

Relationships: Real & Restored, Pt 1

Friendship | Proverbs

Spence Shelton, August 28, 2016

Intro to series

Sermon INTRO – NEXT WEEK ONE SERVICE AT 9am. WHY? FACILITY.

For the next 7 weeks we are going to talk about the important relationships in our life. We are calling the series Relationships: Real and Restored. Here's why. First off we gotta talk about relationships like they really are. The great thing about the bible, it is very gritty and real. And so my hope is that for 7 weeks we will be real with each other. That's a big thing for me to ask I know. Don't worry, if you are new I'm not asking you to do a share time up here or something. But I want you to be real with yourself and maybe a couple of friends. I want to be real about how all of our relationships have problems. I want to be real about how powerful relationships are in your life. Think about it. If I ask you why you are the way you are, you will probably list off a series of people who influenced you and moments where they left their mark on your life. Relationships are real. I'm going to try and be real with you. I always try to be

but I imagine I'll get into that TMI realm a few times. That's why Courtney is reviewing messages for this series.

We are also going to talk a whole lot about hope. Because some of you need to know there is hope. Your marriage has lost its fire and you are just roommates & parenting partners. You need hope. Or you are struggling to build real friendships and you need hope as you navigate making those friendships that will shape your future. Your kids are getting to the age where you can't control them and it frightens you. You need hope. You are single right now and while your instagram feed makes it look like you got the best life with the best SQUAD EVER, you might battle loneliness and need hope! And listen, some of you are suffering because you've experienced a break in a relationship. Maybe recently, maybe a long time ago. That's why we are saying real...and restored. Not that every relationship will be restored to the way it was, but that God promises restoration for you. Hope for you. In fact God promises there is a love so powerful it can lift you from that brokenness. It can heal you from it. It can restore you. I'm nervous and so excited about these next few weeks. Because somebody is going come face to face with real stuff as God's word talks right into your situation. And then you are going to leave here with hope. Hope like you've never had before. And I get TO THE MOON excited about that.

Hey one thing about this series. Normally when we preach we take a book of the bible and start at chapter 1 verse 1 and walk through it verse by verse. That's just how we roll.

During this series however I'm going to show you another way to learn from God's word. See the bible is one consistent book and there is value sometimes in zooming out and looking at what the whole bible says about a particular subject. We'll basically grab ahold of a thread that starts at the beginning and follow it through the pages of scripture. Today we'll start in genesis, hit a couple OT spots, the gospels, and Hebrews. We could go all the way to Revelation though. So, a little bit different style for a few weeks but hopefully will help you see the great consistency of the bible and the big truths that run through it. Truths God is communicating to us about relationships.

Today we are going to take a look at friendship. Couple of reasons.

First, friendship is a foundational type of relationship that others are built on. So if we can get our heads around friendship it will set the stage for us to grow in other relationships. In one sense, the best thing I can say to you about dating, singleness, marriage, and even parenting is for you to learn to apply what God says about friendship to your life. If you do that, you are half-way there.

Second, If this series goes as I hope it does, its going to get personal in some spaces. And you are going to need some friends in the trenches with you to work this stuff out with. Like "ohhh, I think after learning what God says about dating I shouldn't be dating that guy." You need a friend to say that to. Who can say "YUP. Dump the Chump." So we gotta start with some friendship.

Today's sermon: Friendship. Titled: **Why We all wanted to be in the cast of FRIENDS.**

On May 6 2004 the final episode of the TV show "Friends" (show friends image) aired on NBC. It was the final chapter in a story about 6 friends in NY that captured America's hearts. 65.9 million people watched that night, making that episode the most watched tv series episode since that day, and the 4th most watched of all time. In fact it was the most watched since May 14 1998 when the final episode of Seinfeld aired and 76 million people watched. A show about the adventures of 4 friends in NYC. Which is the 3rd most watched show ever. #2 - The final episode of Cheers on May 20th 1993 with 84.4 million viewers. A show about the lives of a group of friends who hung out at a bar in Boston. #1? February 28, 1983 105.9 million people watched the final episode of...MASH.. Which was a show about 4 people in the same army regiment surviving *together*. At least that's what my dad told me. I was 6 months old so my parents didn't let me stay up.

Here's my point - The TV executives know something about their viewers. We love stories that we feel like we can see ourselves in. There are tests online where you can figure out which FRIENDS character you are. (yes I took a test this week and no I'm not telling you.) We want to put ourselves into these fictional friendships and even interpret our real lives through the lens of those stories because we instinctively desire friendships. We want friendships so close that no matter what comes at us we've got a group of

people in our corner who will love us, care for us, and fight for us.

And these fictional shows have simply run with a timeless truth that has been staring at us from the pages of the bible for thousands of years. We were created to run through this life with some friends. So I want to show you from the bible

1. Why friendship is a big deal in the bible
2. How to know a real friend from a loser
3. Where to get started

BTW – it shouldn't surprise you that I have one big goal today in all of this: to convince you from God's word that you need to go get some Jesus loving friends. We'll talk more about how. First,

Why the bible makes a big deal about friendship

The first chapter of the bible points to God's purpose for friendship. Genesis 1.26

[26] Then God said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness."

See according to the bible humans were designed in the image of a God who exists eternally as one being in 3 persons. Which means God has existed, in a sense, eternally as a loving community of friends. He created us not

because he was lonely, but so that he could share his love with us. So when we experience friendship we are experiencing a dimension of God we cannot if we are alone and vice versa without friendship we live unlike God created us to be.

In fact, the first thing that is not good in the bible is Genesis 2 when creation is perfect but man is alone. God says its not good. He needs a helper. He needs community. So he gives naked Adam a friend. Naked eve. First nudist colony. But then he looks at them together and says...this is very good. Now that there are two people they can give and receive love just like the members of the trinity.

But then, Genesis 3...mankind sins. And when sin enters the world it creates a rift in everything, including our relationships. In fact, the rest of the series we will come back to this point. The entrance of sin into relationships means relationships will never function fully as they should. Because when sin entered the world we went back into isolation. We went back to protecting our own interests and we put distance between ourselves and others. And the thread through the whole OT is conflict, brief moments of relational harmony, followed by more conflict. Conflict within God's people and conflict between God's people and other nations. But the exception is proverbs. Proverbs keeps the friendship thread and we are going to come back to that in just a moment.

But then Jesus comes along, and one of his primary goals is restoring friendships between one another and between us and God. In fact, Jesus is going to say in John 13:34-35 the way people will know that you are my disciples “by your love for one another.”

Jesus is saying the distinguishing characteristic of his people: they are great friends with each other. Their friendship is built on a certain kind of love. A self-less love that Jesus describes in John 15.13... **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.** Jesus was teaching them about his love for them and the word he used to describe what his relationship to his followers would be...is friend. Friend.

Here’s what I’m getting at. Why does the bible, from beginning to end, make such a big deal out of friendship?

Friendship shows you a side of God you can’t see by yourself

That’s the purpose of friendship. Don’t sleep on this. God put friends in your life to teach you about God. *I can see your wheels churning on a couple of friends like...really? That guy?* But listen God creates everyone differently. Some of you are extroverts. You love this sermon. Some of you are introverts. You hate this. You think of friends as a necessary evil and just want to go read a book. I’m proud of you today. Way to hang in there. Some of you instinctively care for people. God made you in such a way that you are so thoughtful. In fact it frustrates you how un-thoughtful some of us are. God made others of you to be dreamers who

inspire people to have hope in what God is doing in their lives. Some of you are a calming presence in your friends life. Some of you find drama in anything. Can be walking to class, some other girl looks in your general direction a second too long and you are all up in arms like “THAT GIRL WAS LOOKING AT ME AND I THINK SHE WANTS TO FIGHT ME SQUAD BETTER ASSEMBLE.” People

Listen there are 58 different “one another” commands in the new testament. Each one is an expression of the love that we get from Christ. And God created us differently so that when we look to show the love of Christ to our friends The character of God will shine through each of us differently. So while God has wired you to display his glory in some ways, he’s wired others to do it other ways.

Jesus says the place where you can experience the fullest tangible expression of the character of God everyday is inside of the church. Where other people who have received the love of Christ are now loving others like they’ve been loved by God. That’s what the church is. Not an audience, but a community of friends who are showing the love of Christ these 58 different ways. And when we participate in that, we see a fuller picture of the character of God. The purpose of friendship is to be a tangible expression of the character of God and his love for you. We’ll dig more on that in a second. There a couple more core purposes for friendship. A couple more reasons the bible makes such a big deal about it.

Two anchor verses in proverbs that the book builds its case for friendship on. First:

Proverbs 13.20 - Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Here is what Solomon is saying and ya'll it is SO TRUE. It is true at 6, 16, 36, and 60. You will become like your friends. To say it another way

Your current friends are the future you.

Think about the 3-5 people you hang around the most. Take a second, make a list. Got it? Those are the people you will be like in a couple years. In fact, a study from the new England journal of medicine put forward a thesis that the influence of your friends is so powerful it will quite literally shape you. Their study showed an increase of nearly 60 percent in the risk for obesity among people whose friends gained weight.¹ Friends get fat...you will either need to get new friends or new pants.

Friendship is powerful! Years ago scientists were trying to decide why fish swam in schools. They took one fish and did a partial lobotomy on it because they had isolated the part of the brain that caused the fish to swim in schools. They put the fish back in the water. He could still

1

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMSa066082> accessed 8.24.2016

swim and he swam off not in a school but by himself. Do you what happened? The rest of the fish followed that one lone fish. Here is a fish without brains and everyone is following him. Sounds about like High School doesn't it? A person with partial brain function puts a piercing in their nose and though its painful & senseless, everybody else starts doing it. Or, a fellow church staff member says "lets do the evil Russian push-up program" and the whole staff goes "YEAH!" only to find ourselves in immense pectoral anguish for the next few days.

Like we said earlier God designed you to go through life in the company of other people. And so the **quality** of the people you go through life with...matter. A lot. **Your current friends are the future you.**

You can say, "I'm not influenced by peer pressure, I'm not going to bend to my friends, I make my own decisions..." and that is certainly important. Or, and this is just as important, you can get new friends around yourself so that the natural, internal gravity pulling you to be like the people around you is going the right direction. This is what Proverbs is saying..."He who walks with wise men will be wise; but the friend of fools shall be destroyed."

Now right about here some of you will say, "but yeah Spence haven't you been telling us all along to be friends with people who are not Christians? Won't they naturally act like non-Christians? Are you telling me to cut them out?"

No. Quite the opposite. Watch this I'm saying friends influence you. So the closer the friend is to you, the more substantial the influence. Think of it like concentric circles. Closest friends should be those who will push you to grow closer to God. This is probably 3-5 people, your bros or your squad or your pack or whatever adjective to describe a grouping of people you choose. There is a passage in the bible that says do not be unequally yoked to an unbeliever. Primary application is marriage but it applies to all friendships too. Don't be tightly tied to a non-believer because they will pull you in the wrong direction.

Next layer – I think of my community group and my church family. I want to know everyone well but we are all by and large going in the same direction. I want the majority of those people to be on the same page as me with what matters most.

Outer ring – People who I enjoy, people I am friends with and can hang with them without worry they will pull me away from God. Now, here's the thing. There SHOULD be non-Christians in this outer circle. Because God keeps us in this world to share the hope of Christ with them. And as I pray for every one of my friends in this group, I pray that I get to introduce them to this second ring. That's why our community groups are open to non-Christians. We want them to experience the body of Christ. Some of you are not believers and you've been invited into that group because these people care about you and hope you will see the love of God for you. They aren't forcing it on you & you are NOT

a project to them. They like hanging with you and you like them. Maybe you came to church because the friend group invited you I don't know. And what happens often is God will then bring that non-Christian to faith. And that friend becomes a family member. Becomes really close to you. And we celebrate it. And that's why we go crazy when people get baptized around here. Because a friend now feels like a brother or a sister. Because they share what matters most.

And if you are here and you are not a Christian, your friend that brought you is praying that will happen in your life. Again, not because you are a project. That's not how we roll. It's because they care for you and want you to share in what matters most to them.

Ok here's one other reason friendship is such a big deal in the bible.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Solomon is saying:

Friends save us from self-destruction

Here's the deal: all of us need a friend or two who can point out our blind spots. They can look us in the face and say man, you are about to blow it! See it's not that you always intend to make terrible self-destructive decisions. It's that

you have blind spots, which lead you to make bad decisions even with good intentions. For example: If you intend to get to the mountains, but get on 85 N, you are not getting there. Doesn't matter what you intended to do. You are on the wrong road. Everybody has blind spots! That's why God gives you friends. To help you see those blind spots. To which you say, "I don't have any blind spots I know of." Of course you don't. Their not "seen spots" they are blind spots.

STORY? (Angry reaction in my job – friend saved me from sending stupid email. I sent it to HIM. He said...you got that out? Good. Now trash it, take a day off, and stop whining. Most likely saved me from REALLY burning a bridge with my boss. I cooled off and handled it so much better than I would have. FRIEND saved my job.)

If you are really honest with yourself, and I hope you will be throughout this series, you will we are less than perfect. I've been a Christian for 19 years and I still sin. Can you believe that? 19 years and I am not sinless! Guess what, you never will be. And here's the thing. When that sin is left unchecked, it starts to grow confidence. It gets bolder and bolder all while telling you "its no big deal." Saw this with Samson last week. One day you will wake up with your life completely destroyed by sin. The way David Powlison said it is that "things in a secret garden always grow mutant."

This aspect of friendship, saving each other from self-destruction, runs throughout scripture. Samuel saves

David, Jesus rebukes Peter, the apostles rebuke each other. 1 Timothy 3.16-17 – purpose of the bible is teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness. It's a friendship manual. We can look at each other and say...look follow this. One place it pops really loudly:

Hebrews 3.12-14 – [12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

See sin hardens our hearts. Little by little. And eventually our hearts can become so tough we cannot hear the spirit of God calling us away from sin and back to God. The friend is the one with the hammer who breaks up that hard heart with the words of Christ. Nobody is excluded here. The longer I'm in pastoral ministry the more sad stories I hear of pastors who have some moral failure that causes them to lose their job & often their families. And people want to speculate all kinds of reasons. But there is usually one thing in common: They had isolated themselves from everyone around them. Things in a secret garden always grow mutant.

I've got several men in my life with an unrestricted hunting license to go after sin in my life and call me away from it. I don't want to be a statistic.

YOU NEED TO TAKE THAT STEP. YOU NEED SOME PEOPLE YOU ISSUE A HUNTING LICENSE TO. Not your spouse. A

friend, of same gender, who you give full access to. And here's the thing: when they speak...you gotta listen!

Had a close friend a few years back. He believed in friendship like we are talking about. But then a girl came along he wanted to marry. She was great but they were toxic for each other. And so he asked...think I should marry her? I said nope. He went to another friend. Friend said nope. 20 other friends. Nope. Parents. Nope. Yet he still got engaged to her. Twice. And they broke it off twice. Just a mess. And all along everyone close to him said "nope." But he kept saying "you just don't understand. If you fully understood our relationship." NOPE! Dude had blinders. EVERYBODY ELSE could see. He was blind. And you might be too. You need some friends who will pull you away from destruction. And you need to LISTEN when they try to. Or you are wasting their time and yours.

This is especially true for guys. Not exclusively of course, but a survey of 2.5 million by the Movember Foundation last fall revealed that 51% of men have two or fewer friends. And 1 in 8 said they have zero friends at all.²

Don't be a statistic. Get some friends who you can ride or die with.

² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/active/mens-health/11996473/2.5-million-men-have-no-close-friends.html> accessed 8.24.2016

That's what friendship does. True friends show you more of who God is, they push you closer to who God is calling you to be, and when you are slipping they pull you back. Hopefully you see why it's such a big deal. Now let me show you how the bible describes a true friend.

2. What to look for in a true friend

Ok, the rest of our time I want to tell you what to look for in a good friend. And at the same time show you what kind of friend God calls you to be. And if this seems elementary, good. It is. The bible isn't trying to hide what good friendship looks like. It's trying to make it very obvious.

But friendship just seems harder as an adult right? As 5 year old it was easy. It was all based on proximity and zero pride. Look around the sandbox, see whoever is closest, go over and say, "Hey, you want to be my friend?" "Yes." Awesome. Friends job – play. No emotional awareness needed. If you can roll a toy dump truck, you will be my best friend. "Hey mom this is my friend!" "What's his name?" "I don't know. But we are friends."

But the older you get, the more awkward friending is. You can't be close with as many people, and your friends start to shape you more and more like we've talked about. So lets look at how to build really good friendships.

The friend you need is life giving to you

I hope this is obvious but you need the kind of friend, and more importantly you need to be the kind of friend, who gives life to the people you are around. The book of acts paints a picture of the first believers. They spent time together and being together lifted their spirits.

Acts 2.46 - [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

Friendship should be joyful. It should be fun! Good friends seek to stir the joy of others in the big and in the small things of life. They need to encourage you in your faith, and then be someone you can share the silly things of life.

Girls Who is the girl who is counting down with you the days until Gilmore Girls comes back on to Netflix...
- Or who is the guy you can secretly get hyped about...Gilmore Girls coming back onto Netflix? It's not me Charlie. Stop asking.

God created you to laugh & to smile. One of my favorite new friends is Scott Urbanek because the guy fills every room he's in with laughter. He's not just a goofball. He's an encourager. You got a friend like that? You always feel uplifted after hanging with them? God made that guy to make people feel the joy of God. God is the source of joy and through friendship you should experience his life-giving joy.

Action step this week: how can I encourage my friend this week?

Next thing to look for in a friend comes from Proverbs.

Proverbs 27.10 – Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.

Your “brother” may be your closest friend, the guy you can share anything with. He gives incredible counsel and always looks out for you. But if he's 100 miles away, he's actually not as valuable as a guy you met six weeks ago in your community group.

The friend you need is available

And part of that means he or she lives nearby. The reason is, Discipleship happens in flesh-and-blood relationships. In embodied community. I have good friends in Raleigh, TN, Boston and a couple other spots. I love those guys, but they simply can't speak into my life like the people here at Mercy who see me day in and day out. That's true for all of us. Your friend from college isn't with you. He can't help you figure out if you're dating the right person because he only hears about that person the way you describe her. He won't see if you've been depressed for a couple weeks. He can't pick up on when you seem distant or angry or scared. The only way someone can see those

things is if they're in your living room, your gym, or your office.

God never intended any of us to live alone. Deep friendships with people you live and work and go to church with is a part of discipleship. You can read a thousand books about Christian discipleship, but nothing can replace the available insight of someone who knows you. The people you "do life with" will be Jesus' hands and feet to you—warning you when you're making foolish decisions, comforting you when you're hurting, and encouraging you when you're doubting. A neighbor who is nearby can apply the gospel like no one else.

So collectively Mercy Church, we gotta stop comparing our new friends to our old ones, frustrated because they don't measure up. We gotta stop clinging to some distorted form of 'community' that is primarily through social media and texting. We need to man up or woman up (that a thing?) and dive in to the imperfect, unsure friendships God has put in front of us right here and right now.

Available means available. I call, you answer. I once got a hernia preaching at a conference out of state. Cause I was feeling it. I'll never forget my friend Alex Thomas meeting me at the airport at 11:30 that night to take me to the emergency room. Available. Some of you want to be good friends but only from 7-9 on Thursday night. Not how friendship works. You must build your calendar around your friends not your friends around your calendar.

Here's the next thing to look for

Proverbs 17.7 – A friend loves at **all** times, and a brother is born for adversity.

The friend you need cares for you when life falls apart

A friend doesn't just care about you when it is convenient for them. Doesn't just care for you when it benefits them. It's not the person who texts "I'm praying for you." It's the person who shows up at your door and says lets get through this together. My favorite description of this aspect of friendship is in another book Solomon wrote called Ecclesiastes. He has an effective albeit culturally odd way of explaining it: Ecclesiastes 4.9-11

[9] Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. [10] For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! [11] Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

Translation: When you lie down in the cold moments of life...you need somebody to spoon with. Metaphorically speaking. You know what I'm saying? Not someone who will send a sad face emoji. Someone who will be real and present. I need deep, real friendships with people who will pull me through that cold time.

We provide a vehicle for that here at Mercy. Not for spooning, but to begin building real friendships.

Community groups. Get in one. Coming back to that in a minute.

- We had friends a few years ago. Son was born, lived a day, died. That was big. Courtney remembers laying with that mom and crying together. Then, 8 months after that, we lost a baby in miscarriage. And she was over at our house crying with Courtney. The guy, he and I had a spot on a warehouse rooftop where we snuck lounge chairs to and drank orange cream soda while we talked through big stuff.

When life falls apart, who is going to verbalize and display the compassion and care of Christ to you? And are you willing to get out of your comfort zone to be that kind of friend?

In that vein here is our last one:

Proverbs 24.26 – Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

I know what you are thinking...spooning, kissing...No bueno Spence. Kisses the lips in that day & culture was a show of respect and affection.

The friend you need speaks truth to you

I won't spend much time on this because I already talked about it a little earlier but if you have a close friend who has never called you out on anything, they may not be your friend. You are not perfect. When someone says, "Yeah we are close, and yeah I see them making this decision that is going to ruin their life...but, it's just not my business." True friends make it their business. **A friend who will not be**

honest with you is not a true friend.

A pastor named John Wesley had a group of guys he was really honest with. He developed a set of 22 questions they would answer honestly to each other each time they got together. I'm posting those questions on our blog today so you can use those if they help you have these honest conversations. Some less helpful than others but maybe it will give you a good start.

In all of this, I hope it's becoming abundantly clear that if your friends don't know truth, they can't speak it to you. The best thing you can do for your friend is meet with God each morning and then take what you learn from God to them. Bonhoeffer – Christian community – bringers of the gospel to one another. Every one of these things in this list has been simply gospel application. Encouragement, closeness, nearness, truth, - these are all what we receive in the gospel.

Let me say something. As you look at this list of what a real friend is, maybe you fear you may not measure up. And that it's going to be hard for you to be this kind of friend. That's why you must keep your own eyes fixed on Christ. When Jesus was talking with his friends in John 15, that I mentioned earlier, he said, [12] **"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**

The ability to be a friend like Christ comes from experiencing Jesus' friendship towards you. The thread

of friendship in the bible...Jesus is the only complete picture of it.

- Jesus is the friend who shows you fully who God is
- Jesus is the image you can model your life after.
- Jesus is the life-giving friend who gave up his life so that you might have eternal life with God the father.
- Jesus is the friend who is always available. He is nearby. He sticks closer than a brother. In fact he promises his spirit lives inside of every believer.
- Jesus is the friend who speaks truth...you are a sinner who needs saving...but with love...I've come to save you. I love you.

The point of today isn't just to give you some tips on friendship. It's to show you how the gospel empowers your friendships. To show you how necessary it is for you to immerse yourself in the gospel if there is any hope for your friendships.

When you experience this kind of love from Jesus, you will become a good friend. You won't have to use people to get approval or acceptance because you'll have that in Christ. So you can actually give of your own life without needing to get in return.

When people let you down, you won't be hurt as much. Because you will have Christ who never let you down even when you screwed up. You'll be able to forgive and love because you've experienced such forgiveness in Christ.

The way you know you have a real friend is when you are at the same time fully known by them and fully accepted by them. That's how Christ loves you. He sees you for the mess you are and says, "I love you." The gospel is that you are more messed up than you could ever imagine and yet more loved than you ever hoped for. Once you find that identity in Jesus, then you will be the friend God is calling you to be.

So, like I said I want to call you to take a step. That step is into a community group. And I hear your excuses³

- **"I don't have time...its another night of the week..."** Too bad. Based on what I've shared today I don't think you can afford NOT to be in community with Christian friends. Everything else in your life would be radically helped by being in a community with other Christ followers. If nothing else, being in a group takes a whole lot less time than picking up the pieces of a life that's fallen apart in isolation.
- **I don't want people knowing my business...** Here's the deal on this one: God already knows your personal business. If that troubles you less than the idea of a fellow sinner who has baggage of his own knowing your business, you have a huge

³ From Sermon Notes we used in "Friends-R-Us" sermon in the Proverbs "Still Standing" series preached by J.D. Greear at Summit Church in Raleigh Durham NC.

misunderstanding of the holiness of God. If your personal business is sin, the worst thing you can do is keep that junk between you and the devil, hoping God doesn't find out or doesn't care. Plus, nobody is going to ask you about your personal business this week in your group. These are not interrogation groups. To my knowledge waterboarding has never been a part of any community group experience.

- **Guys: "Any form of a group circle is lame. I have no desire to sit around and be vulnerable. Pass the wings and the beer."** Really sensitive to this one because I feel like most churches are designed for women. The praise service sounds like you're singing songs written by One Direction where you invite Jesus to hold you in His arms and blow in your face and then some guy in a sweater vest gets up and sits on a stool and talks about his feelings for a half our and then encourages you to do your quiet time every morning and go to a community group where you can do prayer and share. And I hate that. Church is also for men here at Mercy and community groups are too. We aren't asking you to gush your feelings all over the place, we are asking you to have a friend, and to be a friend. Sharing life together is only "girly" to those men too insecure about their manhood to talk about anything other than sports and beer. **So, if you are afraid its too girly, the truth is you are probably the girly one and need to get in a group so you can learn what being a man really looks like.**

- **"I have kids and can't afford a baby-sitter".** We provide childcare for EVERY community group. Either your group will take care of it at your meeting, or you can use our voucher system where we will reimburse you for a good portion of your childcare expenses each week. We think it is THAT important.

"I had a bad experience with a group in the past." □

Well, obviously if not at Mercy, then you need to try ours. It's like the Mac version of community groups. Doesn't crash as much.

Or, what if we use this biblical understanding of friendship to alter how you look at community group, realizing that God's grace ministers to lame, dysfunctional people of all types, including you. News flash: some people may think you are lame. You probably aren't as cool as you think you are.