



Theme: Summer Wisdom
"Relational Wisdom"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, July 25-26, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

³ Never let loyalty and kindness leave you.

Tie them around your neck as a reminder.

Write them deep within your heart. – Proverbs 3:3

SLIDE Summer Wisdom: Relational Wisdom

We continue in a series of sermons on Biblical wisdom that we find in the books of Proverbs in our Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, and the book of James in the New Testament. My hope is that this series will give us a better understanding of the wisdom literature in our Bible and that as we look at God's word, the Holy Spirit will move you. Today we are going to look at the background of the book of Proverbs and Hebrew poetry, and the Meditation Moments of this series will allow you to read through large sections of the book Proverbs and the letter of James. As we look at this idea of relational wisdom today, let's begin with a question.

SLIDE Why do we need relationships?

Do we need friends? Do we need others? What's the point of hanging out with people when they often drive us crazy?! We want to explore today the idea of human relationships, friendship and companionship. I was visiting recently with someone in hospice who's at the end of their life looking back, like the writer of the book of proverbs. They shared with me something that I often hear from people at the end of their life. When they look back, they don't wish they had worked more or earned more money. They wish they had spent more time with family and friends.

This person told me about their relationship with their best friend since they were children. They talked about the importance of working at it and not letting it slip by the wayside. They said, ***“friendship is about your willingness to sacrifice your own needs in order to sustain the relationship.”*** These kinds of relationships are so important in our lives. As followers of Jesus, we believe that God came as a person to be in relationship with us and not interact with us from a distant. This idea of sacrifice for others is fundamental if we are to take faith in Jesus Christ seriously.

SLIDE The Christian faith is relational.

We believe that God created us and that we have a fundamental need for companionship. We are designed and wired to need other people. We believe this is a part of the ordering of creation because it is the very nature of God. As Christians we believe that God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is three persons in one God head. There is a relationship between God the Creator and Jesus the Christ. There is a relationship between Jesus the Christ and the Holy Spirit. There is a relationship between God the Creator and the Holy Spirit.

Our God is a relational being, and so God has infused all of creation with that same sense of being interrelated and needing relationship. All beings and all entities have the need for

companionship. We see this in the opening pages of the Bible in Genesis 2 where we read the story of God creating the first humans and placing them in paradise. There were the finest things to eat and drink and see. God would walk with that first human in the garden in the cool of the afternoon. Then in Genesis 2 we read these words.

BIBLE

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.”

The word helper can also be understood as companion. That story relates to more than just marriage. The Bible tells us that not everyone is called to be married. In fact, the highest calling in the New Testament is to remain single and wholly devoted to the Lord. While not everyone is called to be married, everyone is called to have friends, and we are created to be relational. You were designed and wired by God so that you might have companions and helpers along life's journey. And you were called by God to be someone else's companion and someone else's helper.

GRAPHIC Paradise by Bill Bell

I love this image of Paradise by the artist Bill Bell that shows humans and animals enjoying the garden. We see this in the rest of creation as well as the next verse in Genesis reminds us.

BIBLE

¹⁹ So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one.

I shared with you a couple weeks ago that we lost our little dog Jasper who was 18. It got me thinking about the other dogs we have had over the years, and we often have had 2 or 3 depending on the

season. Two of the dogs we had that knew Jasper and now have joined him over the rainbow bridge are Joey and Gwen.

GRAPHIC Joey and Gwen

Gwen was named after Guinevere. Can you tell which one is her? She is the golden retriever, and Joey was her tormentor, part Australian Shepherd and part Tasmanian Devil. These two dogs were funny. They would play in the yard all day long. Gwen was amazing in her ability to put up with Joey chewing on her feet and her ears and anything else he can get his mouth around. You could tell that Gwen was annoyed by Joey, but she put up with him.

We have several bedrooms in our house as well as a living room and family room. They could have their pick, but do you know where they would end up when they wanted to take a nap or no one would play with them? They end up within inches of each other because they need companionship.

GRAPHIC Gwen and Joey

We have a fenced yard that is about half an acre. It is huge but every time I would go outside to see the dogs, where do you suppose they are? I find them almost all the time within a few feet of each other. When Joey was young and I would go to put them in the garage at night which is where they slept, and I try to get Joey to go first, he won't go. He would not go into the garage no matter what I did to entice him. I could throw a dog biscuit in the garage, and he would not go by himself.

But if I called Gwen, she would reluctantly come and head out the door into the garage, and Joey followed her right out. Gwen would go and lie down on her pillow and Joey would go and curl up right next to her because he had to be right where she was. So, we would get Gwen to go into the garage and Joey followed dutifully. If Joey could see Gwen, then all was well in their world.

SLIDE We all have a need for companionship, partnership and friendship.

Medical studies have proven this. Gayle Burkowitz in an article on women and friendship published in the Oregon State University student health website says this:

The famed Nurse's Health Study at Harvard Medical School found that the more friends' women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged, and the more likely they were to be leading a joy-filled life. In fact, the results were so significant that the researchers concluded that not having a close friend or confidant was as detrimental to your health as smoking or carrying extra weight.

There is a lot of great advice on the web or from numerous books or podcasts about how to have friends, how to have good relationships and how to be a good friend. What we are going to do today is to share with you what the Bible has to say about friendship. It won't be a comprehensive view, but we are going to look at the book of Proverbs and ask these questions.

SLIDE Proverbs teach us... (have fly in)



How to wisely choose relationships



How to be in a healthy relationship



What it means to be called by God to relationship

SLIDE How to wisely choose relationships

When I was in sixth grade we moved to a new house and it was my 10th move in 11 years of life. I desperately wanted to be liked by others and fit in. I soon made friends with Eric and Mike who lived on our hill. Eric lived on the edge and liked to do things that were dangerous. Mike was from England and he introduced me to the Beatles. They invited me to be in their circle of friends and together we

made a clubhouse out of an old shack located on property adjacent to my house. It was owned by a mysterious old man no one had ever seen, but he had lots of old junky cars which we used parts off to decorate our clubhouse. There were rumors that he would eat children who sneak onto his property and so we thought we were being very dangerous.

During that summer together Eric introduced me to several things. He had cigarettes and lighters. I had my very first smoke with Eric. Eric's dad had Playboy magazines and my eyes nearly popped out of my head as we sat in the clubhouse and looked through the pages. I had no interest in girls at the time and so mostly I thought it was yucky. One of the things that Eric liked to do was steal things from 7-Eleven. My very first experience with the police department was with Eric. At the end of that experience my parents put an end to our friendship, and we were no longer friends anymore.

Part of that is a very simple truism we find in the book of Proverbs. Your friends can influence you in profound ways that are not always very good for us, which is why Proverbs 12:26 tells us:

BIBLE

**²⁶ The godly give good advice to their friends;
the wicked lead them astray.**

Why be cautious in friendship if we are wise? If we are wise, we're going to think carefully about who you invite to be the influencers in your life. This is especially true when we are children and in our younger years.

We realize one of the most important things we can do as parents is to try to safeguard the friendships of our children. We look and see if their friends will be leading them astray. There may be a time when they can befriend a person, but they can no longer spend the night at their house. We can no longer do things with them that we do with

other friends because it is not healthy. As parents, we are entrusted with caring for our children. We also realize that there comes a time when our children's friends will have more influence in their lives than we do as parents.

I also realize that this is important not just for fifth graders, or high school and college students, but for us as adults as well. I have a sense that God looks at us sometimes and says, "I want you to have some different friends because I see what your friends are doing to you. Your friends are leading you down the path that I don't want to go down. Your friends are influencing you in ways that I don't want you to be influenced. Please stop this."

Benjamin Franklin made this saying popular in his book *Poor Richard's Almanac* about what happens when we hang around with the wrong kind of people.

SLIDE **"If you lie down with dogs then you will rise up with fleas."**
—Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac*

George Bernard Shaw said something similar, "I learned long ago, never wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it!"

GRAPHIC **Never wrestles with a pig**

When I was a youth pastor, I would try to teach students this important truth. I would remind them that if they were trying to follow Jesus and ALL their friends were walking in a different direction, that it would be easy for them to be pulled away from God and towards things that might not be good for them. Yes, we need to be friends with those who are not people of faith and might need us to be the presence of Jesus in our lives, but we also need friends who can encourage us in life and faith.

SLIDE **How to wisely choose relationships**

(I'm going to ask one of you to help me with a simple illustration. If

one of you tries to pull me down off the chancel area and I tried to pull him up, who's going to win? Now, let me invite another person to join the first person. Even if by some miraculous intervention I can pull up one person, what happens when they are joined by a second and then a third person? Is there any chance I will prevail in this? There's not a chance. It's simple physics.)

This is what I hope we see. If all our friends are leading us astray then we will not prevail. Our friends have a great influence on our lives. Let me ask a question. Do you have friends who will encourage you and be honest with you? Do you have relationships with people who will ask you the tough question when you're going down the wrong path? Do you have relationships with people who will cheer you on when you are striving to live a life of following Jesus? Do you have friends that will stand with you and try to pull others up rather than simply allowing you to fall?

We need those kinds of friends, and it is an important part of being a faithful follower of Jesus. This does not mean that we don't have any relationships with people who are not people of faith. I believe every one of us should have friends who struggle with doubts and beliefs. I do believe that we need to have more friends who are believers working with you to stay on the path and encourage you. Just make sure you have more believers trying to pull you up than you do people pulling you down. Ecclesiastes is another book of wisdom in our scriptures and gives us this sage advice in chapter 4.

BIBLE

⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. ¹¹ Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? ¹² A person standing alone can be

attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Jesus clearly knew this as he called a group of disciples, and has three, Peter, James, and John, that were his inner circle. He echoed these words from the Hebrew Bible in Matthew 18.

BIBLE

²⁰ For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

SLIDE How to be in a healthy relationship

Realizing that choosing the right friends is important, let us turn then to what it means to be in a healthy friendship or relationship. We live in a world that says we have value and meaning when we have lots of Facebook friends; or followers on Instagram or Snapchat; or likes on YouTube or Tik Tok. The Bible is not so concerned about us having lots of friends. It is concerned about learning how to be a good friend and be in meaningful relationships. If we act as a friend, then it is likely that we will have lots of friends, but again, the Bible is not primarily concerned with us having lots of friends.

The Bible is concerned about you and I living a certain kind of faithful life WITH others. The Bible gives us advice about what it means to be a faithful friend, and we find that in our Scripture memory verse for this weekend. We are hoping you will keep this somewhere so that you see it each day and that you will say this verse two or three times each day, praying that God will help you exhibit this towards others. This is a key to being a friend. Let's say Proverbs 3:3 together.

BIBLE

**³ *Never let loyalty and kindness leave you!
Tie them around your neck as a reminder.***

Write them deep within your heart.

SLIDE kindness = “hesed” = loving kindness

Write loyalty and kindness on your heart. The Hebrew word used here is “hesed,” which means to do acts of kindness to other people. We are to demonstrate mercy and have compassion for others. This kind of love is a doing love and not a feeling love. Some of your Bible translations use the word love instead of kindness but I think this translation works a bit better to give us a sense of what God is telling us to do, which is a sacrificial love towards other people. That word is “agape” in the New Testament.

Authentic and genuine relationships embody this idea of loving kindness and sacrificial love which CHOOSES to the loving thing. It is sacrificing and setting my needs aside for a moment and ministering to your needs and caring for you.

I recently heard about a man on airplane heading to a business appointment in another city. As he was seated in first class, a woman got on the plane that he thought looked familiar, but he wasn't sure. He waved at her as she went by, but she didn't seem to notice him, so he thought nothing of it and that it must not be the woman he thought it was. As the plane landed at their destination and taxied to the gate the pilot came on and asked everyone to remain seated because there was a passenger in the back that was ill and needed medical technicians to come on board and take her off. The technicians attended to the passenger and helped her off the plane and the man noticed it was the same woman he thought he recognized and he was sure this time that he knew her.

When he got off the plane he went to the technicians who were still working on the woman and introduced himself. Sure enough, they had gone to college together and lived on the same dorm floor. He really needed to get to his appointment, but he felt the Holy Spirit

nudging him to stay with her and so he did. The technicians said she seemed to be fine, but they encouraged her to go to the hospital. She said she didn't want to go but the man stayed with her and eventually insisted that she go to the hospital with him. He called his appointment which he had flown to the city to attend, and he asked the person he was supposed to meet to bring his car so they could take her to the hospital. He agreed and together they went to the hospital and he dropped her off there until she was seen by a doctor. He prayed with her in the emergency room and waited until a friend of hers who lived in the city could come and be with her.

Several days later, he got a phone call from this woman, and it turned out she had 90% blockage in her arteries, and she had emergency angioplasty surgery that night. She wanted to thank him because if he had not insisted on her going to the hospital she most likely would be dead. His act of sacrificial kindness or “hesed” had saved her life.

The amazing thing is that this man felt that he was the one who was blessed by renewing a friendship. The two of them connected regularly over the next few years and they became good friends again. I am reminded of the words written by writer Allen Saunders and then sung by John Lennon.

SLIDE ***Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.***

So, what was more important in this situation? Was it more important for the man to make his dinner appointment or for him to stay with this woman who had no one with her? Those opportunities happen for all of us to extend “hesed” to other people. We must have our eyes and ears open, and we must be willing to lay aside the other things we had planned to demonstrate this kind of love to other people.

SLIDE **loyalty = “Emeth” = faithfulness or trustworthiness**

The other Hebrew word in this proverb is “Emeth” which means loyalty or faithfulness or trustworthiness. What does this mean for us to demonstrate “Emeth”? Part of the meaning we find in Proverbs 11.

BIBLE

**¹³ A gossip goes around telling secrets,
but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.**

Relationships develop over time by revealing yourself to someone else. When you do this with another person and you share your inner thoughts – this is when you develop relationships that are deep and meaningful. All of us in this room have experienced a time when we have shared a personal thought and they went on to share it with their friend, who shared it with their friend, who shared it with their friend until it finally got back to us. We realized that there is no way I would share anything else with that person because the trust was broken. They can no longer be trusted with secrets of my heart.

Relationships that are healthy are trustworthy and faithful. We must be willing to hold the confidence of someone's treasured thoughts and not share them with anyone else. We struggle with this as human beings. When we read the book of Proverbs, we might ask this question, “Why did the writer of the book of Proverbs put this in there?” Well, the reason this one was put in there is because we as humans tend to blab things that people have shared with us. Proverbs tell us that if we do this, we will find it difficult to have friends and healthy relationships.

I have always found it interesting that the scriptures warn much more about gossiping than other topics that Christians tend to get worked up about? Why do you suppose that is? Because it's a pervasive human problem and one of the reasons many humans are lonely and depressed in our world today. We destroy each other with gossip and cruel words online every moment of every day. Proverbs 18 gives us

another meaning to this idea of trustworthiness or faithfulness.

BIBLE

***²⁴ There are “friends” who destroy each other,
but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.***

Let me ask you a question. Do our relationships cause destruction of lives and hearts? Or do our relationships draw us close and make us feel we are safe? Do we have people with whom we can trust our hearts and deepest yearnings and pain? This is the kind of relationship that faithfulness, trustworthiness, and loyalty are describing to us—that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for someone else. We're willing to lay ourselves on the line and other people know, “I can count on you.” This does NOT mean we are perfect. It does mean we are being “perfected in love.”

If you are experiencing a meltdown in your family, or are in the emergency room at 2 AM with no family around, who would you call and you know they would be there if it was within their power? Even if they had to be up early the next morning, who would you call? These are the kind relationships we need, and yet, if we are honest, many of us are not sure who we would call.

The way that we have relationships like that is to live out relationships like this to others. Who are the people who would call you at 2 AM and know that you, even when you are in a deep sleep, would say, “I will be there in 15 minutes”? This requires sacrifice and a willingness to give of ourselves. We don't have these kinds of relationships by accident. We don't get these kinds of friends by simply going to a movie every now and then together. We get these kinds of friends by being willing to be faithful ourselves.

One of the persons I enjoyed reading about as a child was Jackie Robinson, the African American who integrated major league baseball in 1947 by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. You might also be

interested in knowing he was a life-long Methodist as was Branch Rickey who was the manager for the Dodgers that brought Robinson to the Major Leagues. In the 2013 movie, “42,” one of my favorite movie lines is Rickey talking about the challenges of bringing Robinson onto the team with the words, **“Robinson's a Methodist. I'm a Methodist. God's a Methodist. We can't go wrong.”**

GRAPHIC Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey

Robinson is a hero in American history for what he was able to accomplish despite intense pressure to quit. He would take the field in what was a white man's game, and, in every city, he would be jeered and he would receive insults and profanity directed at him. During one of these moments while at a visitor's ballpark, Robinson made an error. The entire stadium was laughing at him and making fun of him after his mistake. Here is how that is depicted in the film.

VIDEO 42

While he stood out there with tens of thousands of people laughing at him an amazing thing happened. His teammate, Pee-wee Reese, jogged over and put his arm around Jackie Robinson and he stared the stadium down.

GRAPHIC Jackie and Pee Wee Statue

You may have seen this picture before or the statue that now commemorates that moment in American history. With his arm around Jackie Robinson, Pee-wee Reese showed amazing trustworthiness and faithfulness and loyalty by saying, “If you insult him then you insult me, because we go hand-in-hand.”

Despite the murky details of the exact arm-around moment, Reese was a vocal supporter of Robinson. As a southerner from Kentucky, Reese's friendship and leadership were incredibly vital to Robinson's integration of the team. Jackie Robinson wrote in his

autobiography that it was that arm around his neck which saved his major league career, because there was someone willing to stand with him and he knew he could trust that person.

GRAPHIC Jackie and Pee Wee in dugout

Would you want that kind of relationship? Would you want to be that kind of friend and teammate? Would you stand by somebody else? Are you faithful? That is what we are called to in this proverb in our friendships. As followers of Jesus, we bind these kinds of promises around our necks and we inscribe this kind of faithfulness and kindness on our hearts. Building healthy relationships based on faithfulness and kindness also involves another biblical mandate we find in the Proverbs.

SLIDE We need to build capacity for mercy and forgiveness.

Proverbs 17 tells us this.

BIBLE

**⁹ One who forgives an affront fosters friendship,
but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.**

(NRSVUE)

Why did the writer of Proverbs need to say this? An affront is an insult or an offense. This needed to be said because when someone insults us or gives an offense to us, most of us react negatively to that. We often focus on that and dwell on it, which can ruin a friendship, even a longtime friendship. We find this advice in God's word because I think God knew that in every relationship we would be hurt in some way at some point. That is just how friendship works. I have hurt other people I did not mean to hurt. Sometimes I have said things, and I wish I could take them back. Sometimes I was not there for a friend when I should've been.

Likewise, I don't have a friend of my life who has not somewhere

along the way said something that I could've taken as an insult. That is life. If we choose to focus on those things then we will never have any lasting friendships. The book of Proverbs tells us that we must be willing to overlook and forgive the slight insult or offense if we are going to have relationships that are meaningful and lasting.

Probably my best friend is a pastor I have known since seminary. He and I, along with several other pastors, have been part of a group for almost 35 years. I remember being on retreat together in a cabin right before a national election. My best friend often finds himself at odds with other pastors over politics. We started talking about politics, which probably was not wise since we were all tired. I knew he was under a lot of stress, but at one point he stood up and started shouting at me. He said some hurtful things, and I think he had been wounded by comments our group had made about his political views.

He yelled several hurtful comments and then he left the room. Our group sat in silence for a long time. A part of me wanted to get in his face and yell right back at him. I was steaming at his assumptions, and I could yell with the best of them so I thought I would let him have it. Then I thought I would just pack my things and I would leave – that would show him!

But this guy had been my friend for almost 25 years at that point, and I didn't think either one of those were good answers to this situation. I went and found him and told him, "I'm sorry for whatever I said that hurt you. I didn't mean to come across in a way that was judgmental if that is what you felt. I've always respected you for your opinions and your willingness to share them and I'm sorry. It was never my intention to do that, and I hope you know that I love you."

He then went on to tell me a few more things that he was mad about and then I was not sure what to do. I went back to my room and started to pack again and realized that was not the solution. It was

awkward for all of us that night and into the next morning. We ate our breakfast and then several of us left and I was not sure how it was all going to work out.

As I was driving back home the next day, I got angrier and more disappointed as the day went on. I wasn't sure if we would talk again or if I wanted to talk again. We've been friends for many years, but I was not sure if was going to continue if this was the way it was going to be. I am your pastor and I thought this way and I finally realized that I was being a bit childish. Yes, I was hurt, but I had to remember that he was under a lot of stress, as were all of us as pastors. I also had to remember that he had never treated me this way before.

Finally, I remind myself of what the Scriptures teach us about forgiveness and so I picked up the phone and called him and we met for lunch. We didn't talk about the elephant in the room for a while. We just kept getting together and having lunch and playing golf until finally one day he said, "Thanks for putting up with me when I got angry that time. I'm glad you're my friend and I appreciate your willingness to stick it out."

We are as close now as we ever were and probably even closer because of that conflict. I also learned there were certain things you just don't talk about when you're stressed out! But there was a moment when it could have gone the other way and that friendship could have been thrown away.

There are some of you sitting in this room who have friends you haven't talked to in years. They hurt your feelings or you hurt their feelings. You didn't feel the need to apologize because you didn't feel you did anything wrong. But do you know what? Sometimes you apologize anyway. Sometimes you must look at the situation and say, "I know there must've been something I said or the way I said it that caused you offense and I love you too much to let that get between us.

I'm really sorry about that. Not that I am sorry that you are mad at me, but I am sorry that I did something that brought offense to you and caused you to hurt."

We could talk for hours on this topic. What I know is there are times when somebody doesn't apologize and we should forgive them anyway, for the sake of the relationship. And there are circumstances where I would tell you not to forget so you wouldn't be hurt repeatedly. But in most circumstances, we have allowed affronts to become walls that separate people, and we have thrown away years of friendships when we didn't need to. That is part of what this passage teaches us. You will not have any long-term friendships unless you learn how to forgive an affront.

I have done this with you before, but it's worth repeating. Here are 12 words we must learn to say if we are going to have any meaningful relationships that last any length of time. Let's do some relationship therapy together, shall we?

SLIDE I was wrong... (Have fly in one at a time.)

I am sorry...

Please forgive me...

I forgive you...

Proverbs consistently give us a biblical theme around humility and pride. Humility is critical when it comes to our relationships and having healthy connections both with God and with others and even with ourselves. Are we willing to be honest with God? Are we willing to be honest with others? Are we willing to be honest with ourselves? I love the message of Proverbs 27.

BIBLE

**⁶ Wounds from a sincere friend
are better than many kisses from an enemy.**

I love this powerful idea that when we are honest and we share our wounds instead of getting defensive, relationships change. It's better to be honest and humble because that leads to loyalty and faithfulness, rather than I bring things up and offering false words about how we are feeling. There's nothing worse than having someone act all kind and flattering, when underneath they are angry and looking for a way to get even. Here's a truth that I have seen and learned over the years as a pastor.

SLIDE Humility leads to curiosity

Pride leads to criticism

Here's why this is important when it comes to meaningful relationships that are healthy. When our pride gets the best of us and we think we are right all the time and we are the most important person in a relationship, we easily criticize others and it leads to what I call the relationship cyclone where there is one criticism that triggers another and it eventually causes tremendous damage. I appreciate this image when it comes to relationships, understanding that something happens to activate one person and then their emotions grab ahold of them and they tell themselves a story in their head which then leads to behavior like contempt or criticism. It then activates the other person, and the cycle begins for the second person in the relationship.

GRAPHIC Relationship Cycle

The reality is that this relationship cycle is normal and the challenge is to learn how to slow it down so we can better understand that story that we tell ourselves. Humility in a relationship leads to curiosity where we wonder why the other person may have done the things they have done, rather than make assumptions. One of the most loving things we can do in a relationship is to stop mind reading and clarify expectations. We have often taught the emotionally healthy relationship course here at summit church and one of the skills that we

teach in that is this very skill and it begins with a question.

SLIDE “Can I read your mind?”

“Can You Help Me Understand?”

Whenever we have these emotions building up, instead of telling ourselves a story in our head about why they are doing what they're doing, it's important to get curious. Curiosity slows things down and one of the ways we can do that is by asking a simple question. “Can I read your mind?” Curiosity and questions like, “can you help me understand?” Are game changers and keep us from getting prideful.

This leads us to one last word. As followers of Jesus, relationships are not just about having someone to hang out with at the movies or to watch football games. It's not just about being lonely and not wanting to be by yourself. Christian friendship is something different altogether.

SLIDE Christian friendship is about being used by God for someone else's sanctification.

Sanctification is the goal of the Christian life; to be made holy. It is to become like Jesus or to be Jesus Christ to the world. It is about being perfected in Christian love. It is to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. This is the aim of the Christian life. The tools that God uses to help us become sanctified are things like worship, study of God's word, mission work, prayer, and holy living. God uses all these things to sanctify you. One of the major tools that God uses to sanctify you is Christian relationships.

GRAPHIC Diamond Cutter

One of the images I think of when it comes to sanctification is that of a diamond cutter. You have a stone which is a diamond in the rough. Then you have a master gem cutter that is God and the Holy Spirit. The master chisels away and picks different tools to get just the right angle so that the diamond releases the light and reflects the light beautifully.

God uses us to sanctify others and uses others to sanctify us.

I met recently with several pastor friends that I have known for 35 years. One of the things I love about being a United Methodist pastor is that we are in connection, and we will stay connected as pastors through two or three annual gatherings. I was thinking about this sermon as I met with them and realized that these people are the tools that God has been using in my life to sanctify me. And I have been tools God will use to sanctify them. If we are married, our spouse does that for us. Our kids do that for us, and we do that for our kids. Proverbs 27:17 reflects this truth a few verses down from the one we read a few moments ago.

BIBLE

***¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron,
so a friend sharpens a friend.***

GRAPHIC Ego Lawnmower Blade

This is my Ego Lawnmower that I use at my house. I used to have a gas one, but now this electric one works awesomely. After a while, the blade becomes dull and I need to sharpen it. I take the blade off the mower and get an iron file like this one. I make a circular motion on the edges of the blade, and it becomes very, very sharp. The book of Proverbs tells us that when we live out our faith daily in the world, the world itself will dull our faith. The world will sap the energy from you. It will draw you away from the path of life. This lawnmower only works if you sharpen the blade AND plug in the battery.

GRAPHIC Ego Lawnmower with Battery

We need friends will come along and sharpen us—to be tools in the hands of God to help move us in the right direction. We need friends that will help us see and stay on the path. We need friends who will question our assumptions about life and challenge us when we

begin to step off the path, and to help us see what God's will is for our life so that we become a tool in God's hands—useful and reflecting the glory of God, accomplishing the very things that God created for us to do. We need those kinds of relationships.

So, here is my question again. Do you have them? Do you have relationships that can help sharpen you AND lead you to God when you need a charge? Do you have people in your life who are encouraging you on the path?

Are you living a life of love and faithfulness, loyalty and kindness, towards other people? Are you willing to sacrifice for them, to give up two hours a week to spend time with other people and be their friend and help them grow in their faith? Are you willing to make those telephone calls even though you don't really have time? Are you willing to show up at the hospital?

Are you willing to forgive an affront? Are you willing to demonstrate grace and mercy towards others?

Finally, do you recognize that part of God's purpose in your life is to be a tool in his hands—to be iron sharpening iron for other people?

This is the mission of relationships when we are following Jesus. I pray you will take time to get connected with others by letting us know at our welcome area that you want this in your life.

Last year I went to the hospital to visit someone before surgery. I don't get to the hospital for every surgery because we have hospital visitors and others who love to do that as well. When I went to the waiting room to meet with this person's wife, I noticed several other church members were already there. They were sitting around with her and laughing together. When they saw me one of them asked, "Pastor Jeff, what are you doing here? Do you think they are going to die? You are too busy and have too much to do to be here! We really don't need you."

Thanks a lot! I told them I came by to pray with the person who is having surgery and his family and they said, “Well, you can pray with us if you want, but we have already taken care of that.”

Not only did they take care of that, but they stayed with that woman while her husband had surgery. They were in a small group together and had been meeting for many years. They helped the man who had surgery come home from the hospital and they were there afterwards bringing meals and helping to care for him and his family.

I have this dream you see. I have a dream that each of us will have relationships like that one day. I have a dream that we will have a group in which we will see our kids graduate high school together. I hope that each one of us will have friends that grow old with us and watch the wrinkles come across our faces. I hope that you will have friends whose funerals you attend, and that one day you will have a party as you greet the last one of your friends into heaven. But it will not happen by accident. It will only happen when you do this. Would you say these words with me out loud from Proverbs 3.

BIBLE

³ Never let loyalty and kindness leave you.

Tie them around your neck as a reminder.

Write them deep within your heart. – Proverbs 3:3

SLIDE

Prayer

Let's pray together. Oh God how grateful we are that you created us to be creatures who need companionship and help. You know in this room there are some who struggle with being willing to put the needs of others first. It seems to be all about us and not about anyone else. Help us oh God to put aside our pride so we can develop meaningful relationships and demonstrate hesed, loving kindness, and loyalty.

There are some of us, oh God, who have a hard time not breaking confidences. Please help us to mind our words and to be trustworthy

with other people's intimate moments. Help us to be faithful in our relationships.

God, you know there are some here who are thinking this very moment of that friend or that one who used to be a friend. I pray that you would prompt their heart to write the note or send the e-mail or make a phone call to forgive, to love, to ask for forgiveness and to begin restoring that friendship.

Finally, oh God, I pray that you would help us as a congregation in our relationships to live out loyalty, kindness, faithfulness and mercy...may we write them deep in our hearts. Those in this room who are not connected, I pray that you would help them have a deep longing to become connected to other people and to develop authentic, faithful, and healthy relationships. Help us in this we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

July 25-26 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people and invites them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – "I Thank God"

4. Song – “Gratitude”
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Invites people to greet each other
6. Announcement Video
7. Sermon Video Intro
8. Sermon
9. Med Moments
10. Offering (Native Hope)
11. Song – “Worthy of It All”
12. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
13. Care Ministers
14. The Bridge
15. Closing Prayer