

## Study Guide: He Sets the Lonely in Families

Sunday, September 26, 2021 | Emily Morrison

**Focus Scripture:** God sets the lonely in families —Psalm 68:6

**Topics:** Community, Relationships

### Short Summary:

In this sermon, Emily Morrison lays out the biblical teaching of the church as family and what this could look like in modern Western culture where church family is often little more than shaking hands and sharing a periodic pot-luck.

### Extended Summary:

When we follow Jesus, we move from being outside God's family to inside God's family. We are adopted into the family of God, with Jesus as our big brother. In God's new family, Jesus is the big brother, the oldest, or, as Colossians calls him, "the firstborn over all creation." And Jesus calls the rest of us his siblings.

Bronwyn Lea writes, ***"Being united to Jesus ripples into every relationship we have, fundamentally changing who we are vis-à-vis one another. Our primary matrix for relating to other Christians is no longer figuring out whether they're 'acquaintances' or 'friends,' but rather knowing they are brothers and sisters and moving from there. The kindred spirits we look for in friendship now draw from a deeper connection of kinship."***

This was the common experience of the early church, but it is a foreign concept in modern life today. God's family totally reorients our lives, and now we have an obligation and a special loyalty to each other, because we are family. This is hard for an individualistic society to understand, but in collectivist societies, people's family ties are bound up with a sense of obligation and responsibility. Collectivist cultures emphasize the idea that you are part of something greater than yourself and that is your family.

For many, our friendships might exclusively consist of affinity or affiliation. Which is unfortunate because Spiritual Friendship, the friendship we need most, is the one we pay the least attention to and are least likely to have. We cannot experience this level of friendship with everyone in the church. We *do* have limited capacity, which is why we see Jesus' friendship in circles: the inner three, Peter James and John, the twelve disciples, and the 72. The capacity for the kind of depth Spiritual Friendship involves maxes out at about 4 people.

Dr. Soo-Inn Tan writes, ***"A friendship that is rooted in Christ for the purpose of helping followers of Jesus grow in Christ ... We cannot connect with all our friends with the same degree of intensity. But there will be those two or three people, in whose lives we are called to be vitally active and extravagantly loving."***

These few special friends propel us to Jesus. They are people with whom we can be our true selves as we carry each other's burdens, challenge one another, and cheer one another on. These are the friends who commit through thick and thin, through ups and downs.

In Spiritual Friendship, because we are siblings, we don't get to opt out because we are bored or annoyed. Our siblings are not disposable. A Spiritual Friendship enables a commitment that goes upstream against individualism because it is self-sacrificing, not meant to suit an individual's need or interests. It goes against consumerism, because we don't jump from person to person for intimacy, but commit deep down to these select friends. We say to this person, "We are walking toward Christ together."

**Reflection Questions:**

- What does it mean to say that we are part of God's family?
- What has been your experience of Christian family?
- What might Spiritual Friendship look like for you? What might be the benefit of it?
- What is the purpose of Spiritual Friendship?
- What is one thing you can do this week to be a friend to another?