

Series: IF YOU WANNA GO UP: You Gotta Go Down

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 27
HANGING AROUND THE RIGHT PEOPLE
Philippians 2:19-30
SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. A little over a week ago, our grand-daughter, Sofia, headed off to JK for her very first day of school! What was strange was seeing her standing in line with 3 other children—all of them wearing face masks. I'm guessing that some of you parents opted out of sending your children back—at least for now. It's scary, isn't it—cause there are **so** many unknowns. -Someone said to me, "The Canadian Government has been scaring us into social isolation for five months—and now they have to **un-scare** us--convince us that being social is **okay!**" Not an easy task! One thing we **do** know—the world will never go back to the **old** normal of March, 2020!

-COVID, along with all the masks, sanitizer and social isolation will pass. It **will** but there's one thing that is **more** dangerous that will still be around. **Peer pressure**. It's the impact other kids have on **your** kids—and how they feel about themselves; what they'll say **yes** to and say **no** to. **Who they hang around with is a BIG deal!**
 - a. Most of us can remember someone we wish we **hadn't** listened to—a group, the mean girls, the cool guys, the person we should **never** have dated or had a crush on. We, like sheep, have strayed away—following someone with a **ba-a-a-ad** influence! Some of you remember words someone said and forgot—but **you NEVER** forgot them! Most us have done things we would've **never** done on our own. **BUT**—but people we wanted to impress pushed us **past** the **inner 'NO'** to '**okay.**' And that '**okay**' opened a door we've never quite been able to shut!

-But this influence **also** works for good. Sometimes **we're** the ones headed in a bad direction—and someone cares enough encourage us—that is, fill us with **fresh courage** to say **NO!** They teach us to be brave and kind--and to laugh!
 - b. Here's what we know. Who you and I spend time with, admire and allow into our hearts will **shape** us. As parents, we're concerned for our children—because of our **own** regrets and shame! I mean, have you ever thought, "**I wish I could do THAT weekend over again!**" Most people, whether or not they believe in God, **want their children to have a center line down their highway!**
 - c. Here's what makes us vulnerable to peer pressure. We are **incurably relational**—because we've been made in the image of a **relational God**. So, **where are we** after this 6 month training course we've been in on, **how to treat other people as if they have cooties that could potentially infect kill you and people you love?**

-There is something we've learned from the POW camps in WW2 and the Vietnam War; people will find ways to connect **even at the risk of torture and death because survival depends on it!** We have been **wired** to live our lives supporting and being supported by friends. And God's plan for us is that we live in a life-giving relationship with him and with others—for all eternity! Remember **cooties?** People don't have **cooties!** We **need** others!

d. In this talk, I want to simply encourage you to make space for—and pursue this life-giving connection. But there are decisions **you** have to make. There's a price to pay--an investment of your life and time and love. Sometimes we just don't know **how!** My starting point is Paul's description of two **very** close friends—and how they brought joy in a very tough time.

2. Paul starts this section talking about how God the Son **descended** into greatness. He became a human—because He wanted to reach and identify with people like you and me. When he started his mission of changing the world—merging Heaven and earth—he started, not with massive, astounding miracles—but **relationships**. He poured himself into 12 men, then 72 people, then 120—then 3000. In 300 years, this movement of ordinary people took down the Roman Empire!

a. And that was **Paul's** plan. When you get to know Paul, you find that he did **nothing** without a team. Paul **and** Barnabas, Paul **and** Silas, Paul **and** Timothy. Not only did **teamwork** make traveling less dangerous, these people gave emotional and spiritual support. See, if you don't have a team—then what you build you're your life dies with **you!**

-What's happening during this pandemic **can't become the model for life!** If you want to follow Jesus and do something great with your life, **that won't happen in isolation!** We **need** others!

b. In the book of Corinthians, Paul spells this out in detail; that Jesus intended that those who follow Him would function like a **body**. A body has many, **many** parts—very different from each other—but all **needing** each other. Put them all together, get them coordinated and helping each other—and amazing things happen.

-Look at your hand for a minute. There are all kinds of hands—big hands that look like a bunch of bananas; delicate hands, hands with fake finger nails, hands with nails bitten right down to the quick.

c. Some of you can text **100 words a minute—or MORE** with those hands. Some of you can do delicate surgery. I knew a woman who successfully performed heart transplants on rats! I'm not sure **why**—but she did!

-But, whatever kind of hands you have--they ain't **nothin'** without a wrist, elbow and shoulder. Without an eye to guide them, they bump into things. Without a vascular system to clean them and keep them filled up with fresh blood--they'd wither.

d. In our world there are a lot of people who would say, “You know, I'm a spiritual person. I don't need to get that junked up with church or being around others!” That may be you. With all due respect—**what is your spirituality about?** Jesus, the most spiritual person who ever lived said that spirituality is not just about you loving God—it's about **loving others as yourself!** Spirituality is **set up** to be strengthened and developed by **being around others**.

-According to this analogy—and I think it's accurate—you can have the most amazing hands on the planet, but by themselves—they're nothing!

I mean, if you saw a hand lying by itself in an aisle at Walmart, would you say, “Wow! What a **gorgeous** hand! I **like** that hand!” No—it would be **gross!**
Parts of a body only work when they’re **connected in vital ways to each other!**

3. And **that’s** why Paul had a team! Let’s just read some of what Paul says about his team—and that will give us some clues about our **own** team, okay?

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. (Philippians 2:19-24 NIV)

-Timothy was Paul’s right-hand man. Because he was in prison, Paul desperately needed Timothy to accomplish his mission. Timothy would go to Philippi, check in with the church there, help them with their faith—based on Paul’s insight—and then come back with an eye-witness account of how they were doing.

-Paul goes on to tell them about Epaphroditus—a leader in the church at Philippi who had been sent to help him—and would be delivering this letter to them.

- a. Let’s talk about Timothy first. Paul had met Timothy when he was either in his teens or early 20s—and spent a lot of time with him—patiently training him, loving him as if he were a son. They were **very** close—and Paul tells us why:

I have no one else like Timothy who genuinely cares for your welfare... (Philippians 2:20 NLT)

-The word Paul uses is **like-souled**. Our word is **soul-mates**. It’s a depth of understanding and connectedness that you find with only a handful of people in a lifetime.

-A **soulmate** is someone who knows what you’re really like—on both your best **and** worst days—but loves you anyway. They don’t just **talk** about loyalty—they **are** loyal to you. You invest in them—they invest in you.

-So. **How does that happen?** Have you ever heard the phrase, **You get what you pay for?** Relationships like this are chiseled out of chunks of time. In their case--seasick on some ship, nursing each other's wounds, bogged down in mud-pits, cranky because of the rain and poor accommodations.

-See the soul is that inner, shy, sensitive part of us that doesn't come out right away --even in extroverts. It stays hidden until it feels safe.

- b Here’s the First clue: If you want to find a soulmate, you will have to **build it into your life!** It will probably involve both pain and vulnerability.

This isn't like **e-Harmony.com** where you take a quiz and then get matched up with your **soulmate** by computer. It will take a number of tries—and you will have to become a trusted person who handle other's souls--their vulnerabilities, their sensitivities, their confidences carefully.

3. There's something else about Paul and Timothy that made their friendship work so well. Notice how Paul describes him:

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone else looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 2:20-21 NIV)

-Think about it for a minute: **Imagine having Paul as your soulmate!** But notice what the connective tissue was: They were both passionate about others--thinking about the interests of others and the interests of Jesus--not just their own!

-What if Timothy had just been dabbling around in what it means to follow Jesus—"Maybe I'm in, maybe I'm not—my girlfriend isn't too crazy about it!" Would he have had a connection with Paul?

-Here's the principle; for **any soulmate relationship** to work, **you need to have a common foundation for life!** And that's true for both friendships **and** marriage! Paul put it like this in one of his letters: **Don't be unequally yoked.** In other words, if you're going to *build a life*, a marriage, a business or a close friendship with someone—there needs to be some common ground as to what is really important in life and what isn't.

- a. There's something else you can see here, too. Paul says,

Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the Gospel. (Philippians 2:22 NIV)

Know what's interesting about Paul and Timothy? There were huge differences in almost **everything**—age, culture, ethnicity and stage of life—and yet they reached a depth of relationship few people find. So here's what we can learn: If you're looking for close friendships, don't limit yourself to people who are the same age, same point in life, or some general profession as you.

- b. When Lori and I first started in ministry, we became friends with an couple named Neal and Lottie. Now, they were older than us **and** our parents—but we grew **very** close—close enough for Neal to kindly rebuke me at times, and for Lottie to teach me her secret fudge recipe--and close enough for us to go on vacation together.

-Neil was kinda like the original Paul Bunyan--this big huge guy who wore flannel shirts, & loved the outdoors. Lottie was pretty, funny, and sassy! They're both gone now, but Lori and I will **never** forget warm and kindness they showed at a critical time of life—and the love we shared even though we were very different!

- c. Here's what I know—and I want you to listen carefully. You don't **find** friends; you **build** friendships. If you want close, life-giving, lasting friendships, that probably won't

happen on a dating website or on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook. You have to invest yourself, flesh and blood and money, in them. ***You get what you pay for!***

4. The other friend Paul talks about here is ***Epaphroditus***. Has anyone here every heard of the hot, steamy, goddess of love and sex, Aphrodite? So, ***Ep-aphroditus*** means, ***charmed by the sex goddess!*** The original ***Prince Charming!*** If I was Paul, I'd have some serious questions about hanging with a guy with ***that*** name!

-They became friends out of ***need***. In the prison system of that day, you didn't have clothes, food or blankets unless friends brought them to you. What the Philippian church did was ***so cool!*** They didn't just sent money—they sent a ***person*** to help Paul—this guy with the strange name. And Epaphroditus laid his life on the line for this mission. Paul says:

And he certainly was ill; in fact he almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him--and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another.
(Philippians 2:27 NLT)

-Think about the kind of friendship you could have with someone who travels 600 miles over dangerous roads and then risks their life to help you? That's a pretty humbling thing, isn't it. Paul and Epaphroditus became close friends--Paul calls him, ***my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier***. The word for that in the Bible is ***community***--working together in the same trench, side by side—becoming a brother and sister to people you're not related to.

-Now, there's a lot of stuff in this passage—but when you look at it purely in terms of building relationships—it describes what I believe ***God*** wants for us—and what ***we*** want for us.

- a. One of the key ingredients of ***Emotional Intelligence*** is the capacity to ***show warmth***. And that's what you see here in this passage. Paul and Epaphroditus didn't choose each other; the depth and warmth happened because of the time they spent together. You can't have close, deep friendships without investing time in them.

-And maybe that's our biggest barrier. We crave warmth and closeness—but we're so busy doing ***other*** things we just don't pursue it—or we move and cut off the roots. If you keeps cutting off the roots in your friendships—they stop growing. And we just roll through life like balls of tumbleweed—without close friends and without roots.

-You can ***totally*** miss out, you know, on what you're heart craves—and ***needs!*** Friends. Soulmates. I think there are times when we ***NEED*** to ask; ***is my next promotion or is my next new and better home WORTH the loss?***

- b. There's something else that comes out; trust. Huge trust. Paul built a deep relationship with Timothy—and then entrusted him with everything he had spent his life building. And this brings out another key quality for deep friendships: ***Trust***. And trust happens when we are...***trust-worthy***.

-Friends are loyal. They do what they say they're going to do—and ***don't*** do what they say they're not going to do. Friends don't betray confidences.

Real friends are not out shopping for a better deal—a friend who has more to offer than you. To be trust-**worthy** you have to prove you can be trusted.

- c. There's another quality you see here: Friends look out for **each other's** interests. They **inconvenience** themselves for each other. They serve each other. This is a critical point. Have you ever developed a friendship with someone whom you suspect has hooked themselves to you—hoping you'll buy something from them or take them someplace they want to be?

-In our culture, we call that...**using people**. It's not friendship. Here's a free clue for building solid friendships. Learn to **serve** people! Look for ways to love them and express warmth and concern. It's called **relational intelligence!** Paul's uses a word to describe Epaphroditus in this passage that expresses how deep his service went:

...He almost died for the work of Christ, *risking his life* to make up for the help you could not give me. (Philippians 2:30 NIV)

-The word translated as **risking his life** is **paraballeo**. It literally means "gamblers" or "risk-takers." **Adrenalin junkies for Jesus**. This became a code-word for early followers of Jesus who risked their lives to help others--people no one else would love and help--people with dangerous, contagious illnesses, people in prison who were dangerous to be associated with.

-That's our heritage! That's how early Christians lived out their devotion to Jesus and one another. Think about that the next time you're tempted to flip off being with a friend because your favorite TV show is on!

-Jesus put it like this:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:12-13 NIV)

-See, love and friendship is **not** about seeing how many people you and I can get to devote themselves to our welfare; it's about **being** a friend, **pursuing** friendship no matter what you get in return.

- d. To talk longingly about friendship and say you wish you had more good friends is quite different than actively **pursuing** others selflessly and **being** a true friend—and **being** a trustworthy person who **builds** friendships. To build friendship means **investing** friendship—not just **consuming** it.
- e. What's clear in **all** of the New Testament is that neither Jesus **or** Paul could've completed their missions without a team of friends. Jesus laid down his **life** for his friends **and** for those who weren't his friends. So did Paul.

-Here's what I know: You will never complete **your** mission in life without friends, will I. True friendship is one of God's **best** gifts to us. You could say that you and I **build** our 'friendship houses' brick by brick, friendship by friendship—over the years. And that means we have to go **down**--become vulnerable, humble our pride—and **invest**—before we go **up!**

5. By the way, did you know that friendship isn't just a great way to live—it's a **healthy** way to live. Research shows that even people with horrible diets and bad habits live longer than people who exercise and eat well—but are alone. One author said, "It's healthier to eat donuts with friends than to eat broccoli alone!"

-I believe with all my heart—and research backs it up—that most of the joylessness and stress of our lives would be dramatically reduced if we all had a team of friends where we served one another, supported one another, loved one another—and did life together. In our culture, feeling **lost** and **alone** is a **huge** issue.

-Why? Because we were **made** that way in the image of a **relational** God—who describes wholeness and holiness in relational terms. Think about the creation account. God makes lizards, snakes, mosquitoes, cows, sheep and whales—and proclaims it, **Good!** The only thing that wasn't good was aloneness.

The Lord God said, "It is *not good* for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18 NIV)

-The solution was... **woman!** And there are people who think that God's solution to loneliness is... getting married! People who marry or live with someone so they won't be alone find that sharing another person's body and living space doesn't necessarily end your aloneness.

- a. So, when God Himself showed up on this planet, He showed us what he **really** meant. Jesus defined holiness—that is, the life we were created for—in terms of living in community with God—**and with others!** It's living out all the **one another's** of the Bible: love one another, accept one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, laugh with one another, cry with one another.
- b. Jesus, our example, had a **very** healthy relational life. He had a larger acquaintance circle of about 100, he had the 12, he had an inner circle, made up of his two cousins—James and John, and Peter. He was known and deeply loved by them --they were known and deeply loved by him. They ate together, went to parties together. They even went **fishing** together!
- c. And the relationship was **mutual**. Jesus' friends didn't just suck him dry. Sometimes they rowed while he slept. Sometimes they went to town for food while he sat in the shade. There were times when He asked them for their support--cried in front of them. Shared his deepest dreams and private thoughts with them.

-Jesus' life is **filled** with all the qualities of healthy, loving, supportive friendships. And you see this carried right over into the early church. In fact, **community—loving with one another, being with one another--**is one of God's greatest gifts to the church. And it's His gift to **you** if you'll make the adjustments in your life to receive it.

6. This morning, I want to say two things in closing. First, friends who have a **bad** influence on you can lead you to places you **don't** want to be—places that will wreck you.

The **right** kinds of friends will, over time, fill your heart with the kind of closeness and connectedness—and the depth of love and commitment we’ve been talking about.

-But this won’t happen by walking into a church or living on social media. You have to get **very** intentional about it. Social media can support what you’ve established face to face—but it can’t replace it. **You** have to **grow...learn** how to be the kind of friend you expect others to be.

-Just like Jesus you start with an **outer circle** of friends that you get to know at a deep level. And it’s in **that** circle that you’ll find one, maybe two friends, with whom you can eventually find the closeness we’ve discussed. There is a natural circle of friends we find in our neighborhoods and at work--and that is **really** important.

- a. But Jesus created—and talked about **community**—that is, **supernatural friendship**. This is the place in life where we live out what the early followers of Jesus describe as **one another’s**. **Love one another, encourage one another, help one another, pray for one another, serve one another, bear one another’s burdens**. It’s a friendship that **starts** here—and continues forever—and is driven by the Spirit of God.

-But for that to happen, you will have to make time; risk; make space in your busy life to be on a ministry team or in a **LIFE** group. If you take the time and make the effort to do this, this community will be a classroom. You will learn to know others—and find a safe place to open your life--to be known. You will learn to do the one thing Christ has clearly said He wants us to learn—to really love, and to really **be** loved!

- b. **The** most difficult—and **the** most critical lessons you’ll learn is how to be **selfless**—to **serve** others in Jesus’ name. This takes a gathering like this from being a restaurant—where you come and consume—to being a family. Now, if you know **anything** about families, you know that you can’t fit 400-500 family members in one home—then love and serve them all.

-And **that’s** why you and I need to be a part of a smaller, more manageable group where **servicing** becomes meaningful—and not exhausting. See, a small team breaks serving down into manageable, bite-size pieces. And, like Paul, there will be a time when life is tough—and you will **need** the help of others.

- c. And finally, something really cool. Your joy—the celebration factor in your life—gets multiplied in a relational world like this. See, you get to hear about and celebrate how God works in exceptional ways in the lives of others. When our children and grandchildren reach milestones--we celebrate. When someone has a victory at work, we celebrate.

-We live a time where there’s a **lot** of fear and a **lot** of bad news in the world. **You** need a safe place where you can have fun, laugh till your sides hurt, put on the party hat--and **celebrate!**

- d. Now, I need to just caution you: **This happens over time**. This will not happen the first time you show up at a small group or ministry team. Or the second. Or the third.

In fact, you may have to try several ministry teams or small groups until there's **chemistry. That's okay!** And you **also** can't come into a group as a consumer; plopping yourself in a chair, crossing your arms and saying, "Okay, I dare you to **friend** me." Friendship is mutual.

-But I know this; you won't find the depth of concern and friendship God wants for you—that **you** want for you—unless you **invest** your life, take the time and effort necessary, and work at learning how to give and receive love. **You get what you pay for!**

- e. And that leads me to the other thing I want to say. Not only do you get what you pay for, you get what you **can't** pay for. You get to be friends with God Himself, because **Christ** paid for that with his life. See, this is the deal. No matter how carefully you choose your friends, no matter how meticulously you screen the **LIFE** groups and ministry teams to find the right one, you will find that friends will always disappoint you.

-Those people--like me, and like you--are sinful people. As sinful people, we do selfish things. Sometimes we pretty much look out for our own interests. We make stupid comments that hurt; we get impatient. We try to fix people when we just need to listen. We misinterpret other's words and intentions. There is no such thing as the perfect friend on this planet.

- f. But there is Someone who offers you friendship of another kind--at great cost to Himself. He **humbled** himself! The main reason why Jesus came and gave His life as He did was so that we could be **reconciled**--become friends with God.

-Isn't it strange thing that some people go through life, **longing** for a friend that doesn't fail them, **longing** for someone who loves them as they are—and then refuse the best **Friend** in the universe. Someone who's never moody or crabby. Someone who knows how to love. Someone who will never betray us. Someone who laid his life down--to be our friend. Jesus **still** knows how to be a great friend! Have you ever accepted His offer of friendship?

7. A few weeks ago, Lori and I were watching some of the 9/11 anniversary footage of people who survived the planes hitting the twin towers and the Pentagon. What's **fascinating** is that they all talked about friends, relatives—and even strangers they tried to help—who helped them—not how far they had advanced in business or the military. No one talked about their cars, their salaries, their high end stuff or designer clothes. It was about **people!**

-I know this—when life falls apart, your investments and stuff and reputation won't make life worth living. It'll be your friends! People who loved you, stayed with you, walked with you, prayed for you and helped you. From what Jesus said, **that's what Heaven is all about too!** If **I** were you—I'd invest **heavily** in your relational world. Everything else will sort itself out! Will you? **Will you?**