

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
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Key verse ECC 4:9-10

“How to Be a Real Friend”
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

We're starting a new series today called "Real Life 360." This theme is taken from the second part of Jesus' words in John 10:10, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" Other versions say, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (KJV); "But I came to give life—life in all its fullness." (NCV) They all mean the same thing – a rich and satisfying life is what Jesus desires for each of us. Now, I'm not advocating the Health and Wealth Prosperity gospel. Far from it. And Jesus is not even talking about that. What Jesus is saying that living a full life is the real life. And you'll experience real life only when you have Jesus in your life. You're not really living until Jesus is in your life. That is what Jesus claims. That's one of the hard sayings of Jesus. Let me explain.

When I became a member of a cult before, and I was a member of many different cults, one of the things they kept saying was "Deny your ambitions. Don't have any ambitions except the ambition to spread God's kingdom." I took those words as gospel truth and so I gave up my plans or my ambitions to become a doctor, to get married, to come to the US because I thought they would all get in the way of my serving the kingdom of God. I was dead wrong, however. Nothing wrong with ambitions per se. But if these ambitions are pursued with the aim of myself getting all the glory, then something is wrong. All our ambitions should be pursued with the goal of glorifying and honoring God.

In this series, I'd like to talk about pursuing ambitions that could help us to get a real life. One of the catch phrases we hear is "Get a Life". But let's change that to "Get a Real Life!"

I would say that our lives is a 360 degree circle. This circle consists of four points. Each point refer to a particular area in our life. Our goal in life is to improve or develop that area. What are these areas?

First, we have Friendship. Then, we have Finances. Then, we have Faith, and fourth, we have Freedom. We'll look at each of them in the next few weeks.

To have a real life which is full and abundant, we need to have the ambition of improving or developing our friendship, our finances, our faith, and our freedom. So, today let me begin by talking about friendship. Let me give you a formula for friendships that would help you to become a real friend.

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"*

We can summarize this in four words: No man is an island. Every one of us should be connected. God designed it that way. We are social beings. God made us for relationships. We were meant to have friends. There's a big advantage in having a friend. But what we're looking for are close friends, not just casual friends.

Casual friends are the result of circumstances. You happen to be in the same circumstance together. You go to church together, PTA together, work together, live next door to each other. But close friends are the result of choice. You can't be close friends with everybody so you have to be selective.

The closer I am to a person the greater their impact on my life. The more I get close to a person, the more they can influence me. Therefore, I must choose my

close friends carefully. That's very important. The Bible says don't get your close friends by default. Choose them carefully.

The Bible has a lot to say about the kinds of friends we are to choose.

Proverbs 27:19 (Good News) *"A mirror reflects a man's face but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses."* The Bible says that the kind of friends that you choose helps show what kind of person you're really like.

Proverbs 12:26 *"A righteous man is cautious in friendship."* You need to select some types of people for your closest friends. Select close friends who will

1. Stimulate you mentally.

The Bible says, *"He who walks with the wise will grow wise"* and *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."*

2. Support you emotionally.

"A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity." A friend is somebody who walks in when everybody else walks out. A friend can be counted on in a crisis. They support you emotionally. They stimulate you mentally.

3. Strengthen you spiritually.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *"Encourage one another and build each other up."*

Hebrews 10:24 *"Spur one another on toward love and good works."*

The Bible says everybody needs a spiritual encourager, somebody you can share your struggles with, somebody who can pray with you, somebody who really lifts you up and is an encouragement not a discouragement to your spiritual life.

How do I attract that kind of friend? This morning, let's spend most of our time on how to build friendships. Let me give you some suggestions right out of the word of God on how to build friendships for life.

1. GET INTERESTED IN OTHER PEOPLE

Philippians 2:4 NLT *“Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.”*

There's a poem that goes like this:

"I went out to find a friend,
But could not find one there;
I went out to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere!"

When you take the first step in being a friend, you will find you have all kinds of friends. But if you stay in your shell and wait for people to befriend you, you'll have fewer friends.

To make friends, you have to be a friend first. Any time we are quick to meet others, greet others, help others, **WE WILL MAKE SOME FRIENDS.**

There's a church in Milford, Missouri called the Milford Christian Church. That church has a 125-year history and for the first hundred years the church ran only about 60 people. Now it runs an average of 270. Why? How? Because the preacher said they have a special welcoming technique. It's called "swarming." They "swarm" their visitors with handshakes, hugs, and friendliness.

In fact, they have another welcoming technique that is bound to make friends. Every visitor gets a homemade pie! There is a lady in the church who bakes delicious pies every week just for those who visit the church. They are delivered the next week after they visit the church.

But in our church, as you know, our first-time guests don't get a pie the week after. They bring home a bag of bread and pastries, and books courtesy of our Fellowship Ministry and Bread Ministry. And we also swarm them with our hugs and handshakes. Am I right?

You know, I read somewhere that when people visit a church for the first time they will decide whether they will come back or not in the first 7 to 12 minutes. This is why a friendly greeting and friendly greeters are so important! And I thank God for Arnel and Tootsie and others who volunteer as ushers and greeters. They truly brighten our day, don't they? And make us want to come back to church.

Another way to build friendship is to

2. SMILE

Proverbs 15:13 *"A happy heart makes the face cheerful!"* There is enormous power in a smile. It is the universal language. It's understood in every culture. You smile at somebody and they'll smile back at you. It's automatic. Somebody said, "A smile is the shortest distance between two people." It costs nothing but it gives tremendous benefits.

I think that an unsmiling Christian is an embarrassment to God. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that our faces are to reflect the glory of the Lord. Look at your neighbor and smile. What reflection do you see? But it makes you feel good, right? When someone smiles at you?

It is said that it takes six muscles to smile. It takes forty-two to frown. If you're frowning, you're wasting a lot of energy. So, smile. Save energy.

In a Rite-Aid store in Jersey City, I saw a definition of smile. Say Hello, Make Eye Contact, Identify Yourself, Listen to the Customer, Express Thanks. I think that's something we can adapt here in church, amen? Especially for our ushers. For the others who would like to volunteer as ushers, make sure you can smile. Make sure people would like to come in the church the moment they see you instead of wanting to turn around and go somewhere else. But, of course, this applies to every one of us.

The third thing to build friendship is to

3. BE A GOOD LISTENER

Two psychiatrists met at their 20th college reunion. One was vibrant, while the other looked withered and worried. The older looking psychiatrist said. "Listening to other people's problems every day, all day long, for years on end, has made an old man of me."

And the younger looking one replied, "You actually listen?"

One sure way of not making friends is by not listening to people or not paying attention to them. Dale Carnegie once said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in people, than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

Listening is not one of our better traits, but it should be if we want to make friends and help the church to grow. James 1:19 says, "*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*"

An 80-year-old grandfather went to his daughter's house for Sunday dinner. When the meal was over, he announced that he was going to take a walk through the neighborhood. "I'll be back in twenty minutes," he said. But two hours had passed before he finally returned. "Sorry I'm late," he said. "But I stopped to talk to an old friend and he just wouldn't stop listening." Are you a good listener?

4. ACCEPT PEOPLE UNCONDITIONALLY.

That's the fourth thing to build friendships.

Romans 15:7 "*Accept each other, just as Christ accepted you.*" You cannot build true friendship until you first give up the impression in your mind of what that person ought to be. You have to accept people unconditionally.

Biblical friendship is always unconditional. *"A friend loves at all times."* It's not "I love you if..." It's not "I love you because..." It's "I love you -- no matter what!" That's friendship. Unconditional acceptance. The Bible says that's the key -- this attitude of even though I don't have it all together, you're going to be my friend. You're a good egg even though you are a little cracked. I like you in spite of the fact you're not perfect.

5. HELP PEOPLE TO FEEL SIGNIFICANT

Make them feel important. Bring out the best in them. Romans 12:10 *"Honor one another above yourself."* You see, people grow under appreciation. When you treat people with respect you make them feel important.

Philippians 2:3 *"Don't think more highly of yourself but think more highly of the other person."* Does that mean you go around saying, "I'm lousy! I'm a bunch of junk! I'm a little worm!" No, it has nothing to do with your own self-esteem. It just says when you're around people, you treat them with respect. You honor them because they're God's creation, and God doesn't make any junk. It doesn't matter who they are, you help people feel significant.

6. STICK WITH THEM IN TOUGH TIMES.

Proverbs 18:24 *"There are 'friends' who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* He sticks with you. He's there in tough times. Friendship means commitment because it takes four things to make a friendship: time, togetherness, triumphs, trials. All of these things are important in building a friendship. All of those mean commitment. Stick with people.

Everybody needs at least one close friend. You don't need a lot of friends. A lot of friends can be a detriment. You can have so many acquaintances that you're always flitting around to social gatherings and parties but you don't have any one person you can depend on.

Now, let me give you two tests of friendship:

1. A friend is someone you can tell your most heretical idea to and they won't blow you away. You can lay it all out and they're going to be there for you.

2. A friend is somebody who can confront you about a weakness and you won't get mad at them. They can point out a blind spot in your life and you will not retaliate or become defensive.

Based on that, how many close friends do you have? Everybody needs at least one, one friend who can say, "Rolly, you're off base. You're getting off track here."

They have the right to confront you and you will accept it because you know, more than anything else, they love you unconditionally. That's commitment.

You stick with them in tough times. A friend is somebody who is in your corner when you're cornered. A friend is somebody who walks in when everybody else walks out. A close friend is kind of like toothpaste -- they come through in a squeeze.

Get interested in other people. You smile. Be a good listener. Accept people unconditionally. Help people feel significant. Stick with them in tough times.

7. SHARE CHRIST WITH THEM

In Luke 8:39, Jesus told a man, "*Return home and tell how much God has done for you.*" The best thing you can do for your friend is share Christ with them. That's the greatest thing you can do. Share with them eternal life and the secret of real joy, the secret of purpose in life. When you share your faith with a friend, you're making a friend for life, not just here and now, but for eternity.

In 1998, I went home to the Philippines for a vacation. There, I reconnected with an old friend of mine. His name is Nanding. We were good friends since high school. We lost touch of each other, however, when I went abroad a few years

after college. So, when we saw each other again after many years, I felt this pang of guilt because I never shared with him the gospel after all those years. And so, when I visited him and his wife at their place, I took the opportunity to witness to them.

Nanding didn't accept Christ. But his wife Felomina did. Her nickname is Neneng. She started to go to church but I didn't know whether she continued.

A few years later, I got married and Anabel and I went to the Philippones and had the chance to meet them. We had dinner, we talked about sundry things and in the end, I encouraged Neneng to continue her walk with the Lord.

Upon our return to the States, I received an email from Neneng. This is what she wrote, *“Dear Rolly, I hope you and your family went back home safe and sound. I'm sad that we did not have much time to talk when we had dinner but I was happy to see you again together with your wife, Anabelle and your daughter, Ali. Did I get their names right?”*

Rolly, I must confess that you were instrumental to discovering and getting to know my Saviour. Remember the first time you went home to the Philippines and you visited us at 10th Avenue. You raised the question if I die, will I go to heaven? It was the key that led me to find my Saviour. And since that time I always hunger to know more about Him. Remember I mentioned to you about Far East Broadcasting Corporation? The station manager of that radio station is the Head Pastor of Caloocan Christian Church. Last April 23 was my first time to attend a Christian worship service at that church and have never been absent since then. I'm very happy and very blessed to belong to God's family.

I confided this matter with Nanding. He didn't get angry. He even became glad. I also informed Deric about this too. He was just cool about it.”

Deric is their son. And I'm praying that one day Nanding will come to know Jesus.

Who of your close friends have you never told about the most important thing in your life? If they're really a friend, that's the best thing you can do for them. A survey done one time found that 90% of everybody who becomes a Christian becomes a believer because of a close friend or relative. For some of my friends, I'm the only way they're going to know. It's the same with you.

When was the last time you invited somebody to church who is a friend, who needs to hear what you are hearing? Make friends for Christ.

Years ago I bought a book. How To Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie. This is one of the greatest best sellers of all times. It's sold 27 million copies. On page 100 Dale Carnegie summarizes his entire book in one sentence. He spent years and years researching How To Win Friends and Influence People. He talked to literally thousands and thousands of people. He hired researchers to go into libraries and read entire libraries to find the key. They read every biography of all the major characters. He said that together he and his researchers read over 400 biographies of Theodore Roosevelt alone. Just one man. Trying to find out what are the keys to winning friends and influencing people.

On page 00 he summarizes it in one sentence: "Philosophers have been speculating on the rules of human relationships for thousands of years and out of all that speculation has evolved only one principle. It is not new. It is as old as history. Jesus taught it among the stony hills of Judea 19 centuries ago. Jesus summed it up in one thought, probably the most important rule in the world. *'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'*"

I knew that, you knew that, but the key is applying it. Everything that we've just looked at -- all of those seven principles -- can be summed up in what Jesus

said, treat other people the way you want to be treated and you can have all the friends that you can handle.

How are you fixed for friends? Are you a friendly person? God says you were made for relationships. Friends are important. You will not have a real life unless you have friends, close friends, the right kind.

H.K. Downie tells about a large newspaper that offered a substantial amount of cash for the best answer to the question, "what is the shortest way to London?" The entry that won the prize read: "The shortest way to London is good company!"

We all need good company in life; good friends as we walk along life's highway. The thing that will make the trip better, more enjoyable, easier, and shorter is to have some good, close friends.

Jesus is the best friend we'll ever have. He's done more for us than anyone and He will walk with us and by us as we travel toward eternity. And He'll make the trip better.

Are you a friend of Jesus? Is Jesus your friend? You know what, he's just waiting for you to respond to him. He's waiting for you to open your heart to him and submit your life to him. He longs for you to be his friend. In John 15:15 Jesus said, "*I no longer call you my servants but I call you my friends.*" He loves you so much as a friend because he died for you. He was crucified on the cross to take the punishment that you should have. All of us are sinners and condemned to hell, separated from God. But Jesus gave up his life so that you can have real life, not only in this world, but in heaven. He offers you eternal life in heaven. He died, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead. If you believe in your heart that Jesus did this for you, then you'll have eternal life. All you need to do is surrender you life to Jesus. Ask God for forgiveness for your sins and promise not to do the

things you used to do. God says, "I want you to be my friend." If you don't have that relationship, that's the one you start with today. Open up a friendship with Christ and ask Him to help put these principles in your life to make you a friendly person.