Text: John 15:9-17
Title: "Make Friends … for Eternity"

Open your Bibles once again this morning to John 15. I'm laying the foundation from God's Word for our focus for 2007 … Make Friends. I'm excited to see how slowly people are starting to think about it.

> Some of our women got together last week and began to dream about how this could become a reality in our women's ministry … Make Friends.

Now let's read these verses again and let me remind you of what we've talked about so far.

> vv.9-14 – The first relationship that has to be in place in my life is this friendship with Jesus Christ, which means I am a disciple or follower of Christ. This is a loving, faithful, intimate and fruitful relationship with Christ. And the interesting thing is that Jesus wants us to live out this friendship with Him in the experience of deep relationships with other followers of Jesus … not out there on my own. So Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command. What is my command? Love each other."
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> vv.15-17 – This friendship with Jesus and other believers is for a purpose … that the Father's business would be done … that we would go and bear fruit that lasts.

My friendship with Jesus will result in "fruit that will last." What is this fruit? It is the ongoing work of Jesus through His disciples to bring lost humanity to Himself.

Jesus said in another setting, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." So let's press in close to Jesus this morning and listen and watch because …

1. JESUS REVEALS MY <u>MISSION</u> (John 15:15-16).

Now let's go back to vv.15-16 and look at it more carefully.

John 15:15-16 (NIV) - I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

We cannot claim to follow Jesus, to walk with Jesus, if we are not doing what He has commanded us to do. To follow Jesus means I will live like He lived … on mission for the Father.

> Jesus said, "The Father has made me part of His business (v.15), and I have made you partners in My business … My mission with the Father. Go and bear fruit that lasts."

When Jesus says, "I appointed you to go and bear fruit," He means, "I set you apart for special service or mission," or "I placed, I positioned you." So Jesus said to go into the world and bear

fruit. And it is to be fruit that lasts. What is this? This is our mission. Now the fruit that we bear can take several forms. There's the fruit of Christ-like character. But often the fruit takes the form of people who come to Christ through our work and our witness.

And if you see this in the context of John 15, you see that this fruit is the natural product of my being connected to Jesus Christ.

John 15:5 (NIV) - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

We have to wonder, why is there not more fruit from our lives?

ILLUSTRATION – In the part of Texas where I grew up, trees were at a premium. And if you wanted to have some shade in your yard, you had to plant trees. And a very popular tree was the mulberry tree. In fact, you drive around town and just about every yard had at least one mulberry tree. Why? Because they grew fast and provided shade in just a few years.

> Most people didn't know that mulberry trees are supposed to produce … mulberries. That's the fruit of a mulberry tree. I remember as boy visiting my grandparents who lived in another part of the state. And they had a couple of huge mulberry trees in their front yard, and you didn't dare park your car under it because it was always dropping these nasty berries.
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> But in my town mulberry trees were everywhere, but there was no fruit. You see, someone decided, wouldn't it be great if you could have the fast shade of mulberry tree without having the mess of the berries falling all the time. So they developed a variety of mulberry tree that doesn't bear fruit. In fact, it is called a non-bearing mulberry. You may have one in your yard. Great shade … no fruit.

I don't think I'm too far off the mark when I say that we have a variety of Christian that has been bred to not bear fruit. They carry the name "Christian" or "Christ-follower," but there's no character resembling the character of Jesus … no lasting fruit in the form of people who we've left in the wake of our lives who are eternally changed because of our witness.

Question: Where's the fruit?

> Note: We may not see all the fruit in this life. We may never know the change that happens in a persons life that we have witnessed to and prayed for … not in this life. But we will *see* fruit if we will *seek* fruit that lasts.

<u>Challenge</u>: Make a friend, lead them to Christ, then don't just dump them. Stay with them. Last week I challenge you to have a Christ-centered friendship with someone. Also, we are producing disciples who in turn produce disciples.

By the way, there's one great prayer promise embedded in these verses. Look at again at the last part of v.16:

v.16b - Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Prayer is our greatest tool in our mission. The purpose of this prayer promise is not just to make life more comfortable for us, but to fulfill the Father's mission for our lives. Question: Are we praying for lost souls to come to Christ?

So Jesus reveals my mission. But also …

2. JESUS BECOMES MY <u>MODEL</u> (John 15:16; Luke 15:1-32).

There's no question that Jesus was teaching them, not just with His *lips*, but with His *life*.

Just think of how Jesus bore fruit that lasts in the lives of these disciples around Him.

"You didn't choose me; I chose you." Jesus made the first move. He pulled them into the orbit of his life. And it wasn't because they were the rich and famous. In fact, the opposite was true. They didn't deserve being chosen; it was grace.

> And Jesus would spend most of His earthly ministry battling this mindset that there were some people who deserved God's attention and God's acceptance, and some people who didn't.

Let me give you and example. Turn to Luke 15. Luke 15 is made up of three hard hitting stories that Jesus tells in rapid fire succession. You may be familiar with at least one of them. There's the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (The Prodigal Son). But let's not skip over the context:

Luke 15:1-2 (NIV) - Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. [2] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

This is key. You must understand who is in the crowd?

> Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering (drawing near) to hear him.

Who were the tax collectors? I think most of us know that they are not really the heroes in the NT. Most of us have heard of one tax collector by the name of Zacheus. Remember the little song: Zacheus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Savior passed that way He looked up in the tree and he said, "Zaccheus, you come down, for I'm going to your house today."

> But you likely do not know just how bad these guys were. He wasn't just a Jewish guy who had purchased the right to collected taxes, and as he did, he tacked on a little Zaccheus tax to each tax bill. So if you owed $100 bucks, you paid $150 including the Zaccheus tax. Well, that's just the tip of the iceberg. The tax collectors were despised, not just for their greed and thievery. No, it was worse. You see, Israel is ruled, like most of the known world, by the Roman Empire. They were truly an "evil empire." They were ruthless is their rule. It wasn't

uncommon for Roman armies coming into a city and literally slaughtering tens of thousands of people. The Roman Empire, with its massive army, required unbelievable finances. Where did the finances come from? You got it … taxes. And the tax collectors were Jews who paid a hefty sum for the concession to collect taxes for the Roman Empire. Some scholars estimate that at this point in time, Jews paid about 90% in taxes to the Roman Empire. Now just think what Jews thought of the guy who paid money to the Roman Empire for the market to collect these criminally high taxes from his own countrymen. So the Romans could continue to slaughter and oppress the people in towns and villages.

So maybe it makes a little more sense to you why the Pharisees and teachers of the law were so miffed that Jesus was hanging out with the likes of the tax collectors … the traitors who were wringing money out of their own countrymen to support the empire that was oppressing them.

Now you understand why religious people muttered when Jesus went into the home of Zaccheus

Luke 19:7 (NIV) - All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

So in the crowd that day were the tax collectors. The second group in the crowd were "sinners." In the NIV the name is in quotation marks. Now we know that all of us are sinners, in the sense that we have all fallen short of God's glory. But these people who are called sinners were not just people who party or who do bad things. In the world of the first century, "sinners" were a class of people.

ILLUSTRATION – Like the lowest caste of people in India. They are born into this caste, and there's no possibility of ever moving out of that class. They are destined to be destitute. So much so that in some situations in India, when a child is born to a couple in the lowest caste, they would in some way maim the child, so disfiguring the child's body so that they will get more sympathy when they send that child out at an early age to beg.

Sinners in the days of Jesus were people who had jobs that were considered immoral. They could be slave traders or prostitutes, and they were considered by the Jews to be separated from God because of what they did. In addition to that "sinners" were people who had some kind of deformity or a disease they were born with.

EXAMPLE: There was a time when Jesus and the disciples came across a blind man. The disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind."

So sinners were a class of people who were immoral or had some kind of handicap or disease.

Now go back and read Luke 15:1-2:

Luke 15:1-2 (NIV) - Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. [2] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In fact Luke 7 tells us that Jesus had the reputation of being…

Luke 7:34b - a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."

They were "dissing" Jesus, but He wore it as a badge of honor.

And the stories that follow have more punch to them when you understand the crowd that was listening that day.

- **The story of the lost sheep** – A shepherd has 100 sheep and loses one. He leaves the 99 and goes after the lost sheep. He finds the lost sheep brings it back and calls for everyone to rejoice with his that what was lost is now found.

  Luke 15:7 (NIV) - I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

- **The story of the lost coin** – A woman has ten coins and loses one. She turns her house upside down. It's sort of like losing the remote control at your house. She pulls the cushions out of the couch. She sweeps the house clean until she finds that coin. And what does she do. She calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice.

  Luke 15:10 (NIV) - In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

- **The parable of the lost son** – There was a father with two sons. The younger one demands his share of the inheritance early. He leaves home and wastes his money … and his life. Things turn bad. He got a job feeding pigs, and coveted the pigs' food. Then he remembers home … and the love of his father. So he humbles himself and returns back to his father. What does he find? He finds his father waiting and watching for his return. The dad rejoices. He puts the robe on his back and the ring on his finger and sandals for his feet. Fire up the grill. Let's cook some steaks.

  But standing off to the side is the other brother … the older son. He hears the party … smells the steaks cooking … heard the band playing. And the father gets word of the older brother won't come to the party, so the father goes to the son and pleaded with him to come in.

  The older son spews his jealousy. "How could you let my little brother come back after all he has done?"

  Luke 15:32 (NIV) - But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

This is one of Jesus parables that has no application attached to it. The application is clear. It shouldn't have to be explained.

Question: Could it be that the reason there are no more prodigals returning home to the Father is because they have seen far to much of the older brother in us?

CONCLUSION

The Christian band, Casting Crowns, has written a song that I think was written for people like us. It's entitled "Does Anybody Hear Her."

She is running
A hundred miles an hour in the wrong direction
She is trying
But the canyon's ever widening
In the depths of her cold heart
So she sets out on another misadventure just to find
She's another two years older
And she's three more steps behind

Does anybody hear her? Can anybody see?
Or does anybody even knows she's going down today
Under the shadow of our steeple
With all the lost and lonely people
Searching for the hope that's tucked away in you and me
Does anybody hear her? Can anybody see?

She is yearning
For shelter and affection
That she never found at home
She is searching
For a hero to ride in
To ride in and save the day
And in walks her prince charming
And he knows just what to say
Momentary lapse of reason
And she gives herself away

If judgment looms under every steeple
If lofty glances from lofty people
Can't see past her scarlet letter
And we never even met her