

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. And a huge shout out to all our students with us today, Jr. High, Sr. High, for Worship Together Weekend. We love you, and I'm super glad you are here.
 - 1. I also want to say hi to you joining us live, online today. Egypt, Hawaii, Croatia, Florida, Maine, Chicago, and all across the nation and around the world. You are part of our family.
- B. There's a whole lot going on this weekend. This is Baptism Weekend, and over twenty people are being baptized this weekend, spread out across all our services. I'll talk more about that in a minute.
- C. Also, our ministry fair in the lobby afterwards... more on that at the end.
- D. And now, into my message for today. Today's message is part of a series for the fall called IGNITE.
 - 1. The whole idea of the whole series is to get in your face with grace.
- E. Today, I want to talk about IGNITE YOUR FRIENDSHIP.

II. Friend Stories

- A. I heard two awesome stories to get into this topic today.
 - 1. Daisy and the peanut butter and jelly.
 - a) So there's one little girl in our church, she's only in Kindergarten, age 6, and she could teach all of us about the heart of a friend. Her name is Daisy.
 - b) Daisy's dad emailed me this:
 - (1) During breakfast, Daisy blurted out, "I'm sad for my friend, Lisa. She's allergic to peanuts and has to sit by herself at lunch a lot."
 - (2) Then Daisy thought for a moment — and remember, she's only six. She said, "Dad, I don't want to bring a peanut butter and jelly sandwich anymore, because I want to sit with her at lunch so she won't be lonely."
 - (3) The Dad wrote, "My heart saw her big heart and with a bit of fun, I formally declared, "No more peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!" We doing wraps and turkey sandwiches now.
 - c) That little girl has the heart of a true friend.
 - 2. Hannah and the boy with autism.
 - a) In our fifth and six grade class, there's a little girl with special needs. This little girl stays right beside the leader the whole time she's here. When the leader walks, this little girl walks. When the leader goes on stage to lead the kid's class, this little girl goes on stage. When the leader leads a song time, this little girl is right beside her leading the song time. The leader has talked to the kids, because sometimes the little girl makes noise, or moves around in ways that the other kids won't do.
 - b) The leader has taught the kids how God loves all people, no matter if they seem different from us, and we should love all people too.
 - c) So that's the set up. In that class is a fifth grade girl named Hannah. She thought of a boy on her school bus that nobody sat with and everybody picked on. See, he has special need called autism, and he had a very hard time making friends.
 - d) So, Hannah, who learned about being a friend to everybody here in our Sunday School class, sat down next to this little boy on the school bus the very next day.
 - e) The next day, the little boy got on the bus, and went and sat next to Hannah. The bus driver got up, walked back to Hannah, and said, "I can have him sit somewhere else if you want me to." (Sad).
 - f) Hannah said, "Oh no, we're best friends." And the little boy with autism smiled.
 - 3. The Bible says the words... "and a little child shall lead them." That is the heart of friendship on display.
 - a) *BIG IDEA: If you're a Christian, you should be the most loyal, encouraging, dependable friend a person could ever have.*
 - b) And you can. How? By following the Four Laws of Friendship.

III. Four Laws of Friendship

- A. *THE LAW OF HONOR: All people are sacred, and are precious to God.*
 - 1. You are created for honor and dignity and respect. Nobody has a right to hurt you, use you, or disrespect you in any way. You are sacred. That means you belong to God. You are precious to him, and he's got your back.
 - 2. That's about you. But today, we're not really talking about how people treat you; we're talking about how you treat other people as a friend.
 - 3. God created the people in your life for honor. They belong to God. You have no right to call them names. You have no right to hurt them, use them, ignore them, or dishonor them in any way.
 - 4. Most of us know the verse that says you shall not commit murder. It's one of God's Big Ten Commandments in the Bible.
 - 5. But the Bible pushes it deeper than just the physical act of killing:
 - a) *"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. (Matthew 5:21, 22, NLT).*
 - 6. You can murder a reputation. You can kill a person's self-confidence. You can wound a person's spirit.
 - a) Do you realize what this means?

- (1) It means you've got to stop being a jerk. You've got to stop gossiping. Stop saying unkind things. If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all.
- (2) It means that if you're a bully or a mean girl, you've got to change your ways. That's not God's plan for you. And in the end, you're going to reap what you sow.
- (3) If you've been a jerk, go make it right. Ask for forgiveness, and change how you relate. Not everything has to be teasing, or sarcasm, or about you.
- (4) Be an honorable friend. Be a dependable friend. Be a self-giving friend. Be a person who builds up instead of tears down. Be trustworthy. Be decent.
 - (a) BIG IDEA: If you're a Christian, you should be the most loyal, encouraging, dependable friend a person could ever have.
- (5) It's a harsh world out there and people are hurting.
7. Jesus came for this very reason. He saw a world full of dishonor. A world full of cruelty, unkindness, harshness, and sin.
8. He came to restore each one's dignity.
 - a) He gave hope to the hopeless.
 - b) Forgiveness to the guilty.
 - c) Cleansing to the dirty.
 - d) Love to the loveless.
 - e) *If society pushed them away, Jesus pulled them close.*
9. You might be here today feeling wounded, disrespected, dishonored, and misused.
10. Our hearts are with you. Jesus came for you, and he loves you, and he wants to restore to you your true dignity, honor, and worth.
11. You can receive him today, and he will begin that work in you. I'm going to ask you to do that today, at the end of this talk. I'm going to ask you to receive Jesus... to trust him as your Savior, and begin the journey to the honor that can be yours. I won't embarrass you or single you out, but at the end, I'm going to invite you to receive Jesus, and when I do, just say yes.
12. There are some people today who have said yes. They have received Jesus, and they want you to know that. So we will baptize them today... not so they can be saved, but because they are saved and want the world to know it.
 - a) Jesus honors you by saving you and making you his friend.
 - b) You honor Jesus by being baptized and showing the world that you've got a friend in him.
- (1) That's the law of honor.

B. *THE LAW OF DIVINE APPOINTMENTS: The people you meet most often are in your life on purpose.*

1. The first time I saw Margi (my wife), I was teaching a Wednesday Night Bible Class in Chicago. She walked in, went across the back of the room to find a seat, and my little heart started pounding, and my palms got sweaty, and my mouth kept going, my mind was racing... who is this beautiful woman walking across the back of my church.
2. Well, she was there because of her assistant, Denise. Denise was one of the kids in the Awana clubs I helped run at my little church, back when she was just a kid, and I was in high school and college.
3. So God put Denise in Margi's life, and Denise put Margi into my life, and that's what I mean by Divine appointment.
4. It's the opposite of an accident.
 - a) *Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. (Acts 16:25, NLT).*
5. Think about that. Those prisoners who just happened to be in that prison on that day had a divine appointment to be encouraged by two people they never met before.
6. If you're going to have the heart of a friend, you have to change the way you think about the people around you. The other students in your class. The people you work with. Sports team. Wherever.
7. One of my friends ran the women's ministries at a church in Indiana. She now leads Habitat for Humanity in her county. When I met her, she was a waitress at a barbecue joint in Chicago. A bunch of friends went there week after week to build a bridge of friendship. She wasn't just a table server, she was a friend. And because she was a genuine friend, she was open to the message of Jesus. She got saved, her husband got saved, she went into ministry, and all her family is friends with Jesus.
 - a) Just like you can meet Jesus today— because this whole message is a divine appointment for you. At the end. Get ready.
8. If you're going to ignite your friendship, if you're going to light it up with grace, and kick it up a notch, you have to make a shift in how you look at the people around you.
9. You have to make a shift, a change, so there's something like a BEFORE and AFTER picture in your mind.
 - a) *BEFORE: The people in my life are there by accident, and some I will like, and some I won't like and it's all random anyway.*
 - b) *AFTER: The people in my life are there by divine appointment, and I can bless them and they can bless me in ways I never saw coming.*
10. It doesn't have to be epic. You can bless a person...
 - a) Just say something nice.
 - b) Just invite them to have lunch with you and your friends.

- c) Stick up for them if someone isn't kind.
 - (1) You're in their life for a reason... bless them, encourage them, help them, be kind to them. You're a Christian. You're not like the world. People are hurting. People are lonely. You might be hurting and lonely. I get you.
 - (2) But maybe the way out of it for you is to be a blessing to another person in your life, because it just might be God setting you both up for something really cool.
- C. *THE LAW OF LONELINESS: Loneliness is not God's plan for your life, but he can use periods of loneliness to draw you into a deeper relationship with himself.*
 1. There were periods of loneliness in my life that were pretty intense. Especially when I was in my twenties. All my friends were getting married, and I wasn't. I was one of the last guys in my circle of friends to get married — but that's okay, she was worth the wait.
 2. But during that time I felt extremely lonely, and it was painful. I still feel that at times, and I think most of us do.
 3. When I've felt lonely, I've gone in two directions with that. One is to pull inside, and just focus on myself. That never works. I only sink deeper into depression and loneliness when I do that.
 4. The other is to pull closer to God in my emotions and thoughts.
 - a) Jesus said,
 - (1) "[God] has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted..." (Luke 4:18)
 5. That gives me a lot of hope. Loneliness is probably more common than you realize.
 6. We have our students with us today, so I want to ask a question of our adults... just our grown ups. If you've struggled with loneliness in a serious way in the last year, would you help our students know they're not alone... would please raise your hand?
 7. My hand's up.
 8. It's especially hard if you're more of an introvert than an extrovert. As a proud member of the Introvert club, let me say that if you have people in your life who are thoughtful, thinkers, quiet in a crowd (but lit up in smaller settings), socially awkward, communicates on paper, and doesn't fit in easily... you are dealing with an introvert... and they are the most creative, most loyal, most fun friends you will ever have if you'll just take the first few steps and reach out... a few times, because, well, we're introverts, and that's what it takes.
 9. I don't think God causes loneliness, but I think he can use it when it comes.
 - a) I think God uses loneliness to draw our attention back to himself.
 - b) He uses loneliness to help us help other lonely people.
 - c) He uses lonely periods in our lives to teach us lessons from God's Word, and to make us grow deep. Some people have so many friends, they don't have energy left over to be a friend with God.
 - d) God uses loneliness to prepare you for leadership. Many people that God used as great leaders felt serious times of loneliness: You want examples? Moses, Elijah, Paul, and Jesus... Did you know that in large churches, you have a huge share of introvert pastors? Leadership requires a vast interior world of truth, and study, and imagination...
 - (1) God also uses loneliness to draw you to the one friend who will never leave you or betray you. It could be that your isolation today, your loneliness today can lead you to receive Jesus as your Savior... and I can't promise that you won't feel lonely at times, but I can promise you with Jesus, you'll never be alone.
 10. It's okay to be lonely. It's not a sin. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. It just means you haven't found the right people to click with you yet.
 11. So here's my to-do list for you:
 - a) *If you're lonely:* dig yourself into the Bible extra hard, push yourself into one or two activities where you'll rub shoulders with other people, and be kind. The kindnesses you show today will come back to you in your future in ways you can't begin to imagine. Loneliness isn't forever... God loves you extra special.
 - (1) If you've never received Jesus, trust him today.
 - b) *If you see someone who's lonely:* include them. Invite them. Talk to them. Next to Jesus, we Christians should be the best friends people ever have, whether they are saved or not saved. Jesus came to make you into excellent friend material. And if you're not, you have a lot of growing to do.
 - c) You will never be more like Jesus than the day you decide to be friendly to the friendless.
 - d) Ignite your friendship.- D. *THE LAW OF THE BEST FRIEND EVER: No one has ever had a friend like Jesus.*
 1. The whole Bible is about Jesus. In symbols. In stories. In promises. In prophecies. In a million ways, the whole Bible is about Jesus.
 2. But in the Bible, there are four books that focus on Jesus like a laser. These are called the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 3. They are a blend of biography and theology (which is truth about God, life and, the world).
 4. So I did a study a while ago. I used a computer app to look something up in just the gospels. I looked up all the verbs that Jesus did. Verbs are action words, right? I think all the teachers in church just swallowed a little throw up.
 5. And I counted them to see what was the most common action in the gospels for the life of Christ.
 6. Number one: Jesus taught. That makes sense.

7. Number two: Jesus ate. I thought that was cool. You know why? Because eating together is a sign of friendship. And Jesus was a great friend.
8. Yes, he is the Almighty God. The King of kings. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The Mighty Lord. The Father of Eternity. He is All Powerful, All Conquering, Almighty, and All in All.
9. His glory is like a thousand suns.
10. He commands the angels of heaven.
11. He crushes the devil's head.
12. He is the all time, undisputed, undefeated Champion of love.
13. There is this incredible glory and elevation in Jesus. He is holy and high and lifted up.
14. But there's more.
15. He's also meek, and humble, and lowly, and gentle. He's a friend of anyone who will be a friend with him. Big and important. Low and a nobody. Makes no difference.
16. He said, *You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. (John 15:14, 15, NLT).*
17. There's an old hymn that Christians have sung for a hundred years:
 - a) What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear...
18. And he did that, you know. He carried your sins, and your heartbreaks, and your darkness, and your grief. He carried them away.

IV. Ignite Wake Up Call

1. He said,
 - a) *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:13, NKJV).*
2. And he did that. He laid down his life for his friends... and that can be you if you will receive him today.

V. Invitation

- A. We want you to know that Jesus Christ had you personally in mind when he died on the Cross. He was nailed to that old rugged cross because he loved you.
- B. And when he was on that Cross, God did something in you and for you.
- C. Long before you were ever born, God reached into you, and he took out from you all your guilt, and all your failures, and all your mess, and all your sin. God didn't pretend these things never happened. He didn't ignore the punishment your sins deserved. No.
- D. Instead, God did something the devil never saw coming.
- E. God placed that entire mass of darkness and sin—yours, mine, and the world's—he placed it all on Christ. And then God punished him for your sins instead of punishing you.
 1. *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29, NKJV)*
- F. Christ died for your sins. Christ died as your sacrifice. Whatever had to happen to break down the wall between you and God, Jesus did. And he did it all.
- G. And you can be forgiven. You can be God's child forever.
- H. How?
- I. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.*
 1. I'm going to ask you to bow your head and to close your eyes. We do this to give you privacy and quiet, and to extend that courtesy to your neighbors.
 2. I said I wanted to give you a chance to receive Jesus today, and here it is. No pressure. Just a prayer. The way it works is I will say the prayer one line at a time, and you say it back up to God. I'll pray out loud, but you pray silently. This is between you and God.

VI. Prayer

- A. ADMIT: God, I admit I need you. I admit I have broken your laws. I have sinned. I can't reach you. And I need you in my life.
- B. BELIEVE: God, I believe that Jesus is my one and only way to you. I believe he is your Son. I believe he died and rose again. I believe he did that for you. And right now, as best as I can, I'm believing in Jesus as my Savior.
- C. CHOOSE: God, right now, I choose Jesus. I choose to believe him. I choose to receive him. I choose to trust him as my only hope. And right now, I ask you as best as I can, Dear God, please save me, please forgive me, please make me your child forever.
- D. If you prayed that prayer. God heard that prayer, and he's never turned anyone away.
- E. So if you just prayed to receive Jesus, we would like to hear from you and make sure you have a Bible. Please contact the church (530) 221-5683. Let them know you prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior and if you need a Bible.
- F. Welcome to the Family of God.