



## A Biblical Vision For A Healthy Local Church

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### **Genuine Christian Community and Relational Vitality (Part 3)**

This morning's message is titled: "**Dear Friends**"

We shall be looking at the element of Biblical friendship in this 3<sup>rd</sup> part of our mini-series: "*Genuine Christian Community and Relational Vitality*" – which is within the umbrella series of **A Biblical Vision For A Healthy Local Church**.

The Christian is nothing less than a miracle!

The Christian life is nothing less than miraculous!

The Christian church - this gathering of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ - is nothing less than a collective miracle of God's grace, produced by the power of gospel of Jesus Christ – and founded upon His sin-atonement death and bodily resurrection from the dead!

Like the Thessalonian Christians, this gospel has come to us with "*not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*" (1 Thess 1.5a)

Therefore, when there is a growing degree of health among us...how miraculous of a work of Almighty God is this? As Pastor Mark Dever defines a "healthy local church" by stating:

*"A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God's character as His character has been revealed in His word."* (*What Is A Healthy Church?* P.40)

This character of Almighty God alive in your life - you cannot work up on your own, nor manufacture by the prowess of your flesh! It's a miracle of God...a gift!

This morning we shall "*ponder anew, what the Almighty can do, if with His love He **befriend** thee*"

So ponder along with me: think, meditate, muse, consider, brood over – don't pass by too quickly, linger a moment...God befriends you...come on! ... and what His friendship does to create, shape and deepen our friendship with one another...

We are a congregation of friends...we want to grow deeper in our friendship...  
By being a better friend to others and finding deeper friendship from others....



“*Genuine Christian Community and Relational Vitality*” ...Is another way of saying “Dear Friends”.

Divinely speaking, a few weeks ago we looked at the infinite dearness friendship that exists in the Triune God. We here @ HCC love to always begin with God...for this is what it means to be “God-centered”. So we went to John 17 and got a glimpse of the kind of friendship that exists between God the Father and God the Son, as told us by God the Holy Spirit in scripture.

*“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:25-26 NIV)*

Because God has healthy Divine Friendship, we can have healthy human friendship!

Concerning the Biblical subject of “Dear Friends”, we see in the Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians:

*So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves (souls), because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:8 ESV)*

1. A sharing of the gospel!
2. A sharing of life!
3. creation of deep, rich, meaningful friendship! “*Affectionately desirous*”, “*you had become very dear to us.*”

God, through Paul communicates His priorities right:

1. The gospel of God: The death of Jesus, who died on a cross - in our place - for our sins to remove the hostility that exists between God and man. God has been hugely offended by us, by me, by you! Hugely offended by our rebellion, disrespect and self love!

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of his cross**. And you, **who once were alienated and hostile in mind**, doing evil deeds, **he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (Colossians 1:19-22 ESV)*

This is the bedrock of our friendship: The Gospel

**Q:** How are you doing sharing the Gospel of God with one another?

Are you just sharing the things of this life among yourselves? Have you ever talked about “the gospel” with your life-long friend, buddy?

Did you know the word “gospel” occurs 96 X in the NT?

Perhaps I will give you a printout of all the verses for you to discuss over a coffee with a friend!:

2. A sharing of life:

*For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. **But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.***

*(1 Thessalonians 2:3-7 ESV)*

*For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. **For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God,** who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. *(1 Thessalonians 2:9-13 ESV)**

We see this sort of thing established by Jesus with His apostles:

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.** You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

*(John 15:9-15 ESV)*

Factoids

In the New Testament:

“Brothers” 222 X ESV

“Beloved” 66 X ESV



And we see it all over 3 John

**3 John 1:1-14 NIV** The elder, To my **dear friend** Gaius, whom I love in the truth. **(2) Dear friend**, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. **(3)** It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. **(4)** I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. **(5) Dear friend**, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. **(6)** They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. **(7)** It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. **(8)** We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. **(9)** I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. **(10)** So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. **(11) Dear friend**, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. **(12)** Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. **(13) I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. (14) I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.** Peace to you. The **friends** here send their greetings. Greet the **friends** there by name.

*A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

*(Proverbs 18:24 NIV)*

Jesus is the best friend you could ever, ever, ever imagine!

*As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"*

*(Romans 9:25 ESV)*

Do you know the grace of God?

Do you know and enjoy God in friendship?

Are you becoming a better friend to others, by the grace of God?

Are you finding others to become better friends to you, by the grace of God?

I know of two families that spent time together last night and one dad wrote to the other saying: *"we had a lovely time last night. just the way it should be, thanks."*

Praise to the Lord

***Praise to the Lord, Who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;  
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.***

***Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,  
If with His love He befriend thee.***

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!

All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him.



Let the Amen sound from His people again,  
Gladly for all we adore Him.

AMEN!

ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> “GOSPEL” in the NT

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,**

(1 Corinthians 15:1-4 ESV)

(Matthew 4:23 ESV) And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

(Matthew 9:35 ESV) And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

(Matthew 24:14 ESV) And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

(Matthew 26:13 ESV) Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

(Mark 1:1 ESV) The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

(Mark 1:14 ESV) Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,

(Mark 1:15 ESV) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

(Mark 8:35 ESV) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

(Mark 10:29 ESV) Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,

(Mark 13:10 ESV) And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.

(Mark 14:9 ESV) And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

(Mark 16:15 ESV) And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

(Luke 9:6 ESV) And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

(Luke 20:1 ESV) One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up

(Acts 8:25 ESV) Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

(Acts 8:40 ESV) But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

(Acts 14:7 ESV) and there they continued to preach the gospel.

(Acts 14:21 ESV) When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

(Acts 15:7 ESV) And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

(Acts 16:10 ESV) And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

(Acts 20:24 ESV) But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

(Romans 1:1 ESV) Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

(Romans 1:9 ESV) For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you

(Romans 1:15 ESV) So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

(Romans 1:16 ESV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

(Romans 2:16 ESV) on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

(Romans 10:16 ESV) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"

(Romans 11:28 ESV) As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

(Romans 15:16 ESV) to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:19 ESV) by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God--so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;

(Romans 15:20 ESV) and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,

(Romans 16:25 ESV) Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages

(1 Corinthians 1:17 ESV) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

(1 Corinthians 4:15 ESV) For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 9:12 ESV) If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 9:14 ESV) In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 9:16 ESV) For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

(1 Corinthians 9:18 ESV) What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 9:23 ESV) I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

(1 Corinthians 15:1 ESV) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,

(2 Corinthians 2:12 ESV) When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord,

(2 Corinthians 4:3 ESV) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.

(2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(2 Corinthians 8:18 ESV) With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

(2 Corinthians 9:13 ESV) By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,

(2 Corinthians 10:14 ESV) For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. We were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ.

(2 Corinthians 10:16 ESV) so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

(2 Corinthians 11:4 ESV) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

(2 Corinthians 11:7 ESV) Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?

(Galatians 1:6 ESV) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--

(Galatians 1:7 ESV) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

(Galatians 1:8 ESV) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

(Galatians 1:9 ESV) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

(Galatians 1:11 ESV) For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

(Galatians 2:2 ESV) I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

(Galatians 2:5 ESV) to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

(Galatians 2:7 ESV) On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised

(Galatians 2:14 ESV) But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

(Galatians 3:8 ESV) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

(Galatians 4:13 ESV) You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,

(Ephesians 1:13 ESV) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

(Ephesians 3:6 ESV) This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

(Ephesians 3:7 ESV) Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

(Ephesians 6:15 ESV) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

(Ephesians 6:19 ESV) and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

(Philippians 1:5 ESV) because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

(Philippians 1:7 ESV) It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

(Philippians 1:12 ESV) I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,

(Philippians 1:16 ESV) The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

(Philippians 1:27 ESV) Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

(Philippians 2:22 ESV) But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

(Philippians 4:3 ESV) Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

(Philippians 4:15 ESV) And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

(Colossians 1:5 ESV) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

(Colossians 1:23 ESV) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

(1 Thessalonians 1:5 ESV) because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

(1 Thessalonians 2:2 ESV) But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

(1 Thessalonians 2:4 ESV) but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

(1 Thessalonians 2:8 ESV) So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

(1 Thessalonians 2:9 ESV) For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

(1 Thessalonians 3:2 ESV) and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,

*(2 Thessalonians 1:8 ESV) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

(2 Thessalonians 2:14 ESV) To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Timothy 1:11 ESV) in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

(2 Timothy 1:8 ESV) Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

(2 Timothy 1:10 ESV) and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

(2 Timothy 2:8 ESV) Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,

(Philemon 1:13 ESV) I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel,

(1 Peter 4:6 ESV) For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

(1 Peter 4:17 ESV) For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

(Revelation 14:6 ESV) Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.