more work.

You've got to water them. You've got to weed them. You've got to keep the birds away and so on and so forth. And it takes all this time to even get a harvest. And lots of people give up on friendships before that period of time.

And so what I guess I'm trying to talk to you, and I'm going to go because I'm noticing that. Well, hold on one second. Oh, okay.

I'm supposed to meet a couple of my son and one of my son-in-laws tonight, so I didn't want to miss that. I saw them texting. Anyway, you know, the thing I notice is that when people engage in any system, and I suppose that this podcast is really just about, you know, system work in general.

[31 : 00] When people engage in the obedience of sowing, they really can get pretty easily dissatisfied, discouraged, and quit. So I wanted to present that idea of farming because it's like, okay, you need to go out and sow a bunch of friendship seeds.

What is a friendship seed? It's some kind of indication whether by the questions you ask, the time you spend with them, the way you pay attention in a conversation, that you are interested in investing in them.

Sometimes you'll immediately see, like, they're not interested in you. Other times it will look like it's going to pay off and turn out not to pay off. And then even the people who are sincerely open to being their friend, that's just going to take more patience and time.

And so you really have to believe in the process, the aura and the labora. So that's one thing I wanted to bring up to you in this series on friendship.

And I wanted to just, I wanted to kind of communicate, okay, if you are struggling with friends, stop blaming others. Take responsibility. Develop a system that is kind of whole life, that you're always working, just like a farmer is always working.

[32 : 12] And then just be patient and just keep at it and trust that the Lord will provide for you. I'm thinking of another story that Jesus tells where he says the kingdom of God is like a farmer who plants a seed and then goes to sleep.

And then the earth nurtures the seed and it grows. The farmer knows not how. And then he eventually harvests it. Well, that's life. Figure out the right system.

Work it. And at some point down the road, God will bless your efforts. Again, Galatians 6. Therefore, do not grow weary in doing good.

We will reap a harvest if we do not give up. All right. Well, that's installation number one. Is there anybody you could share this with that would maybe benefit from this?

I don't know how you would even do that. I would hope that it's not awkward. But I would encourage you to consider that even if you're not sharing this, it's not clear to me at any point in young adulthood that someone sits down and tells you how to make friends.

[33 : 22] That isn't essentially. It's not clear to me that anyone sits down and says, hey, the recess model doesn't work anymore. You can't be a friend forager. You can't be a friend finder.

You have to be a friend maker, a friend farmer. So this would be a good conversation perhaps to have with someone who's frustrated with their social life. And by social life, I also include romantic life.

All right. Well, be well. I hope this was helpful to someone. And we'll come back again, I guess, in a day or so and talk more about friendship. Be well.

Be well.