

Play Video of Cheers opening. Maybe you remember the Cheers TV series that was a big hit. Whenever Norm walked into the bar, everyone would say “Hi Norm!” A friend of mine visited the “Cheers” bar in Boston with a couple of friends a few years ago. When he gave the waitress his credit card to pay for the bill, she came back and announced, “Fred forgot to sign his credit card.” Everyone in the place said, “Hi Fred!” True story.

Last week we concluded our series on High Yield Friendships. Today we are celebrating Friendship Weekend and we welcome all of our friends who are here today. This morning we want to focus our attention on the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John (15:13), **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”**

Before we begin, let me ask you a few questions:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
3. Name ten people who have won a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
4. Name the last six Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
5. Name the last ten World Series winners.

If you're like me you didn't come up with very many correct answers.

Now let me ask you another set of questions:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

The point is simple. The people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most awards. They are the ones who care.

So why are friends so important to us? **(Get some answers from the congregation)**

Friends make life better. They help us enjoy the good times and help us through the tough times. They laugh with us and cry with us. Studies even show that we can extend life expectancy by having the right kind of friends.

We have to remember that there is a difference between Friends and Acquaintances. An Acquaintance is someone I know. We all know a lot of people, but we don't know them well enough to turn to them when we really need some help. They may know us when they see us, but they don't want to hear about all of the tough things going on in our lives. On the other hand, a friend is a person you can count on, especially when things get tough. In the long run, our

friendship and relationships with other people are far more important than the things that we have. Think about it this way. We all have a belly button that reminds us that one time we were connected to another person. We spend all of our lives trying to reconnect with someone. God made us that way, to relate with other people and to be connected with Him.

Sometimes our friends let us down. When that happens the hurt can be deep and the loneliness real. Sometimes friends can't help us because they are in the same boat with us. When that happens we need another friend to turn to. His name is Jesus. God's friendship option always works. Jesus said, **"You didn't choose me, remember, I chose you."** (John 15:15) We can't earn Jesus' friendship or convince Him that He should be our friend. Jesus loves us and wants to be our friend.

Take a look at this slide. There is a divide that separates us from God, that keeps us from reaching him. That divide is called sin, turning our back on God, doing things our own way instead of His way. We cannot bridge the gap. But Jesus did that for us on the cross. He paid the price for our sins and opened the path for us to be reunited with God. He did exactly what he said a friend would do when He laid down His life on the cross for us, His friends. Since Jesus did this for us, we can be confident that He will never leave. Nothing can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus Christ. We can count on Jesus.

Jesus makes the difference in our lives. He gives us the hope that comes from knowing that we are never alone and that we have the gift of eternal life. He accepts us regardless of how bad we mess up. He may not like the things that we do, but he always loves us. God's love gives our lives value. After all we are so important to God that His Son died in our place. And Jesus gives us a purpose when we are connected to Him, when we worship and honor him.

But God doesn't just want us to be connected to Him. He also wants us to be part of a family of believers, a community of faith that we call the church. God created the church, people didn't. God knows that we need the support and encouragement that we can give each other in His church. When the church is right, then it is the place where we can be real. We shouldn't put on a "Church Face" when we walk through those glass doors. We should be real people in need of God's love and forgiveness. This should be the place where we all matter to God and where we should matter to one another. Knowing Jesus and being part of His family does make a difference in our lives.

Jesus said, **"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."** (Revelation 3:20 NLT) If you don't already have a relationship with Him, then answer Jesus' invitation to become His friend. Admit your sins and the failure of living your way instead of God's way. Ask Jesus into your heart and confess that He is your Lord and Savior. If you do that, we would like to help you begin your

journey of faith. Put your name on the friendship pad and mark that you would like a visit or to become a member. Talk with me or one of our members over a cup of coffee today. And come back again to learn more about the Lord. We are going to begin a series next weekend called “Why? Looking for Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions.” We’ll start next weekend with “Why Am I Here?” And remember this; you are always welcome here, at Peace. Amen.