

# Friends In A Broken World

*Thoughts On Friendship From the Emmaus Road*



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Foreword by  
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# Introduction



**I** have always believed in the importance of friendship. I was an only child for many years. My sister came when I was nine. We were the only two children in the family. Therefore I was “alone” for many years during the formative stages of my childhood. I remember that period of my life as a time when I often felt lonely. I am grateful for my parents, who spent as much time with me as they could. And I am especially grateful for my friends. Looking back I realize I wasn’t a particularly good friend to them. Perhaps being an only child made me rather inward looking and selfish. Still, I remember the times I spent with my friends with great joy. Those moments shine in my memory as I think of my childhood.

The importance of friends was something I continued to appreciate as I moved away from childhood, to adolescence and then into adult life. I am grateful for the many good friends the Lord has sent my way. They were channels of His grace, truly undeserved because more often than not, they were better friends to me than I was to them.

My time in Regent College, Vancouver, further reinforced my conviction about the importance of relationships.<sup>1</sup> Regent in the '80s both emphasized and practiced community. My four years in Regent also gave me a biblical and theological framework for my understanding of the critical place of relationships for life. In particular, Regent helped me make the link between community, spiritual formation, and the authority of Scripture. Regent gave me a vision for life and ministry that has remained to this day. It taught me that God's number one priority for us is that we grow in Christ-like maturity. It also showed me that people are changed through love and truth, through relationships and Scripture.

What really cemented the vital place of friendship for me was my time in the wilderness. It was a time that began with the death of my first wife from cancer in 1993. One tragedy led to another. A second marriage

ended in divorce. I lost most of my public ministry. I went into clinical depression. I had to undergo church discipline. And most of that time I had to function as a single parent, trying my best to raise my two boys. Looking back on that period of my life, I often wonder how I survived. In truth, I know the answer—I survived because of the grace of God and the encouragement of my friends.<sup>2</sup>

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It is in your darkest moments that you discover who your true friends really are, and that God's friendship is faithful and sure.

I thought I had lost my public Christian ministry. After all, divorce was the kiss of death for any sort of public ministry in my part of the world. Again, it was the intervention of a few friends who convinced me that my ministry was not over. Since that dark period, I have started two ministries. Not surprisingly, both have emphasized the importance of friendship.

The first ministry I started was Grace@Work. Based in Malaysia, it was committed to seeing lives transformed through friendship and Scripture, a ministry carried out through speaking, writing, and mentoring. More recently, my wife Bernice and I have started Graceworks. Based in Singapore, Graceworks is committed to promoting spiritual friendship in church and society through training and publishing.

Although the two ministries are slightly different, both are committed to seeing lives transformed through community, and both see the Bible as the final authority for belief and practice. This booklet contains five meditations from a key passage that undergirds what we are trying to do. The passage is Luke 24:13-49. The first part of the passage records the encounter between the risen Christ and two of His disciples on the Emmaus Road. The rest of the

passage records the appearance of Jesus to a larger group of disciples. The following meditations will focus more on the encounter on the Emmaus Road.

Here is the passage taken from the New Living Translation, second edition.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Walk to Emmaus**

<sup>13</sup>*That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem.* <sup>14</sup>*As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened.* <sup>15</sup>*As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them.* <sup>16</sup>*But God kept them from recognizing him.*

<sup>17</sup>*He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"*

*They stopped short, sadness written across their faces.* <sup>18</sup>*Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."*

<sup>19</sup>*"What things?" Jesus asked.*

*"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people.* <sup>20</sup>*But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him.*

<sup>21</sup>*We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.*

<sup>22</sup>*"Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an*

amazing report. <sup>23</sup>They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! <sup>24</sup>Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. <sup>26</sup>Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?” <sup>27</sup>Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup>By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, <sup>29</sup>but they begged him, “Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.” So he went home with them. <sup>30</sup>As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

<sup>32</sup>They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup>And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, <sup>34</sup>who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.”

### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

<sup>35</sup>Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. <sup>36</sup>And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly

standing there among them. “Peace be with you,” he said.  
<sup>37</sup>But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!<sup>38</sup>“Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt?”<sup>39</sup>Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.”<sup>40</sup>As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

<sup>41</sup>Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”<sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish,<sup>43</sup> and he ate it as they watched.

<sup>44</sup>Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.”<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.<sup>46</sup>And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day.<sup>47</sup>It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’<sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of all these things.

<sup>49</sup>“And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

(Luke 24:13-49)

# Chapter 1

## Lonely in a Broken World



<sup>17</sup>He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.”

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“The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. <sup>20</sup>But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. <sup>21</sup>We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.”

(Luke 24:17-21)

**S**ooner or later, in one way or another, life disappoints us. Intuitively we all seek love and meaning, and a security that ensures that we continue to enjoy both. We find both in varying degrees but discover in the end that the joys of life are ephemeral.

This truth came home to me when I lost my first wife, Hee Ling, to cancer. It happened at a time when I was on top of life. I was pastoring a major church, our second child had just arrived, and the future looked very bright. And then we discovered that Hee Ling had stage four lung cancer. She was gone within a year.

When you go through a major tragedy, your eyes are changed. Suddenly, you see that all around you are people who are also hurting and broken. You realize that a world that is so full of promise is also a world full of people with crushed hopes.

This is the lot of the two disciples we encounter on the Emmaus road in Luke 24. They had hoped that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They had come to believe that Jesus was the one that would lead Israel to a time and place where God's people would once again experience the fullness of life promised in the Scriptures. Living as they did in a day and age when many claimed to be "messiahs", they had overcome their cynicism and given their hearts to Jesus.

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Faith could not have come easy for the two. But they had seen Jesus' miracles. They had noted His compassion for the broken and downtrodden. They

had heard His teaching. And they had come to stake their lives on this man. Now their hopes were crushed. And in what must be some of the saddest words in the Bible, we are told that they “had hoped” (v. 21). But they hoped no longer. Their hope was dead.

In their despair, the two disciples are “everyman”. As Henry David Thoreau observed, “The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation” (1854). The wages of sin indeed is death and we all experience that “death” in different ways. It’s just that in our time we have so many more things to distract us from our “desperation”. Today, we live lives of noisy desperation. What is worse, we also live in times of greater loneliness and alienation.

In his book *Vital Friends*, Tom Rath notes that:

...friendships are among the most fundamental of human needs. The fact is, we are biologically predisposed to this need for relationships, and our environment accentuates this every day. Without friends, it is very difficult for us to get by, let alone thrive.<sup>1</sup>

We will examine friendship in more detail later but we note that at least the two disillusioned disciples on the Emmaus road had each other. The rest of us may not be as fortunate.

More and more we live lives disconnected from others, lives bereft of the succour of friendship. Technologies meant to connect us result in fewer face-to-face connections and the loss of intimacy in our day-to-day relationships. John L. Locke observes this trend in his book, *The De-Voicing of Society*:

Computer-assisted communication is coming on like a steamroller, flattening intimate forms of self-expression. Justifying the cost and time associated with business trips will get harder, especially when the available communication systems were bought in order to obviate such travel. Eventually, meeting or knowing someone with whom we work will be viewed as a coincidence.

A clock is ticking on our personal lives, and our communities, and our civic institutions. How much longer can we and our communities prosper with so little personal warmth and trust?<sup>2</sup>

Locke wrote in 1998. I wonder if he could have foreseen how ubiquitous the Internet would become and how acute would be the experience of loneliness in modern society.

More than ever we need to recover a healthy understanding of friendship and its practice. More than ever we need our friends. This is particularly true for those who are followers of Jesus Christ for we

follow a Lord who says, “...you are my friends” (John 15:15b). Indeed, the first friend we need in a broken world is Jesus. [♥]