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**Friend of Sinners**  
**Part 1 – We All Need a Friend**  
Adam Donyes

We're starting a brand-new series – *Friend of Sinners*, as Mackenzi alluded to. When we hear that title, we like to think that we are the friend and not the sinner. But there is going to be a challenge today. The title of Part 1 is *We All Need a Friend*. That's because we are all the sinner and Jesus is actually the ultimate friend. If you're watching online or you walked in here today and you've ever been burned by the church because you felt judged or you felt like you weren't good enough, let me apologize. I want to tell you from up here that I'm sorry because that's not Jesus.

As a matter of fact, I want to be transparent with you guys. I've been a slave to sexual immorality. I've been a slave to the thrill of a thief. My heroes were hedonistic. Before I knew Jesus, I was a master at manipulation, a doctor of deceit, with a lifestyle of lies and lust and chasing that. So, I understand the life of a sinner. And even after knowing Christ, I'm now a perfectionist that's far from perfect. I'm impatient with the people that I love the most. I'm critical of other people's faults more than my own. I can be full of pride, which is the fertile soil from which all other sins grow. So, if you've ever felt judged by the church, let me tell you, you are not alone.

As a matter of fact, I still struggle with sin with my wife all the time. I know my wife hates being scarred. Any other wives in here hate being scarred by their husbands? And then we do it anyway, knowing they hate it. Why do we willingly walk into our sin when we know our wives hate something?

My wife and I take an annual abandon. The three things that Ted really encourages in a marriage is an annual abandon, a weekly withdrawal, and a daily delay. So, not too long ago, my wife and I took our annual abandon in New Smyrna Beach in Florida. Like any Florida beach town there are high sky rises, but my wife and I figured out the best time to go to retreat places like beaches is in April because all spring breaks are done and all high school hasn't graduated yet. So, if you go to these beach towns when it's all senior citizens, they are really quiet and fun to be around.

So, my wife and I decide to go to dinner at 8:00 because there would be an empty restaurant, and nobody would be there because they're all asleep. It will be awesome. Well, we're at one of those high rises, on the eighth or ninth floor. I start walking down the hall. I always walk ahead of her. I'm pretty fast. I bet you can't image that. I don't sit still very well. I look back and I notice she's ten feet behind me, so I get in the elevator and go down before she can catch up to me. I get to the parking garage... Why would I do that? It's just games. I like to play games. I love to keep my marriage interesting. This sermon is going to be really good for you because you're already judging me, so this is good.

I go down the elevator and I go around the corner and hide, waiting for the elevator to come down next because it's going to be my wife because everybody's sleeping; they're senior citizens and that's what they do at 8:00 at night. So, the elevators are on a wall right here and then the cars are over here, so I'm right on the edge of the wall with three elevators. I'm standing on the edge of the wall where you can't see my body, so when you get out of the elevator, you're going to walk this way, straight towards me.

I'm listening and I hear a ding sound. The elevator opens and all I'm listening for is one set of steps. If it's one set of steps, I'm good. I know it's her, there's nobody else with her. Sure enough, I think I hear one set of steps. I'm listening closely. You could feel that body getting closer and closer to you. By this time, you're all in. There's no half-hazard when you scare somebody. It's all or nothing. I jump out and shout at the top of my lungs. To which is about an 80-year-old man and his wife. My wife is about five feet behind them giving me the look. I'm now walking with the man, trying to apologize. "Sir, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to; please forgive me." What a great story that would have been in the news. "Pastor From Branson Kills Senior Citizen Of A Heart Attack." We get in the car and my wife says, "Serves you right!" Needless to say, I haven't scarred my wife since. Now my boys love doing it, so I'm good.

What is it in us that loves to do what we know other people hate? You don't ever have to remind me, "Hey, Adam, don't forget to sin today." I'll naturally do that. As a matter of fact, I know that I'm on the edge of the abyss. I'm one dumb decision away from ever being able to stand up here and preach in front of you guys. Understanding that and believing that keeps me in a place that's healthy with Jesus. I didn't need Jesus on the day he saved me; I need Jesus every day because he's saving me from myself. When we're talking about being a friend of sinners, we're the sinner that needs the ultimate friend every day.

I'm going to challenge you guys with something great with this sermon. Here's why. I'm going to read you a story from Abraham Lincoln, one of the former presidents of the United States.

*It is said that Abraham Lincoln often slipped out of the White House on Wednesday evening to listen to the sermons of Dr. Phineas Gurley at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. He generally preferred to come and go unnoticed. So when Dr. Gurley knew the president was coming, he left his study door open.*

*On one of those occasions, the president slipped through a side door in the church and took a seat in the minister's study, located just to the side of the sanctuary. There he propped the door open, just wide enough to hear Dr. Gurley.*

*During the walk home, an aide asked Mr. Lincoln his appraisal of the sermon. The president thoughtfully replied, "The content was excellent; he delivered with elegance; he obviously put work into the message."*

*"Then you thought it was an excellent sermon?" questioned the aide.*

*"No," Lincoln answered.*

*“But you said that the content was excellent, it was delivered with eloquence, and it showed how hard he worked,” the aide pressed.*

*“That’s true,” Lincoln said, “But Dr. Gurley forgot the most important ingredient. He forgot to ask us to do something great.”*

I would be remiss to not ask you to do something great today. Great doesn’t mean easy. Sometimes, when asked to do something great, it might be really hard. I still think it’s really great because if you’re willing to do this today, I think the impact you’ll have on other people for God’s kingdom and his glory will be great. As a matter of fact, it says this in John 14, **12 *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*** I’m going to call you to do something great today, but it begins at a place that you may not think, and it’s going to be challenging. I can assure you that in the last service, I was crying at that last song when it talks about “break our hearts for what break yours.” That get us to a place of greatness. Humility gets us in a proper standing with Jesus.

You think about the number of times we have our own stones and we’re ready to throw them at a political party that thinks differently than we do or we’re ready to throw them at somebody who cuts us off in traffic as we give them a one finger wave. Or we’re ready to just yell and spit venom and be so mad... As you’re holding your stone, ready to judge or condemn somebody, you’re like, *Wait a minute, is that what Jesus did.* In fact, I know from scripture that he didn’t.

In John 8, it’s very clear. This is the scene of this woman who is caught in adultery. All these Pharisees that had it all together on the outside... They looked great out here. They had their robes, they had their acts, their works. They were like, *Look at us; we’re better than everybody.* They acted like they were better than everybody. *Look at us; we’re awesome. Get this woman out of here that committed sins.* They’ve got their stones and they are ready to chuck them at this woman and kill her. Then guess who shows up on the scene? He doesn’t even say a word. It says he gets down and draws in the sand, which I believe he started out with their own sin. And they dropped their stones and walked away. Watch what the scripture says. **9 *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first*** (usually the leaders), ***until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*** **10 *Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”***

**11 *“No one, sir,” she said.***

***“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”***

You see, there is no judgment there. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So, when we come with condemnation and judgment towards others, we are not showing them Jesus. Regardless of how differently they think from us... I don’t think I’m better than you because I’m a Christian; I’m a Christian because I know I’m not. Let me say that again. I don’t think I’m better than you because I’m a Christian, if you’re a non-Christian; I’m a Christian because I know I’m not.

So, we see this amazing picture of how Jesus comes with love, mercy, grace, forgiveness. He says, "I don't condemn you. Stop living in sin, but I don't condemn you. Follow me and leave your sinful lifestyle." To help illustrate this better, I brought back an old video clip from about ten years ago that would be really powerful. [video plays]

That is what a friend of sinners looks like. No judgment, no condemnation, no stones, no verbal abuse, no I gotta be right. That is what a friend of sinners looks like. Just so you know, **pride and compassion cannot coexist**. Jesus was the epitome of humility. Even in the fact that he was God; he always gave credit to the Father. He never even took credit for himself. As a matter of fact, he said he came to serve and not to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many. As we walk as Jesus walked, the question is, "Does that aroma draw people towards him or does it repel them?" Always having to be right and always having to prove your political point and always having to fight with different political views. Pride and compassion cannot coexist.

From the greatest sermon we've ever had, which is known as The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.... It wasn't one day like people think. It was multiple days. By the time he gets to Matthew 7, he says this, and it's really powerful and people sometimes take this out of context. **1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**

Have you ever thought about how we look at the sins of other people in our lives? We like to look at other people's sin like looking through the up-close end of binoculars. Then, when it gets to our sins, we turn it around and look through the long-distance end. "Oh, those are so tiny. But your sins... Whoa!!" And it's crazy because Jesus isn't telling us not to hold one another accountable. That's where we can take this out of context. He's not saying not to hold each other accountable. He's saying what a beautiful place of accountability when you recognize the gravity of your own sin and not just try to point out the sin of others. You may sin differently than other people, but your sin isn't better or greater. It's still separates you from the Savior.

He goes on to say exactly why we should flip the binoculars. **3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?** Have you ever thought about what a plank looks like versus a speck of sawdust? He says, "Hold on; evaluate your own heart." We do this with our spouses. We will be so magnified on this little part of our spouse and completely neglect and ignore the plank in our eye. And Jesus is saying, "Whoa, your focused on the plank? Why don't you examine what's going on in your heart?"

I told you I was going to call you to do something great today, but I didn't say it was going to be easy. There's a speck of sawdust that you want to criticize and judge in somebody else that might think or act differently than you. Jesus says, "Whoa, why don't you take care of that plank?" But what we love to do is take our plank, ignore our plank, try to bury our plank, and put other people on top of it and talk about and gossip and slander their sin and everything that they are struggling with and everything thing that they have. "You know what? I'm going to elevate myself and feel better about myself by talking about them, by judging them, by pointing out their sin, and recognizing their sin and ignoring my sin. I'm going to elevate myself by stepping on others."

Oh, because that's attractive! "Oh, tell me more about your Jesus as you put me down and tell me how horrible I am." Do you know what's crazy? Jesus is the exact opposite. There is no place low enough you and I can go to be in proper standing with Jesus.

1 Peter 5 says, ***6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*** Words I've never heard in my life are, "I just don't like that person; they're too humble." Said no one ever. I've heard the exact opposite. I've met a lot of people that are really attractive because of the humility they have to reach Jesus. When we get in that place and we stop trying to ignore and cover up our own plank, and we come to place of understanding that we're not better than anyone else; we just know the one who is and we need him daily. My sins might be different than yours, but they are not better, not elevated.

Justin Edwards said this: *"Men who are exceedingly blind to their own faults are often exceedingly quick sighted to the faults of others."*

This last weekend, I was in Dallas with my family. A couple of days ago, the trial went down with Amber Geiger. She the police officer, if you haven't heard, that had just ran a 13-hour shift, got confused, and went to the wrong apartment. She walked into what she thought was her apartment and saw Botham Jean. Botham Jean was on his couch. She thought he was in her apartment, so she shot and killed him. The trial just went down. She got ten years in prison. It was big news in Dallas. I was down there right in the middle of it. Botham's brother, Brandt Jean, goes on the witness stand as she's getting her sentence before the judge. This is what happens.

[video plays]

Brandt Jean: If you are truly sorry, I know... I can speak for myself. I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. I don't think anyone could say it... Again, I'm speaking for myself, not even bad for my family. But I love you just like anyone else. And I'm not going to say I hope you rot and die just like my brother did, but I personally want the best for you. And I wasn't going to ever say this in front of my family or anyone, but I don't even want you to go to jail. I want the best for you because I know that's exactly what Botham would want you to do. And the best would be to give your life to Christ. I'm not going to say anything else. I think giving your life to Christ would be the best thing that Botham would want you to do. Again, I love you as a person and I don't wish anything bad on you. I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug, please. Please.

Judge: Yes.

[video ends]

Adam Donyes: That's also what a friend of sinners looks like. He's forgiving a woman that killed his brother and we can't even forgive someone who cuts us off in traffic or has a different sports team than us or said some hurtful words towards us or thinks differently than we do or had some bad behaviors towards us. That is also what a friend of sinners looks like. Color didn't divide them. Beliefs didn't divide them. Position didn't divide them. But the blood of Christ united them. Do you think the last

words she hears as she now goes to spend ten years in prison... That officer is going to be looking for a Bible to figure out how in the world a man that should be bitter, angry, and frustrated towards her gives her all the forgiveness in the world. That just opened the door for the gospel for Amber Geiger as she now spends ten years in prison.

It goes on to say in Matthew 7, **4** ***“How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite...”*** I love this word *hypocrite* here and I’m going to give you an excerpt from Matt Chandler in just a second. ***“...first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”***

Listen to what Matthew Chandler has to say here on hypocrites as Christians. We’re all Christian hypocrites. We’re all the same. We need Jesus. We’re not perfect. So, the thing is we should stop acting like we’re perfect and maybe it would invite more people into it. Here’s what Matt Chandler has to say about hypocrisy. *“The good news of the gospel is hypocrites are welcome. That’s the good news, because there’s no one in this room who’s not hypocritical. No one. Whether you’re completely secular and humanistic or whether you’ve been a person of faith since... I mean, Mama shot you out on the altar. You don’t remember a day you weren’t in church. You are inconsistent and you are hypocritical. No one is clean on that. No one.”*

*The difference between those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ is Christ’s perfection carries our imperfection so between the tension of perfection and hypocrisy we have a perfect God who says, “I paid the bill for that stumbling and bumbling. Yeah, he’s an idiot. Doesn’t that make me spectacular if I can save that dude, if I can save that woman? How inconsistent and foolish they are, and yet I can still rescue them.” Isn’t that where God is most glorified, not in saving the pretty people? So now you have this idea of hypocrisy.*

*Here’s what, unfortunately, Christians want to do: Christians need to know that and walk in a lot more grace and a lot more compassion with a lot more lack of “judgmentalness” on people than they walk in now, because you’re not there. Even though you might act like you’re there or think you’re there, your response to the fallings and failings of others should be patience, grace, compassion, empathy, prayerfulness, and a steadfast friendship that says, “I love you and I’m walking with you until God opens up your eyes and opens up your heart.” So what hypocrisy or lack of perfection on our way to should create in the unbeliever is a hope that God can work in them, and for the believer, it should increase compassion, grace, and empathy.”*

We’re all hypocrites, but just recognize it and realize that. That he can save idiots like me and people like you. I won’t call you idiots; I’ll just call myself an idiot. People like us should just invite people into that when we remove the judgmentalness.

I run a nine-month discipleship program that also has soon to be major division one athletes. I get this picture from one of my staff members the other day, telling me that two of my guys were sleeping in class. I said, “So, wake them up.”

“Well, do you want me to do anything with them.”

“Wake them up, I want them to be respectful of the teacher; wake them up.”

“Should there be any consequences?”

“No.”

“Really?”

“Oh, because you never slept in class? Let me tell you I had a 7:50 am Cultural Anthropology class at Boise State University. Trust me, as a freshman, I slept in that class a lot.”

Then he responded, “Oh yeah, accounting after lunch was really rough.”

How quick we are to elevate ourselves and forget we too once had to be pulled out of the muck and mire. We too have been there. And when we begin to get forgetful about all that Christ is doing and has done, we get to a place of eliteness or judgmentalness and that’s not the way of Jesus. That is not the friend of sinners. When we fail to recognize our own sin and the depravity of our own heart, we fail to show the humility of Christ and our need for Christ and other people’s need for Christ.

Here’s the truth. **Don’t be surprised when nob-believers act like non-believers, but rather be more concerned when you as a believer don’t reflect the One you believe in** by giving compassion and empathy and grace and long suffering and patience. It doesn’t mean any of us has to be perfect; we’re not. But recognize your own sin rather than trying to pull out the faults of your employer or your neighbor or your leaders or your pastors. Start in your heart and work out from there. Jesus said that to the Pharisees. He said, “You whitewashed tombs. On the outside, you act like you have it all together, but inside is death and decay. First clean the inside of the cup then the outside will be clean.”

Even Mahatma Gandhi say this about Christians. *“I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”*

“Well, I don’t struggle with drugs. “I don’t struggle with pornography” “I don’t struggle with sexual immorality.” “I don’t struggle with alcohol addiction.” “I’ve been in the church my whole life.” Yeah, great. Do you know what that’s called? Pride. Do you know what C.S. Lewis said about pride? *“...the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride.”* It’s the fertile soil from which all other sin flows. *“Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil...”* That Adam and Eve got us in this whole mess to begin with. *“...Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”*

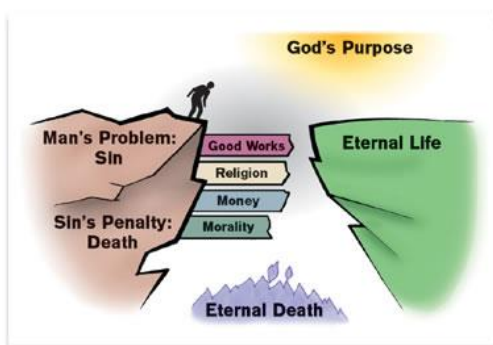
Remember there’s no place low enough that we can go. I’ve never seen someone attracted to the gospel because our pride makes us think we’re better than them. I’ve seen a lot of people attracted to the gospel because of humility enough to be transparent with the junk in our life that invites them in. Every time I call out a student that I disciple on something they’re struggling with, it begins with the

invitation of, "Let me tell you what I've wrestled with in my own life and what I'm currently wrestling with." It's amazing how that breaks down a wall. I'm not perfect; I need Jesus; he's saving me.

Buck Parson said this: "I want to hate my sins more than I hate the sins of others who sin differently than I do." That'll tweet.

Do you realize when we begin paying attention to this, it invites those with the speck in. This is how we are a friend to the sinner. It's not acting like we have it all together, but recognizing we're following the One who does. Jesus takes you just as you are; that's the good news. Jesus is not in love with a future version of yourself; he's in love with you today.

I told you I was going to call you to do something great. The greatest thing we can do is reflect on our own heart and our need for Jesus on a second by minute by daily basis. When we get out there, we get on the internet and we start spitting venom at people that have different political beliefs. We start getting after them and yelling. We have all these differences. But whoa, what would Jesus do? I told a friend, as I've been preparing for this for the last five weeks, maybe I should bring the WWJD bracelets back for where we're at in our cultural climate.

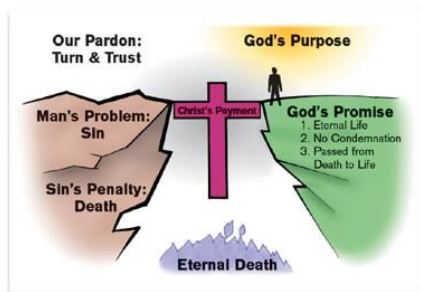


Look at this picture to remind yourself of the gospel daily. It's so healthy to get in a place to be an ultimate friend of sinners. We all need a friend.

Man's problem is sin. Romans 3: 23 – **For all have sinned...** That's everyone in this room. **...and fall short of the glory of God.** Why do you think you're going to get to heaven?

Because I'm a good person? No. No one is good; not even one. "Why do you call me good? Only God is good alone."

Because of my religious works and my devotion in reading the Bible? No. Because I made a lot of money and I was really successful and had a white picket fence and boats and big houses? No. Because I was moral, and I did good things and I served the poor and I helped out and I donated? No. All those fall short of the glory of God. Romans 6: 23 says, **For the wages of sin is death.** It even says in Isaiah 64: 6 that our righteous deeds are like filthy rags before a holy God. All those things fall short of the glory of God. You are not getting to heaven on your good works, religion, money, morality.



But, there's really good news. In Romans 5: 8 it says, **Yet, while you and I were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Look at this new picture. Christ died for us and those who believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. John 14: 6 says, **I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one shall come to the Father except through me.** Romans 10: 9-11 says **...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raises the dead, you will be saved.**



Christianity separates itself from every other worldview and religion because it's the only one not based off of works. It's not based on what you did; it's based on what He did and therefore we cannot boast. It's a free gift of grace so that no one shall boast. - Ephesians 2: 8 And that's what drives us to a place of humility. You didn't do this. You didn't earn this. You didn't do this. You didn't earn this. You have the plank in your eye. And this was paid for on the cross. When we understand that and when we remind ourselves of the gospel and what you really deserve daily and the fact that he doesn't treat us (Psalms 103: 12) as our sins deserve, brings us to a place of humility. That's the great news. That's what the word *gospel* literally means – good news. And when we understand that, we become a better friend to sinners because we understand our own problem.

So, what was I going to challenge you to do that was so great today? Look inwardly rather than outwardly and recognize the work that Jesus wants to and will do in your heart if you'll stop pointing and stepping on others to elevate yourself so you can ignore the condition of your own heart. The problem isn't other people. The problem is your heart. My problem is my heart, my hedonism, my lust, my pride. It's my heart. I need Jesus to come in there and clean that up. I need him daily.

You received the elements as you walked in here today. The reason I shared this right before we go into communion is this reason. The scripture makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 11. If you're not a believer, if you've never made a decision to follow Jesus Christ... Maybe you've been turned off by the church. I'm telling you Jesus is not condemning you; he died for you. He defeated the tomb and he tasted death so you don't have to. But if you don't believe that and you've never trusted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I'm going to ask you not to take communion. Not because we think we're better than you, but because scripture says don't eat and drink judgment on yourself. Sit there and reflect and pray.

We're going to have the prayer team up here in just a second. If you want to have a deeper conversation about this with the prayer team, please come forward. If you want to come forward and just talk about some of the conditions of your heart with the prayer team, please do. That's what they're here for. Why wouldn't you want free prayer. The prayer team is here to pray with you.

It says in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26, ***The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Thank God we have the ultimate friend of sinners. I told you I was going to challenge you to do something great. Imagine the impact you'll have on this Branson community and beyond when you approach it with humble eyes and humble hearts that draw people towards Him.

I'm going to close us in prayer and as I do, it's the first Sunday of the month, so we do a mercy offering. The mercy offering is different than our normal offering. The mercy offering goes toward helping and benefiting the needs of others in our church family. So, pray with me and have a blessed week.

Father God, thank you so much that you are the ultimate friend to the ultimate sinner standing up here before these people today. I'm a wretch, but I'm saved. I was lost, but now I'm found. There is nothing I did to earn it or deserve it. God, that puts my heart in a humble place. I pray every heart in here would look inwardly in their desperate need for you, the heart surgeon, the ultimate physician.

God, challenge us when we want to look externally at what's wrong with other people because they look different or act differently or respond differently. God, use this church to look more like your son.

We love you. It's in the powerful and pure name of Jesus we pray. And all God's people said... Amen.