



The story of Simon carrying the cross has been depicted in stained glass in historic churches for centuries. The scene has been understood as an image of friendship.

This is jarring to our modern sensibilities of friendship. Simon is here forced under the glint of Roman spears to take up Jesus' cross. The categories of reciprocity and personal preference and freedom aren't immediately relevant. The question Simon faces is this: What sort of friend will I be to the person I am already and inescapably placed in relationship with?

Earlier in Luke's gospel (9:23) Jesus told the crowds, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Friendship, as rewarding and freeing as it can feel, also invites us into a voluntary form of suffering. A spiritual, Christian friendship looks to Jesus, who has gone ahead of us and voluntarily suffered out of self-giving love to us.

Paul later writes in Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Scripture Reading

Luke 23:26-34

Social Media + Modern Mobility = Friendship?

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Discussion

1. What is a time when you felt "used" or "disposable" in a friendship? How might social media and modern mobility encourage a consumeristic and disposable view of friendship?
2. Consider the question Simon faced: What sort of friend will I be to the person I am already and inescapably placed in relationship with? Who comes to mind? Who are the people you share space with on a regular basis at your work, school, gym, neighborhood, church?
3. List the names and locations of friends you put in Rawlins' category of "active friends." What are some steps you can realistically take to connect with them more regularly across a variety of platforms? (See Media Multi-Plexity Theory on the other side of this page.)

Sources

- *Read* [The Tech-Wise Family](#) by Andy Crouch
- *Watch* "The Impact of Social Media on Friendships" by *The Atlantic* <https://goo.gl/oXRE9L>
- *Listen* "The Weight of Lies" by The Avett Brothers
- *Meditate*: Genesis 1-2

Closing Prayer

Social Media + Modern Mobility = Friendship?

Review: Last week we took a tour of how people have defined friendship throughout history up to our current moment. We also considered our personal history with friendship in the highs and lows. We discussed how friendship is a form of love marked by mutual vulnerability and mutual intimacy and shared affinities. Spiritual friendship has a shared affinity for God and, more specifically, Christ who laid down his life for us and calls us friends. We are able to love as a true friend, genuinely caring for the other person (not simply friends for utility or pleasure) when we know Christ's self-giving love for us.

Bill Gore and the GORE-TEX factory discovery: 150 workers is the max. division of people to maintain genuine connection.

Robin Dunbar's theory: We can meaningfully have 150 relationships.

- Avg. Facebook user has 338 "friends"
- Avg. LinkedIn user has over 500 "friends"
- Social media promises to increase our capacity for friendship by making it easier and more efficient. True?
- Social media promises to increase mobility: our ability to move freely and still keep up. True?

Nuancing our understanding of "friendship" — William Rawlins suggests 3 categories of friendship:

- 1| Active (I can reliably call on anytime)
 - 2| Dormant (can pick back up)
 - 3| Commemorative (fond memory but firmly in the past)
- "Facebook is a trophy case for commemorative friendships. Friendships fade as people grow up." — *The Atlantic*
 - Dormancy doesn't mean the friendship is over. Social media gives you that ability to reconnect.
 - For most of us though, especially who moved a lot, "social media keeps friendships on life support," unless we use the...

Media Multi-Plexity Theory: the more platforms you use in addition to face-to-face, deepening of relationship is possible.

Typically, social media allows for more, shallower friendships. But! If you focus on your 20 closest friends and include multiple platforms in your friendship, then you can deepen those relationships.

A working definition of friendship: to most of us and to the people we interact with, friendships are flexible. There is no clear expectation or obligation. Drop them when busy. But when we define friendship as mutual intimacy and a form of love, we come to see that we are talking about a kind of friendship that *does* require commitment and obligation. Even with social media, the hard-won nature of intimacy/trust/love remains as always: requiring decision, commitment, grace, and work.

Aelred: "Christian friends should be willing to go all the way to a cross for each other, if that were what love required." And yet, today we can barely sacrifice our attention. We have all seen a table of friends out to dinner and they are staring at phones!

John 15:15 "I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." God's desire to be personally present with us is perhaps most powerfully and clearly shown in Jesus. Should this not also be true of His followers? Theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin writes, "[Jesus] does not bequeath to His posterity a body of teaching preserved in a book. He does not leave behind an ideal or a program. He leaves behind a community— the Church." Jesus was emphatic about the importance of personal presence. He left friends and sent his personal Spirit— He did not leave an autobiography or memoir you can go read by yourself. Relationship is the medium by which God makes Himself known.

While studying the many emerging mediums/platforms that people use to communicate, Marshal McLuhan famously said "The medium is the message." How does communicating through the medium of for-profit corporations like Facebook, Instagram, etc. shape the messages and relationships? McLuhan also wisely noted: "We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." How do we begin to see ourselves as our mobile devices— able to receive messages and give input constantly?

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we learn that you and I are persons made with bodies to enjoy intimacy "naked and unashamed." Genesis 3 explains how sin has changed that, and many of us use social media and mobile devices as a proxy identity to achieve intimacy and hiding at the same time. And this frustrated experience leaves us with a deep longing for real intimacy. One person put it this way:

"I dread having those moments, those "moments of being" to borrow the phrase from Virginia Wolf, going forever unwitnessed. Someone there when I return from work. Prepare a meal. Walk. Read from a book out loud. There when I laugh. There when I am sick. Not just comes for a visit or closes the distance with a call or message, but I need the face of God in a watchful and loving human face."