

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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The Good Life

PART

5

TITLE

Running Together

SCRIPTURE

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It's so good to see you this morning and for all our guests welcome and were really glad that you are here. I'll be honest with you, this is the fourth or fifth week in the series and I just love that little tune. That's just the coolest little video. And so anyway, I hope you like it, but it is so good to see all those who call Providence home here. I just want you to know that at least part of the reason, but it's a really big reason why I consider my life to be such a good life is because I get to be tied to people like you. I'm so grateful to be in this church family with you. You are so encouraging to me in so many different ways and I want to just take a moment and thank everybody who serves at Providence.

There's over a thousand people that serve in some place, whether it's children or senior adults or the parking lot or hospitality or worship. And you give and you give and you give. And I want you to know that it makes a big difference. It really does change people's lives. And sometimes even I wonder, is there any effect with the investment that we're making? There sometimes I drive home and I think, "Did that help anybody today?" And so I know that it's normal, that it's natural, that when you're serving, wherever you're serving to sometimes wonder if the investment is actually having an effect in people's lives to where they're being encouraged and changed. And I want you to know that I hear every single week stories from people who say, "I came to providence for the first time and this is who I met and this is how they helped me and this is what happened."

And I want you to know that you are making such a profound difference in people's lives. And I simply want to say thank you. See all of us, we're a body. But we're not only a body, we're like this picture, right? We're like horses that are hitched together. And what that means is that we're affected by the speed, by the agility, by the endurance, by the weariness of everyone else that we're hitched to. And sometimes there's parts of our body that are weary and sometimes there's parts that are like, "Man let's run, let's run, let's run." And so we have to be humble. And that's why God, I believe, loves humility so much. You see it throughout the pages of scripture. He says that he gives grace to the humble, he opposes the proud and part of the reason within the church is because if we're not humble then we force people who were unable to run fast to try to run fast, and it just doesn't work.

And so there are times when we have to make a choice on the basis of everybody. And not everybody always loves it because sometimes it means that we're ready to run, but we're asking them to slow down. Okay, so not this Sunday, but for the next two Sundays, we're not going to have life groups for all ages at Providence with the exception of birth to two years old. And you say, "Now why are we doing that at this time of the year?" It's called Summer Sabbatical, right? And it's for those in particular who are serving with our children. You see we have 200 plus leaders at Providence who serve week in and week out with our children, and on the 19th of August, it's the day when all the kids change grades and so it's sort of a launch for the next year.

And so what we wanted to do was to give our teachers a little sabbatical to say thank you. And so if you are a teacher, we want you to know that we so appreciate you. We're so grateful for your investment. You've done such an amazing job and I pray that this time is really restful. And for those of us who may wake up in the next week or two and we think, "Man, we don't have life groups. This is a bummer." Well, what I want to ask you to do is to leverage that energy into one of three different ways. Number one is you can pray for all of the teachers that are resting because many of them will be teaching your children in the year to come. And so just pray that God would use these weeks of rest for them to be an encouragement for them.

The second way that you can leverage that longing to be together with your life group is to maybe join next year those who are with all of our children. We need about 80 leaders more and so if God places that on your heart, we would love for you to stop at next steps after we're done here. And then the third thing that you can do is you can either call people in your life group or maybe even ask some of them over to your house or maybe all of them to your house. The fact that we're not meeting on Sunday it doesn't mean that you can't be together because we love the fact that we get to run together as a church family. And so what I want to do now is just pray for us for the word, but also for each and every one of us. Okay?

Father in heaven, we love you and thank you so much for your word. And as we open it, we pray that you would encourage our hearts as we look at this idea that we're attached to each other, that, that was your will, that you made us, you created us to run together. I pray in particular for those in the room that are lonely, even lonely in a big group, maybe even lonely even though they have lots of friendships and I pray, God, that you would transform their friendships. I pray that you would over the next year for those that really are lonely, Lord, that you would establish healthy refining, encouraging friendships in their life. We come to you and pray for all of our leaders, for all of our service people throughout the entire church. Everyone that just gives of their time. I pray that these weeks Lord, that they really would be an encouragement, that people would be refreshed and that we will be ready to run hard here in a few weeks in our life groups. And so we thank you for this day. Would you open up our eyes to see amazing things within your word and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

So if you have a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Proverbs chapter 11. We'll be in lots of Proverbs, but we're going to start reading in chapter 11. Over the last several weeks we've been in a series in the Proverbs. It's on wisdom. It's the good life. Well, all of us are looking for this good life and what the Bible says is that a life that's marked by wisdom is a really good life, and Proverbs is written in order to give us wisdom. Wisdom we've looked at is this idea, it's knowing and doing the right thing even when the Bible doesn't specifically address our situation. And so for many of us, we find ourself in seasons of life at times of life to where we can find a direct verse within the scripture where someone who was going through that exact thing or God instructed that exact circumstance so we can say, "Okay, this is what I'm supposed to do", and that's a wonderful thing.

But you know, there's a lot of our life that simply doesn't fit into a direct verse within the scripture. There's all kinds of scenarios that we go through day in and day out to where there's not a verse that you can look to that says, "This is precisely what God would have me to do", and yet wisdom is available. And what wisdom is, is even where there's not a verse that you can directly point to, wisdom allows us to take the heart of God and take the word of God and everything we know and combine it all together, so where we can know the right thing we're supposed to do and have the ability to actually do it. And so some people, when they study Proverbs, sometimes it actually causes just a little bit of angst because it promises to give us wisdom and yet frequently the Proverbs do not tell us the wise choice.

Typically what the Proverbs do is tell us the kind of person that routinely makes the wise choice and then calls us and encourages us to be that kind of person. And so what we want to look at here is one of the facets of a wise person that we want to be like, is a person who runs together with really good friends. And before we look at some of these proverbs, I want to do what we did last week just for a moment and I want to give you some tools so that when we're done with this series that the net of it isn't that you've just heard me talk about some proverbs, but that you have some tools that you can open up your Bible. You can turn to Proverbs and you can study these for yourself. Now I know that I did this last week, and so if you're here and you're going, "Well, I already know that." Well, you can take comfort that one of the attributes of a wise person is they're grateful for the reminders of things they already know. Okay?

And so if you're here, this is just fantastic. This is just going to reinforce something that you already know and so you should rise up and say, "Thank you so much for doing this again", and you are welcome. Okay? Proverbs comes from two Latin words, it means in the place of. That's what 'Pro' means and 'Verba', it means words. And so proverbs literally means in the place of words and yet when you look at the page of your Bible, all you see is words. But what you can find is this, is that each and every one of these proverbs could be opened up and expanded and an entire novel could be written on any one of them.

What it does is it takes these huge life experiences and condenses them down as tightly as they possibly can into just a little kernel. Eight, nine, 10, 12, 13 words, and he says, "Now, this is the reality of what it means to be a wise person." They're all mixed together. Last week I brought a real one, this one, I only have a picture. A bunch of jelly bellies. Now how these things are made, every one of them, they taste a little bit different. Jelly bellies are not meant to be consumed in mass like a huge handful where you just reach in and grab a great big assortment and throw in your mouth because they all taste different. And it's precisely the same way with the Proverbs. The first thing that I can tell you is that when you're studying the Proverbs, you need to go slow. You shouldn't be in a hurry. Look at one, you stick one in your mouth, you chew it, and suddenly what happens is it begins to expand.

Your understanding begins to expand. You start seeing how it applies to different areas of your life and then suddenly what happens is you look and you go, “Wow, I’m actually growing in wisdom. This is helping reinforce different areas of my life.” Well, the other thing about Proverbs is they’re all written a little bit differently. There’s three main kinds of proverbs, okay? Most of them are written as a couplet. What that simply means is there’s two thoughts and they’re joined together. Now how they’re joined together helps us interpret what it means, and so I want to show you how they’re joined together. Most of them are joined in one of three different ways. One is they’re seeking to contrast something and so the coupler is joined by the word ‘But’. For example, proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”

You see the word ‘But’ there. It separates the two, and so what we’re supposed to do is one helps understand the other. You may look at that and if you only had the first half of that, it says, “The way of the fool is right in his own eyes.” Now how many of us have ever made a decision believing it was right? All of us. So you go, “Well, wait a minute, it sounds like a fool.” And so there must be more and there is more and how we know what the more is, it says, “But a wise man listens to advice.” And because the ‘But’ is a contrast, we can know that what he’s comparing is not just someone who thinks that they’re right, it’s someone that’s not listening to advice. That’s what a fool does.

They have people in their life and those people in their life say, “Hey, have you considered this?” And they say, “I don’t want what you want. I want what I want. I don’t want to hear your advice. I don’t want that to contribute to my decision.” And so that’s one way and it really helps us to see and to understand. The second is the word ‘And’, and the word ‘And’ seeks to complete these two thoughts. For example, in proverbs 15:33, it says, “The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom and humility comes before honor.” So what’s happening here? He’s saying this, he goes, one of the very first steps to become a wise person is the fear of the Lord. That means facing him, acknowledging him, recognizing his justice and his holiness and his mercy is to live a God-ward life. And then to help us understand how to become that kind of person, he completes it. Meaning he reinforces the first with the second and the second says this, is that before we ever be honored, we have to be humble.

What does that mean? The only people that truly fear the Lord are those who bow the knee, who bow their heart, who are humble. And then there’s a third kind. And the third kind is where there’s seeking to compare two different things. It’s not contrast, but they’re seeking to compare Proverbs 15:17. These are oftentimes built on the words ‘Better than’ or ‘So that’, things like that. And it says this, “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.” And what does that mean? It means that if you’re at a table and you’re with people who genuinely love each other, and the only thing you have on that table is parsley, then this is a better life than to have a fattened calf or a huge steak, a big turkey at the table, where all the people at their table or backbiting and fighting and gossiping and hurting one another.

And so we're supposed to ask three questions. This is the last thing, and then we'll jump into friendship. There's three questions then that we need to ask at any proverb. The first is this, how is the proverb written? Is it a contrast? Is it seeking to complete or compare? How is it written? Because once we understand how it's written, it helps us to understand what it means. The second is what experience is being described? In other words, think about that in the context of real life situations. Try to add water so that the proverb begins to expand back to its novel size. And then the third thing is this, and this is the goal, is to identify what kind of person is being extolled.

What kind of person should I want to be like as a result of reading this proverb? And once you understand the kind of person that's being extolled, then you get on your knees and you pray to God and say, "God, would you help me to be a man or the woman that's like this? Would you help me to be like this?" And here's the cool thing, is that when you do that and then you become like this person, you become like someone who routinely makes wise decisions. And this is called the good life. So let's read a few of these in the context of friendship. Proverbs chapter 11 verse 14. It says, "Where there is no guidance a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." And then proverbs chapter 13 verse 20, he says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

And then proverbs chapter 14 verse four, "Where there are no oxen the manger is clean, but abundant crops come from the strength of the ox." And Chapter Eighteen verse 24, it says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." And then the last one is proverbs 27. This one's a little bit different in that there's five versus all tied together. Starting in verse five, it says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. One who is full loathes honey, but to the one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet. Like a bird that strays from his nest is a man who strays from his home. Oil and perfume, make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest council."

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." So two things I want you to see here at a macro level and then we're going to zoom into several of these proverbs. The first is this, is that God created us to run together. He created us to run together. You see that throughout the Proverbs, they all extol a person who is surrounded by other people. You see it in chapter 11 verse 14, we read in the abundance of counselors, there is safety. We saw it in chapter 13 verse 20 when it says, whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. I want you to know that there's not a single proverb that extols the virtue of loneliness or living alone or living in isolation of other people in our life.

You see, you look at this sort of picture and there are moments in life when this seems really appealing. When you're absolutely overwhelmed, when you're exhausted and you go to the beach and you look out and it's simply you and you can think and you can rest and you can find time to just unwind, sometimes this is a real blessing. But if this is the summation, if this is the culmination, if this is what your life is always about, then the Bible says, this is not a good thing. And the reason is because when God looked at our life, when he looked at humanity, when he was creating all things and he starts looking around and he says, "This is a good thing and this is a good thing", and he sees Adam before there was another human on the earth and he says, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

What a thing for God to say, "It's not good for us to be alone." What he means here is this, is that a man without a friend is like a garden without a fence. It's exposed, it's vulnerable. The person is vulnerable. You see, one thing I've found, I'm 44 years old and this is what I know. If you want to run fast for a while, if you want to run fast, you run alone. But if you want to run a long way, then you have to run with friends. You can get a lot done in one week if nobody's around you, but if you want to make it home, if you want to run long enough so that you're faithful to the end, then you have to surround yourself with people who love you and who hold you accountable and who speak truth to you and can help you in adverse times. We're not meant to run alone and what we found in the Proverbs that we just read are three different virtues of running together. The first is that running together provides help during adversity. It provides help during adversity. You see God tells us to run together because life is hard. Disappointment and work and family and marriage and children and sickness and death, it's all hard.

There's tremendous adversity in front of all of us and so he tells us that we need people. So let's zero in here on Proverbs chapter 18 verse 24. He actually compares or contrasts three different people within one proverb. He says this, he says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." And so you noticed there the word 'But', which means that he's trying to contrast, and so this gives us help. You see if the whole Proverb ended with simply saying, "A man of many companions comes to ruin", we may go, "Wait a minute, I have many companions." And so he's comparing a man of many companions to something and this is what he's comparing it to, a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So this is what he means. A man of many companions knows a lot of people. In fact, the word companion there can be translated acquaintance.

A lot of people know their name, they know a lot of people's name, but none of them know each other well enough to really know each other's adversity. They go to a party and they know a lot of people and a lot of people know them and a lot of handshakes and, "Hey, so good to see you. So good to see you." And then they go home and something breaks at home. They don't know how to fix it. And all those people who know their name, they don't know any of them well enough to be able to call and say, "Can you help me?"



He says, there's a better way to live than this. And the fact is, we all have acquaintances. There's nothing wrong with that. What it's saying is there's something more to be had. There's something even deeper that's available for each and every one of us that God wants for us. It says, a man with a brother has someone who would visit him in the hospital even if they don't get along right. And so in the second half of the verse, he actually compares a friend, he says, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. So you may have a brother or a sister. You may be really close to them, you may not be, but if you go to the hospital or if you die, they're probably going to show up, right? Whether it's obligation, whether it's blood or you may be really, really close to them, okay?

However, when you have a friend, you have somebody who chooses to stick by you. The word stick means clean like a dryer sheet. You throw clothes in and suddenly those clothes are put into an adverse situation. They're tumbled. They're moving all over the place, high heat is being thrown at it and yet that dryer sheet, you pull it out and it stuck to one of those shirts, and that's a true friend. You go through all kinds of adversity and they're here and they say, "I'm going to hold on. I'm still here with you." He says this is a blessing. Ecclesiastes chapter four says it this way. "Two are better than one for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. Woe to him who is alone, when he falls and has not another to lift him up ... Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him."

One of the cool things that I see over and over and hear over and over again at Providence is when we ask people generally, what is the thing that you love about Providence? What's the big thing? For folks who've been here a long time, typically their answer is this. "When I was going through this difficult time, people that I was serving with or that I was meeting with in a life group or a smaller group, they were with me." That's what they remember.

You're not going to remember these sermons. You're not. You're not here primarily or you won't stay here because of the preaching or the music. Relationships are the glue of the church. That's what sticks together. We're all going to go through adverse times and when you have people who were there and he says, "I'm with you, you can call on me." It is such a blessing. It's a good life. The second advantage is that running together provides guidance during decisions. God tells us to run together because making good decisions is really hard. This is what we saw. Proverbs chapter 11 verse 14, it says, "Where there is no guidance a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." It's probably true in your life. I know it's true of mine, but the worst decisions I've ever made are those decisions that I've made with intentionally not asking for advice because I knew they'd tell me no.

Years ago I made an investment. It was \$500, I invested in something. And I knew that it probably wasn't like the safest bet, right? I said bet. It wasn't the safest investment. Totally legal, okay? And I didn't ask anybody, including my wife. Say, "Hey, that's amazing." I didn't ask anybody, you're like, "That's stupid." Excluding your wife, "I mean he is a fool is what he is, right?"



And lost it all. It's amazing there would've been people in my life I know that if I said, "Hey, what do you think about this?" They'd go, "That's probably not a good idea", but you know what? I wanted what I wanted and I didn't want people telling me no. And it's interesting, I've seen this so many times here at Providence, for years. 13 years I've served with our single adults. They're running together and all of a sudden one of them meets someone, maybe not inside of our group. They don't know and suddenly they just disappear. And what in the world happened?

Sometimes what happens is that when we know that the people who love us the most are going to tell us no, we would rather have what we want and so we simply isolate ourself. Proverbs chapter 18, verse one says this, "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire and he breaks out against all sound judgment." It's not wise to isolate yourself when you're making decisions. This is why frequently when I meet with teens where there's pastors or elders and we're seeking to make decisions on the basis of our church family, I sit there and I pray. And one of the things I pray is that "God, would you use everything that you've done in each one of these persons lives? Would you use our collective wisdom to come together so that whatever we decide would be better if I was in the room alone?" There's wisdom in running together because we get guidance during decisions. It's a good life.

The third benefit is running together provides correction during temptation. Correction during temptation. Now this comes from proverbs 27 and it's sort of a complex passage. I want to read it one more time then I'll walk you through these five versus, okay. This is what he says. Proverbs 27 verse five, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. One who is full loathes honey, but to the one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet. Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his own home. Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest council." Now, what's he saying here? He's saying that it's good to run together because we all get tempted. And some people get tempted like in verse eight where he says, "Like a bird strays from his nest is a man who strays from his home." Now this is just one example of temptation, but it's a real one and some of you may be going through it right now.

You see someone who's not your spouse, you see a life apart from your family and you think that, that's a better life. And so you're thinking of straying from your family, straying from your marriage for something else. Like a bird saying, "You know what? I'm just tired of all these eggs and I'm tired of having to build this nest. I'm just starting over somewhere else." Now that's not the only temptation we face, it's just an example of one. Now when we're in that kind of temptation or any kind of temptation, what do we need? And this is what it says, verse five and six. It says we need a friend who will openly rebuke us even more than we need a friend who loves us but they say nothing to us.

We need verse six, the faithful wounds of a friend. We need someone to tell us, "This is not the path." Who loves us enough to confront us. You see, some people surround themselves only with people who tell them what they want to hear and that's what it means when it says, "One who is full loathes honey." What does that mean? Well, just imagine you have a honey vat, right? And there's a tap, and you open up the tap and you just sit under it and you just kind of lay there and it just falls on your face and falls in your mouth. It maybe fun for like eight seconds, but eventually, you know, "I'm tired of honey falling on my face". And when you have people and the only thing they do in your life is support your folly to support your bad decisions, to support your sinful decisions, and when your life is on fire, you even get tired of all the honey.

But it says that he who is really hungry, even bitter words that are by a true friend, true words that hold us accountable. Even those bitter words can be very, very sweet because they restore and they help and they protect. He goes on a few verses later in proverbs 27 verse 17, it says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Sharpening hurts. Running together though provides correction during temptation. So for all these reasons, God creates us to run together. But then there's another amazing thing that you find in Proverbs and the whole of scripture, and that is this, is that God restored our ability to run together. He not only created us to run together, he restores our ability to run together. Now, let me tell you why this is so important, and it's because every single one of us, even now, no matter how many friends we have, have a temptation every single day to live in the shadows, to hide in the bushes. And this is why. You see all these proverbs, they all extol the goodness of running together, but they also tell us doing so is really hard. I mean, proverbs 27 verse five says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." He calls them wounds. Wounds hurt. They leave a mark. You have a really good friend, they'd leave a mark.

It's sort of like blackberries. You see this picture? They're beautiful, they're sweet you reach in. The fact is is you'd never get to enjoy the blackberry unless you have a scratch on your hand. It's the same with friendship. All these benefits that we just talked about, what God says, "This is why I want you to run together." You get into it and you're going to get scratched, but it's worth it. This is what proverbs chapter 14 verse four is all about. I read it in both hours now and folks go, "What does that mean? Listen to what it says. It says, "Where there are no oxen the manger is clean, but abundant crops come from the strength of an ox." Well, what is that about? This what it means. Let's just say you've got a farm. You've got a beautiful barn and it's all clean and you have no ox. You know what happens to that barn? It stays clean. But you know what else happens or doesn't happen. You have no grain. You have no crop because there was nothing to actually help you plant everything and harvest everything, and it's the same with friendship.

You can have no friends in a really clean house or you can have a messy house with a lot of really good friends and find that you've see grain stacked up everywhere. But it's hard, and ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God and hid alone in those bushes, people just like you and me have settled for terminally casual friendships. We all grow up and master the art of limiting accountability and giving non-answers and managing perceptions and throwing out the idea that we live a riveting life and yet we hide all the trash. You find in scripture that God has more for us. He wants more for us, and so he did the unthinkable in order to bring us what he knew we could have. He sent his only son from heaven to earth in order to pull us away from the bushes. You see, Jesus is the one who actually modeled the way of what a life of running together looks like. He began his ministry and he chose some running mates, and to these people and the many other he began to disclose his identity, his plans in his fears and his prayers and even in John 16, his homesickness.

He says, "Guys, I'm about to go home and you should be really happy because you're my friends. You know, it's been a long time since I've been home." He went to social events and weddings and festivals and cultural events, where the people were. He stood in the river where people were going to be. And then after these years he looked at us and in our sin, still hiding in the bushes, aware that we are shameful and have shame and we want to hide it from one another, he says, "I want to liberate you. I want to restore the possibility of running together again in your life. And so he went to a cross. The Bible says that, that cross was outside the city. It was outside the city, and this was representative of something significant. Outside the city representative being separated from the community of God, separated from the family of God. Now this is what's happening here, right? You have the son of God who is perfect in relationships, who's the only one who has a right relationship with the father inside the city of God and he dies outside of the city of God in order to get all of us who are outside the city in the bushes back into the city, into a relationship with him where we can be restored not only to him but to each other.

Where we could find enough resources to live together in such a way that we can benefit one another and help each other. Three days later, Jesus, he rose from the dead and the Bible says that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that I cannot save myself, but I'm trusting in him. The Bible says he adds us, adopts us into his family. Mark Chapter 10 says that when we come into his family, no matter what we have or what we left, he says, we inherit hundreds of brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and friends. It's a big family with lots of people. We who were in the bushes, who were separated, who were alone, who were distanced from the community of God, the only one who was in the family died outside of it in order to bring those who are outside of it, into it. He did that for you and me. And then he gives us his structure, he says, "Now that you're in the family, how are we going to live together?" And the whole new testament is just so packed with things like love one another and welcome one another and forgive one another and submit to one another. Encourage one another and build one another up. But you know it's not only full of instructions, it's full of resources, because around surrounding these words are other words.

Now notice what surrounds all of the instructions I just read. He says love one another how? Just as I've loved you. Welcome one another how? As Christ has welcomed you. Forgive one another how? As God and Christ forgave you. Submit to one another how, out of reverence for Christ.

Why encourage and build one another up? Why? Because Jesus Christ died so that we might live with him. Therefore, encourage and build one another up. Don't you see Jesus is all about creating a community of people so we can run together all the way to heaven and then all through eternity. So what do we do with this? First thing, let's look to Jesus who is a friend to sinners. For those in this room who have never trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord, I want you to know you're never going to find a friend that will stay closer than Jesus Christ. Do you know what it says of him? Jesus said, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." He died for you outside of the city in order to bring you into a relationship with God. And all you need to do is to look to him and believe.

You admit that you're a sinner. You believe in him and you confess him as lord of your life, and he says that he forgives us and adopts us into his family, and you can do that today. The second thing though, for us is the church families, let's honor God by making room for friendship. Let's honor God by making room for friendship. You see every single one of us, we need running mates. We all do, and so how are friendships formed? Well, obviously the answer begins that just like Jesus, we need to step into the streams where people gather. If you're here at Providence and you come to this service and you leave every single week, can I ask you to try just for a month or two to go to a life group in addition to your time here.

To meet some people who know your name. Those friendships can be built and developed in such a healthy way that will support you through adversity and through how you make decisions and through temptation. We want to be able to help, but there's a paradox within scripture. I'm going to end here. And this is really important for all of us who are in the stream looking for friendships. This is really important. Friendships are rarely formed when making friendships are the goal. It's interesting how that works. Friendships begin when we find someone who shares an affinity with us. "You have a hobby. Oh, you too? I love Jesus. Oh, you too. I'm going to Peru on a mission trip. Oh, you too." You see, when people had the healthiest relationships and friendships, they spend little time defining the relationship because the affinity has already done so .

And it's interesting that the more eternal and valuable the shared affinity, the deeper the friendship and the longer the friendship will last. This is why people can go on a mission trip for a week or serve together at CityServe for an afternoon, and it does more for that friendship than 10 potluck dinners throughout the year. Now, I'm not trying to rid life groups of potlucks. I might offer a good potluck, but the fact is that I'm trying to redeem them. When we say we're going to do this, and the purpose of this is us, rarely does everyone leave feeling truly edified with what they really need. They still feel alone.

But when we aim towards the mission together, when we aim towards helping people and we aim towards praying for one another, when we aim for knowing each other, then suddenly those relationships, they deepen and they developed so they last. And so I pray that God gives us wisdom as a church family, I pray that he helps us to be patient in locking arms, and I pray that you develop some people in your life who can run with you. So let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your love for us. We thank you for your grace in each of our life and we confess to you Lord, gratitude in our heart when we think about what you did for us to bring us into a relationship and to restore the possibility of healthy relationships in our life. We thank you God for what you've done. It's amazing. We want to sing to you and so as we sing to you, we pray, God, that you will be pleased and glorified. And as we give, we pray that these resources will be used to propel the gospel to the ends of the earth. We love you and we are so grateful for the privilege of being instructed in your word, to run with people who love us. We're grateful and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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