

Church Together

Friendship In The Christian Community

23rd March 2025



Welcome

In today's Service we will be looking at: **Romans 12 v. 9 - 21**

The theme for our service today is: **Friendship In The Christian Community**

We hope that you will be able to engage with everything that has been produced for today's service and that you would be able to **Have Meaningful Christian Relationships With Those In The Church With You!**

Call To Worship

Psalm 42 v. 1 - 6 NLT

As the deer pants for streams of water,

So I long for you, O God.

I thirst for God, the living God.

When can I come and stand before him?

Day and night, I have only tears for food,

While my enemies continually taunt me, saying,

'Where is this God of yours'?

My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be:

I walked among the crowds of worshippers,

Leading a great procession to the house of God,

Singing for joy and giving thanks -

It was the sound of a great celebration!

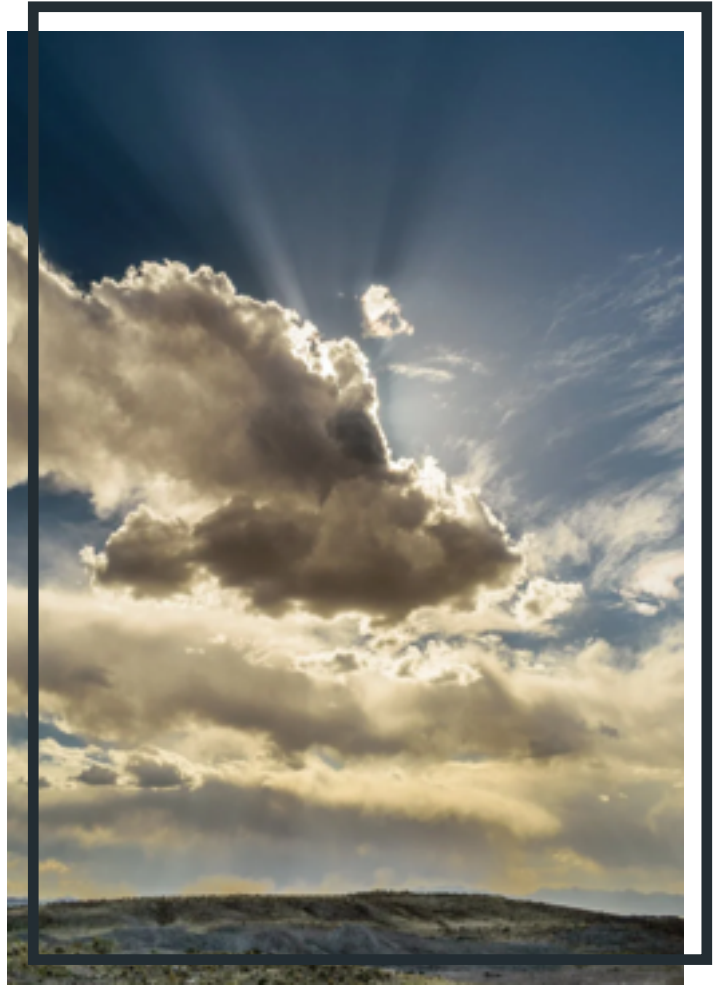
Why am I so discouraged? Why so sad?

I will hope in my God!

I will praise him again - my Saviour and my God!

Song Suggestion

Light Of The World



Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you today for all the bright things of life. Help us to see them, and to count them, and to remember them, that our lives may flow in ceaseless praise of you. We thank you Lord, for the Good News of Jesus, that he loves each and everyone of us. We thank you for the pleasures of life that we can enjoy, and for all the blessings that you have given to us.

Teach us this day Lord, to serve you as you deserve. Help us to be a shining light to those around us, that your name may be glorified, in order that your presence may be known. Give us grace, O Lord, not only to hear your word with our ears today; but also help us to receive it into our hearts and lives, so that we be your witnesses wherever you may send us and we ask all of this through the wonderful name of Jesus.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in Heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
And the glory, forever and ever.
Amen

A TRUE FRIEND
WARMS YOU
with their presence,
TRUSTS YOU WITH
THEIR SECRETS,
& remembers you in their
PRAYERS.

Bible Reading

Romans 12 v. 9 – 21 NIV

Love in Action

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Song Suggestion

King Of Kings, Majesty



You can't live the Christian life
without a band of Christian friends,
without a family of believers in
which you find a place.

— *Timothy Keller* —

Church Together

Thought

Someone once wrote: 'It was the journey of a lifetime. I had an around the world air ticket and was travelling with two friends. During our journey we lived in close proximity to each other and made innumerable decisions. Where would we stay? Whom would we visit? What would we do each day? Would we do things together or apart? Where would we eat? What were the essential places to visit in the limited time available? Which cultural experiences could we not miss and where would we worship? We are long-term friends who have our own homes. Living out of suitcases and sharing bedrooms required all the negotiation and communication skills that we could muster. Afterwards all of us agreed that the journey was wonderful. We learned a lot about the people and places visited but even more about ourselves. We laughed and wept together, exercised patience and tolerance, shared resources, resolved differences, explored our beliefs and had some of them challenged. In a sense we became more fully human because, sharing as we did, we each found that the rough edges of our personalities were being smoothed down. You could say that through sharing the journey we were becoming more Christ – like; being honed and refined. There were times when I remembered Paul and wondered whether his experiences on his long missionary journeys were like ours'.

Only in western societies do we find people living alone, or in small, private households. We seem to value our individualism, and mainstream culture suggests that we should look after number one, sometimes at the expense of community. However, the Christian calling is to live as friends, like brothers and sisters, in the community of God's people – usually a local church that is firmly placed in the world.

In this community we are to be practical friends, with a common purpose to worship and serve the Lord. We are to recognise that our friendships can have a powerful influence on both good and bad as we can see from **Proverbs 13 v. 20**, which says: 'Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm'.

There are warnings against close friendships with unwise, evil, violent people who are not committed to the way of peaceful friendship, as recorded in passages such as **Proverbs 22 v. 24; 24 v. 1, 2**, yet we are to offer practical friendship to them, as outlined in **Romans 12 v. 17 – 21** as we aim to 'conquer evil with good'.

Through a letter, we are told in **Romans 12 v. 9 – 21** that, Paul called his friends in Rome to a life of deep, practical love in ways that might remind us of the Sermon on the Mount, as we find it in **Matthew 5**. If you were to read **Romans 12 v. 9** now you will see how intensely practical the guidelines are.

Friendship in the local Christian community had to be worked at and there had to be a degree of knowing one another, of openness and honesty, of sincerity and respect, of sharing resources, of working and praying together and of being there for one another. Through the process of living in friendship in this way, people would be

changed, and their community life would speak for itself to those outside.

Yet, according to Paul, the community witness was to go even further by extending love and forgiveness to those outside the fellowship, not least to those who might wish them ill as we read in **Romans 12 v. 14, 17**.

We need to compare what we read from this portion of **Romans 12** with the realities of life in our own church.

Would you describe it as friendly? Do people really know each other and share friendship in practical ways? How would a stranger perceive your friendships within the church – would they see people who love one another warmly as Christians? Would they see a church concerned for others and providing practical help for those in other parts of the world?

We are told in Scripture that the Macedonian Church, aware of Paul's needs, sent gifts and money with Timothy and Silas as **Acts 18 v. 4, 5** tells us. Consequently, Paul spent more time sharing the good news and less time tent-making to provide for his daily needs. They were practical friends.

Of course, there is no such thing as a perfect church. However, things can improve if there is the will to respond positively to Christ's call to be practical friends.

Romans 12 v. 9 – 21 is hard – hitting. It is as though Paul is firing exhortations at us like bullets – twenty – four of them to be precise, dealing with the Christian's attitude to the Lord (**v. 11**), the church (**v. 13**), his neighbour (**v. 16**), his enemy (**v. 20**) and himself (**v. 9, 11**). From these far – reaching statements, we are going to focus on some that are relevant to our topic today about Friendship In The Christian Community.

There are some things here which challenge us as to the kind of friendship we ought to practise within our church. Therefore, as a church here at Salendine nook Baptist Church there are possibly four 'bullets' that maybe we need to bite if we aim to make our Christian friendships count:

FIRSTLY, THERE IS THE BULLET OF LOVE (Romans 12 v. 9, 10)

Love is at the heart of any meaningful human relationship, for love is at the heart of all that God is. We are told that 'God is love' and, because of this, he 'so loved the world, that he gave his son Jesus to save that world', as we read in **John 3 v. 16**. Love is forever looking outward to others; by its very nature it cannot be self-centred. Paul begins this section of **Romans 12** with a clarion call to Christians to 'be genuine' in their love for others. We are not to be hypocritical, pretending to love, so he provides some examples of what loving involves:

Hate evil ~ As Christians we must learn that there are judgements to be made in life which will affect our spirits. Evil is anything destructive of God's purposes in the world, like pride, bitterness and discrimination against others. These are inconsistent with God's love.

Hold fast to what is good ~ Everything wholesome is to be embraced. We are to give ourselves to actions that are healthy and character building: encouragement, support and service to those around us.

Show affection ~ The Bible distinguishes between the 'agape' love to be offered to all, Christians and non-Christians alike, and the 'brotherly affection' which is reserved for our closer friends and fellow believers.

'Agape' love is offered from the will and aims at the good of the individual, even an enemy, as **Luke 6 v. 27** instructs

us; brotherly affection, however, springs from the heart and results in a bonding of two or more individuals.

'Outdo one another' ~ in showing honour. No matter what our rank, position or status, each believer is a child of God and deserves to be honoured as such within the family of the church. **Philemon 1 v. 15, 16** tells us that even the wealthy Philemon was to receive his errant slave Onesimus as a Christian brother. If this idea were truly practised, it would transform our attitude to each other, and in turn transform our churches.

SECONDLY, THERE IS THE BULLET OF CARE (Romans 12 v. 13)

Christian love has a practical side to it, sometimes evident in compassion and sometimes expressed in practical care. Christians need to be demonstrating practical expressions of their new - found friendships. Again, Paul suggests ways in which this should be evident:

Giving to one another ~ Situations continually arise in which some among us will need practical support, and not just in obvious ways - clothes, food, books, music, furnishings, as reflected in **1 John 3 v. 17**. Sharing our home in hospitality ~ Some may find this easier than others, but the rewards of doing so are enormous. Friendships are cemented, burdens halved, and hopes are shared. Is there anything stopping you opening up your home? **Hebrews 13 v. 2** tells us that we may even entertain an angel.

THIRDLY, THERE IS THE BULLET OF HUMILITY (Romans 12 v. 15, 16)

Harmony should be increasingly evident amongst friends and within the local church. Paul again, ever practical,

suggests:

Do not be proud or conceited ~ Both these words refer to a kind of snobbish superiority which is occasionally apparent in some of us. This is a barrier which must be removed if we are to practise Christian love and befriend those who are different from us.

Make a point of associating with 'the lowly' ~ No matter whether you feel you are among 'the lowly', ours is a culture in which image, designer labels, attending the right places and knowing the right people are seen as increasingly important. The Christian ethic therefore makes real demands upon us. It involves going out of our way to meet and befriend others of a different class, who live in a different area or move in a different social group. We are called to be part of a Christian counterculture.

FINALLY, THERE IS THE BULLET OF PEACE (Romans 12 v. 18 – 20)

If making friends is an important Christian duty, so is maintaining them. Friendships must be kept in good repair. We are told to make sure we live at peace with our neighbour, our friend, our associate, our boss, our spouse, our children, our enemy – with everyone!

If there is a disagreement or dispute, the Christian is to be the one to go the extra mile for the maintenance of peaceful relations. We are not to resort to revenge, which can have bitter consequences. The peaceful way promotes good health, maintains genial relations and benefits the church as a whole.

Tithes, Gifts & Offerings



If you feel that you are able to, then please keep on giving to the work of the church here at Salendine Nook, with a generous and cheerful heart, praising God for all that he has given to you and share in the finances of the church.

Song Suggestion

What A Friend We Have In Jesus



Godly Friendships

Godly friendships should be about loving each other, looking out for each other, and striving to bring out the best in each other - the same way Christ loves you, looks out for you, and strives to bring out the best in you.

7 SAMUEL 18:1-4

Prayers Of Intercession

We come before you today, Lord, and we thank you for teaching us that we are your friends and we can know each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus. We thank you for hearing us when we cry out to you in moments of despair and anguish, and we also thank you for the ability to praise you and glorify your Holy name.

Heavenly Father, we pray for those who govern over us, for our Prime Minister and his Cabinet. We lift before you our Royal Family, and all the complexity of their lives at this present time. We pray for the ongoing situations throughout the world where there is turmoil and unrest, where individuals and countries can not agree and war prevails. May your mercy and grace be evident in all that happens throughout our world.

Loving Lord Jesus, we pray for our families and friends. We thank you that Jesus knows our every situation. Help us today to face the different situations we face with dignity and love, and give us peace in our hearts and minds when we have not been able to see or be with our families or friends for a long time.

We continue to pray for those who are unwell, both at home and in hospital, or hospice. We think of the elderly, the housebound and those in care homes. We pray for all those who care for their needs. So again, as we share a moment of silence together today, we bring before you

those known only to ourselves and name them before you, Lord Jesus.

And finally, Lord we pray for ourselves. Help us Lord to follow your example in all that we do and say as we journey with you. We place ourselves, this Church and all your people into your loving care. Please accept these our prayers, in Jesus name.

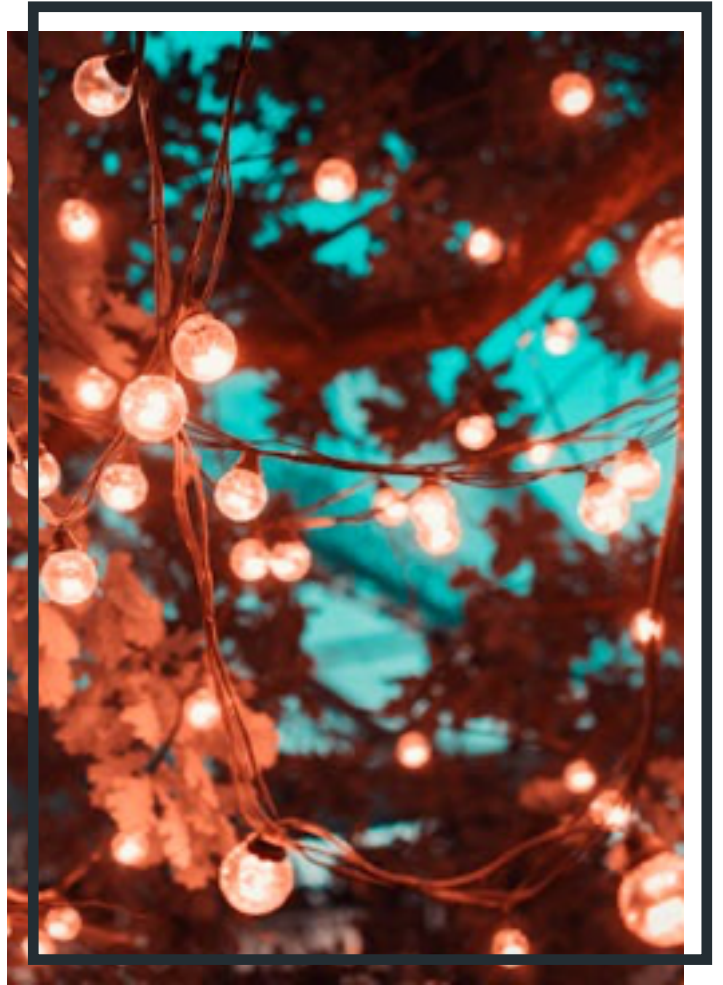
Amen

Christ, who said to the disciples, 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,' can truly say to every group of Christian friends, 'You have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another.'

C. S. Lewis

Song Suggestion

My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less



Blessing

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Remain with us all
Now and forever more.

Amen