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# THE COMPANY WE KEEP

IN SEARCH OF BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIP

Foreword by Ed Welch

Jonathan Holmes

"A wonderful primer."  
— Alistair Begg

"A solid, fresh way of re-thinking  
all of your relationships."  
— Tim Lane, co-author,  
*How People Change*

# THE COMPANY WE KEEP

*In Search of Biblical Friendship*

Jonathan Holmes

Cruciform Press | September 2014

To Kelly, Scott, Nathan, and Joe: Your friendship  
in my life has been an unexpected grace from God.

Thank you.

To Jennifer: Your friendship has been the single  
greatest testimony to our Savior's sacrificial love.

I love you, friend.

—Jonathan Holmes

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“Jonathan Holmes has the enviable ability to say a great deal in a few words. Here is a wonderful primer on the nature of Biblical friendship—what it means and why it matters.”

**Alistair Begg**, Senior Pastor, Parkside Church

“I talk with many Christians who have intensely practical questions about how to make and maintain friendships with their fellow believers. Jonathan Holmes’ book is filled with answers that are equally down-to-earth, nitty-gritty, and specific. This book isn’t just a roadmap for cultivating Christian friendship. It’s also a tour guide, taking us where we need to go with warmth and wisdom.”

**Wesley Hill**, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Trinity School for Ministry; author of *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*

“Jonathan Holmes has tackled an often neglected and sometimes misunderstood topic: biblical friendship. He brings clarity to what Christ-centered friendships are and how to cultivate them. In a time when friendships are defined by a few taps on a keyboard, this book will cause you to take pause and reflect on why and how God intended our friendships to be a testimony to a desperate world looking for intimacy in all the wrong places. Pick a friend, read this together, and watch how your faith and the faith of others grow as a result.”

**Dr. Garrett Higbee**, author of *The Uncommon Community: Biblical Soul Care for Small Groups*; Board Member, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Short. Thoughtful. Biblical. Practical. I’m planning to get my friends to read this book so we can transform our friendships into something more biblical. I am grateful to Jonathan Holmes for carefully helping us think through the topic of Christian friendships.”

**Deepak Reju**, author; Pastor of Biblical Counseling and Families, Capitol Hill Baptist Church

“So often, books on biblical fellowship place our relationships in a “spiritual” realm where none of them really exist. Thankfully, Jonathan has succeeded in giving us a picture of how normal, daily, biblical friendships can be used by God to mold us into the likeness of Christ. He successfully steers clear of over-spiritualizing what friendship between brothers and sisters in Christ should look like. It is rich in its application of Scripture and practical in the way it connects all of our relationships to Christ. If you want a solid, fresh way of re-thinking all of your relationships, read this book.”

**Dr. Tim S. Lane**, President, Institute for Pastoral Care;  
conference speaker; co-author of *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* and *How People Change*

“Thought provoking, rooted in theology, and a topic that has needed to be addressed more deeply. I’ve often bemoaned the superficial relationships in the church so I’m thankful for a book that addresses this and takes gospel-saturated one-anothering seriously. I can assure you the church would be different and get the attention of the world if these types of friendships were pursued. I finished reading and wanted to invest more in Christ-focused relationships.”

**Dr. Ernie Baker**, Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Master’s College

“*The Company We Keep* presents a compelling vision of biblical friendship that glorifies Christ, builds up believers, and witnesses to the world. I was both encouraged and challenged in my own relationships and counseling ministry through the wisdom of this book. The section on friendship and same-sex-attraction is especially timely and helpful for the church today. Jonathan has written a clear, concise book that is biblically faithful, relationally practical, pastorally wise, and, above all, Christ-centered. I highly recommend it!”

**Pat Quinn**, Dir. of Counseling Ministries, University Reformed Church

“We live in a world of easy, quick, superficial, and selfish relationships where Christians need biblical wisdom about how to develop meaningful friendships. In *The Company We Keep* Jonathan Holmes provides this wisdom in abundant supply. This guide to biblical friendship is grounded in the timeless truth of God’s Word, centered in the grace of Jesus Christ, and focused on relevant and practical application. This book is required reading for anyone desiring to grow in deeper Christian friendship.”

**Dr. Heath Lambert**, Executive Director, The Association of Biblical Counselors

“*The Company We Keep* casts a vision for the kind of friendships we all really want—to love and be loved as Christ loves us. Jonathan provides practical guidance that is both biblical and inspiring. I’ll be recommending this book to friends and counselees.”

**Winston T. Smith**, faculty and counselor, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

“*The Company We Keep* is a refreshing and challenging book. Here you will find rich, practical, and theologically grounded counsel. Jonathan Holmes demonstrates that our need for friendship is rooted in the eternal relationships within the triune God in whose image we are created, illustrates how the self-centeredness of sin has distorted our view of friendship, and teaches us how to apply the humility of Christ to the intentional pursuit of careful relationships that draw attention to the gospel. This is a book that I wish had been available in my early years as a believer. I really need this book.”

**Paul Tautges**, author; founder of Counseling One Another

“In *The Company We Keep*, Jonathan Holmes has made a significant contribution to the Kingdom. We expect far too little from our friendships, and Jonathan’s work not only encourages us to expect more, it also equips us to give more. His four

marks of biblical friendship—constancy, candor, carefulness, and counsel—provide a robust and relevant GPS for intentional and vulnerable gospel-centered friendships. The ‘Dig Deeper’ sections embedded in each chapter make this a great book not only for individuals, but also for small groups.”

**Robert W. Kelleman, Ph.D.**, author; Executive Director,  
Biblical Counseling Coalition

“People want to connect with others. It is part of the image of God in man. But so often we struggle to have meaningful relationships, settling instead for various kinds of cheap substitutes and wishing for more. In this work, Jonathan helpfully teaches a biblical theology of friendship and along the way he provides wise counsel while having his feet firmly planted in the reality that we have many God-given responsibilities. Wise will be the one who evaluates his own life and seeks to make practical changes to pursuing and enjoying true biblical friendships based on the conviction of the Holy Spirit.”

**Rob Green**, Pastor of Counseling and Seminary Ministries,  
Faith Church

“*Friendship* is a word like *trust*. We all know what these words mean but we’re not always sure how to ‘do’ them. Our tendency can be either to fear friendship or to deify what it means to have ‘a good friend.’ In *The Company We Keep*, Jonathan Holmes serves us well by giving us a functional definition, realistic expectations, and practical steps to develop the kind of biblical friendships God intended for his people.”

**Brad Hambrick**, Pastor of Counseling, The Summit  
Church; author of *Burnout: Resting in God’s Fairness*

“Friendships are such an important part of our lives, but there is so much confusion about what a true friend is. Is it someone I shop with, someone I play sports with, someone I meet for lunch, or someone I call when I’m in trouble who never condemns me? Jonathan winsomely unpacks what biblical

friendship really is. Prepare to be blessed, encouraged, and perhaps surprised. Then look forward to putting his wise words into practice and enjoying sweet fruit. I wish all friendships had the focus Jonathan describes.”

**Amy Baker**, Biblical Counselor, Faith Church

“Ever get the sense there’s something lacking in your friendships? This book provides Christ-centered, practical wisdom on the obstacles and benefits of biblical friendships. You’ll gain valuable direction for real-life relationships and you will see the vital role of biblical friendships as a witness to the gospel. From his wealth of experience as a biblical counselor, Jonathan Holmes knows that friendships can be hard but also deeply fulfilling, especially when pursued with an eye to God’s glory.”

**Dr. Stephen K. Moroney**, Professor and Chair of the  
Department of Theology, Malone University

“I loved this book because it honestly addresses a significant problem we all face in ways that are both theologically robust and delightfully practical. I especially appreciated Jonathan’s authenticity as he described ways he has struggled with these very same concepts. I felt like I was talking to a good friend as I read the book—how appropriate for a book on friendship. Now I plan to get to work applying the tremendous principles I’ve read. I needed this.”

**Steve Viars**, author; Senior Pastor, Faith Church

“In a world where we are seemingly surrounded by friends, many continue to search for meaningful friendships. *The Company We Keep* not only provides a theological lens to view friendship accurately, but gives practical insights on how to develop them in everyday life. This book will encourage and enhance your friendships from a biblical perspective to become what they are truly designed to be.”

**Joe Keller**, D.Min., Vice President of Student Life, The  
Master’s College

“We hear a lot about the goodness of marriage, the honor of parenting, and the call to disciple others, but so little about life’s most common relationship: friendships. And what we see today is that like never before people have more connections and fewer true friends. My life receives so much richness thanks to Jonathan’s friendship, and I believe yours will too by embracing what he has to say here. I challenge you not to read this book alone, but with a friend!”

**Scott Zeller**, Training Coordinator, Redeemer Church of Dubai

“I am glad that this book has been written. This short book challenges readers to understand God’s bigger purpose in giving friendships. It is filled with biblical wisdom, honest reflections, and helpful questions. I highly recommend this book.”

**Lilly H. Park**, Assistant Professor, Crossroads Bible College

“Jonathan Holmes has gifted the body of Christ with a fresh, insightful, relevant, and theologically-rich window into biblically-shaped, Christ-centered friendship. He invites the reader on an exploration, discovery, and practical pathway to healthy friendship. Not only does he unpack the relational challenges that can exist within friendships, but he also provides wisdom, direction, and hope for those desiring to experience friendships that thrive. This book is a timeless resource that could equip every reader on his or her journey to relating biblically.”

**Dwayne R. Bond, Ph.D.**, Lead Pastor, Wellspring Church

“With convicting transparency, Jonathan Holmes not only addresses the philosophical and motivational underpinnings of biblical friendships, he offers help in overcoming a lost obedience with practical applications. Helpful and penetrating questions accompany each chapter, making this book a useful tool for leaders and groups as they take on the challenge of deepening their commitment to bucking the cultural tendency



to call shallow relationships ‘biblical friendship.’ Ideally, this book should not be read alone, but along with people willing to take a deeper plunge into the challenge of biblical friendship.

With candor and insight, Jonathan exposes our sinful impediments to biblical friendships in a Christ-centered, contemporary manner. This book challenges those are maturing in their biblical friendships to continue to grow, and introduces others to the concepts and challenge of biblical friendships. Thus, fresh challenges, motivations, and applications to the common and pervasive problem of shallow or selfish relationships can be applied by those new to the faith as well as those who have been struggling to deepen relationships biblically for a long time.”

**Greg Cook, D.Min,** Pastor, Christ Chapel Church

“With meaningful friendships in sharp decline in an age of superficial acquaintances, we receive encouraging words in *The Company We Keep*. In this book, Jonathan Holmes paints friendship in exalted hues, drawing inspiration from no less than the ‘friendships’ formed within the triune Godhead. When we image the sacrificial love of heaven, we create friendships on earth that bring great glory to God and immense delight to ourselves. This concise book is biblical and personal, incisive and emotive, theological and practical—and causes us to yearn for the prize of Christ-centered friendships. *The Company We Keep* elevates interpersonal relations to new heights, beyond fellowship to friendship.”

**Tim Savage, Ph.D.,** Senior Pastor, Camelback Bible Church

“*The Company We Keep* offers a beautiful invitation to participate in the life God has called us to live with one another. Throughout this short yet thoughtful and robust treatise on biblical friendship, I found myself stirred in different ways—excited with a renewed vision, convicted about my tendencies to ‘go it alone,’ and compelled to persevere in my fight to love and be loved. I also found myself drawing near to Jonathan, with his

gentle tone and keen insights, as he brought us along on his own personal journey. I confidently recommend this work, which will serve the church well.”

**Robert K. Cheong**, author; Pastor, Sojourn Community Church

“It is one thing for a church or an individual to be friendly, and quite another for us or our churches to be places where we find and make real friends. Jonathan’s book helps us understand what real friendship is, and then how we can cultivate it in our lives and churches on God’s terms. *The Company We Keep* is honest, realistic, and God-centered.”

**Sam Williams**, Professor of Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Yes! A book on a subject that all kinds of people—parents and grandparents, teenagers and empty nesters—often struggle with: biblical friendship. I will put this well-written, biblically saturated, easily accessible resource into the hands of as many church members as possible. This resource will inform, convict, and encourage people to pursue meaningful Christian friendship. Thank you, Jonathan, for living out these very principles in our friendship. May others benefit from this work.”

**Kelly Wright**, Associate Pastor, Castlevew Baptist Church

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*The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*

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# FOREWORD

Could there be anything more important? When we reflect on our lives, they are measured not by our incomes or good works, but by our relationships—by our friendships. This is true for everyone.

What makes a child's day "good" is a friendship forged on the playground. What stands out from the din of our daily activity is the personal connection we had with a neighbor or even a salesperson. What rivets the thoughts of a dying billionaire are the regrets from relationships that were broken and the joys of the friendships that remain.

We are, after all, offspring of the Triune God who has always existed as a unity of three persons, and, in a move that remains stunning, he calls us friends, which is the very best of relationships. God actually draws us into that triune friendship as co-participants. Who could have imagined?

Ah yes, all good things come from God himself, and friendships, indeed, are among the great gifts that he gives us.

Your guide in this book will be Jonathan Holmes. Since he will be pointing to God and his wisdom on

friendships, Jonathan will be in the background. But it just wouldn't be right to have an anonymous person guide you through the topic of friendships. So you will get to know him along the way. You will meet his youngest daughter Ruby, appreciate his friendship with his wife, and listen to his extended conversations with those who join his family on vacations or share a meal with him. Before you get to the end of the book, Jonathan will be a guide who is becoming a friend.

There are some people who feel like friends almost immediately. They are the ones who have nothing to hide. They listen and are moved by the things that move you. They engage in that wonderful back-and-forth that is natural to your best relationships. Jonathan is that kind of person. If you meet him face-to-face, you will consider him a friend. He is the ideal guide for this most important matter.

– Ed Welch, CCEF

# One

# **WHAT IS BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIP?**

## The Definition and the Goal

At age 25, David was saved by Jesus as he heard the gospel regularly preached at a large, vibrant church. He's been a member for six months now and overall it's been wonderful. One thing is odd, though. He expected everyone here to be his best friends ever, and it hasn't worked out that way.

Ann was raised in her church. Her bubbly personality allows her to make personal connections easily. There are lots of people she loves seeing on Sunday, and she does feel love for them in Christ. Yet even after all these years she still struggles to form and maintain ongoing, fruitful Christian relationships that break into real life.

When Ben is at church, he tends to stew in his own insecurities. *All these people have busy lives. Am I just being selfish in wanting friends? Maybe I should just come to meetings, do my best to serve and glorify God, and go home.*



Lindsey is a high school sophomore who couldn't wait to meet other young people in her family's new church. What she found was a confusing collection of cliques within cliques. How could she ever make real friends here?

Armand and Julie wonder if something is wrong with their marriage. Although they are each other's best friends, they feel a lack of meaningful friendship in their lives, and they don't know how to pursue it.

Brittany is a junior in college. People comment on how connected she is through Facebook, Twitter, and her blog. She also helps the local campus ministry chapter plan social activities. While she is friends, in a way, with literally thousands of people, she is often disappointed when others don't pursue her and help out in tough times.

Tom thinks his relationships in the church are fantastic. He and his buddies make plans on Sunday and then get together during the week to watch sports, play video games, and just hang out. He's grateful to God for these guys and he's sure that what they're enjoying has got to be about as good as it gets.

Damian loves to serve in church. Lately he's seen, however, that when he's in "servant mode" people can turn into projects. Turns out you can't be close friends with a project.

Stephanie works in the home raising her three young kids. Her husband's job requires long hours, so they usually arrive at church frazzled and slightly late. She tries to connect with other young moms, but despite the occasional phone call and shared prayer request, she still feels like there's a wall between her and other moms.

## Common Questions

These people may be fictional, but their stories are all too typical. Should a Christian's expectations for friendship differ from those of a non-Christian? Many of us harbor silent questions like some of these:

- *If a group of people are all saved and adopted into God's family, then really—why can it seem so hard to form open, honest, genuine friendships in the church?*
- *Didn't Jesus say believers can be recognized by their love for one another? What is that supposed to look like? Whatever it is, why don't we see more of it?*
- *None of my church friendships really get much below the surface, but we enjoy them anyway. What's wrong with just keeping that status quo?*
- *Should it concern me that there's still no one in my church who actually knows me well?*
- *Will I ever have people in my life who truly accept me for the mess that I am? Or is it unrealistic and selfish of me to want that?*
- *What are normal expectations for biblical friendship? What should I be hoping for, and how can I get there?*

Some of these questions may feel familiar. Deep and meaningful friendships don't come easily—even within the church, and sometimes *especially* within the church. And because from time to time we all sense that things ought to be different, we can find the challenges of biblical friendship perplexing, frustrating, and discouraging.

It doesn't have to be this way.

## **Beyond Fellowship**

Not every church has the same friendship “climate.” A strong culture of fellowship within a church can help minimize the sense of isolation faced by individual believers. But I’m distinguishing here between *Christian fellowship* and *biblical friendship*.

Fellowship might be described as that special sense of companionship and love among believers based on our unity in Christ. This is a truly wonderful thing and can pave the way to the development of biblical friendships. But in this book I want to help you see what Christian fellowship can look like when taken to the next level and applied more personally. This is fellowship that has been given added depth, refinement, and detail through active investment in one another’s lives. It’s what I’m calling biblical friendship.

While some books for Christians have a chapter on the subject, the topic of friendship among Christians has been largely overlooked in recent years. Pastor and author Kevin DeYoung agrees, writing “It [friendship] is the most important-least talked about relationship in the church.”<sup>1</sup> This is why I want to try to show you God’s great design for biblical friendship and describe how we can all take concrete steps toward the kind of friendships that can and should exist among believers. As we begin our journey together, the first thing we need to grasp is how we came to have this legitimate need for biblical friendship.

## **The Origin of Relationships in the Community Known as God**

In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This surprising “us,” right there near the start of Scripture, is only the first of many indications that our creator exists himself as one God in three persons.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the eternal Trinity is the most fundamental expression of community and relationship. Therefore, one of the simplest yet most profound aspects of mankind being made in God’s image is that we were designed to live in relationships.

As if to affirm that truth, the author of Genesis soon goes on to tell us, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’” (Genesis 2:18). Just as the “us” was surprising, this “not good” can likewise raise a reader’s eyebrows. Up until now we have been told that *everything* God creates is good, yet suddenly he announces something about the created order is *not* good: it is *not good* Adam is alone. Why?

We see the answer in the solution God provided—a final creation. God causes Adam to fall asleep and creates for him Eve, a fellow human being, a woman and a friend. Some may say the creation of Eve is more about giving Adam a helpmate, but pastor and commentator R. Kent Hughes expands on the significance of this creation, “While [Genesis 2:18] relates directly to the creation of Eve, it is also a primary ontological statement about the nature of man, who is, whether he admits it or not, a relational

being. His growth and significance are worked out in relationships.”<sup>3</sup>

The “problem” of Adam being alone, therefore, did not reflect a failure either in Adam’s divine design or in his performance as a person. It lay in the limited nature of humanity, that none of us can be a community in ourselves the way God is a community in himself. Adam *needed* community in order to better image the God who *is* a community. He was created to pursue, develop, and maintain human relationships as an integral part of being made in the image of the triune God. In the language of software programmers, Adam’s “problem” prior to Eve was a feature, not a bug. As Tim Keller explains,

This is one ache [the ache for friendship] that is part of [Adam’s] perfection...God made us in such a way that we cannot enjoy paradise without friends. God made us in such a way that we cannot enjoy our joy without friends. Human friends. Adam had a perfect quiet time every day, twenty-four hours, never had a dry one, and yet he needed [friends].<sup>4</sup>

Like Adam and all who have come after him, you and I were made for biblical friendship. Even Jesus, the Second Adam, needed and desired friendship. Consistently in Jesus’ earthly ministry, he sought the friendship and companionship of others. Scottish pastor Hugh Black explains, “He was perfectly human, and therefore felt the lack of friendship.”<sup>5</sup> Whether it was twelve disciples of random backgrounds or a family like that of Lazarus,

Mary, and Martha, friendship was an indispensable element of Jesus' earthly ministry.

What we learn from these crucial first two chapters in Genesis, then, is that God has made man in his image. And part of our image-bearing capacity entails living in relationships with others—not relationships built merely around common interests, but relationships that emanate from our very nature as image bearers.

Here is the significance of Genesis 1–2: we reflect God's image when we live in God-centered *relationship*; when we pursue biblical *friendship*.

## **Sin, Shame, and the Breakdown of Relationships**

But as we know, the storyline quickly goes awry when, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve fall into temptation and sin enters the world. Immediately their perfect communion, which mirrored their perfect union and communion with God, is shattered.

Running and hiding, Adam and Eve isolate themselves from their Creator. God comes along in the cool of the day looking for his image-bearers and calls out, “Where are you?” Adam’s response is painfully revealing. In his desperate scramble to justify himself, we see how quickly the union and fellowship he enjoyed with Eve has been lost. Gone is the transcendent, ecstatic, exultant song that rang through the garden when he first saw her: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). Instead, Genesis 3:10 reads like a chattering string of futile self-justifications.

*I heard the sound of you in the garden, and  
I was afraid, because  
I was naked, and  
I hid myself*

As soon as sin appeared, *we* quickly became *I*, and human history has never been the same.<sup>6</sup>

Just like every other aspect of the fall, Adam's sin has deeply corrupted our ability to pursue and maintain friendship with others. Not knowing any world except this fallen one, you and I can't begin to imagine just how true that is. The connection between our sin and our friendships has at least three components:

- A vertical component (the root cause)
- A motivational component (the internal result)
- A missional component (the external result)

## **Vertical**

Paul describes our unredeemed state in Colossians 1:21 as one of alienation from God, hostility toward God, and sinfulness against God. If this fundamental vertical isolation between us and God is not addressed, then the ability to move horizontally toward others in biblical friendship is impossible. Thankfully, the good news of the gospel proclaims that we can be made right in our relationship and friendship with God because of the atoning work of his son, Jesus Christ.

Even after becoming Christians, however, sin continues to hinder our vertical relationship with him who saved us. Throughout our lives, our sin nature

continues to press us toward relational isolation, separation, and alienation from God, as well as from one another. Thus, our ongoing vertical problem (with God) leads to two horizontal problems (with others), problems that are motivational and missional in nature.

## Motivational

The reformer Martin Luther noted that sin curves us inward. Left unaddressed, sin causes us to become increasingly self-focused. This affects our motivations, especially as we pursue others in friendship. Remember the picture of Adam in the garden? He was looking for someone to serve as an adequate companion in reflecting the glory of God. Zebras could not do it. Elephants could not do it. But a fellow human being and friend could.

Flash forward to the present, and we see how sin has affected our pursuit of friends. It taints our motivations before we even pursue someone else.

*Do they like me?*

*Can I make them like me?*

*Will they accept me?*

*Will they love me?*

*What will they give to me?*

*What are they expecting from me?*

*Will they hurt me?*

These questions are not inherently bad or evil, but notice how they are all utterly self-referential. Me, me, me—God and his purposes are woefully absent. In other words, due to the inward-curving effects of sin, we often pursue friendship not out of a biblical understanding of



bearing God's image and glorifying his all-encompassing gospel, but out of a desire for personal benefit.

Then, once our vertical problem has created an internal, motivational problem, it's inevitable we will have an external, missional problem.

## **Missional**

Friendship has the power and ability to tell a story—and biblical friendship can tell a story that demonstrates that God came to us in Christ to redeem us for himself. Indeed, as we will discuss later in this book, the ultimate purpose and design of friendship is to point to God and his glory.

Yet sin can quickly make friendship about us, to the exclusion of God. When a non-Christian peers into our friendships, is he or she able to see the outlines of the gospel story, the good news of Jesus Christ? When our friendships exist for our own pleasure, comfort, and relational happiness, rather than a communication of God's love and mercy in the gospel, we're telling the story badly, and we may be telling the wrong story altogether.

## **Beyond the Fall**

We see from Genesis 3 how sin affects our ability to be in friendship with one another. From that point the storyline continues downhill. In Genesis 4, Adam and Eve's son Cain murders his younger brother Abel in jealousy and rebellion. In just two chapters we have moved from a magnificent vision of loving relationships and intimate friendship to the petty, cold-blooded murder of a sibling.

Fast-forward to the New Testament. Into this mess

of broken relationships, God sends his one and only Son to reconcile and redeem a people for himself. Through his perfect life and righteousness, Jesus stands *in* our place, condemned *for* our sin, thus paving the way to the Father for all who will believe and confess his name. Mankind, once hopelessly alienated and separated from God because of sin, can now be brought near to God through his perfect Son, Jesus.

We are stunned to hear Jesus' words to the disciples in John 15:13–15, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends."

Let that sink in. Jesus calls you his friend.

This is more than enough to overflow our hearts. The One in whom the fullness of God dwells calls you and me *friends*. The One who became flesh and dwelt among us, living a perfect life on our behalf, calls you and me *friends*. Jesus, through his death on the cross, *be-friends* us so we can now go and *be* friends with others. I love how Steve Timmis puts it, "At the cross, the Godhead's friendship was ruptured so that our friendship could be restored."<sup>7</sup> The eternal communion, fellowship, and friendship, which the Godhead enjoyed for eternity past, were temporarily broken at the cross. In that breaking, as God poured out his wrath on Jesus, he restored the friendship that had been broken by our sin.

This is what makes biblical friendship distinct from the world's sentimental approximations: Jesus at the

center. For not only is he the center, he also gives us the power to follow his example and befriend others. This embodied friendship, centered on Jesus, flows out into every area of life. Friendship ceases to be primarily something we *do*, and instead it transforms into something we *become* as we follow Christ.

When we embody biblical friendship, we bear Jesus' image, his character, his priorities, and his glory. No longer will our friendships be situated merely around common circumstances or interests, but will instead become an embodied commitment to live out the image of God together in every area of our life.

In his *Confessions*, the great theologian Augustine writes of a dear friend he had before he came to faith in Christ. Although Augustine and his friend were very close, he makes the distinction that true friendship must have Christ at the center, "No friends are true friends unless you, my God, bind them fast to one another through that love which is sown in our heart by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."<sup>8</sup>

Centuries later, a Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx, would echo this when he wrote his famous treatise on friendship, "And so in friendship are joined honor and charm, truth and joy, sweetness and good-will, affection and action. And all these take their beginning from Christ, advance through Christ, and are perfected in Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Following in Augustine and Aelred's footsteps, Keller argues forcefully as well for Christ-centered friendship,

Friendship is only possible when there is a common vision and passion. . . For believers in Christ, despite enormous differences in class, temperament, culture, race, sensibility, and personal history, there is an underlying commonality that is more powerful than them all. This is not so much a “thread” as an indestructible steel cable.<sup>10</sup>

Augustine, Aelred, and Keller all recognize this transcendent element of a biblically shaped and embodied friendship: it all flows from our faith in Christ.

## **Biblical Friendship Defined**

So then, for the purposes of this book, what do I actually mean when I use the phrase “biblical friendship”? In the fewest possible words, I mean that biblical friendship is explicitly Christ-centered. Here’s the same idea, with a bit more elaboration:

*Biblical friendship exists when two or more people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, pursue him and his kingdom with intentionality and vulnerability. Rather than serving as an end in itself, biblical friendship serves primarily to bring glory to Christ, who brought us into friendship with the Father. It is indispensable to the work of the gospel in the earth, and an essential element of what God created us for.*

I hope you find that both inspiring and at least a little bit intimidating. For the remainder of this book we will

journey together to unpack biblical friendship: what it is not, what it looks like, how it is formed, what threatens it, and how to recognize if it's working.

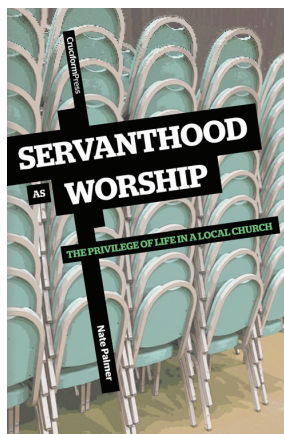
We all know that even our best efforts at friendship can go wrong. We have all been burned, rejected, cast off, and ignored by people whom we would really like to know better. Sometimes, in the spirit of biblical friendship, our best efforts to be vulnerable and transparent only leave us more lonely and empty than before.

But let me encourage you to hear me out. Allow this book to round out and inform your understanding of biblical friendship. I believe that as we unpack biblical friendship together, your understanding of it can be richly expanded and your practice of it can be revolutionized.

As the first and most important step, be encouraged in your friendship with Jesus Christ. Our Savior died for you so he could call *you* a friend! He is *the* faithful friend, the supreme friend. So cry out to him. Ask for the ability to understand biblical friendship better, and as a result to receive the grace and courage to pursue others with a glad heart—even if your attempts at biblical friendship sometimes go unrequited. As we come to realize what biblical friendship really is, we can become far better at pursuing others, drawing them closer to Christ and the church, even as we grow in our ability to better open ourselves up to others.

## ***Dig Deeper***

1. How would you describe the difference between fellowship and friendship? What have you learned from this chapter that helps you distinguish the two?
2. In what ways can your friendships become more Christ-centered? What would that look like practically?
3. As you seek deeper, more biblical friendships, what are some fears or anxieties you have?
4. Write out a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for befriending you through Jesus Christ.



## Servanthood as Worship

The Privilege of Life in a Local Church

by Nate Palmer

**We [serve] because he first [served] us. - 1 John 1:19 [sort of]**

**What ever happened to servant-hood? Here is a biblical presentation of our calling to serve in the church, motivated by the grace that is ours in the gospel.**

[bit.ly/Srvnt](http://bit.ly/Srvnt)

"In an age where the church can be likened to Cinderella - beautiful, but largely ignored and forgotten - Nate Palmer's brief book forces us to rethink both the church and our relationship to her. In an age where egocentrism ensures we sing, 'O say, can you see - what's in it for me?' on a weekly basis, Palmer forces us to say instead, 'How can I best serve the church?' Looking at the needs of others rather than one's own is possibly the most serious deficiency in the church today. Reading this book will help redress the deficiency. I heartily recommend it."

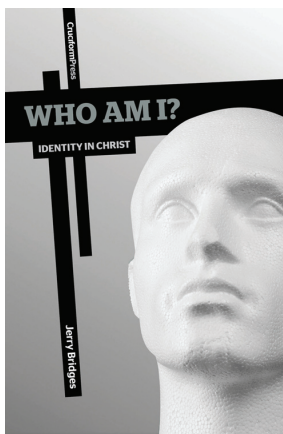
***Derek W.H. Thomas, Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)***

"Think of these pages as a handbook. It contains a sustainable, practical vision for serving in the local church that is powered by grace. Along the way, you'll get a mini theological education."

***Justin Buzzard, pastor, San Francisco Bay Area, Buzzard Blog***

"In our media-crazed, me-first culture, the art of the basin and the towel has been shoved off onto those who get paid to serve - certainly a call to serve in humility can't be God's will for all of us, or could it? Nate Palmer gets at the heart of our resistance.. I strongly recommend this book."

***Elyse Fitzpatrick, author of Because He Loves Me***



## Who Am I?

Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

**Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.**

[bit.ly/WHOAMI](http://bit.ly/WHOAMI)

"Jerry Bridges' gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian's true identity in Christ."

***J.I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology***

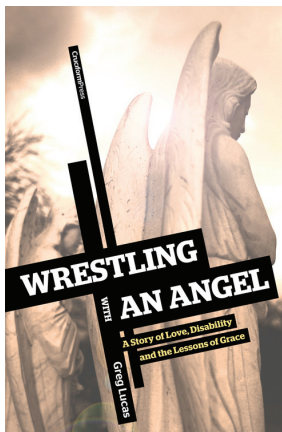
"I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book."

***R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible***

"*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians."

***Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC***





## [Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability  
and the Lessons of Grace

by Greg Lucas

**The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called “a touchstone book of my life,” and “alternately hilarious and heartbreaking,” a book that “turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before.”**

[bit.ly/CPWrestle](http://bit.ly/CPWrestle)

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’ – and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

***Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible***

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

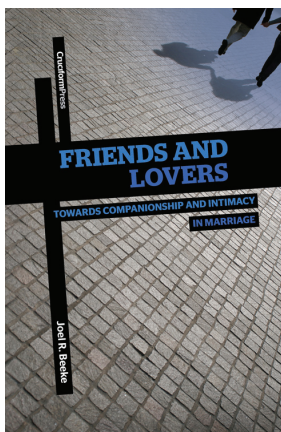
***Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International***

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

***David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary***

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

***Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper***



## Friends and Lovers

Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage

by Joel R. Beeke

**Marriage is for God's glory and our good.**

**The secret?... Intimate Christian companionship.**

[bit.ly/FriendsAnd](http://bit.ly/FriendsAnd)

"A book about love, marriage, and sex from Joel Beeke that is surprisingly candid yet without a trace of smuttiness. Fresh and refreshingly straightforward, this is the best book of its kind."

***Derek WH Thomas, Visiting Professor, Reformed Theo. Sem.***

"Marriage is hard work. And wonderful. And sometimes, it's both at the same time. *Friends and Lovers* is like a personal mentoring session on marriage with a man whose heart is devoted to seeing Christ honored in how we love each other as husbands and wives. It's full of practical wisdom and grace. A delight."

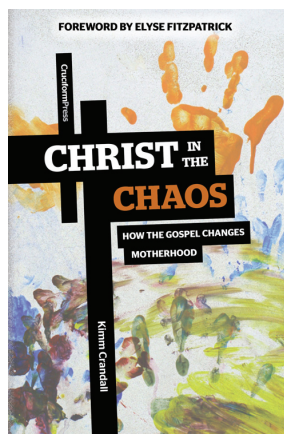
***Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today***

"By laying the theological, emotional, social, and spiritual foundations of marriage before heading to the bedroom, Joel Beeke provides a healthy corrective to the excessive and obsessive sex-focus of our generation and even of some pastors. But, thankfully, he also goes on to provide wise, practical, down-to-earth direction for couples wanting to discover or recover physical intimacy that will both satisfy themselves and honor God."

***Dr. David Murray, Professor, Puritan Reformed Theo. Sem.***

"There is no better book than this to renew the affection of happy marriage."

***Geoffrey Thomas, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Wales***



## [Christ in the Chaos](#)

How the Gospel Changes  
Motherhood

by Kimm Crandall

**MOMS: Stop comparing yourself to others. Stop striving to meet false expectations. Stop thinking your performance dictates your worth.**

**Look to the gospel for rest, joy, sufficiency, identity, and motivation.**

[bit.ly/Christ-in](http://bit.ly/Christ-in)

“Although Kimm Crandall’s message would revive any soul longing for the breath of the gospel of grace, I am especially eager to recommend this book to that heart who strives to know God and to make him known to the little ones who call her ‘Momma.’ Kimm is a candid and gracious fellow sojourner, faithfully pointing to God’s immeasurable steadfast love and grace in the midst of our mess.”

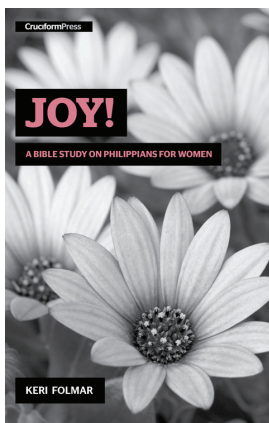
***Lauren Chandler, wife of Matt Chandler (pastor of The Village Church), mother of three, writer, singer, and speaker***

“What an amazingly wild and wise, disruptive and delighting, freeing and focusing book. Kimm’s book is for every parent willing to take the stewardship of children and the riches of the gospel seriously. This is one of the most helpful and encouraging books on parenting I’ve read in the past twenty years. This will be a book you will want to give to parents, to-be parents, and grandparents.”

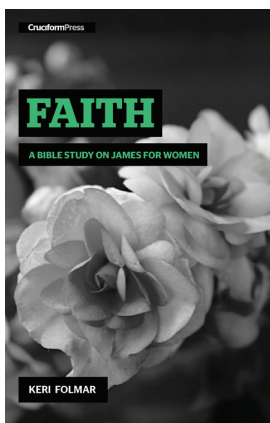
***Scotty Smith, author; Founding Pastor, Christ Community Church***

“Kimm Crandall has discovered that chaos can be the perfect context in which to experience God’s liberating grace. She is a wise, practical, gospel-drenched guide for anyone navigating through the wearisome terrain of parenting.”

***Tullian Tchividjian, author; Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church***



[bit.ly/JoyStudy](http://bit.ly/JoyStudy)



[bit.ly/FaithStudy](http://bit.ly/FaithStudy)

## Inductive Bible studies for women by Keri Folmar endorsed by..

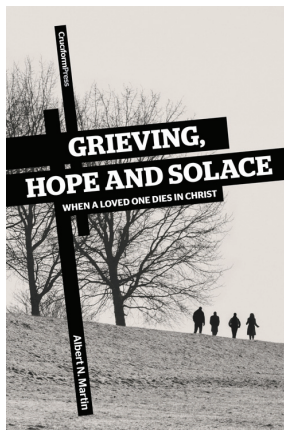
**Kathleen Nielson** is author of the *Living Word Bible Studies*; Director of Women's Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; and wife of Niel, who served as President of Covenant College from 2002 to 2012.

**Diane Schreiner** – wife of professor, author, and pastor Tom Schreiner, and mother of four grown children – has led women's Bible studies for more than 20 years.

**Connie Dever** is author of *The Praise Factory* children's ministry curriculum and wife of Pastor Mark Dever, President of 9 Marks Ministries

**Kristie Anyabwile**, holds a history degree from NC State University, and is married to Thabiti, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Grand Cayman, and a Council Member for The Gospel Coalition.

**Gloria Furman** is a pastor's wife in the Middle East and author of *Glimpses of Grace* and *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*.



## [Grieving, Hope and Solace](#)

When a Loved One Dies in Christ

by Albert N. Martin

**There is comfort for the grief.  
There are answers to the questions.  
The Bible does offer hope, solace,  
healing, and confidence.**

**Pastor Albert Martin has been  
there.**

[bit.ly/GriefHope](https://bit.ly/GriefHope)

“This tender book by a much-loved pastor, written after the death of his beloved wife, offers comfort to those in tears. A rare guidebook to teach us how to grieve with godliness, it is relevant to us all – if not for today, then no doubt for tomorrow.”

***Maurice Roberts, former editor, Banner of Truth magazine***

“Albert N. Martin is a seasoned pastor, skilled teacher, and gifted writer who has given us a priceless treasure in this book. All who read these pages will, unquestionably, be pointed to Christ and find themselves greatly helped.”

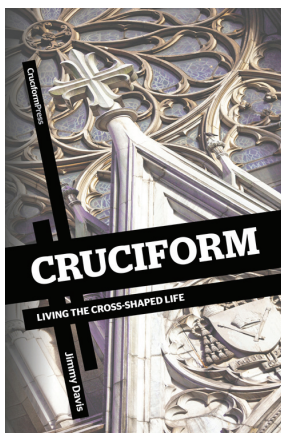
***Steve Lawson, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, AL***

“Like turning the corner and being met by a glorious moonrise, or discovering a painter or musician who touches us in the deepest recesses of our being—this little book by Pastor Al Martin has been such an experience for me. Whether you are a pastor or counselor, one who is experiencing the pangs of grief, or a member of the church who wants to be useful to others, you need to read this book.”

***Joseph Pipa, President, Greenville Presbyterian Theo. Sem.***

“Personal tenderness and biblical teaching in a sweet book of comfort. Buy it and give it away, but make sure to get a copy for yourself.”

***Dr. Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theo. Sem.***



## Cruciform

Living the Cross-Shaped Life

by Jimmy Davis

**This is the shape of the gospel.**

[bit.ly/CrucBK](https://bit.ly/CrucBK)

“Jimmy Davis loves the cross. This little book will open your heart up to see how the cross is the center of all of life. Well done.”

— **Paul Miller, Director of seeJesus.net, author of *A Praying Life***

“Jimmy Davis shows us how to cut through the fog of contemporary Christian thinking to recover the Savior’s plan for our lives.”

***T.M. Moore, Dean, Chuck Colson’s Centurions Program***

“Jimmy shows from personal experience how a lack of passion and purpose, focus and fervor, compassion and conviction, is always due to distance from the now-power of the gospel. I pray that through this book you will rediscover the beauty and brilliance of the gospel in brand new ways.”

***Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church***

“*Cruciform* is a theologically grounded and redemptively freeing picture of a life spent boasting in the cross of Jesus.”

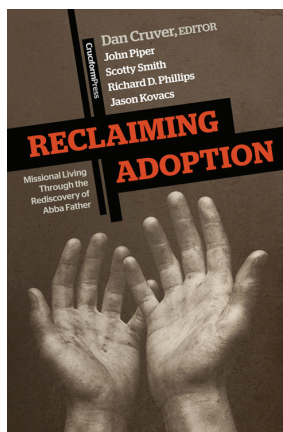
***Scotty Smith, Christ Community Church***

“This book will be a help to everyone struggling with ‘Why, God?’ I believe every person planning for, and serving, in a place of Christian ministry should read this book.”

***Dr. Brian Richardson, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***

“This is a terrific book for those breakfast discipleship groups. It is the next one I am going to use.”

***Dr. William E. Brown, President, Cedarville University***



## Reclaiming Adoption

Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father

Dan Cruver, Editor  
John Piper, Scotty Smith  
Richard D. Phillips, Jason Kovacs

[bit.ly/AdoptBK](http://bit.ly/AdoptBK)

“There is no greater need in our day than theological clarity. Dan has brought us near to God’s heart. As you read this book, you will sense the need to embrace your own acceptance as God’s adopted child.”

**-Darrin Patrick, Pastor and author**

“I can’t recall ever hearing about, much less reading, a book like this before. Simply put, this remarkable volume fills a much-needed gap in our understanding of what the Bible says both about God’s adoption of us and our adoption of others. I highly recommend it.”

***Sam Storms, Author of The Singing God: Discover the Joy of Being Enjoyed by God***

“The authors writing here are some of the most fearless thinkers and activists in the Christian orphan care movement. Read. Be empowered. And then join Jesus for the orphans of the world.”

***Russell D. Moore, Pastor and author of Adopted for Life***

“With spiritual insight and effective teaching, *Reclaiming Adoption* will help believers better understand our place with Christ and work in his kingdom.”

***Ed Stetzer, President, LifeWay Research***

“Something like...a revival, is happening right now in evangelical theology....it may have the momentum to reinvigorate evangelical systematic theology....The most promising sign I’ve seen so far is the new book *Reclaiming Adoption*.”

***Fred Sanders, Ph.D., Biola University***