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A Theology of Friendship in a Digital Age

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Department of Theology and Religion,

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ABSTRACT

A Theology of Friendship in a Digital Age

Joelle E. Lucas

Friendship has been a subject of theological study for many years – being viewed as both an earthly blessing and a heavenly virtue. In recent years friendship has become a topic of interest in the social sciences and within popular culture. This thesis aims to bring the theological roots of friendship into conversation with modern scholarship. This is of particular interest due to the introduction and impact of technology on friendship making and keeping. The primary question this thesis engages with is: To what extent does friendship, as practiced in a world saturated by digital technology, reflect biblical and classical ideals of friendship? This question may be answered both positively (areas of continuity) and negatively (areas of divergence).

The research approach combines theory (ancient and modern literature) and practice (empirical data). This approach reflects how friendship can be studied in a theoretical manner or within the scope of lived practice. Beginning with the theory in the form of a literature review which encompasses Biblical, classical, historic, and modern sources, these were used to create frameworks of thought and interview questions for semi-structured interviews for the empirical research. Interpreting the empirical data in consideration of the literature along with particular attention to the roles of theology and modern technology, brings about new understandings concerning the relationship between the theory and practice of friendship.

This thesis consists of seven chapters, the first chapter providing an introduction while the remaining six make up three partitions. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the ancient world addressing friendship in the Bible, ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, and church history up to the Reformation. Chapter 4 and 5 take friendship from theory towards practice focusing on value and technological changes in the modern world. The final chapters (6 and 7) contain empirical research and the conclusion.

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Introduction

1. Chapter One: Why study friendship?

Being social creatures, humans invest in and build relationships, families, and societies. While the family provides initial social relationships, family is not the only means of social bonding, nor should it be assumed that families will be the primary means of enjoying close relationships throughout a person's life. Friendship is a unique human relationship because it is not inherently dependent upon blood ties, nor is it always necessary for human survival.¹ Just as marriage and family relationships are often subjects of academic study, friendship, as one of the primary means of human relationship building, deserves to be a subject of academic study across disciplines. Theology, though often overlooked, is one of the academic disciplines aptly suited to the study of friendship. Theologians, both ancient and modern, have believed friendship to be a valuable subject for study within the realm of theological topics. One of the earliest Christian writers, Saint Augustine (354-430) for example, while never writing a separate book on friendship, mentioned friendship throughout his letters and in numerous writings including his *Confessions*.² The English monk, Saint Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), was best known for two books, one on the love of charity and one on the love of friendship.³ Aelred believed both manifestations of love were meant to be mutually illuminating for the Christian. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) also devoted ample space in his *Summa Theologiae* to attend to the topic of friendship, coming to the belief that the highest end of man⁴ was friendship

¹ This is not to say that someone cannot be friends with a parent, sibling, cousin, etc., but that usually a friend is a relationship that one has with a non-relative.

² Augustine, *Confessions*. trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³ St. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary by Dennis Billy*, ed. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2008).
St. Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity: xvii* (Cistercian Fathers Series, xvii) (Collegeville: Cistercian Publications, 1990).

⁴ There will be times in this thesis that I use the traditional term "man" to refer to both men and women as one might use the word "mankind" or "humanity". The reason for this is for consistency within a certain historical context and within a significant strand in the discipline of theology. However, when deemed more appropriate terms like "humanity" or "men and women" will likewise be used depending on the relevant texts and contexts which are being engaged.

with God and that through friendship with God, the heart could be transformed to extend friendship and charity to others.⁵ In the nineteenth century, Henry Trumbull (1830-1903), a pastor known for pioneering the Sunday School movement in the United States and being a frequent traveller to the Middle East,⁶ dedicated a large work to friendship titled *Friendship the Master Passion*, in which he argued firstly that friendship can be studied within a biblical and theological framework, and secondly that friendships (between both Christians and non-Christians) have changed the world.⁷ C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), wrote a book called *The Four Loves*, in which he addressed the four different Greek words for love and their meanings within a theological context.⁸ In this book he acknowledged that unlike marriage (which produces children in most cases) friendship is not necessary for life but it does make life worth living.⁹ Furthermore, C. S. Lewis was well known not only for his books but for his lived friendships, especially with the well-known Oxford writers group, the Inklings. More recently, a Durham University graduate, Wesley Hill, followed after St. Aelred of Rievaulx writing his own version of “Spiritual Friendship” in which he challenged the Church to celebrate friendships for their role in providing non-sexual, same-gendered affection, especially for those who are same-sex attracted, or identify with the LGBTQ community.¹⁰ It might be tempting to perceive friendship as less important to theology in comparison to doctrines like the Trinity, Justification, or Christology. However, friendship relates to all of these key Christian doctrines, and more importantly, theology is not defined as the study of Christian doctrine; theology is the study of God and subsequently His design and purpose for humanity. If God designed friendship to be enjoyed between humans and between humans and Himself, then friendship ought to be studied as part of the central purpose of theology: to come to a knowledge of God and His design for human beings. Furthermore, the study of friendship pertains to God’s salvific plan, the life of Christian community, the

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Second and Revised Edition) trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), II-II, q. 23, a. 1. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>

⁶ Cyrus Adler and Joseph Jacobs, “Trumbull, Henry Clay” in *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. ix. <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14529-trumbull-henry-clay>

⁷ Trumbull, Henry C., *Friendship the Master-Passion: Or, the Nature and History of Friendship and Its Place as a Force in the World* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960).

⁹ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 87- 89, 94.

¹⁰ Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2015).

Kingdom of Heaven, and the adherence to the two great commands to love God and neighbour. The study of friendship is not limited to Christians, theologians, or the Church; rather understanding God's purpose and design for friendship can be of benefit for all people, especially as it pertains to ethical concerns regarding the cultivation of lasting and emotionally satisfying friendships based on trust and sacrificial love, rather than tenuous relationships often resulting in psychological and emotional scars.

The other primary aspect of this research concerns digital technology. This is yet another area of study which, while not a primary theological subject, has great impact on the practice of theological values and pastoral concerns. All technologies, digital or otherwise, impact not only how people live, but what they value, how they think, and what they believe; all of which are of theological importance.¹¹ Digital technology was not initially part of this research question but in studying friendship, technology became an unavoidable "elephant in the room". Technology mediates so many aspects of human interaction. This means friendship is being directly impacted by digital technologies and so therefore any intention to speak into the modern conceptions of friendship requires engagement with the technologies that are shaping society.

This study on friendship arises out of a tradition within theology and connects to other disciplines like that of philosophy, psychology, and anthropology which have also found friendship an important area of academic research. The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to specifically address the biblical understanding of friendship and demonstrate how theological research in this area is especially useful for discerning a path towards meaningful friendships that will flourish in modernity's increasingly digitalised society.

1.1 Thesis aim, questions, and approach

The main question this thesis will engage with is: to what extent does friendship, as practiced in a world saturated by digital media, reflect biblical and classical ideals of friendship? This question may be answered both positively (areas where continuity exists) and negatively (areas of divergence). From this question, both the areas of alignment and

¹¹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

misalignment can be explored with the aim of discerning potential effects. To get to the heart of this question it is vital to first understand friendship: definitions, ideals, changes, etc. Equally important is to understand how Christian theology informs friendship ideals, as well as how digital technology impacts philosophical frameworks which affect practices of friendship. Upon reflecting and engaging with the historical and modern understandings of friendship within theological frameworks the goal will be to emerge with at least a preliminary understanding of a theology of friendship which is faithful to the tradition while being appropriate for the digital age.

One of the main difficulties for this study is the scope both in terms of disciplines by which to study friendship as well as the breadth of friendship itself (male and female friendships, friendships which intersect with other relationships like spouses or children, degrees of friendship, etc.). The objective therefore is to focus on the primary questions and allow breadth when relevant but without losing sight of the aims of this thesis. For this reason, rationale will be given for any divergent topics explored; otherwise, footnotes will be used to indicate topics outside the scope of this study which will not be pursued further.

The approach for this thesis is a combination of theory and practice. This thesis will begin with the theory in the form of a literature review, highlighting and defining initial questions which were used to create frameworks of thought for the proceeding parts which focus on friendship in practice. The first two parts will therefore address the history of friendship leading up to the modern day and setting the scene for the empirical work. The final part will explore the empirical data from semi-structured interviews and conclude by interpreting the empirical data in light of the literature from the first two parts. The goal is to arrive at an understanding of the relationship between the theory and practice of friendship, with particular attention given to the roles of theology and modern technology.

1.2 Important Cultural Factors

In addressing the topic of friendship both historically and at present, there are a few key cultural factors which will be helpful to take into consideration. While there are potentially numerous cultural influences which would impact the theory and practice of

friendship, there are three cultural influences which will be particularly pertinent to consider regarding this study.

1.2.1 Truth

Firstly, there is the cultural conception of truth, whether truth is subjective and personal or a fixed constant and impersonal, or some mixture of the two. Beliefs concerning truth as relative or transcendent can impact friendship behaviours. In chapter one, it will become clear that according to the Bible, friends are to seek God's will and to love truth; which was understood to be as unchanging as God himself. However, in many modern societies, truth is often understood as relative to persons and situations rather than as an unchanging, impartial transcendent reality. If friends are to help each other pursue truth and live in response to truth, how a person conceptualises truth will subsequently have a significant impact on their perceptions and experiences of friendship.

1.2.2 Sexual Identity and Intimacy

The next important cultural factor to consider is two-fold: sexual identity and intimacy. Since the time of the Bible, a significant cultural shift has occurred affecting the ways in which sex and sexuality are discerned and discussed. In the ancient world, sexual activity was not thought of in terms of one's identity.¹² There were moral and immoral sexual behaviours, but individuals were not classed or defined as being a certain kind of person based on their sexual behaviour.¹³ Today, sexual identity is, for many, a fundamental part of who they are, rather than an activity or action with which they may or may not

¹² "Indeed, can we not speak of heterosexuals and homosexuals as distinct categories of persons that are at least implicitly, if not explicitly, present in all cultures? That is, whatever the relative novelty of the terminology, can we not speak of heterosexual and homosexual identities as universal, intrinsic, natural, and essential facts of what it is to be sexual within the human community?" Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

¹³ Other than perhaps broader terms of "saints" and "sinners".

engage.¹⁴ This leads to the question of how these changes concerning sexuality and sexual identity might impact friendship. In the Torah (and for the majority of practising Christians, Jews, and Muslims today) there was one acceptable outlet for sexual intercourse which was in marriage (a man and a woman). This stands in stark contrast to both the sexual ethics of the modern Western world (where there is far more freedom to engage in sexual activity) and to the concept of sexuality as directly tied to one's identity. Furthermore, sexual intercourse and intimacy seem to have become definitionally intertwined. While these concepts are related and can certainly overlap, they are neither interchangeable nor inherently linked. It is understandable why these words would have become deeply connected since they are often mutually enjoyed in romantic relationships. However, intimacy does not require sex (nor vice versa). This is an important distinction due to the potential impacts on friendships. For example, two men who love one another could have a very different experience depending on when, and in which society, they lived. For example, David and Jonathan, in the Old Testament were able to express intimacy and love; even saying "your love is better than that of a woman"¹⁵ without their identities coming into question. Conversely, if two men in modern Western culture developed as deep an emotional bond as David and Jonathan, there would be those who would assume homosexual identity rather than platonic intimacy. If some men were to question their sexual identity in a friendship with another man, due to this cultural development, this could impact the friendship because of questions relating to sexual identity; questions which would not have arisen in many historic societies.

1.2.3 Moral Responsibility

Lastly, the effects of digital technologies on culture, especially regarding the role of moral responsibility, are important to understand. For example, the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan once famously declared, "the medium is the message".¹⁶ McLuhan was

¹⁴ Judith S. Kaufman and David A. Powell, eds., *The Meaning of Sexual Identity in the Twenty-First Century* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1-4. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵ 2 Samuel 1:26.*

* All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964).

arguing that people communicate not only through words and actions but also through the medium used. Not only are the styles, tenors, and messages communicated impacted by the medium, but the medium also reciprocally impacts the beliefs and values of individuals and societies. That said, technology does not have desires or a will therefore the moral weight should not be placed on technology, but rather upon the human producers and consumers of technology who do have desires, wills, and moral conscience. Therefore, while technology might be infused with certain patterns which would lead to certain moral ends, it is not the technology making moral decisions, but the developers who create the technology and the users who then bear the responsibility for how they employ their technology. In terms of friendship, if issues arise regarding social media or digital devices which help or harm friendship, then it is worth considering the moral implications of these technologies.

1.3 Important Christian Doctrines

1.3.1 Morality and the Body in the Creation Account

In the creation account in Genesis, God proclaimed all He created to be “good” and then placed humans (Adam and Eve) in the garden of Eden tasking them with stewarding creation.¹⁷ The use of ‘good’ is perhaps best understood in the classical understanding which arises from philosophers like Aristotle and Aquinas: that ‘the good’ can be understood both *teleologically* and morally. This means that good can be understood as either 1) when a thing is operating within its intended purpose, acting according to its *telos*, or 2) that an action is morally good according to a moral standard, such as the Ten Commandments or the laws of God from scripture or those inherently known in human hearts (Romans 2:12-16). In the creation account, both uses of *good* are employed. At the close of each day of creation, God proclaimed that creation was good. The sun, moon and stars in the sky and fish swimming in the sea were not morally good, therefore the goodness implied is *teleological* goodness. These things are good because they operate according to

¹⁷ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

their created design. Adam and Eve however possess moral responsibility. They were to bear God's image in the world by morally doing good, by actively choosing to obey God and care for creation. For Adam and Eve, both definitions of good converge as being morally good was also their designed, *teleological* purpose. Evil, as the opposite of good, was then either the inability to function according to its *telos* (a better term for this might be to call something, not good, broken, or bad), or when opposed to moral goodness, as the deprivation of moral perfection. Thus, creation does not itself have a moral will: humans do. Therefore, humans are the ones to impress morality upon the creation through interacting with other people, creatures, nature, and anything created by humans. According to the Christian worldview, which asserts that humans are made in the image of God, there is an even higher expectation of care to be shown towards other humans. This is subsequently more difficult to achieve with multiple moral agents interacting. Conversely, when humans interact with the rest of creation such interactions are morally neutral and can be understood as something akin to the using of a tool. For this reason, it is vital to consider the way a tool will be used because, when utilised by a human, it will (in most cases) have some moral value attached to it.

Thus, the physical world and humans as embodied creatures with both flesh and soul, were both deemed good by God. Movements like Gnosticism and Docetism undermined this teaching by promoting negative views of the body and creation. Such negative views of the body continue to persist in different guises (i.e., praising the body while abusing it to look "perfect", idealising representations or enhancements over the original, or in extreme cases, trading in the human body for man-made machines that will not "die"). What this communicates is that one's view of creation can profoundly impact how one interacts with the world. The idea that the body and the physical world are good will be vital for discussing friendship later in the part on digital technology. It is important to understand that creation itself and humans, as part of the created cosmos, comprise a physical reality. The soul or the mind, the non-physical aspects of humanity, are also very real and intrinsic to being human. However, it is often the physical body or the physical world which is deemed to be of lesser value, and yet from creation God proclaimed the goodness of the created world.

In the garden there was only goodness but after the fall in Genesis chapter two Adam and Eve chose the moral responsibility of knowing both good and evil and living with the imperative to choose between them. The beliefs one has regarding the morality of the world and who bears moral responsibility are critical to consider when it comes to how people go about making friendships using created things such as our digital technology and devices. Human friendships do not exist outside of creation therefore friendship interacts with many objects and situations which can help or hinder friendship-making and keeping.

1.3.2 The Doctrine of the Imago Dei and the Trinity

In this section, how the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and that of the *Imago Dei*¹⁸ serve as foundational frameworks for understanding human nature and both the need and capability for community and friendship will be explored. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God himself exists within a community of love and intimacy.¹⁹ Part of the very essence of God then implies communal love.²⁰ Indeed, for love to exist there must be objects of affection which means love cannot be expressed in isolation. Therefore, if God is triune then even before creation, love existed. Furthermore, if humans were created to bear the image of God and were made according to His likeness,²¹ then it follows that humans are meant to live in communities where love is experienced and expressed. Indeed, while humans are individually complete biologically, and even spiritually each person is responsible for his or her own standing before God, there is an aspect of being human that requires the presence of other humans to fully experience humanity. To display certain qualities such as love, mercy, forgiveness, commitment, and generosity humans must interact with other humans. Indeed, it is impossible for any of these and other emotional activities to take place in isolation because they all require both a giver and a receiver. This idea fits within the broader view that the whole narrative of scripture should be seen as one overarching story

¹⁸ The idea that human beings are made in God's image.

¹⁹ John 17:21, John 3:13-17.

²⁰ Joshua Reginald Sijuwade, "Love and the Necessity of the Trinity: An A Posteriori Argument," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110990>.

²¹ Genesis 1:27.

of God's love as He rescues and redeems humans so that they might enter into eternal friendship, just as God himself enjoyed within the godhead in eternity.

1.4 Friendship from the Ancient World to the Modern World: *What is Friendship?*

1.4.1 Biblical Friendship

For this study, friendship will be defined within a biblical context. Towards this end, the first chapter will construct a definition of friendship from Scripture. Here, friendship is given by God and can be enjoyed with God Himself. Scripture asserts that the foundation of true friendship for the biblical authors is a mutual love for God and the pursuit of His will. Biblical friendships also encouraged (whenever possible) the physical sharing of life and the cultivation of emotional and spiritual intimacy. Biblical friendship was also quite inclusive in that friendship was open to men and women, as well as non-Jews, and was intended as a blessing both for the community and future generations. These main points of biblical friendship will be explored through the story of Abraham and Moses with Yahweh in the Torah, the friendships of David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi in the historical books of the Old Testament, the books of Proverbs and the wisdom of Sirach from the Apocrypha, and the gospel of John and Pauline letters from the New Testament. While these Biblical texts do not encompass every reference to friendship in the Bible, they do cover the breadth of the biblical teachings on friendship representing the themes of biblical friendship well.

1.4.2 Classical Friendship

Since biblical friendship is distinct from classical friendship chapter 2 will address classical friendship (traditionally understood as developed by the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers). Exploring classical philosophies of friendship are particularly important to understanding the development of later church teachings on friendship. These ancient philosophers believed friendship to be a virtue as well as a relationship by which friends

would cultivate virtue together. For the majority of these ancient philosophers, friendship existed in categories so as to make distinctions between virtue friendships and lesser friendships. Regardless of the categories used, all of the classical philosophers considered virtue friendship to be the highest and most rare form of friendship. Virtue friendship was considered noble and often rare and yet was also a means of enabling men²² to pursue a virtuous life. In the first part of this chapter Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch's writings on friendship will be explored. While there are other philosophers who also discussed friendship, these four are some of the most prominent and also address aspects of friendship which can be traced through towards later Christian conceptions of friendship which will be the focus of the second half of chapter two.

1.4.3 Christian Virtue Friendship

Towards the end of chapter 2 the term "Christian virtue friendship" will be explored. Though not commonly used, it seemed the most appropriate term for friendship as understood as it emerged from both Christian and Classical definitions over the course of Western history.²³ A distinction ought to be made between Biblical and Christian friendship as Biblical friendship is solely based on scripture while Christian virtue friendship is informed by the classical tradition. Christian virtue friendship emerged from the combining of Biblical friendship with classical ideas of friendship, especially from the Scholastics, Reformers, and Puritans between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The idea that Christian theologians merely "Christianised" ancient texts (this did happen explicitly) misses the nuances as the influences of both biblical and classical beliefs of friendship merged to create the Christian tradition of friendship. For the purposes of this thesis, the distinctions between

²² Friendship for the ancients was primarily for men, though some made allowances for women, but given that friendships of virtue was understood as something for the learned and that women were less likely to receive an education it would have been assumed that men were the primary audience when speaking of virtue friendship in the ancient world.

²³ Joelle Lucas, "Christian Virtue Friendship and Puritan Friendship in the English Reformation," MA diss., (Durham University, 2019).
https://www.academia.edu/41830536/Christian_Virtue_Friendship_and_Puritan_Friendship_in_the_English_Reformation

biblical friendship, and that of classical and Christian virtue friendships arise primarily because many notable differences exist between friendship as understood from the Scriptures and friendship as understood from the assimilation of philosophy and theology. This chapter will conclude the first part by comparing and contrasting biblical and classical ideas of friendship highlighting areas of importance and nuanced differences which are relevant to the study of friendship.

1.5 From Theory to Practice: *What Happened to Friendship?*

Having looked in-depth at the history and shaping of friendship part two of the thesis will address the ways in which friendship has changed and evolved from friendship perceptions and experiences of the past. While constants certainly remain, the focus will be to address areas of change. Some of these deviations relate to theological values, such as the friendship aims of seeking of God's will and the cultivation of holiness and virtue, while others relate to underlying beliefs, such as views on truth, sexual identity, and intimacy. Lastly, more experiential changes to friendship, such as the longevity of friendships or openness when making friends (like male and female friendships, or friendships between people of different cultures or classes) will also be explored beginning with the deeper underlying beliefs regarding friendship, progressing to the more surface level ideas of friendship (since these usually rest upon foundational values). Changes are not assumed to be inherently negative; rather the goal will be to understand the changes, within their contexts, so to be better qualified to assess moral questions and bestow value judgements. Indeed, the nuances relating to contexts and outcomes, motivations, etc., may preclude the use of "good" or "bad" labelling. Therefore, the primary aim of this part is to not decide what is good or bad but to create a framework which will set the stage for the empirical data and concluding remarks of part three.

1.5.1 Changes with Friendship

Chapter 4 outlines changes beyond technology which have emerged in the modern world which could affect friendship, and which also link to the emergence of digital devices and exploration of living which is increasingly common. These changes are traced from around the time of the Industrial Revolution, as the most recent technology boom before the digital technological boom and are separated into two sub-sections: 1) environmental and technological factors, and 2) beliefs and values. For the part on beliefs and values, issues of independence/dependence, truth and ethical frameworks, sexual and intimacy definitions, roles of gender, and the importance of physical bodies and matter are addressed as these all factor into broader discussions of modern friendship and the experiences of the integration of digital devices. In the first section which focuses on environmental changes, social scientists and philosophers like David Hume, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson from the Scottish Enlightenment, along with many secondary academic sources will be explored along with more modern examples from Neil Postman and Marshall McLuhan. In the latter half, historical examples such as Bonhoeffer or Trumbull will be compared with modern social scientists like Dean Cocking, Sofia Kaliarnta, and Sherry Turkle, along with more contemporary non-academic writers such as Kate Leaver, who together provide a well-rounded and helpful multi-dimensional view of modern friendship.

1.5.2 Technology and Friendship

Technology is much more than merely a medium of communication. The scope of what the internet and digital technology will mean for humanity is likely far greater than one could possibly imagine. The abilities technology offers are multifaceted and ever-changing. Neil Postman wrote that digital technology would do for humanity what the technologies of the wheel and the printing press did: forever alter how humans live, and more importantly, how they think and what they value.²⁴ As Marshall McLuhan, whom I have mentioned previously, argued, the technologies used for communication inherently

²⁴ Postman, *Technopoly*, 10-20.

send messages before any personalised message is crafted.²⁵ This is to say that without even the words or sentences, simply choosing to send a letter versus a text message sends a subliminal message. For example, a hand-written letter might communicate extra time, money, or special affection, while an email might communicate efficiency or urgency. While digital technology certainly interacts with cultural issues, it is also important to not over-emphasize the impact of technology; forcing technology to be a scapegoat for societal issues.²⁶ Change is not always for the worse, indeed sometimes there is much to be gained with change, but most often change - even for the better, comes at the price of losing something in return for convenience. Thus, the goal of part 3 will be to better understand the changes, gains, losses, hurdles, and innovations that have come from technology as it applies to friendship.

Chapter 5, the final chapter for part two, is comprised of two main sections. The first delves into McLuhan's idea of the message of technology addressing the topic both generally and morally. In the second half of this chapter, friendship itself comes into full focus through examining the technologies of the mobile phone, social media, and the impact of technology upon the mirroring aspects of friendship. Some of the voices which will be engaged with in this chapter are Adam Briggles, Johan Hari, Mary Aiken, Johnny Hartz Søraker, Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews as well as Christian pastors and theologians such as Andy Crouch, Andrew Graystone, C.S. Lewis, and Tricia McCary Rhodes. The hope is that by bringing thinkers from different disciplines together on overlapping subject matter relating to technology and friendship, a theological understanding of technology's impact on friendship can be discerned.

1.6 Empirical Research: *What do we want from Friendship?*

Much of friendship-making and keeping now occurs via digital devices and in digital spaces. This raises questions regarding what effects this could have on friendship. Could technology be changing friendship values, can technology be used to reflect certain

²⁵ McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1-2.

²⁶ Shannon Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook: Virtue Friendship & New Social Media," *Ethics and Information Technology* 14, no. 3, (2012): 197. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-010-9262-2>

friendship values, or does technology ultimately distract from true friendship? These are some of the main questions with which this final part seeks to wrestle. While there has been research on topics like the effects of online friendship, the theology of technology, and the need for in-person friendship encounters, there has been little academic research with a primary focus on the intersection of digital ethics, intimacy, theology, and friendship. This is where there is a gap in the literature which this thesis seeks to address by presenting a study which rests on a theological foundation, dialogues with other humanities disciplines to understand the lived-out implications of friendship in a sexualised and digitalised society, and which promotes interdisciplinary research which is vital for new and innovative research.

This final part is comprised of two chapters which together work through the empirical data ending with conclusions which tie together the empirical data with the literature. The first part, which deals with the empirical data, begins by outlining the methodology behind the research methods which, along with assumptions and other information about the data-gathering process, are provided with the research methods themselves before moving on to the data collected. The collected data which has been deemed useful and relevant to this study is then presented by progressing through the survey questions. In the final conclusion, the data from the empirical research is sifted into categories which highlight areas of continuity and areas of divergence relevant to the tradition as seen through the literature which provides a useful way of answering the primary question of this thesis which seeks to understand the changes made to friendship in the modern Western world and how the current ideals of friendship correlate to biblical and classical models of friendship. This empirical data is also useful because it further highlights modern challenges to friendship (such as respecting the body-soul relationship, or maintaining long-term friendships amidst a world of instant gratification and “cancel-culture”) and how theological frameworks (such as the ideas of the *imago dei*, or sacrificial love) can support friendship in the changing landscape of the modern world.

1.6.1 Methodology

The methodology arose from research questions based on gaps in the literature. Through reading and research, the areas for subsequent and clarifying questions became clearer, influencing the methods used. Semi-structured interviews were chosen since they would allow for additional relevant questions to be asked, as well as granting greater freedom to respond to each interviewee uniquely based upon his or her responses. This was preferable to structured interviews which would not have the same freedoms and would take away from the conversational style of interviews. Interviews were preferred as well to surveys for their story-like nature and for interviewees to share openly about their experiences rather than merely responding with one word or in a few sentences. While surveys would have potentially provided greater amounts of data, the data sought was in quality rather than quantity. Semi-structured interviews allowed for hearing participants' stories while also being able to ask responsive questions. The goal then was to conduct interviews which allowed participants to share their thoughts in response to the questions. This therefore necessitated a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study. The purpose was to understand some patterns of friendship which may be salient to people in some English-speaking countries like the US and the UK.

1.6.2 Research Methods

The downside of interviews is that they are long and therefore limited in how many people could be interviewed. With that consideration, it was still desirable to interview a diverse group of people. Participants of various ages, both men and women, living in both the North East of England and Portland, Oregon USA were therefore selected. The two locations were chosen for two reasons, firstly, because these were both places where I had residence and thus were accessible and secondly because they were both western contexts without isolating participants to one region of a country. This was to be avoided as this is not an anthropological study of friendship for a particular region but rather a study on friendship in two Western cultural contexts within the discipline of theology.

The interviews were composed of eight primary questions with sub-questions relative to how the interviewee responded. The questions were developed based on relevance to major themes already explored in the literature, as well as how they might garner responses from participants which would reveal thoughts, desires, definitions and lived experiences of friendship. Questions primarily corresponded to topics of friendship, faith, cultural ideas, and technology.

Twelve people were initially interviewed but there were only 11 interviews used in this thesis due to a corrupted transcript file which made it unusable. These interviewees were from either the greater Portland area (Oregon, USA) or the Northeast of England. The interviews took place either in person or online and were recorded with Otter audio-transcription software. All the data was anonymised, and any names given are pseudonyms. All eight header questions were asked in each interview and the follow up questions were also usually asked in each interview unless the question was answered previously or if deemed irrelevant based on previous answers. Unscripted follow-up questions for clarification were also asked when appropriate.

1.6.3 Qualifications, Questions and Assumptions

Due both to the limited size of the study and that those interviewed were those most easily accessible, the sample of participants will not represent wider portions of Western society. Participants ranged from strangers to personal acquaintances and friends though any preferential treatment was actively avoided in analysing the data.

Another reason for choosing semi-structured interviews was to avoid preferences for any personal assumptions of desired answers by allowing participants greater freedom in their responses. Likewise, responses to participants aimed to be clarifying as much as possible so as to avoid influencing responses. To give respondents more time to consider their answers (if they wished) and to avoid the questions only being given out blindly in one order at the time of the interview, all respondents received copies of the eight main questions prior to the interview. The interview questions were also written with the assumptions that hyper-sexualisation, religion, society, and digital technology could influence and affect friendships to varying degrees.

1.7 Conclusion

The primary thesis question posited was, “to what extent does friendship practised now, in a world saturated by digital media, reflect biblical [or Christian] ideals of friendship?” The conclusion will arise from an analysis of all the philosophical and empirical data. This research question is a sizable one which will require ongoing investigation as technology and culture continues to shift and change. However, I am confident that answers can be ascertained which will be helpful for both philosophical understandings and moral values of friendship as well as the bettering of lived experiences of friendship making and keeping in the modern world.

Part One

Friendship in the Ancient World

2. Chapter Two: Biblical Friendship, From the Old Testament and the New Testament

Understanding biblical teachings on friendship brings clarity to the conceptualisations of friendship; and when understood properly, friendship proves itself to be not only a human benefit or means of pleasure but also an integral part of the purpose and design for humanity to know and be known by God Himself. In the Bible the word *friendship* is not expressly defined, there are no biblical laws to provide clear definitional boundaries, nor are there any direct commandments specific to friendship (unlike the commandments to honour one's parents and be faithful to one's spouse).²⁷ Instead, friendship can be understood and defined through the reading of narratives and wisdom books such as of Proverbs in the Old Testament, Sirach in the Apocrypha, and the gospel of John and Paul's letters in the New Testament.²⁸ Through examination of these texts, Biblical friendship proves to be not only part of God's design for fellowship and human flourishing but also an important means of understanding the gospel where God's redemption plan to atone for sin and restore humanity in mercy is also intimately revealed as a restoration of friendship between God and man. Understood in this way, the theme of friendship becomes integral to the overarching message of Scripture. This becomes increasingly apparent if friendship is understood as a manifestation of the *agape* love of God (which is intrinsic to His character and a catalyst of his will). When friendship is mentioned in the Old and the New Testaments it is used to refer both to human friendships as well as friendship between humans and God himself. Furthermore, not only is understanding friendship from a Biblical context of use in

²⁷ Exodus 20:12,14.

²⁸ "The writers of patristic and medieval times consciously reflected upon the biblical references to friendship, notably the story of David and Jonathan, verses from the book of Proverbs, and the relevant New Testament passages, such as John 15:15. The basis of spiritual friendship was identified in the person of Jesus Christ."

James McEvoy, "Ultimate Goods: Happiness, Friendship, and Bliss," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 272.

any exploration of the history of friendship (due to the historical and literary impact of the Bible) but this will be especially necessary for being able to discern a theology of friendship both historically as well as within the modern context.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is comprised of two main sections, the first of which addresses friendship in the Old Testament, starting with the narrative accounts of David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi, followed by friendship through the wisdom literature of Proverbs and the book of Sirach, concluding with passages relating to human friendships with God through the accounts of Abraham and Moses. The second part will explore friendship in the New Testament starting with a cursory explanation of some of the various words for love and friendship which provide useful context before delving into the biblical texts themselves, followed by an exploration of the integration of friendship and salvation in the gospel of John and concluding with a brief look into Paul's examples of friendship from his letters and the book of Acts. This chapter should lay a biblical foundation of the meaning and significance of friendship from Scripture itself, before moving on to the ideas and ideals of human friendship in the subsequent classical writings (both secular and Christian) which will be explored in chapter 3.

2.2 Old Testament Narratives

While there are other narratives which also touch upon friendship,²⁹ for the purpose of this study, the narratives concerning the relationships between David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi will be explored as they are both excellent examples of friendship in the Old Testament.

²⁹ Such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego during the Babylonian captivity (see Daniel chapters 1-3) or Job's friends who come to "comfort" him in his affliction (see Job 2:11-13; 4:1-5:27; 8:1-22; 11:1-20; 15:1-35; 18:1-21; 20:1-29; 22:1-30; 25:1-6; 32:1-37:24; 42: 7-17).

2.2.1 David and Jonathan

The friendship between David and Jonathan was selected for this study due, in part, to the plethora of research already addressing this friendship, but primarily because of how the text celebrates the friendship which arguably indicates this is an ideal friendship for the biblical writers. There are also many curious and intriguing aspects to this friendship which make it especially useful when seeking to ascertain defining qualities of Old Testament friendship. Because the nature, purpose, and intentions of this friendship have served as fodder for much academic study, the arguments run in many directions. Some scholars assert that David and Jonathan were not friends but lovers, while others see the political undercurrents and ramifications as motivating their relationship. Then there are questions regarding the covenantal nature of their friendship.³⁰ Further topics explored through this friendship are related to differences in status or age and mutuality in their friendship.

The story of David and Jonathan is situated within the books of First and Second Samuel. The accounts of David and Jonathan detail the friendship of only two characters in a wider narrative which takes place within a broader history of the Israelite people and God's story of salvation in which David later becomes an ancestor of Christ the promised Messiah.³¹ In discussing the nature of their friendship, it is useful to remember that these accounts serve as contributions to the arc of the larger narrative of the people of Israel and their God, so as to avoid erroneous readings of the text. There are many potential elements such as politics, wars, gender, and sexuality etc., to explore within the accounts of David and Jonathan. However, not all of these topics are relevant to a discussion on friendship. That said, some of the debate surrounding sexuality and gender will be addressed as it is relevant to clarifying the nature of their friendship and how it should be best understood within the wider biblical context. Therefore, since the purpose is to evaluate the relationship between David and Jonathan for its message concerning a biblical teaching on friendship, basic

³⁰ I first explored this topic in a Master's paper titled: "The Theology of Friendship: The Covenantal Nature of Biblical Friendship". Joelle Lucas, "The Theology of Friendship: The Covenantal Nature of Biblical Friendship," MA paper, (The Master's University, 2014).
https://www.academia.edu/39152489/The_Theology_of_Friendship_The_Covenantal_Nature_of_Biblical_Friendship

³¹ Matthew 1, Luke 3:21-28.

background context will be relayed as this will bring clarity and context, before delving into the significance of the covenant made and reaffirmed by these two men.

2.2.1.1 Background

In 1 Samuel 18 David and Jonathan pledge friendship in a covenant. However, before delving into the covenant itself, it is important to understand the background and context in which their covenant was forged. In many ways, David and Jonathan did not begin their friendship as equals: Jonathan being older, possibly stronger, a prince with wealth and power etc., while David was younger³² (though having already been anointed as the future King), lacked in riches and power, and was King Saul's armour bearer.³³ However, these factors of inequality did not prevent their friendship.³⁴ According to Gary Stansell, these inequalities diminished with the covenanting of their friendship where Jonathan promoted David by giving him his robe and sword etc.³⁵ Furthermore, in marrying Jonathan's sister, Michal, David would have increased in his political standing.³⁶ Thus, it would seem that in Jonathan's making a covenant with David, an equality emerged as he humbled himself and elevated David.³⁷ This provides an interesting perspective on whether equality is necessary in friendship, and if so, what can account for equality. The measurement of equality often correlates more to physical attributes, but for David and Jonathan, their equality was measured less by power or wealth and more by faith and character. Consider how, in both their introductions, Jonathan and David were described as men strong of character and

³² "The age difference may be a factor in this response as Marti Williams places David around 15 or 16 years old when he killed Goliath." Notes from Dr. Marti Williams' "BOTB 511 Rise of the Davidic Monarchy class," [Wednesday, July 16, 2003], Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA., quoted in, Kevin C.R. Tyson (2010) "A Cultural Study of the David and Jonathan Relationship through the Ritual in 1 Samuel 18:1-5." PhD Diss. (Durham University, 2010), 83.

³³ Gary Stansell, "David and His Friends: Social-Scientific Perspectives on the David-Jonathan Friendship," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 41, no. 3 (2011): 123. doi:10.1177/0146107911413209

³⁴ Stansell, "David and His Friends," 122.

³⁵ 1 Samuel 18:4.

³⁶ 1 Samuel 18:17-27.

³⁷ "The intensity of Jonathan's love for David is further emphasized by the sequence of actions that Jonathan takes. He makes a pact with David, removes his cloak, and gives it to David along with his armour, sword, bow, and sword belt.... Jonathan was a commander in the army; this presentation of his armour and weapons to David signifies a transfer of his military authority." Stansell, "David and His Friends," 7.

faith. Jonathan's first appearance in 1 Samuel chapters 13-14 describes how he and his armour bearer defeated the Philistines³⁸ through an act of faith in God. David's introduction in chapter 17 displayed a brave young man with an intense faith in Israel's God.³⁹ He declared to King Saul: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine,"⁴⁰ before facing Goliath the Philistine. David and Jonathan may not have started their friendship as equals in station, but they were equals in faith. Furthermore, where they were unequal in other measurements, with time such inequalities faded. Therefore, it would seem that while equality of station can be useful and pleasant in a friendship,⁴¹ it is not necessary, while equality of values and faith are far more important factors for building a lasting friendship.

There were clearly many dynamics in the relationship between David and Jonathan; one of the most prominent was the political roles they filled and the ensuing underlying political narratives.⁴² For example, Martin A Cohan queried: "How else explain the fact that David and Jonathan made a *berith*, a type of covenant which in all other passages of the Bible resounds not with sexual, but with political, military and religious overtones...?"⁴³ To view their friendship as merely a political alliance, however, would fail to appreciate the depth and love shared between these men, and would be a gross under representation of

³⁸ 1 Samuel 14:6.

³⁹ 1 Samuel 17:26-27.

⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 17:37.

⁴¹ This will be made clear in chapter 3 where equality was considered desirable by many of the classical philosophers.

⁴² Erin E. Fleming noted a 1963 article by William Moran was formative for a stronger argument in favour of a political reading of the text. Fleming said that Moran, "argues that the term *love* (Hebrew אהב) has a specialized political connotation in biblical and ancient Near Eastern treaty relationships....In light of Moran's argument, I suggest that two other terms associated with David and Jonathan, חפץ, meaning "delight in" or "desire," and נעם, which denotes being "pleasant" or "lovely," can also have political overtones in particular contexts....A politicized understanding of חפץ and נעם has significant bearing on the interpretation of the relationship between David and Jonathan presented in 1-2 Samuel." Erin E. Fleming, "Political Favoritism in Saul's Court: חפץ, נעם, and the Relationship between David and Jonathan," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 21-22. Referencing: William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background for the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77-87.

"...Jonathan, recognizing the inevitability of David's eventual accession to the throne of Israel, was won over to David's conspiracy and subordinated himself, not sexually, but politically." Martin A. Cohen, "The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 36 (1965): 83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23506568>

⁴³ Cohen, "The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel," 83.

the nature of their friendship.⁴⁴ A more accurate depiction would be to acknowledge the very real political ramifications, while asserting these were not the only motivators for their friendship.⁴⁵ One example is how Jonathan did not align himself with David so as to stay alive, given that he made a choice to keep David alive, even at the price of disregarding an order from his father the King;⁴⁶ something Jonathan would not likely do if his friendship with David was only for political advantage. Why then, if not for political reasons, did David and Jonathan forge their friendship? A detailed appendix from a popular Christian book titled *Friendish* by Kelly Needham, provides one of the most sensible, logically argued, and contextually relevant exegetical interpretations regarding the relationship between these two men in comparison to many of the various academic papers evaluated for this topic.⁴⁷ Needham argues that the two introduction passages (1 Samuel 13-14 and 17) illustrate a clear similarity of characters and devotion to Yahweh. From a straightforward reading of these texts, her assessment would appear to be correct.⁴⁸ While others cowered in fear, retreated from battle, and lacked faith in the power of God, both Jonathan and David faced their enemies due to their conviction that God would bring victory to the Israelites. David and Jonathan shared the belief that they were to be God's servants, who, by their faith and obedience, could become God's instruments of defence for the Jewish people. Shared character and faith seem to be the most accurate reasons for why they entered into a covenant of friendship rather than social standing or political gain.

⁴⁴ Julian Morgenstern argued kingly succession by a son might not have been a given meaning Jonathan might not have assumed he would become King after his father, and possibly even by David marrying into the family this may have placed David in position for the throne. Julian Morgenstern, "David and Jonathan," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 4 (1959): 324. doi:10.2307/3264728

⁴⁵ "It seems that the love that inspired Jonathan to conclude his alliance with David has two implications: (1) on the emotional and personal level and (2) on the practical and political level.... Certainly the metaphor is apt for the fierce love of two souls that are intertwined. But the bond is not two-way, and the love is not mutual. The description focuses on Jonathan's emotions and actions: 'he loved him', 'he made a covenant'." Orly Keren, "David and Jonathan: A Case of Unconditional Love?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 1 (2012): 8. doi:10.1177/0309089212455544

⁴⁶ 1 Sam. 19:1-3.

⁴⁷ Academics like F. B. Meyer, and Barry A Jones, also share this view. Frederick Brotherton Meyer, *David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895), 53-54. "Zeal for YHWH, which has characterized each on the battlefield, also appears to foster their mutual devotion." Barry A. Jones, "Between Text & Sermon: 1 Samuel 20:1-17," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 2 (2004): 174.

⁴⁸ Kelly Needham, *Friendish: Reclaiming Real Friendship in a Culture of Confusion* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), Appendix II.

2.2.1.2 The Covenant

These shared purposes are needed to understand the reasons for which this covenant of friendship was made between David and Jonathan as recorded in 1 Samuel. 18:

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.⁴⁹

In this passage Jonathan made a covenant with David,⁵⁰ a promise which was invoked in the presence of God.⁵¹ While some scholars like Orly Keren, Ralph Klein, and Julian Morgenstern noted the possible political motivators for making a covenant, it has already been shown that this is not likely to have been the primary motivating factor in the forming of this covenant. Therefore, the more logical conclusion is that as these men noticed their shared values, they formed a covenant based on a foundation of faith which is also most-likely why the covenant was invoked before God. This is not simply a modern evangelical reading of the text; Danau Lambert, a French theologian from the 16th century, whom I studied when researching friendship in the time of the Reformation, also believed shared faith and love of God's will was the centre of their friendship and the motivation for their covenant. While consensus is not the only measure of good exegesis, it is a helpful marker. In his writings he shared Needham's view, writing that it was the boldness and shared nature of their faith; their shared inclinations and "conformity of wills" that was the catalyst whereby Jonathan, "knit himself in the most firm friendship with David."⁵²

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 18:1-4.

⁵⁰ According to Webster's 1828 dictionary, a covenant is firstly, "a mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act of thing;" the third and fourth definitions are given in a theological context and refer to things God promises to do corresponding with human conditions, or agreements between church members who promise to "walk together according to the precepts of the gospel, in brotherly affection."
Webster's 1828 Online Dictionary, s.v. "Covenant," <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Covenant>.

⁵¹ 1 Samuel 20:23.

⁵² "...mooued Ionathan to knit himselfe in most firme friendship with Daid: whom for his valiaunt heart and noble courage in van-quisshing proud Goliath.... to wit, the mutuall knitting together of myndes, and a like inclination and conformi-tie of willes." Daneau Lambert, Thomas Newton, George Robinson, Abraham Veale, *True and Christian Friendshipp: With All the Braunches, Members, Parts, and Circumstances Thereof, Godly and Learnedly Described* (Imprinted at London for Abraham Veale,

To say, however, that their friendship was entirely based on faith apart from any emotional ties would also fail to represent the whole of the text. The text makes clear that affection – *love*, was shared between these men. Thus, while political and religious factors are not irrelevant to their friendship, indeed they cannot be avoided, it would seem that the greater incentive for their friendship was their similarity in character and values. In his thesis, *A Cultural Study of the David and Jonathan Relationship through the Ritual in 1 Samuel 18:1-5*, Kevin Tyson also highlighted the brotherhood, or warrior bond⁵³ aspect this friendship covenant might convey. This bond was one of affection which, the Israelite readers would have seen as, “the two souls merging even though there is no blood relationship or sexual relationship between them.”⁵⁴ Their covenant was reaffirmed multiple times, Jonathan constantly taking the initiative.⁵⁵ Jonathan’s proactiveness does not however mean that David was a passive participant. In one passage David invoked the covenant, remembering it and affirming it.⁵⁶ David is shown here to be the one invoking the covenant which shows his active participation. Jonathan is clearly the primary instigator but that does not mean that David is therefore indifferent.⁵⁷

dwelling in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Lambe, 1586), 3. http://downloads.it.ox.ac.uk/ota-public/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A19/A19802.html#index.xml-group.1_text.1_body.1_div.5

⁵³ “Within this context, the cue for the ancient reader might refer to a bond between warriors in that culture or a brotherhood which could easily be stronger than a bond between men and women.” Tyson, “A Cultural Study of the David and Jonathan Relationship through the Ritual in 1 Samuel 18:1-5,” 82. Quoting from Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 200-201.

⁵⁴ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 189.

⁵⁵ 1 Samuel 20:16-17.

⁵⁶ 1 Samuel 20:8.

⁵⁷ Keren argues for David’s indifference: “It is astonishing that only after Jonathan’s death does David express his feelings, and even then he speaks of Jonathan’s love for Him... there is a repeated and systematic pattern in his behaviour, which expresses what he holds dearest of all— his own image.” Keren, “David and Jonathan,” 22.

Stansell, however argues against such an interpretation: “He [David] does not say, ‘it was very pleasant for me to have loved you as a friend’; rather, David laments that ‘I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; . . . your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women’ (2 Sam 1:26).” Stansell, “David and His Friends,” 128.

2.2.1.3 Potential Sexual Overtones

Another question raised by David and Jonathan's relationship, particularly due to the animated language of their affection, is whether theirs was an entirely platonic relationship or if sexuality was ever a factor. Later in II Samuel, David's love for Jonathan was clearly portrayed as he lamented poetically after the passing of his beloved friend:

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan
very pleasant have you been to me
your love to me was extraordinary
surpassing the love of women.⁵⁸

The words used to express David's love are words of passion such that they have caused some researchers to assume there must have been a sexual attraction between them. Some, like Kevin Tyson, noted that the invoking of a covenant and their overtly affectionate language did not necessitate that their relationship was one of a sexual nature. However, considering this is both a topic of scholarly interest and it bears upon the question of whether affection and friendship are inherently non-sexual, it is an important aspect to address. Given that this story sits within a larger narrative, one in which David features much more prominently, it may not be that David's role in the friendship is more seemingly passive at points due to any of a lack of love for Jonathan, but rather that Jonathan is being praised for his love and dedication to God *through* his friendship with David, thus putting him in line with God's will to make David the king of Israel. Rather than assume a sexual attraction or homosexual relationship between these men, I believe it is a more accurate and faithful reading to understand that the power of their friendship arises precisely *because* their intimacy was of a non-sexual nature. Importantly, David did not directly compare his love of Jonathan as the same as the love of a woman (which potentially may have alluded to a sexual nature), but rather that it surpassed it arguably asserting that this love was of a wholly different kind. Their friendship was not one with homo-erotic or sexualised desires, but rather a friendship which surpassed physical comforts and pleasures; it was a friendship where the capacity for pleasure was greater in their intimacy of soul than any intimacy of the body. Of course, some scholars argue that the question of sexuality

⁵⁸ 2 Samuel 1:26.

cannot be so easily dismissed, and some of their arguments have more merit than others. For example, Karin Hügel asserted that based on David's dancing in 2 Samuel chapter 6, David was expressing himself as a homosexual man. One of her arguments was that David wore extravagant robes, given that, "...some queer people are unusually and extravagantly dressed today". Regarding David's dancing, she not only assumed that the dance was erotic, but that the dance was homoerotic: "The linen ephod, which usually covers his loins, probably lifted at the intense moves of the dance ... and his genitals came into view. Thus, David's dancing is to be definitely considered by the spectators and by the readers—back then and today—as an erotic event."⁵⁹ Such arguments ought to be given little consideration especially regarding the context of the passages which, while perhaps shocking even at the time, were more to do with the lack of dignity shown in worship given David's kingly station, rather than making a sexual statement which would have been unacceptable behaviour for Israelite worship.⁶⁰ Some scholarship, however, contains more robust arguments, such as Susan Ackerman's, *When Heroes Love*, and Yaron Peleg's, "Love at First Sight?".⁶¹ These two works focus their arguments primarily on how gender roles, as understood in the Hebrew culture, and in light of David and Jonathan's relationship, bring an interesting interpretive lens from which to understand the text. Importantly Ackerman does believe that David and Jonathan had a sexual relationship, while Peleg argued that the relationship had "a subtle manipulation of gender roles", but remained non-sexual.⁶² Susan Ackerman's overall argument was that David and Jonathan were lovers because of the text's erotic imagery and language.⁶³ She wrestles however, with how the Bible condemned same-sex sexual acts in other contexts but praised David and Jonathan's relationship, ultimately

⁵⁹ Karin Hügel, "King David's Exposure While Dancing: A Queer Reading of 2 Samuel 6," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2016): 249-60. doi:10.1080/09018328.2016.1226414, 256-57.

⁶⁰ Leviticus 18.

⁶¹ Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*.

Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2005): 172, 189. doi:10.1177/0309089205060606

⁶² Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2005): 172, 189. doi:10.1177/0309089205060606

⁶³ She argued her position from a few key points: 1. David's wife and Jonathan's sister Michal is a literary foil to Jonathan, 2. Use of language and imagery that could be sexualised, 3. And gender-role swapping. For the first point about Jonathan and Michal she writes, "...the Samuel tradition may suggest that the erotic relationship it previously presumed between David and Michal should now be imagined to have been supplanted by a relationship between David and Jonathan." Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*, 179.

concluding that since David was supposed to be king, this created an exception for Jonathan to humble himself to be “wife-like” towards David because of God’s desire to elevate David as King. However, given that God sent the Prophet Nathan to convict David of his sin with Bathsheba, that David would be given some kingly exception to go against God’s moral laws seems an ill-founded explanation.⁶⁴ Before delving into her arguments, Ackerman prefaced the importance of understanding that modern sexuality identification (such as terms like “straight” or “homosexual”) were not present within the culture in which the story of David and Jonathan exists. This is an important point, whereby any of her arguments asserting that David and Jonathan’s relationship contained a sexual element must be framed within the understanding that modern ideas of sexual identity did not exist and so neither David nor Jonathan could be considered a homosexual man in a modern sense.

In her second point Ackerman argued that there was erotic imagery in the text. She interpreted the texts concerning Jonathan’s bow as an erotic symbol: “The bow is, after all, ‘a common, practically unequivocal symbol of masculinity in ancient Near Eastern texts,’ and ‘the phallic symbolism of the arrow is rather obvious.’ Jonathan’s offering of his bow in 1 Sam 18:4, his shooting of arrows in 1 Sam 20:36, and David’s subsequent lauding of Jonathan’s prowess as an archer in 2 Sam 1:22 might therefore all be read in terms of homoerotic innuendo: a sexual proposition, followed by coitus, and then a fulfilled lover’s words of gratitude.”⁶⁵ She used this as an argument for there being a sexual nature to David and Jonathan’s relationship, though not homosexual in a modern sense.⁶⁶ As these texts are narrative (as opposed to poetic or literary) and are spread throughout the text, it is a leap to assume that in this historical narrative that a bow is anything more than an object. Not to mention that the only time *bow* seems to carry a symbolic weight is when Jonathan gifts David his armour and weapons which most commentators asserted as being associated with Jonathan’s putting aside his position to align himself with God’s choice of making David King. Furthermore, the biblical account of David never mentioned any sexual relationships with men. Rather, David had many wives and even followed his lusts to adultery and murder

⁶⁴ 2 Samuel 12.

⁶⁵ Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*, 183-84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

in his relations with Bathsheba.⁶⁷ Because of these factors, it would be difficult to make the argument that David or Jonathan had a sexual relationship.

2.2.1.4 Gender

There is also an argument made concerning gender roles as a reason for what seems to many modern readers as homoerotic behaviour.⁶⁸ Peleg's (and Ackerman's)⁶⁹ argument is that making a male more feminine would be a degradation that was normally considered shameful, if not immoral, but because the account painted Jonathan as being subordinate to David (the coming King), an exception is made and thus what would normally be shameful, was, instead, praised. Two issues come to mind with this idea, however. The first is that if it was considered sinful to take on the opposite gender role it would likewise be wrong to participate in sexual acts with someone of the same gender as they cannot participate in such acts without the gender norms being altered and therefore it seems a moot point to distinguish between the two (gender roles and homosexual intercourse). This argument also fails to acknowledge that Jonathan was first a skilled warrior like David and was the initiator and often the reinforcer of the covenant which would be a masculine role. Jonathan did take the seemingly unusual course of protecting David at the cost of his relationship with his father and risking treason. However, Jonathan's choice is not necessarily due to his support for David to become the next king, rather Jonathan's choice is consistent with his dedication and alignment to the will of God. Perhaps in some sense, one might argue that submissive behaviour is more feminine likely (due to the idea of marital submission to one's husband), however, submission to authority was a requirement for both men and women.⁷⁰ Considering the account within the whole of Scripture (including the New Testament), one

⁶⁷ 2 Samuel 11.

⁶⁸ Yaron Peleg believed there to be a clear sexual meaning in the accounts of David and Jonathan and that frequent manipulations and substitutions of gender roles created the "lovers" reading. Unlike Ackerman, however, there was no possibility of sex for Peleg and thus the important factor was the confusion of gender roles. Jonathan was put in the feminine/servant role while David was the dominant/male role.

Peleg, "Love at First Sight?" 188.

⁶⁹ Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*, 2, 192, 222-23.

⁷⁰ Job 22:21, Proverbs 24:21, Deuteronomy 17:12.

might argue that Jonathan's actions modelled the future self-sacrificial love which Christ himself would perfectly display on the cross. For Jonathan, loving David in light of loving God's will, meant sacrificing his claim as heir and allowing God to work His will through David's kingship. Thus, out of a love for God, Jonathan and David loved one another, and their friendship was considered by them so sweet that it surpassed even their sexual relationships with women because their friendship was founded, rooted, and sustained in God.

2.2.1.5 Summary

The story of David and Jonathan's friendship highlight friendship as an emotional bond that, when anchored to God's will, can push past boundaries of inequality. Their bond also highlights the spiritual bond which can remain steadfast through physical separations and even be formed into a covenant promise. As arguments for a sexual relationship do not hold up, their friendship provides a window into an intimacy so profound that it could be mistaken for sexual passion. Perhaps it is this enduring passion that makes sense of why David and Jonathan delighted to do the will of their beloved and keep their promises – even beyond death.

2.2.2 Ruth and Naomi

The name *Ruth* means, "friendship".⁷¹ Given that names in the Bible often carry significant meaning,⁷² studying a book in which the titled heroine bears the very name of friendship, would seem wise. While this is one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, there is much to learn about the virtue of friendship through Ruth's relationship to Naomi. Unlike the story of David and Jonathan, which is a story within a larger Old Testament history, this book is solely focused on the account of two women, from the ancient world,

⁷¹ "Ruth means Friendship (for רַחֵם, i.e. friendship, Syriac ܪܘܬܐ (r'ut)." Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 946.

⁷² Gahl E. Sasson, "The Symbolic Meaning of Biblical Names as a Narrative Tool: Moses, Abraham, and David," *Storytelling, Self, Society* 11, no. 2, (2015). <https://doi.org/10.13110/storselvesoci.11.2.0298>.

and their mutual love.⁷³ Like the books of First and Second Samuel, the story still connects to the salvific message of how God blesses the nation of Israel and the whole world but does so through the account of two women devoted to each other in friendship through God.

Towards understanding the important themes of this text in reference to friendship, their backgrounds and character will first be explored, followed by an analysis of the promise made by Ruth to Naomi at the beginning of the story, then examples of Ruth's faith lived out in friendship both towards God and Naomi. This will finally lead to discerning the blessings which arose from their friendship.

2.2.2.1 *Ruth and Naomi as Women*

While the story begins with some background concerning Naomi, a Jewish woman,⁷⁴ the title of the book is given to the non-Israelite woman named Ruth. She was a widowed Moabite woman and the daughter-in-law to the also widowed Naomi.⁷⁵ Interesting, unlike other women in the Old Testament, Helen Leneman noted that "Ruth is not described as either beautiful, wise, or intelligent."⁷⁶ Instead, the reader is encouraged to observe Ruth's character and actions to discern where her true beauty lies. These two women came from different cultures and religions, not to mention their difference in age. While the book bears Ruth's name they both share the spotlight as main characters; the narrator often switching between Naomi's and Ruth's perspectives.⁷⁷ Their story began with three women (Naomi's other daughter-in-law Orpah being among them) in dire straits, all widows with no male protection. Naomi having decided to return to her people tried to urge her daughters-in-law to return home as she could not promise any hope for a good future. Orpah alone listened

⁷³ George Savran, "The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* no. 30 (2016): 7. doi:10.2979/nashim.30.1.01.

⁷⁴ Ruth 1: 1-5.

⁷⁵ Ruth 1:3.

⁷⁶ "Sarah (Gen. 12:14), Rebecca (Gen 26:7), Rachel (Gen. 29:17), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:3), Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2), Esther (Esther 2:7)." Helen Leneman, "More than the Love of Men: Ruth and Naomi's Story in Music," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 64, no. 2 (2010): 151. doi:10.1177/002096431006400203

⁷⁷ Athalya Brenner, "Naomi and Ruth," *Vetus Testamentum* 33, no. 4 (1983): 386. doi:10.2307/1517972

to Naomi and returned home to her father's house.⁷⁸

2.2.2.2 *Ruth's Promise*

Ruth however refused to go, pleading: "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried." While some viewed Ruth's pledge as more related to the land of Judah rather than motivated by faith saying, "Ruth's dramatic vow to accompany Naomi ... to a foreign land is an Earth-centred decision. She undertakes to become one with the Earth of Judah, Naomi's land,"⁷⁹ that she continued on to appeal to Naomi's God, makes this view less likely. For indeed, Ruth invoked the Hebrew God Yahweh, making her words more than aspirations, but an oath: "May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."⁸⁰ Ruth pledged herself to Naomi, making a similar kind of covenant with Naomi as Jonathan did with David.⁸¹ This was not merely a formal declaration; love seemed to motivate Ruth's binding herself to Naomi. Ruth's use of the word "cling" is key as it is the same word (*dabaq*) which appears in Genesis 2:24, where God proclaims that a man will "cling" to his wife as they leave their families and becoming one

⁷⁸ "Orpah pursues the natural course; Ruth is determined to swim upstream....Significantly the narrator does not criticize her. She is not presented as a negative example of unbelief; the narrator interprets her role in the narrative as a foil for Ruth. Her actions also highlight the incredible fortitude and faith of this other Moabite, qualities that will become even more evident in the final interchange." Daniel Isaac Block, "Judges, Ruth, vol. 6," *The New American Commentary*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen, Kenneth A. Mathers, and David S. Dockery. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 638.

⁷⁹ Alice Mary Sinnott, *RUTH: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567676245.ch-002>

⁸⁰ Ruth 1:16-17.

⁸¹ "Orpah kisses Naomi goodbye, and leaves, still weeping. Ruth, however, *clings* to Naomi,...What is lost in the English translations is Ruth's tone of indignation. She is incensed that she would be asked to leave, or forsake, her mother-in-law." Jessica Tate, "Ruth 1:6-22," *Interpretation* 64, no.2 (2010): 170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096431006400205> Quoting, Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, "Ruth," in *New Interpreters Bible vol. II* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 907.

"Using covenant language, Ruth swears an oath of faithfulness to Naomi; binding herself as strongly as one can to Naomi." Timothy, J. Stone, "Six Measures of Barley: Seed Symbolism in Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 38, no. 2 (2013): 191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089213511755191> "As the word *hesed* in Ruth describes an action rather than its motivation or the quality of a character (contrast "man/woman of worth" in 2:1; 3:11), I have preferred to translate *hesed* as "kindness" or "kindly" rather than as "loving-kindness" or "covenant-loyalty," among other options." Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* ed. John Collins (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 32. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.12987/9780300216547>

flesh.⁸² Ruth's language therefore highlighted the gravity and permanence of her promise to Naomi.⁸³ The manner in which Ruth attached herself to Naomi must have been intended to cause the reader to associate her vow with the life-long promise of marriage.⁸⁴ While the text does not explicitly use the word "covenant", covenant terminology is nonetheless being employed in this text considering all the defining factors of a covenant are present as Ruth invoked a binding contract (complete with stipulations, made before God, and bringing together two parties). Despite the marriage-like language employed in this passage, there does not seem to have been the same question of a sexual relationship with Ruth and Naomi as with David and Jonathan, given that none of the scholarship touched on this point. Unlike the covenant made between David and Jonathan, where David's response is not recorded at the initiation of the covenant, Naomi's response is recorded as one of silence. Naomi simply did not respond to Ruth's declaration and so seemed to passively (perhaps even begrudgingly) accepts Ruth's loyalty: "And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more."⁸⁵

2.2.2.3 Ruth's Faith

Similar to David and Jonathan's story, faith was also key to Naomi and Ruth's friendship, though for Ruth and Naomi there is no back story to their faith before their friendship. Rather it is through their story of friendship that the depth of their faith is proved. John Peter Lange notes that Ruth was attracted to the qualities of the Jewish people

⁸² Genesis 2:24.

Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 50.

"The promise made incarnate in Ruth as she clings to Naomi is made incarnate also in us as we cling to one another." Tate, "Ruth 1:6–22," 171.

⁸³ "The word for cling (*dabaq*) is not a common word in biblical texts. Its earliest appearance is in Gen. 2:24, after the speech the first man makes to the woman made from his rib This intimate ideal, which may even suggest the closeness of sexual intercourse, is woven into marriage ceremonies and is the foundational text on which many theologies of marriage are based. When read with Genesis Ruth's clinging to Naomi is understood in terms of a husband's clinging to his wife." Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 50.

⁸⁴ Interestingly Alice Sinnott in her introduction to her commentary on the book of Ruth, noted that it is most often at weddings that she hears this passage quoted. Sinnott, *RUTH*, 1.

⁸⁵ Ruth 1:18.

and thus also loves the God who made these people distinct.⁸⁶ Certainly, Ruth's love for Naomi could not be detached from her devotion to Naomi's God, though which came first is not clear from the text. Ruth loved not for what she might get from an attachment to Naomi, but because Ruth is shown to be a woman of virtue who would act rightly, and so she swore before Yahweh to serve Him and love Naomi. Ruth was clearly placing herself under Yahweh's protection in her pledge to follow Naomi, and thus both women sought after God for provision.

In the stories of both David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi, both challenge views of friendship relating to equality, gender, age, etc., a theme which will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. Certainly, to focus on two poor widows in the ancient patriarchal society, is significant for their time.⁸⁷ Ruth and Naomi, like David and Jonathan, were not equals at the beginning of their story. Ruth was much younger than her mother-in-law, and an outsider; a foreigner (in returning to Bethlehem). Because these women were already family through marriage, we might wonder at the extra effort given to explaining their friendship. Perhaps this is because their bond went beyond the call of familial obligations; as foiled by Orpah's different choice. David and Jonathan's given societal relationship was that of political opponents. Ruth and Naomi's given relationship was mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (often seen in many cultures as one with many difficulties even without culture differences). But friendship pushed past these societal relationships, fashioning a friendship bond which reflected the steadfast love of God.

2.2.2.4 *Blessing*

For the cause of biblical friendship, Ruth chose to sacrifice a known and potentially hopeful future with her people for an unknown future with Naomi. It is interesting that the

⁸⁶ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Ruth* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 20.

⁸⁷ In "The Literary Effect of Gender Discord in the Book of Ruth" Andrew Davis notes that there were times of gender disagreement (between pronouns and antecedents) throughout the text arguing that, "the gender discord is also a literary device that makes an important contribution to the book's narrative design and its development of characters," which would make the highlighting of these women's stories more confronting. Andrew R. Davis, "The Literary Effect of Gender Discord in the Book of Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, No. 3 (2013): 495. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23487883>

only commandment that comes with a promise is the fifth commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”⁸⁸ Ruth honoured her mother-in-law by offering friendship particularly in times of difficulty.⁸⁹ In her own vulnerability Ruth chooses to love: “Ruth teaches us something about covenant relationship that might not otherwise be clear...that the real test of covenant relationship is how one vulnerable person treats another who is likewise vulnerable...”.⁹⁰ Ruth did not only follow Naomi to Judah, but she also heeded Naomi’s words regarding her conduct with Boaz – their kinsman redeemer.⁹¹ Because of Ruth’s obedience to Naomi, Boaz marries Ruth⁹² and they have a son who will be in the lineage for King David. Thus, just as the fifth commandment promises,⁹³ there comes a blessing which was not only for Ruth, but also for Naomi.⁹⁴ The book comes to a close with the women of the town giving thanks to the Lord and praising Ruth for her role in bringing about God’s blessing to Naomi proclaiming, “He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”⁹⁵

2.2.2.5 Summary

The stories of Ruth with Naomi and Jonathan with David both speak to sacrificially loving others to whom they owed no obligation. Ruth and Jonathan both chose to profoundly love in their friendships with Naomi and David, and in the returning of that love

⁸⁸ Exodus 20:12.

⁸⁹ Amy Zietlow and Naomi Cahn, "The Honor Commandment: Law, Religion, And The Challenge Of Elder Care," *Journal of Law and Religion*, 30, no. 2 (2015): 237-238. doi:10.1017/jlr.2015.14

⁹⁰ Ellen F. Davis, “‘All That You Say, I Will Do’: A Sermon On the Book of Ruth,” in *Scrolls of Love*, (2006), 6-7. doi:10.5422/fso/9780823225712.003.0001

⁹¹ Ruth 2:21; 3:1-5; 3:18.

For more on this chapter see, Thomas, W. Mann, “Ruth 4,” *Interpretation*, 64 no. 2 (2010): 178-180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096431006400207>

⁹² Concerning the legalities of their marriage see Brad Embry, “Legalities in the Book of Ruth: A Renewed Look,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 41 no. 1 (2016): 31-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089216628519>

⁹³ Zietlow, "The Honor Commandment," 254.

⁹⁴ “... the events that occur after Ruth's encounter with Boaz are all part of the divine plan to redeem and restore Ruth and Naomi.” Greg A. King, “Ruth 2:1–13,” *Interpretation* 52 no. 2 (1998): 183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430005200207>

⁹⁵ Ruth 4:14-15.

from Naomi and David, they cultivated two friendships of such value as to have been written down and be read thousands of years later. In both stories love for God and His will poured forth into love for their fellow man. Thus, these narratives are case studies which teach that friendship which rests upon God and love for his will, and that from this heart posture, friendship towards others will flourish even under great trials and will become a manifold blessing.

2.2.3 The Wisdom of Proverbs and Sirach

Proverbs and Sirach⁹⁶ are both known as wisdom books, both of which contain many sayings about friendship. They touch on topics like the qualities of a good (or bad) friend, the influences of friends (for good or bad), instructions for becoming a good friend, and discernment between false or trustworthy friends. While the book of Sirach is not included in the Protestant canon, the apocryphal writings of Ben Sira in the book of Sirach are useful comparison for Proverbs.⁹⁷ Ben Sira wrote these wisdom sayings in the second century BC with the desire to prove that Athens was not only the only source of true wisdom, but that wisdom was also to be found in Jerusalem: wisdom for the whole world descending from the God of all Creation.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ "The work was composed in Hebrew ... the author has much to say about friendship; he stands in the biblical wisdom tradition, like the authors of Proverbs and Job; and he writes from a Hellenistic context, thereby allowing us to assess the degree of the influence of Greek thought on his ideas about friendship." Saul M. Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 87.

⁹⁷ Also known by the titles: the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus. Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Ben Sira was "deeply rooted" in the traditions of Ancient Near Eastern, Including Israelite wisdom.... his attitude to Hellenism was nuanced....As in most Hellenistic philosophy of the time, in Ben Sira more emphasis was on how to live, rather than on speculations about the nature of things," Ibolya Balla, *Ben Sira on Family, Gender, and Sexuality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 3-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110247473>

2.2.3.1 Defining Terms

2.2.3.1.1 Friend

To understand friendship in these two Hebraic wisdom texts it is important to understand the contextual terminology. Friendship was a term to describe an intimate personal relationship that expressed commitment outside of the marriage bond. That said, in Hebrew the term “friend” could apply to a neighbour, family member, fellow Israelite, or fellow human.⁹⁹ This is consistent with the previous narrative examples. However, friendship was not meant to be a catch-all term for any human relationship lacking another identifying term (father, mother, cousin etc.).¹⁰⁰ That said, given the broad application of the term, friendship was therefore, not necessarily limited to men, the educated, those of equal standing, or even to one’s own tribe or people group. Friendship was considered rare and to be treasured, and to be greatly desired and sought after in the wise person’s life.

2.2.3.1.2 Wisdom

It is also important to consider the role of wisdom, given that these are wisdom books. If friendship was a theme of wisdom books, friendship itself must be part of the life of wisdom. At the beginning of *Proverbs* wisdom is personified as a female who instructs that it is wisdom to befriend her: “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ /and call insight your intimate friend.”¹⁰¹ But how does one “befriend” wisdom and what does it mean to be wise,

⁹⁹ The term friend (*rea*) still has some ambiguity where it could also mean neighbour, peer, or simply “another person”. Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible*, 6.
Ronald L. Giese Jr. “‘Iron Sharpens Iron’ as a Negative Image: Challenging the Common Interpretation of Proverbs 27:17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 1 (2016): 69. doi:10.15699/jbl.1344.2016.2997
“It is, however, not always easy to differentiate the ‘friend’ from the ‘neighbour’ or ‘fellow human’....Still it may be said that, as distinguished from the fellow, the friend does not simply belong to someone’s sphere of life, but is to be regarded as a personal intimate.” Andreas Scherer, “Is the Selfish Man Wise?: Considerations of Context in Proverbs 10.1-22.16 With Special Regard To Surety, Bribery and Friendship,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 no. 76, (1997): 67.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892970220760467>

¹⁰⁰ “On the basis of only a survey of biblical nouns often rendered “friend,” we can say that ideally friendship is a relationship between people who choose to associate or affiliate with one another and that it involves positive feelings described by texts as “love.” Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Proverbs 7:4

or how might one learn wisdom? These questions are answered: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...”.¹⁰² The foundation for friendship, and indeed all other good and wise endeavours, according to the author of Proverbs, rests on a holy reverence and fear of God. This fear of God¹⁰³ serves as a catalyst for the cultivation of wisdom and is consistent with the foundation of David and Jonathan’s friendship which is concerned with God’s will. This was the foundation for David and Jonathan and is, according to the writer of these proverbs, the foundation for all true friendships to flourish. Thus, the wise man or woman should first begin cultivating wisdom in their own life before seeking out potential friends in other men or women likewise chasing after godly wisdom: “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise / but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”¹⁰⁴ This proverb also comes with a warning, because not all friendships lead to wisdom: befriend a wise person and become wise, befriend a fool and become a fool. The desire for personal wisdom is insufficient on its own. To truly learn wisdom requires like-minded friends.

Such sentiments can also be found in the book of Sirach, such as seeking to surround oneself with righteous people who have a shared fear of the Lord as their primary character trait,¹⁰⁵ or in Ben Sira instructing his readers to find like-minded friends who are obedient to God’s laws and are willing to be constant in times of grief.¹⁰⁶ Sirach went further in encouraging not being overly hasty in choosing a friend due to the influence and trust which comes with friendship.¹⁰⁷ For Ben Sira it would seem that a successful friendship must be preceded by a relationship with God, (so as to know God’s truth personally). He was also concerned with building friendships that could weather storms so that in both grief and difficulty comfort could be found in a true friend. Furthermore, the hope was that such a friend could steer the other towards truth in times of trial. Indeed, a wise man with wise friends would be better able to see the truth and endure in trials than one who is alone.¹⁰⁸

“It can mean either “say that Wisdom is your sister” ...or “tell Wisdom to be your sister.” Al Wolters, *Proverbs* (Leiden: Brill, 17 Mar. 2020), 257. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1163/9789004425590>

¹⁰² Proverbs 1:2–7.

¹⁰³ Fear of God is not a terrorising or danger provoked fear, but one of reverence, honour, and obedience.

¹⁰⁴ Proverbs 13:20.

¹⁰⁵ Sirach 9:15-16.

¹⁰⁶ Sirach 37:12-15.

¹⁰⁷ Sirach 6:6-7.

¹⁰⁸ Sirach 37:12-15.

2.2.3.2 Characteristics of Friendship

Truthfulness and trust were noted as important characteristics for discerning between true and false friends in both Proverbs and Sirach. Proverbs stated that honesty was more important than flattery or pleasantness. A friend who is willing to give wise counsel even at the risk of offending their friend would be preferable to a flatterer, who appears to be a friend but is really an enemy in disguise.¹⁰⁹ As Richard Clifford writes, “A friend’s reproof can reveal something important to us, whereas an enemy’s flattery can mean betrayal (cf. Mk. 26.40).”¹¹⁰ A friendship based on lies and vanity cannot be the friendship of God-fearing or wise people, as such friendship is merely an imitation. A true friend will risk discomfort and offence to speak life-giving truth for the purpose of saving their friend from harm. A false friend, however, cares little about their friend growing in wisdom and/or holiness and so would flatter and lie to the other’s demise.

The other test for friendship is how someone responds during seasons of adversity.¹¹¹ True friends remain constant, even when they get little in return for their friendship.¹¹² Both Proverbs and Sirach assert that a true friend is stalwart through plenty and famine, joy and sadness, sickness and health,¹¹³ but trials will expose a false friend.¹¹⁴

If friends are a good, how many friendships should one cultivate? Can there be “too much of a good thing”? While there is nothing written to insinuate that one cannot have more than one friend, it is suggested that old friends ought to be preferred to new ones as

¹⁰⁹ Proverbs 27:6, 9.

¹¹⁰ Richard J. Clifford, "Your Attention Please! Heeding the Proverbs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, no. 2 (2004): 160. doi:10.1177/030908920402900203

¹¹¹ “To be loyal and trustworthy are manifestations of such love and are an expectation of friendship....offering active support in times of need rather than making oneself inaccessible...is a specific way in which friends are thought to be loyal in Ben Sira and earlier biblical texts.” Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible*, 91.

¹¹² Of course, this does not mean that poverty or adversity should not be avoided, as if to say there is wisdom in poverty. Andreas Scherer argues that there is wisdom in being able to provide for oneself. A poor man will be a burden to his friends, but a wise person will care for themselves and their family. They will likely also have more friends for the wise attract more friends. Scherer, “Is the Selfish Man wise?” 69.

¹¹³ Proverbs 17:17.

¹¹⁴ Sirach 6:10; 12:8; 37:1.

the old ones have already been tried, tested, and proved trustworthy; like a wine that, once it has aged, will be more enjoyable to drink.¹¹⁵

Beyond displaying truthfulness and faithfulness, Ben Sira contributed a few additional qualities for friendship. Interestingly, he believed that friends should be similar, rather than from vastly different social-economical spheres.¹¹⁶ This is unlike the narrative stories where friends were not inherently equal at the start of their friendships. Perhaps this advice is given in the sense that to pursue a friendship with one who is not an equal is the exception rather than the rule. Of course, the nature of the inequality matters, as seen with David and Jonathan, furthermore, it is often the one with more to give (such as with Jonathan) who must extend friendship down towards the other. Finally, Ben Sira talks about the joy and blessing of friendship, that there ought to be pleasure in finding a good friend saying, “Do not deprive yourself of a day’s enjoyment/ do not let your share of desired good pass by you.”¹¹⁷

2.2.3.3 Summary

Friendship in these proverbial settings have many says regarding friendship and yet the overarching theme seems to be faithfulness and moral accountability. Friendship, according to these books, should present a challenge to live up to higher aims of holy living. Because correction and challenge can be painful and difficult friendship also needs to be faithful to withstand loving rebukes. This seems to be point to an inherent value and dignity of each person in the friendship, whereby friendship could be seen as a relationship that affirms and uphold the *imago dei*.

2.2.4 Friendship with God

There is another important facet to biblical friendship: friendship with God Himself. In the wisdom books and narrative accounts God is shown to sit at the heart of all true biblical friendships, yet the Bible promotes an even more shocking idea: the possibility of friendship

¹¹⁵ Sirach 9:10.

¹¹⁶ Sirach 13:2.

¹¹⁷ Sirach 14:13-14.

with God himself. That a human could have as true and intimate a friendship with God as with a fellow human, even more so, was profoundly radical in the ancient world where gods were not friends with humans.¹¹⁸ The majority of religious deities of the ancient world were often like slave masters to be placated or bribed.¹¹⁹ These gods were worshiped to earn their favour not to cultivate a relationship.¹²⁰ Yahweh, by contrast, draws near, he befriends, he speaks face to face, and does not simply seek worship but relationship with humanity.

2.2.4.1 *Walking with God*

From the Garden of Eden God showed friendship to the first humans. Genesis 3:8 suggests that God had a habit of walking with Adam and Eve; showing himself to be relational with his creation, and especially with humans.¹²¹ After the fall God did not abandon humans, he spoke to Noah because Noah was found to be righteous for his time and served God.¹²² Similarly to biblical friendships based on two people who fear God and seek His will, it would seem that such persons can also be invited into friendship with God.¹²³ Before Noah, a man named Enoch also “walked with God,” and was spared from death – being taken directly into heaven.¹²⁴ This account is only a few verses long and so

¹¹⁸ “... the god was perceived as being immanent in the phenomenon.... the gods were also perceived in human images ...and as transcendental powers behind various natural and cultural phenomena; they were treated and cared for in the same way as rulers.” Tzvi Abusch, “Mesopotamian Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 9. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Jeremiah 10:3-5, Exodus 34:15-16, Psalm 135:15-18.

¹¹⁹ “The goals of Egyptian ritual were two-fold. The first was to avoid the state of non-existence; to attain the status of a transfigured spirit (akh) that would dwell eternally in the afterlife.... Closely related to this was the role of ritual in the maintenance of the cosmos.” Emily Teeter, “Ritual and Worship in Ancient Egypt,” *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, 23.

Adrian Curtis, “Syria-Palestine,” *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 53-57.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/durham/detail.action?docID=6335366>

¹²⁰ “The Greeks worked with a plurality of competing divine powers, all believed to have an impact on their lives as individuals and as a community, aiming to keep the gods assuaged and happy, and preventing their anger.” Barbara Kowalzig, “The Greeks and their Rituals,” *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, 70.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12.

¹²¹ Genesis 2-3.

¹²² Genesis 6-9:17.

¹²³ Genesis 9:1b.

¹²⁴ Genesis 5:21-24.

there is not narrative to learn about what this friendship with God looked like over time – but it shows that God did not restrict his friendships to the most prominent biblical figures.

2.2.4.2 *Abraham and Moses*

In the Biblical narratives of Abraham and Moses, arguably the two most praised men of the Old Testament, the accounts in both Genesis and Exodus highlight friendship in various aspects (including God appearing in some physical capacity, which will be explored shortly) as God used them to establish and then bring the nation of Israel into the promised land. God first declared he would make a covenant with Abram promising that he would become a father of many nations. The covenant was to be an eternal one not only between God and Abram but also with Abraham’s offspring.¹²⁵ In the very next chapter Abraham was visited by three angelic men one whom he understood to be God himself in human form.¹²⁶ These appearances are meant to be taken literally, given that in the next verse Abraham and Sarah bring food for God and the other two holy men with him, and they ate.¹²⁷ This is significant because God comes down and eats and speaks literally, face-to-face with Abraham long before the incarnation of Christ.

Moses arguably also had face-to-face encounters with God and was considered His friend. In Exodus 33:11 God spoke to Moses face-to-face and states that this is an act of friendship in the text itself.¹²⁸ While it is not clear in Exodus if this was a literal face-to-face encounter as it seemed to be in Genesis, regardless, that friendship was present is made clear in the text. Abraham’s friendship with God is also stated explicitly elsewhere in the Bible, where he is given the title, “the friend of God.”¹²⁹ In both accounts, Abraham and

¹²⁵ Genesis 17:1-7.

¹²⁶ Genesis 18:1-2.

Michael S. Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with The Bible* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2015), 95.

Paula Owens Parker, “Genesis 18:1–15,” *Interpretation* 77 no. 2, (2023): 177-179. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1177/00209643221148171>

Michael Chris Ndele, “The Narrative Significance of the Role of Abraham in the Identity of the Visitors in Genesis 18-19,” *Old Testament essays* 36 no. 3 (2023): 709–735. doi: 10.17159/2312-3621/2023/v36n3a9.

¹²⁷ Genesis 18:4-8.

¹²⁸ Exodus 33:11.

¹²⁹ James 2:23, 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, Exodus 19-24.

Moses entered into covenants with God. These covenants were not made individually with Abraham or Moses; rather these men served as representatives of future generations (Abraham) or the Israelite nation (Moses), and the promise was that one day the covenants made with Abraham and Moses would come to encompass the whole world.

2.2.4.3 Summary

In the next section the question of whether man can befriend God is raised but without much support considering the prevailing views of what the gods were like (as shown above). That the Christian God would dare to stoop down then to enter into friendship is unique in the Christian and Jewish faith. Even before the Incarnation God shows himself as personal and relational, willing even to take on physical form to speak with humans. In these Old Testament accounts God befriended individuals to set apart a people (the nation of Israel) to be his representatives for all peoples. In many ways, it was God's friendship towards these men, unequal and sinful though they were, that undergirded the entire salvific plan which came to fruition in the New Testament, to which we turn next.

2.3 Friendship in the New Testament

Much like the Old Testament, the New Testament addressed friendship from both narrative stories and explicit teachings. Friendship was also taught in the same two capacities; in relation to God and other humans. The New Testament's primary focus concerns the good news of Jesus Christ (God becoming human to fulfil the promised salvation of the Old Testament and the coming kingdom of God), as well as history, doctrine, instruction, and the life of the early Church. There are numerous ways to address a topic like friendship in the New Testament. One of the challenges is that there are many different terms which can be used for or overlap with the idea of friendship. For example, many scholars have noticed and discussed the four main words for love in Greek: *agape*, *eros*,

Andrea D. Saner, "Chapter 4: Moses as Covenant Mediator," *'Too Much to Grasp': Exodus 3:13-15 and the Reality of God* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015), 165-205. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1515/9781575063980-005>

philia, and *storge*. The relationships between these words have been a topic of recent debate – some stating that the differences exist for a purpose while others argue that the differences are perhaps not as important as once thought.¹³⁰ There are also terms and themes that arise from much of Paul’s writing within the context of the early church: community, discipleship, fellowship, body, and family, which all have some relation to friendship. Understanding the etymology of these terms as well as the themes of love and fellowship provides useful context for addressing friendship in the New Testament. This, however, will be done briefly since this has already been well studied and is not the primary focus of this chapter. Once this groundwork has been laid we will explore some of the New Testaments texts starting in the Gospel of John followed by some of the Pauline epistles as well as Acts. These texts will then be compared to those of the Old Testament in the hopes of creating a synthesis between these texts so as to arrive at a holistic representation of Biblical friendship across the two Testaments.

2.3.1 Etymology of Love and Friendship

In the New Testament, *agape* and *philia* are Greek words which are both translated to “love” in English. These words have both noun and verb forms. *Agape* (ἀγάπη) being the noun form and *agapao* (ἀγαπάω) the verb form, both translated, “love” and “loving” respectfully. Then there is *philos* (φίλος) and *philia* (φιλία) which are the noun forms of the word translated as “friend”. The verb form of *philos*, *phileo* (φιλέω), is often translated as “love” or “loving” in English but could also be translated as a verb form of “friend”, though this does not make sense in English (i.e. “God *friends* us”). It is useful to understand that sometimes the original meaning and use of “friend” in Greek can get lost in the English translations.

¹³⁰ Heli Tissari, “Affection, Friendship, Passion and Charity: A History of Four ‘Love Lexemes’ since the Fifteenth Century,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 102, no. 1 (2001): 49–76.
Oli Mould, “Love,” *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, ed. Tariq Jazeel et al. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc; 2019), 164–169.

2.3.1.1 *Philia* vs. *Hetairos*

Philia, *philos*, and *phileo*, describe a loved one with whom there is a relationship of affection and mutual interest.¹³¹ This “brotherly love... often refers to affection pure and simple, attachment, sympathy, always marked by kindly attitude and good will”.¹³² *Philos* therefore, could have differentiated between friendship and an acquaintance.¹³³ According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *philia* denoted familial friendship and also connotes hospitality¹³⁴ and in the New Testament was defined as: “one who is close or well-known”.¹³⁵ Besides, *Philia*, there was one other word used for “friend” in the New Testament: *Hetairos*, which is a masculine noun meaning a friend or companion: it connotes “an association not necessarily involving affection or intimacy.”¹³⁶ That there are different terms means that there were distinct words to describe friendship of different depths. In the gospel of Matthew this word was used of complaining labourers in a parable, of a wedding guest wearing the wrong clothes in another parable, and of Judas in his betrayal of Jesus.¹³⁷ In each of these uses the meaning is clear that such a friend is more of an acquaintance, and “friend” is used almost ironically. Thus, there is a distinction made between intimate friends (*philos*) and those who are called friends out of either politeness or irony. In modern English the use of *philos* might be compared to a close friend, or best friend while *hetairos* would be used of a Facebook friend, “frenemy”, colleague, and other general acquaintances where in modern English one might still use the term friend. This is

¹³¹ Robin P. Nettelhorst, “Love,” *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. eds. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹³² Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2009), 13.

¹³³ In Luke 15 verses 6 and 9, Jesus told two parables, both of which end with the protagonist calling together his or her friends and neighbours to rejoice over their having found something that was lost. Here *philos* was used in connection with neighbours, ... for both friends and neighbours, the call is to bring together those who will rejoice with you.

¹³⁴ Gerhard Kittel, et al., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume ix. trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), 150, 165.

¹³⁵ This makes sense of why, in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34, *philos* was used by those who complained that Jesus was associating with sinners and tax collectors: “The fact that Jesus sits at table with noticeable sinners is the specific basis of the charge that He is a ‘boon-companion of publicans and sinners’.” Here *Philia* was both active and passive; Jesus loved sinners and was loved by them in return. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 159; 161.

¹³⁶ Justin Langford, “Friendship,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, eds. Douglas Mangum, et. al. *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹³⁷ Matthew 20:13, 22:12, 26:50–51.

helpful because *hetairos* is in many ways a foil for *philia*, and when *philia* was used, it is highly probable that intimacy and depth was to be inferred from the term, and at the very least a sense of kindness, welcoming, or drawing near to another person.

2.3.1.2 *Agape*

Agape is generally understood as goodwill and benevolence, most often used of God towards humanity, and in the verb form this word for love denotes action as opposed to an emotional feeling.¹³⁸ When used to translate love from Hebrew, however, *agape* could also carry the meaning of “a spontaneous feeling which impels one to a self-giving” and could have an emotional component which “...meant the experiencing and the desiring of love.”¹³⁹ *Agape* was also a word to describe seeking after or desiring someone or something.¹⁴⁰ This means that love in action is not necessarily void of emotion but may rather be compelled to action because of emotion. Interestingly, however, according to the *Dictionary of the New Testament*, in the Greek world, it was *eros* (most often used of sexual or romantic love) which was the word most often used to elicit religious love, for *eros* evokes an intoxicated love which defined religious experience for Greeks. For the Greeks, religion overpowered the human, mind, body, soul, and will.¹⁴¹ *Agape* is most often used in reference to the perfect love of God towards humans. Arguably the most famous passage in the Bible, John 3:16-17, shows us what God’s perfect love is like: “For God so loved [*agapeo*] the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” This is reiterated many times, especially in the book of John¹⁴² as a reminder that God’s love is self-sacrificing, reconciling, forgiving,

¹³⁸ Nettelhorst, “Love,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*.

¹³⁹ Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ It seems that at the time *agape* was used to describe God’s love for humanity for *agape*, “...is a free and decisive act determined by its subject,” and it, “...relates for the most part the love of God, to the love of the higher lighting up the lower, elevating the lower above others” *Ibid.*, 36-37. *Agape* could be used generally to speak of allegiance and affection of the heart, such as if one loves righteousness or evil. Matthew 6:24. This means that while *agape* is used to describe God’s love for His creation, it could also be used negatively to describe corrupted human loves.

¹⁴¹ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 35.

¹⁴² John 10:17; 13:1.

selfless, generous and perfect. In John 17, Jesus prays his high priestly prayer, praying for love and truth to unify all who would believe. Love is often thought of as passion or sacrifice, but it is also unity. When there is unity there is shared emotions, goals, joys, and sorrows, and from these come the desire to maintain the unity.¹⁴³ Consider the marriage covenant in Scripture, where a husband and wife are said to become one flesh, two merged into one. This is meant to reflect how Christ unites himself to his bride the church. *Agape* love can also be described as unity, where the greater the unity, the greater the love and vice versa. God loves in perfect unity in the Trinity, and those who are in Christ can participate in this unifying love; a love that is real and eternal.¹⁴⁴

It was through the biblical use of *agape* that this term for love combined the power of *eros* with the affection of *philia*. God's love is incomplete unless brought to fruition through action. This is why the overall message of the Bible concerns a God who is compelled to action to unite himself to his people, to unite people to each other, and restoration all of creation to a state where the lion and the lamb can once again in perfect peace.¹⁴⁵

2.3.1.3 *Koinonia*

The other Greek word often used in a similar capacity in the New Testament is *koinonia* (κοινωνία) which is best translated as fellowship or community.¹⁴⁶ It was used to illustrate the means by which peoples come together to build a community in solidarity, sharing assets and responsibilities, and possessing a "shared conviction that manifests itself as mutual responsibility and status."¹⁴⁷ In Greco-Roman society this term was applied to both family members and individuals, but the New Testament writers applied this to the

¹⁴³ "Love in the Gospel of John is seen in the relational sphere. This sphere consists of God, Jesus, the disciples, and the unbelievers. The fraternal love of the disciples of Jesus is a participation in the divine [*agape*]. This divine [*agape*] unites the Father and the Son in an absolute and intimate union. In this union is found the source of every love. Love in its divine perfection is basically a communion. The Father wishing that humanity may participate in this love opens up the possibility through his Son. The one who loves the Son loves the Father and the one who rejects the Son rejects also the Father." Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 53.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 5:43–46, Mark 12:30–33, John 13:34–35.

¹⁴⁶ Derek Leigh Davis, "Assembly, Religious," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, eds. Douglas Mangum et al. *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014), κοινωνία.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

church. *Koinonia* described those who were willing to partner with the Body of Christ in sharing the gospel, suffering for Christ, and enjoying unity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸ In Acts 2:42 Christians were said to have *koinonia* because they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, broke bread, and prayed together. This description of fellowship has many crossovers with how friendship was defined - considering the definition of true friendship as shared beliefs combined with shared activities and with a foundation of shared values. This fellowship for Christians is achieved by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁹ Like friendship, the New Testament writers also used *koinonia* to describe fellowship between Christ and humans.¹⁵⁰ In Colossians, Paul wrote that it was God's faithfulness which called men and women into fellowship with Christ.¹⁵¹ In 1 John, *koinonia* was used of both fellowship with one another, and fellowship directly with Christ himself on an individual basis. In his first letter the Apostle John made it clear that *koinonia* linked with Truth, for true fellowship could not exist with sin, deceit, and darkness. Only those walking in the light of truth and righteousness could honestly participate in genuine Christian fellowship made possible through Christ's atonement.¹⁵² *Koinonia* was also used negatively as a warning against having such fellowship with unbelievers, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"¹⁵³ This passage does not imply that Christians cannot associate with unbelievers, as this would conflict with other Scriptures which command the spreading and preaching of the gospel to unbelievers. Indeed, Paul would have been a hypocrite as he spent much of his time with unbelievers.¹⁵⁴ Rather, if a Christian attempted to partner with a non-Christian to share the gospel, to grow in sanctification, etc., this would be impossible due to the lack of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

1 Corinthians 10:16, Philippians 1:5, 2:1, 3:10.

¹⁴⁹ Paul wrote that it was through the Holy Spirit that he wished for the Church in Colossae to enjoy *koinonia*: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Corinthians 13:14.

¹⁵⁰ Davis, "Assembly, Religious," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*,

¹⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 1:9.

¹⁵² 1 John 1:6-7.

¹⁵³ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

¹⁵⁴ "For Paul the relationship between them was not anthropocentric, but Christocentric. Thus, for Paul what is important is the Christ-factor. Christ dying for the sinners (enemies) has proved his friendship and thus it is in Christ that one can have a relationship with others which does above the purely anthropological-human ties." Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 230.

shared values and therefore in these respects they would be incompatible for fellowship or, by proxy, friendship. It would seem the ideal would be for unbelievers to be saved into Christ and then enjoy a mutually uplifting Christian friendship.

2.3.1.4 Words in Context

While each of these words carries a different meaning and connotation, it is also important not to overly isolate these terms, for just as a friendship could be combined with another relationship, such as with a work colleague, a spouse, or other family member, there is no imperative for these terms of love to exist in isolation from the others. It would be perfectly reasonable for someone to experience *agape*, *philia*, and *koinonia* with one person simultaneously. For example, someone might have a friendship with a person in their church community with whom they share resources and values (*koinonia*), intimate thoughts and feelings (*philia*), and an affection which compels them towards selfless action for the other's benefit (*agape*). Furthermore, I propose approaching love similarly to how one might perceive of truth or the nature of God. When speaking of God, it is acceptable to call him Truth.¹⁵⁵ Truth is synonymous with God because God is perfect and unchanging as is Truth.¹⁵⁶ God and truth cannot be divided for then they would cease to be perfect. However, the indivisibility of God/Truth does not mean that aspects of God or Truth cannot be understood as parts of a whole. Much like how a puzzle piece, a thread in a tapestry, or a tree in a forest cannot be removed without taking away from the whole, and yet each one can be observed as a unique aspect of the whole, so truth can be examined in such a multifaceted manner. Thus, to study an aspect of the character of God, one may not, indeed cannot, grasp the whole, but because God/Truth are undivided to comprehend one part is to grasp the whole, at least in part. Love is much the same; God is Love¹⁵⁷ in as much as He is Truth. Love is whole, perfect, eternal, and boundless, and yet like a puzzle piece is at once

¹⁵⁵ John 1:1, 8:32; 14:6; Numbers 23:19.

Augustine, "Sermon 91 on the New Testament," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. vi.* ed. Philip Schaff, trans. R.G. MacMullen (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160391.htm>>.

¹⁵⁶ James 1:17; Malachi 3:6; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 102:26-27.

¹⁵⁷ 1 John 4:8, 16.

separate and part of the whole, so ought love be seen and observed both individually and as part of the whole. Therefore, the loves of friendship, family, romance, compassion, etc., are all part of the fullness of love. Thus, there should be a circular relationship where to understand love as a whole enables unique expressions of love to be stronger, and where those unique loves likewise enable a greater understanding of the perfect and eternal Love that is God. Importantly for this thesis, understanding love is necessary to understanding friendship for friendship cannot properly exist without love.

2.3.2 The Gospel of John

John's gospel is the one that focused on the friendship aspect of the gospel story the most. Ian Galloway's book, *Called to be Friends: Unlocking the Heart of John's Gospel*, does a brilliant job showing how even the structure of John's gospel is crafted in such a way to invite the reader into intimate friendship with God through Christ Jesus.¹⁵⁸ Galloway argues that friendship (both explicitly and implicitly) was one of the primary themes of this gospel. Whether Jesus was calling his disciples friends, cultivating friendships with his disciples and others like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, or through his atoning death on the cross in a display of *agape* love,¹⁵⁹ Jesus lived a life of friendship and calls to all who seek to live a good and godly life to follow his example. Thus, the gospel of John employed friendship as a means of exploring the implications of Christ's gospel message. Friendship compelled Christ's sacrifice and His sacrifice produced friendship, both with God through Christ but also with others. In this gospel, Christ's example showed the object of friendship's outpouring to humanity as both all encompassing (for the world)¹⁶⁰ as well as particularly and intimately (for the individual).¹⁶¹ This section will highlight two Johannine gospel passages which address the theory and practice of biblical friendship, the salvific nature of friendship, the relational aspects of friendship between God and other humans, and the emotive element of friendship that compels righteous behaviours. Lastly, to gain an understanding of the

¹⁵⁸ Ian Galloway, *Called to be Friends: Unlocking the Heart of John's Gospel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021).

¹⁵⁹ The ultimate act of friendship according to John 15: 13–17.

¹⁶⁰ John 3:16-17.

¹⁶¹ Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 10:13, Matthew 7:7-8.

manifestation of friendship in practice, we will look at John's portrayal of the interplay between the personal friendships and universal love of Christ.

2.3.2.1 *Not Servants, Friends*

In John 15: 13–17 Jesus told his disciples that they were no longer servants but his friends. The passage began by employing *agape* love as the love which compels sacrifice for others in the way that Christ laid down his life for his friends: “Greater love [*agape*] has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends [*philos*].” This was both a foreshadowing of the sacrificial death of Jesus as well as a prescriptive teaching on how followers of Christ are called to likewise lay down their lives by serving, blessing, and bringing others into the love of God. This did not mean that followers of Christ must literally die; rather, Christ's love is the Christian's example of the intensity of friendship.¹⁶² Christian friendship, as modelled by Christ, sometimes necessitates the laying down of one's own desires, needs, or dreams, etc. for the benefit of the friend, sometimes even unto death.¹⁶³

2.3.2.2 *Obedience in Friendship*

Jesus told the disciples that they would also be His friends if they obey His commands. Obedience as a defining feature of friendship is fascinating (which will be addressed more fully in this chapter's conclusion). However, it is important to note that not only was friendship-love illustrated by Christ's sacrifice, but it also served as a powerful example of what obedience to God's will and commands requires: total surrender. The passage goes on to note that friendship in its obedience is not to be confused with slavery¹⁶⁴ because

¹⁶² Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 682.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 664.

¹⁶⁴ Slave is possibly a more accurate translation of the word: “δοῦλος (*doulos*). n. masc. slave, bondservant...a person who is the property of an owner, or a state of being controlled by someone or something.” Eric Lewellen, “Servant,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, eds. Douglas Mangum, et. al. *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014), δοῦλος. “*Doulos* covers both slave and servant. In one way “slave” might be more appropriate here when the servile condition of the *doulos* is stressed - he follows order without comprehending. Yet the implication that hitherto Jesus had treated his disciples as slaves seems too harsh.” Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, 664.

master-servant obedience was to be unquestioned and lacked equality in relationship but obedience to God is meant to be an informed and relational obedience which flows from a desire to please the one who is beloved.¹⁶⁵ In calling his disciples friends rather than slaves, Jesus was not implying that they were not under God's authority or became equals with Christ. Rather, Jesus was referring to the special knowledge bequeathed to friends: "You may be, you must be, my servants still; I am your Master and Lord; but you will be servants from a higher motive and a more enduring link and bond of union."¹⁶⁶ The passage ends with a reciprocation of obedience from God himself, that when a friend of God asks for something (which is in keeping with the will of God¹⁶⁷) that it will be given. Thus, God offers reciprocal obedience in His extending of friendship to humankind.¹⁶⁸

This passage also shows a relationship between *agape* and *philia*. These two words of love in the Gospel of John required sacrifice and obedience: acquiescence in the beloved's desires. Gerald Borchert, a New Testament commentator, argued that John placed the same requirements on friendship (*philia*) as *agape*, "that obedience to the commands of Jesus defines what it means to be his friends."¹⁶⁹ Friendship with God was not so much an obligation, as when a slave might be asked to feign friendship with their slave master. Rather, like human friendships, there is freedom to accept God's friendship.¹⁷⁰ The friendship Christ extends towards humans is one of intimacy; similar to the intimacy Christ shares with the Father and the Spirit in the Trinity where there is "...affection, familiarity, trust, intimacy of shared knowledge and intention, permanent friendship'."¹⁷¹ Trust and obedience flow freely from such an intimacy and are signs of friendship with God.¹⁷² In this passage from John 15, *agape* and *philia* highlighted the interweaving of two facets of Love;

¹⁶⁵ It was common for both pagans and Jews to see themselves as slaves to God or the gods. Such an idea was not foreign. See footnotes 85-87.

¹⁶⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., "St. John," vol. 2, *The Pulpit Commentary* (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 272.

¹⁶⁷ James 1:5.

¹⁶⁸ "This was not, however, a friendship of equals - for the Master is calling the student to become his friend; God is calling sinners to become both students of holiness and his intimate friends." Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 163-4.

¹⁶⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 149.

¹⁷⁰ Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 208-209.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁷² Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, 682.

agape sacrifices and invites and *philia* cultivates intimacy and reciprocity which combine to produce actions in line with the holy will of God.

2.3.2.3 “Friendship” As an Active Verb

In John 21:15-17 another interesting passage uses friendship (*phileo*) in the verb form providing another means of understanding how friendship and love relate. The passage recounts a conversation between Jesus and Peter after the resurrection. Jesus took Peter aside to ask him if Peter loved him. This question is repeated three times (likely echoing Peter’s triple denial of Christ before the crucifixion). The first two times Jesus questioned Peter he used *agapeo*, but in the third and final question, Jesus used *phileo*, with Peter responding “yes” with *phileo* each time. The question regarding the significance of this change is itself debated. Some scholars do not feel the linguistic change is significant based on the view that both words were interchangeable.¹⁷³ Others see the change as insignificant because the conversation was had in Aramaic and later recorded in the Greek; thus it is unknown if there was a linguistic difference in the original language.¹⁷⁴ Others, however, believe that the difference is significant but disagree on the meaning of the change.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps Jesus was asking for a more noble love from Peter but settled for love in the form

¹⁷³ Gerald Borchert noted that the Greek word for romantic love or lustful desire: *eros* is not in the New Testament, but yet there are examples of lustful or corrupt love. Likewise, he argues that *agapan* and *philein* were both used in the Gospel with interchangeability and that by the fourth Century B.C. *Agape* was used as a standard verb for love. Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 335.

Raymond Brown wrote, “with the partial exception of Origen, the great Greek commentators of old... saw no real difference of meaning in the variation of vocabulary; but British scholars of the last century, like Trench, Westcott, and Plummer, found therein subtle shades of meaning”. For this reason, Borchert did not affirm that Peter was grieved by Jesus’ change of *agape* to *phileo* in Jesus’s third question, but in his grappling with his denial of Christ.” Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, 1102.

¹⁷⁴ “...one might point out that the conversation between Jesus and Peter would have taken place in Aramaic. In Hebrew and Aramaic there is one basic verb for expressing the various types of love...” Ibid., 1103.

¹⁷⁵ Kenneth Gangel argued that one cannot dismiss the change in Greek words since John chose to use two different words in his recounting of the exchange. So, while it was generally agreed that Peter’s grief was primarily concerned with the remembrance of his tri-fold denial of Christ, it could also have something to do with the change of words when Christ adopted Peter’s word. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John vol. 4, Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 388-389.

of friendship.¹⁷⁶ Or, it could be that Jesus was requesting a reverential love and conceded to Peter's passionate expression of friendship.¹⁷⁷ Ian Galloway argues that the two words were used to create a richness and depth of meaning rather than to be pitted against each other.¹⁷⁸ Ideally this passage is best interpreted with consideration to the differences of the words as well as their integration. As the primary meaning of this text was in Aramaic, it is therefore not vital to dissect the words, however, there is meaning to be gained from the Greek in the quest to understand friendship in the Gospel of John. The simple fact that interplay exists between two different verb forms of love suggests the intentionality. That love for Christ is to be reverential but also personal and intimate fits with the previous passage in John 11. Jesus was asking Peter if he believed, honoured, and would serve God and follow his example as a servant. This explanation is further supported in that Jesus ends each question with the command for Peter to "feed my sheep" – as an opportunity for obedience and sacrificial service. Peter's employment of the verb form of friendship in response echoes the idea that disciples are invited to friendship rather than slavery and that

¹⁷⁶ John Lange and Peter Schaff also did not believe that the change in the Greek was an accident. They argued that *agapeo* was a reverential love, founded on character and was a love to be directed towards God and others, while *phileo* was used for personal love and human affection. Peter thus employed a lesser word for love, which implied his own weakness, but at the same time spoke of his "deep feeling of personal love" and that in Christ's adoption of Peter's word, Christ used this term of intimacy "to press the meaning of it home to him." John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 639.

Marvin Vincent proposed from Peter's point of view *agapeo*, (a more dignified and noble word for love), seemed the colder or less affectionate word for love - like to compare love for a king or teacher with that of a dear friend, and so Peter responded with the word more for affection than respect. Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament vol. 2* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 300.

Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2058.

¹⁷⁷ Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, 1103.

The question over which was "higher" or "less" becomes moot as it was not about which was of greater or lesser value since that would depend on what one desired from the other. If one desired devotion and reverence: *agapeo*, if intimacy and affection were desired: *phileo*. Taken this way, Jesus did not lower his expectation of Peter, but rather Christ accepted his affectionate friendship love: "Dost thou esteem me worthy of thy love?" Simon, with a burst of personal affection, says, yet with a certain humility, "I love thee"—meaning, "Such love as I can lavish upon thee, such as I may dare in my humility to offer thee, O my Master, Brother, Friend!" ...Again Peter, with his heart bursting with personal affection, feels that he can and must say, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love theeAnd now Peter seems to have conquered, by his persistence, the heart of his Lord, and Jesus adopts the very phrase which Peter twice over had substituted for that which he had himself used; for he saith unto him the third time...". Spence-Jones, "St. John," 505–507.

¹⁷⁸ Ian Galloway *Called the be Friends*, 324.

Peter was responding not as a slave but as a friend. Peter was not merely willing to obey but desired to obey out of affection for his Lord. The change that Jesus made in his final question to copy Peter, I believe, confirms His assent that Peter was in fact a friend rather than a servant – like the prodigal son who was welcomed back into the Father’s house not as a servant but as a friend.¹⁷⁹

2.3.2.4 Love of Neighbour and Personal Friendship

Understanding the interplay between individual friendships, Christian fellowship, and neighbourly love subsequently becomes a pertinent question. Jesus himself had circles of friendships and relationships that existed at different levels of intimacy. In the gospel of John we are told about the close friendships Jesus had with Lazarus¹⁸⁰ and his sisters, Mary and Martha.¹⁸¹ It was at the tomb of his friend Lazarus where Jesus wept, even though he soon after would raise him from the dead.¹⁸² Jesus also exhibited a love that mixed the particular and intimate love of friendship with the compassionate love of *agape* to a number of people who only made small appearances, such as his interactions with Nicodemus,¹⁸³ the woman from Samaria,¹⁸⁴ or the man at the pool of Bethsaida.¹⁸⁵ In each of these encounters individuals were seen uniquely, responded to specifically, and treated with intimacies of friendship, such as speaking candidly (such as talking to the woman from

¹⁷⁹ Luke 15:11-32.

¹⁸⁰ “Lazarus’ place alongside Jesus during the dinner seems to be his customary place. This would be another pointer to the friendship between Jesus and Lazarus. The evangelist also remarks ... that Jesus loved Lazarus.... It is clearly stated that Jesus loves Lazarus yet there is a purposeful delay in coming to him. Jesus weeps for Lazarus, yet seemingly he does not do anything to prevent his death. The nature of Jesus’ love is a deep value to be seen and excavated at the symbolic and the literal level.” Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 240.

¹⁸¹ John 11:1-44, Luke 10:38-42.

¹⁸² “The faith-response of the Bethany family to Jesus and his teaching needs to be seen together with the natural and human friendship between this family and Jesus.” Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 247.

John 11:11.

Only in John 11:3 and 36 is *phileo* (φιλεω) used to describe friendship between Jesus and Lazarus. The authors of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* argued that John was using the term to explain the love which Christ has towards those whom Christ has chosen as friends. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 130-131.

¹⁸³ John 3:1-21.

¹⁸⁴ John 4:1-45.

¹⁸⁵ John 5:1-47.

Samaria about her relationships), asking for favours (such as whether or not to tell others about the healing), or giving up precious time to listen and respond to questions (like with Nicodemus). These people did not return in the narrative and there was no on-going friendship but there was a showing of a kind of friendship to these people in their need likely in response to the idea that at the heart of friendship is sacrificial love.

Jesus also chose to share a distinctive closeness with his twelve apostles,¹⁸⁶ and Peter, James, and John¹⁸⁷ were his particularly intimate friends (these accounts appear primarily in the other synoptic gospels). For example, it was just these three that Jesus allowed to see him bring Jairus' daughter back to life¹⁸⁸ or to see the transfiguration on the mountain.¹⁸⁹ These friendships did not limit Jesus from loving others who followed him, including children, but he did not form deep intimate friendships with everyone he interacted with. Instead, Christ extended love and care (and sometimes reproof) to all, regardless of their station or relationship to him. Clearly Christ himself enjoyed particular, intimate friendships without jeopardising compassionate care for the multitudes.¹⁹⁰ This should bring encouragement to those desiring to follow Christ's example; to show love to the many does not exclude particular intimate friendships with a small few. In the incarnation Christ had the limitations of human existence where friendship, such as he had with his disciples and Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, was humanly impossible to extend to every human being. Therefore, a theology of friendship calls not for omnipotent-God-like universal friendship, but rather, for the cultivation of a few intimate and abiding friendships alongside friendly kindness to be extended towards strangers. Within Christian theology love, friendship, and community are simultaneously interrelated and unique to each other, and a theology of

¹⁸⁶ "As God choose His friends in the OT...so Jesus chooses His friends." Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume*, 165.

¹⁸⁷ There was also "disciple whom Jesus loved" (*phileo*) who is assumed to have been the apostle John himself. Spence-Jones, "St. John," 208.

¹⁸⁸ Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:51.

¹⁸⁹ Matthew 17:1-8.

¹⁹⁰ "Loving one's neighbour or even enemy both expands the boundaries of those eligible to be considered as friends and calls into question the motive of self-interest that undergirds friendship under that system. By making Jesus' own behavior the norm of love commanded to the disciples. however, the Fourth Gospel expands the action of friendship to a Christological category. As God's love encompassed "the world" (3:16), and it was for the World that Jesus Christ was sent or appointment, so the love that mirrors the love of Christ likewise knows no limits." Sharon H. Ringe, *Wisdom's Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 69-69.

friendship in practice should involve a cultivation of each, allowing these forms of love to intertwine whenever appropriate.

2.3.2.5 Summary

The theme of obedience comes out again in John's gospel, but it is now incorporated into friendship not only with other humans but with God. What was hinted at in the Old Testament accounts was clearly expressed in the incarnation of Christ: God is not like other "gods" looking for slaves to do his bidding but rather friends who operate from a place of mutual love and desire to see creativity and holiness break like a watershed over the whole earth. The intermingling of parsed out words for love also bring newness of depth to friendship as it become aligned with God's own *agape* love. This friendship is somehow made both intimate and therefore limited without becoming exclusive.

2.3.3 Paul and Acts

The New Testament continues to speak about friendship at the time of the early church in the book of Acts as well as the Pauline epistles. As previously mentioned, there are connections between friendship, church community, and the stranger, which will now be explored.¹⁹¹ The apostle Paul's letters to churches often contained teaching regarding Christian conduct and many of these letters contained useful insights into friendship. While Paul did not often use the word "friend" we can nonetheless learn about friendship from examples in his own life and from his teachings on love more generally by applying what has already been discerned about friendship in the Bible. For example, Paul had close relationships with his disciple Timothy¹⁹² and with Barnabas.¹⁹³ As both relationships appear

¹⁹¹ For more on how friendship integrates in the modern church (Anglican) and some of the challenges and opportunities regarding friendship, fellowship, and the gospel see, *Friendship & the Body of Christ*. The Church of England, *Friendship & the Body of Christ: A Living in Love & Faith Resource for Reflection and Conversation* (London: Church house Publishing, 2022).

¹⁹² Acts 16:1-5, 1st and 2nd Timothy.

Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of the Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 32-47.

¹⁹³ Acts 13-15.

to be affectionate relationships, it can be assumed Paul experienced friendship with these two men. These friendships did not limit Paul but rather, these friendships served in his ministry of growing the church.¹⁹⁴ Paul in his letters also clearly cultivated many meaningful relationships with people in various churches and while he likely did not share the same level of intimacy with everyone, he did not shy away from praising or highlighting particular individuals within the churches. Based on these examples, ideally the wider Christian fellowship should be comprised of many groupings of deep and intimate friendships and these intimate friendships should become a means of discipleship, helping individual believers to grow in their ability to follow Christ. Even more so Jesus lived out this example of how to have both personal and intimate relationships, while not allowing those relationships to prohibit in any way love for one's neighbour. The friendships Jesus had with his disciples did not create a closed clique but instead transformed the disciples to be more other-focused, motivating their love for each other, their neighbours, and even their enemies. Love, therefore, ought to proceed from Christ's friendship which transforms intimate relationships like friendship into a love which can extend beyond where it began into love for the stranger or even one's enemy.¹⁹⁵

2.3.3.1 Summary

Paul's example of friendship creates a helpful link to how one might embody the principles of friendship shown in the life of Christ. Paul positioned himself as someone to emulate as he himself followed Christ.¹⁹⁶ Paul also gives New Testament examples of the tensions which David and Jonathan also faced due to often being absent in the body. Paul re-affirms that

¹⁹⁴ Acts 13:46; 15:35; 16:1-5.

1 Thessalonians 3:2.

"The friendship motifs can also be seen in {Romans} 15, 14-33. In 15,14 Paul praises the brothers of the community for their goodness, knowledge, and ability to instruct one another and at the same time reminds them of how bold he had to be with them (v.15). This affectionate feeling makes correction more easily accepted among friends." Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John*, 230.

¹⁹⁵ "The picture of Jesus as at once Wisdom incarnate and the friend who befriends others and commands them to befriend to one another is developed through a wealth of images and narrative instances. ...The performative language also builds a community, as a people coalesce that claim and is claimed by it. That community, in turn, becomes the way that God's love for the world... which was incarnate in Jesus - continues to be embodied in the creation." Ringe, *Wisdom's Friend*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:1

while the body is important and the longing for spiritual and physical union is good – there is a spiritual friendship which can be expressed and felt even with long physical absences.

2.4 Conclusion

In the Old and New Testament, friendship was not meant to simply be a means to an end such as obedience, wisdom, fearing God, or holiness – though these have all proved to be vital elements of friendship. Friendship was also meant to be a joy in itself: pleasant and lovely – as David said of the love he received from Jonathan. From the Old Testament through to the New Testament friendships take on many facets but there are a few overarching themes which emerge. Firstly, Friendship is defined as a particular love where intimacies are shared. Second, Biblical friendships are propelled towards righteous actions in line with the will of God, trust and affection mingle to give birth to acts of love and obedience towards fulfilling the desires of the beloved. This idea of obedience may, at first, seem strange, and I believe this is due to connotations of how obedience is defined in the western context. Rather than defining obedience in a negative sense of command and obligation where obedience is undertaken primarily due to a power dynamic, and instead viewing obedience in the context of actions undertaken to please one's beloved, bring a vastly different perception of obedience in friendship. Such obedience, like Ruth obeying Naomi, David obeying Jonathan, and the disciples obeying Jesus, is not slavery but joy, and based on insight and revelation from the friend. In the Scriptures obedience is then a manifestation of friendship in action as one sets out to see the will of their friend come to fruition.

Third, Scripture makes it clear that friendship is not merely a human experience but commences in God proceeding towards humans to be reciprocated back to God and extended towards others. This references that humans are made in the image of a triune God – a God who exists within Himself in intimate relationship: bringing about the importance of human dignity and inherent design for friendship. Fourth, Friendship is experienced in relation to the human composition of both body and soul. This means friendship desires to be felt in the soul as well as through the body, though it can survive

apart from physical presence. Later in this thesis I will explore how friendships are maintained online and across distances, returning to the example of Paul's letters. For Paul as well as David and Jonathan, friendship is not always about living out friendship in the same physical spaces. For indeed these men experienced the continuation of friendship over great distances. This points to the fifth theme of friendship. Friendship with God himself exists for most Christians¹⁹⁷ solely in a spiritual capacity, especially through the indwelling Holy Spirit;¹⁹⁸ though ever with the hope of physical unity in the eschaton where God dwells with his people. All love, and therefore all friendship, being derived from God's perfect love, desires to be unified by every means. Friendship on earth is meant to foreshadow love and relationship as it will be in the coming Kingdom – the new Heavens and Earth. The merging of broken humans loves into a fuller understanding of God's love is a theme threaded throughout the whole of Scripture and points to a future fulfilment where Friendship as part of perfect love will be finally be expressed in its truest and fullest form.

¹⁹⁷ Exceptions would be Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Abraham, the disciples and others who met Christ.

¹⁹⁸ John 14:16, Acts 2.

3. Chapter Three: Classical Friendship from Philosophy to Theology

The second chapter explored friendship through the lens of Scripture. To follow friendship forward from this will require tracing the writings of both the Greco-Roman philosophers and the Church fathers. Understanding how friendship was shaped through ancient history – in both sacred and secular contexts will provide useful context for how ideas of friendship were shaped through Western history linking back to the Bible and looking forward to modernity. This context will be vital for any meaningful discussions later on regarding theological understandings of friendship.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is comprised of two main sections. The first delves into Greek and Roman philosophy from the writings of Socrates/Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch.¹⁹⁹ The second half of this chapter will proceed to understand the myriad of ways in which these philosophical ideals of friendship merged with the Biblical concepts of friendship to bring about what I call Christian virtue friendship.²⁰⁰ This will be accomplished by investigating the writings of select Church fathers and theological movements, including St. Augustine, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, St. Thomas Aquinas and movements from the time of the Reformation. In essence, this chapter engages with the Athens versus Jerusalem debate, with particular regard to friendship, intending to reveal how these differences highlight the ways in which cultural values, worldviews, and theological beliefs shaped how friendship was valued and practised.

¹⁹⁹ There are many other philosophers who could be in this list, but these four were included because they either are integral to philosophical thought on friendship, i.e. Aristotle, or they were included because their work significantly linked to Christian thought on friendship, i.e. Cicero.

²⁰⁰ This term was first used in my master's dissertation submitted to Durham University for the degree of Christian Theology. Joelle Lucas, "Christian Virtue Friendship and Puritan Friendship in the English Reformation."

3.2 Greek and Roman Philosophers

The reasons for covering the Greco-Roman philosophers before the church fathers are two-fold. Firstly, because Greek and Roman philosophy mingled with Biblical teachings immersing it within the cultural contexts of the Judeo-Christian faith and ancient Western philosophy. Therefore, to understand friendship within Christian theology, one must also understand the influences of ancient philosophy. Secondly, these philosophies concerning friendship continue to influence the modern conception of friendship and are deeply ingrained in the academic debates surrounding friendship. To share in this tradition is important groundwork which must be discerned before entering into any of the current academic debates on the topic of friendship within the humanities more broadly, topics which the later part of this thesis will cover.

3.2.1 Plato's *Lysis*

Lysis was written in the style of a Socratic dialogue between Socrates and a few young schoolboys. *Lysis* begins with Socrates seeking to explain to one boy how to approach someone he wishes to befriend. Rather than with flattery, as one might initially suppose, Socrates instead argues that one must woo²⁰¹ by engaging the mind. Socrates desired to stimulate the boys to think philosophically about their relationships²⁰² and make philosophical conversations the basis of their friendships, but to do this Socrates had to first set an example by drawing the young boy Lysis into philosophical conversation.²⁰³ Socrates approached Lysis and his friend Menexenus and began to inquire of them what they believed to be the nature of friendship. Whether this conversation was helpful rather than a confusing circular conversation is a topic of debate. Some researchers like Benjamin Rider

²⁰¹ This was not a sexual wooing, but an intellectual wooing.

²⁰² "His goal is to help his interlocutors discover what true friendship is and what they must do to enact it. Socrates is therefore...willing to use specious arguments because he believes that they will better achieve his goal of helping his students come to the epiphany he seeks for them." Mark E. Jonas, "Education for Epiphany: The Case of Plato's 'Lysis.'" *Educational Theory*, vol. 65, no. 1, (2015): 43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12094>

²⁰³ Benjamin A. Rider. "A Socratic Seduction: Philosophical Protreptic in Plato's *Lysis*." *Apeiron* 44, no. 1 (2011): 41. doi:10.1515/apeiron.2011.005.

argue that Socrates' opinions were often disjointed, confusing in their abstractness, inconclusive, and potentially frustrating for the boys.²⁰⁴ While Rider is not wrong in finding the dialogue both frustrating and inconclusive, this text remains of use in raising questions one might ask about the nature of friendship which Aristotle subsequently wrestled through in his impressive attempt to create a philosophy of, and ethics for, friendship.

3.2.1.1 *Love and Freedom*

The first question Socrates asked was whether friends must have all things in common: could one friend be richer than the other or is that an impossibility as they shared everything? The students responded that friends must have all things in common.²⁰⁵ Socrates shifted course asking how one might discern love, arguing that since love finds itself within friendship one must understand friendship to understand love. Towards this end, Socrates inquired about the love of parents as this would have been a love with which the boys would have familiarity. From here Socrates led the boys through a maze of questions to find out if freedom was a sign of love. The boys asserted that their parents desired their happiness, but that they were not allowed to do whatever they wanted and that some of their slaves had more freedom than the boys themselves, though it was the boys who were loved more than the slaves.²⁰⁶ Through such questions the boys soon realised that freedom must not be the key to love since their parents, out of love for them, did not, in fact, grant them copious amounts of freedom. Socrates suggested that freedom perhaps was more related to wisdom and trust; the wiser a person, the more they would be trusted and the freer they would be: "Then this is the way it is, my dear Lysis: in those areas where we really understand something everybody...will trust us, and there we will act just as we choose, and nobody will want to get in our way. There we will be free ourselves, and in control of others."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Rider, "A Socratic Seduction: Philosophical Protreptic in Plato's Lysis," 40.

²⁰⁵ Plato, *Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 691.

²⁰⁶ Plato, *Complete Works*, 691-92.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 694.

The converse could also be said, that if one was not wise, no one, regardless of how loved they might be, would dare trust them. This conversation links well with the passage from John's Gospel concerning love, slavery, and friendship. It would seem Socrates wanted the boys to wrestle with this same idea that love and freedom are not inherently linked but that while sons and slaves are to obey, the slave does so from a relationship of obligation but the sons from a relationship of love. Furthermore, with reference to John 15, love must be bestowed by God prior to exhibitions of obedience, therefore love must begin of its own accord.²⁰⁸ Love therefore, is not inherently about freedom so much as it concerns the good of the beloved.²⁰⁹ Indeed, some of the issues with this premise of love and trust are, as Socrates pointed out, that a neighbour or king might come to love a wise young man with fatherly affection, yet a parent will still preferentially love their own child. Paul Ludwig also asserted the absurdity of this idea in that one does not love someone simply for being wise.²¹⁰ The same might be said about usefulness. The boys contended usefulness was desired, though love does not depend upon usefulness since their parents loved them despite their youth and subsequent lack of trustworthiness and/or usefulness.²¹¹ Perhaps, while a parent would always have love for their child regardless of any wisdom gained, a parent may add pride to their love if their child grew up to be wise.

3.2.1.2 *Commonality in Friendship*

Another important theme Socrates discussed with the young boys was whether commonality was necessary for friendship. Through their discussion, it was agreed that there must be sufficient commonalities to unite friends, and yet there should also be differences to enable them to be helpful to each other by balancing areas of strength and weakness.²¹² This latter point was based on the premise that friends should be useful to one another, especially in pursuing virtue. Thus, friends needed to be of similar moral character,

²⁰⁸ Romans 5:8; Ephesian 2:8-9.

²⁰⁹ Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, eds. 'Plato's Lysis,' in *Cambridge studies in the dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211-213.

²¹⁰ Paul W. Ludwig, "Without Foundations: Plato's Lysis and Postmodern Friendship," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 137. doi:10.1017/s0003055410000018.

²¹¹ Plato, *Complete Works*, 694.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 698-700.

for if one was too evil (or too good²¹³), they would be more of a hindrance than a blessing since friendship is related to the beautiful and the good:

Only one possibility remains, if anything is a friend to anything, what is neither good nor bad is a friend either to the good, or to something like itself. For I don't suppose anything could be a friend to the bad.²¹⁴

To complement each other in the pursuit of goodness and beauty, was thus one of the ideals of friendship.²¹⁵ Plato here showed how Socrates wanted to steer the boys from competitiveness to cooperation in the pursuit of truth and self-improvement.²¹⁶ That said, Mary Nicolas and Mark Jonas have insightful points concerning taking care not to overemphasise the importance of philosophy in friendship otherwise the friend might be in danger of becoming merely a tool of the philosopher, rather than a unique and dear friend.²¹⁷ To lose sight of the individual brings into question whether friendship is merely a means to wisdom or if friendship can be an end in itself. Eugene Garver astutely raises this issue when he noted how Socrates himself proved that friendship could be faked as a means to an end by the very conversations being recorded by Plato. Socrates was not friends with these boys; rather he made a pretence of friendship to illustrate friendship. In spite of this demonstration, the ability to make a forgery of friendship seems to be proof enough that this is a valid concern in the process of friendship-making.²¹⁸ The dialogue concludes with Socrates and Lysis claiming to have become friends, while also admitting they still did not

²¹³ This was because of needing to be equally able to help the other and if one was so far ahead in virtue the other might become a hindrance.

²¹⁴ Plato, *Complete Works*, 700-701.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 706.

²¹⁶ Rider, "A Socratic Seduction: Philosophical Protreptic in Plato's *Lysis*," 45.

²¹⁷ "If the truest exemplar of friendship is the philosopher's love of wisdom, and philosophy replaces reciprocal friendship between human beings as the true human fulfilment, what character would philosophy have? If one pursues the truth because it is one's good, one's good would become the measure of the truth rather than the truth the measure of one's good.... The initial exchange between Socrates and Lysis... does not foreshadow the notion that the deepest friendship is between the philosopher and his own good." Mary P. Nichols, "Who Is a Friend? (The *Lysis*)," in *Socrates on Friendship and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179.
doi:10.1017/cbo9780511586583.005.

"The idea that Socrates ... aims to produce contemplatives who meditate all day long on the "Good" is untenable Socrates and his interlocutors almost always pursue questions that have "live" implications. *Lysis* is a case in point....The relationships imply activity. Love and friendship without activity are not love and friendship." Jonas, "Education for Epiphany," 45.

²¹⁸ Eugene, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*," *Rhetorica* 24, no. 2 (2006): 134.
doi:10.1525/rh.2006.24.2.127.

understand what makes a friend. Indeed, it seems that while Socrates attempted to demonstrate friendship in a short conversation, it was unlikely any authentic friendship was formed; not only because they conceded to being no closer to understanding friendship than when they began, but because likeness, devotion, and wisdom could not be fully formed in the short time that Socrates engaged Lysis and Menexenus in dialogue.²¹⁹ Furthermore, as A.C. Grayling noted in the first chapter of his book *Friendship*, the whole conversation began with the assumption, that the, "...concept of one kind of love – that of an older male for a younger – at least largely overlaps with the concept of friendship..."²²⁰ which would conflict with the view that equality is necessary for friendship.

3.2.1.3 Summary

A few of the main points raised in this work are: 1) friendship is difficult to define, more experienced than definitively known, 2) friendship is a form of love which relates to other relationships such as that of parent and child, or lovers, etc., and 3) that, according to Socrates, the greatest friendships are philosophical friendships which pursue truth and wisdom. This is where *Lysis* ends, with many questions unanswered and a host of excellent questions raised, which, if answered, could lead to a helpful philosophical ethic for friendship;²²¹ which is precisely what Aristotle did in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. He asserted the importance and usefulness of Socrates' questions on friendship and wrestled with them until he could provide his own answers which resulted in providing the Western world with one of the most helpful philosophies on the nature of friendship.

3.2.2 Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

Arguably the most prominent and foundational work on friendship comes from chapters VIII and IX of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle helpfully arranged Socrates'

²¹⁹ Garver, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*," 136.

²²⁰ Grayling, A. C. *Friendship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 19.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm5c4>

²²¹ Michael Pakaluk. *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 1.

initial thoughts on friendship as relayed through Plato's *Lysis* and crafted a beautifully organised approach to friendship.²²² Aristotle makes a number of important claims about friendship. He argues firstly that "...For friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue", and secondly that "it is one of the most indispensable requirements of life. For no one would choose to live without friends, but possessing all other good things."²²³ He proceeds to argue that friendships exist in greater and lesser forms, which he divides into three categories.²²⁴ The first two categories would both be considered lower forms of friendship: (1) utility (or usefulness) and (2) pleasure.²²⁵ While such friendships can contribute certain means of goodness to the participants these are not friendships of moral virtue and as such are easily gained and lost. The third and highest form of friendship was virtue friendship, which will be addressed in the following section.

3.2.2.1 Virtue Friendship

The truest form of friendship is that of virtue friendship,²²⁶ in which a friend was to be loved for themselves²²⁷ and is loved through a shared passion for the pursuit of the good:

The perfect form of friendship is that between Friendship of Virtue, the perfect kind. the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue. For these friends wish each alike the other's good in respect of their goodness, and they are good in themselves; but it is those who wish the good of their friends for their friends' sake who are friends in the fullest sense, since they love each other for themselves and not accidentally. Hence the friendship of these lasts as long as they continue to be good; and virtue is a permanent quality.²²⁸

²²² Aristotle also addressed friendship in his *Eudemian Ethics*.

Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 28.

²²³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean ethics*, ed. Harris Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), VIII. i. 1-2.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII. iii.

Grayling, *Friendship*, 38.

²²⁵ "Now those who love one another for the useful do not love them for their own sakes, but inasmuch as there results some good to themselves So also with those who love for pleasure... because they are pleasant to them.... Consequently such friendships are easily dissolved, if the parties do not continue in similar circumstances for if they are no longer pleasant, or useful they cease to love". Aristotle, *The Nicomachean ethics* VIII. iii.

²²⁶ "He [Aristotle]...does allow that there is more than one type of friendship, but regards only the friendship between virtuous persons as complete friendship, because only the virtuous can and do care about each other for the other's own sake." Diane Jeske, "Friendship, virtue, and Impartiality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, 1. (March 1997): 57.

²²⁷ Grayling, *Friendship*, 35-36.

²²⁸ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, VIII.iii.6.

Aristotle argued that those who lacked virtue could participate in the lower forms of friendship but never in virtue friendship, for bad men are self-seeking and thus cannot have friendship that is selfless.²²⁹ Furthermore, even friendships of utility or usefulness will be short-lived, because of their self-seeking, for such people are prone to change and are thus unstable, unlike good men, who tend to remain steadfast.²³⁰ Therefore, friendship either made bad men worse or good men better.²³¹ Indeed, such friendships were better than friendships of usefulness or pleasure because it was through friendship with a virtuous person that one could achieve greater degrees of self-knowledge. According to Mavis Bliss, friendship was not seen as a neutral relationship that is stagnant, but one that has moral quality and a trajectory; constantly moving those who share friendship in a direction either to their detriment or benefit.²³²

3.2.2.2 Equality

Aristotle further believed that friendship can only truly be had between equals.²³³ He felt that friends should not feel either obligation or indebtedness. Rather, they ought to perceive themselves on a level footing so as to walk in tandem towards their shared goals.²³⁴ However, according to Aristotle, the rule was not absolute if inequalities could be balanced, or if the higher friend condescended to their friend's level: "But in this manner

²²⁹ A distinction should be made between selfishness and self-sufficiency, as, "It is important to emphasize that the self-sufficiency Aristotle has in mind is self-sufficiency with regard not merely to living, but to living well." Nancy Sherman, "Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no. 4 (1987): 396. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107230>

²³⁰ Ibid., 195.

"...by acting immorally, we make ourselves unworthy of the highest form of friendship." Dale Jacquette, "Aristotle on the Value of Friendship as a Motivation for Morality," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 35, no. 3, (2001): 377. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011873730850>

²³¹ This is similar to the biblical proverb from chapter 2 which taught that those who surround themselves with wise companions become wise, but foolish companions make one foolish.

²³² Mavis Bliss, "Aristotle on Friendship and Self-Knowledge: The Friend Beyond the Mirror," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2011): 126. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032377>
Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, VIII.iv.

²³³ "Differences also arise in friendships where one party is superior for each expects to receive more: and when this takes place, the friendship is dissolved: for the better character thinks that it is his due to have more, because more is given to the good man...a useless person should not have equal, since it will be a burdensome service, and not friendship..." Ibid., 213.

²³⁴ "... the friendships continue most, when there is an equal return from each other ... an equal return from the same thing, for instance, from the facetious to the facetious..." Ibid., 195.

those who are unequal, may also be the greatest friends; for they may be brought to an equality.”²³⁵ Indeed, it would be unfortunate if friendship was out of reach for the rich and powerful due to their advantages elevating them so far above others making friendship elusive.²³⁶ Thus, while the importance of shared commonalities remained vital to a long-lasting virtue friendship, if any differences could serve as counterparts to assist each other in their pursuit of their shared goals and ideals, a friendship could move forward in newfound equal standing.²³⁷

3.2.2.3 *Friends and Community*

There are two final points on friendship that Aristotle made. The first concerns how many people one may have as friends, “...for love is something exceeding; and that which exceeds is naturally felt towards one object. And for the same man greatly to please many at once is not easy, and perhaps it is good that it should not be so.”²³⁸ According to Aristotle, friendship did not *need* to be exclusive, but wisdom suggested that an ideal friendship would consist of two persons, and on occasion perhaps a small group of friends, rather than multiple companions.²³⁹ The second concerns the political and communal aspects of friendship.²⁴⁰ While community is certainly a different matter to friendship, Aristotle considered it important to remember that, since all relationships exist within a larger community, many good friendships would benefit the wider society at large:

But all kinds of community are like parts of the political one. For people make their way together on the basis that they will get some advantage from it, and so as to provide themselves with some necessity of life; and the political community too seems both to have

²³⁵ Ibid., 202.

²³⁶ “Even those – indeed, perhaps especially those – who have wealth or power need friends, he says, for how otherwise would they be able to show beneficence, or protect their wealth and position, which are more at risk the greater they are?” Grayling, *Friendship*, 32.

²³⁷ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, VIII.vi-vii.

²³⁸ Ibid., 198.

²³⁹ “Aristotle argues that one’s friends ought to be limited to the maximum number of those who can live together and are friends with one another...” Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible*, 100.

²⁴⁰ Bradley Bryan, “Approaching Others: Aristotle on Friendship’s Possibility,” *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 754–79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25655519>
Eleni Leontsini, “The Motive of Society: Aristotle on Civic Friendship, Justice, and Concord,” *Res Publica (Liverpool, England)* 19 no. 1 (2013): 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-012-9204-4>

come together in the beginning and to remain in place for the sake of advantage²⁴¹

This point echoes the ideas of friendship and community in the New Testament where individual friendships always existed within the larger church community and as such there would often be reciprocal impact between friendships and the community.²⁴²

3.2.2.4 Summary

In summary, Aristotle's ethics on friendship highlight two important points regarding friendship. Firstly, that selfishness is a key differentiating factor between lower and higher friendships; lower friendships being self-seeking, but higher friendships seeking after the good of the beloved. Thus, to have a virtuous friendship, selflessness must be cultivated (a concept of friendship also seen in the Gospel of John).²⁴³ The second point deals with how rare and precious virtue friendships were and are, especially considering the difficulty in finding someone who could be considered an equal who also has shared pursuits. If, however, one could find such a friend, according to Aristotle, such a friendship had the potential to be long-lasting, beneficial, and pleasurable. Aristotle left a substantial work of friendship for others (like Cicero) to build upon. Aristotle's ideas especially concerning the relationship between friendships and the political state were of particular interest to Cicero who lived under the rule of the Roman Empire.

3.2.3 Cicero's *De Amicitia*

As a Roman citizen from the first century, Marcus Tullius Cicero (impressively a statesman, lawyer, scholar, and writer) wrote at a time of great political unrest in the Roman Republic which likely informed many of his political ideas concerning how personal

²⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, eds. Christopher J. Rowe and Sarah Broadie (Oxford University Press, 2020), VIII.ix.

²⁴² For more on the historical impact of friendship see Henry C. Trumbull, *Friendship the Mater-Passion: Or, the Nature and History of Friendship and Its Place as a Force in the World*.

²⁴³ In the highest friendships, especially, friends do not act selfishly or based on egotistic calculation but rather seek the good for their friends. They pursue the good on behalf of the friend, and for the friend's own sake." Frank Vander Valk, "Friendship, Politics, and Augustine's Consolidation of the Self," *Religious Studies* 45, (2009): 128.

friendships relate to the *civitas*. Cicero's primary work on friendship was titled *De Amicitia*.²⁴⁴ This work was similar to Plato's *Lysis* as both were written as dialogues. The conversation began with two men (Gaius Fannius and Quintus Mucius Scaevola) asking their father-in-law Laelius, in light of the passing of Laelius' dear friend Scipio, to instruct them on the essence, purpose, and meaning of friendship. The father-in-law humbly explained that he was not prepared to make a great oration on friendship but did his best to oblige their request. For this reason, the arguments, definitions, and explanations of friendship were not organised in the fashion of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Instead, the ideals of friendship were accumulated as various thoughts built upon each other through conversation.

3.2.3.1 Friendship as Happiness

Cicero defined friendship as a happiness cultivated through spending time together, sharing in public and private aspects of life, living together/spending significant time together, being engaged in projects together, and being of the same mind.²⁴⁵ Cicero later produced a more precise definition, stating that friendship "...is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection, and I am inclined to think that, with the exception of wisdom, no better thing has been given to man by the immortal gods."²⁴⁶ Friendship and love therefore, could not be separated, for they arose from the same source.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Cicero also touched on friendship in his *De Officiis* and *On Brotherly Love*.

²⁴⁵ "... I feel as if my life has been happy because it was spent with Scipio, with whom I shared my public and private cares; lived under the same roof at home; served in the same campaigns abroad, and enjoyed that wherein lies the whole essence of friendship—the most complete agreement in policy, in pursuits, and in opinions." Marcus Tullius Cicero, "De Amicitia" in *Cicero Vol. XX: On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*, Trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 126.

²⁴⁶ Cicero, "De Amicitia," 141.

²⁴⁷ "At this point Laelius reminds his listeners that the word for friendship, *amicitia*, shares the same origin as the word for love, *amor*, 'for it is love that leads to the establishing of goodwill'." Grayling, *Friendship*, 48.

3.2.3.2 *Who Can Be a Friend*

Cicero first considered who was capable of, and could benefit from, friendship. Firstly, Cicero believed that true friendship could only be enjoyed by good people. Cicero defined, “good people” with some leniency as he understood humans to be imperfect, and yet in spite of imperfections, he believed friendships could still be enjoyed by those striving towards greater goodness.²⁴⁸ He did add the caveat that the better a person was, the greater their capacity for true friendship. Cicero also explained some of the characteristics which separate friendship from other relationships. Firstly, he explained that:

friendship must have goodwill: that goodwill may be eliminated from relationship while from friendship it cannot; since, if you remove goodwill from friendship the very name of friendship is gone; if you remove it from relationship, the name of relationship still remains.²⁴⁹

This meant that, if goodwill were removed from a parent-child relationship, that relationship would remain, but without having goodwill a friendship could not apply, and thus the friendship relationship would no longer exist. It is interesting to remember that this dialogue on friendship was happening between family members, which seems to further support this idea that friendship and family, while distinct, are not that different.²⁵⁰ Therefore, friendship could be added to other relationships but only in situations where goodwill was actively being cultivated. Cicero also believed that, like goodwill, friendship and virtue were inherently intertwined, for “without virtue, friendship cannot exist at all.”²⁵¹ Friendship was what made life worth living and added to the lives of the good and virtuous.²⁵² Even a ‘common’ friendship (one that did not measure up to the level of virtuous friendship), could be an enjoyable and profitable aspect of life, and ought not to be disregarded.²⁵³ In this way, Cicero believed friendship, both common and virtuous, was

²⁴⁸ Cicero, “De Amicitia,” 129, 127.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 129.

²⁵⁰ John Gruber-Miller, “Exploring Relationships: Amicitia and Familia in Cicero’s de Amicitia,” *The Classical World* 103, no. 1 (2009): 88–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40599907>

²⁵¹ Cicero, “De Amicitia,” 129, 131.

²⁵² It was sometimes thought that virtuous people did not need anything, let alone friends, since the life of the virtuous was nearly perfect, lacking nothing. Cicero, however believed even the most perfect people would still benefit from friendship since friends are a good in themselves. Ibid., 141, 143.

²⁵³ Ibid., 133.

attainable for any person who had a desire for virtue.

3.2.3.3 Disagreements

In terms of the substance and experience of friendship itself, Cicero had many points of agreement with the philosophers of his day, but there are a few points with which he strongly disagreed.²⁵⁴ Concerning mutuality, Cicero had three areas of dissent, all which had to do with reciprocation. Firstly, love for the self needed to be the same as love for the friend. Secondly, goodwill needed to be reciprocated, and thirdly, the value given to a friend must echo that attributed to oneself.²⁵⁵ He instead insisted that true friendship, while mutual, ought to arise from a love which was motivated not by what an individual thought would be good for their own self, but specific to what was determined as good for their friend.²⁵⁶ Aristotle would likely have agreed to this point in that he too argued that a friend must concern themselves with the unique good for their friend as opposed to a general good.²⁵⁷ Thus, it was not equality or fairness but goodness that was the goal of friendship for Cicero. Self-interest was therefore not the aim of friendship, but for friends who sacrificially loved one another, mutuality of benefits would likely be a happy consequence regardless of an equality of outcome due to their mutual commitment.²⁵⁸ For Cicero, this meant that love in friendship extended to the beloved need not coincide with the love one felt towards oneself.²⁵⁹ Thus, what Aristotle and Cicero meant regarding the self-love, arose from different starting points and were aimed at different questions regarding outcome.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ "... what are the limits and, so to speak, the boundary lines of affection....three views are usually advanced, none of which I approve: first, 'That we should have the same feeling for our friends that we have for ourselves'; second, 'That our goodwill towards our friends should correspond in all respects to their goodwill towards us,' and third, 'That whatever value a man places upon himself, the same value should be placed upon him by his friends.' I do not agree at all with any of these views." Ibid., 167.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 167.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 167-169.

²⁵⁷ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, VIII.v.

²⁵⁸ Willy Evenepoel, "Cicero's Laelius and Seneca's Letters on Friendship," *L'antiquité Classique* 76, no. 1 (2007): 178. doi:10.3406/antiqu.2007.2628.

²⁵⁹ This was different to Aristotle's conception of love for self and friend. Aristotle asserted that one must first love themselves in such a way that they desired the good, being oriented towards the pursuit of virtue, therefore it was more about ordered loves. This means that how a friend would be loved began first with the regard one had for oneself. Aristotle, *The Athenian constitution; The Eudemean ethics; On virtues and vices*, ed. H Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 401, 435.

²⁶⁰ Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 29, 78.

Aristotle was more concerned with the values which directed behaviour, while Cicero was more concerned with personal applications of love for the good of each individual. Aristotle and Cicero thus agreed that to love a person was to love an individual with unique desires and needs. Cicero, Aristotle, and other philosophers of friendship of the classical period held to a belief in universal truth and virtue, therefore subjectivity in friendship was related more to the manner of applying values and beliefs in individual friendships rather than to the beliefs or values concerning friendship itself. For example, encouragement in friendship would be applauded, and thus the method, subject, and tone of encouragement would be where any individual differences would arise. In this understanding, Cicero believed good friends would help each other apply universal truths specifically into each other's lives.

3.2.3.4 *Friendship and the State*

The relationship between friendships and the state was also of interest to Cicero.²⁶¹ Cicero believed, like many philosophers before him, that friendship was a means to bring order and peace to political life and to the wider culture. For Cicero, it was the power of friendship which cultivated goodwill in a community, leading to a strong and unified people; while animosity and divisions could conversely destroy a nation.²⁶² For Cicero, friendship and peace were tied together, for a country or community was composed of individuals, and if those individuals were gathered into virtuous friendships this would lead to the flourishing of the whole community. Friendship could be seen like a chain in which one friendship linked with another and in turn another and so on, eventually connecting the whole community in friendship. Friendship, in this light, was not merely a pleasant association for a few individuals, but was rooted in the very fabric of society determining whether a culture would flourish or flounder.

²⁶¹ Evenepoel, "Cicero's Laelius and Seneca's Letters on Friendship," 183.

²⁶² "But if you should take the bond of goodwill out of the universe no house or city could stand, nor would even the tillage of the fields abide. If that statement is not clear, then you may understand how great is the power of friendship and of concord from a consideration of the results of enmity and disagreement. For what house is so strong, or what state so enduring that it cannot be utterly overthrown by animosities and division." Cicero, "De Amicitia," 135.

Cicero also adamantly believed it a great sin²⁶³ to disobey or commit treason against the state, and to ask such a thing from a friend was to reach the limit of friendship. Given Cicero's other views on friendship and the *civitas*, to sin against the state, even for a friend, would be to sin against the community and all the other friendships within the society. For context, it is helpful to understand that Cicero lived through the Ides of March; Arthur Keith noted that this likely affected him and was perhaps even a cause for some confusion in his writings about friendship.²⁶⁴ Keith believed this was why Cicero not only addressed the political nature of friendship but also why the political aspects are an undercurrent through *De Amicitia*.²⁶⁵ In *De Amicitia* there was a passage which seems to suggest that primary allegiance is owed to 'the good' itself²⁶⁶ (as opposed to the friend), but it is unclear if 'the good' could trump the state.²⁶⁷

3.2.3.5 Summary

Morality in friendship was key for Cicero. Cicero never made it clear if the state could ever be against "the good" of friends. Friends, however, were to speak rebukes when needed and to be counsellors for each other that they might follow in the way of wisdom.²⁶⁸ In speaking truthfully to each other, friends should avoid asking such things of each other that would destroy not only their friendship, but their morality. These rebukes must be

²⁶³ Cicero used the term *sin* (*peccatum*), though it likely would not have held the same Christian/religious connotation.

²⁶⁴ Arthur L. Keith, "Cicero's Idea of Friendship," *The Sewanee Review* 37, no. 1 (1929): 51. www.jstor.org/stable/27534355

²⁶⁵ "The political situation with its corollaries of expediency and calculation thrusts itself into the more intimate experiences; indeed, tends to dominate the tone of the whole. When this is understood, we may see in the discussion a reflection of the troubled state of Cicero's mind." Keith, "Cicero's Idea of Friendship," 52.

²⁶⁶ "...he now says that loyalty requires that we should indeed help a friend even if it means 'turning aside from the straight path', just so long as doing so does not involve us in 'utter disgrace', and if it is a matter that involves the friend's life or reputation.... 'limit to the indulgence which can be allowed to friendship': this is the one thing neither Laelius nor Cicero was prepared to contemplate even for a friend. Death, yes; disgrace, no" "Cicero De Amicitia." Grayling, *Friendship*, 52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm5c4.8>

²⁶⁷ Cicero, "De Amicitia," 149, 151, 155-57; Cicero, "De Officiis," 43-45.

²⁶⁸ "A troublesome thing is truth, if it is indeed the source of hate, which poisons friendship; but much more troublesome is complaisance, which, by showing indulgence to the sins of a friend, allows him to be carried headlong away...." Cicero, "De Amicitia," 197.

given in love. Cicero was also interested in how wealth or status might impact friendships. For example, it might be harder to find a true friend if one was rich or powerful since many might be merely flatterers seeking to use and take,²⁶⁹ while someone who is poor, having little to give, might more readily trust a friend.²⁷⁰ It was also possible that prosperity could tempt people to become pompous, spurning old friends.²⁷¹ This is an interesting and relevant question from Cicero because he considered both wealth and poverty not only in terms of inequalities, but in the correlation between trust and wealth/power. If friendship were truly between good men, then whatever wealth or power each possessed (whether similar or very different) should not greatly affect the friendship. However, for imperfect men subject to temptations, such disparity of wealth could harm a person's ability to be a friend.

The question of old friends and new friends was also a topic of interest to Cicero. Cicero compared friendships to wine; they improve and become sweeter with age and were therefore preferable to new friendships. This said, Cicero was not in opposition to the cultivation of new friendships, for, in time, new friends could become as enjoyable as old friendships.²⁷² New friendships should not be preferred to old ones, for then friendships would never deepen, nor would they become trustworthy and therefore deserving of the title of friendship. Likewise, old friendships should not be preferred to the exclusion of new friendships which could be the means of gaining new virtues or experiencing the openness and shared nature of Love. Plutarch makes this question the primary focus in his *Moralia* which we will turn to next.

3.2.4 Plutarch's *Moralia*

Plutarch's work on friendship, *On Having Many Friends (De Amicorum Multitudine)*, as the title suggests, concerns how many friends one ought to have. This essay is found within

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 175.

²⁷⁰ "...how grievous and how hard to most persons does association in another's misfortunes appear! Nor is it easy to find men who will go down to calamity's depths for a friend." Cicero, "De Amicitia," 175.

²⁷¹ Mary Dorothea, "Cicero and Saint Ambrose on Friendship," *The Classical Journal* 43, no. 4 (1948): 222.

²⁷² Cicero, "De Amicitia," 177-9.

his *Moralia*, though the topic of friendship can also be found in other sections of *Moralia*.²⁷³ In this first work, he argued, along with other philosophers, that fewer friends of high quality were preferable to many fair-weathered friends. For Plutarch, friendships were the sort of beautiful thing best enjoyed with restraint. He argued that the desire for many friends was not inherently wrong, but rather an unwise desire revealing a lack of contentment. The ideal was to have contentment with a few beautiful and good things, rather than to collect the mediocre in abundance. He gave the example of a child collecting many wildflowers, not having yet learned contentment with just a few lovely flowers, and warns that this leads to the danger of missing the good that is already in our possession.²⁷⁴ One of the reasons Plutarch gave for limiting the number of close friends was that humans have limited resources of time and affection, and to stretch this beyond one's capacity would lead to fruitless and unsatisfactory friendships. Therefore, it would be better to possess only the amount of friendships which could be properly maintained to the satisfaction of both parties. Plutarch understood the impossibility of being with every interesting potential friend, but said that it would be unnatural and ill advised to have none. Thus, a frustration emerges in discerning one's limitations regarding how many friends one might endeavour to maintain.²⁷⁵ Van der Stockt raised an important question about Plutarch's reasons for such advice given that he himself had many friends. He questioned to whom this advice is given and why such advice even needed to be given.²⁷⁶ If Plutarch defined friendship as other philosophers did where friendships existed at two levels, perhaps this differentiation in friendships can reconcile the contradiction. Broadly speaking, one could be friends with a great deal of people given that a shallow and broad definition of friendship amounts more to goodwill for one's neighbours than virtue friendship, as

²⁷³ Plutarch also has a section in *Moralia* called "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend" though for this thesis "On Having Many Friends" was more applicable to the topics covered while also dialoguing well with other primary sources in this chapter.

²⁷⁴ Plutarch, Tr. Frank Cole Babbitt, "On Having Many friends" in *Moralia Vol II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 2.

²⁷⁵ Plutarch, "On Having Many Friends," 6.

²⁷⁶ "It seems indeed paradoxical that a man like Plutarch would argue against having many friends: in modern times, he is reputed to have cultivated many friendships himself....Clearly, Plutarch upholds a rather exclusive notion of friendship, one that limits its extent through the fullness of its content." L. Van Der Stockt, "Semper Duo, Numquam Tres?" in *Virtues for the People*, eds. Geert Roskam and L. Van Der Stockt (Leuven University Press, 2011), 22. doi: 10.2307/j.ctt9qdzvk.4

previously shown. True, deep, and thus narrowly defined friendship, however, must be reserved for a limited amount. In this way, it would be reasonable for Plutarch himself to have many friendships of goodwill as well as smaller group of intimate friends.²⁷⁷ Therefore, I do not believe it is inconsistent or hypocritical for Plutarch to have many friends while still warning against having too many friends, given the broad definitions of friendship.

3.2.4.1 Three-fold Purpose of Friendship

In terms of the purpose of true friendship, Plutarch believed this to be three-fold: “virtue as a good thing, intimacy as a pleasant thing, and usefulness as a necessary thing.”²⁷⁸ Plutarch seems to have taken both higher and lower views of friendship and connected them along a spectrum rather than dividing them into distinct categories.²⁷⁹ This hierarchical nature provided a logical progression. Usefulness, for example, was noted as being necessary rather than good or pleasant, the usefulness as part of making life easier for one another. To usefulness, intimacy could be added, making the relationship enjoyable and rich, and to this virtue could additionally transform the friendship into something morally good and beneficial. It was not clear whether for Plutarch these three could be separated, though it would seem plausible that they might exist in varying degrees and thus the greater the friendship the more of the purposes that friendship enjoys. The order might also be reversed. Perhaps a friendship was formed because of the good character perceived in the other and a mutual desire for virtue; from this intimacy forms and eventually the practical means of being useful to each other results as a form of showing love. A question emerges regarding if these three can be added in any order, or if a virtue friendship must always start with virtue. Perhaps an answer can be found in that Plutarch also reminded his readers that friendships are difficult to break, therefore it is best to prudently test the friendship before

²⁷⁷ N. Bryant Kirkland, “‘The Friend-Making Table’: Variety and the Definition of Friendship in Plutarch’s Table Talk,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 143 (2023): 96-97. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1017/S0075426923000526>

²⁷⁸ Plutarch, “On Having Many Friends,” 3.

²⁷⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia. Volume II: How to Profit by One’s Enemies. On Having Many Friends. Chance. Virtue and Vice. Letter of Condolence to Apollonius. Advice About Keeping Well. Advice to Bride and Groom. The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men. Superstition*, ed. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 53.

committing. Likewise, it would be ideal to start friendships off with virtue wherever possible.²⁸⁰ He also warned that since friendships are built upon character, character should remain stable for the friendship to remain stable, but one who has too many friends becomes changeable and can strain their friendships.²⁸¹ Tying these points together then (that of the usefulness of friendship and the amount of friendships one might have), if one does desire to have multiple friends, it would be ideal for the friends to all be friends with each other. Of course, it could be challenging to find two or three friends who all share the same values, but it is not impossible, and if found, should be treated like a rare treasure.²⁸² On this idea Plutarch tweaks the Aristotelian idea of a single soul dwelling in two bodies, asserting that it is possible within the realm of friendship for one soul to be shared between multiple bodies.²⁸³ Thus, in friendship, there can be more than two, but that does not mean one should get carried away and try to have as many friends as possible. Perhaps he was responding to the idea of popularity; the idea that if one is liked (or friends with) many people, they will somehow be more powerful, respected, popular, etc., but such goals of friendship would not lead to true friends but rather to moral ruin. Furthermore, Plutarch went so far as to say that *eros* corrupts same-sex friendships, but friendship is the food of opposite-gender romantic relationships, meaning that romantic feelings could harm a same-sex friendship but when friendship is added to a romantic relationship between a man and a woman the relationship is enhanced.²⁸⁴ He was also one of the only ancient philosophers who spoke positively regarding female friendship, asserting that not only were women capable of friendship but that husbands ought to seek out friendship with their wives.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 9-10.

²⁸² Plutarch, "On Having Many Friends," 8.

²⁸³ "Plutarch is of the opinion that the proper relationship among friends must be in all respects 'as if one soul were divided among more than one body'." Donald J. Verseput, "Plutarch of Chaeronea and the Epistle of James on Communal Behaviour," *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 04 (2001): 505. doi:10.1017/s0028688501000303

²⁸⁴ Plutarch, *Moralia, Dialogue on Love, Volume ix*, eds. Francis Henry Sandbach and William Clark Helmbold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 319, 425. Jeffrey Beneker, "1 *Erōs* and Marriage," in *The Passionate Statesman: Erōs and Politics in Plutarch's Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22-23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199695904.003.0002> Plutarch, *Moralia. Volume II*, 63.

²⁸⁵ Plutarch, "The Dialogue on Love" in *Moralia Volume I ix*, eds. Edwin L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach, and W. C. Helmbold, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 23.

3.2.4.2 *Correction in Friendship*

Like Cicero, Plutarch believed reproof to be a main qualification of true friendship. If one only flattered and never rebuked, they were no friend. For this reason, someone powerful would know they had a true friend in receiving a loving rebuke. For example, if a philosopher befriended a statesman to gain importance they would be using each other and thus not friends; to truly be friends the philosopher would need to keep his statesman friend from abuse of power so that they might both be men of virtue and have a friendship based on virtue.²⁸⁶ A true friend would also take on their friend's enemies, for as Aristotle and Socrates both argued, friends had all things in common. All does not mean only benefits and blessings, but also enemies and lack.²⁸⁷ Plutarch, however, did not go into great detail about what this might infer in relation to the state, or the extent to which one might share in their friends' enemies. But the idea seemed to reflect a willing attitude of taking on the enemies and offences of a friend whenever prudence and wisdom would allow.²⁸⁸

3.2.4.3 *Friendship in Perfection*

The final point on friendship, for Plutarch, concerned the pleasantness of friendship even for the wisest of humanity. He disagreed with the assumption that wisdom and goodness made a person so self-sufficient that they would cease to need friends. Plutarch understood that if friendship was truly a virtue and that a true friend gave freely for another's benefit, a supremely wise and good person would still desire friends. This person could live without friends, of course, but in his wisdom, knowing the blessing of friendship, he would never choose to forego friendship: The wise man could live without friends, as he might live without a limb; he can do it, but he would not cut off his own limb to prove it.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Mark Shiffman, "A Partial Cure for the Political Epicurean: Plutarch's Advice to the Statesman's Friend," *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 27, no. 2 (2010): 322-23. doi:10.1163/20512996-90000173

²⁸⁷ Plutarch, "On Having Many Friends," 6.

²⁸⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia. On Brotherly Love, Volume vi*, ed. William Clark Helmbold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 313.

²⁸⁹ Plutarch, "On Brotherly Love," 3.

3.2.4.4 *Summary*

Plutarch's views on friendship brought together many aspects of friendship often considered separately. For Plutarch friendship did not have to be put into categories like a useful friend, pleasant, or a virtuous friend; friendship that is virtuous cannot help but be also useful and pleasant. Plutarch also seems to draw on many of the biblical concepts of friendship – that it corrects, shares all it has, can be limited and broad in scope. Most interestingly Plutarch emphasises friendship as a means in itself rather than an ends to goodness or virtue. Because of this even perfected humanity (or perhaps God himself) even when they do not have need of friendship out of lack can delight in friendship simply because it is good.

3.2.5 Conclusion

In this section, many themes emerged regarding friendship, such as the degrees and different definitions of friendship as well as the benefits of friendship, from usefulness to virtue, to the growth of character. These ancient philosophers considered how many friends to have, when to end a friendship, and what can be asked of a friend. Clearly, there is overlap between Greco-Roman concepts of friendship and what can be discerned from the Old and New Testaments. Friendship shapes character and can be either a vice or a virtue. For the Greeks, the foundation of friendship was virtue, but for the Biblical writers, the primary foundation was fear of God, which led to wisdom/virtue. For biblical friendship then, there was a deeper foundation of faith. It is also interesting to note the similarity found in the idea that wisdom was a prerequisite to friendship, as well as one of the primary goals of true friendship. Both the Greeks and the Biblical writers acknowledged the vital role of wisdom in friendship. Of course, the question on the role of wisdom, and from where wisdom comes was expressed differently. For the Greeks who prized wisdom friendship was a catalyst for gaining wisdom. The biblical writers, on the other hand, expressed the opposite sentiment, writing that friendship was founded on wisdom. Wisdom was the basis for friendship, with friendship itself being the penultimate goal and friendship with God as the ultimate goal. Thus, for both the Jews and the Greeks, wisdom was both foundational to friendship and gained through friendship, but each emphasised one over the other. Another striking difference is how equality among friends was understood. For the Greeks, while

there was some flexibility to establishing a sense of equality, it was often based on qualities of status. In the Bible however, equality was more focused on faith and character before any other measures of equality. However, The Bible seems to subvert assumed beliefs about equality in friendship as God himself extends friendship to humans. For God to set this precedent suggests that even human friendships can cross lines of inequality. There were, of course, many similarities as well especially concerning the behaviours of friends such as to will the good of the other or to endeavour to grow in personal virtue or holiness, so which is of benefit to a friend, or that friendship – while an intimate relationship, did not have to be exclusive but was open to including others in friendship.

Moving forward, friendship as it began to emerge within the rise of Christianity in the West will be explored within the biblical and Greco-Roman contexts already covered. This final section will cover some important epochs of church history regarding friendship which have built on these two foundation stones, including commentary on a few significant Christian doctrines which influenced notions of friendship within Christianity historically as well as the modern understandings of friendship, which will be the subject of the remainder of this thesis.

3.3 Christian Virtue Friendship

Christian virtue friendship was a term I coined²⁹⁰ in a master's level thesis in which I argued that the ideals of virtue friendship from the Greco-Roman philosophers, as part of the resurgence of classical ways of thinking, teaching, and learning within the scholastic movement, mingled with the Reformation. As these two schools of thought mingled, I argued that rather than just classical virtue friendship ideals or Biblical ideals of friendship, the two combined to create a view of friendship which can aptly be called "Christian Virtue Friendship." Christian virtue friendship, I argue, is now the prevailing basis of most academic and theological discussions in the Western world on the topic of friendship. This is not to say that other views of friendship are no longer applicable or prevalent in other cultures or contexts (much of this thesis discusses such departures and modern conceptions which

²⁹⁰ I have thus far not found others using this term, but I may not have been the first to use it.

differ from Christian virtue friendship); rather this is more to say that the historical, theological, and underlying assumptions regarding friendship are most often linked to this merging of ancient philosophical and Christian thought. In this section, this development of thought on friendship will be examined from the early church up through the time of the Reformation. Theologians who gleaned from both classical and biblical ideas in the development of their views on friendship will be studied as they serve to provide a framework for the evolution of friendship thought in the development of Christian virtue friendship. The theologians I discuss include St. Augustine, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Finally, the impact of Reformation thought beginning with Erasmus of Rotterdam and ending with Richard Rogers from the later Puritan movement will be addressed.

3.3.1 St. Augustine

Saint Augustine is one of the most influential Church fathers, and certainly one of the early Church's most prolific writers. He is probably most well-known for his spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*. In *Confessions*, the topic of friendship is examined from various viewpoints. Augustine also addressed friendship in many of his other works and letters, and while he never wrote a text solely on friendship, a simple word search reveals that this was a topic often discussed in his writings. Examining a few of these different sources from Augustine will highlight some emerging Christian ideas of friendship such as seeing friendship as both vice and virtue,²⁹¹ the limitations of true friendship, developing thoughts on friendship with God, and friendship as an orientation of the will.²⁹²

²⁹¹ "In these ways he at once acknowledges the classical friendship ideal, which he had lived out in his early years, and at the same time develops a Christian theory of friendship and love in which faith, hope, and charity are accorded their fullest value." McEvoy, "Ultimate Goods," 257.

²⁹² For a fuller exploration of St. Augustine's views on friendship, see my paper, "Augustine and Friendship." Joelle Lucas, "Augustine and Friendship," MA paper (Durham University, 2019). https://www.academia.edu/38839114/Augustine_and_Friendship

3.3.1.1 Friendship as a Vice

In *Confessions*, Augustine first addressed friendship as a vice which led him into sin as a small boy.²⁹³ In contemplating his early life before conversion, he noticed that it was false and wrongly oriented friendships which often led him into sin, sins which he likely would not have participated in without the influence of “friends”.²⁹⁴ Such friendships were therefore distortions of true friendship. True friendship, however, Augustine believed to be a gift from God, as well as a relationship to be had with God, the effects of which would lead to holiness.²⁹⁵ Because friendship could lead towards or away from God and holiness, Augustine saw friendship as useful for diagnosing the orientation of a person’s heart.²⁹⁶ One could be “friends” in an abstract sense with the world²⁹⁷ (i.e. sin and everything opposed to God) or friends with God and holiness (i.e. everything good and in line with the will of God). In this manner of speaking, friendship was an allegiance of the heart either towards God or the world, so actual friendships would also develop in accordance to one’s heart posture. In this way Augustine seemed to be suggesting that friendship could shape and direct one’s will.²⁹⁸ For Augustine this shaping could be for good or for evil. Since Augustine believed that love inclined one to action of moral good or evil,²⁹⁹ friendship therefore, as a form of love, was an indicator of both heart posture and moral behaviour. In essence, Augustine

²⁹³ St. Ambrose may have influenced this idea, Tamer Nawar, “Augustine On The Dangers Of Friendship,” *The Classical Quarterly* 65, no. 02 (09, 2015): 837-8, doi:10.1017/s0009838815000427.

²⁹⁴ “...what I stole pleased me not, but rather the act of stealing; nor to have done it alone would I have liked so well, neither would I have done it. O Friendship too unfriendly! You mysterious seducer of the soul.” Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk II, 9.

“... Augustine gives careful attention to how human friendships may depart from the *luminosus limes amicitiae*, and it quickly becomes clear that these lusts are intertwined in earthly amicitia. In particular, Augustine reflects over the theft of the pears...and uses the episode to raise important questions concerning the origins of evil and sin.” Nawar, “Augustine On The Dangers Of Friendship,” 6.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk II, 5.

²⁹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. III, 3.

²⁹⁷ “For the friendship of this world is fornication against You; [James 4:4]” *Ibid.*, Bk. I, 13.

²⁹⁸ “... friendships may prove an impediment to virtue by: derailing our practical reasoning (rather than aiding it); fostering vices (rather than virtues); and misdirecting our love. Augustine’s investigation of the murky depths of friendship shows an original philosopher and keen observer of the human condition at work.” Nawar, “Augustine On The Dangers Of Friendship,” 1.

²⁹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. II, 9.
Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. John O’Meara, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), XIX, 5.

argued that, beyond sinful human nature, the desire to please a friend or to belong to a group would also prove influenceable.³⁰⁰

3.3.1.2 Friendship as Virtue

As much as sin could corrupt friendship, Augustine lauded the virtuous side of friendship as the more powerful.³⁰¹ Because Augustine saw friendship more as a manifestation of the orientation of one's heart before God, friendship was not irredeemable; but just as one's sinful heart could be saved by the gospel and one's desires reoriented towards the good, so could friendship.³⁰² Once one exchanged friendship with the world for friendship with God, one's human friendships were purified.³⁰³ Augustine himself benefited from such friendships.³⁰⁴ For Augustine, friendship started and ended with Christ, and thus the best way to love a friend was to love them in God.³⁰⁵ This is why Augustine also believed that true friendship could only be had by Christians.³⁰⁶ This is in many ways a development on the classical view that friendship could only be had by those who were "good" men, those who were devoted to morality and virtue.³⁰⁷ For Augustine,

³⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. II, 5.

"... he emphasizes that friendship was a necessary condition of the sin taking place ... that the sin was occasioned by friendship in some way.... Further, friendships may misdirect our sense of shame ... and inflate that dangerous vice: pride." Nawar, "Augustine on the Dangers of Friendship," 8-9.

³⁰¹ "Nor could I, even in accordance with my then notions of happiness, make myself happy without friends ... And these friends assuredly I loved for their own sakes, ..." Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk VI, 16.

³⁰² Augustine, *From Augustine to Jerome (A.D. 404). 2 To Jerome, My Venerable and Most Esteemed Brother and Fellow-Presbyter Augustine Sends Greeting in the Lord* (Toronto: Canada, 2017), Kindle.

³⁰³ Augustine, "Letter 167.3 (Augustine) or 132 (Jerome)" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. I*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J.G. Cunningham (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102167.htm>

³⁰⁴ Like his life-long friend Alypius, his friend from the monastery in Hippo as well as a small and intimate group in Cassiacum of men (as his mother Monica) who studied religion and philosophy together. Herbert T. Weiskotten, "Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo," PhD Diss. (Princeton University, 1919). http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/possidius_life_of_augustine_01_intro.htm Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 56-57.

³⁰⁵ "Blessed be he who loves You, and his friend in You, and his enemy for Your sake. For he alone loses none dear to him to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost. And who is this but our God, the God that created heaven and earth..." Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. IV, 9; X, 29. Augustine, *Propositions* (Toronto: Canada, 2017), Kindle, 23.

³⁰⁶ Augustine, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean: Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, eds. Roland J. Teske and Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2007), XXII, 78.

³⁰⁷ While Stefan Rebenich in *Augustine on Friendship and Orthodoxy*, argued that the majority of early Christians were not interested in Greek ideas of friendship (*philia*). Augustine took from both the Latin

however, personal holiness was not necessary for friendship, but rather reflected his views concerning the allegiance of one's heart. If someone was aligned with the world and thus in a state of damnation, then they could not properly love a friend in God's will and could not channel love for their friend through the love of God.³⁰⁸ The requirement of faith for true friendship, did not stop morally upright "pagans" from having good friendships, but it would have been a barrier in Augustine's view for pagans to enjoy the fullness of friendship which could only be experienced through Christ.³⁰⁹

3.3.1.3 Friendship in Heaven

Finally, for Augustine, friendship, as with everything on earth, was fallen and imperfect. Therefore, the hope was for the world to be restored and renewed, in the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness.³¹⁰ Friendship too would one day be perfected in this eternal kingdom. Augustine believed that God began these eternal works of redemption on earth, and therefore friendships made in God's love would be perfected in heaven.³¹¹ Friendship would be a convergence of love and unity.³¹² Of faith, hope, and love, love was considered the greatest,³¹³ because faith and hope were meant to usher repentant

amicita and Greek *philia* cultivating an understanding of friendship which denoted a unity of persons in love, care and mutuality which brought about a deeper Christian meaning of friendship. Steve Summers, "Friendship: Exploring Its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity: Exploring Its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity" (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2011), 79. ProQuest Ebook Central. Quoting Stephan Rebenich, "Augustine on Friendship and Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Augustine*. ed. Mark Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, 368. Nawar, "Augustine on the Dangers of Friendship," 3.

³⁰⁸ Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, "On the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. III*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), V, 15. Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>
Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. II, 5.

³⁰⁹ Augustine, "Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. III*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. C.L. Cornish (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1305.htm>

³¹⁰ "This emphasis on complete unity among friends is taken very seriously by Augustine and ... will have an important part to play ... in the development of his theological and ecclesiological ideas." Caroline White, *Christian friendship in the fourth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1992), 188.

³¹¹ White, *Christian friendship in the fourth century*, 206.
Augustine, *Propositions*, 23.

³¹² "The friendships of men also are endeared by a sweet bond, in the oneness of many souls." Augustine, *Confessions*. Bk. II, 5.

³¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:13.

sinner into salvation and God's kingdom, but love continues into the heavenly state. Friendship was seen as belonging to both earth and heaven; on earth as a conduit of support and grace³¹⁴ as well as the eternal fruit of Heaven. One might even argue that friendship *is* heaven, for indeed, perfect friendship is unity and love. Augustine believed friendship to continue in the heavenly life in its perfection. This might be one of the reasons he chided himself for being selfish in mourning the death of his Christian friends, for they had the privilege of already enjoying the greater portion of friendship with God in Heaven.³¹⁵

3.3.1.4 Summary

For Augustine, friendship was complex in that it could be both vice and virtue. That Augustine saw friendship, rightly understood, as a virtue began to bring together biblical and philosophical conceptions of friendship. Virtue in friendship was thus not simply something to be gained for moral edification, but something spiritual and associated with God's own perfect love. Therefore, friendship, for Augustine, was different for pagans and Christians since without faith in Christ pagans would not be capable of fully understanding the depth of friendship. This spiritual nature of friendship also leads to friendship being viewed as a foretaste of Heaven where the goal of earthly friendship was to emulate this perfected friendship as much as possible while on earth.

3.3.2 St. Aelred of Rievaulx

St. Aelred of Rievaulx was an important figure in friendship history due to his book titled *Spiritual Friendship*, in which he purposed to "Christianise" Cicero's *De Amicitia*.³¹⁶ *Spiritual Friendship* is comprised of three sections, all written as a dialogue between Aelred

³¹⁴ "Friends could help one another in the attainment of those aims, leading one another on the search for God." White, *Christian friendship in the fourth century*, 186.

³¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. IV, 4.
White, *Christian friendship in the fourth century*, 217.

³¹⁶ Kevin Vost, *The Four Friendships: From Aristotle to Aquinas* (Tacoma: Angelico Press, 2018), 99.
James McEvoy, "Friendship and Love," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 50 no. 1 (1983): 35.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002114008305000102>

and his fellow monks, echoing the style of *De Amicitia*.³¹⁷ In book one Aelred and his dear friend Ivo were speakers (though Aelred began by acknowledging the presence of Christ in their discussion, asserting that three persons, rather than two, were involved in the conversation).³¹⁸ Though already a close friend, being younger than Aelred, Ivo sought his elder's wisdom regarding the nature, value, source, and end of friendship. Aelred mentioned that he found Cicero's *On Friendship* both useful and enjoyable³¹⁹ but Ivo responded that it lacked Christ and thus he wished to hear a Christian understanding of friendship from Aelred.³²⁰ Aelred then modified Cicero's definition of friendship ("... mutual harmony in affairs human and divine coupled with benevolence and charity,"³²¹) to define friendship as both a virtue and a spiritual bond of unity crafted from the eternal love of God:

Friendship, therefore is that virtue by which spirits are bound by ties of love and sweetness, and out of many are made one....Solomon in the Book of Proverbs appears to agree with them when he says: "He that is a friend loves at all times," manifestly declaring that friendship is eternal if it is true friendship; but if it should ever cease to be, then it was not true friendship, even though it seemed to be so.³²²

In this definition, an important feature of friendship was its eternal and unending nature.

³¹⁷ Aelred lived in a monastery, which greatly influenced his writings on friendship. "Aelred's thinking and writing about friendship, for all their universal worth and application, are stamped indelibly with the spirit of the cloister." Nathan Lefler, "Saint Aelred of Rievaulx and Saint Thomas Aquinas on Friendship: A Comparison of Monastic and Scholastic Theology," PhD Diss., (The Catholic University of America, 2008), 48. <http://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/saint-aelred-rievaulx-thomas-aquinas-on/docview/304666323/se-2>

"The prologue leads us to expect that the ideas of Cicero's Laelius *de amicitia* will play a role in the dialogue And ... what follows will differ from the pagan ideal much as the shape of Aelred's own life in the cloister differed from his life in the world as a king's courtier." James McEvoy, "Notes on the Prologue of St. Aelred of Rievaulx's 'De Spirituali Amicitia' with a Translation." *Traditio* 37 (1981): 397. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27831101>

³¹⁸ St. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary by Dennis Billy*, ed. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2008), I.1.

³¹⁹ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.6-7.

³²⁰ Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 102.

³²¹ "Perhaps for him the word, "charity" expressed an affection of the heart, and the word "benevolence" for carrying it out in deed. This reflected the biblical idea that love was affection followed by action, which together manifested the fullness of love." St. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.15. Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 103.

Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.11.

³²² *Ibid.*, I.21.

3.3.2.1 *The Faithfulness of True Friendship*

Aelred and Ivo believed a friendship which ended could never have been a true friendship. This was a high bar certainly, but if Aelred was using the perfect love of God as the measure for friendship then to see friendship as perfectly exhibiting consistency, trust, and ongoing affection would be a reasonable response. This point echoed St. Augustine's eschatological views of friendship, in which love and truth (and thus friendship) would eternally exist in Heaven in a perfected state. For a Christian who believed in a literal eternal heaven, it would be logical to see friendship (a manifestation of love) to be a key aspect of heaven; it would be a place where friends united in Christ would look forward to the continuation of their friendship both with God and with fellow believers.³²³

3.3.2.2 *Friendship as Love*

While Aelred believed friendship and love to be connected, he did not believe them to be interchangeable.³²⁴ Charity (*agape*) and friendship (*philia*) were both manifestations of love, but they were still separate. While Christians were called to love everyone, friendship was a particular relationship of such great intimacy that human limitations necessarily limit friendship capacity in a way that is not so with the love of charity.³²⁵ Despite their unique qualities, friendship and charity are both manifestations of love, and as Scripture asserts that God himself can be defined as love,³²⁶ Aelred did not consider it a leap too far to say that just as God *is* love, God *is* friendship.³²⁷

³²³ Ibid., II, 9.

³²⁴ "Aelred helps us to view friendship as part of a larger attitude that we call charity, one that has its rules; moreover, while remaining a deep human experience, friendship has to do in some way with God. On the other hand, charity envelopes friendship, and this reality creates a positive dialectic and a dynamic mixing of *agape* and *eros*, self-sacrifice and the joy of gratuitousness, given and received, answering thus that basic and deep need to be loved and to love..." Domenico Pezzini, "Aelred's Doctrine of Charity and Friendship" in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167)*, ed. Marsha Dutton (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 221. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1163/9789004337978>

³²⁵ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.35.

Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 103.

³²⁶ 1 John 4:7-21.

³²⁷ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.69.
Pakaluk. *Other Selves*, 130.

3.3.2.3 *Qualifications for Friendship*

Like Cicero and others before him, Aelred and Ivo were curious as to what sort of person might be able to enjoy such friendship. The assumption was that one must be virtuous, but the measurement of virtue was in question. Similar to his predecessor Cicero, Aelred believed that one did not need to be perfect but rather that it was necessary for both participants to be inclined towards walking in the path of virtue.³²⁸ This virtuous criterion was in relation to the higher form of friendship which Aelred called spiritual friendship³²⁹ (as opposed to virtue friendship because friendship at its highest was a spiritual connection through Christ rather than attainment of virtue). Aelred believed there were friendships which did not reach the level of spiritual friendship, which could still be called friendships as long as the distinction between the different kinds of friendships were made.³³⁰ Aelred termed such friendships as carnal friendships which were based purely on emotion; little thought was given regarding the forging of the friendship, and it would often fade as quickly as it was created.³³¹ Then there were worldly friendships which were the sort of friendships Aristotle called friendships of utility, in which there was an exchange or temporal gain to result from the friendship.³³² Spiritual friendship, however, as the highest form of friendship, was the sort that would be thoughtfully chosen, invested in, fruit bearing, and (hopefully) long lasting.³³³ There were clearly many overlaps with classical philosophy in Aelred's conceptions of the different forms of friendship, though each were moulded into Christian framing. For Aelred, a friend should not be chosen simply for the gaining of virtue

³²⁸ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.26-27.

"Similarly, we know that the sacred bond of friendship between David and Jonathan, which was consecrated not through the hope of future advantage, but from the contemplation of virtue, was very profitable for both." *Ibid.*, I,63.

³²⁹ "Spiritual friendship, which we call true, should be desired, not for consideration of any worldly advantage ... but from the dignity of its own nature and the feeling of the human heart, so that its fruition and reward is nothing other than itself." *Ibid.*, I.45.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, I.36-37.

Pezzini, "Aelred's Doctrine of Charity and Friendship," 236.

³³¹ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.41.

³³² *Ibid.*, I.42.

Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 106-107.

³³³ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.45-46.

but rather for how they might benefit one's relationship with God.³³⁴ The investments and fruits of such a friendship should echo the "Fruits of the Spirit,"³³⁵ and the friendship should last beyond death.

3.3.2.4 Source of Friendship

The next question concerns the origin of friendship. God, as the author of friendship – not for himself, being all-sufficient – designed for humans to find wholeness in unity and friendship with other humans.³³⁶ This was a theme from his earlier work, *The Mirror of Charity*, in which he reflected on love, considering how looking to Christ and to other Christians would enable one to see their own self as well as the whole world through the truthful lens of love.³³⁷ In this first work, Aelred addressed affection of the mind, believing that humans most deeply and primarily preferentially desire the embrace of the soul to that of the body.³³⁸ It was also in this work that Aelred wrestled with how to love those who prove challenging; or how one might even "befriend" an enemy as God befriends sinners. Aelred bridged this gap by arguing that the friend who is easy to love and an enemy who is difficult to love must both (in their own ways) be loved in God and for God.³³⁹

³³⁴ The four cardinal virtues play an integral role in the making and keeping of spiritual friendship. Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.49.

Though Aelred recycled Cicero's definition, the usage of *divine*, as Pezzini noted, no longer carried Cicero's connotations. Pezzini, "Aelred's Doctrine of Charity and Friendship," 237.

³³⁵ "Indeed, the Christian ought not to despair of acquiring any virtue since daily the divine voice from the Gospel re-echoes: "Ask, and you shall receive...." It is not wonder, then, that pursuers of true virtue were rare among the pagans since they did not know the Lord, the Dispenser of virtue..." St. Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.27.

³³⁶ Aelred, *The Mirror of Charity*, I.51-57.

Aelred *Spiritual Friendship*, I.16

Pezzini, "Aelred's Doctrine of Charity and Friendship," 235-236.

³³⁷ Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 133, 136.

³³⁸ "I embraced you, dear brother, not in the flesh but in the heart. I used to kiss you not with a touch of the lips but with attachment of the mind. I loved you because you welcomed me into friendship from the very beginning of my conversion, showed yourself more familiar with me than with the others, linked me with your own heart in the inner depths of your soul." Aelred, *The Mirror of Charity*, I.34.109.

³³⁹ "...And so, let the friend whom it is impossible for us not to love, be loved in God, and let the enemy whom it is impossible to love for his own sake be loved for God's sake; the first in virtue of attachment and the second in virtue of reason." *Ibid.*, III. 26.63.

3.3.2.5 *Sharing in Friendship*

In books two and three of *Spiritual Friendship*, the speakers were no longer Aelred and Ivo (Ivo having passed away), but Aelred and two younger monks. Thus, the conversation moved from one between two intimate friends to that between a teacher and pupils. One of the young monks had just discovered a copy of notes from the previous discussion on friendship between Aelred and Ivo and wished to discuss the matter further, asking Aelred if he remembered the writing (II.5-7). Aelred reiterated some main points from the book and continued on to further topics such as the sharing of joys and burdens through friendship³⁴⁰ and the relationship between human friendship and friendship with God.³⁴¹ For the first point Aelred seemed to agree with Aristotle that friendship was about sharing in all things, both joys and sorrows. But for Aelred such sharing did not need to be equal in measure, for friendship “heightens the joys of prosperity and mitigates the sorrows of adversity by dividing and sharing them.”³⁴²

3.3.2.6 *Friendship and love of God*

As for human and divine friendship, Aelred quoted from John’s Gospel, noting a connection between the two forms of friendships: “...friendship ... consists in the love and knowledge of God, so that man from being a friend of his fellowman becomes the friend of God....‘I will not now call you servants but my friends’.”³⁴³ Friendship with God thus could enable better human friendships, and friendships with other humans could promote a deeper understanding of friendship with God. It would seem that this reciprocity was one of the reasons why a monk such as himself would be so invested in friendship. There seems to have been a debate among monks at this time of the usefulness of friendship for a monk as his life was intended to be fully devoted to Christ, and friendship could be seen as a

³⁴⁰ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, II.13.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 2.9-14.

³⁴² “Our yearning for friendship says something about the very fabric of our lives and about the nature of God in whose image, as Aelred so firmly believed, we are made.” Ibid., 79.

³⁴³ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, II.14.

distraction from God.³⁴⁴ For Aelred, friendship was not a distraction or even a good but unrelated call for a monk; rather, friendship was itself a means of greater knowledge and intimacy with Christ.

3.3.2.7 *Limits of Friendship*

Lastly, following the inquiry of many of the philosophers and, of course, Cicero, Aelred and his companions discussed the extent to which one should obey or sacrifice for a friend. Aelred, following Cicero, agreed that while a true friend ought to hold nothing back, there was a limit: anything opposed to God, *i.e.* sin.³⁴⁵ It is interesting that there was not much discussion regarding if friendship required giving or obeying the requests of a friend. This seems to have been taken for granted and so the conversation was not *if* but *how much* to give. Sin for Aelred, however, was not the same as sin for Cicero. For Cicero, sin was anything against the state or to cause harm to the wider community.³⁴⁶ Aelred took a more spiritual view regarding sin, (though in practice, to sin against God would usually include sins against the governing authorities or actions that bring harm to one's community).³⁴⁷ The book closes by meditating on how unity with a friend would bind them to Christ and the subsequent hope of enjoying eternal friendship in Christ's return.³⁴⁸ Aelred's focus on the heavenly state of friendship as the end purpose of friendship would continue to be a mark of Christian friendship, putting friendship in the same category as the kingdom of God; something already present to be enjoyed but not able to be fully realised until the return of Christ.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004.), 71.

³⁴⁵ Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 113.

Carmichael, *Friendship*, 89.

³⁴⁶ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, II.44.

"But in response to the Ciceronian suggestion that one may do anything that pleases a friend provided one's country and neighbours do not suffer, Aelred considers it insane to protect the honour of others while besmirching one's own." Carmichael, *Friendship*, 89.

³⁴⁷ Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 115-116.

³⁴⁸ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, III.90-134.

Pezzini, "Aelred's Doctrine of Charity and Friendship," 244.

Vost, *The Four Friendships*, 121.

³⁴⁹ McEvoy, "Ultimate Goods," 258, 273.

3.3.2.8 Summary

For Aelred friendship was intertwined in the love of God. Like Augustine, friendship was spiritual and the virtue it inspired should be of a spiritual nature while also being rewarding in physically tangible ways. Aelred seemed to understand the embodied spiritual nature of friendship – that it was a joy and blessing which, if based in and oriented towards God would bear spiritual fruit. Therefore, those who pursued the things of God would then find the greatest fulfilment in their friendships both with God and with others. The perfect love of God would transform the soul to be taught true friendship making friendship fruitful and eternal.

3.3.3 St. Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas³⁵⁰ was greatly influenced by classical thought, primarily Aristotle, whom he referred to simply as “The Philosopher”.³⁵¹ Consequently, much of his writing on friendship in his *Summa Theologica* synthesises classical and Christian schools of thought.³⁵² Aquinas, like Aelred and Augustine before him, believed it consistent that if one said God *is* love, it was also correct to say that God *is* friendship. Aquinas advanced the idea that the final and perfected state of friendship would be fully realised in Heaven where one could enjoy friendship with God. He also suggested that a form of friendship could, through the working of the Holy Spirit, be extended even towards one’s enemies.³⁵³ Aquinas takes much of his direction in writing about friendship from areas of concern or remaining questions

³⁵⁰ For more on Thomas Aquinas on friendship see my paper for my MA titled “Thomas Aquinas and Divine Friendship”. Joelle Lucas, “Thomas Aquinas and Divine Friendship,” MA Paper., (Durham University, 2019). https://www.academia.edu/41830378/Thomas_Aquinas_and_Divine_Friendship

³⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1. Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 147.

³⁵² “It is being increasingly recognized that virtue ethics is central to Aquinas’s moral thought and to his consideration of the characteristic capacities and achievements of human nature. His study and appreciation of the virtues links him firmly to Aristotle. Thomas endeavours to relate happiness to the moral and speculative virtues, arguing that *beatitudo* does not lie in bodily or material goods such as pleasure or wealth, but rather that the highest happiness attainable by human beings lies in the contemplation of truth.” McEvoy, “Ultimate Goods,” 262.

³⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

This was in reference to loving the sinner not the sin. Carmichael, *Friendship*, 123.

Gerald J. Beyer, “The Love of God and Neighbour According to Aquinas: An Interpretation.” *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 985 (2003): 118. doi:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06281.x.

regarding friendship at the intersection of Aristotelian thought and Christian theology. For example, one of Aristotle's conditions of friendship was equality. This requirement led to the belief that friendship with God was impossible. Aquinas resolved this dilemma by responding from both philosophy and theology. Even Aristotle acknowledged that differences could be overcome if the higher friend were to lower themselves to create equality, which is precisely what, according to Aquinas, Christ did in taking on human form; God lowered himself,³⁵⁴ and raised humanity up,³⁵⁵ to make friendship with humanity possible.

3.3.3.1 *Friendship as a Virtue*

Like others before him, Aquinas was greatly interested in the value, pursuit, and acquisition of friendship as virtue.³⁵⁶ Virtue existed in two orders, those which can be acquired through the grace available to all humans (pagans and Christians alike), and those which can only be obtained through the infusion of the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁷ Charity/love was one of the infused virtues; therefore, friendship, being a form of love, could only be possessed by those who were themselves indwelt with the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁸ So, friendship in its truest form, could only be had by those who were in Christ, subsequently turning friendship into a virtue of the highest order. Indeed, Aquinas went so far as to say that friendship with God was the highest end of man.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 24, a.4, ad. 3.

This does not address friendship in the Old Testament with men like Abraham or Moses, though perhaps God's transcendent nature would suffice as a reasonable response.

Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 47.

Carmichael, *Friendship*, 111.

³⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 23, a. 3, ad. 1.

³⁵⁷ Thomas Ryan. "Aquinas on Compassion: Has He Something to Offer Today?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2010): 157. doi:10.1177/0021140009360496

Carmichael, *Friendship*, 110.

³⁵⁸ "Charity attains God Himself that it may rest in Him....Hence charity is more excellent than faith or hope, and, consequently, than all the other virtues..." Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 4.

Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 146.

³⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.4, a. 8, ad. 3.

3.3.3.2 Ordered Loves

Another important concept for Aquinas, which others touched on, but Aquinas highlights, was the importance of self-love. There was a theological debate concerning the order of love, particularly in regard to love for God, self, and others.³⁶⁰ For Aquinas, the first love should be for God, followed by the self, rather than others.³⁶¹ This love was not a self-centred love but a love in which every desire and motivation was properly ordered by the love of God.³⁶² This meant that God needed to enable the capacity for love by enabling a person to receive and imbue God's love in their soul so that love could then be produced outwardly for God and others.³⁶³ To love oneself was therefore to embrace what is good: friendship with God.³⁶⁴ To love oneself was to pursue friendship with God first and then with other humans.³⁶⁵ Conversely, if one did not love themselves, they would lack the understanding of how to order their life, resulting in a lack of desire for friendship with God and an inability to properly love other humans.³⁶⁶ Aquinas seems to argue then that a person who did not love themselves would lack selflessness and prudence, which are necessary for friendship, while a person who loved his or her soul would learn how to selflessly live a properly ordered life in all things, including friendship.³⁶⁷ While it might seem that friendship for Aquinas was very one-sided, he acknowledged that reciprocated

³⁶⁰ Ibid., II-II, q. 23, a. 3, ad.3.

There are also debates about the order in which other people should be loved, i.e. family, neighbours, church, community, friends, strangers, etc. But I am focusing on this first categorisation of an ordering of loves.

³⁶¹ "God is loved as the principle of good, on which the love of charity is founded; while man, out of charity, loves himself by reason of his being a partaker of the aforesaid good, and loves his neighbor by reason of his fellowship in that good....Therefore man, out of charity, ought to love himself more than his neighbor... a man ought not to give way to any evil of sin, which counteracts his share of happiness, not even that he may free his neighbor from sin." Ibid., II-II, q. 26, a. 4.

"(1) we must wish him, on account of his virtuous qualities, all the good that we wish for ourselves, and (2) we must have a well-ordered relation toward ourselves." Marko Fuchs, "Philia and Caritas: Some Aspects of Aquinas's Reception of Aristotle's Theory of Friendship," in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean ethics*, eds. Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 207. doi:10.1017/cbo9780511756313.012

³⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 25, a. 4.

³⁶³ Ibid., II-II, q. 23, a. 3; q. 24, a. 2.

³⁶⁴ "I answer that, Charity, as stated above ... is a kind of friendship of man for God." Ibid., II-II, q. 23, a. 5.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., II-II, q. 23, a. 3, ad. 1.

³⁶⁶ Fuchs, "Philia and Caritas," 208.

³⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 25, a. 4.

affection and unity of purpose in Christ would be ideal friendship.³⁶⁸ Aquinas' framework created a value system for ordering one's resources to maximise love for God and others, ultimately making friendship the highest attainment in life. As Marie T. Farrell astutely noted, the gospel is God moving in friendship towards humans, redeeming them and raising them up to be worthy of His friendship.³⁶⁹

3.3.3.3 Summary

Aquinas, much like the other church fathers and classical philosophers saw friendship as inseparable from love and therefore as a virtue itself. For Aquinas, the proper ordering of loves was of great importance. While friendship and love are interconnected, they are not necessarily interchangeable: one must first be loved by God, so that God can then be loved. Part of loving God was learning to love the good for oneself and it was only after God and the self were loved rightly that one could properly extend love outwards to another. It seems for Aquinas then it was not simply a matter of seeing the body/spirit relationship in friendship but to understand the right ordering of the body/spirit aspects of friendship. Friendship – coming from God begins in the spiritual realm and in the gifting of friendship to humanity and through the incarnation friendship also becomes a physical and embodied experience. This ordering seems to give priority to the spiritual side of friendship, but this should not diminish the importance of the embodied aspect of friendship.

3.3.4 Friendship Movements at the Time of the Reformation

Having looked at individual theologians, I want to consider broader historical/theological movements which influenced friendship. The Reformation was just such a movement which shaped western and Christian friendship thought. I have already argued that the scholastic movement (primarily happening within colleges and seminaries)

³⁶⁸ Ibid., II-II, q. 26, a. 2.

Carmichael, *Friendship*, 103.

Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship*, 31.

³⁶⁹ Marie T. Farrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Friendship with God," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 61 no. 3-4 (1995): 216. doi:10.1177/002114009506100305

revitalised Greco-Roman thought, caused a resurgence of friendship as a subject of discourse, and shaped friendship into what I have termed “Christian virtue friendship”. I do not argue that the idea of Christian virtue friendship did not exist until the Reformation, but rather that a moulding of past ideas emerged into a more definable idea than had existed previously. I define Christian virtue friendship as a means of pursuing Christian virtues with someone beloved with the ultimate purpose of glorifying and enjoying God. While there were many examples of friendships (some of which directly impacted the Reformation itself) during the Reformation, this section will focus on friendship movements pre- and post-Reformation to see where these ideas began and how their trajectory led into the Puritan movement.

3.3.4.1 *The Brotherhood of the Common Life*

Preceding the Reformation, a movement in the Netherlands called *The Brotherhood of the Common Life* was started which reconceived the mediaeval monastery “culminating in the new concept that ordinary people could share more fully in religious life through contemplation and fellowship with others.”³⁷⁰ Fuller called this the “vision of layman-as-monk.”³⁷¹ One of the latter members of the brotherhood was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. His friendship with John Colet was one which influenced both of their lives, writings, and theologies.³⁷² Their correspondence contained elements of friendly banter, encouragement, reproof, intimacy, and love.³⁷³ For these men, friendship was both a joy and a serious responsibility. Desiring to bring a friendship like what Saint Aelred spoke of in *Spiritual Friendship*, this group was open to both men and women, making it accessible for

³⁷⁰ Joelle Lucas, “Christian Virtue Friendship and Puritan Friendship in the English Reformation.” Ross Fuller, *The Brotherhood of the Common Life and Its Influence* (State University of New York Press, 1995), xii.

³⁷¹ Fuller, *The Brotherhood of the Common Life and Its Influence*, 176.

³⁷² Philip Wyatt Crowther, esq. *The Christian’s Manual: Compiled from the Enchirideon Militis Chritani of Erasmus* (London: A. J. Valpy, Teoke’s Court, Chuneery Lane, 1816), 203.
<https://ia800209.us.archive.org/6/items/cu31924029228198/cu31924029228198.pdf>

³⁷³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus*, ed. Hans Joachim Hillerbrand and Marcus A. Haworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 29.

those who did not live in monasteries or nunneries. The hope was for virtuous friendships to form in “normal” society, bringing many of the communal joys of a holy life to the laity.

3.3.4.2 Puritan Movement

Post-Reformation, the Puritans grew these ideas of friendship and pushed them more towards the role of correction and exhortation. Puritans were very concerned with moral behaviour, specifically in the subjugation of sin and the cultivation of holiness. Friendship became a means for a companion on the difficult and narrow path of the Christian life. Some Puritans like Richard Rogers lived and wrote between two movements of friendship thought, which also highlights how ideals of friendship were being shaped within his lifetime. For example, his diary focused more on moral correction between friends,³⁷⁴ but in his *7 Treatises*, he focused more on the cultivation (and subsequent delight) of virtue for the sake of godliness. Also, in his *Treatise on Faith*, he asserted that Christian friends should lovingly help one another to bind their disordered desires, grow in the wisdom of God, and bring peace to their souls.³⁷⁵ The earlier model of friendship seemed to have the more positive focus on friendship as a delight, whereas the later Puritan works emphasised the duties of friends for correction. Interestingly, the notion of covenant appears in the *7 Treatises*. This is a concept which has been seen already from the Old Testament and did not seem to be lost on Rogers. Towards the end of this work, Rogers mentioned a friendship covenant he entered into with around twenty Christian men for the purpose of engaging in Christian virtue friendship.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ M. M. Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan diaries*. Chicago: The American Society of Church History. (Chicago: The American Society of Church History, 1933), 56.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89017186313&view=1up&seq=163>

³⁷⁵ Ezekel Culverwell, *A treatise of faith: Wherein is Declared How a Man May Liue by Faith, and Finde Releefe in All His Necessities*, (London: Printed by I.L. for William Sheffard, and are to be sold at his shop, at the entring in of Popes Head allie out of Lumbard streete, 1623), 109.

³⁷⁶ One might wonder how there could be such a friendship covenant with 20 men, and it could be rightly considered friendship. Richard Rogers, *Seven Treatises, Containing svch Direction as is Gathered out of the Holie Scriptvre* (AT London Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, for Thomas Man, and Robert Dexter, and are to be sold at the brasen Serpent in Pauls Churchyard, 1603), 477-78.

3.3.4.3 Summary

For both Puritans and the Scholastics, Christian virtue friendship was a present means of God's grace on earth that would one day be perfected in Heaven. The Reformation highlights the convergences of Athens and Jerusalem, highlighting how ideals of friendship have been shaped over the course of history and influencing culture. In the Reformation the parameters of friendship seemed to be broadening again to reflect friendships as we saw in the Bible, such as being something not only for men but also for women, and not limiting age or resources but encouraging people to seek meaningful friendships as they could. For these groups the goals of meeting together and living life together in both ordinary and spiritual capacities alike were important and pointed to the kind of friendships they could look forward to in the coming Kingdom of God.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid out the history of beliefs concerning friendship which have shaped western thought. I have considered Greco-Roman philosophy and continued on to see how this ancient philosophy interacted with Christian thought through the works of Augustine, Aelred, and Thomas Aquinas. Then the movement of the Reformation was used as an example of the continuation of the mingling of philosophical and Christian religious ideology particularly in relation to friendship. While there are many other examples of Christian virtue friendship from various points in history which would be both relevant and interesting for this study, there was simply no room to address them all while still having space to consider the influence of technology on friendship within the current cultural epoch. However, there are a few prominent people and movements which I have read and considered in researching this topic which have impacted my thoughts on friendship, including the following: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*,³⁷⁷ Henry Clay Trumbull's

³⁷⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2009).

Friendship the Master Passion,³⁷⁸ the society and writing of the Inklings including J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, and Wesley Hill's *Spiritual Friendship*.³⁷⁹

While many themes of friendship have begun to immerge in this chapter which have influenced ideas and beliefs of friendship there were four which I want to draw particular attention to at the close of this chapter: 1) Equality, 2) Levels of Friendship 3) Morality, and 4) Being Present. This section will then end by briefly exploring some of the emerging theologies of friendship.

3.4.1 Equality

There were a few key topics shown in the Bible and discussed by philosophers which will be essential to later discussions regarding friendship in modernity. The first is that of equality. In the Biblical accounts of Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan, their lack of equality did not inhibit friendship. Rather, it could be argued their inequality made the friendships all the more admirable. The Greeks were curious if it was possible to have friendship with those who were not equal, seeming to hope that for true friendships any inequalities could be overcome. Moving through the Church Fathers, and particularly with regard to Thomas Aquinas, the idea of equality was answered in the person of Christ. By first lowering himself, and in his atoning death and resurrection, raising humanity to share in all of his glory, Christ created equality. The measurements of equality were also considered, where spiritual measures were seen to be of greater importance than factors of wealth, age or status, or even gender³⁸⁰ as was shown in the Biblical examples and confirmed by the teachings of the church fathers.

³⁷⁸ Trumbull, Henry C., *Friendship the Mater-Passion: Or, the Nature and History of Friendship and Its Place as a Force in the World*.

³⁷⁹ A book titled after St. Aelred's writings continues the conversation into modernity, probing questions within the gender, marriage, and sexuality debates of the modern day regarding the role of friendship. Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2015).

³⁸⁰ For Aelred, friendship was integral to the human condition and a part of creation itself and was something for both men and women. Thomas Aquinas also believed marriage to be a place for the greatest friendship between men and women to exist. Anne-Marie Ellithorpe, *Towards friendship-shaped communities: a practical theology of friendship* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 109-10.

3.4.2 Levels of Friendship

The second is that of levels of friendship, where friendship was often used as a catch all word for several different relationships the intimate and close bond of deep friendship, any social connection, and even corrupted or negative relationships. The book of Proverbs warned against false friendships with fools, and the Greeks warned against picking friends too quickly. The New Testament showed Christ as enjoying different depths of friendships with various people. Saint Augustine warned about friendships which lead one into sin and Saint Aelred and Cicero acknowledged the goodness of having friends of varying degrees of intimacy as each level has its own benefits. In all these examples, not all friendships were seen as equal, and the trouble with differentiating them based on terms seemed to have been and will likely continue to prove difficult.

3.4.3 Morality

The role of moral behaviour or virtue regarding friendship was another important and repeated aspect of friendship in this first section. The main differences seemed to be viewing friendship as an influence (to vice or virtue/holiness or sin), or a means to virtue, or as a virtue itself. In other words, the friendship could either be used as a means to an end or was an end in itself, or both. While all three of these models have arisen in this chapter, I believe both response seems to best fit with the Bible and finds the most support through the various writers considered. Friendship, especially theologically, ought to be first founded on the good (God's will and God's Word) and should be a relationship which seeks to both learn and act according to holiness and the good. In this way, friendship itself (when founded on truth) will be a good in and of itself, and friendship experienced becomes a means to virtue.

3.4.4 Being Present

Lastly, the place of the body or physical presence was discussed and will be of particular interest later in this thesis. Interestingly, the question of friendship across

distances was already something to be explored from the Bible, though it was not much discussed elsewhere. In researching for my master's thesis on friendship in the Reformation, many of the source documents were letters between friends; furthermore, Trumbull provided many examples of friends who were physically distant but still impacted history. David and Jonathan were often separated due to Saul's desire to harm David, resulting in the friends spending little time together. In the New Testament Paul was often in prison, and the letters which comprised much of the New Testament canon were written while he was separated from his friends and fellow believers. Therefore, the question remains concerning the importance of being present with friends, or if spiritual presence is sufficient for friendship.

Having now laid the historical groundwork regarding friendship in part 1, the focus of part 2 will concern changes resulting from the modern era and current research on friendship with regard to new digital technologies.

3.4.5 Emerging Theologies of Friendship

Considering these secular philosophers and early Christian fathers alongside Scripture there are some theological themes that begin to emerge. Notice the importance given to both the physical body in friendship – the sense of being able to live life in close proximity to be useful and enjoyable to one another along with the spiritual nature of friendship which can make a friendship worth keeping even across distances. This points to understanding the relationship between the *imago dei* and moral responsibility. If humans are made in the image of a holy and relational God and friendship is a gift which flows out from God to humanity then it would make sense that human friendship will echo God's friendship. Thus, the more aligned with holiness and virtue and the more it aligns with the will of God the more one should be able to enjoy the depths of friendship. Lastly, there is the theme of friendship being both a present earthly blessing as well as a promise of a future fulfilment of friendship in the coming Kingdom of God at the return of Christ. A theology of Friendship thus cannot be rightly limited to the temporal but must have a vision beyond the grave.

Part Two

From Theory to Practice: *What Happened to Friendship?*

4. Chapter Four: How Friendship Values and Practice Change

In Part One, friendship was explored in history beginning with the Bible moving to ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, finishing with a brief exploration of church history. This overview shows some alterations and shifts to friendship values and beliefs as well as many consistent ideas which have developed over the centuries. Some of the differences of friendship arise from personal choices such as how much time and effort one puts into a friendship, or the degree of depth desired in a given friendship. There are, however, cultural and societal factors which can significantly impact both cultural expectations and individual experiences of friendship. Society is comprised of individuals influencing culture and reciprocally culture influencing the individual, a cycle which can make responsibility often difficult to determine. From the previous two chapters, it would be difficult to definitively argue Aquinas' or Aristotle's writings arose solely from personal conviction/observation rather than as products of their culture. Most likely both are true to greater and lesser extents. The Reformation, once again, provides a helpful example of cultural shifts, like scholasticism or the Puritan community which greatly impacted individuals, and yet it was individuals who lit the fires of these cultural movements. While it might be impossible to ever definitively draw lines between individual and cultural factors, it is useful to explore the influences of both. In this part, broader cultural and societal values and beliefs which impact friendship will be explored. In my empirical research, which will be addressed in part 3, I found some complexity between beliefs concerning friendship for individuals compared to the culture. Some people expressed a synergy between their beliefs and practices with the messaging of the culture surrounding them. Others felt a dissonance between their own beliefs and practices concerning their culture (some felt a mixture of both depending on if they were part of a sub-community where they might feel synergy with their subculture but dissonance with the broader culture). This second part addresses these harmonies and

dissonances intending to prepare the way towards theological understandings (addressed in part 3) which would apply at both the individual and cultural levels. In this chapter I will first address various societal changes specifically in two key areas: 1) environmental and technological changes, and 2) beliefs and values. The second part dealing with beliefs and values will address: 1) individualism and dependency, 2) the roles of truth, storytelling, and science 3) sexuality and intimacy, 4) gender, and 5) the body and physical presence. Each of these topics could be a whole dissertation in themselves and thus, while space will not allow for in-depth coverage, they will be briefly considered regarding their impact on friendship, highlighting changes to friendship. This is important to this study as it presents a bridge between understanding the changes to friendship from the ancient world to the modern-western world. Before we can consider a theology of friendship in the modern world we must first understand the environmental and ideological shifts which have taken place.

4.1 Introduction

Society significantly affects the lives of individuals. Such societal influences can arise from parents, education, social values, governmental policies, technology, physical surroundings and more. Since opportunities for impact are broad, to be as concise as possible I have chosen to examine the writings of those in fields of study such as sociology or anthropology to understand what they have to say regarding the social factors of human relationships, particularly relating to friendship in modern western societies. I noticed that, while, to some extent, all of the aforementioned factors were mentioned, some were more prominent than others. Most notably are the technological changes³⁸¹ and the ensuing ramifications that these changes impose on family and friendship relationships. I argue that combined with these factors of environment and technology the other very influential factors concern the education and practice of friendship either spoken or inferred through observation of behaviour.

³⁸¹ These are not necessarily digital technologies, but also technologies such as those which impact industry and the building and design of modern cities.

4.2 Environmental and Technological Factors

In Neil Postman's book, *Technopoly*, he reasoned that technology is not a new issue for the modern world with the rise in digital and "tech" devices. He notes that technologies change and shape cultures in profound ways both positively and negatively.³⁸² Postman considers the impact of certain technologies upon society, remarking that there are three types of cultures: tool-using cultures, technocracies, and technopolies.³⁸³ A technocracy, he explains is a culture in which tools "play a central role in the thought-world of the culture".³⁸⁴ Such tools affect all of a culture, not to integrate, but attack, overcome, and control the culture, meaning that "... tradition, social mores, myth, politics, ritual, and religion have to fight for their lives."³⁸⁵ This was differentiated from the further development into a Technopoly, wherein "thought-worlds" disappear, making them not illegal, but irrelevant by redefining, "what we mean by religion, by art, by family, by politics, by history, by truth, by privacy, by intelligence, so that our definitions fit its new requirements. Technopoly, in other words, is totalitarian technocracy."³⁸⁶ Thus, rather than seeing the term technology in reference only to digital technology it would be more accurate to add "digital" or "computer" as prefixes since the term technology can refer to any man-made device or tool that enables a human to easily achieve something that would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible. The wheel, printing press, piano, washing machine, hammer, aeroplane, fork, SCUBA gear and ballpoint pens are all examples of various types of technologies. Most technologies enable people to expand their human capabilities such as with a washing machine, pen, or the wheel – without which humans could still communicate, walk, or wash clothes. Other technologies go further, allowing people to do things which would otherwise be impossible; like flying in an aeroplane or breathing underwater with SCUBA gear.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, Postman notes that sometimes a technology

³⁸² Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xi-xii; 5.

³⁸³ Postman, *Technopoly*, 22.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁸⁷ Andy Crouch makes a distinction between a device and an instrument saying that Devices are "...the kind of technology that displaces earlier tools and, eventually, replaces the human beings who use them." While instruments are "...cultural goods that are less like a device and more like a tool. Rather

so powerful comes along it shapes an era of human history, shaping people groups and cultures.³⁸⁸ One example would be the printing press in around the time of the Reformation. This technology enabled information to be dispersed at a rate never before seen: it reduced the cost of getting books and pamphlets, enabling access for lower classes; and with the ability to print pictures, people could see the face of someone they had never seen.³⁸⁹ These kinds of technologies, Postman argued, not only change how people live their lives (enabling them to do the same things more efficiently), but they change how people think and live and what they value.³⁹⁰ One example Postman gave using the internet today was how pastors often thought about how they could use the internet to share sermons and the gospel more widely or put their church online for people to find, but what they should have been asking was how the internet would change their congregations; how it would change how people think of God and church altogether. In other words, big technological booms do not merely change the answers to questions, they change the questions themselves.³⁹¹

From the genre of popular Christian books, Andy Crouch wrote a book titled, *The Life We're Looking for*. While this may not be a scholarly work in the sense that Postman's book is, Crouch addresses many of the same questions, but from a pastoral/theological perspective with particular concern for the current cultural context. In this book he echoed the warnings of Postman, that technology might not always be a friend, and that our technological advances might come at a cost, one of which is relational, for indeed, every

than disengaging us from the world and thrusting us into the superpower zone, this branch of technology relies on the ingenuity we human beings have brought to our work and play in the world from the very beginning. ...this kind of technology have degrees of complexity, precision, and power that outstrip any pretechnological tool."

Andy Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022), 135.

³⁸⁸ Postman, *Technopoly*, 3-20.

³⁸⁹ Eric Metaxas argued in his popular biography, *Martin Luther*, that Martin Luther was the first celebrity as the printing press enabled people to recognise his face having seen it in print, thus recognising his face when he came to town they celebrated him. Before this time, people would not even have known what even the King or Queen looked like. Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, (New York: Viking, 2017), 203-204.

³⁹⁰ "Without being too literal, we may extend the truism: To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number." Postman, *Technopoly*, 14.

³⁹¹ "New technologies compete with old ones—for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world-view." *Ibid.*, 16; 18-19.

new technology comes at a price.³⁹² Crouch used the phrases, “You’ll no longer have to”, and, “But you’ll no longer be able to” to summarise the exchange of new technologies.³⁹³ Sometimes what is lost is hardly worth noticing but other times something more significant is lost. Because these exchanges come as an unforeseen consequence of the newly adapted technology it is only after the loss that one might ponder if the trade was worth it. One example Crouch used concerned music, where having the technology to access recorded music on a vinyl disk, CD, mp3, or Spotify, is an incredible technology which enables access to music one might otherwise never hear. On the other hand, learning to play music for oneself, having friends around to play or going to live concerts became a luxury rather than the only way to enjoy music.³⁹⁴ It is important to understand that as society adapts to new technologies there are significant changes that occur which cannot be fully realised until enough time has passed to reflect. When living in a technology boom all that can be done is to make predictions and seek to ride the waves of change with the least amount of social damage and to hopefully leave the next generation with the tools to steward well the new technology bequeathed to them.³⁹⁵

To better understand what happens to society regarding relationships in a technology boom is to learn from history. Besides the Reformation, another significant and more recent technology boom was the Industrial Revolution. During the time of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson all presented views on what the technologies of the 18th and early 19th Centuries could mean for social relations and how this would impact society. While these men praised many of the changes

³⁹² Crouch, *The Life We’re Looking For*, 140-141.

“For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them.” Plato, “Phaedrus” in *Lysis; Symposium; Phaedrus*, eds. and trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022.), 275a. Loeb Classical Library Online.

³⁹³ For example:

1. Now you’ll be able to write stories down.
2. You’ll no longer have to remember them.
3. You’ll no longer be able to remember them.
4. Now you’ll have to write them down.

³⁹⁴ Crouch, *The Life We’re Looking For*, 138.

³⁹⁵ Many expressed such views including Mary Aiken in her powerful call to action and hope at the end of her book, *the Cyber Effect*. Aiken, *The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behavior Changes Online* (London: John Murray, 2017), 304.

brought about by the Industrial Revolution, they also noticed how many of the ensuing changes could result in damage to friendships and other relationships. For example, Adam Smith noted that the free market allowed people to free themselves of feudalism, but this also freed them from the dependencies feudalism created (like the need for friends and family to have the basics of life).³⁹⁶ In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith also wrote that, a negative side effect of industry could lead to a neglect of education, degradation of morals, and deteriorating of personal relationships,³⁹⁷ and that in a country village setting where people will observe one's behaviour one is held accountable and will often develop (and then protect) good moral character, but in a city where there is no accountability it is easy to fall into temptations, and, "abandon himself to every low profligacy and vice."³⁹⁸ David Hume more optimistically believed that the value of friendship would not be deterred due to all the monetary and societal changes in the world, but Adam Ferguson, like Smith, was not so hopeful and saw that the competitiveness and demanding nature of a capitalist society could create difficulty in making and sustaining friendships.³⁹⁹ Thankfully Smith and Ferguson were not completely correct on this account as it was reported that, "By the 1880s around 75 to 80 per cent of working-class men belonged to a friendly society and large numbers were involved in mutual improvement activities⁴⁰⁰ that were commonly described as friends educating each other'."⁴⁰¹ Nevertheless, Smith and Ferguson were not completely wrong in their predictions as marks of an individualistic society have seemed to affect the felt need for friendship at the basic/utility level – which unsurprisingly, seems to have also led to a decline in friendships of pleasure and virtue. This example clearly shows that while

³⁹⁶ Lisa Hill and Peter McCarthy, "Hume, Smith and Ferguson: Friendship in Commercial Society," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1999): 33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698239908403290>

³⁹⁷ "In particular, he argued that the focus on industry and commerce would lead to a neglect of education and a 'degradation of morals'." Michele E. Doyle and Mark K. Smith, "Friendship: theory and experience," *The encyclopedia of pedagogy and informal education*, (2002). <https://infed.org/friendship-some-philosophical-and-sociological-themes/>

³⁹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: Penguin, 1776), 747. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-adam/works/wealth-of-nations/index.htm>

³⁹⁹ Hill and Peter, "Hume, Smith and Ferguson," 43. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 [1767]), III.I; 107.

⁴⁰⁰ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300259827>.

⁴⁰¹ Doyle and Smith, "Friendship: theory and experience."

there seemed to be an ingrained desire for friendship, this desire can still be greatly influenced by social, political, and cultural factors.⁴⁰² While the Greek philosophers believed that strong or weak friendships made for a strong or weak *polis*, the *polis* also appeared to have sway in promoting either strong or weak friendships. What they predicted has, in many ways, proven to be the groundwork of much of Western culture today and therefore their writings shed light on the challenges of the technology boom of the 21st century.

4.3 Beliefs and Values

Michele E. Doyle and Mark K. Smith acknowledge the difficulty inherent in the term *friendship* as it lacks "... firmly agreed and socially acknowledged criteria for what makes a person a friend...", and go on to say that today there is "... a very thin understanding of what friendship entails."⁴⁰³ They argue Aristotle's friendships of pleasure⁴⁰⁴ now serves as the most prominent definition for friendship in modern western society, with friendships of utility, being more difficult to conceive of having a place in friendship today.⁴⁰⁵ As for virtue friendship, this is what they had to say:

What we least understand is the third component, shared commitment to the good, which seems to us quite extraneous to the idea of friendship. In a culture dominated by expressive and utilitarian individualism, it is easy for us to understand the components of pleasure and usefulness, but we have difficulty seeing the point of considering friendship in terms of common moral commitments.⁴⁰⁶

Firstly, it is interesting that both friendships of utility⁴⁰⁷ and virtue are becoming less important. The reasons for this disregard may be connected, despite these being the lowest and highest forms of friendship according to Aristotle. Understanding the nature of a friendship of utility is not without controversy. Friendships of utility could be friendships lacking emotional investments and commitments and are thus simply a term for work

⁴⁰² Graham Allan, *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), 114.

⁴⁰³ Doyle and Smith, "Friendship: theory and experience."

⁴⁰⁴ See Chapter 3 section 3.2.2.

⁴⁰⁵ Doyle and Smith, "Friendship: theory and experience."

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ While the quotation mentions usefulness, this does not seem to be the same as utility for the point was that people did not need friends for survival, though people might still use others for their own benefit in an individualistic way rather than as a mark of inter-dependence.

associates for whom one might have a passing fondness, or these friendships could assume some level of emotional investment and enable community connection and interdependence. An example might be work colleagues in comparison with a church community: work colleagues may help each other with tasks and might have an occasional drink out together, while the church congregants are hospitable, share meals, have some level of involvement in each other's lives, and make themselves useful to one another. It would seem Doyle and Smith were primarily focused on the second definition of friendships of utility – the ones which create a sense of community and interdependence which are becoming rarer.⁴⁰⁸ While friendships of utility still exist, the cultural structures which might have encouraged these friendships in the past have radically altered the ways in which humans since the Industrial Revolution have felt a need for other humans.⁴⁰⁹

The claim of both Smith and Hume that mutual utility is what holds society together is unconvincing because it ignores the comparative anthropological evidence which suggests that the 'bands' of society are actually stronger in communities where material conditions are extremely difficult and hostile. Hume and Smith have little or no faith in the power of beneficence to regulate society, insisting that 'each person loves himself better than any other single person'.⁴¹⁰

This quotation highlights some fascinating insights regarding how societal restructuring affects friendships of utility and virtue, and how a culture that places a high value on individualism is at risk of devaluing the importance of long-term companions along with the loss of necessity of friendship for survival. Additionally, if a culture became accustomed to having things handed to them quickly ("microwave culture") making long-term investments feel like too much effort, combined with a lack of shared transcendent morality, then friendships would likely suffer due to lacking both incentives to pursue moral virtue and ability to invest long-term. If proven true that such factors have affected western society,

⁴⁰⁸ Doyle and Smith, "Friendship: theory and experience."

⁴⁰⁹ Hill and McCarthy, "Hume, Smith and Ferguson," 43-44.
Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, VIII, 208.

⁴¹⁰ Hill and McCarthy, "Hume, Smith and Ferguson," 44.
Ferguson *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, I.III, 21-4.
David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1978 [1739-40]), III.II.II, 487.
Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976 [1790]), III.3.10, 140.

then these would present a compelling case that friendship has undergone substantial changes since the 20th century.

4.3.1 Individualism and Dependency

As shown, one of the changes to friendship and beliefs which undergirds how people value and pursue friendships is linked to individualism and tangentially, inter-dependency. In many past cultures, it was understood that humans were social creatures, not merely for the enjoyment of having companions, but rather that people were dependent on each other in order to survive.⁴¹¹ While human dependency has been commented on by evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, and social scientists, Ferdinand Tönnies addresses this from the realm of cultural and structural influences saying that many viewed “...friendship (along with kinship and place) as one of the three pillars of traditional community (*gemeinschaft*) that were disrupted by the rise of the more impersonal forms of society associated with industrialization, urbanization and capitalism.”⁴¹² Essentially in modernity societal norms for making a living have become less dependent on familial structures (including friendship) and more dependent on the government and the individual. Thus, the practical necessity for friendship (the utility of friendship) has become unnecessary as the well-regulated market separates the classic Aristotelian friendship of virtue from the friendship of utility: Aristotle’s three levels of friendship become independent, rather than interdependent, levels of friendship. Such a commercial society requires ‘authentically indifferent co-citizens’ rather than potential enemies or allies.⁴¹³ This is one explanation of how society generates a heightened value of individualism, yet while systemic structures certainly play a part in this,

⁴¹¹ “A good deal of sociological comment about friendship is based on the assumption that a traditional society characterized by face-to-face and largely convivial relationships has been replaced by a more competitive and individualistic one.”

Doyle and Smith, “Friendship: theory and experience.”

“...but also the question of whether it makes sense to think of friendship as existing in mutually comprehensible ways across cultures.it is important to be aware of whether one is talking about friendship as ‘a cultural artefact and a social arrangement, or as a set of universal needs’.” Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman. “The Anthropology of Friendship: Enduring Themes and Future Possibilities,” in *The Anthropology of Friendship* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), 2-3.

⁴¹² Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association (Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1887, 1955), 48-50, 233.

⁴¹³ Ray Pahl, *On Friendship* (Cambridge: Polity. 2000), 57.

these structures are not solely responsible for how individuals or society choose what they value, nor do they explain the ramifications of these changes in belief. To understand the significance of these changes, theology gives some explanations for the dangers of being too independent.

In the creation account in Genesis God declared all of creation was good.⁴¹⁴ After the creation of the human male but before the creation of the female, God, for the first time, declared that something was not good.⁴¹⁵ God declared it was not good for the first human *Adam* to be alone and so he created Adam's female counterpart Eve.⁴¹⁶ After the man and women were presented to each other, God proclaimed this good and gave them a mutual commandment, to be fruitful and to multiply.⁴¹⁷ Many theologians believe that the "great commission"⁴¹⁸ in the New Testament was meant to echo this command in this next part of the salvation narrative; the age after the death and resurrection of Christ preceding his return.⁴¹⁹ Interestingly in both commands they are given not to individuals but to units or groups of people. God gave Adam the task of naming creatures on his own but he could not reproduce on his own.⁴²⁰ While God often sent prophets out alone to call people back to their faith or convictions, Christ did not send out the disciples alone in order to produce new spiritual children, or disciples.⁴²¹ In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer allocated a significant portion of this small work to how one cultivates character and a relationship with God alone, a seemingly odd subject for a book titled, *Life Together*. However, Bonhoeffer explained that

⁴¹⁴ "good" in the teleological sense since there was not as yet any moral imperfection as sin has not entered into the created order.

Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Genesis: The Rational Bible: Genesis, God, Creation, and Destruction* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Faith, 2019), 17, 1.4.

Ian Paul, "And God Saw That It Was...Pretty Good (Gen 1)" *www.psephizo.com*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/and-god-saw-that-it-waspretty-good-gen-1/>

⁴¹⁵ Genesis 1.

⁴¹⁶ Genesis 2:18.

⁴¹⁷ Genesis 1:28.

⁴¹⁸ Matthew 28:16-20.

⁴¹⁹ Myrna Stoddard-Deas, "Cities of God: Temple Building, the Priesthood, and the Great Commission in Genesis 1:26-2:2" MA. Thesis (Regent University, 2023). <http://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/cities-god-temple-building-priesthood-great/docview/2809302658/se-2>

Chad Bird, "The 'Great Commission' Is Not in Matthew but Genesis" *www.1517.org*, August 14, 2021, <https://www.1517.org/articles/the-great-commission-is-not-in-matthew-but-genesis>

⁴²⁰ Genesis 2:19.

⁴²¹ Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1-12.

intentional and purposed time alone was necessary for fruitful time with others. Likewise, the time spent in Christian fellowship would also aid in one's solitary time with God. The question of individualism was not therefore as concerned with being alone; the issues had to do with beliefs about the value of people and community. In essence, an attitude of selfishness vs selflessness is the heart of the matter. Following in the footsteps of Thomas Aquinas, Bonhoeffer suggested time alone cultivating an inner life of contemplation (seeking God and developing character) with the intention of venturing back out into community and friendships so as to jointly bear fruit in each other's lives; this is good, proper, and unselfish behaviour.⁴²² This way of life acknowledges that to bear good fruit (be that children, creative projects, or solutions to cultural issues, etc.) best happens when humans draw their creative resources together.⁴²³ God did not design humans to be little machines whirring away alone producing things robotically. God intended production to be a joint human effort born from loving and labouring together.⁴²⁴ As already mentioned, in past societies, when there were no machines or nanny states to care for people's needs, people wove their lives together to live out of necessity. Out of a physical need for each other they found as a result that life is often better together.⁴²⁵ Thus, in many ways, human biological and physical needs served as a catalyst for friendships to begin and what began as a relationship to meet a need often developed into something much sweeter.⁴²⁶

Individualism buys into the very believable lie that humans are self-sufficient autonomous beings who might as well look after their own interests, as everyone else does. Like all good lies, this one is especially deceptive because there is some truth to it, in that there are things humans can do on their own. But there is reason to believe that the things humans can do alone pale in comparison to what can be accomplished when working

⁴²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (Harper One: First Edition, 26 May 2009), 76-89.

⁴²³ For a host of examples of the impact of friendship in the world see Henry C. Trumbull's book *Friendship the Master Passion*.

⁴²⁴ "To image God, I will argue, is to embrace a befriending relationship with the whole of creation, both human and nonhuman, and to commit to building just communities." Annie-Marie Ellithorpe, *Towards Friendship-shaped Communities: A Practical Theology of Friendship* (Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 139, 144.

⁴²⁵ Prager, *Genesis*, 150, 11.8.

⁴²⁶ "...what *brings people together* in friendship may not be what *keeps* them together." Bell, "The Anthropology of Friendship," 6.

together (for good or for evil).⁴²⁷ Today, with so many basic human needs being met by machines and faceless government agencies, coupled with a decline of shared values and a heightened sense of self-fulfilment as the pinnacle of human life, it is easy to see how someone might lose sight of their need for meaningful friendships.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, if friendships do develop from this individualistic value system, they will be less stalwart than the friendships espoused through history as such friendships will be preoccupied with self-fulfilment and self-interest and if a friend is no longer useful for one's ego-centric vision they can easily be discarded and replaced.

Understanding how a belief in individualism impacts friendship is one piece of understanding cultural issues which could affect individuals' lived experience with friendship. If the culture one lives in does not promote interdependence as a normal and healthy part of human culture, opting instead to celebrate self-sufficiency, friendship is prone to suffer. Humans thrive by working through difficulties, building or creating together ("be fruitful and multiply"), enjoying life and being of use to each other, and this necessitates partnering with other humans in relationships like friendship. Friendship is therefore the opposite of a solitary, self-fulfilment project, and therefore for friendship to be meaningful the cultural beliefs surrounding individualism and self-sufficiency must be rejected.⁴²⁹

4.3.2 Truth and Ethics

Another potential area or difficulty within modern cultural values concerns the concept of *truth*. Given that friendships of virtue are considered to be the richest form of friendship, a discussion on virtue cannot happen productively without considering truth itself. To pursue virtue pre-assumes universal, or transcendent truth, or at the very least, mutually shared values of truth. With the rise of post-modernism and relativism, unlike in

⁴²⁷ Trumbull, *Friendship the Master Passion*.

⁴²⁸ Jeremy Shearmur and Daniel B. Klein, "Good Conduct in a Great Society: Adam Smith and the Role of Reputation," in *Reputation: Studies in the Voluntary Elicitation of Good Conduct* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 30. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=464023>

⁴²⁹ Robert Paine, "Friendship: The Hazards of an Ideal Relationship," in *The Anthropology of Friendship*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), 40.

the past, universal truth cannot be assumed to be the majority view, even in religious circles. Part of what made Aristotelian friendship so powerful was the fact that it was based on mutual respect, love, and desire to jointly pursue truth.⁴³⁰ Universal truth meant moral standards which highlighted both vices and virtues. If a friendship was founded on a belief in moral standards outside of oneself, universally applied to all humans, then the friendship had a shared base upon which to build the friendship as well as a moral trajectory towards which the friends could venture. As the Puritans and church fathers suggested, such friendships held the capacity to deliver a loving rebuke when a friend strayed from the path of virtue.⁴³¹ Likewise, when successfully walking in the way of virtue, they would mutually benefit from the enjoyment of that classical trinity which comprised a good life: the good, true, and beautiful.⁴³² If, however, individuals attempted to find a friendship on the basis of personal values of truth and moral relativism, that friendship would neither enjoy a shared foundation nor a shared trajectory. For if two people held truth as personal rather than universal, there would be a high likelihood of them differing on morals, truth, and what is good. They must then decide whether to mutually respect each other's views of truth, helping their friend live up to their personal truth values, even if that puts them in opposition to their beliefs and values; or if they ought to instead try and sway their friend to adopt their truth claims. Of course, an important question becomes, which areas matter most regarding truth. Plato noted in *Lysis* that one does not need a friend to be like oneself in all things.⁴³³ Thus, which areas, and to what extent, ought friends share beliefs concerning truth and morality? In the Stanford Encyclopaedia article on friendship, this tension is noted in this way:

...trusting my friend's assessments of my good in this way seemingly involves trusting not only that she understands who I am and *that* I find certain things valuable and important in life but also and centrally that she understands the *value* of these things that are so meaningful to

⁴³⁰ See Chapter 3 section 3.2.2.

⁴³¹ See Chapter 3 section 3.3.

M. M. Knappen, Samuel Ward, and Richard Rogers, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries* (Chicago: The American Society of Church History, 1933).
Culverwell, *A Treatise of Faith: Wherein Is Declared, How a Man May Live by Faith, and Finde Reliefe in All His Necessities. Applied Especially Vnto the Vse of the Weakest Christians.*

⁴³² Joelle Lucas, "Christian Virtue Friendship and Puritan Friendship in the English Reformation."

⁴³³ See Chapter 3 section 3.2.1.

me. That in turn seems to be grounded in the empathy we have for each other—the shared sense of what’s important.⁴³⁴

It has been previously assumed that a good friend will be one who is to be trusted to help you do what is right... but if “right” is subjective, one wonders how friends might help each other in such an endeavour.

There is also the issue of friendship “rubbing off” on one another – again, if there is no objective truth, how then would friends know if their friend was a positive or negative influence? How ought one judge if the changes their friend is evoking in them, are beneficial or not? This concerns the idea of *mirroring*. Cocking and Kennett wrote that friends both affect *and* mirror one another.⁴³⁵ One influences change in their friend but also serves as a reflection for their friend.⁴³⁶ These are both passive and active roles of friendship that once again come down to the pursuit of virtue, truth, goodness etc., which will not be effective unless there are shared foundations.⁴³⁷ The ancient philosophers noted the importance of ethics regarding friendship, which essentially has to do with the ramifications of one’s beliefs regarding truth and morality. Cicero, as we saw, took special care to make known that one must not ever ask a friend to be immoral, harm others, or commit crimes against the state.⁴³⁸ Today there are different theories of ethics, such as consequentialism or utilitarianism.⁴³⁹ These different views of ethics will likely impact one’s views on friendship, especially if it is a friendship beyond that of pleasure or utility. If, for example, someone believed doing good was determined by doing what is best for the greatest amount of people, they might then struggle between choosing what is good for their friend and choosing the good for the majority. For example, “... the right action according to consequentialism is to sacrifice your friendship for the greater good.”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁴ Bennett Helm, "Friendship," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/friendship/>

⁴³⁵ Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, "Friendship and the Self," *Ethics* 108 no. 3 (1998): 509-510.

⁴³⁶ Michael T. McFall, "Real Character-Friends: Aristotelian Friendship, Living Together, and Technology," *Ethics and Information Technology* 14, no. 3, (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-012-9297-7>.

⁴³⁷ Helm, "Friendship."

⁴³⁸ See Chapter 3.

⁴³⁹ Elinor Mason, et al. *Morality, Rules, and Consequence: A Critical Reader* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2000).

David Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks 2007; online edn. Oxford Academic, 2 Sept. 2009). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195325911.001.0001>

⁴⁴⁰ , "Friendship."

4.3.3 Sexuality and Intimacy

Intimacy in friendship, as well as that of how friendship love and intimacy compare with other human relationships, is another cultural factor to consider. True friendship differentiates itself from casual acquaintances or the lesser friendships of pleasure or utility.⁴⁴¹ Vulnerability is key to understanding intimacy. Intimacy in friendship ought not be assumed to be a sexual intimacy, but rather an emotional intimacy. Indeed, emotional intimacy (while often also part of romantic relationships) ought to be part of meaningful non-sexual relationships, like those with family and friends. Friendship is also distinct from love, in that, as Friedman argues, friendship is “... valuable in a way that love is not... friendship can involve the mutual support of, in particular, unconventional values, which can be an important stimulus to moral progress within a community”.⁴⁴² This is a recognition of where the *polis* and the individual shape each other. While both friendship and marriage/family have reciprocal impacts on society, it is worth considering the myriad of ways in which friendship uniquely impacts the *polis* in ways that perhaps the family does not.⁴⁴³

Coming to know a person is a significant part of the human experience. To “know” is a word much like “good” which has multiple meanings. The French language avoids much of this confusion by having two words for “to know.” In French, there is *savoir* and *connaître*. *Savior* means to know facts or information but *connaître* means to have a personal familiarity with someone or something, *connaître* being deeper than factual knowledge.⁴⁴⁴ Similarly the word “friend” might be used both for an acquaintance and an intimate friend, thus it might be just as appropriate to think of friendship as related to one’s knowledge of someone. Of course, an acquaintance is known personally (as opposed to factually)

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

Marilyn A. Friedman, “Friendship and Moral Growth,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 23 (1989): 6.

⁴⁴³ Paine, “Friendship,” 40.

Hsing-Chen Yang, “Young People’s Friendship and Love Relationships and Technology: New Practices of Intimacy and Rethinking Feminism,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 20, no. 1 (2014): 97.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2014.11666174>

⁴⁴⁴ Camille Chevalier-Karfis, “Savoir vs. Connaître – the Verb “to Know” in French,” www.frenchtoday.com, last modified Apr 1, 2024. <https://www.frenchtoday.com/blog/french-verb-conjugation/savoir-versus-connaître-to-know/>

however, this knowledge is superficial. Conversely, to *know* someone beyond their name, hair colour, and favourite pet – to know someone’s desires, motivations, values, joys, sorrows, etc., this is deeper knowledge that can only be cultivated over time, through open and unhindered sharing of the inner self. The Hebrew language also upholds this connection of intimacy with knowledge so much so that sexual intercourse is referred to as “knowing”.⁴⁴⁵ Of course this does not mean every sexual act is about knowing another intimately, as the Bible has many accounts of sexual abuse and deviations from God’s design for sex.⁴⁴⁶ But the ideal is that intimacy ought to be linked with knowledge of the other in a space of mutual love and honour towards the other.

It is clear that sexuality and intimacy are connected, and rightly so. However, the ideal that sexual intimacy is founded on other forms of intimacy (emotional, spiritual, etc.) does not mean that all intimacy must culminate in sexual expression or is the only true expression of intimacy. Rather, it is the opposite; sexual intimacy is *a* physical expression of intimacy which *can* be an intimate act as well as a physical act. In *Your Sexual Self*, Catholic psychologists delved into this question of the relationship between sexuality and intimacy in human development. They argue that the human sex drive is the basis of all human cravings for intimacy – the desire to know and be known – but that it is not primarily meant to lead to a physical sexual union (especially considering that in the majority of human relationships to do so would be inappropriate).⁴⁴⁷ Towards the end of the book they gave a helpful picture of an iceberg where the visible peak of the iceberg represents sexual union, however, the peak of an iceberg only exists because of the support of the substantial iceberg sitting unseen under the surface of the water and were the tip of the iceberg to be cut off, the majority of the iceberg would still exist and what remained would be far more substantive than the peak which was lost. This illustration means that while the visible part (sex) is often most noticed and desired in society, it is not the primary place for human experiences of intimacy; rather it is the unseen iceberg underwater which is most

⁴⁴⁵ Wilhelm Gesenius, et al. “יָדַעַ,” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, ed. E. Rödiger, trans. Edward Robinson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010.), 943.

⁴⁴⁶ Having the word “to know” be different from the sexual act seems to imply that there is a difference between intimacy and a sexual/physical relationship or encounter.

⁴⁴⁷ Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self: Pathway to Authentic Intimacy* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 156-157, 163.

important, from which good and appropriate intimacy (sexual or non-sexual) is to be cultivated. Furthermore, a life without sex, for whatever reason, does not necessitate a life without intimacy, just as an iceberg without a peak does not cease to be an iceberg.⁴⁴⁸ Importantly, this means that intimacy and sex are not the same though they are related; intimacy does not require sex, but sexual intimacy (sex as a union of soul and body rather than a physical experience) is dependent upon intimacy. The concern is that if intimacy is misunderstood in regard to sexuality, this could subconsciously build a barrier of intimacy in friendship. For example, if two men, two women, or a male and a female, desired to cultivate a friendship their desire for deeper intimacy might lead to a fear that going beyond a certain level of intimacy might cross a line between friendship and romantic affection simply due to the belief that, beyond a certain level, all intimacy becomes romantic or sexual in nature, thus prohibiting deeper friendship.

This leads to another issue where romantic love is sometimes lauded as superior to friendship, and results in people directing a large portion of their social energy towards finding a romantic partner or feeling insignificant if they lacked a romantic partner.⁴⁴⁹

Many of the commentators, be they journalists or self-help writers, seemed to always include at least one chapter dedicated to the confusion, difficulties, and general debates surrounding friendship and sex.⁴⁵⁰ While it may be short-sighted to assume that this is a modern problem, there is good evidence to show that, while these underlying tensions and taboos around sex and the blurry lines between intimacy and sexuality have always existed, there is also evidence to support that many social developments within the past 100 years or so have created new opportunities for these tensions to rise to the surface.⁴⁵¹ For

⁴⁴⁸ Ferder, *Your Sexual Self*, 160.

⁴⁴⁹ This was something a few of the people I interviewed mentioned as a cultural trend they noticed, where so much of the cultural messaging around them seemed to show a preference for romantic relationships over friendship, See chapter 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Emily Dubberley, *You Must Be My Best Friend... Because I Hate You!: Friendship and How to Survive It Paperback* (Boston: Fusion Press, 2005), 4.

Kate Leaver, *The Friendship Cure: Reconnecting in the Modern World* (Richmond: Duckworth, 2019).

⁴⁵¹ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 110-111.

Dubberley, *You Must Be My Best Friend...Because I Hate You!*, 151-152.

In Sofia Kaliarnta's article, "Using Aristotle's Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships: A Critical Counterinterview." She argued that the rise in online friendships could potentially alleviate sexual tensions in male and female friendships due to the lack of the presence of gendered bodies online. Sofia Kaliarnta, "Using Aristotle's Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships: A Critical

example, before the rise of feminism men and women simply lacked an abundance of opportunities for social interactions and friendship to develop.⁴⁵² Likewise one might argue that with the sexual revolution came a new freedom to explore sexuality, and with old boundaries gone the space for confusion to grow between friendship and romantic/sexual relationships also become increasingly blurred.⁴⁵³ This is one area of many where social and personal views on this topic play into how friendship is understood today. This leads to the questions of gender and friendship which we will turn to next.

4.3.4 Gender and Friendship

Related to these questions of intimacy and love, is that of sex and gender. It seems that in Western modernity men and women experience friendship differently; men often being less willing to be emotionally open with other men out of fear of homoeroticism.⁴⁵⁴ Women on the other hand did not seem to have the same fears and were found to be more willing to communicate their emotions, but the change in lifestyle as women entered the workforce en masse in the late 1900s impacted women's relationships.⁴⁵⁵

Gender and friendship are interesting topics because, as with many things related to gender (besides basic biological differences) the differences which arise are most often found in generalisations rather than in rules where individuals' experiences and personalities impact friendship, frequently making it difficult to distinguish if a certain friendship behaviour was due to gender or personality. Furthermore, most of the generalisations of friendship according to gender differences are usually experienced by both men and women, meaning that any gender differentiations are less about a behaviour or attitude itself, but rather a matter of degree, method, or emphasis. For example, females tend to emphasise conversation as the most important aspect of friendship cultivation and

Counterview," *Ethics and Information Technology* 18, no. 2 (2016): 70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-016-9384-2>

⁴⁵² Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 110-111.

⁴⁵³ Dubberley, *You Must Be My Best Friend... Because I Hate You!*, 154-168.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

Pahl, *On Friendship*, 116.

Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 78.

⁴⁵⁵ Pahl, *On Friendship*, 116.

any activities enjoyed together serve as means of promoting the primary goal of conversation.⁴⁵⁶ two women might say they are meeting for coffee, but the coffee serves as a scenario for the main objective of conversation. Men, on the other hand, often emphasise the shared activity and any conversation or mutual sharing becomes an enjoyable addition to their activity.⁴⁵⁷ For example, many men engage in male sporting groups like basketball or go to the gym with a “gym buddy” and through these shared activities men often end up having deeper conversations.⁴⁵⁸ Notice that in both scenarios, both activity and conversation are present, which suggests that men and women are not so different in their needs from friendship. Men and women, it would seem, generally take different routes to the same destination.⁴⁵⁹ The debate then becomes whether the routes are as significant as the destination. For the purpose of this thesis, the destination is of primary importance, but the routes taken are also of interest in as much as they impact friendship experiences.⁴⁶⁰

In her book, *The Friendship Cure* (a well-researched mass publication book on friendship) Kate Leaver approached this question of gender from an evolutionary and anthropological viewpoint. She asks whether women’s more natural inclination towards friendship arises out of a need for protection.⁴⁶¹ This argument links to the idea that, from a biological perspective, friendships often begin for their own benefit. If women were, on average, biologically weaker than men, it would make sense for them to rally together for protection for themselves and their children. Men, however, would have less of a biological need for strength in numbers (due to their generally being stronger), in comparison to their female counterparts.⁴⁶² Out of this basic need for each other, Leaver argued, women discovered an enjoyment in their female companions which led to a cultivation of deeper

⁴⁵⁶ Eileen Green and Carrie Singleton. “Mobile Connections: An Exploration of the Place of Mobile Phones in Friendship Relations,” *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 57, no. 1 (2009): 126, 131.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.01807.x>

Yang, “Young People’s Friendship and Love Relationships and Technology,” 100.

⁴⁵⁷ Bell, “The Anthropology of Friendship,” 10.

⁴⁵⁸ “By the 1880s around 75 to 80 per cent of working-class men belonged to a friendly society and large numbers were involved in mutual improvement activities...” Doyle, “Friendship.” Rose, *The Intellectual Life of British Working Classes*.

⁴⁵⁹ Further discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this thesis but would make for interesting further studies.

⁴⁶⁰ This is a topic where much more could be said, but to do so goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴⁶¹ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 42-45.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 43.

bonds. Men, on the other hand, lacking the same biological need for companionship, were less likely to instinctually seek out friendship.⁴⁶³ While there is far more research which could be conducted in this area, it is interesting to consider if this might be one reason why so many books about friendship were written by men, for men, highlighting the benefits of friendship, as if to encourage friendship in men because it was men who needed to be taught friendship more so than women.⁴⁶⁴ Even in my interviews I found it fascinating that most of the men I interviewed seemed to desire more friendships, found it easier to befriend women than men, and were even a little envious of how “easy” women seemed to make, keep, and enjoy their female friendships.⁴⁶⁵

4.3.5 The Body and Physical Presence

One of the most profound aspects of the Christian faith is that God became a human, took on flesh, and lived and died. While other religions include incarnated gods, God as the suffering servant who dies a brutal criminal’s death is unique to Christianity. Some faiths, such as Islam, dislike the idea of an incarnated God because it is an affront for God to dwell in the frail flesh of human beings.⁴⁶⁶ Some early sects of Christianity were repulsed by the incarnation due to a disdain for the human body; viewing the body as a container for the human soul. Before Christianity, in Judaism the importance of the body can be seen even in the many laws regarding care for the body through food and dress, etc. Likewise, looking towards the eschatological state, Christ promises to bodily raise people from the dead. Christ was not merely spiritually or symbolically resurrected. According to the gospel accounts Christ experienced a physical bodily resurrection, which is why the resurrection was so scandalous, causing secular historians and Jewish religious leaders great difficulty accounting for the empty tomb. Paul wrote to the early churches that Christ’s resurrection is a “first fruits” which means those who are believers will also experience a resurrection in their body like Christ himself.⁴⁶⁷ Christianity thus dignifies the human body both in the

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ellithorpe, *Towards Friendship-shaped Communities*, 109.

⁴⁶⁵ See chapter 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Quran 112:1-4.

⁴⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:20-27.

present life and in life to come. Of course, this needs to be likewise balanced with a proper understanding of the spiritual aspects of the human being: the soul and mind. Whether humans are a tripartite or bipartite, the human is comprised of both physical matter and spirit. However, the conceptions of what it means to be human are facing new challenges and ideological oppositions with the arrival of robotics and computers, which could impact how humans understand themselves. While this will be the primary subject of the next chapter, the ideological shifts from other forms of technology and ethical topics which impact social beliefs surrounding the body and its importance, are of present concern.

Sherry Turkle has become one of the pioneers of a field that will likely be called something like digital anthropology. In her first book, *Alone Together*, she focused first on the rise of robotics, AI, and computers to see how these technologies shape how humans think.⁴⁶⁸ What she discovered was both fascinating and disturbing, particularly in relation to how robots and AI affected how people thought about themselves, other people, and human bodies. Turkle noticed that children who played with Furbies began to think of themselves in more robotic terms, like describing dying as having one's batteries removed or sleeping being akin to recharging.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, many tests at MIT were conducted to ascertain how humans interacted with humanoid Robots (robots displaying certain human characteristics both in their looks and behaviour) and even though people knew they were talking to a machine, they often enjoyed the experience of sharing their thoughts with a Robot.⁴⁷⁰ The ability of humans to self-deceive, pretending that a Robot could think, feel, and respond just like other humans was fascinating. It was likewise concerning how both children and adults quickly begin to describe themselves with computer terminology.⁴⁷¹ Similarly, in his book, *Stolen Focus*, Johan Hari noted that when computers were made which could run multiple tasks at a once, humans started to adopt the computer language of multi-tasking to describe themselves; however this is simply not the case, humans are not like computers; the human brain is not like a computer and it cannot simply run multiple

⁴⁶⁸ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁴⁶⁹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 36.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-30, 37-52.

⁴⁷¹ "The question is not whether machines can be made to think like people but whether people have always thought like machines." *Ibid.*, 54; 55-56.

tasks at a time.⁴⁷² In *Too Much Information*, Andrew Graystone also points out that humans when they interact with other humans continue to be two separate human beings but two computers when joined become a bigger computer.⁴⁷³ Physically, our bodies remind us of the unique and individual nature of being a human, but also at a deeper level human thoughts and spirit do not merge. This does not mean that humans cannot share or intertwine themselves⁴⁷⁴ but the unity humans experience is a coming together of two individuals: a difficult labour. Whereas, for computers there is no struggle to converge or find unity, because there are no persons or unique souls to contend with, and yet this distinction is becoming increasingly blurred. There is a danger in adopting new views of humans based on human creations. Perhaps a theological way of viewing this phenomenon would be to consider how humans were created in the image of God, and yet this does not mean humans *are* God. Certainly, humans bear characteristics of their creator, but they are not God, nor is God his creation.⁴⁷⁵ Likewise humans often make robots and AI in their image, but this does not make humans and robots the same. They might share certain qualities and characteristics but they are, at their very core, different substances (to adopt a term from Thomas Aquinas);⁴⁷⁶ different creations. Human beings are not advanced computer codes or software; they are bodies and souls inextricably linked together.

Mathematician John Lennox in his book *2084* also considered the ramifications of confusing the defining features of humans and AI.⁴⁷⁷ The danger for Lennox lies in seeing the human body as a shell, like the nuts and bolts which comprise a computer case and wiring which is not the computer itself, as code is essentially the computer.⁴⁷⁸ The thought is that a human's code (the mind) becomes the true human which it could potentially be released from its cage (the body) and exist – perhaps forever, in some other casing. This is the ideal

⁴⁷² Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 35-36.

⁴⁷³ Andrew Graystone, *Too Much Information?: Ten Essential Questions for Digital Christians* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2019), 80.

⁴⁷⁴ Graystone, *Too Much Information?*, 81-82.
1 Corinthians 1:10, John 17:20-23, Mark 10:8-9.

⁴⁷⁵ Genesis 1:27, John 1:1, John 4:24, Isaiah 55:8-9, Colossians 1:16,

⁴⁷⁶ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 29-30.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 75.

⁴⁷⁷ John Lennox, *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

⁴⁷⁸ Lennox, *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*, 98-102.

of transhumanism, the quest for eternal life through human ingenuity.⁴⁷⁹ While such futures seem like science fiction, even now there are ways in which these views are shaping how people think about their minds and bodies. Are humans really just code? Could humans truly live and experience life virtually? These questions are becoming increasingly pertinent as technology pushes forward towards virtual reality and lives lived through screens and other means of prioritising experiences of the mind apart from the body.

In the Christian worldview, both the body and mind, the spiritual and temporal are very real and very necessary. The eschatological kingdom of God promises more than a spiritual existence, but a physical kingdom to be inhabited by resurrected and redeemed humans. Even the eucharist, celebrated daily in churches around the world, serves as a reminder of the relationship between the spiritual and the physical. In the eucharist people drink real wine and eat real bread. They can touch, taste and smell the elements. At the same time, this meal represents the sacrifice of Christ, it looks into the history to the Passover meal in Exodus and it looks forward to the wedding feast at the return of Christ and serves as both a symbol and a sign of friendship with God.⁴⁸⁰ To lose sight of either aspect of the human experience creates problems for friendship, such as how people will learn to understand other humans if they cannot even understand themselves. I will continue to probe these questions about what it means to be real, and the importance of both the physical and spiritual world in the next chapter.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed both social and environmental influences as well as a handful of specific beliefs which all impact friendship to varying degrees. The topics brought up highlight specific changes which create new difficulties for friendship which are unique to the twenty-first century. While the majority of the topics addressed in this chapter go beyond surface differences to historic problems, this does not mean that the historical issues which afflicted friendships in the past are supplanted, or no longer relevant. Indeed,

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 46-47, 89.

⁴⁸⁰ Exodus 12:3-14, Matthew 26:26-29, John 6:51-58, Acts 2:46-47.

many of these areas deal with both new challenges as well as old issues in new clothing. For example, the issue of equality or moral character was addressed in chapters 2 and 3 and they are still pertinent queries for today, however, the impact of technology or conceptions of truth create different manifestations for dealing with such situations. Other issues, like gender, sexuality and intimacy, or individualism were less relevant in the literature and any information on these topics would be answering very different cultural issues than what would be relevant for modern audiences.

Importantly, for this study, there seem to be some significant factors which affect many of the key aspects of friendship as understood theologically. For example, as Crouch stated many new technologies (and thus cultural environments) will offer enticing new abilities, but these always come at a cost. While in the past friendships that went beyond simple pleasures or usefulness were grounded in shared truth, now with universal concepts of truth being questioned this undermines not only the moral edification of friendship but also the spiritual aspects of friendship. Likewise in considering the rise of individualism this promised more independence but as shown previously there are links between friendships of virtue and those of usefulness; as a friendship which begins for practical reasons could develop into something richer, or that even friendships of virtue ought to seek to be beneficial to the other. Without the natural need for dependence upon others this could undermine the design of friendship built into humanities very nature by God. Similarly, regarding the body, the sexual liberation movement made promises as well but has also confused our understanding of intimacy and especially the proper places for non-sexual intimacy as well as the fulfilling sense one can have in a non-sexual yet deeply intimate relationship. It should not be a surprise as well that with all the promises of technology the body has also been affected as we have been promised connection without proximity. While it is true that friendship has always had a complicated relationship with the body and spirit this duality has become exacerbated and more confused as modern technology simultaneously pulls us physically further apart while providing digital connection. These digital implications will be more broadly explored in the next chapter and the final section will address more fully the questions which have begun to arise regarding the changes and

challenges to understanding and enjoying friendship through a theological lens and begin to explore how the theological frameworks might be reconstructed for the digital age.

This chapter sought to outline some of the significant changes in the landscape of friendship which will set the stage both for the next chapter which addresses the topic of technology, as well as for part 3 which considers empirical data concerning friendship today and an explanation of how friendship has altered in recent years when compared to the tradition. All of which continues to lay the groundwork for a path to regaining a theological understanding of friendship in the digital age.

5. Chapter Five: Technology and Friendship

Thus far, friendship has been covered historically with the last chapter venturing into modernity. This chapter will fully engage with friendship as it is in the present which also brings the role of digital technology to the forefront and will be a primary focus of this chapter. Online life has increasingly become an aspect of modern culture and daily living. Many people have loved ones spread far and wide, due primarily to technologies like aeroplanes enabling people to travel much farther and faster than ever before. While aeroplanes might be the means for relocating, it is digital technology that makes the distances more palatable for those wishing to continue to invest in their relationships. It is interesting to ponder whether people would relocate as willingly without the modern conveniences of technology. Certainly, people moved away from their homes long before the arrival of the internet or cell phones, but experiences of travelling or relocating far away from home have changed dramatically in the past 20-30 years.⁴⁸¹ These changes affected people settling into new environments, building or maintaining friendships.⁴⁸² In the past, a relocation or summer-long holiday would mean near-total immersion. Today people can move across the world and relationally continue with friends and family without the impetus for social engagement with people from the local culture. The internet has, for the first time ever, enabled people to both move away and yet in a sense remain.⁴⁸³ Furthermore, the internet not only allows for maintaining relationships created offline; but also provided a new means of selecting friends without ever seeing them face-to-face. Developing friendships (even romantic relationships) which exist solely online (regardless as to whether such relationships eventually progress offline) has become increasingly common.⁴⁸⁴ The arrival of the internet and cell phones, seems to have prompted an

⁴⁸¹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 156, 287-299.

⁴⁸² Patricia Niland, et al. "Friendship Work on Facebook: Young Adults' Understandings and Practices of Friendship," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2201>.

⁴⁸³ Barbie H. Clarke, "Early Adolescents' Use of Social Networking Sites to Maintain Friendship and Explore Identity: Implications for Policy," *Policy & Internet* 1, no. 1 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1944-2866.1018>.

⁴⁸⁴ See chapter 6.

Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*, 206-231.

Kaliarnta, "Using Aristotle's Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships: A Critical Counterinterview."

evolution in human friendship making. Whether these new developments are positive or negative is the probing question. The difficulty lies in the fact that there are no simple answers, and to discern positives or negatives requires nuanced responses from delving beneath the surface to the issues of motivation and intent.

5.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter dealt with environmental and ideological factors, this chapter will delve into the area of digital technology to explore the implications of how these tremendous technological advancements have also changed the landscape of friendship. As with the other chapters, the information explored here provides necessary context for understanding the modern friendship landscape as a prerequisite for considering theological frameworks for modern friendship.

It is no small addition to the human experience to possess a technology essentially tethered to one's person and used potentially for hours a day. Thus, the goal is to come to a greater understanding of how digital technology can be implemented positively while simultaneously limiting negative consequences.⁴⁸⁵ There are many fascinating ethical topics which such questions will inevitably raise; however, not all of these will be relevant to the topic of friendship, and so topics will be limited to ones which have either a direct or indirect yet potentially significant impact on friendship. Technologies are created by humans for humans, but this does not always mean that the humans making, producing or selling these technologies have altruistic goals.⁴⁸⁶ Some technologies were promoted with ideals of human connection and creativity, and yet it is the product itself, not the claims of the salesmen which matter most.

Towards this end, this chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first addresses questions regarding the impact of these new digital technologies. This section will consider Marshall McLuhan's insightful claim, "the medium is the message," in seeking to

⁴⁸⁵ Daniel Miller, Elisabeth Costa, et al. "Academic Studies of Social Media," in *How the World Changed Social Media*, vol. 1, (London: UCL Press. 2016), 11. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1g69z35.9>

⁴⁸⁶ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 101-118.

understand the message of technology.⁴⁸⁷ Next, changes in understanding what is “real” in light of the arrival of digital technology and what this means for friendships will be addressed. Lastly, moral responsibility on the part of both producers and consumers and its effects on friendship will be examined. In the second half of this chapter I will focus on the ways technologies directly impact friendships, such as phones both connecting and disconnecting people, social media having positive and negative impacts on friendships, and mirroring (or not mirroring) in friendship (seeing the self-reflected in the other). This chapter will conclude by summary of the questions which will carry into the final section which deals with empirical interviews and evidence in response to the theological questions arising from this and previous chapters.

5.2 Digital Technology and its Message

Johan Hari, in his book *Stolen Focus*, applies McLuhan’s dictum, “the medium is the message,” to the various social media outlets:

Twitter: that you shouldn’t focus on any one thing for long. The world can be understood in short and simple statements of 200 characters ... the world should be interpreted and confidently understood very quickly, ... and what matters most is that people immediately agree with and applaud your simple little statements. Facebook: that your life exists to be on display and you should aim to show your life to your friends in edited highlights... what matters is that people like your highlights and ... friendship is when you look at their highlights and they look at yours.... Instagram: what matters is how you look on the outside, and ...that other people like how you look.⁴⁸⁸

Hari suggests that the messages these social media platforms promote seem less like truthful representations than the propaganda of a good salesman. While it would be a challenge to summarise the message of the whole of digital technology, one harmful message technology sends is that experiences online are just as “real” as offline ones and that online one can attain the same rewards or benefits of offline interactions but with less effort. As with most lies from good salesmen, there must be an element of truth for the lie to be successful. While it is true that the internet provides opportunities for “real” or authentic interactions, some researchers have found such simplistic explanations

⁴⁸⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

⁴⁸⁸ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 79-80.

problematic, especially when it comes to replicating relationships online. For example, can two people truly come to know each other online, can authentic or real friendship exist online? Furthermore, can one take the shortcuts offered by digital technology and still have the same depth of friendships? These are the sorts of questions which will be addressed in this section.

5.2.1 The Message of Technology

My understanding of McLuhan's "the medium is the message" is that there is a subliminal message sent simply by means of the chosen messenger. There does not need to be intention or understanding for the implications of the message of the medium to be effectual at both personal and cultural levels. There is the old saying, "don't shoot the messenger" which suggests the opposite sentiment from McLuhan as it implies that the message itself, rather than the method of delivery, matters most.⁴⁸⁹ There seems to be an instinctual understanding that, although the messenger is not of primary importance, it still matters. Consider siblings sending the favourite child to ask for a treat from their parents; they have learned that choosing the messenger elicits a positive response. Likewise, if one must deliver unexpected bad news to the king, a favoured messenger would be preferred. It is commonly assumed that romantic statements such as "I love you" should be delivered in person or in a handwritten note as a text message would be considered in bad taste in such a situation. While the message "I love you" is the same, the medium (face-to-face, letter, text) communicates its own message in very different ways. The combination of the medium, the intent, and the message all impact how both the giver and the receiver evaluate the communication. One ought to question what message(s) digital technology sends, as well as the subtle differences of messaging across various platforms, applications, and devices. Rather than delve into each application or device, some of the various themes of communication will be considered and explored for how current or future devices and applications should be evaluated. Part of what makes a medium in use today so confusing is that one medium might also be used in various ways – much like how an envelope might

⁴⁸⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1-2.

contain a bill, flyer, love note, wedding invitation etc. While all are in the medium of a mailed letter the message itself and how it was sent impacts the message as well.⁴⁹⁰ So, it is not as simple as to say that a text message or a phone call sends a particular message, rather the combination of the medium, the intent, and the message all impact how both the giver and the receiver evaluate the communication.

Regarding friendship, it is important that bonds of security and closeness are felt; authentic communication must be a priority for a deep friendship to flourish. Understanding what is “real” and the moral responsibility of humans when interacting with technology will be the two main topics addressed for understanding the impact that technology and its subsequent message has upon friendships.

5.2.1.1 *What is Real?*

The term “real” as it is defined has come into question with the arrival of digital technologies. For example, “real” used to distinguish between online and off-line spaces. Today, “real” could more broadly refer to something being authentic, which could happen in a physical or digital space. Previously, the online space was a place of anonymity, avatars, emails, and fictional online worlds like Second Life. In such a capacity, the use of “real” to describe the off-line world would seem appropriate. However, with people increasingly developing deep relationships online, enjoying online communities, and experiencing other impactful interactions (positive or negative) some have come to question how useful the term “real” is for differentiating the online and off-line worlds, as its use would imply that an encounter online would be less real than one face-to-face. However, with studies showing the impact of cyberbullying, crimes committed online, etc.,⁴⁹¹ it would be difficult to continue to say that these experiences were less real or that the victims of such online crimes faced less severe abuse because it was online and thus not “real.” If these negative online experiences create real or authentic feelings for those who experience them, why would this not be the case for positive encounters? The internet provides the avenue for

⁴⁹⁰ Adam Briggie, “Real Friends: How the Internet Can Foster Friendship,” *Ethics and Information Technology* 10, no. 1 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-008-9160-z>.

⁴⁹¹ Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*, 127-131.

creating digital meeting spaces; however, the people using these spaces are real humans interacting with one another; people capable of having very real experiences in these online realms. The differences between these online meetings and in-person meetings, and the "realness" of them and how they impact friendship are topics that will be explored. The main arguments related to the idea of what is "real" in regard to authenticity and physicality, will be explored, as they relate to engaging with the five senses.

Ethicists from various fields relating to technology and relationships have engaged in academic debates regarding mediums of communication and what are considered "real" encounters. The debate centres on whether a letter could be considered essentially the same as a text message or email. Some argue that because both are types of written communication, both enable sharing either deeply or in brief (not every letter is a small book and not every text is 100 characters). There is the argument that communication via digital technology could serve a purpose similar to how letters once provided a space for friendship, authenticity, and self-discovery, even amongst people who had never met in person. Briggles argues that the space and time given to online communication might provide an opportunity for deep and meaningful exchange, noting that such communication either online or offline requires dedicated persons.⁴⁹² Other academics contend that the physicality factor is too important, leading to the view that a letter (which can be seen and touched, smelled etc.,) is inherently superior to a text message.⁴⁹³ The manner in which one composes a letter rather than a text, such as how thoughts are organized, whether it can be easily erased, depending on the writing implement, all impacts the message. What makes this debate especially difficult is that to look at only one of these approaches would be to miss out on other equally important factors. For example, Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews, in their article, "Unreal friends" contend that the ways in which people express their genuine selves (the good and the bad) cannot be adequately self-disclosed online, and so do not believe it fair to say that online communication is the same as physical or face-to-

⁴⁹² Briggles, "Real Friends," 71-73.

⁴⁹³ Laurence Thomas, "Friendship in the Shadow of Technology," in *Morality and Moral Controversies: Readings in Moral, Social, and Political Philosophy*, eds. John Arthur & Steven Scalet (New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1981).

face communication.⁴⁹⁴ They write that even in the most ideal situations of online engagement (such as video calling) it would simply be impossible to share enough of the mannerisms, and human feedback responses necessary for forming a deeply authentic relationship with another person.⁴⁹⁵ Fröding and Peterson share similar concerns, especially that some may be deceived and harmed by thinking of virtual friendship as a shortcut to genuine friendship.⁴⁹⁶ At the heart of these questions is the assumption that the values of honesty, vulnerability, and mutual sharing are necessary for friendship-making. How technology helps or hinders these values is at the core of the debate.

5.2.1.2 Authenticity

When looking to connect with other people online how one presents themselves becomes a challenge. Previously humans would have perceived others through visual and behavioural factors such as speech, dress, tone, introductory topics of conversation, and body language. Of course, meeting online can also create new means of presenting the self. One might post pictures of themselves and describe themselves just as they would in an off-line manner, thus presenting realistic representations of their authentic self. However, the internet also allows for embellishments, making opportunities to create and maintain a completely different self easier than ever.⁴⁹⁷ People have always found ways of concealing the truth, but the internet allows for maintaining such a ruse easier as well as potentially more socially acceptable.⁴⁹⁸ For those studying social media there is growing concern as to whether people will be able to maintain real friendships online due to "...the assumption that one of the inevitable consequences of increased technological mediation in social relationships is the loss of authenticity."⁴⁹⁹ Furthermore, the line between embellishment

⁴⁹⁴ Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews, "Unreal Friends," *Ethics and Information Technology* 2, no. 4 (2000). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011414704851>.

⁴⁹⁵ Cocking, "Unreal Friends," 26-228.

⁴⁹⁶ Barbro Fröding and Martin Peterson, "Why Virtual Friendship Is No Genuine Friendship," *Ethics and Information Technology* 14, no. 3 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-011-9284-4>.

⁴⁹⁷ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 158-159.

⁴⁹⁸ Kaliarnta, "Using Aristotle's Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships," 69.

⁴⁹⁹ Xinyuan Wang, "Social Media and Social Relationships," *Social Media in Industrial China*, 1st ed., vol. 6, (London: UCL Press 2016), 119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1g69xtj.9>.

and false representation becomes increasingly difficult to discern whether or not what someone posts online is a true reflection of the self. Even when desiring to present an authentic self, it can be difficult to know if how one self-describes online is an accurate reflection of the self that others would experience if meeting face to face.⁵⁰⁰

The shadows that technology can cast over authenticity are evident in the stories highlighting the complexities of online interactions. Turkle reports an interesting interview with a man who ended up having what might be called an emotional affair with his online “wife” in the game Second Life. When asked if he would ever want to meet up with the human behind his avatar’s wife, the man said no even though he had shared more intimate and personal details with this online “wife” than his real wife.⁵⁰¹ There was also a hypothetical story referenced in numerous articles on this point regarding a disabled woman who makes a friend through an online community. The two become very close but never meet face to face. It is only by chance that they meet at the local pool when one woman discovers her online friend is disabled.⁵⁰² This posed the question as to whether or not the withholding of a disability would harm the friendship. Some argue that the disembodied experiences of being online took away any stigmas or limitations which could have prohibited friendships in the physical world, and therefore the withholding is justified as it enables a friendship which may not have taken place otherwise.⁵⁰³ Others however believe that if friendship is meant to include open and honest vulnerability with another person that while the online medium may have created spaces for prejudices to disappear, the continued lack of disclosing such information would be harmful to the friendship.⁵⁰⁴ Another example would be someone with wealth or power, like a celebrity or royalty. Such people can also experience prejudices and inequalities which make honesty and friendship

⁵⁰⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (London: Penguin Books: 2016.), 85. Kindle.

⁵⁰¹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 159-160.

⁵⁰² Kiliarnta, “Using Aristotle’s Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships.”

William Bülow and Cathrine Felix, “On Friendship Between Online Equals,” *Philosophy & Technology* 29, no. 1 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-014-0183-6>.

Fröding, “Why Virtual Friendship Is No Genuine Friendship.”

⁵⁰³ Bülow, “On Friendship Between Online Equals,” 21.

⁵⁰⁴ Fröding, “Why Virtual Friendship Is No Genuine Friendship,” 205.

Cocking, “Unreal Friends.”

Kiliarnta, “Using Aristotle’s Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships,” 70.

difficult in the physical world. For such people meeting behind an avatar or username could provide them an equalising anonymity which in turn offers opportunities for deep friendship.⁵⁰⁵ How long one can hide behind “digital walls” in the cultivation of a friendship before the friendship itself begins to suffer from a lack of openness and honesty becomes the pressing question. As digital spaces remove opportunities for the five senses to test and validate information this may present a barrier.⁵⁰⁶ When meeting face-to-face people can be deceived, so it would not be fair to deem this solely an online issue. It is, however, fair to say the problem is exacerbated online.

The multitude of ways of interacting online makes this problem more complex. A text cannot rightly be considered the same as a phone or video call and all social media platforms cannot be lumped together.⁵⁰⁷ If the medium is the message and each medium has its own unique variation of meaning, then they must be evaluated individually. One measurement would be the amount of accessible information provided for the senses. In this measurement a text or email provides only one dimension of information, while a phone call adds the element of sound and vocal intonations. Video not only provides visual information on the person speaking but also environmental stimuli.⁵⁰⁸ Likewise, there is a difference between recordings and live interactions. With recorded messages, be they video or voice, the sender does not get immediate feedback, while live calls and videos enable both parties to experience in-time feedback. All of these factors change the experiences of communication between friends. There is also the factor of features in the chosen medium or application. While these differences might not be as substantial: whether someone can record their response to a recorded message to be sent to the sender, if there are emojis and gifs, filters, the ability to share photos, or word or time limits, they all impact the interactions and experiences of the users. Interestingly, many young people seem to enjoy text communication likely due in part to the accessibility to share links, videos, gifs, and

⁵⁰⁵ Bülow, “On Friendship Between Online Equals,” 26.

⁵⁰⁶ Cocking, “Unreal Friends,” 228.
McFall, “Real Character-Friends.”

⁵⁰⁷ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 79.

⁵⁰⁸ McFall, “Real Character-Friends,” 221.
Tiffany Petricini, “Friendship in the Digital Age: Implications from a Philosophy of Communication Approach,” PhD Diss., (Duquesne University, 2020), 79.

emojis with friends.⁵⁰⁹ How useful these platforms are depends greatly on the measuring criteria. If the criteria is to have the most fun, then texting and many of the social media apps or online gaming platforms might be the prevailing means; however, if deep conversation and authentic knowing of the other is the primary aim, then video and phone calls in real time would be the ideal online means of engagement, as these have the greatest capacities for person-to-person interaction.

Lastly, there are many ways in which people can choose to present themselves online. It would seem that many researchers in this up-and-coming field have concerns that the anonymity of the internet would allow people to create false representations online.⁵¹⁰ This is certainly true for many people, especially in the realm of online games and sites with avatars, as some people relish the chance to be something completely different from who they are in the physical world: a man might test out being a woman, a smaller person try being tall or muscular, or an adult enjoy revisiting childhood.⁵¹¹ However, this does not seem to be the normal response. Rather, it would seem the majority of people prefer to try and represent themselves online as authentically as possible.⁵¹² This is positive news as this means that the general propensity is for people to prefer authentic representations of themselves online. This, however, does not dismiss the problem of self-presentation. How someone chooses to represent themselves in online capacities is subjective to one's own interpretation, which may not necessarily be what others would sense if meeting offline.⁵¹³ This means that even if someone was trying to be as authentic and honest about themselves, there is the human propensity to focus on the positive aspects of one's character, as well as the fact that people often have tendencies which are unknown or

⁵⁰⁹ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 34-37.

⁵¹⁰ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 153.

Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 83.

Kaliarnta, "Using Aristotle's Theory of Friendship to Classify Online Friendships," 68-69.

⁵¹¹ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 83-84.

⁵¹² "In the case of the avatar, you begin with clarity that you are "playing" a character that is someone other than you. That's the game. On Facebook, you are, ostensibly, representing yourself and talking about your own life. That's why people friend you. They want to know what you are doing and thinking." Ibid., 84.

⁵¹³ Desire Avom and Flora Yselle Malah, "Social Media and Happiness Nexus in the Millennial Generation," *Telecommunications Policy* 46, no. 8 (2022): 189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2022.102368>
Briggle, "Real Friends," 72.

unobserved to themselves but which would be picked up by others.⁵¹⁴ These might be idiosyncrasies, ticks, or other habits etc. which others can observe, leaving open questions of whether they can truly know or be known by a friend in online spaces.

5.2.1.3 *Physicality*

The role and importance of physicality is intriguing. Regardless of how advanced the internet might one day become, a digital replica will never fully replace or become the thing it represents. For this reason, acknowledging the barriers which exist online and remembering that online or digital representations are not replacements for genuine face-to-face encounters is important. Most people do not wish for disembodied experiences as much as they desire embodied experiences. The younger generations apparently are now intrigued by things they can touch and feel in the way that previous generations were excited about things they could put on a screen.⁵¹⁵ The point is that the physical does not need to be replaced with the digital, and the digital will never be the same as the physical. They are inherently different and not interchangeable. That is not to say one is better than the other, but that they are different forms of experiencing life, and it is important to know the limitations of both physical and digital entities.

When it comes to using digital devices, or engaging in digital activities, these “digital experiences” are still happening through a physical body and physical devices. The internet is a strange place where, on one hand, it feels like this is a non-physical space, and in a sense this is true. But the internet does not operate without servers and machinery; likewise, emotional experiences, thoughts, and feelings, which are not physically measurable, also happen through a physical body which enables these intangible realities to exist.⁵¹⁶ In this respect, nothing is truly separate from physical existence. Humans are embodied beings and, though people often forget, there is another human person on the other side of the screen.⁵¹⁷ Many researchers are rightfully worried about the continuing use of digital

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 233-256.

⁵¹⁶ Petricini, *Friendship in the Digital Age*, 29.

⁵¹⁷ Tricia McCary Rhodes, *The Wired Soul: Finding Spiritual Balance in a Hyperconnected Age* (Colorado Springs: The Navigators, 2016), 81-82.

devices in ways that make this harder to remember because of how it impacts the human capacity for empathy and emotional connection.⁵¹⁸ There is a danger in forgetting that every digital experience is still tied to a physical reality. In a very real sense, there is nothing solely digital or non-physical in the online world. To pretend or wish otherwise would be unwise and could risk fracturing the human design. Indeed, the spiritual, emotional, physical, and digital realities ought to weave together rather than exist in isolation. Consider the Eucharist: where the physical, spiritual, and communal meet; the bread and wine are real and tangible; and somehow these elements make tangible that which is intangible: forgiveness, salvation, love, fellowship, etc. The Lord's Supper is one religious example of what it means for the physical and non-physical to meet. In many churches, this mingling is expressed as a great mystery. The question remains, however, whether a similar mingling can occur online, and if so how and when? These will be questions explored further in the last two chapters.

Furthermore, consider the desire of fulfilment. In Christian theology the end of the salvation story will come with the arrival of the eschaton, which, perhaps surprisingly, links to understanding the fulfilment of friendship. As mentioned previously, during the Reformation, the link between the eternal future Kingdom of God and the aims of friendship came together.⁵¹⁹ For Christians at the time, it was the future kingdom which they believed was the true fulfilment of friendship and love. They understood that love seeks to be physically and spiritually united. This future kingdom is not to be merely spiritual or a disembodied future reality but, like Christ's resurrected body, it would be tangible.⁵²⁰ For long-distance friends there is often a longing to be reunited in physical space. This should not be dismissed or minimised. Much like the Reformers, who believed that the future kingdom would be the fulfilment of all good things, where friendship would be eternal, even now this longing to be united with friends ought to be encouraged and understood as the ultimate goal for friendship. Online interactions are best when understood that they are not the final destination. Friendship is love, and love is possible across distances and digital

⁵¹⁸ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 160.

Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 86.

Avom, "Social Media and Happiness Nexus in the Millennial Generation," 194.

⁵¹⁹ See Chapter 3 section 3.3.4.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

spaces, but true friendship always longs to be united in a physical space. For this reason, training oneself to know the difference between the representations, acknowledging the barriers which exist online, and remembering they are not replacements for genuine face-to-face encounters with other people, can help counteract false ideas of digital friendship. This does not mean that online discussions have no value, but rather they need to be used for a particular purpose. Tricia McCary Rhodes writes that even if someone has fallen prey to the deceitful representations or knock-off online replicas, the human brain can be wired and disciplined, either to one's benefit or detriment.⁵²¹ Therefore, taking the initiative to consider how the internet and digital devices are shaping *how* and *what* they think, as well as to consider how subsequent actions regarding these technologies can affect their friendships and relationships, is deeply important. Thankfully habits can be changed, which means humanity still has the opportunity to lay hold of the freedom that comes from using the digital world to support and grow friendships, rather than allow them to be undermined and weakened.⁵²²

5.2.1.4 Summary

This section has considered the message of technology, or in other words, how digital technology changes reshapes definitions and how humans interact with one other. All of the factors considered: what is “real”, authenticity, and physicality all correlate to the broader theological questions of embodiment (*i.e.* the body-spirit composite) in relation to how humans interact as people made in the image of a triune God. These are not inherently new questions as we have already seen that human beings enjoyed friendship across great distances before the arrival of the internet or telephones. However, these new technologies provide digital meeting places which offer an unprecedented ability to interact in increasingly immersive ways. Thus, if and how humans may manage to retain a sense of reality, check for authenticity, and remain grounded in their embodiment will prove to be a challenge.

⁵²¹ Rhodes, *The Wired Soul*, 129.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

5.2.2 Moral Responsibility

Another subtle means of messaging through technology has to do with morality and who bears responsibility. The main questions are who bears moral responsibility when using technology, can digital technology be imbued with moral ends, and if so, how can one discern them? In this section, I will address debates of how morality and ethics are discussed in light of modern technological advances. Whether something is good or bad, when discussed in this section, will relate to issues of morality as opposed to teleology.⁵²³ In the first section I will look at human responsibility and subsequent accountability for the implementation and use of technology. The next section will discuss how technology is built to achieve certain ends, some of which can be infused with moral aims. This means that, while devices cannot be moral agents in and of themselves, they can be infused with moral trajectories that will influence the human agents who use them, making it important to understand the ethical implications of the technologies we use. The last section will consider how these two aspects of ethics and morality affect friendship, propelling the discussion into the second portion of this chapter which focuses primarily on the various ways in which technology has impacted the friendship experiences of many modern Westerners.

5.2.2.1 Human Responsibility and Accountability

Moral responsibility and accountability, in relation to technology, is a highly contested topic, which has proven to be a challenging topic with which to wrestle. These technologies are so new that their impacts are just beginning to be examined and understood. That said, the most straightforward means to understanding the intersection of morality and digital technology is to glean from the classical-Christian model which asserts that humans are moral agents who bear the responsibility of all moral decisions. Moral decisions *can* be delegated, in some capacities, to non-human things, like machines, or algorithms, but these non-human devices never become, in themselves, moral agents. Computers cannot sin, dogs do not need to be forgiven, and cars (even fully automated ones) are not locked up for

⁵²³ See the Introduction for more on morality and teleology.

running over people. While dogs might be put down if they attacked a child, and cars that run over people might be scrapped and pulled off the market, this is not the same as committing sins. Humans still bear the weight of moral responsibility. However, this moral responsibility exists at two levels: individual and societal. Johan Hari made many points concerning the environmental or systemic issues which plague Western culture on a host of various fronts – one of which is technology.⁵²⁴ To focus only on the individual, he argued, misses the environment in which that individual lives and all the social factors which influence a person.⁵²⁵ Hari was adamant about this point because it highlights the frustrations of an individual taking the initiative to change their behaviours, and accepting responsibility for their own choices, but who cannot seem to break free because they have not escaped their environment, which limits their choices.⁵²⁶ If one human can make moral choices, it stands to reason that a community of humans can also make moral choices, creating environments which pre-select the options for individuals to make.⁵²⁷ When it comes to technologies, this means that while an individual might choose to limit their screen time, take more walks to meet face-to-face with friends, and remind themselves that there is always another person on the other side of the screen, they cannot control the ways social media seeks to keep them online, the number of work emails they receive, or the social expectations to always be contactable. Some of these choices are beyond one person's control.⁵²⁸ Moral responsibility is a complex issue; however, understanding these two levels of moral accountability (societal and personal), may help to alleviate some of this burden, enabling people to make positive choices within their present circumstances, while also encouraging them to engage with change on a societal level.

⁵²⁴ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 137-148.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵²⁶ "Ronald Purser... introduced me to an idea I hadn't heard before – a concept named 'cruel optimism'. This is when you take a really big problem with deep causes in our culture – like obesity, or depression, or addiction – and you offer people, in upbeat language, a simplistic individual solution." *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵²⁸ This is not a new human experience; throughout history people have been forced into situations with limited choices, often resulting in great moral difficulty; consider the moral agony of many who lived through world war II.

5.2.2.2 *Imbuing Technology with Morals*

Technology, while neutral in the sense of moral agency, can be directed towards certain moral ends. For example, a bomb, knife, or gun do not possess any agency in themselves to choose to kill, but they were all designed for destructive purposes. That destruction might be to destroy a clay target, to destroy the structure of a cake by cutting a slice, or create an explosion to mine for precious metals, all of which do not carry the moral weight of destruction of human life (or some may argue any sentient life). Because these technologies were created to destroy, that will be their primary use and would not be correctly used for the purposes of creating or building. In a similar way, modern digital technologies are made by humans and infused with certain goals which direct people's behaviours in certain ways, some of which lead to more morally positive ends and some which incline towards morally dubious or outright evil ends.⁵²⁹ From books from Hari, Akin, and Turkle, it is becoming clearer that the algorithms, coding, and design of many digital technologies are aimed towards consumerism and not towards human flourishing.⁵³⁰ It is not that these technologies *must* serve these aims to be what they are, but rather, as they are currently designed and marketed, these technologies cause many people to struggle to have healthy and beneficial relationships with their devices.⁵³¹

5.2.2.3 *Moral Friendship in a Digital Age*

Along with cute cat videos and pictures of loved ones, acts of violence, bullying, and abuse have also found their place online. In-person or online, such behaviours violate trust and dehumanise the victim. In cases such as school bullying, students, before the rise of the internet, were able to escape when they went home.⁵³² However, now that children are increasingly allowed online access at younger ages, for longer periods of time, and often

⁵²⁹ Graystone, *Too Much Information?*, 6-9.

⁵³⁰ Documentaries like *The Social Dilemma* also provide interesting insights into digital media. *The Social Dilemma*, Directed By Jeff Orlowski (9 September 2020; USA: Netflix), online streaming.

⁵³¹ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 119.

⁵³² Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*, 130.

with little supervision, bullying can continue, or even exist solely online, where escape can feel impossible.⁵³³ Daniel Miller has this to say about cyberbullying:

While there has been much academic discussion on how the internet brings the public realm into the private, for example networked privacy, social media is in addition seen to bring the school realm – where ‘traditional’ bullying took place – into the home: ‘They don’t have the decency, let them have their home, somewhere safe to be. Now there’s nowhere to go. People say “just log off Facebook”, but if you log off you have the voice in your head like she’s posted six things about me and I can’t see it . . .’⁵³⁴

In many ways, screens can encourage people to forget, to varying degrees, the reality of other people beyond their own devices. As Miller notes, “...quite natural for people to talk about their ‘email friends’ as opposed to ‘phone call friends,’”⁵³⁵ subconsciously categorising people into categories of greater or lesser value, which in itself can be dehumanising. People join online chat groups where they communicate not to individuals but to groups. This brings the risk of losing one’s individuality within online spaces.⁵³⁶ Resistance is vital in overcoming the temptation to dehumanise; remembering instead that there are human beings sitting on the other side of digital devices. Any discussion on friendship must be aware of these challenges and promises of digital technology. To ignore this would be to miss a pivotal aspect of human engagement. To make positive moral choices, one ought to know their options and prepare themselves for the potential issues which arise from online engagement and the use of digital devices. This is what the next section of this chapter will cover: the opportunities and obstacles for friendship in a digital age.

5.2.2.4 Summary

In part one of this thesis, the majority of historical/biblical/philosophical beliefs regarding friendship as well as lived friendships explored all had a moral component. In more secular accounts this was often spoken of as virtue, whereas many Biblical and

⁵³³ Ibid., 127-131.

⁵³⁴ Daniel Miller, “Making social media matter,” *Social Media in an English Village*, vol. 2 (London: UCL Press, 2016), 133. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1g69xs1.9>

⁵³⁵ Miller, “Social Media and Social Relationships,” 96.

⁵³⁶ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*, 168.

Christian accounts discussed holiness or the desire to live within the will of God. Morality has thus always held a place in friendships (at least ones with some level of depth). The questions raised in this section however deal not as much with personal morality within the friendship, but the moral impact of technology itself upon friendships, such as how applications or devices are designed. These technologies, while not having moral agency, can influence their users towards ends which may not align with that person's moral values or may create situations where it is easier to engage in morally questionable behaviours (consciously or otherwise). This becomes important in that, if morality is inherently important in friendships, the mediating role of technology should also be considered as integral to a flourishing friendship.

5.3 Friendship in a Digital Age

This section will focus primarily on the direct influences of digital technology on friendship whether they are areas of concern, debate, or positive (realised or potential) impact. This section is comprised of three segments, the first dealing with the phenomena of how cell phones both connect and disconnect friends. The second addresses social media and the ways these platforms impact friendships both personally and culturally. The final section takes a wider view, echoing back to Saint Aelred's work *The Mirror of Charity*⁵³⁷ and the Greco-Roman philosophers, to address how digital technology impacts the mirroring element of friendship.

5.3.1 Mobile Phones and Mobile Friends

If friendship already suffered from ambiguity, with the rise of social media and digital devices, the lines of friendship have become even more blurred with the advent of both in-person and online friendships. As one researcher aptly said, it can be hard to distinguish if friendship has changed by the emergence of the internet and technology, or if the internet

⁵³⁷ See chapter 3 section 3.3.2.

and technology are merely new platforms for old problems.⁵³⁸ There is good reason to believe both answers are correct. The internet and digital devices create many new opportunities and problems, but in many ways, the opportunities and issues which arise are the same ones which previous generations have dealt with, but they are wearing new “digital” clothing. On one hand, this should be encouraging since, in essence, the issues of the present age are not alien, as other generations have had to manage similar issues, allowing opportunities to learn from the past. On the other hand, the digital technology boom is one of the most significant changes in history and so the manifestations of these human issues will, very likely, produce such new challenges that past solutions will not always be especially helpful in the current context. One example of this might be the health crisis and the focus crisis.⁵³⁹ Humans have always needed to pursue healthy lifestyle choices like diet and exercise, as well as learn strategies to help aid one’s focus, so as to not be constantly distracted. However, the ways in which modern cities impact these two issues of health and focus, due to the infrastructures, technologies, and other broad cultural circumstances, create such different situations compared to anything else in history, the solutions of the past will not be sufficient to handle the massive changes humans now face.⁵⁴⁰ This is in many ways similar to the sweeping changes of the Industrial Revolution but even more extreme.⁵⁴¹ Friendship has always suffered from too broad a usage: that has not changed, but the problems and solutions which will be needed to tackle these age-old issues will need to be as radical as the technology which so altered them.⁵⁴²

In Sherry Turkle’s first book, *Alone Together*, her first part addresses how phones often isolate more than they create places for solitude or connection.⁵⁴³ In this research Turkle uses the term cyborg to describe humans with their phones.⁵⁴⁴ Her reasoning is that the actual physical integration of organic bodies with digital tech has reached a point where

⁵³⁸ Sonia Livingstone and Julian Sefton-Green, *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 34. <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.18574/nyu/9781479884575.001.0001>

⁵³⁹ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 8-9, 143.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ See chapter 4 section 4.2.

⁵⁴² Graystone, *Too Much Information*, 13.

⁵⁴³ Turkle, *Alone Together*.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 151-152.

most people are so tethered to their phones that the phone might as well be physically attached. While I would argue being physically attached is more than semantics, her words are those which should cause alarm over how connected people are to their phones. There is also a difference between how connected people want to be, and how connected they are in actuality; often desires are not consistent with reality. Eva-Lynn Jagoe argues that Turkle is overly negative regarding technology and does not seem to appreciate other ways of appreciating and understanding authenticity.⁵⁴⁵ However, Turkle is right to warn that there is a difference between the digital and “real” – whether the changes are positive or not is the ever-present question. Indeed, constant connectedness has innumerable societal connotations impacting people’s friendships. One area of concern, in this new era of mobile phones, is that of unspoken expectations. Some people feel they are obligated to respond almost immediately to a text message as if every text was an emergency, or that if a notification comes up it must be attended to with immediacy. This is of concern if one is being distracted from their present tasks, work, or conversations, in order to send a quick response out of obligation; it also could diminish the time and quality of response given to the person on the other end of the phone.

Turkle has much to say on this point from her conversations with many young people. For example, one student named Oliver said that texting is now the baseline for his friendships and that his friends would think something was wrong if he didn’t “keep it up”.⁵⁴⁶ Rona, a high school student, added that she and her friends could be reached immediately and, because of this immediacy, she felt the need to be “on call” for her friends. She said, “If someone sends me a message on Facebook, I have to . . . I feel the need to get it and get back to them when they’re still online.”⁵⁴⁷ Turkle calls this a new, “obligation in friendship”, highlighting the hypocrisy to complain when friends do not give their undivided attention when together in person, while also feeling obliged to be tethered to friends through phones in case of emergencies.⁵⁴⁸ One student explained what could pass as an emergency: “My friends need me. I’m the one they see as the stable one. They’ll text

⁵⁴⁵ Eva-Lynn Jagoe, “Depersonalized Intimacy: The Cases of Sherry Turkle and Spike Jonze,” *English Studies in Canada* 42, no. 1 (2016): 159-160. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2016.0004>.

⁵⁴⁶ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 144.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 142

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

for boyfriend things. For when they feel a crisis. I need to get back to them...” and so, this young student would often miss class to rush to the bathroom to respond to her friends’ “emergencies”.⁵⁴⁹ If this type of obligation were to become commonplace, then use of phones could seriously damage people’s ability to invest in their work and relationships. Often the phone is either a distraction because someone is on it working or talking to someone who is not present,⁵⁵⁰ or the phone itself is made part of the conversation – as if to suggest that we are losing the ability to have quiet time with our friends, or come up with conversation on our own without the help of videos or memes on our phones.⁵⁵¹ Turkle rightly mourns that people seem to be losing their ability to reflect or enjoy pauses in conversation without turning to phones to fill the void. In escaping to phones, it becomes easier to neglect those who are physically present and people do not grow in their ability to ponder points of conversation, learn to read body language, or grow in empathy.⁵⁵² One teacher expressed deep concern that her students were lacking the ability to pay attention and engage in a conversation.⁵⁵³ She said:

I’m not convinced they are interested in each other. It is as though they all have some signs of being on an Asperger’s spectrum. But that’s impossible. We are talking about a schoolwide problem.⁵⁵⁴

Turkle does not believe this problem with conversation is just an issue for young students; adults too are struggling to have conversations in-person without the mediation of a phone.⁵⁵⁵ The problem has become so pervasive that simply giving all of one’s attention to another person without checking one’s phone or messaging other people while in the company of a friend is not something to be taken for granted.⁵⁵⁶ Such quality time used to

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 151.

This is what Michael Daher called “mechanized empathy” where technology attempts to meet and attend to certain human needs for comfort or companionship through digital technology and robotics. Michael Daher, “Sherry Turkle on Thoreau,” *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* no. 297 (2017): 3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44651672>.

⁵⁵³ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 162.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 140-141.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 156.

be a basic component of any friendship. These issues are not just about technology or human communication – they are about friendship and true human intimacy of the soul. Indeed, if people forget how to communicate in this emerging age of modern technology, meaningful friendships are in danger.

One example of the complexity of the positives and negatives of modern technology, concerning friendships, comes from the experiences of international students. A study was conducted in Auckland, New Zealand, aimed at discovering the ramifications of the internet and social media on international students.⁵⁵⁷ They discovered that students found their devices and the internet simultaneously a help and a hindrance to their daily lives as international students. The use of modern technology allowed students to remain connected to their loved ones back home as well as serving as a springboard for making new friends in Auckland.⁵⁵⁸ Many students felt that having the ability to easily call home and connect with friends and family was a factor in their decision to study so far away. One student said, “If we didn’t have social media and all I had was the telephone and writing letters, I don’t think I would live away from them, to be honest, and so it’s a huge, huge factor. (P12, Female, Indian).”⁵⁵⁹ However, at the same time there were concerns about the negative effects on international students as to how they might connect with people in their new location,⁵⁶⁰ such as issues with the students integrating into their new community, either because they no longer had free time to spare to meet new people, or the comfort of friends back home could dissuade them from the often difficult task of making new friends in a new place. It could also be that international students used social media to connect only with other international students rather than mingle with local (non-international) students. These students also had much to say on the impact of social media regarding socialization.⁵⁶¹ For instance, one student mentioned how social media created space to get to know someone based on their online profile before actually getting to know someone in

⁵⁵⁷ Jay M Marlowe, Allen Bartley, and Francis Collins, “Digital belongings: The intersections of social cohesion, connectivity and digital media,” *Ethnicities* 17 no.1 (2017): 86. DOI: 10.1177/1468796816654174

⁵⁵⁸ Marlowe, “Digital belongings,” 87-88.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

person, which alters how someone might meet and befriend people.⁵⁶² Students also noted that if someone did not have social media, this could jeopardise their chances of socialising and making new friends. It would seem that the internet has become so pervasive that being without a social media presence could make someone a social pariah.⁵⁶³ In this study the experiences of international students were varied, not because the internet is either good or bad but because it is a tool. The positive and negative impacts the internet had on students' relationships were directly related to the way in which the Internet was utilised. If, for example, a student needed the ability to call home in order to feel confident to make the move, but they limited their contact home to prioritise making new friends in their new location and they also used social media to help them join new clubs and make new friends, then the internet could be a positive aid for that international student. If, however, a student used the internet as an excuse not to mingle with new people, and was always online connecting back home, and only connected with other international students (as opposed to meeting non-international students who could better share culture and language skills via in-person friendship), then this student would have used the internet in a way that negatively impacted their study abroad and would be a poor use of the internet to connect them in meaningful friendships.

5.3.1.1 *Isolation*

The first major issue to consider with phones is their isolating nature. One of the strange dichotomies of the phone, and especially internet accessibility via the phone, is how people can be physically isolated but digitally connected.⁵⁶⁴ This is why the previous conversation about the importance of physical things, the human body, as well as the reality of non-physical experiences, is so important. The questions regarding whether people can truly connect over a phone, or if such connection does more harm than good, will likely need years of research before any firm conclusions can be made. However, in the meantime, it is possible to evaluate this based on the relevant information presently

⁵⁶² Ibid., 94.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁶⁴ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 155.

available in light of previously argued philosophical and theological beliefs. I argue that through various elements of interactions one has while alone in a room with a phone, one can determine if that encounter was positive or negative. The needs of the person also contribute to the positive or negative nature of the interaction over the phone. In the classical understanding of virtue friendship, friends were to help one another in the pursuit and enjoyment of virtue.⁵⁶⁵ For this to be achieved there must be the prerequisite that those involved in a virtuous friendship must themselves be lovers and possessors of virtue, at least to some extent. One does not become such a person overnight nor by merely desiring to be so. To be a person of virtue one must, within one's own capacity, invest in one's own betterment. Often this requires productive solitary time, often engaging in activities like reading, journaling, "daydreaming," contemplation, or prayer.⁵⁶⁶ This is not to say that only intellectual or highly educated people can truly be friends – the point is not about knowledge, it is about motives, desires, and values. How can someone become this sort of person if they are constantly being distracted by their phones and devices? Turkle's insights are not unique: Aquinas and Bonhoeffer, just to name a few, are some of the thinkers across history who highlighted the necessity and importance of purposeful time alone for quiet and contemplation, both for themselves and for their relationships. These moments of quiet can help in the process of discerning one's goals and values; and will in turn enable them to be better fit for friendship as they will know both what they can offer or what they are looking for. However, one can sit alone in a room and still be connected with the world through a phone or computer, so what does "being alone" mean in a digitally connected world? For many, the internet provides a new space for self-reflection.⁵⁶⁷ But any attempt at self-reflection using social media or online blogs, which are open for others to see, is not truly isolated self-reflection. Turkle would say it is a mirage: people feel they are alone, but it is only a ruse. The presence of an audience changes the dynamic of honest self-reflective thought.⁵⁶⁸ Knowing one might be observed changes the dynamic from reflection

⁵⁶⁵ See chapter 3.

⁵⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*.

Rhodes, *The Wired Soul*, 176-177.

Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 59-78.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-100.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

to performance. Of course, not all self-reflection needs to happen alone. Indeed, many people find talking in the company of a therapist or trusted friends to be very therapeutic for understanding their own thoughts.⁵⁶⁹ However, is online communication the best place for verbal processing? Sadly, what happens when two people talk in person and learn to listen and reflect, is very different from most communication on social media sites where there is hardly any listening and much more “shouting”.⁵⁷⁰ Turkle bemoans the days when conversations in therapy sessions allowed for true self-reflection and how many people instead now turn to apps that offer a promise of personal growth but instead reduce people to numbers and data points. Not to be overly reactionary, Turkle does not say such apps are wholly unhelpful, but strongly urges others to remember that these apps lack the piece that teaches users how to interpret data about themselves and how to think about who they are, who they want to be, and what changes one would need to make to become better.⁵⁷¹

5.3.1.2 *Being Present*

Turning from the question of being alone, while being bombarded with input from devices, the other side to consider are times when people are present; to understand what it means to be present and to ponder whether people can manage to be present even when not meeting face-to-face. Returning to Turkle, it was interesting to hear from many of the students she interviewed, who shared sentiments of feeling the awareness that they were missing something they were never taught – namely how to communicate face-to-face effectively.⁵⁷² This is an insightful observation; it asks the question, is all the technological progress worth the cost of forgetting or losing parts of what it means to be human? What can be done to protect these aspects of human flourishing as humanity moves further into this burgeoning digital age?

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 96.

Vallor, “Flourishing on Facebook,” 193.

⁵⁷⁰ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 98.

Vallor, “Flourishing on Facebook,” 190.

⁵⁷¹ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 97-98.

⁵⁷² Turkle, *Alone Together*, 265.

5.3.1.2.1 The Importance of Touch

As noted previously, theologically speaking, human beings are both souls and bodies and these cannot be divided without losing what it means to be human. The physical body cannot be ignored; there are times when humans need to be touched, seen, or engaged in a physical environment. If, in these times, someone attempted to meet those needs with digital alternatives, there is the possibility the result could leave one feeling diminished, isolated and alone. In her book, which addresses the importance of touch as ministry, Lore Ferguson Wilbert discusses how humans are not merely spiritual beings who inhabit bodies, as if the human body is an optional extra.⁵⁷³ Rather, the human body is essential to being human and the body has physical needs as well as spiritual needs. One of those needs is to be touched in appropriate and healthy ways.⁵⁷⁴ In a hyper-sexualised society, it is easy to see how a fear of abusive touch could discourage any touch at all; but to neglect the need for touch could also be abuse.⁵⁷⁵ A study was conducted to understand the impact of touch on developing children in orphanages. The children who were deprived of physical touch (not food or other needs) did not develop normally and some even died.⁵⁷⁶ Humans were not meant to live their lives plugged into a computer or only having physically disengaged experiences. Furthermore, since physical touch is not inherently sexual, just as intimacy is not solely for romantic love, so friendship ought to be one of the outlets for meeting people's need for affection both emotionally and physically. Humans cannot be dissociated from their bodies, and to pretend that the phone is an adequate replacement for meeting face-to-face is to misunderstand what it means to be human.

⁵⁷³ Lore Ferguson Wilbert, *Handle with Care: How Jesus Redeems the Power of Touch in Life and Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers: 2020).

⁵⁷⁴ In her second chapter Wilbert notes the various categories of touch as well as giving or receiving proper touch and sinful feeling or taking of improper touch for each category. Wilbert, *Handle with Care*, 42-48.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-48.

⁵⁷⁶ Ashley Montagu, *Touching the Human Significance of the Skin* (New York: Harper & Row: 1987). <https://archive.org/details/touchingthehuman000913mbp/mode/2up>

5.3.1.2.2 The Snack Analogy

Avom and Malah craft a very helpful analogy which I refer to as the “snack” analogy.⁵⁷⁷ The argument is that, as a good snack which helps quell hunger between proper meals, a text message, voice note, email etc. can help maintain friendships between in-person meetings, especially when living far away. But, also like a snack, if it is treated as a full meal this will eventually lead to bad health. Just as one cannot exist on crisps and candy bars, or even apples and peanut butter, (not even a healthy snack ought to be a replacement for proper meals), people may find themselves disillusioned if they expected a few text messages, an update on social media, or even a phone call, to be sufficient to maintain a healthy friendship. The further danger is that if friendship begins to be perceived in the manner of social snacking, this could lead people to forget the depth of meaningful human interaction offered in friendship if it is routinely belittled; just as thinking a bag of crisps was a meal could harm one’s belief that meals are truly satisfying. There are plenty of dystopian novels and films, from *Ready Player One*⁵⁷⁸ to *Wally*,⁵⁷⁹ which already promote this idea played out in potential futures and, in all these experimental conceptualisations of the future, end up pulling people back to the real world. Even when the online world first lured people into their isolated technology pods, eventually their bodies cried out for human connection, and they learned that choices made online rarely stayed online. It is impossible to separate the human from the body and therefore, not advisable to attempt to separate friendships from the humans who create them. This idea raises the question of whether there are any kinds of online interactions with friends which come close to being truly satisfying, and if so, what might such friendship interactions look like?

5.3.1.2.3 Intentional Presence

As mentioned previously, intent matters. While not a full meal, snacks can still provide nourishment, and so it is also possible, to be present emotionally if not physically. In all intimate relationships, time and dedication are required if they are to flourish. Removing

⁵⁷⁷ Avom, “Social Media and Happiness Nexus in the Millennial Generation,” 200.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ready Player One*, directed by Steven Spielberg (March 28th 2018; UK: Warner Bros.).

⁵⁷⁹ *Wally*, directed by Andrew Stanton (18 July 2008; UK: Walt Disney Pictures).

the physical element means that investing in friendship, which can be difficult in the best circumstances, becomes more challenging, but not impossible. To be present requires more than simply showing up in a physical capacity. It is possible to be physically present and still feel alone or to cause another to feel ignored and isolated. Showing attention, interest, and focus, towards another person, can make all the difference in enabling them to feel valued.⁵⁸⁰ Making another person feel seen, and cultivating spaces for vulnerability, are both key aspects to friendship which necessitate being present for the other person. This might mean not looking at one's phone when meeting with a friend face-to-face, or not scrolling through social media while talking to a friend on the phone. Perhaps it would be better to define presence as focused attention. In this way, presence goes beyond being physically available, to being emotionally (regardless of whether one is physically present or not) focused on the needs, feelings, desires etc., of a friend. In this capacity, a phone could become either a facilitating device or a deterrent for friendship. This also raises a question of priority.⁵⁸¹ Should the friend or person physically present be prioritised over a friend on the phone? For some people, the level of relationship creates a hierarchy: the friend on the phone could be prioritised over the acquaintance face-to-face. For others, physical presence always takes priority, while some might decide based on whoever had the greater need, be they a friend, stranger, or acquaintance. Discerning a value structure in this way might encourage better communication through articulating and directing one's focus in a clear and meaningful way towards those around them.

5.3.1.3 Summary

While it has already been established that a friendship does not always need face-to-face interactions, it has been understood that friends should desire to see each other face-to-face, not just facetime-to-facetime. Technology certainly allows for a greater sense of connection while apart, but this does not take away the desire for or need of having people

⁵⁸⁰ This was even applied to the workplace in: Tim M. Goetz and Stephan A. Boehm. "Am I Outdated? The Role of Strengths Use Support and Friendship Opportunities for Coping with Technological Insecurity," *Computers in Human Behavior* 107 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106265>.

⁵⁸¹ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 144.
Rhodes, *The Wired Soul*, 150.

who are physically present. There is also the issue of being around people but being distracted and so giving another divided attention. This may not even be consciously done and sometimes it can be due to not knowing how to prioritize people when dealing with those both face-to-face and online simultaneously. Traditionally there seemed to be more built-in boundaries; when one was alone they could truly be alone to contemplate, pray, or enjoy other solitary activities, and when meeting face-to-face with someone else they were not holding other conversations with those not present. Today these natural barriers are disappearing as one can have their alone time interrupted by technology, and those who are in person can be ignored for others online. This does not mean that humans now have new abilities to multi-task or no longer need time alone – rather it means if we want to have healthy relationships we must do the hard work to reinstate boundaries which will help us live more humanely in this digital age.

5.3.2 Social Media and Friendship

In spite of its name, social media can be very un-social and, when it does manage to be social, it could hardly be considered the same as friendship. Facebook, for example, uses often-misleading terminology calling online connections (often called followers on other platforms) “friends”. Given that Facebook started with the intention of connecting university alumni, the word friend may have previously been more appropriate.⁵⁸² The term friend can be used to create a sense of closeness, belonging, or *friendliness*, when no actual relationship exists; in this sense it is understandable that social media sites would use this term to make people feel more included. That said, “follower” is a far more accurate term for what happens on social media sites. More often than not, social media facilitates more of an open journal sharing platform than an interactive place of mutual sharing. There is also the issue of defining what counts as social media. Unfortunately, the definitions are vague and lack any strictly defining features. For example, the messaging app WhatsApp is considered by some to be social media because of a the “status update” feature which

⁵⁸² Mary Bellis, “The History of Facebook and How It Was Invented: How Mark Zuckerberg Launched the World's Most Popular Social Media Network,” *www.thoughtco.com* Last modified on February 06, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/who-invented-facebook-1991791>

allows people the option of posting a “story” or a picture or quote for others to see. WhatsApp however allows users to send and receive text messages, and phone and video calls without using one’s phone service. Then there are apps like YouTube and TikTok which are less about interacting with others on a personal level and more about entertainment and consuming media (though all users can post). It is not even straight forward to determine what social media is, let alone understanding how these various applications help or hinder making and keeping friendships. There are also issues about the effects that social media can have on the human capacity to engage in meaningful ways with others, which is a vital part of friendship. The following sections will seek to better understand user interactions via social media and subsequent effects of social media in relation to friendship.

5.3.2.1 *One-to-One vs. One-to-None*

The distinction between what is considered public or private, in the online world, often becomes blurred. The trouble with social media is how it can dehumanize people on both sides of the screen, creating an environment where people feel it is acceptable to publicly complain about friends and family, leave passive-aggressive posts,⁵⁸³ and post anonymous annoyances against another.⁵⁸⁴ Even positive things like praising loved ones can be taken to an excessive level online.⁵⁸⁵ Of course, there are different types of online friendships. There are those which started in the physical world and online communication is added. Then there are friendships which begin online and either continue online or progress into the physical world. In terms of hybrid friendships, which exist in a combination of off and online engagement, some would argue that, since friendships are difficult enough to cultivate and maintain in real life, the use of the internet is more of a hindrance than a help. Shannon Vallor, for example, takes a more negative view of friendships online, noting that “new social media tend to facilitate many-to-one, or many-to-many kinds of mirroring

⁵⁸³ Avom, “Social Media and Happiness Nexus in the Millennial Generation,” 198-199.

⁵⁸⁴ Miller, “Making social media matter,” 131.

⁵⁸⁵ For example, infatuated teenagers public displays of affection can be uncomfortable enough in public; online, lovesick young people will often post their adoration all over their social media forcing those who don’t want to be bombarded with sappy posts to unfollow their friends for a time. *Ibid.*, 112.

rather than a one-to-one mirroring of integral selves; for the average person.”⁵⁸⁶ This idea of mirroring is the need to see oneself reflected back through friendships; I address this more fully in the next section. Furthermore, she reminds her reader that even if what is posted on social media is of moral value, it is not a conversation for moral improvement as much as “shots into the moral darkness”.⁵⁸⁷ For Vallor, social media then can become a place where people can be fooled into thinking they are building relationships, engaging in moral discussions, or enjoying mutual sharing, when in reality none of those things are happening at a personal level. As a result, they cannot be places for facilitating friendship as much as they are platforms for “shouting” into the void.

One of the most interesting situations facilitated by the online world are completely online friendships. This might be an Instagram connection who liked a “story” and sent a message, a friend from school who was never spoken to but was added online as “a friend”, or online game rooms where people chat and befriend other players. In all these situations if further one-to-one conversations took place, perhaps adding phone or video calls, certainly some form of friendship could blossom. Take for example a young girl named Hannah whom Shery Turkle interviewed. Hannah developed a crush on a boy, through a video game, who said his name was Ian. They became close and she got to experience what having a boyfriend might be like. They only communicated online which in some ways provided a sense of protection (it was not fully “real”) but there was also the worry that, as Hannah herself put it, “the person I love most in the world could simply *not show up* on any given day.” To this Turkle remarked: “Ian boils down to a probably made-up first name and a history of warm conversations.”⁵⁸⁸ So what might it mean to have online friendship, and at what point can one say with confidence they know their online friend? To what extent can someone really know another person without ever meeting face-to-face? Furthermore, how might humanity escape the “social dissonance” of being physically alone but digitally connected, trying to be authentic and seeking intimacy, all the while hiding behind profiles and avatars? Answering questions such as these is difficult because people are all different; some people are more trusting than others, some are more open while others are more

⁵⁸⁶ Vallor, “Flourishing on Facebook,” 195.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁸⁸ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 249.

closed off, some wear their heart on their sleeve, and others are private. All of this means there are no definitive answers. Nonetheless, having some standard of measure would be useful. Johnny Søraker provides just such a tool in asking, “what is prudent?.”⁵⁸⁹ His idea is simple: ask the question of whether it is prudent before posting, friending, responding, etc., while online. Each situation is unique and so must be responded to individually. Pausing to consider how wise or beneficial an online action might be, is one quick but meaningful way of guarding one’s online interactions.⁵⁹⁰ This prudential view promotes the notion that there can be principles for guiding people through the moral fog and finding ways to use our technology for helping to build friendships rather than harm them.⁵⁹¹

5.3.2.2 *Friendship, Friendliness, and Empathy*

As mentioned previously, there is a vast difference between acting in a friendly manner towards someone and having an actual friendship. In both cases, one of the ways to develop the ability to be friendly and have deep and personal friendships comes from learning empathy. Empathy and emotional engagement are necessary predecessors for developing and maintaining healthy friendship bonds. An age-old problem of friendship is settling for lesser friendships; ones that are primarily self-centred rather than mutually beneficial and virtuous.⁵⁹² One troubling example of this came from a teacher Turkle interviewed. Students were asked to list three things they desired in a friend:

In the more than sixty responses she received, only three students mentioned trust, caring, kindness, or compassion. Most of the students say they are interested in someone who could make them laugh, who could make them happy.⁵⁹³

It should be concerning if young people are lacking a basic understanding of the ideals of true friendship preferring instead friends who will simply “make them laugh.”⁵⁹⁴ This is troubling because one does not need a friend in order to laugh, as one’s phone can supply

⁵⁸⁹ Johnny Hartz Søraker, “How shall I compare thee?,” *Ethics Inf Technol*, May 27 (2012), 215-216. DOI 10.1007/s10676-012-9294-x

⁵⁹⁰ Søraker. “How shall I compare thee?,” 215-16.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Yang, “Young People’s Friendship and Love Relationships and Technology.”

⁵⁹³ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 163.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

funny videos, memes, and entertainment. By this measure, one's phone could suffice as a friend, no longer making human friendships necessary for entertainment. While it is not wrong for children, or anyone, to desire friendship where merriment and laughter abound, to make pleasure the defining feature of friendship would be to miss out on deeper friendships and all they have to offer. Furthermore, enjoying jokes, connecting over online posts, or sharing a smile are not so much marks of friendship as they are signs of friendliness. Certainly, a friendship should be friendly, but being friendly does not necessitate friendship. Furthermore, returning to the question of empathy as necessary for both friendliness and friendship, in the same section of *Reclaiming Conversation*, where Turkle interviewed teachers about children's development, there was concern from many teachers about their students' abilities to understand emotions in other people. Those who had been teaching for a decade or more noticed marked changes in their students' abilities to empathise.⁵⁹⁵ They were concerned that their students had spent too much time interacting with screens and not enough time reacting to human faces in real time and space (rather than in a recording or on a video), which was hindering their development to read and understand emotions. There was one example of a student who deeply hurt a classmate. It took over an hour of talking with the child for their own emotions to be triggered enough to understand how their behaviour had hurt their classmate. This may not be troubling if it was only happening to a handful of children but, when many children begin to show a lack of empathy, this should be cause for concern. To combat some of these issues people are taking steps to help them attend to those who matter to them, by finding ways to encourage their empathy and capacities for connection with others, and by reducing time on their phones and increasing their interactions with people. For some, even simple changes can be meaningful; like adding office hours for checking their emails, turning off work phones when on holidays, having phone-free meals, or putting their phones on silence when talking to a friend. For others, more radical steps were taken such as leaving social media altogether.⁵⁹⁶ Some people apply the discipline of fasting to their devices,

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 160-166.

⁵⁹⁶ Personally, I was intrigued when at a conference with other PhD students in the summer of 2023 that many of my peers and colleagues when asked for a twitter/Instagram/Facebook connection said they were no longer on social media.

locking them up in a timer box, or going back to “dumb” phones.⁵⁹⁷ There are many ways to challenge these issues, build empathy, and grow the capacity for investing in meaningful friendships. As with friendship in every period of human history, and as with the most meaningful things, dedication over time is needed. There simply are no shortcuts to friendship – no phone or application or VR (virtual reality) will provide a shortcut to friendship.⁵⁹⁸ The challenge is to discern methods of using technology as tools for encouraging the hard work of friendship rather than to use-devices as shortcuts to friendship which will more than likely result in disappointment.

5.3.2.3 Summary

According to the tradition explored in part one friendships were understood to exist on a spectrum, and friendship was not the only type of human relationship outside of family. Indeed, there might be fellow citizens, comrades in war, those who traded or exchanged goods/services, political allies, teachers and pupils, apprentices, masters, etc. Friendship then is meant to highlight a special relationship amid the myriad of other relationships. In the Biblical and Christian accounts, the same theme emerged where one could enjoy varied levels of depth with a variety of associations and where friendship was a more intimate relationship. In this section social media has been shown to be problematic in that it can harm proper emotional development generally as well blur relationship distinctives. Communication becomes less personal and intimacy declines. In pursuit of a theological framework for friendship both of these failings undermine God’s design for human dignity and joy of being truly known both by God and by a few intimate friends.

5.3.3 The Mirror of Friendship

The ability to reflect values, desires, and a sense of self in an authentic capacity has historically been shown to be an important aspect of friendship. In modern academic vernacular this is called “mirroring.” Shannon Vallor, while not the first, is one of the few

⁵⁹⁷ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 17.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

modern researchers to focus on this important subject of mirroring in friendship.⁵⁹⁹

Returning to the biblical examples of friendship, mirroring can be understood similarly to obedience in friendship. In the Biblical examples, friendship was concerned with mutual actions taken towards knowing, reflecting, and acting in manners consistent with truth. In this section, the traditional mirroring idea and that of biblical obedience to do the will of the friend will be further explored before concluding with ways in which digital devices disrupt or redirect this mirroring effect.

5.3.3.1 *The Self Reflected in Another*

Mirroring is meant to be a two-way system, inviting another to be seen and to reciprocally see the one's self reflected back. This means, that as friends share thoughts, emotions, and their daily lives with one another, they can reflect who they are becoming. As authentic conversation occurs and the inner self is revealed the friendship becomes like a sounding platform where new ideas, beliefs, etc., can safely be explored in the presence of a trusted friend.⁶⁰⁰ It is this mirroring which helps people to grow in wisdom, and moral goodness, etc. or in a false friendship, to degrade into folly and immorality.⁶⁰¹ As this type of virtue friendship develops, the two people become increasingly alike. One of Aristotle's most quoted lines on friendship is that friendship is one soul in two bodies.⁶⁰² C.S. Lewis likewise wrote that friendship begins when one says to another "you too?".⁶⁰³ For Lewis, friendship began over a commonality which would draw two people together,⁶⁰⁴ but for Lewis and Aristotle, as friendships progressed, the friends would become more alike in the quality of their souls. This is not to say friends lose all their distinctiveness or cease to be individuals. The similarities are not aimed at the superficial: what one wears, hobbies,

⁵⁹⁹ Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook."

Cocking, "Unreal Friends."

McFall, "Real Character-Friends."

⁶⁰⁰ Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook," 193-195.

⁶⁰¹ Aelred, *The Mirror of Charity*.

⁶⁰² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), Bk. 5, XX.

⁶⁰³ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 96.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 96-100.

careers, etc. (though these might be held in common). The heart of the “oneness” is driven by ethical and moral values. As a virtuous friendship deepens the aims and desires of the friends, their values and morals should become increasingly similar and thus their moral actions will be ever more alike. If a friend were to err from the shared values, their friend, like a mirror, could reveal the blemish to the friend. Saint Aelred in his book, *The Mirror of Charity* noted that whether with God or with fellow monks they should always be striving to mirror the love of God to one another,⁶⁰⁵ with the Holy Spirit acting as a guide to friends united by their Christian faith. Interestingly, Aelred noted that for God, desire and intent was more important than action: someone desiring to be good, and yet failing, was preferred to one who did good yet lacked a desire for friendship with God.⁶⁰⁶ Applied to friendship, the heart of the person and their desires should be considered, and not only their actions. This is where obedience comes into play. As mentioned in chapter 2, obedience is not to be understood as an emotionless servanthood to another’s wishes, but rather as a lived expression of shared will, desires, and emotions. Even if the actions are not followed through perfectly, the desire to enact the wills and wishes of the beloved friend also count towards obedience in this context. However, to know the will or desires of the friend, the friends must first mutually and openly share with one another. This can be done through mirroring their souls, and over time they can come to see that the each has come to know the other well enough to mutually reflect their inner lives back to each other.

5.3.3.2 *The Self Reflected in the Screen*

But what happens when there is another mirror between friends? What happens when, as mentioned in relation to the importance of authenticity, there are screens which create walls (both figuratively and literally) between the friends? This is the question of how a phone or screen impacts the mirroring of friendship. One potential issue might be that the friend begins to mirror their device rather than the friend, with the mirror itself becoming distorted, or they might mirror their own reflection rather than experiencing themselves

⁶⁰⁵ Aelred, *The Mirror of Charity*, 74, III.2.3-4.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, I.34.109, II.17.41-52.

through the other.⁶⁰⁷ Interestingly, looking into a blank screen of a phone or computer, one can see their reflection in a mirror. There are also times when it can feel as if one is talking to their phone rather than to a real person on the other end. These are just some of the reasons why acknowledging the existence of these barriers and striving for authenticity whilst interacting over devices is so important.⁶⁰⁸ Digital devices certainly offer a more convenient way to talk with friends, get updates, and make plans, but pursuing meaningful relationships via the Internet will present certain challenges due to inevitable barriers. This does not mean friends cannot mirror one another over devices, but as with most things online, the barriers make this a more difficult task. Thus, whether offline or online, mirroring is an important aspect of friendship and understanding how the internet impacts friendship mirroring will be important for any friendship to deepen.

5.3.3.3 Summary

This section looks into yet another aspect of the moral component of friendship and how screens could prove a barrier in the endeavour of “mirroring” both self and friend. This raises questions about how these barriers might be lessened or avoided so to not lose this important part of friendship. While meeting in person is clearly one way of removing the barrier of the screen this might not always be possible or preferable. Thus, perhaps a better question is how might depth and authenticity be encouraged in friendship mediated by technology so that the barriers are limited. One way to do this is in going back to the purpose of mirroring in friendship – how it is meant to be a means of mutual moral growth and accountability to certain standards of virtue or holiness. To engage in conversations which touches on these points could hopefully re-centre the friendship on such growth and depth. This is not to say that all friendship conversations need to look like theological or philosophical discourse but rather that friendships with any meaningful sense of intimacy and moral grounding will be able to openly talk about life choices, feelings about various aspects of life, and allow the friends to encourage, listen, and even rebuke one another.

⁶⁰⁷ Vallor, “Flourishing on Facebook,” 197.

⁶⁰⁸ Petricini, *Friendship in the Digital Age*, 23.

Bülow, “On Friendship Between Online Equals.”

5.4 Conclusion

Social media has made ordinary (though often challenging) human experiences more confusing as it presents new hinderances for personal exploration as well as for individuals wanting to create a safe place for intimacy to flourish. People often struggle to reflect without being interrupted by their devices, and are increasingly lonely, whilst fearing intimacy; Sherry Turkle summarised these dilemmas saying:

Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities. And as it turns out, we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We'd rather text than talk.⁶⁰⁹

In many ways, texting and social media have evolved to facilitate new places for friendships to grow.⁶¹⁰ Texting, no longer being limited to quick communication, often enabling deep and intimate one-on-one conversations, provides the possibility for true intimacy and friendship even over digital devices.⁶¹¹ Conversely, having the ability to engage in multiple one-on-one text conversations at the same time increases the likelihood of hindering one's ability to focus on any one individual.

In Part Three, I will review responses from those I interviewed on the topic of making friends online. There is growing research that acknowledges people can use the internet as a space to build friendships; however, this can prove more challenging online.⁶¹²

We have explored many of the online issues and problems facing friendships today related to the emergence of technology and online media. To chart a path which will enable the use of technology to help rather than hinder friendship necessitates change, even in

⁶⁰⁹ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*, 1.

⁶¹⁰ Eileen Green and Carrie Singleton, "Mobile Connections: An Exploration of the Place of Mobile Phones in Friendship Relations," *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 57, no. 1 (2009): 135.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.01807.x>

Avom, "Social Media and Happiness Nexus in the Millennial Generation," 192-196.

Søraker, "How Shall I Compare Thee?," 211-212.

⁶¹¹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 268.

⁶¹² Dawn Bikowski, "Internet Relationships: Building Learning Communities through Friendship," *Journal of Interactive Online Learning* 6, no. 2 (2007): 137-138.

Briggle, "Real Friends."

Bülow, "On Friendship Between Online Equals."

how people think about their devices. Every tool has a purpose and, to most effectively use a tool, one must first learn how to use it for its intended purpose(s). One use of the internet is as a tool for communication. If one has a goal of cultivating meaningful friendships, they must ensure that they are properly employing their devices towards that end. Friendships are most fulfilling when both intimacy and authenticity are present. For most people pursuing meaningful friendships, this will mean using online tools (phones/computers) to communicate when meeting in person is not possible, whilst making the effort to meet in-person when it does become possible. Furthermore, when connecting online, video chats should be preferred to text messages, as video provides the ability to use more of the senses, such as reading body language and hearing the tone of voice, etc., which all help facilitate intimacy and authenticity. Taking steps to avoid feeling pressured into instantly replying to notifications can instil a greater sense of freedom and control over digital devices. Taking control in such ways can also cultivate the freedom to focus on current tasks or in-person conversations resulting in greater respect for both oneself and others. Digital devices can be addictive, but they do not need to control people's lives. Some students Turkle interviewed mentioned how they would remind each other to put their phones away when hanging out.⁶¹³ As these students discovered, accountability in making difficult changes could be extremely beneficial when attempting to swim against the tide.

Having addressed the current contexts both of the wider cultural changes and specific technological changes which have affected friendship, the final part of this thesis will progress from theories and practices of friendship towards addressing these complex issues and questions. This will be accomplished by exploring responses from empirical research, gathered in response to the data gathered in this and the preceding chapters, before concluding by considering the nuanced ways in which friendship today has diverged or remained faithful to the tradition for the purpose of regaining a theology of friendship that will thrive in the digital age.

⁶¹³ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 146.

Part Three

Empirical Research: From Practice to Theory

6. Chapter Six: What People Want from Friendship

This last part is the reverse of part 2, to highlight the cyclical nature of research especially within a reflective model where assumptions are considered, tested, re-examined, modified and then considered again.⁶¹⁴ In the last two chapters the current research regarding changes made to friendship was shown with particular regard for how friendship practices have changed with some of the relevant theories for why such changes have and are still taking place, as well as some of the questions raised relating to both theory and practice. Chapter 6 will address in full the empirical research I have undertaken. The purpose of this empirical research was to better understand and unpack questions (which arose out of the current research) relating to friendship in the present with the aim of filling in in research gaps concerning both theory and practice of friendship. Chapter 7 will be the concluding chapter which will be used to bring together information and data collected from the literature and empirical data to provide some theories of why certain friendship practices occur, how some might be changed for the better, what questions should be undertaken to push the research further, and importantly how a theology of friendship can restore and revive friendship in the modern world.

6.1 Introduction

Rather than only having a philosophical approach this chapter provides empirical evidence. One of the many benefits of empirical research is the “boots on the ground” aspect this data provides. There is an opportunity to hear from real people their own thoughts and experiences regarding friendship. The aim is that these experiences (though not representative of the whole of society) can provide insights which will add further

⁶¹⁴ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2014), 57-58.

perspective to the changing landscape of friendship as well as the role theology can play in providing insights and frameworks for thriving friendships in the modern world.

This chapter consists of two main sections, the first deals with my research methodology and methods where I will relate the reasons for the type of empirical research, I felt best suited this thesis. In this section any assumptions, qualifications, or questions relating to findings will also be addressed before moving on to the transcripts and findings themselves. This section will conclude with the questions I asked in my interviews, including the reasoning behind each question.

The second section is where I highlight relevant and interesting findings from the interviews. These will include anonymised quotations as well as information from the programme NVivo.

6.2 Methodology and Methods

Firstly, this thesis did not begin with a commitment to empirical research though it was noted that empirical research would be useful towards answering my original thesis question which concerns experiences of friendship within a theological framework.⁶¹⁵ When the topic of technology came to feature more prominently in the main thesis question, the need for empirical research became clear, as without it what relevant original research I could bring forth in this dissertation would have been significantly reduced. It also became increasingly clear that collecting my own fresh data would be necessary in a field which is only at the cusp of being researched. For these reasons, I am hopeful that the research I have undertaken, though only a small amount compared with what is needed, will be a means to encourage more and larger scale research to be done in these areas of digital ethics and human relationships.

The methodology undergirding this study relates to choosing methods which would best suit the purpose of friendship. As friendship is often relayed through stories and experiences, more casual and personal approaches were preferred, which pointed to

⁶¹⁵ Easten Law, "Theology, Qualitative Research, and World Christianity," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, eds. Knut Tveitereid and Pete Ward (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated 2022), 279.

interpretivism as it would allow for subjective views of the participants to be collected and analysed.⁶¹⁶ For similar reasons qualitative rather than quantitative methods seemed most appropriate, as friendship is a personal subject rather than impersonal and factual. This topic is likewise personal to myself as the researcher. For this reason, I have tried to be as open about any personal biases which I may have and have opted for a transparent approach in doing this empirical research.⁶¹⁷ Since impartiality would be impossible in this study, the hope was that by acknowledging any personal biases any resulting influences on the study could be taken into account.

This research is a combination of deductive and inductive research, though it leans more on the deductive side.⁶¹⁸ The reason for this is that I drew together my questions relative to the research from the previous chapters and therefore they inherently contain assumptions. In many ways the questions serve to illuminate where my assumptions were either correct or incorrect.⁶¹⁹ The ways in which this research is inductive is that in using semi-structured interviews there was space for the participants to have more open and free discussion which could lead to findings not predicated by any assumed questions.⁶²⁰ Interviews were preferred over surveys because these allowed for more detailed and personal responses. The other reason for a deductive approach was that I was interested in depth rather than breadth and felt interviews would best fit gaps in the research. Surveys also would have provided numerical data from which to draw out information, while

⁶¹⁶ Glynis M. Breakwell, "Choosing a Research Design," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, eds. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 93.

Gerard Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods: An Entry to Social Science Research* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2010) 42, 118. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132105961>

⁶¹⁷ Ignacio Ferrero and Javier Pinto, "Research Ethics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, eds. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 28.

⁶¹⁸ Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 39.

Karen Glaser, *Inductive or Deductive?: The Impact of Method of Instruction on the Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence in EFL* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 58-60. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

⁶¹⁹ Kirsten Donskov Felter, "Fieldwork and the Person of the Theologian," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, eds. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2022), 380. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶²⁰ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (Norwich: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2016), 70-71.

interviews would provide me with written information which could later be quantified, at least to some degree.⁶²¹ There will, therefore, be some charts created with the NVivo software, but these are not to be seen as traditional quantitative research, rather they are representation of the qualitative data in charts which adds a visual means of understanding the data. One downside to this approach, however, was that the interview process meant I only had time for about a dozen interviews while surveys could have allowed for a greater number of responses. This negative side was outweighed by the depth allowed for and the opportunity for follow up questions.⁶²² Furthermore, while wider surveys would be useful, these would be better served as a follow-up to my research and would best be done at a much larger scale than this thesis could accommodate.

6.2.1 Project Summary

The purpose of this project was to collect information through interviews which were aimed towards answering questions that came from the current research, but which have yet to be answered, as well as to provide data that I hoped would inform the philosophical and theological claims and questions raised in the literature portion of my dissertation with the hopes of providing some answers and next steps for further research. As the larger aim of the dissertation is to rediscover a theological or philosophical framework for friendship in light of changes in the modern world, notably the rise and impact of digital technologies and the hyper-sexualisation of Western culture, the questions asked focus heavily on these two main areas. In analysing both historic and modern literature and research I crafted questions which I propose will be useful for shedding light on any changes pertaining to

⁶²¹ Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund, eds. "Statistical Approaches," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 45-46.

⁶²² "Semi-structured interviews use guides so that information from different interviews is directly comparable. Interview guides usually have standard introductions and conclusions, but allow flexibility to vary the order of intervening questions to provide a natural flow...Additionally, they look for opportunities to follow-up with open-ended probe questions ... so that the interviewer can flexibly get a better understanding of the respondents' views. The result is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data." Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 120-121.

friendship at both fundamental and experiential levels, i.e. the definitions and desires for friendships as well as lived experiences. The goal then was to conduct interviews in a way that allowed participants to more freely share their thoughts in response to my questions. The over-all purpose was to understand some patterns of friendship that may be salient to people in some English-speaking countries like the US and the UK. The aim was never to understand friendship for every culture around the world, nor even the whole of Western culture or in the UK. Such research on topics like friendship, uses of technology, experiences of intimacy, and the role of sexualisation cannot be understood through numbers or non-relative values; therefore, this study aimed instead to provide a sampling of responses which could relate to trends which would be pertinent to many western, English-speaking people.⁶²³

6.2.1.1 Interview Set Up

The interviews were set up to ask participants to answer eight main questions, and as many of the follow-up questions as was relevant to each participant. As these were semi-structured interviews, some questions were improvised if a participant mentioned something that needed clarification or brought up new information which was not previously considered. As the purpose for these interviews was to inform current debates and collect new data, the semi-structured interview seemed the most suitable choice.⁶²⁴

Twelve interviews were planned as that was the maximum number manageable for allowing for the greatest opportunity for comparison within the allotted timeframe. While all twelve interviews were conducted only eleven could be used as one interview's audio transcripts were corrupted and unsalvageable. Having no notes, because of the assumed transcript, scrapping that interview was decided to be better than trying to go off unverifiable memory as it would be conjecture at best.

Participants had the option of doing in person (when possible) or online interviews. Only one was online (via Zoom) and the other ten interviews took place in person, as the

⁶²³ Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 74, 89.
Nichols, "Tips for a Successful Research Career," 683.

⁶²⁴ Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 120-121.
Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 100.

majority chose to meet face-to-face at a location that was comfortable for the participant. These interviews were recorded either with audio (in person) or video (online) recording. All the data has been anonymised, and per university regulation all non-anonymised data will be deleted after 6 months, unless it is saved for future research purposes.

The interviews were all conducted after receiving permission from the Ethics Committee for the Theology and Religion Department in accordance with university ethical guidelines. All participation was voluntary, and the participants were informed that they would be allowed to rescind any statements or their participation at any time, though none chose to do so. Participants were also informed that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to and could also move on to their next question any time they felt they were done answering any particular question.

6.2.1.2 *Participants*

The majority of the interviews were conducted with participants from either the greater Portland area (Oregon, USA) or the Northeast of England. Two interviews were trial interviews and ended up being used since the final version of the interview schedules did not alter greatly and those interviewed were from the same areas as the other participants. For example, both people in the trial interviews lived in the North-East of England at some point, though one had recently relocated. These two areas were chosen because they were both accessible for in-person interviews in the timeframe needed. The North-East of the UK is where my university was located and where I lived as a student, while the greater Portland metro area of the USA was selected as this is my hometown where I would be travelling for personal holiday time. These presented two locations in English-speaking Western countries which would provide enough shared characteristics to be relevant to my research audience while being different enough to provide a slightly wider pool of participants.⁶²⁵ One of the goals in picking research participants was to be able to compare

⁶²⁵ Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 54.

Jesse Chandler, "Participant Recruitment," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, eds. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 179–201.

across various sections of society and demographics, such as older vs younger generations, males and females, people of faith (particularly Christians) and people outside the Christian faith, and any other comparable aspects.⁶²⁶ I aimed to accumulate participants roughly equal between males and females, and of varying age groups and faith backgrounds.⁶²⁷ Ethnicity was not a primary demographic I sought to balance, since my study focused more on broader Western culture than any specific ethnic backgrounds. However, interestingly there was some ethnic diversity among some of my participants which ended up being interesting for comparison. For example, I ended up with participants whose ethnic backgrounds were from Western and Eastern Europe, South Africa, and East Asia. To verify the diversity of my participants I did ask them to fill out a form that gave them the opportunity to describe their personal characteristics such as gender, ethnic background, faith, sexuality etc., but all these questions were optional and open-ended. While I attempted to interview people who were not friends or acquaintances only three participants were strangers whom I met through non-personal connections, and the rest were known through some personal relationship. I believe it is important to acknowledge this, not necessarily because this influences my views on my participants or their responses, so much as it raises the question of diversity of class and sub-cultures.⁶²⁸ Of the eleven interviews, many of them came from similar socio-economic backgrounds (which is how I was able to connect with them). If further studies were considered, it would be useful to do so with a broader range of society than what was accessible in my timeframe. The shared socio-economical background might have elicited similar responses to what I assumed from my own environment and experience. While I did attempt to avoid too much of similarity by interviewing those whom I could find who were outside my own social setting, however, this was not always possible, and the degree of difference being subjective, I felt it

⁶²⁶ This was a type of “haphazard sampling”. Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 56-58.

⁶²⁷ “The simplest example of a probability sample (appropriately called a simple random sample) assigns everyone an equal probability of selection, as if sample members’ names were written on papers drawn from a hat. More complex designs use a process called stratification (discussed in the section on sample composition) to ensure that the sample will have a specific composition. Other designs can account for multiple stages of selection, such as when clusters of people ... are sampled and then participants are sampled within them...” Chandler, “Participant Recruitment,” 181.

⁶²⁸ Guthrie, *Basic Research Methods*, 126-127.

important to acknowledge the potential conflict of interest that a lack of social diversity might raise.

6.2.1.2.1 Participant Demographics

Below are some charts which illustrate the demographics of the participants by category. The categories consist of gender, age range, religion, location, ethnic backgrounds, occupation, and sexual identity.

Gender	Male	Female
<i>No. Participants</i>	5	6

Age range	18-25	26-29	30-39	50-59	60-69	70+
<i>No. Participants</i>	2	2	4	1	1	1

Religion	Christian	Agnostic
<i>No. Participants</i>	7	4

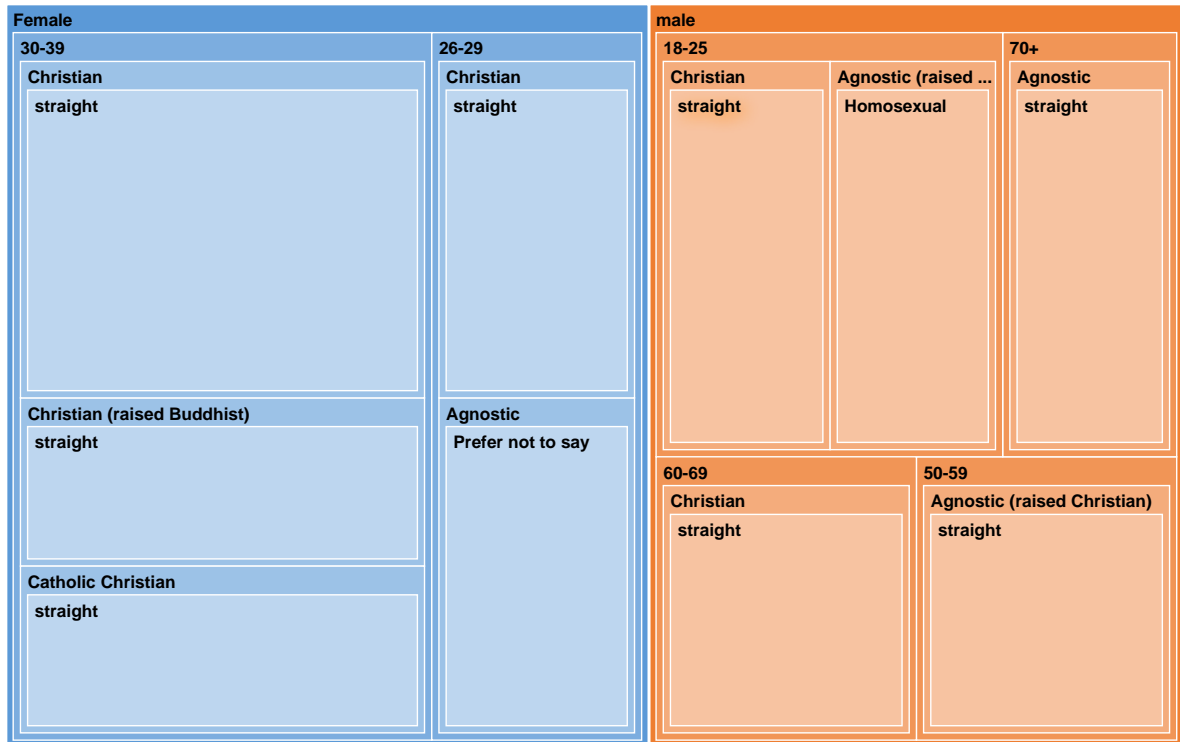
Location	UK (NE)	Portland, OR metro area USA
<i>No. Participants</i>	8	3

Ethnic Background	White (USA and UK)	Asian (Sri-Lankin and Indian/African)	European (Italian and Romanian)
<i>No. Participants</i>	7	2	2

Occupation	Student	Teacher	Labour worker	Medicine	Stay at home mom	Retired	Other
<i>No. Participants</i>	3	2	2	1	1	1	1

Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Prefer not to answer
No. Participants	9	1	1

Figure: Demographics of participants⁶²⁹



6.2.2 Qualifications and Questions relating to findings

6.2.2.1 Qualifications

As previously mentioned, the participants were ones who were accessible to me and may not represent a wider portion of society. Some participants were friends, some acquaintances, and other strangers with whom I connected via shared networks (e.g. university or online social networks). The limited sample size was due to time and capacity restraints, and I hope that my research highlights the need for larger scale studies in the future.

⁶²⁹ This is an example of a chart which is not included as qualitative data but for a visual representation.

The questions asked arose from my own research, as well as the research of others, and is not unbiased as all questions were shaped by my own hunches and assumptions; however, I aimed to make the questions open-ended and chose semi-structured interviews in order to avoid questions that would assume the answer.⁶³⁰

In the interviews I did respond to my participants, partially to create a more conversational style. Influencing my participants was something I sought to avoid by attempting to limit my responses to clarifying remarks, however this was not always possible to maintain the casual feel of the interviews.⁶³¹

The order of the questions was given great consideration, because how they answered each question would pertain to whether sub-questions or follow-up questions were asked as well as how some questions built upon previous questions. While every main question was asked, not every sub-question was asked of every participant because not every question was relevant. Two-part interviews were considered at first, as I thought this structure might be helpful to see if answers would change after thinking about the questions over time.⁶³² Since time constraints did not allow for this, I decided to give the answers to my participants ahead of time to allow them time to consider the questions before the interview.⁶³³ The caveat with this, however, is that I do not know how much time, if any, was given to considering the questions beforehand, so some participants might have given the questions more thought than others, whereas if I had asked the questions only at the interview, they would all have had the same amount of time to consider their response. To try and correct for this, I only sent out the main 8 questions rather than all the potential sub-questions, so people were only able to consider the main questions ahead of

⁶³⁰ Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao, "Semistructured Interview," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, eds. Lewis-Beck, et al. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 1020. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>

⁶³¹ Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, Tim Futing Liao, "Double-Blind Procedure," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, eds. Lewis-Beck, et al. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 289. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>

⁶³² Elisabetta Ruspini, "Longitudinal Research: A World to Explore," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, eds. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁶³³ Sinikka Elliott, Kayonne Christy, and Siqi Xiao, "Qualitative Research Design" in *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research*, eds. Austin Lee Nichols and John Edlund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

time and everyone was presented with any relevant subsequent questions during the interview.⁶³⁴

6.2.2.2 Questions Relating to Findings

I assumed that hyper sexualisation was an influencing factor in modern-day friendships, and so I included questions to see the range of the intersection of romance and friendship. I also assumed that religion influences people's beliefs and practice of friendship and so included questions to this end. Age was also assumed to potentially factor into how people use technology and so I included questions to see if this proved true and if so, how.

6.2.3. Interview Questions

The main 8 questions were as follows:

1. What is a friend?
2. What are the differences between friendships and romantic relationships?
3. What do you want from friendship? What would make an ideal friendship?
4. In what ways would you say our society's understanding of friendship could be better?
5. Does being physically present impact your friendships?
6. What is the role of technology in your friendships?
7. Do you have any friendships with people you have never met face-to-face?
8. Does your faith or understanding of God impact your ideas of friendship?

I will briefly explain what prompted each question as well as any relevant background context before moving on to the responses which will be the focus of the second half of this chapter.

⁶³⁴ Lewis-Beck, Bryman, Futing Liao, "Nonsampling Error," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, eds. Lewis-Beck, et al. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 743. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>

6.2.3.1 Q:1 What is a friend?

The interviews began with this question because it was necessary for discerning how each person defined a friend. Follow-up questions were asked to help people think through how they might try to differentiate between various kinds of friends.⁶³⁵ An open-ended question asking participants to tell a story or provide an example explaining why they considered someone to be a close friend was also asked to allow for different angles to be considered which would highlight different aspects of friendship that were believed by the participant to be important.⁶³⁶ Included with this I also asked about negative friendship experiences, and what people considered an ideal number of friends.

6.2.3.2 Q:2 What are the Differences Between Friendships and Romantic Relationships?

This question was asked to compare and contrast romance and friendship. This question allowed for friendship, romance, intimacy, love and other social and emotional experiences to be better understood and defined. What boundaries, or desired boundaries, were desired or assumed to exist between friendship and sexual or romantic love were also highlighted by this question. Similarities regarding expectations of experiencing love was also compared. Often when researching friendship, the question of male and female friendships is explored.⁶³⁷ I, however, wanted to explore this question from a different angle, seeking rather to understand how intimacy and affection create overlaps between romance and friendship. I also wanted to better understand how these two types of loves are different, beyond the obviously sexual desires – a subject which is often lacking in friendship literature.

⁶³⁵ The full interview sheet with subsections can be seen in Appendix A

⁶³⁶ Harriet Mowat, "Interviews and Observation," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, eds. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), 382-383.

⁶³⁷ See chapter 4 section 4.3.4

6.2.3.3 Q:3 *What Do You Want from Friendship? What Would Make an Ideal Friendship?*

This question was asked as a return to the first question after having explored some of what friendship is and what it is not, while also asking the question in an idealised context rather than a purely experiential context. This question was aimed at the ideals or goals or perfection of friendship. Some people altered their first answer for defining friendship, and other less so or not at all. Given that the ancient philosophers and the church fathers spoke of various degrees of friendship, I wanted to see if people today also had multi-faceted definitions of friendship which might reveal idealised visions of friendship which differ in comparison to experienced friendship.⁶³⁸

6.2.3.4 Q:4 *In What Ways Could Our Society's Understanding of Friendship be Better?*

This question was posed to better gauge people's experience of cultural messaging regarding friendship. There have been many studies which have explored individuals' responses to technology, or how people connect with friends online,⁶³⁹ but few academics have fully addressed the subtle messaging and unwritten rules of friendship within society.⁶⁴⁰ Of course, the responses could differ based on any sub-cultures people might live within, or based on personality differences which would shade how messaging would be received. I also made sure to clarify that they could respond that no changes were needed. Part of this question was to see how much participants assumed or believed that culture and technology sends subliminal messaging to them about friendship through social media, movies, music etc.⁶⁴¹ I also asked about how any education they received about friendship (positive or negative) had impacted their understanding or experiences of friendship either explicitly, implicitly, or both.

⁶³⁸ See chapter 3 for more on ideal friendships from classical philosophers and church fathers.

⁶³⁹ See chapter 5 section 5.2

⁶⁴⁰ Sherry Turkle however does address this in *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*.

⁶⁴¹ See chapter 5.

6.2.3.5 Q:5 Does Being Physically Present Impact Your Friendships?

Physicality was an important point of discussion especially as humans are moving further into the digital age. The reality of the “real” or “physical” and “virtual” have been debated at the philosophical level therefore I wanted to ask this question to understand what ordinary people thought about such debates. When asking this question and the sub-questions, I shared briefly about the current scholarly debates in order to give the participants context to be able to respond more accurately. I tried to be as objective as possible in relaying these questions so not to sway any of the participants answers.

6.2.3.6 Q:6 What is the Role of Technology in Your Friendships?

The focus for this question was on the influences of technology from a variety of angles. I asked this question because the literature seemed to concentrate mainly on well researched assumptions rather than empirical evidence based on personal experiences. Furthermore, in what empirical research I could find, these studies did not address all the areas which my questions sought to cover. Rather than looking at gender differences, ethnic differences, or students’ experiences when going to university, I wanted to learn how people’s relationships with their devices had changed over time, what positive or negative experiences and feelings people had towards the devices themselves, as well as how their devices served them in connecting them to friends. The last three sub-questions for this topic were about whether people lived by or created any sort of ethical framework or guidelines to govern their online behaviours in terms of social interactions, even if not done consciously. They were also asked if they could conceive of any changes that would make their devices and applications better suited for helping them build and maintain friendships. Lastly, they were asked about future technologies which would lead further into digital/virtual living. These questions in particular were the sort of questions needed to carry the current research regarding friendship and digital technology further.

6.2.3.7 Q:7 Do You Have any Friendships with People You Have Never Met Face-to-Face?

This question was asked separately to the previous technology question because it was not so much about digital technology per se as it relates to relationships made via technology. This question was asked to try to understand the depth of friendship which can be achieved online, how online friendships compare and differ from face-to-face friendships, as well as if transitioning the online friendship into the physical world would be desired. There simply is not much research on this subject as online friendships have only been possible within the past few decades and so, as with all research at the intersection of technology and human relationships, there is a great need for more data to be gathered and examined.

6.2.3.8 Q:8 Does Your Faith or Understanding of God Impact Your Ideas of Friendship?

As this thesis is concerned with the intersection of theology and technology regarding friendship, asking a question on the role of faith was also deemed important. The hope was that for participants both with or without a faith, this question would be of interest to them and their responses insightful. Since most of the research on the social impacts of friendship comes from disciplines other than theology, and any research within the Christian faith is often non-academic (insightful and helpful as it may be), therefore much of the research that acknowledges the role of faith is limited which makes this one of the more unique aspects of my research. This question was posed to incorporate how faith might impact personal friendships, both experientially as well as theoretically. Furthermore, this question also delves into if friendship with God might be possible and if such friendship could potentially alter the very meaning or significance of friendship. If so, the very essence of friendship deepens as it takes on a spiritual nature which has ramifications for salvation and one's relationship with God himself.

6.3 Transcriptions and Findings

In this section, the empirical data gathered from the interviews will be addressed. First, each question will be worked through touching on some of the responses, especially noting similarities and differences as well as any intriguing insights or questions which surfaced in the data. The second part will address the data as I examined and sorted it using NVIVO software with some additional use of charts to bring up other forms of sifting through the data resulting in new and pertinent insights.

6.3.1 Interview Responses⁶⁴²

11 men and women were interviewed for this study. They shared their thoughts on what friendship means, what they want from friendship, how they wish friendship could be better, what struggles exist in friendship, and more. Most of the men and women I interviewed, in their own ways, expressed both a deep appreciation for friendship as a meaningful aspect of their life, and yet also longed for more – feeling at times that something was missing, or wishing they had been taught more about friendship, or just wanting deeper friendships and wishing it was easier to make and keep friends today.

The data from these interviews was helpful in providing insights into possible changes, both positive and negative, regarding friendship experiences in the modern Western context. This relates back to the broader purpose of the thesis: to arrive at a modern theology/philosophy of friendship which can be compared and contrasted with historical theologies/philosophies of friendship, culminating in either alterations or appreciation with respect to circumstances which will or already promote human flourishing with regard to friendship.

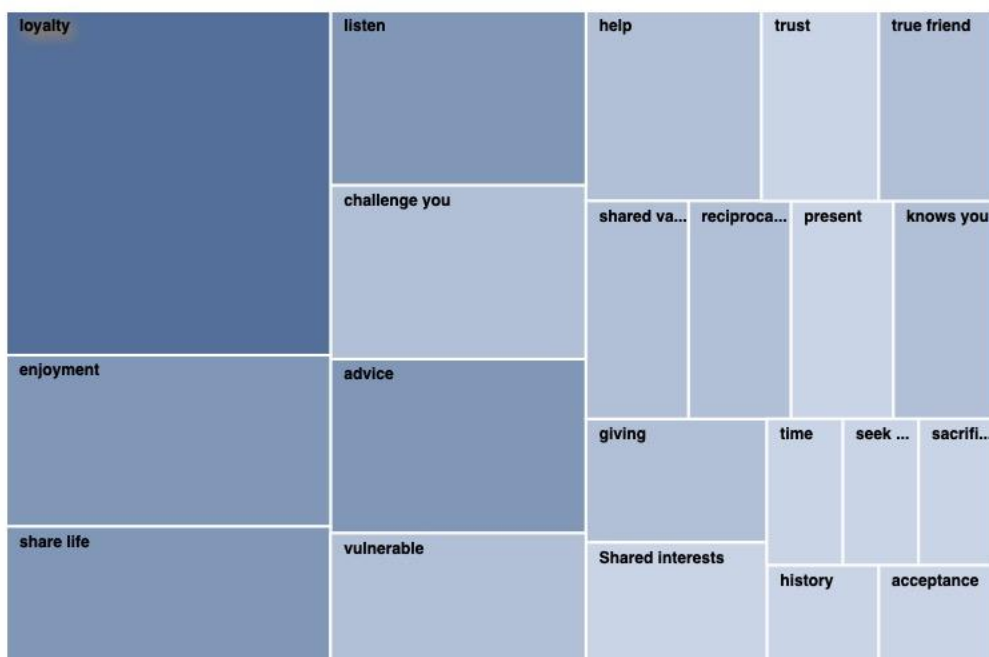
⁶⁴² Participants will be referenced with their pseudonym and a time stamp from their interview, unless there was an issue with a time stamp in the transcript at which point the question number will be given for referencing.

6.3.1.1 Question 1: What is a Friend?

This question garnered many varied responses. Below are all the different terms used in trying to define a friend:

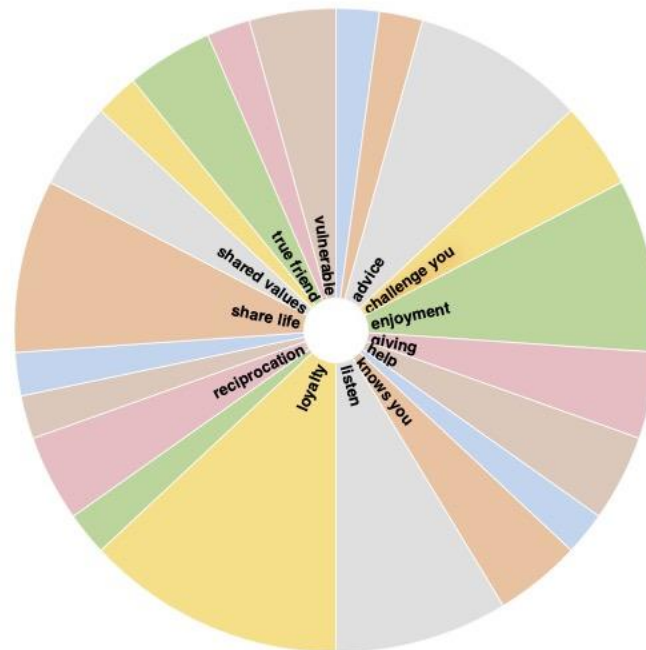
Shares life	Fun	Reciprocates affection
Looks after you	Supportive	Enjoys time together
There in the good times and bad	Has your best interests at heart	Someone loved
Trustworthy	Self-sacrificial	Vulnerable
Listens	Journeys with you	Seeks your good
Gives time	Challenges you	Gives advice
Stays in touch	Makes life better	Present
Has shared history	Has shared interests	Emotional vulnerability
Doesn't judge	Accepts you	Reliable

Figure: number of mentions re. definitions of friendship⁶⁴³



⁶⁴³ There are two charts for visual representation of key terms given to define friendship. The larger and darker the box, or the larger the “pie slice”, the more that word was used by participants.

Figure: pie chart of number of hits per definitional term



With so many various responses to define friendship there seem to be no concrete lines for defining these sorts of social relationships. One reason for this is that friendship is often defined by experience rather than a clinical definition. For example, Isabella noticed this saying:

I think that it's hard to separate the definition of a friend from the experience of having friends....mine is surely derived from the encounters that I've had and from my experience [a friend is] someone who is willing to be vulnerable with you, and willing to journey with you through the thick and thin of life⁶⁴⁴

Isabella could not define friendship without considering her own experience, which is likely why the list of traits given by the participants was so long and varied; they were not reciting a dictionary definition, but rather defining friendship based upon their unique experiences. Thus, this substantial and varied list of traits of friendship served to highlight the breadth and depth of friendship. For a few like Ian, however, they could sum up friendship in one trait: "trust."⁶⁴⁵ Most, still, could not settle on one term to describe a friend. That friendship

⁶⁴⁴ Isabella interview 04:11

⁶⁴⁵ Ian interview 00:35

can mean different things to different people presents a challenge when it comes to crafting one definition. Further, what criteria is offered can be experienced to varied degrees. For example, a shared history might mean 20 years for one person and 5 for another, or this might mean a historic friendship of 10 years of primary school, or it might mean having similar childhood experiences, though not necessarily experienced together. Staying in touch is another example. Reading updates on Facebook over the years might be sufficient for one person while for another this would necessitate weekly or even daily interactions in person or over the phone for another, while yet another might count intention over practice.⁶⁴⁶ Then there is the question of whether a friendship ought to be all of these traits or only some, but if some, which ones? Given the subjectivity of the responses and that such a plethora of responses were produced from a small sample (it is thus likely more participants would produce more even responses), it does not seem illogical for a working definition of friendship to encompass all the traits provided. Similarly, limiting the traits to one or two would likely be insufficient as many of the traits provided can describe many relationships besides friendship, and thus definition of friendship must have enough qualities to distinguish it from other relationships.

Amber noted this difficulty in defining friendships saying:

I suppose my first instinct is to say... a friend is someone that ... you enjoy spending time with. Although even as I say that, I kind of can think of caveats to it. ... Because ... a friend is someone that you enjoy interacting with, but I suppose you don't always enjoy your interactions with your friends - and they still remain friends.⁶⁴⁷

She went on to add that a friend is someone whom one cares about, but that there are people, like family, whom a person might care about other than friends. She also mentioned that a friend is someone not only cared for but loved, and that such feelings should be reciprocated, though not necessarily always, at the same time, or in equal measure. She concluded that friendship must then be some combination of all these things. Interestingly, the word "Love" was only used by Amber and Isabella⁶⁴⁸ in defining friendship, which was a word I would have assumed would have come up more in defining friendship. There are numerous explanations for this, one being that love is assumed and thus might not need to

⁶⁴⁶ Isabella interview 04:11

⁶⁴⁷ Amber interview 05:57

⁶⁴⁸ Isabella interview 04:11

be said, or it might be because love is a term so often used for romantic affection in English that the word was not used so as to avoid confusion. These seem to be the most plausible reasons, though there might be others, and which explanation is the most accurate would be pure conjecture, and in hindsight this would have made an excellent follow-up question to ask the participants.

6.3.1.1.1 Levels of Friendship

I have sorted the friendship traits given by the participants into three categories which echo Aristotle's three tier model (as it is the plumbline for any academic discussion of friendship),⁶⁴⁹ though any other number could also be argued for since, as noted previously, there are no concrete lines for defining friendship. These levels should be seen as consecutive, meaning they can stack on each other, so a level 3 friendship could encompass traits of levels 1 and level 2. Level 1 is meant to reflect that of pleasurable friendships and the ones made most easily.⁶⁵⁰ Level 2, friendships which are useful or beneficial in some way, and Level 3 are virtue friendships where intimacy, longevity, self-sacrifice, and love come together with pleasure and usefulness. This sort of system seemed especially useful since some of the participants also mentioned friendships at differing levels. Anaya, for example, noted that a friend is someone trusted, but she does not trust all her friends equally.⁶⁵¹ It should be noted that these terms have been sorted by my own educated intuition, considering themes of the literature and comments from participants, but ultimately arguments could be made to move say a level 2 trait to level 3 or a level 3 trait to level 1. Part of the difficulty lay in how each trait can be experienced at different depths or degrees. As mentioned previously, staying in contact could mean something more casual and infrequent to one person and to another it could mean almost daily open and vulnerable communication. In this instance for the former person this trait would likely only need to be a level 1 or 2 friend while for the latter this would indicate a level 3 friendship.

⁶⁴⁹ See chapter 3 section 3.2.2

⁶⁵⁰ Pleasurable traits like fun and laughter were also the ones most noted by children in interviews by Shery Turkle, see chapter 5.

⁶⁵¹ Anaya interview 00:09

Thus, these categories are more to provide some guideline by which to understand the many facets and experiences of friendship. The reference to an Aristotelian division of three became consistent in the tradition and still applies in our modern context.

6.3.1.1.1 Level 1: Pleasure Friendships

Level 1 friendships are meant to reflect the friendships that are enjoyable; those which bring mirth and pleasure. These friends are not necessarily to be depended on or deeply trusted, except in the context of looking for a good laugh. Such friends are easily gained and, without adding depth to the friendship, can be as easily lost.

fun	gives you time ^{652*}	present*
enjoy time with	doesn't judge	shared interests
listens*	makes life better	reciprocated affection*

6.3.1.1.2 Level 2: Useful Friendships

Level 2 friendships reflect friendships that are useful according to Aristotle’s model but can also be thought of as friendships which are not just enjoyable or fun but also provide something beneficial or helpful while not necessitating a deeper commitment or vulnerability. Often friendships such as these, due to the basis of being useful, will only last as long as they continue to be useful or beneficial, unless the friendship should include level 1 traits making the friendship more enjoyable, or if it should deepen into a level 3 friendship.

supportive*	gives advice*
looks after you*	shared history/background*

⁶⁵² * Traits which could exist at different levels based on depth of investment or meaning.

6.3.1.1.1.3 Level 3: Virtue Friendship

Level 3 would be those friendships where there is vulnerability and commitment as well as growth and challenge, not only for one's social or professional life (which would be level 2) but more importantly in character and moral values. There are a vast array of different traits for this level of friendship, some of which are easier to give or receive and some which take years of hard work to achieve.

there in the good times and bad times	has your best interests at heart	journeys with you
emotional vulnerability	self-sacrificial	seeks your good
trustworthy	someone loved	challenges you
shares life	vulnerable	reliable
stays in touch*	accepts you*	

Once again, even within these levels of friendship these can be many degrees of depth to explore. One example of this might be how one could become a black belt in a martial art; however, once the level of black belt is achieved there are still degrees of skill to learn within the level of black belt. The same could be said of level three friendships, that to have such a friendship is in itself an achievement, but there is always room to grow and deepen this kind of friendship. It is interesting to note however, that these deeper qualities were not necessarily regarded as more important than level 1 or 2 qualities like fun, laughter, or support. Brian, for example said:

I think a friend ... is someone that you just really enjoy spending time with and is someone ... you have in your life ... to do fun things with because life's always better with friends and I think they're ... the kind of people ... that you want ... to go out and get like a drink or a bite to eat or something ...though, they're going to be with you - there for you ... for the long haul.⁶⁵³

For Brian, friendship had to be both pleasurable (hanging out over a meal) and committed (be there “in the long haul”). Other participants agreed that a friendship should be able to encompass both fun and deep commitment. From my interviews on this question, it would seem unlikely – if not impossible, or a friendship to exist with only level 3 traits without any of the other levels as well. So, while someone might be trusted, steadfast, or vulnerable, without shared interests, laughter, and mutual affection that could mean they are a parent, counsellor, teacher, etc., rather than a friend.

In these other relationships, reciprocity is not necessary, which raises the classical question of whether friendship must be reciprocal. One of the older men interviewed, Timothy, thought deeply about the relationships he had formed and said that reciprocity was one test to see if a relationship was deepening into friendship.⁶⁵⁴ If feelings were not reciprocated perhaps that is more friendly behaviour than a friendship relationship. The difference seems to be whether friendship is a noun or adjective where friendship as a noun describes a relationship but as an adjective or adverb the characteristics of friendship are displayed without necessitating a friendship relationship. Thus friendship, as a noun, describes a relationship which must include two mutually invested participants. Timothy’s assertion of mutuality highlights how friendship differs from relationships of proximity or relatedness. For example, calling someone “mother” does not describe the quality of the relationship, it could be estranged or close. Friendship, however, is not like familial relationships because friendships are voluntary (unlike a mother and child) and thus are defined not by inherent values of relatedness (proximity, genetics, environment, etc.) but rather by qualities of affection and enjoyment which can also be added to relationships of inherent values (a mother and child can also be friends, likewise co-workers might also be friends).

⁶⁵³ Brian interview 00:27

⁶⁵⁴ Timothy interview 04:44-05:09

Another aspect of friendship which came up often was the importance of investing in a friend. Timothy provided a useful analogy of investing in a friendship: "...if you've got a friend and you invest in that friendship, the more you invest, it's like a bridge that will take a weight. So you invested in this relationship. It's like a three-ton relationship, you know ... but ... you couldn't drive a 10-ton truck across a bridge that's only designed to take three tons. So ... if you're looking for that close friendships, you've got to build and invest."⁶⁵⁵ This is a perfect example of degrees within level of friendship, where the more one invests into a friendship the more one can depend on that friendship and the more they can be depended on. Of course, the desires, expectations, and needs for friendship vary from person to person and from friendship to friendship. John, however, seemed to feel that friendships did not need consistency or ongoing investment to be strong, they simply needed commitment.⁶⁵⁶ John seemed content to have friends that were there when he needed them and with whom he might enjoy a night at the pub, but he did not seem to have the desire to invest into deeper friendships and he was contented with that. Timothy, on the other hand, expressed a desire to get to deeper levels of friendship with other men which would require more consistent investment in order to reap the benefits of deeper commitment.

6.3.1.1.2 Labels in Friendship

To differentiate between levels of friendships, some people use terminology like "best friend" while others actively sought to avoid such terms.⁶⁵⁷ For Amber, the term 'best friend' held child-hood connotations, like a childhood best friend, but that the term was not something she continued to use into adulthood.⁶⁵⁸ Brian felt that the term "best friend" was a term used by more women than men.⁶⁵⁹ Isabella explained that she was consciously attempting to not use terms like "best friend": "I think that with age I've become increasingly sceptical in using the word best friend. But I have started instead realizing the

⁶⁵⁵ Timothy interview 12:00

⁶⁵⁶ John interview 01:21; 2:20

⁶⁵⁷ "I have always tried to stay away from the word best friend." Anaya interview 00:09

⁶⁵⁸ Amber interview 08:25

⁶⁵⁹ Brian interview 02:28

beauty again of calling someone friend when he's actually a friend.”⁶⁶⁰ She then added that she makes more of a distinction between a friend and an acquaintance.⁶⁶¹ The term “Acquaintance” was something people brought up more as a label they might use to categorise a person to themselves but was not a term they would use verbally directed at a particular person.⁶⁶² In my interview with Sophie I asked if she would feel comfortable using the term acquaintance and she said, “no”, adding that “friend” is rather vague and there are people who might be more than an acquaintance – such as a closer work colleague, who may be privy to some personal information, but still lacks a deeper level of vulnerability, and is thus neither an acquaintance nor friend, but something in-between. I then asked her if she felt having more words to describe these different levels of friendship would be useful, and she said, “yes, there definitely needs to be more words.”⁶⁶³ These comments came from younger participants, but they were not the only ones who struggled with a lack of terms and did not much care for using the word acquaintance. Older participants like Timothy also felt that while “acquaintance” worked in the past, its usefulness/appropriateness had faded.⁶⁶⁴

‘Colleague’ was another word used where some felt this was a better term for people who were not friends but work associates. Some people, like Ian, felt no need to call a colleague a friend.⁶⁶⁵ Other participants did not agree with Ian’s clear cut answer however. John, for example, found it hard to delineate work-mate from friends:

...obviously he’s a work mate, okay? Because although, for example, you’ve seen [name of friend] I know him as a workmate, right. He's a friend, and he just calls for a cup of tea occasionally, but he's primarily a work man.... Definitely there's work mates - friends, that's what we call them, or I would call them, and then friends are normally people outside work.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁰ Isabella interview 06:33

⁶⁶¹ Isabella interview 06:56

⁶⁶² “... I suppose sometimes almost psychologically, it's important to make that differentiation to yourself, both so that you don't over invest, or you don't have realistic expectations of that person.... And so sometimes, it's kind of helpful for me to psychologically be like, oh, you know, I'm actually more of an acquaintance with that person....I and that's an important thing for me to say to myself.” Amber interview 08:25

⁶⁶³ Sophie Interview 07:34

This would have been a good question to put in all my interviews. It was not listed on my initial sheet, but would make for an interesting survey question in future research.

⁶⁶⁴ Timothy interview 03:50

⁶⁶⁵ “Well, if I work with somebody, I would just call my colleague... basically, you don't go out with him ... So you can't call him a friend....you don't know what your trust is gonna be like...” Ian interview 01:13

⁶⁶⁶ John interview 03:21

It would seem that young and old alike felt a desire to have differentiations in their associations with people. It would seem that young and old alike felt a desire to have differentiations in their associations with people. Nathan, a university student, also wanted to be careful with distinctions between a friend and a best friend, or between a work friend and a “friend, friend.” He noticed that the quality of his friendships were different and he would like to make that distinction from the language he utilises.⁶⁶⁷

For Amber, it was also important to remember that, whether people consciously or subconsciously used labels, such segregations were not set in stone, as people can move into and out of various categories of friendship throughout one’s life.⁶⁶⁸

6.3.1.1.3 Stories of Friendship

In telling stories of friendship, history and investment often came up, especially for women. Isabella noted that friendship over time was a sort of proof of the investment and these could not be disconnected from each other.⁶⁶⁹ Amber, also noted that many of her friendships were historical – meaning that they were friendships made in the past and which mostly remained in the past.⁶⁷⁰ This raises the question of how long a friendship can be considered a friendship with the passing of time if investment and consistency begin to fade. Perhaps such friendships ought to be regarded as past or lapsed friendships rather than present or active friendships. Sophie mentioned that, for her, it was a combination of shared background and history combined with ongoing growing and sharing life together that makes for a good friendship.⁶⁷¹ It would seem that, for Sophie, having something in common to found the friendship on and developing a shared history were not complete without the component of consistency. For Nora, it was not only history, but history in the form of weathering difficulties which was a vital aspect to friendship.⁶⁷² This sentiment was

⁶⁶⁷ Nathan interview 06:34

⁶⁶⁸ Amber interview 10:53; 11:58

⁶⁶⁹ Isabella interview 01:31

⁶⁷⁰ Amber interview 08:25; 14:23

⁶⁷¹ Sophie interview 08:10

⁶⁷² Nora interview 03:05

not made only by females, however, as Timothy also mentioned going through life's difficulties as being an important feature of friendship.⁶⁷³

Humour was also noted as essential to friendship. Brian, another university student, felt that friendship should be fun.⁶⁷⁴ Sophie likewise noted that one of her best friendships started with humour and deepened through vulnerability relating about traumas and difficult life experiences they both had which were very similar.⁶⁷⁵ For Sophie, this friendship was cherished because of the dual joys of humour and vulnerability.

Some people mentioned romantic relationships while discussing friendship as well because that romantic relationship started out as a friendship, or their romantic partner is also their closest friend, something which I will address more in the questions about the differences and similarities between friendship and romantic relationship.

6.3.1.1.4 When Friendship is Negative

Friendship was generally considered positive, and quite a few of the respondents seemed a bit surprised by this question but all gave it some thought. The difficulty in answering this question echoes that of Augustine when he mentioned his evil friendships as a boy which led him into sin.⁶⁷⁶ Some like Timothy struggled to say yes or no to this question, seeing it could be answered in both ways.⁶⁷⁷ Brian wanted to say friendship is always positive, but his experience and his own worries meant that friendship did not always live up to his hopes.⁶⁷⁸ There seemed to be a general agreement that a friendship could end up being negative where the relationship was toxic or abusive, or just unpleasant or unhelpful. Others felt a need, however, to add that a negative friendship was not truly a friendship, because friendship itself is a good, but people can think they have a friendship

⁶⁷³ While discussing this point Timothy also mentioned how he felt men have, on average, fewer friendships than women and that this was even a topic which he has witnessed discussed by men. In that this was brought up whilst discussing friendship as being a means of support through difficulty, it would seem that for men, having a lack of friendship might also mean a lack of support in trying times. Timothy interview 08:38-09:51

⁶⁷⁴ Brian interview 00:27

⁶⁷⁵ Sophie interview 12:51

⁶⁷⁶ See chapter 3.

⁶⁷⁷ Timothy interview 10:25

⁶⁷⁸ Brian interview 07:57

when it turns out to not be so. Amber and Anaya, for instance, said that friendship itself is not negative but we can be in relationships we call friendship that are negative but that is a corruption of something that is inherently good.⁶⁷⁹ Nora was willing to say that a friendship could be considered negative if it had a negative effect on one or both parties.⁶⁸⁰ Isabella, would have agreed with many of the ancient philosophers and Church fathers who put forth that, “...the experience of negative friendships is because they were not friendships in the first place.”⁶⁸¹ In such situations, many respondents mentioned that the relationships should be ended by some means, such as distancing oneself or walking away entirely.

Sophie considered the depth of friendship and boundaries in response to this question.⁶⁸² She noted that one might share an interest with someone who is not a very positive influence and they might just enjoy that one activity and use boundaries to keep that relationship from becoming a deeper friendship that could have negative impact – she believed it would be better to have a lower level of friendship with that person while employing boundaries to contain negativity. Interestingly, Amber felt it important to remember that in a good friendship there might be times of unpleasantness which in the moment might seem negative, but which could be a sign of a true friendship, such as a friend challenging a behaviour or correcting one’s poor choices.⁶⁸³

6.3.1.1.5 How Many Friends Ought One Have?

When first asked this question, participants were often vague, saying that it depended on the person, or there should be no limits, but as they continued to consider and discuss this question most eventually responded with 5-6. Perhaps the initial reluctance was because of how different people can be; some people like having a lot of friends and some only one or two close friends. Given these differences I thought it was interesting that the

⁶⁷⁹ Amber interview 21:38

Anaya interview 19:00

⁶⁸⁰ Nora interview 04:55

⁶⁸¹ Isabella interview 13:24

See chapter 3 for more on the ancient philosophers and church fathers on friendship.

⁶⁸² Sophie interview 16:39

⁶⁸³ Amber interview 5:27

answer given was so unanimous. Given that this was a small sample size of interviewees the answer might differ more in a larger poll. However, the fact that no one said “10” or “2” but most said 5 or 6 is very interesting. This number is the number with which psychologists say people can handle a deep relationship without being overwhelmed by the effort required for friendship, while also being enough to have the support and love needed without burdening one or two people with all of one’s emotional needs.⁶⁸⁴ Brian mentioned that sometimes people try too hard to make lots of friends, and he realised that people really only need a smaller amount of friends to invest deeply in.⁶⁸⁵ He also questioned how much we hold onto and invest in our friendships today, with the sentiment that people should spend more time investing in their friendships.

6.3.1.2 Question 2: What are the Differences Between Romantic Relationships and Friendships?

This question asked people to consider how friendship was different from romantic relationships and then to consider how they might be the same. The answers seemed to vary according to how they answered the first question. For example, a friend should be supportive and loving. These qualities, however, were also considered part of romantic relationships. For some people, things like sharing life or finances could pertain to a friend, not just a romantic partner. If, however, sharing daily life, a house, or finances was not part of a friendship then these things would likely be seen as important differences between friendship and romantic relationships. By far, the most common responses for their differences seemed to be a sexual or physical relationship,⁶⁸⁶ as well as the necessity of seeing a romantic partner face-to-face. It was not that seeing a friend was not necessary or that a romantic relationship could not be long distance, but the emphasis and importance of

⁶⁸⁴ Kate Leaver, *The Friendship Cure: Reconnecting in the Modern World*, (Richmond: Duckworth, 7 Feb. 2019), 25.

Robin Dunbar, *How Many Friends Does One Person Need?: Dunbar’s Number and Other Evolutionary Quirks* (London: Faber, 2011).

⁶⁸⁵ Brian Interview 11:18-14:02

⁶⁸⁶ This does not mean that these lines are never crossed but none of the individuals I interviewed mentioned situations like the modern concept of “friends with benefits”.

the factor of being face-to-face took priority in romantic relationships. It was not clear if this preference was due to emotional investment, or the physical and sexual element.

Finances also were noted as an aspect that set romantic relationships apart – though this was not seen as just for romantic relationships but for the practical difference of someone who one lives with (like a roommate, or a parent, or family member) where the finances might also be involved. As most people live with their romantic partner and not their friends – this was a common differentiation.

In most other areas besides these, people seemed to struggle to find differences between friendship and romance, inasmuch as the emotional desires for what friendship and what a romantic relationship ought to bring into someone's life were similar. The combination of humour with kindness and care were shown to be important for both friendship and romance. Sophie noted that in both relationships you need to enjoy the other's company: "For me personally humour is really so huge. That's just how I connect with people personally....you have to enjoy each other's companyI want to keep spending time with somebody who can like, calm my anxiety, speak truth into my life, steward me in a way...I've ... in both [sought] that commonality."⁶⁸⁷ Brian commented on how many people will post on social media that they just "married their best friend."⁶⁸⁸ This again shows the Venn diagram like overlap between friendship and marriage (at least in the modern Western context). Because the overlaps were more common, I pressed into the areas of difference, which often arose by degree more than by type, though this was not always the case. I have organised the most common differences into five categories: 1) *Time and Commitment*; 2) *Sex, Chemistry, and Touch*, 3) *Finances and Life*; 4) *Spiritual Bonds and Marriage*; and 5) *One vs. Many*.

⁶⁸⁷ Sophie interview 26:23

⁶⁸⁸ Brian interview 16:57

Figure: Similarities Between Friendship and Romance

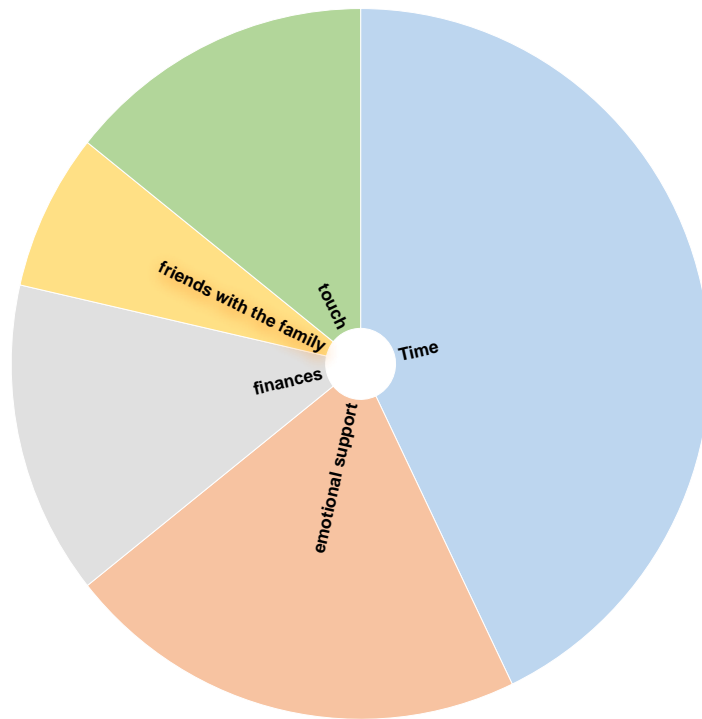
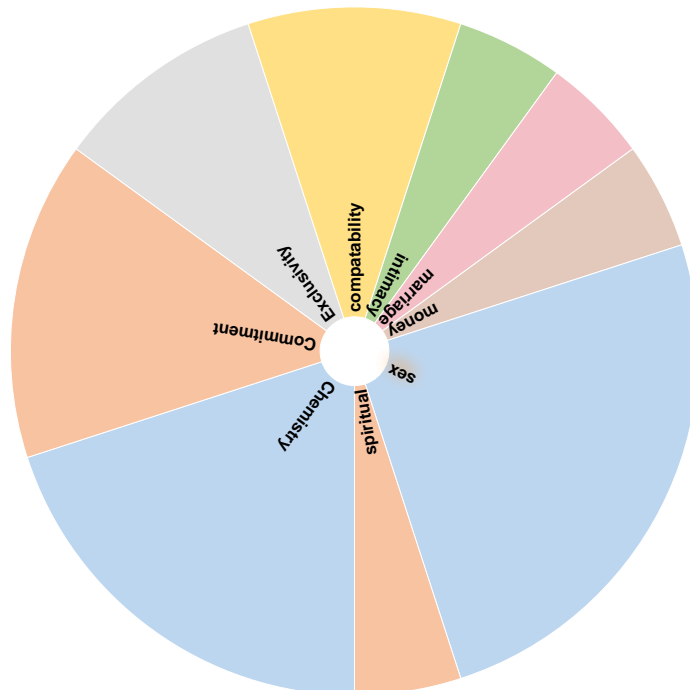


Figure: Differences Between Friendship and Romance



6.3.1.2.1 Time and Commitment

Time and commitment are both needed in friendship, but these were also considered a means of noting the difference between friendship and romantic relationships where the romantic relationships required greater amounts of time and commitment/investment. The degree of difference of investment between friendship and romantic commitments differed among participants. John, who had remained friends with many of his ex-girlfriends said a key difference was “probably the amount of time I spent with the person. So, a partner would be somebody I'm going to spend a lot more time [with]... that's probably the main difference.” He went on to add spending holiday time together, as well as a physical relationship also were differences.⁶⁸⁹ Nora, similarly said that, in friendship, “...there's not so much of an expectation to spend as much time together. I think if I had a romantic relationship and only saw them in person every few months...[that] would not be a satisfactory relationship necessarily, whereas a friend, you can sort of check in with them every now and then and there can be lots of time that's passed.”⁶⁹⁰ Nora did make an exception for long-distance relationships, though in normal circumstances she saw the commitment to give time, especially face-to-face, as being heightened in a romantic relationship.⁶⁹¹ Ian similarly noted that a way to show your commitment to someone you are romantically interested in was to do things they enjoyed, which might not be a sacrifice made for a friend: “A friend may not want to go where they want to go. But when you're in a romantic situation.... then I would say yes. I might not enjoy it, but I'll go.”⁶⁹² It would seem acquiescence in the desires of a beloved wife or lover was greater for Brian than it was for him towards his friends, again heightening the amount of commitment – though both are clearly needed in either relationship.

⁶⁸⁹ John interview 14:23

⁶⁹⁰ Nora interview 08:30

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Ian interview 08:54

6.3.1.2.2 Sex, Chemistry, and Touch

Sex was, not surprisingly, the most noted difference. It was a slightly awkward topic such that people sought to find indirect ways to allude to it, or jokingly commented things like “well do you mean besides the obvious answer...”. Nathan’s interview is a perfect example:

Nathan: well there is a very obvious answer I can give

Joelle Lucas: related to physical intimacy?

Nathan: Yes, yes. Yes. Yeah.⁶⁹³

Anaya, similarly, commented, “I think the biggest thing is the physical intimacy. Like that's most obvious that the difference between a friendship and a romantic. [pause] It's funny, and I mean, maybe there should be more.”⁶⁹⁴ For some, gender difference also played into their friendship due to sexual tension. For example, Bridget said: “I think the main difference would be sexual relations with them.... I would feel more comfortable having a deeper friendship with another girl rather than with a guy.”⁶⁹⁵ While differences of gender in friendship was not a primary topic of this thesis, it is interesting that most often it was assumed or said in passing that most often the friendships people referenced were same gendered – unless they were talking about someone who was both a friend and a romantic partner/interest (and often times they asked if they could use that romantic person to describe friendship).⁶⁹⁶ Linked to sex was sexual attraction. This was not inherently a barrier to friendship, but it was something which was seen as a differentiator in whether someone was pursuing a friendship or a romantic attachment.⁶⁹⁷ For Sophie, there can be friendships where there is also sexual chemistry without a desire for a romantic relationship, but where boundaries needed to be set to maintain the friendship.⁶⁹⁸ The assumption was that without boundaries the friendship would have to cease or the desire to avoid a romantic attachment would have to be reconsidered for the friendship to become a romantic relationship.

⁶⁹³ Nathan interview 16:03

⁶⁹⁴ Anaya interview 23:17

⁶⁹⁵ Bridget interview 03:59

⁶⁹⁶ Both Amber and Brian did this, for example.

⁶⁹⁷ Timothy interview 14:03

Sophie interview 21:53

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 20:41

Something which was interesting, however, was how many people took the time to explain that a sexual relationship was not the same as a physical relationship. Sexual intimacy was seen as reserved for romantic relationships, setting romance apart from friendship. There were, however, many forms of physically intimate expressions of affection (non-sexual physical touch) which people enjoyed in their friendships. Amber clarified saying, "...But I say sexual intimacy and not physical intimacy, because I think normal friendships often [have] both a level of physical intimacy, hugging, kissing, massages, ... you know, help each other out. Like all that kind of stuff."⁶⁹⁹ Nathan likewise said that he considered himself "a hugger" and that he enjoys non-sexual comforting touch from his friends: "...like watching a film or something, like ... my friends ... they like lie across me and ... it's just like, it's nice... I feel quite comforted...".⁷⁰⁰ Clearly for many of the participants, not all touch was considered sexual, and furthermore, non-sexual touch was deemed important for humans and especially in friendship. Lore Wilbert, in her book, *Handle with Care*, explains the need for healthy non-sexual touch because kind physical touches of friendship are comforting and healing – much like my participants expressed.

Similarly to how touch could be separated into sexual/romantic vs non-sexual/friendly touch, the same could be done with regards to chemistry. For Timothy, he looked for a spiritual ("Holy Spirit") connection with people, regardless of whether he was looking for a male friend or when he was pursuing the woman who became his wife. That heart connection or emotional connection was necessary for friendship, not just romance.⁷⁰¹ Bridget also assumed there would be some chemistry in looking for a friend, but that more would be needed for a romantic connection.⁷⁰²

6.3.1.2.3 Finances and Life

Another popular response had to do with money and daily life commitments which deeply intertwines the lives of two people. While it was acknowledged that there might be

⁶⁹⁹ Amber interview 26:03

⁷⁰⁰ Nathan interview 16:25

⁷⁰¹ Timothy interview 14:03

⁷⁰² Bridget interview 02:17

times when friends would combine finances, resources, and daily life tasks – especially if living together – this would be rarer in friendship, while it would be increasingly expected in a romantic attachment. Thus, sharing one’s finances or certain lifestyle habits would be of less importance when building a friendship.⁷⁰³ Amber, who came from an Indian background, noted the importance of considering the Western vs Eastern contexts when addressing this issue. She said that the idea of emotional support and couples always living together is a Western notion but that in some cultures (usually Eastern) the idea that one would get emotional support from other friends and family (of the same gender) would have been normal. Furthermore, many families around the world live significant parts of their lives apart, usually for work.⁷⁰⁴ She also commented that not all couples share finances, and there might be situations where friends and housemates might be more financially interdependent than some couples. The majority of the participants (predominantly from the West) noted that romantic relationships usually lead to planning life together for the long term, living life together, and often starting one’s own family, etc.⁷⁰⁵ Sophie said in her interview that it is not only finances, but other living habits like cleaning, or morals and worldviews, which she would weigh very differently depending on if she was assessing a potential friend vs. a romantic interest:

... that romantic relationship ...has to ... have chemistry and compatibility, whereas in a regular friendship, chemistry is not there. And then compatibility... well, your spending habits don't affect me; your cleaning habits don't affect me. We're never going to live together; the way that they live their daily life or some of their worldviews ...don't have to align. I have friends who I massively disagree with. We choose not to talk about those things. ... they're still my close friends. I still dearly love them. We just agree to disagree. And that's it. Whereas in a romantic relationship, you're thinking way more long term.⁷⁰⁶

Anaya wanted to know if the context was boyfriends/girlfriends or husbands/wives, because in the marriage relationship that was when finances came into play and she said that in marriage there is an expectation to provide for each other and take care of one another but with friendship, “ ... you don't monetarily, financially expect your friend to take care of

⁷⁰³ Sophie did note that travel might be the other exception to this rule for friendship.

⁷⁰⁴ Amber interview 34:17

⁷⁰⁵ Bridget interview 06:40

⁷⁰⁶ Sophie interview 21:23

[you], right?”⁷⁰⁷ As mentioned before, there could however be some exceptions. Amber said: “... you could live with a friend and share your finances with your friend. You could do all of that stuff as well. If you wanted to. Depending on ... how vulnerable you wanted to be ... how much you trust that person...”⁷⁰⁸

A further question which might have produced interesting insights would have been to ask participants what differentiations they felt were cultural and which ones more universal, since it seems that culture and historical time periods might provide very different answers. For example, Socrates and Aristotle believed the truest of friends would hold everything in common, even their worldly possessions,⁷⁰⁹ while the early church taught Christians to consider all they had as given by God and to be shared with any friend or neighbour in their local church.⁷¹⁰ Such ideals of mixing friendship and finances might seem extreme in a culture where finances are private and not always shared even with a romantic partner.

6.3.1.2.4 Spiritual Bonds and Marriage

For some of the more religious participants, marriage was discussed as a big difference between friendship and romantic relationships because friendships do not result in a life-commitment like marriage,⁷¹¹ which – especially for Christians – is a sacrament and a covenant. Isabella, a Catholic Christian, said that “romantic relationships should, should be built on friendships...at the heart of a romantic relationship, there's the desire of, you know, loving the other person as the other person is and desiring the other person's growth, desiring the other person's well-being. So, love is at the heart of both.”⁷¹² She went on to say that for dating or romantic relationships, however, she would be discerning marriage as a life-long commitment. For Christians there is also a need for, as Timothy said, a spiritual connection.⁷¹³ Of course, Timothy believed a spiritual connection to be important whether pursuing a friend or a spouse. Pushing this thought further, Amber brought up the spiritual

⁷⁰⁷ Anaya interview 24:01

⁷⁰⁸ Amber interview 32:54

⁷⁰⁹ See chapter 3 Section 3.2.2

⁷¹⁰ Acts 2:44

⁷¹¹ Bridget interview 02:17

⁷¹² Isabella interview 20:35

⁷¹³ Timothy interview 14:03

bond of a husband and wife where the two become one.⁷¹⁴ Which is interesting given that this idea has also been noted with Aristotle's one soul two bodies, or David and Jonathan being of one heart.⁷¹⁵ It would be interesting to consider more nuanced similarities and differences on this subject. Amber said simply that the difference is that, "...one is to pursue marriage and the other one's to just enjoy a good relationship with a person hopefully...I suppose ... biblically the Bible says... Eve was created for Adam, and he saw her, and he ... felt complete, and the two became one."⁷¹⁶ Amber was likely referring to Genesis 2 or Ephesians 5 where marriage is described as creating a union where a man and a woman, in a spiritual mystery, become one.⁷¹⁷ Considering that the two become one flesh is only ever said of marriage in the Bible, and assuming the bond is sexual as well as spiritual, this brings up the question of whether Aristotle was at odds with the biblical account in believing friendship as a bond of "one soul in two bodies." A more plausible explanation for what these participants noticed and how their insights relate to the biblical narratives echoes back to David and Jonathan's knitting of their hearts, or Aelred's spiritual friendships as religious expressions of Aristotle's ideal of Virtue friendship. Marriage would then be the mingling of the spiritual and the physical whereby the addition of the sexual embrace differentiates between friendship and marriage. Thus, preserving both friendship's depth and marriage's uniqueness as the foundation of family life.

6.3.1.2.5 One vs. Many

The last commonly raised difference between friendship and romantic relationships was the consensus that romantic relationships are exclusive in a manner in which friendships are not. While defining friendship many participants noted that some friends were allowed more trust than others which created a level of exclusivity; however, to share intimate details or to have close bonds of friendships with multiple people was not

⁷¹⁴ Mark 10:8,

Matthew 19:5,

⁷¹⁵ Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Bk. 5. XX.

See chapter 2 section 2.2.1

⁷¹⁶ Amber interview 27:11

⁷¹⁷ Ephesians 5:31

Genesis 2:24

considered a betrayal. In fact, the majority of the participants said it was ideal to have at least a few good friends and that no one said it was good to have only one (they might have said it was good to have *at least* one, but that it was better to have more than one). The same, however, could not be said of romantic relationships, where exclusivity was important and none of my participants promoted any type of romantic relationships that would involve more than two people.⁷¹⁸ Nora explained it this way, “...for me, like a romantic attachment would be just me and one other person, whereas with friendships, ...you could have however many number of friends and them be ... of equal significance.... And there's no kind of expectation of like exclusivity, I guess.”⁷¹⁹

While it was more assumed that the romantic relationship would be exclusive, a few participants did explain reasons for why it might be useful to have friendships outside of a romantic relationship, and ideally a few. Amber explained that her husband struggles to appreciate or understand some things in her life which her close female friends could. She said it might be a gender difference, but it might also be a personality difference.⁷²⁰ Anaya shared a similar view saying how she found certain emotional support from her friends and would often seek them out in times of need, especially if the issue concerned her romantic relationship.⁷²¹

6.3.1.3 Question 3: What do you want from friendship? What would make an ideal friendship?

Often those whom I interviewed thought I was returning to the first question. I would then explain that this question aimed at ideal friendships or a model to define friendship, or what things they might look for in pursuing a new friendship; a sort of friendship people could admire. This question usually brought up some things desired, but not present in their

⁷¹⁸ This is mentioned to acknowledge that “thruples” and polyamory etc. are certainly realities but they were not acknowledged by any of those whom I interviewed as ideal or even part of a normal definition of a romantic relationship. It seemed that it was to be assumed that any romantic or sexual relationship involving more than two people was to be considered as abnormal.

⁷¹⁹ Nora interview 07:42

⁷²⁰ Amber interview 27:11

⁷²¹ Anaya interview 24:01

friendships which would fit an ideal definition of a friendship. Some added something to their initial definition, some emphasised a previous trait and expounded on its importance, while others did not have anything to add.

6.3.1.3.1 Positivity and Selfless Love

Most common were the ideals of a friend willing to make sacrifices and to put the other person first,⁷²² and who would be a positive influence.⁷²³ Nathan said he wanted a friend who would be there at 3 a.m. if necessary, but also who would simply remember to text and check in, a friend who would remember to send a card on their birthday. He also wanted a friend to be a positive influence: for Nathan this looked like someone willing to take the time to listen and seek to understand their friend's point of view due to the emotional connection shared in friendship.⁷²⁴ Brian used the terminology of love languages to describe his ideal friendship as someone who would meet his need for love according to his love languages of physical touch, quality time, and words of affirmation.⁷²⁵ Positivity itself was something Anaya was looking for especially after she shared that she had bad experiences with friends who had negative attitudes which often rubbed off on her.⁷²⁶ For Isabella the ideal of putting another person first meant being able to rejoice in a friend's joys and successes even if they were things that she personally desired. She gave the example of being able to rejoice at a friend's wedding even while single and having a desire for marriage. This for Isabella was a mark of an ideal friendship because it proves a genuine love and desire for the friend's good.⁷²⁷ Others, like John, simply desired friends who will go out of their way in a time of need and would be the kind of people to whom he would also be happy to lend a helping hand.⁷²⁸

⁷²² Nora interview 14:55

⁷²³ Amber interview 36:04

Nora interview 30:01-30:52

⁷²⁴ Nathan interview 21:02

⁷²⁵ Brian interview 18:44

⁷²⁶ Anaya interview 26:38

⁷²⁷ Isabella interview 24:10

⁷²⁸ John interview 20:54

6.3.1.3.2 Shared Faith

Some of the participants mentioned that shared faith was also important for an ideal friendship since a shared faith would add a deeper level of commonality and connection. Bridget, said that she found it difficult to say what would be an ideal friendship in human terms, but that God is the perfect friend:

I think God paints the picture of friendship and love and sacrifice that's more definitive ...about laying down your life for a friend and loving people unconditionally which we see ultimately in Jesus dying for us. But I think then how those sorts of... ideal principles and the ideal model looks like to people will be different, like, I've definitely observed that in, I think, sometimes seeing other people's friendships or sometimes their romantic relationships and just not getting it at all, but they clearly get it and enjoy it and that's great.⁷²⁹

This is an interesting observation where ideals might be universal but the way such ideals would be lived out might vastly differ depending on an individual's idiosyncrasies, personality, cultural factors, and the like. Timothy similarly believed faith to be part of an ideal friendship, as he believed that would be the sort of person who would not run away even in times of trial. Having friends who could join him in prayer was also an element of faith he wanted to share: "... That's why ... the majority,... if not all of my friends are Christian because you're looking for them to be Bible believing prayerful Christians ... saying, 'Okay, I'll go away and pray about that' and see if there's a solution that doesn't readily come to mind. and a friend should have a connection to God and with the Holy Spirit."⁷³⁰ The addition of prayer is interesting because this alludes to friends who will offer support and steadfastness in times of trial where prayer acted as an additional spiritual element of support which differs from physical or emotional support.

I thought this question about ideal friendships would garner distinctive definitions of friendship which might be different from peoples' lived out experience, but this question instead seemed to prove that for something like friendship most people did not think of friendship apart from their own experiences, negative or positive. What this question did bring out was deeper explanations of what qualities were most important. Because of this it

⁷²⁹ Bridget interview 08:05-11:05

⁷³⁰ Timothy interview 19:53-21:35

might be helpful to consider this question as sifting question one for the most important traits of friendship.

6.3.1.4 Question 4: In What Ways Could Our Society's Understanding of Friendship be Better?

This question presented some difficulties for discerning appropriate sub-questions. One reason for this is that there are some cultural assumptions which, from my own research and personal experiences, I believe impact friendships, though I wanted to avoid pushing these assumptions on my participants. Of course, because of the semi-structured style of interview there was leeway to ask follow-up questions based on conversational flow. Thus, some questions naturally linked to some of my own assumptions which provided opportunity to notice points where participants agreed or disagreed with my own informed hunches. For example, I could have opted to include a question on personal experiences vs. cultural views regarding non-sexual intimacy in friendships, but I decided to instead ask questions which would approach friendship in broader strokes which would be open to this particular question without syphoning off other areas of discussion. In the end, many participants felt a dissonance between their personal beliefs and values in friendship when compared to cultural messaging regarding friendship.

6.3.1.4.1 Be a Friend to Make a Friend

Ian, my oldest participant, simply described friendship as a relationship of trust that is community based and close in proximity where someone cares enough to look after you.⁷³¹ Other participants discussed ways in which a more traditional and simple view of friendship like that of Ian's has proved to be a challenge. Nathan, for example, noted some cultural assumptions regarding who can be friends, such as age gaps, ethnic/racial differences, and

⁷³¹ Ian interview 15:38-16:04

sexual overtones between men and women (which could hinder friendship making,⁷³² or harm friendships due to gossip).⁷³³ His insights were especially interesting given that he is openly homosexual and so I was able to ask him if he felt that similar sexual overtones present in male and female friendship were also present in same-sex friendships and he said, "...with heteronormality, it would be very hard to assume that."⁷³⁴ He did, however, amend this to say that he might have different assumptions compared to a heterosexual man. He also noted that there are positives and negatives with assumptions and cultural progression, like how some prejudices have improved dramatically, especially regarding inter-racial friendships, and that this gives hope for other improvements to be made in future.

John pointed out how social isolation is becoming a cultural norm; with people becoming increasingly content to stay at home, impacting one's ability to meet new people and make friends. He bemoaned how so many people don't know their neighbours and were not outside hanging out with friends on a Friday night, etc. He was concerned that he saw fewer people out in the evenings and felt both COVID-19 and technology had set people down a path of losing friendships. He said that he even talked with a woman who said she had everything she needed at home.⁷³⁵ Other participants like Isabella also noted the role that COVID-19 played in people seemed to spend so much time alone that they seemed to forget how to be social.⁷³⁶

Some participants were not as concerned about not being able to meet new people, because they were noticing that people often lacked investment. The old adage, "to have a friend, one must first be a friend" seemed to be in jeopardy. In what some have called the "microwave" generation, people seem to increasingly expect things which have historically taken time and investment to come about overnight.⁷³⁷ But friendships cannot be "microwaved", and my participants noted that friendships will not just arise out of thin air

⁷³² Brian also noted the issue of being friends with the opposite gender and how society has changed on this in recent years. Brian interview 11:18

⁷³³ Nathan interview 27:23-31:30

⁷³⁴ Nathan interview 29:14

⁷³⁵ John interview 23:32

⁷³⁶ Isabella interview 01:31

⁷³⁷ See chapter 4 section 4.3

or wishful thinking. Consider Anaya's response in which she expressed John's concerns while addressing the "instant friendship" desire:

And I think I crave for a little bit more old school in that way.... I feel like I'm such an old soul in that sense of ... wanting certain things to go back to the way they were. Social media is awesome. I think especially when you get out of college. It's really hard to meet people. So ... it's great to have these apps and to meet people but it shouldn't...replace the old school ways of making friends and friendships. I think also our society is more like instant noodles. They want like ramen, like quickly done. ...So they also expect that out of friendships like, what is it in it for me? like it's all about me. ...⁷³⁸

These sentiments, that investment was lacking in friendship both for making and maintaining friendships, were also expressed by Timothy, Bridget, Isabella, and Nora.

Bridget put it this way:

I think lots of society at the moment is all about what you can get out of things, and I think lots of friendship is ... seen as a take, not as a give as well. I mean... the same could be said of romantic relationships. So, it's what you can get out of something. But if you're not getting anything out of it, you should just drop that person and leave them alone. ... I think lots of things like cancel culture ... expressive individualism - it's all about the individual rather than community and being relational.⁷³⁹

Timothy and John also asked, "what do you mean by friend?" in terms of maintaining friendships because different levels of friendship require different levels of investment.⁷⁴⁰ So, perhaps the investment level is lower if the friendship is a level 1 or level 2 friendship, but for those seeking level 3 friendships (which many of my participants were) then the level of investment encouraged in cultural messaging would be insufficient.

6.3.1.4.2 Faithfulness When it Gets Hard

Prioritising relationships with more acceptance of people's weaknesses and failures was also raised by a few participants. This was in opposition to a trend in Western culture called "cancel culture" which is the idea that if someone makes a grave mistake (usually publicly) they should be stripped of any online or social platform (to be "de-platformed"). While being "cancelled" usually applies to celebrities on social media, people seemed to feel

⁷³⁸ Anaya interview 33:54-35:12

⁷³⁹ Bridget interview 13:04

⁷⁴⁰ John interview 26:28

that this sentiment was also being encouraged in ordinary spaces and between individuals.⁷⁴¹ Similar to “cancel culture” was the term “toxic”. If a person were labelled “toxic” they could be immediately discarded due to disagreement with another’s beliefs or choices or because of some negative behaviours which affected the other person.⁷⁴² The issue for many seemed to be a lack of discernment in being able to differentiate between overall positive friendships where forgiveness and faithfulness are practices, and overall negative “friendships” where abuse and toxic behaviours are common. To confuse the two could be detrimental as one could lose good friendships if they pushed aside a friend the moment they (seemingly or in actuality) act in opposition to their friend’s values.⁷⁴³ Conversely, someone could also stay in a damaging relationship, continually glossing over abusive behaviours.

Anaya also raised an interesting point about how people are getting married much later in life and wondered if society encouraged choosing instead to commit to marriage at a younger age, might that help cultivate patterns of commitment which would apply not only to romantic relationships but to friendships and familial ties as well. Her thought was that perhaps choosing commitment in such a powerful way (like with marriage) would support and encourage deeper commitment to other relationships (many of which would require easier levels of commitment by comparison).⁷⁴⁴

6.3.1.4.3 Rules of Friendship

This main question regarding societal messaging concerning friendship led to conversations about instruction – or lack thereof, on how to be a friend. Sophie and Amber had helpful things to say about educating children on how to be a good friend as well as about ongoing education for adults for the making and maintaining of meaningful

⁷⁴¹ Bridget interview 13:04

⁷⁴² Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 180-181.

Dubberley, *You Must Be My Friend... Because I Hate You*, 90-96, 231.

⁷⁴³ Amber interview 21:51

Isabella interview 04:11; 06:56

Brian interview 00:27

⁷⁴⁴ Anaya interview 47:11

friendships. Sophie believed education for children regarding what makes a good friend and how to deal with negative friendships would be especially useful:

Nobody really teaches you ... what it means to be a friend and what to look for in a friend. You just kind of grow up around those people and you have to assume they're your friends. But then like, later in life, you realize ... there's no way they could be in my life right now... the way that they are.⁷⁴⁵

Lack of education on choosing friends, she argued, might be prevented if people were taught more about friendship at an earlier stage. Sophie also mentioned that dynamics between men and women in friendship were confusing, especially when she was younger. Given that in her community friendships between men and women were not assumed to be possible, she was inadvertently taught that such friendships could not exist which led to difficulty as she reconciled that she could have male friends but did not know what such friendships could look like.⁷⁴⁶

Amber shared that while she did not struggle to make friends, some of her friends mentioned their struggle in making friendship and asked her how she cultivates good friendships. She felt that instruction on friendship is often seen as something for kids, when in fact, adult relationships are complicated and it could be helpful for adults to be able to receive advice or coaching for learning to navigate friendships well.⁷⁴⁷ Given that adults hire counsellors for many reasons, including parent or marriage counselling, it might be worth asking why, as Amber suggested, it might not also become socially accepted for people to seek counselling for their friendships.⁷⁴⁸

Sophie mentioned receiving positive education which she felt dramatically improved her friendships and felt that it might also help other people's friendships and therefore ought to be encouraged. She claimed that learning about personality differences was really helpful for maintaining her friendships because she could better understand another's needs and feelings, and be better equipped, wherever possible, to meet the needs of her

⁷⁴⁵ Sophie interview 32:52; 35:14

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 32:52

⁷⁴⁷ Amber interview 1:21:20

⁷⁴⁸ Having also worked as a counsellor, I have personally experienced people seeking counselling for friendship and they admitted it might be a bit odd and something people do not usually seek counsel for, but I assured them that any human relationship that may be causing tension or difficulty is not a silly or strange thing for which one might seek counsel.

friends.⁷⁴⁹ Sophie suggested not only societal changes like education in schools or de-stigmatizing getting counselling for friendships, but also advocated for a cultural shift that would incentivise people to see their friendships as worth investing time in order to learn more about how to care for friends as individuals.⁷⁵⁰ There are many books for understanding personality types, love languages, and the like, but these are often promoted within the spheres of either family life (marriage and children) or in the work place, whereas Sophie's point was that friendship should be included when marketing these helpful relationship tools.

6.3.1.4.4 When Friendships End

The ending of friendships was a painful subject for some of the participants to discuss. This was also a topic which one of my sub-questions raised, though there were points elsewhere in some of the interviews where my participants mentioned or began to mention times when friendship failed them, like any time negative experiences arose. I chose to put this question (both regarding the interviews and reporting on my findings) in this section because many of the responses had to do with cultural expectations regarding the ending of friendships.

One of the main issues raised was that of how to best to end a friendship, (i.e. how to "break up" with a friend). Nora and Amber mentioned "fading out", where one slowly leaves the friendship without any clear conversation by communicating less and less until the friendship has in effect ended.⁷⁵¹ Nora said: "we just fade out, we phase out and just don't speak anymore."⁷⁵² She added:

...the idea of saying to someone 'I no longer want to be your friend', is ... not an expected common thing. I think most people would find that quite shocking.... the idea of saying to someone I no longer want to be your friend is seen as really, really hurtful.⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁹ Sophie interview 36:24

⁷⁵⁰ Sophie interview 32:52-35:14

⁷⁵¹ Amber interview 49:52

⁷⁵² Nora interview 21:54

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 21:25

She made the case that, if friendship is seen as a lower commitment which does not require lots of effort, then to tell someone the friendship is ending would be like saying to someone they are not even worth the minimal effort of friendship.⁷⁵⁴ This is a fascinating observation which highlights the ways in which friendships might be minimised within society. If friendship truly is regarded as a low-effort relationship than telling someone they are not worth minimal effort would be insulting. The question then becomes, if friendships were more highly regarded as relationships which require dedicated time and effort, which by nature would be limited to a few rather than available to many, would it be less insulting to tell someone that they do not have the capacity to be their friend? This would be an interesting question to ask in future research, though to truly ascertain an answer would require observing a societal change. Another reason given for “ghosting”, as Brian put it, was that compared to romantic relationships, there was less to untangle. Brian used a sort of scale where there are boyfriend/girlfriend break ups, and then there are marriage break-ups which are far worse, but with friendships, there is no breaking up, just “ghosting”.⁷⁵⁵ The question Brian’s comment raises is whether it is true that friendships have less to entangle than romantic relationships. If entanglement only applies to assets and finances, as Brian seems to suggest, the difference makes sense. However, if entanglement also applies to emotional bonds, then one might wonder as Nora did, why one might be expected to “break up” with a romantic partner, but not with a friend, and why a friendship break-up would be considered insulting in a way that romantic break-ups are not.

Why this difference between friendships and romantic relationships? Much of it seems to come down to “societal norms” or unwritten rules. For example, Amber noted that she was never taught how to end a friendship; she was never given guidelines to follow.⁷⁵⁶ Isabella, mentioned the hurt of losing a friendship, especially because the parting was not formalised which inhibited closure as one cannot be sure when that door has firmly closed.⁷⁵⁷ There was another means of friendships ending that Brian addressed which was more aggressive; to use social media to cut ties by blocking, unfriending, etc. These insights

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 21:54

⁷⁵⁵ Brian interview 25:03

⁷⁵⁶ Amber interview 01:21:24

⁷⁵⁷ Isabella interview 06:21

echo social commentator Kate Leaver. She spent a large section of her book delving into this particular phenomenon and noticed that friendships usually take one of two routes to end, they fade quietly, or they explode and there is no middle ground.⁷⁵⁸ From my own interviews, this sentiment was consistent. Anaya also asked this question of why there are such different social expectations for ending friendships versus romantic relationships:

like I said, before, there's a lot more similarities in a friendship ... compared to a romantic relationship than differences. So why not give the friendship that much equal regard? Especially if it was a meaningful one at some point. Or if you ...are coming to a point ...not [necessarily] walking away but trying ... to ... communicate and see if you can make it work. And if it doesn't...and you just say... "Hey, I need I need space."⁷⁵⁹

Some participants seemed to believe friendships would end better if a new approach were implemented, and perhaps some might be salvaged if they could simply ask for space or go to counselling. It would seem that some of my participants would be open to trying new ways of giving value to friendships, even in their endings.

A few of my participants even opened up about their own, often painful, experiences with losing a close friendship. Timothy got choked up while sharing about two friendships which ended. One was a newer friendship, but both families were friends with each other and invested quickly but when the other family moved churches, they ended the friendship even when Timothy asked for it to continue. Something similar happened but with a much older friendship when he suddenly decided to move, and the friendship ended. He was still grieved over this and expressed the sadness of trusting someone and putting in time and effort, only to be discarded. He said the experience made him question what the friendship meant to the other person.⁷⁶⁰ Anaya also shared a painful story of her best friend letting her down around her wedding. She addressed the issue of trying to restore such an important friendship through understanding and forgiveness, but that there must come a time to accept that a friendship is over and let it go.⁷⁶¹ Amber also admitted letting go of friendships was difficult, especially when she was younger, and part of growing up was learning to let them go peacefully and to appreciate them for the season she had them.⁷⁶² These stories

⁷⁵⁸ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 181, 191.

⁷⁵⁹ Anaya interview 36:20

⁷⁶⁰ Timothy interview 34:51- 37:35

⁷⁶¹ Anaya interview 39:25

⁷⁶² Ibid., 44:59

highlight the investments made in friendship which are different to investments in romantic relationships. Participants seemed to understand that friendships, unlike many romantic relationships, are not expected (to the same degree) to be permanent for them to be meaningful, legitimate, or purposeful. This might explain why some of the participants expressed the loss of valued and beloved friendships that faded over time, without regret or deep grief, because there was never an expectation for those particular friendships to be lifelong. The deeper grief seemed to come when a friendship ended through a breach of trust or a sudden lack of interest without explanation and when the other held an expectation of the friendship continuing on at the previous levels of investment.

6.3.1.5 Question 5: Does being physically present impact your friendships?

While the responses to this question varied in many aspects there were overall similarities. For example, the level of emotion or importance of seeing a friend face-to-face differed greatly, but the overall preference and importance of physically being in the same space was agreed upon as all the participants expressed a preference for being physically present with their friends.

6.3.1.5.1 Face to Face vs. Soul to Soul

All of the participants more or less agreed that being in person was preferable to being long-distance, though there was plenty of nuance to their responses. The primary caveat was that the emotional connection one might have with a friend at a distance would be superior to a face-to-face interaction with someone of less importance. Here is a sampling of participants responses on this point:

Anaya: ... my closest friends - none of them are here. I mean, I ... have developed some good friendships over the last like five years... here, but they're not as deep So yeah, I mean, distance doesn't really matter. I mean, ... it's great if we can sit like this and have coffee every like every other week or ... just catch up.... I would totally choose in person 100% There's no doubt in my mind about that. But that's not the reality. We are all in ... different places.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶³ Anaya interview 43:16-44:39

Brian: I think I'm much more for in person than online, ... and I've tried dating apps, you know, and even ... used ... to try to find friends That's how I tried to connect with a bunch of people I just think... it's way easier to have those interactions in person...because ... through text, ... just harder - I feel like you need to be in person [or] on the phone with someone ...⁷⁶⁴

Bridget: I think ...it's just part of ... being there for each other. Like how can someone cry on your shoulder if you're not there physically? Like, yeah, we can cry over the phone to each other, but we all know that sucks compared to actually having a hug from someone and them comforting you in your sadness....I've always been tempted to say ... it's not real in the same way...in a nuanced way, because ...it's not that it's not real, but it's just not the same ... depending on what sort of technological interaction you're using you might not see their expression, ... [and] we don't just communicate through words...but actually we read each other's body language and facial expressions.⁷⁶⁵

Amber: I think when you're physically present, yeah, there's a lot of like practical ways in which you can help someone ... that kind of add value to that relationship. ... [however], emotionally, I don't think it makes a big difference. Like ... those practical things...can add value, but I don't think the lack of those practical things also mean that the relationship's weaker. Like, ...I consider my mom a good friend, she's all the way in South Africa, I speak [to her] ... almost every day.⁷⁶⁶

Ian: Because they'd like to hug them and things like that, you see? Well... just talking online? You know, it's not the same.⁷⁶⁷

For these participants they clearly preferred face-to-face encounters, however, for many of the participants the soul-to-soul interactions held the most value. Even when face-to-face was not necessary, however, it was still the ideal to enjoy emotional (and for some, spiritual) connection in a face-to-face capacity.

In asking Sophie this question she related some of her experiences related to online dating in trying to make connections from the internet world to the in-person world and how in one instance she was talking to a man who lived a few hours away and she felt like they had to start over every time they met up. She noted that it could have been a chemistry issue, but she felt that the distance and switching between online and offline was disruptive to building a connection.⁷⁶⁸ Of course, this could only be an issue with a romantic relationship, but given that her experience was only the beginning stages of meeting someone her experience might be more relevant to any kind of human relationship building

⁷⁶⁴ Brian interview 28:32

⁷⁶⁵ Bridget interview 10:24

⁷⁶⁶ Amber interview 50:26

⁷⁶⁷ Ian interview 23:21

⁷⁶⁸ Sophie interview 48:46

including friendship. As Bridget noticed, much of human communication is non-verbal and so it is important to see and interact with an embodied person. This was the issue raised by some like Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews⁷⁶⁹ concerning how much can get missed through online communication where even technologies like video chat cannot replicate a face-to-face meeting.

While technology will be addressed more fully in the next question, it is fitting at this point to consider the responses of how the participants would feel about future technologies which would attempt to recreate in-person experiences completely online. In response to this question not one of my respondents was positive about such a scenario. It therefore seems that while technology is praised for the ways in which it has provided the ability to interact with friends and family who live far away, total online immersion which seeks to replace being physically present with loved ones was not something desired, with some participants being very adamant that they do not wish to live to see that day. Brian summed it up well: "If technology takes us down that road, I wouldn't be happy. It's not the same as getting around the table. Putting the plates out, putting the food out around."⁷⁷⁰ Isabella even said that when people live far apart there should be an ideal number of times friends ought to meet up (depending on the distance and their resources). For her this amounted to 3 times a year for friends in the same country and every few years for friends who live in different countries.⁷⁷¹ Nora admitted that as she thought about the different questions, she saw that she was possibly going to have to contradict herself⁷⁷² when it came to using the internet and digital devices to substitute in-person friendship saying they would only ever be substitutions and never the real thing, and so while she emphasised the importance of emotional connection over physical connection, the in-person relationship will always be ideal and irreplicable.⁷⁷³

⁷⁶⁹ See chapter 5 section 5.2.1.1.

⁷⁷⁰ Brian interview 48:12

⁷⁷¹ Isabella interview 06:21

⁷⁷² See footnotes 686, 687.

⁷⁷³ Nora interview 22:30

6.3.1.5.2 Letters and Gifts

Given the previous responses, it should not be shocking to find that most respondents similarly felt physical items, things they could touch, hold, even smell, were preferred over things they could only see on a device. Nora said:

I think a letter holds something very special...There is nothing you can do to replace that feeling of opening an envelope and like checking a card and then reading through it. Digital cards are great, because it's there, but it ... does not come even close. And it's the same thing with like, photographs. I have ... two albums ...that I have carried for the last 15 years from house to houseThere is something to be said about turning the ... heavy pages; having something tangible.⁷⁷⁴

There were, of course caveats to this as there were with the previous point. While there was a preference for physical things, something was preferable to nothing. For example, Bridget said she preferred written letters, but that communication exists on a hierarchy; something is better than nothing and that understanding context matters.⁷⁷⁵ Isabella also noted a difference between being pragmatic where the information is the same and thus a text and letter are the same in one sense, but that at the end of the day the message is not about being pragmatic it is also about the effort put into showing affection and with the internet there is little to no effort.⁷⁷⁶ Amber, however, while generally considering effort more important than the medium used, did not hold the same belief with regards to cards (e.g. birthday/Christmas cards) saying that she would rather send a real card or no card as she doesn't see the value in digital or "E-cards" and will not send them.⁷⁷⁷ It was also Amber who shared that one of her most treasured items were printed-off texts and emails, etc., between her and her husband which she was given as an engagement present.⁷⁷⁸ For John, nothing can beat the internet for speed. However, because of how quick and cheap and easily accessible digital communication is, this has caused the value of things like letters to explode in value. Where letters would have been commonplace (valued as they were) with

⁷⁷⁴ Anaya interview 50:33

⁷⁷⁵ Bridget interview 16:57-17:40

⁷⁷⁶ Isabella interview 14:04

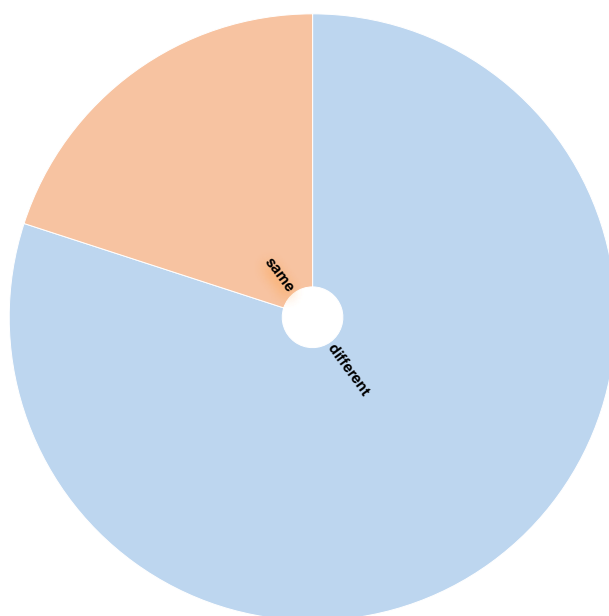
⁷⁷⁷ Amber interview 1:01:25

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:02:29

emails and texts messages the value of letters (in the cost of postage but especially in emotional capital) has risen.⁷⁷⁹

Similar sentiments about favouring physical things proved true regardless of whether the subject was about written communication or digital gifts – the physical was preferred to the digital, but for most people something was still better than nothing. John made sure to note that monetary costs was not the primary importance, it was the intention, thought, and effort put in that made a gift more valued.⁷⁸⁰ Nora however made an interesting personal observation which was that she has a hard time accepting gifts and so it is sometimes easier for her to accept a digital gift. This, however, does not negate the overall sentiment. Rather it shows that for Nora it is because digital gifts require less time, money, and effort and are therefore (generally) believed to be of less value, that she was more comfortable accepting such a token gesture because she did not feel anyone was put out on her behalf.⁷⁸¹

Figure: percentage of responses if letters and texts/emails are the same or different



⁷⁷⁹ John interview 35:05

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 40:20-41:27

⁷⁸¹ Nora interview 05:42

Another question – which did not come to mind, but which would have been interesting to ask my participants – could be the importance of getting rid of physical and digital items, either due to the ending of a friendship, or just organizing and clearing out unwanted items. Perhaps they would have found it easier to “clean up” their computer files and delete emails from friends than it would be to decide which birthday cards to keep. Similarly to how some people find it therapeutic to throw away or even burn love letters and keepsakes after a romantic break-up, would people find the same sort of clearing up helpful when a friendship ends badly?

6.3.1.6 Question 6: What is the Role of Technology in Your Friendships?

All the participants used technology to interact with their friends, but how they used their technology for friendship could differ greatly and not necessarily due to differences of age or gender. For example, some participants preferred to use text messaging to set up times for phone calls or in-person meetings with their friends, while others used text messaging (or phone or video calls) as the means to catch-up with their friends regardless of whether that friend was local or at a distance.

6.3.1.6.1 Evolution of Technology

Technology has changed significantly regardless of what year you were born. Irrespective of whether I spoke with my most elderly participant or university students they all felt they had experienced the evolution of technological changes, though for some their advanced age and experience with such changes impacted how they felt about technology. The mobile or smart phone seemed to be the most notable technology brought up when I asked them about how technology and their use of it had changed. Most participants could describe getting their first phone (how old they were, if they got it later or sooner than their peers). The mobile phone seemed to be far more momentous than say email or the internet, regardless of whether I was speaking with younger or older participants. Brian, for example said he had a little bit of popularity for being one of the first kids at his school to have a cell phone – which seemed to be for him a silver lining in that the reason he was

given the phone was because of his parents' divorce.⁷⁸² Bridget, on the other hand, was one of the last of her peers to get a phone (because her siblings kept forgetting their lunches and she needed to be able to call her mom).⁷⁸³ She remembered that her first phone was not nearly as invasive as the one she currently has, it was easier to carry around, and she did not think much about it. Ian, my oldest participant, was very thankful that he has been able to take advantage of a cell phone as it allows him to communicate with his family, both local and those who live in another country.⁷⁸⁴ Some of the younger participants like Brian admitted that, growing up with technology, he didn't feel like it was so weird to switch between online and face-to-face. It will be interesting to see in the coming years how future generations will respond to further integration of technologies into daily life, if it will be seamless like in Brian's experience or if, like Timothy, they will struggle to incorporate new technologies.

6.3.1.6.2 Positives of Technology

All the participants had positive things to say about technology. Most felt that technology was a means to keep in touch but less of a space for baring their soul. Sophie, for example, referred to technology like a glue to hold the relationship together - a filler between face-to-face encounters.⁷⁸⁵ Nora felt digital technologies were vital to maintaining her long-distance relationships.⁷⁸⁶ Indeed, for those moving far away, technology was often mentioned when considering the positive opportunities for staying in touch. Amber, like Nora, felt that without technologies like her mobile phone and the internet which allows for texting, video calls, phone calls and more, she would not have been able to maintain her friendships after moving far away.⁷⁸⁷ Ian, said, however, that technology was never a factor when he considered moving out of the country. For him the choice was based on job

⁷⁸² Brian interview 37:58

⁷⁸³ Bridget interview 21:56

⁷⁸⁴ Ian interview 37:22

⁷⁸⁵ Sophie interview 54:01

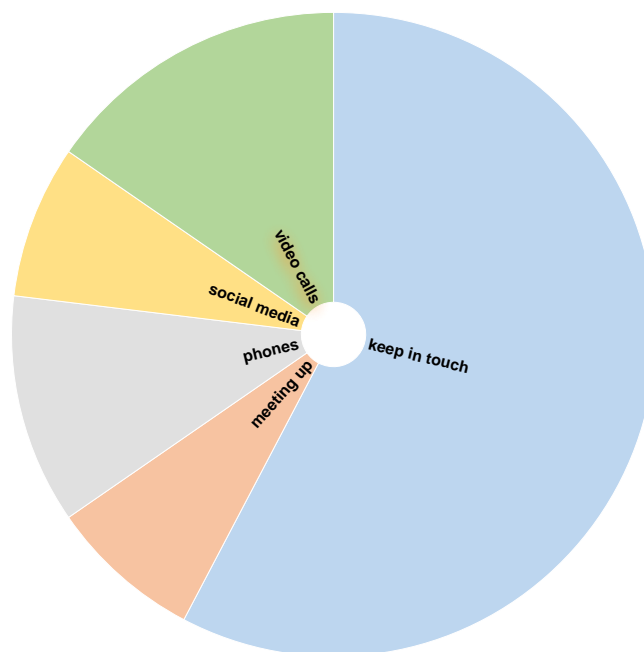
⁷⁸⁶ Nora interview 08:07

⁷⁸⁷ Amber interview 01:06:55

offers.⁷⁸⁸ Interestingly, both Ian and Timothy mentioned during their interviews that they had opportunities to move internationally before modern technologies for staying in touch were available, and they both decided against moving. Ian said that deciding against relocation was not because of this factor, while Timothy explained that the main reason to stay was because he would either have had to leave his fiancé or get married and take his young bride away from her family. While technology was not the primary reason for deciding whether to move countries, because they were making these decisions prior to the current technological advances for staying in touch cheaply and easily, it is hard to say whether access to current technologies might have impacted their decisions differently had these technologies been available at the time.

Of course, the positives were not limited to long-distance friendships, as people who lived close to their friends also enjoy the benefits of being able to stay connected to their friends instantaneously. For those with loved ones far away, though, technology proved an even more invaluable means of enabling one to continue to invest in one's friendships.

Figure: Technology positive pie chart



⁷⁸⁸ Ian interview 38:06-39:54

6.3.1.6.3 Negatives of Technology

While the positives were fairly streamlined into the sentiment of “staying connected”, the negatives were more diverse. Social media was specifically mentioned as having negative aspects such as how it leads to bullying and feeling left out, likely due to the comparative ease of bullying online,⁷⁸⁹ sometimes even by “friends”, as well as by increasing the difficulty of making friends. Social media also felt to many of the participants as less personal (in contrast to phone calls and video calls which some, like Sophie, felt was becoming increasingly personal). Anaya and Sophie noted as well how social media creates strange situations where one might know things about someone by following their posts, but then in seeing someone face-to-face, not being sure whether it would be appropriate to mention something they saw online.⁷⁹⁰ They also feared there could be a danger in assuming to know details of someone’s life because of social media posts. In extreme cases, this could even lead to friendships failing from lack of effort to keep in touch directly, assuming that they know all they need to know from online posts.

As to phones themselves, Bridget felt these pocket-sized devices often proved to be distractions from people physically present.⁷⁹¹ She was further concerned that in some cases, phones could make some people more socially awkward as they used phones as an escape from having to learn to interact in in-person social settings; potentially harming both the making and maintaining of friendships. She said:

... I think when people are hanging out in a big group or sometimes as well in a small group, ... if they're feeling awkward they resort to looking at their phones, or some people are sort of slaves to their phones in that if they get a notification, they'll immediately look at their phone which personally, I think it's really rude if you're hanging out with other people. Like if you're there, you're there to socialize with those people and see them not to ... spend time on technology with people who aren't actually there.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁹ Nathan mentioned feeling FOMO (fear of missing out) seeing his friends having fun online without him.
Nathan Interview 50:55

⁷⁹⁰ Anaya interview 30:28

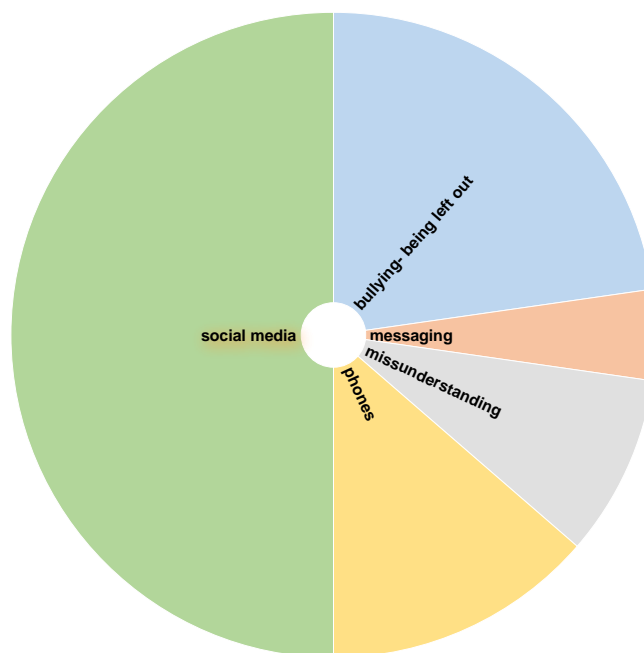
⁷⁹¹ Bridget interview 16:29

Sophie interview 58:17

⁷⁹² Bridget interview 00:17

While not inherently related to friendship, Sophie also mentioned getting notification fatigue which had a negative effect on her mental health.⁷⁹³ In light of Bridget’s comments, however, these notifications could also be a distraction from people who might be already physically present, or it could sap away social and mental energy which could rob people of the energy needed to invest meaningfully in their friendships. For Timothy, there was also the concern that messages and context could be more easily misconstrued over text messages, and so he preferred phone calls or meeting face-to-face in order to hear a person’s tone and/or facial expressions which reduced the risks of being misinterpreted.⁷⁹⁴

Figure: Technology negatives pie chart



6.3.1.6.4 Ethics of Technology

There are many unwritten rules of behaviour or rules of etiquette which people both consciously and subconsciously live by, so I wanted to know if any of my participants conducted themselves according to any rules or even ideals of behaviour, which might have

⁷⁹³ Sophie interview 56:43

⁷⁹⁴ Timothy interview 02:57

moral or ethical roots or implications, or which might just be useful for their own mental or social well-being. As it turns out, many of my participants did have rules or guidelines which they tried to live up to regarding their digital devices and their friendships (and other relationships). Most people discussed their relationship with their phone as the device that needed parameters, though Ian (the oldest participant) mentioned turning off the television when people were around or when he was on the phone so as to focus on others.⁷⁹⁵ The sentiment of giving one's full attention to those physically present was also expressed by many who tried to not be on their phones around other people.⁷⁹⁶ Some tried to monitor their speech so as not to say anything online they wouldn't say to someone's face.⁷⁹⁷ While others chose to limit their use of online communication when face-to-face communication was an option.⁷⁹⁸ Some participants like Brian seemed to feel caught between rules, however, like how he personally felt he could not ask his friends to be off their phones,⁷⁹⁹ in part because he felt like he would be a hypocrite due to how much his mother would get upset with him being on his phone. It would be an interesting question whether it is better to try and fail or surrender out of fear of hypocrisy, as many may share Brian's frustration.

It was also interesting that both Sophie and Bridget had opposing issues regarding responding to friend's text messages. Sophie said she would be hurt when people took a long time to respond to her messages and felt that more help in rules for online etiquette might help alleviate hurts by managing expectations.⁸⁰⁰ Bridget, on the other hand, was the opposite in that she was the one whose friends would sometimes be frustrated at her slow responses since she did not appreciate feeling enslaved to her phone, needing to immediately respond to every notification. For both sides, increased communication for managing expectations would seem helpful, especially in terms of online communication between friends.⁸⁰¹ For Isabella, keeping a proper work-life balance was also important. She

⁷⁹⁵ Ian interview 46:30

⁷⁹⁶ Amber interview 01:14:52
Isabella interview 21:09

⁷⁹⁷ Amber interview 1:14:52
Bridget interview 03:06

⁷⁹⁸ Isabella interview 21:44

⁷⁹⁹ Brian interview 42:24

⁸⁰⁰ Sophie interview 01:00:11

⁸⁰¹ Bridget interview 24:47

tries to not check work emails after 5pm and tried to avoid social media before bedtime. She said: “I am trying ... to be more focused, ... I’m on Facebook because... I want to find out the birthday of this person...to be more intentional, but it's hard, because oftentimes social media can easily become just a way to relaxso these are parts of my rules.”⁸⁰²

6.3.1.6.5 Wish List of Technology

The question which caused my participants to pause the longest before answering was usually the one where I asked them if there was anything technology-wise (apps, devices etc.) which could be invented or brought to market that would be a positive help for their friendships. When they did answer, however, they had some interesting ideas. Amber suggested an app to navigate friendship, providing tips and helpful advice for building better friendships.⁸⁰³ Isabella wanted a shared calendar for friends to set up times to catch up, and Bridget thought a “hanging out with friends” mode, similar to Apple’s work mode or sleep mode would be a helpful addition.⁸⁰⁴ Bridget also mentioned how phones and apps are made and marketed (which can lead to effects like Sophie’s notification fatigue) and desired that her phone could be more neutral which would make her phone less of a target for marketing or political agendas and more for keeping in touch with friends and family.⁸⁰⁵

6.3.1.7 *Question 7: Do You Have Any Friendships with People You Have Never Met Face-to-Face?*

Many of my participants did not have any friends whom they first met online – it was only a few who were in the younger age categories who could say yes to this question. The degrees of depth differed with participants’ online friends, however, and all my participants who had friends they only knew online did desire to meet them face-to-face, though some

⁸⁰² Isabella interview 19:11

⁸⁰³ Something like the weight loss app “noom” or the plethora of romantic relationship building apps.

⁸⁰⁴ Bridget interview 08:41

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 06:02-06:45

felt that meeting in face-to-face could be such a different experience that it might alter the friendship. The participants who said yes to this question were: Brian, Isabella, Nathan, and Sophie: 4 out of the 11 participants. It is fair to assume that these numbers would likely increase in the coming years especially since those who did assert they had friendships which were formed and primarily maintained online (for some they are solely online) were all under the age of 35. Since I did not interview anyone under the age of 18, it would be interesting to compare the online friendships of generation Alpha with the Millennial and Gen Z generations.

Brian said he did have some online only friends, though he is not in much contact with them anymore. He said, "I've definitely experienced what it's like you know, to have that and ... I think it's interesting ... you can really get to know someone ...".⁸⁰⁶ Brian did not use video calling but he did text and use voice chatting. Isabella was the only one to have seen an online friend in person. She said that she used to have an online friend, but she is not sure they are still friends. They did see each other in person at a conference once when this friend was a speaker, but they never got to meet at the conference. She said they had called and video chatted but even then, she felt such friendships were more risky due to assumptions which might not correspond to reality or the chance that someone might pretend online easier than in person.⁸⁰⁷ Nathan had a friend he met while in an online debate about football. Nathan's online friend was Indian and expressed a desire to learn about English culture and Nathan, in turn, wanted to know about his new friend's culture. They exchange video messages and Nathan said he would love to meet his friend if he ever comes to the UK, but that he would want to manage his expectations since they have not met in person before.⁸⁰⁸ Sophie had an online blind date, and they decided to continue as friends and they talk nearly every day. This is what she had to say about it:

... we decided we weren't going to date, and I've stayed friends with this person ever since he's moved from Michigan to California, and we literally talk every single day, about ... everything. I tell this person, everything, even the vulnerable things about me and ... and I've never met them. We've tried to make an effort and ... it just hasn't worked out. I think part of it is ... we both kind of have this fear that ... we'll ruin it Because right ... you kind of

⁸⁰⁶ Brian interview 46:57

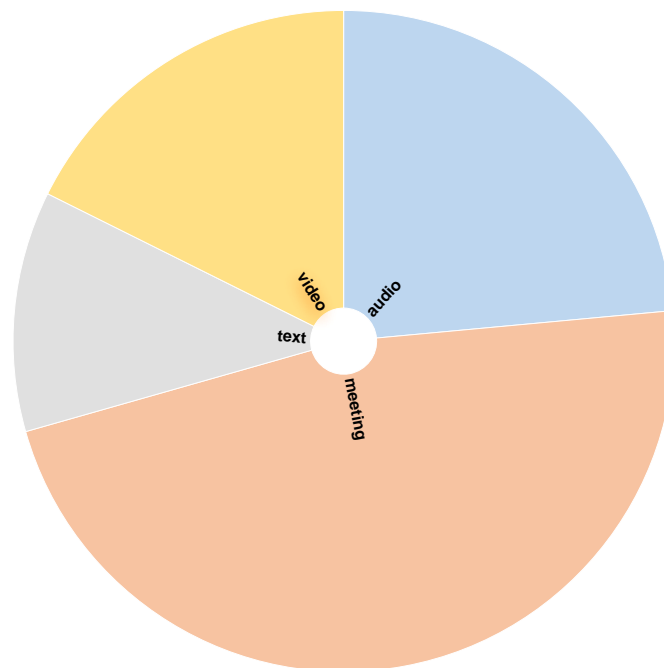
⁸⁰⁷ Isabella interview 01:43

⁸⁰⁸ Nathan interview 56:11-59:29

have this person that's not ... in your current life. So, I can tell him anything because he doesn't know any of the people that I'm talking about, you know?It's a good sounding board. A good ... life advice person, and vice versa.⁸⁰⁹

Sophie claimed she would be happy to meet her online friend in person, but she wondered how things could change. She also noted how the different ways of communicating could maybe hide parts of our personality etc. that we would then see in person. This was not necessarily deemed good or bad, but different and such differences could change the dynamics of the friendship.

Figure of the Medium of Online-only Friendship Communication.



6.3.1.8 Question 8: Does Your Faith or Understanding of God Impact Your Ideas of Friendship?

Regardless of the faith background, all the participants had something to add to this question. It seemed to be that the particular morality which religion imparts, and the spiritual elements of faith were not seen as irrelevant to the topic of friendship, even for

⁸⁰⁹ Sophie interview 01:07:05 -1:08:36

participants who were non-religious. Some of the participants were Christians and they felt their faith actively played an important, if not vital, role in their friendships. Others were agnostic but were raised religiously and felt that the Christian faith in which they were raised played some part in shaping ideals of friendship which they still held even though they no longer associated with Christianity.

6.3.1.8.1 Faith and Friendship - Believers

Of those who were Christians, all firmly believed their faith impacted friendship deeply. Brian said Christianity redefined friendship for him by changing what he was looking for in friendship as his faith became more important to him.⁸¹⁰ Amber saw her faith as teaching her to be more inclusive in those she would consider for friendship, seeing friendship as a gift rather than something to be earned. She did seem to struggle, however, over how to honour the Christian principles to love everyone (and in this way show friendship to all) and still have deeper (and thus inherently more exclusive) friendships. She attempted to explain it in this way: "Everybody's in, some people are more in than other people."⁸¹¹ Anaya, a Christian who converted from Buddhism said that both Buddhism and Christianity taught her the importance of forgiveness in her friendships.⁸¹²

Many of the Christians interviewed noted that their faith affected their friendships, usually in two ways: 1) values and behaviours concerning friendship, and 2) the belief that God is their friend and that it is through friendship with God that they learn how to love others. Isabella summed it up well when she said:

... if friendship is about love, and God is love himself – it's through the relationship that I have with God, that I can learn to love and be loved. So, friends make the love of God real and to be a friend gives you the opportunity to love as Christ is calling you to love.⁸¹³

Timothy and Bridget also brought up scripture and theology in their responses. Timothy had scriptures ready for this question, Proverbs 18:24, and John 15:15 which both reference friendship (Proverbs referencing the goodness of friendship and John referencing Jesus

⁸¹⁰ Brian interview 48:59

⁸¹¹ Amber interview 01:27:15

⁸¹² Ibid., 01:07:17

⁸¹³ Isabella interview 05:00

inviting his followers to be his friends).⁸¹⁴ He also said he seeks out friendships with people who share his faith. He added that he can befriend those of another faith or with no faith, but that being friends with another Christian allows for a friendship to deepen in ways he cannot experience with those who do not share his faith.⁸¹⁵ For Bridget, not only faith but her theology about God shaped her ideas of friendship:

being a Christian, seeing the way the Trinity works together ... and how they serve one another and glorify one another and work together....it's a unique relationship that our human friendships are not going to mimic ...in the same way because ...we're not God. But at the same time... He shows us how to be relational in a perfect way ...in the Bible, it talks about laying down your life.... how loving your friends is that sacrificial thing.⁸¹⁶

Sophie shared the sentiment that her Christian faith taught her how to be more servant-hearted. For Sophie, following Jesus takes away narcissism and helps people “truly care about somebody.”⁸¹⁷ She also noted, like Timothy, that with Christian friends there are things she can talk about like spirituality, theological questions etc, which she did not believe would happen with friends who did not share her faith.⁸¹⁸

Many of the Christians also expressed a desire to see friendship discussed more in their churches. Amber had questions about how this might be done, especially if the needs/desires for friendship might not all look the same, but she hoped to hear more about friendship in church nonetheless.⁸¹⁹

6.3.1.8.2 Faith and Friendship – Non-Believers

Of those who did not believe in God, their responses were perhaps even more intriguing because none of them denied that faith could impact friendship. They did not all see faith as necessary, but they all acknowledged that it could play an important part, especially at a societal level. Ian, who did not believe in God, implied that faith, even culturally or with neighbours impacts how people like himself treat others and want to be

⁸¹⁴ See chapter 2 for more on this.

⁸¹⁵ Timothy interview 18:46

⁸¹⁶ Bridget interview 23:29

⁸¹⁷ Sophie interview 01:19:41

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 01:21:3

⁸¹⁹ Amber interview Q. 8.b

treated. He said, “There's still something there with me. I suppose people would say it's because of your God. I think about [how] people are different. And think like, I don't really want to be here to hurt people.”⁸²⁰ John and Nathan both said “no” at first, but they both went on to explain in such a way that they began to consider the role of faith more as they spoke. Nathan, said no, that he did not need God to tell him right from wrong, but also acknowledged that this was likely because he grew up in the UK which was a society with deeply ingrained Christian influences.⁸²¹ Nathan noted that the teachings of Jesus include many stories of how to love people which he saw as useful, but he also felt that Kantian, general moral law, could serve the same purpose. John when first asked this question said that faith did not matter. He went on to explain that he would be friends with people without regard to their personal faith – as long as they were decent people.⁸²² He then went on to add that he was brought up a Roman Catholic and he felt that the morality and ethics gained in childhood “helped him on a friendship basis”.⁸²³

Nora was the most interesting agnostic with whom I discussed this question because her answers sounded in many respects very like the responses of the Christians participants, even though she had not been raised religiously. She said that while she had never given it much thought previously, she felt including God in the conversation would elevate friendship's importance (something she said she desired earlier in her interview). She asked herself questions like, if God did create everything, why would he do it? Why would he create something like friendship?⁸²⁴ She said:

... I'm agnostic... I wasn't raised with a religion but I'm not an atheist. I don't I feel like I'm open. But ... I already feel some kind of level of like sanctity or specialness to friendship, we're so much more solitaryand yet choosing to be friends and have friends is kind of unnecessary, but a lovely thing that you can do, and so that in itself is a ... level of specialness.⁸²⁵

For Sophie, if God did create everything in the name of friendship, then friendship would be given deeper significance: a sanctity.

⁸²⁰ Ian interview 50:33

⁸²¹ Nathan interview 1:04:00

⁸²² John interview Q. 8

⁸²³ Ibid., Q. 8a

⁸²⁴ Nora interview 28:34

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 29:26

6.3.1.8.3 Friends of God

Both Christians and non-Christians also had things to say about friendship with God. Amber, a Christian, seemed hesitant to say that people can truly be friends with God. For her, it was a question of degree and definitions. She believes that the Bible asserts humans can be friends with God, but she also felt like human friendship is so fallen that it almost seemed improper to use that term for relating to God in his perfection: “I know in the Bible it talks about people being friends with God but I... don’t think that the way I think about being friends with [named two friends and her husband] ... it seems too superficial for our relationship with God.”⁸²⁶ Anaya also explained that her conversion to Christianity from Buddhism meant that she was able to be friends with God, which was not possible in Buddhism. She also said that when you realise you can have friendship with God, that puts all other friendships into perspective, and that this is a unique aspect of Christianity.⁸²⁷ Timothy added that being friends with God adds a depth to friendship that, “... only God can show you the full richness of”⁸²⁸ While believers had questions about what friendship with God might mean, for all of them, friendship with God changed the importance of friendship, as well as their perspectives and experiences of friendship.

John, however, had issues with being friends with God because of a power imbalance. He felt a two-way relationship would not be possible. He asked philosophical/theological questions like, how could you have vulnerability from God? Or would you find out he was not perfect and thus not God?⁸²⁹ I shared with him that his questions were pertinent, valid, and interesting especially given that Aristotle had similar issues, and that Thomas Aquinas had some interesting answers to this dilemma. His questions highlighted what the interviews were trying to understand like the nature of friendship, why friendship and faith are important, and if they can ever come together.

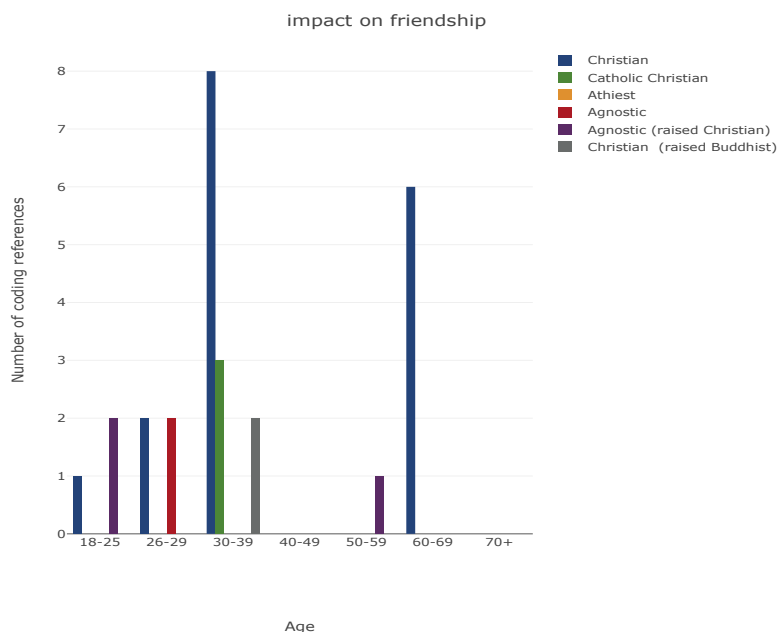
⁸²⁶ Amber interview 8.b

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 01:09:38-1:12:50

⁸²⁸ Timothy Interview 27:21

⁸²⁹ John Interview Q. 8.b

Figure: Impact on Faith on Friendship



6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has walked through all the empirical data collected for this research, showing that as common as friendship is, it clearly contains many layers of complexity which are not all well understood. Most of my interviews went longer than an hour, though I tried to keep them under an hour and a half to respect the participant’s time. Many of the participants seemed to enjoy delving into the questions and show how emotional friendship can be as it is not something theoretical but deeply personal. Furthermore, their responses show that while there are many things to agree upon, there are still many questions to ask of friendship. There are clearly also aspects of culture, particularly related to changes in technology, which the participants would like to see altered.

The questions engaged with ranged from defining of friendship, to experiences of friendship, the role technology plays concerning friendship, as well as the role of faith and theological beliefs. All of these questions relate to the various chapters of this thesis and provided insights into how people are reacting and responding to influences both from

within themselves and from their outward environments in regard to friendship. Interestingly, faith was a factor in terms of understanding the role, importance, and behaviours relating to friendship for both Christians and non-Christians. Many of the same ancient questions were also captured in these interviews though often within more modern contexts. For example, people still wondered how many friends to have or when to end a friendship, but changes in defining a friend and social media brought about variation to these otherwise ancient questions. The themes of body and soul, morality, intimacy, virtue etc, continued to be important themes of friendship for many of the respondents which undergirds the initial assumption of this thesis that theology plays an important role in providing robust and meaningful friendships. This all now leads to the final chapter where the empirical data which has been laid out in this chapter will be brought into conversation with the historical literature from chapters 2 & 3 and the modern literature and current research from chapter 4 & 5 to discern how all of this fits together with my original thesis and the goal of providing at least a preliminary theology of friendship for the digital age.

7. Chapter Seven: Christian Friendship in a Digital Age: Hope for Friendship in the Modern World

Now that friendship has been explored from the vantage points of tradition, current research within academia, insights from popular culture, as well as empirical data from participants about their personal experiences and beliefs, this final chapter will bring these 3 elements of research into conversation with each other. The hope is that, in bringing these all to bear upon each other, differences as well as similarities will come into focus leading to the questions of *why* and *how* friendship is perceived today in comparison to the tradition and current research thus leading to the question of a theology of friendship in a digital age.

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter has been separated into three main sections. The first concerns continuities with the tradition, the second divergences from the tradition, and the third closes by looking to the future of friendship. In the first two of these sections, as with much of this thesis, the emphasis will generally be more concerned with degree of difference or similarity than kind. Thus, the first section deals with topics which, by degree, are more related to the narrative of the tradition while the second deals with areas which, by degree, diverge from the traditions from the literature. In this first section the areas of questions, assumptions, and values of the tradition will be further explored. This section will cover those aspects of friendship which link to the tradition but where consideration to nuance, questions, and struggles persist. Special attention will also be given to areas where themes continue but where significant or pertinent changes to either the underlying beliefs or outward expression emerge.

The second section focuses on areas where there is greater divergence from the tradition. While this section will have some continuity to the tradition, this section, unlike the first, which addressed nuanced differences within the continuing tradition, will focus on where friendship departs from tradition, either by adapting so greatly that the ties to the

tradition are more historical than currently relevant, or where new questions arise which the tradition has little to add to such conversations in the present.

The third and final section will be the conclusion of this thesis and will summarize the differences and similarities (covered in the first two sections) concerning friendship and consider the implications of friendship in the modern world, while highlighting areas where research may advance in the future, as the influences of technology and cultural values continue to progress and change.

In that this thesis has been studied and written within the discipline of theology, rather than have a separate section to discuss theological issues on the nature of friendship and the empirical findings, I have judged it best to weave the theological influences, implications, and ideals into all three sections wherever relevant. Theological understanding has not been seen as separate from the discourse on friendship undertaken in this thesis and therefore will be included throughout this concluding chapter. This conclusion is both descriptive and to some extent prescriptive. Given that there is still much to be studied at the intersection of friendship and digital technology it seemed most appropriate to discuss the findings in the spirit of moving towards theological understandings of contemporary friendship. The goal is therefore that the findings and questions presented will clarify both the opportunities and challenges facing friendship with the hope of prompting positive changes.

7.2 Continuing the Tradition

While there are many aspects of continuity between the empirical data and the tradition, rather than try and sort through each and every one, I have chosen instead to select those which seemed most significant both to the tradition and to the information provided from the empirical data. From these I was able to divide the topics into two categories: 1) The Challenge of Friendship and 2) the Soul of Friendship.

7.2.1 The Challenge of Friendship

This first section deals with challenges in friendship. This will cover aspects of friendship such as who can be friends, negative experiences of friendship, and the difficulties of integrating lives and sharing resources and how these relate to previously explored challenges to friendship from the tradition.

7.2.1.1 *Who can Be a Friend?*

Questions posited by the ancient philosophers often related to the challenges of attaining true friendship. It has been thought by some⁸³⁰ that the demands of friendship were such that very few humans could truly claim to have possessed a virtue friendship. This question begs another question of how friendships are defined as well as what qualities of moral virtue those who desire deep friendship might embody. This question continues on into the present though it has been reshaped in many ways. Rather than considering who is worthy of friendship, and limiting accessibility, the reverse is often experienced, where friendship is not seen as something rare, difficult and so hard to attain few manage to experience it. However, the broadening out of friendship in its definitions has resulted in many expressing concerns that friendship needs more restraint. Popular writer Kate Leaver writes that friendship is difficult, and while people often mistakenly talk about friendship as something everyone can have, not everyone actually has the moral character needed for friendship – and until those people develop better moral character, they really just cannot be friends.⁸³¹ This might seem a strong statement, and perhaps it is, if friendship is seen as “the bare minimum” to quote Participant Nora.⁸³² It bears consideration as to what other relationships people may also have to by which to grow and develop their character. It is

⁸³⁰ “Therefore it is between good men that affection and friendship exist in their fullestSuch friendships are of course rare, because such men are few. Moreover they require time and intimacy...” Aristotle, *The Nicomachean ethics*, ed. Harris Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), VII. 1156b, 8. John Cuddeback, *True Friendship: Where Virtue Becomes Happiness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), 149.

Briggle, “Real Friends.”

⁸³¹ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 194.

⁸³² Nora interview 21:54

also worth considering whether friendship is a relationship which does require a threshold of character development in order to attain the deeper levels of friendship. Some of the social scientists who discussed friendship and the internet likewise noted that it might not be so much a question of whether friendship is more difficult online, as much as it is a reminder that friendship is difficult, regardless of what mediums of communication are used.⁸³³ The majority of the participants seemed to echo these sentiments, where they knew that not just anyone would make a good friend, nor did they assume that there would not be requirements on their part if they wanted to enjoy a lasting and meaningful friendship.⁸³⁴ Both Christians and non-Christians who were interviewed felt that friendship which was far deeper than Facebook friends, work colleagues or casual acquaintances, required effort, time, and commitment – preferably over many years. The level of engagement desired also made sense of the deep pain and loss expressed by many participants in their comments on betrayal or abandonment in friendship. The emotional pain seemed to correspond to the level of trust which was extended and subsequently abused.

Many of the respondents noted a desire for more terms to differentiate between the various forms of relationships lumped under the umbrella term of friendship. In the first two chapters it became evident that true or virtuous friendship, from the perspectives of Scripture, Greco-Roman philosophers, and the church fathers, requires a level of moral character and a commitment to growth. In Scripture, examples like Ruth or Jonathan, as well as the example of Christ as the friend who lays down his life for his friends, set a high bar. Of course, not all friendships will meet the requirements of such friendships but, as many of the ancient philosophers and church fathers attested, friendships exist at various levels of commitment. Furthermore, there can be some confusion in understanding how friendship relates to more general calls to love other people. Certainly, Scripture asserts an intrinsic human value, due to the *imago dei*, and promotes many teachings concerning loving one's enemies or showing kindness to strangers. The Bible illustrates friendship alongside these other teachings, providing helpful context for addressing the tension of

⁸³³ Briggie, "Real Friends," 71-73.

Vallor, "Flourishing on Facebook," 185-99, 190.

⁸³⁴ Dubberley, *You Must Be My Friend... Because I Hate You*, 234.

wanting to agree (at least to some extent) with the tradition, in its claims that friendship comes with demanding minimum requirements for friendship, combined with the desire to be inclusive and welcoming to everyone. The key is to differentiate between love and kindness, more generally speaking, *friendliness*, and the specific category for non-sexual intimate relationships between two or more humans: *friendship*.⁸³⁵ Friendship must be exclusive to a cherished few or it will lose all meaning because human limitations do not allow for numerous intimate (and thus time-consuming) relationships.

That there are thresholds of character needed for intimate and long-lasting friendships seems to be more implicitly understood than explicitly expressed. The broadening of the term “friendship” also plays into the increased difficulty in expressing and gatekeeping standards for friendship. While there remain difficulties in understanding and expressing the complexities of social values and language surrounding friendship, the fact that friendship continues to be as wonderful as it is challenging, has not changed over the centuries.

7.2.1.2 *Can Friendship be Negative?*

Whether friendship can truly be considered negative has not been determined; however, resolving this question was not the goal. The primary aim in asking questions about any negative aspects of friendship was two-fold. Firstly, considering the negative aspects of friendship reveals the shadow side of friendship, and what it *is not* to ultimately highlight the true meaning of friendship. In the tradition some, like Saint Augustine, firmly believed that friendship could be used in a sinful and morally depraved manner, where friendship, corrupted by sin, could influence a person negatively instead of positively.⁸³⁶ Others, like Saint Aelred,⁸³⁷ would not disagree that there could be a corruption of friendship as Saint Augustine described, but the corruption would mean that the relationship could no longer rightly be called a friendship. Kate Leaver notes that friendships

⁸³⁵ Aelred *Spiritual Friendship*, I. 36.

⁸³⁶ See chapter 3 section 3.3.1.1
Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. II.5.9.

⁸³⁷ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, III. 48.

which are negative might be considered in a similar way to an abusive romantic relationship. The language of love (boyfriend/girlfriend, lover, spouse, etc.) would still be used, and their actions might be called “loving” but the abuse and toxic behaviours would so poison any love that the word would have little meaning in such a relationship.⁸³⁸ She interviewed a London psychotherapist named Samantha De Bono who said that she deals with many, “clients trapped in toxic friendships...” noting that these relationships are often similar to domestic abuse which victims frequently struggle to acknowledge the abuse mostly due to deflecting, excuse making, and blame shifting.⁸³⁹ In situations such as these, both victim and abuser may use words like “friend” to describe the relationship, and words like “loving” to describe behaviour, though in abusive situations such words would no longer be accurate, and their continued use would only create situations for the abuse to continue.⁸⁴⁰

Those interviewed similarly struggled to determine if friendship could be rightly called friendship if it was negative or abusive. Much like those in the tradition, the sentiment that corrupted friendship (named so or not) was indeed real. Furthermore, many of the participants felt that there should be education about prevention and those already in such situations should be given help to escape the abusive relationship. Sophie, for example, believes it would be good for people to be educated on what a friendship is and what it is not and how to put up boundaries especially with people who might be acquaintances but who are not desired as friends due to negative traits.

The term “friend” was even used in the New Testament with negative connotations. One example is in James 4:4 “...friendship with the world is enmity with God...”. The use of friendship in this passage was meant to describe a condition of the heart rather than a human relationship. The manner in which the Bible uses the terminology of friendship to describe moral desires, and how one could align their moral allegiance or “friendship” towards God (morally good) or towards the world (morally evil), would support the view of using friendship even in a corrupted form. Pushing this biblical concept further, in describing Judas, even in betraying Christ, the word *philos* or “friend” was used. Perhaps it was the continual use of the word in a negative light which most-likely served as a reminder of how

⁸³⁸ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 190-191.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, 195-198.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

great was the betrayal.⁸⁴¹ While there is merit on both sides as to whether friendship itself can be deemed negative, or if friendship is always positive, and negative experiences would be a rejection of friendship, the former position seems to be the stronger from the tradition, Scripture, modern and popular research, as well as the empirical data from chapter 6.

Beyond questions of semantics, regarding the terminology of negative friendships, there is also the question of when a friendship crosses the line from being positive to negative, and whether a friendship could be in the middle space of moral neutrality. The idea that a friendship could be neutral would seem most difficult to argue in that humans are moral creatures who make moral choices.⁸⁴² Without delving into all the philosophical waters of the question of human morality, this question, considered from the assumption that human choices are often morally significant, reveals that two humans in relationship will experience many morally significant situations in friendship. This would mean that virtuous/true/deep friendships would need to engage at a moral level. The difficulties, however, seem to originate with the social changes concerning beliefs regarding truth and morality.⁸⁴³ Furthermore, some of the participants commented on the importance of understanding the differences between moral accountability and negativity. The concern was that one might confuse moral accountability or correction (a situation which might bring up negative feelings) with a friendship that is itself negative.⁸⁴⁴ This could present a challenge for friendship today if the changes in social values, regarding moral issues, and even how to think about truth, or right and wrong, are in many ways considerably different to those of the past. While many of those writing about friendship in the past would have assumed a shared belief in universal truth (rather than moral relativism), or adherence to a standard of morality from the Judaeo-Christian worldview, this might not be so easily assumed in Western society at present. Lack of shared moral values and belief systems, in the far more multicultural modern Western world, presents a very different landscape in which to pursue friendships which engage at the moral level.

⁸⁴¹ Matthew 26:48., Mark 14:44–45, Luke 22:47.

⁸⁴² See chapter 5 section 5.1.2.

⁸⁴³ See chapter 4.

⁸⁴⁴ See chapter 5.

Clearly, negative or abusive friendships, rightly labelled as such or not, continue to present problems for friendships today. Therefore, while many ideas of negative friendships persist from the past, the experiences and social conditions in which these ideas are made manifest may prove so different that it might feel as though the questions have changed, when in reality the questions remain, while the context has been altered.

7.2.1.3 *How to Share in Friendship?*

One of the defining features of friendship for many of the voices from the past was that friends shared their lives with each other. Aristotle, and Socrates before him, believed that friends hold all things in common,⁸⁴⁵ and this could have included monetary wealth or possessions, but to some extent also included accomplishments, achievements, dreams and longings, beliefs and values, etc. Some of these could be shared emotionally, but others can only be shared physically and would require a closeness of proximity. For those like Saint Aelred, who lived as a monk in a monastery, it would not have been difficult to share his inner and outer lives with his friends who lived the monastic life alongside him (he did not talk about situations where he might have a friend living outside the community).⁸⁴⁶ That friends would share wealth as a manifestation of love was probably always more of a rarity. For example, a couple in love might delight in their emotional/spiritual connection and find this deeply satisfying but they might still long for physical expressions of their love. Friendship, while defined as being non-sexual, can also have longings for physical expressions. This might more often be shown through hugging or gift-giving; in some friendships perhaps that love might also take the form of wanting to share in their physical possessions, allowing them the joy of sharing in both their inner and outer worlds. From the views of my participants, emotionally sharing was preferred as an avenue of expressing friendship more than wealth and physical possessions, which were often reserved for sharing with a romantic partner or housemate. Therefore, while sharing life was an

⁸⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 9.

See chapter 3 section 3.2.2.

⁸⁴⁶ See chapter 3 section 3.3.2.

important factor for friendship, sharing physical wealth, possessions etc., were not the primary means for sharing to be displayed in friendship alongside the preferred sharing of joys and accomplishments. Given that monetary sharing appears to have always been more of a rarity it does not seem strange that it would continue to be regarded as a lofty rarity in friendship.

The assumption that the majority of friendships will exist within close physical proximity of each other seems to be lessening. Of course, neither history nor Scripture is limited to these friendships based on physical proximity. In Scripture the two main narrative stories addressed were the friendships of David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi. The latter friendship's fame was directly linked to Ruth's pledge to stay by Naomi's side until death. Jonathan and David's friendship, however, was one not of a pledge to remain close in physical proximity but to be faithful in their love for God and one another regardless of their physical locations. Jesus himself claimed friendship, not only for his disciples present during his earthly ministry but with all who believed in him and did his will. Paul too wrote numerous letters in which he often addressed friends he missed and longed to be present with though he was assured of their mutual continued love and friendship while parted. It would be a mistake to thus assume that because it is only within recent history where the number of people who live far away from the communities where they were born/raised has greatly increased, due to advances in air travel and the conveniences that technology affords, that friendships in the past were only local rather than long distance or that long-distance friendships are now a new issue for present generations to grapple with. Rather, while the amount of people dealing with long distance friendships has certainly risen, history still has many examples of friendship enjoyed over great distances which were primarily maintained through hand-written letters. This means that humans have been capable of relationships without the necessity of being physically present. This also must mean that the concept of "doing life together," or sharing their lives, has a variety of applications and could, in some contexts, make use of the physical sharing of space, money, goods etc., but that sharing in friendship could also be less tangible and more spiritual in nature. That both existed historically, and in the present, does not resolve the question of whether or not one is superior in value.

From my interviews there was a hierarchy of importance, where the spiritual/emotional side of sharing in friendship is the more necessary and valued, but sharing of physical space or resources etc., with a close friend was greatly desired and considered ideal. Sharing in friendship at a physical level had little meaning or importance if there was not first the emotional sharing. In chapter 4 the impact of the Industrial Revolution in bringing about a shift from the need to be more communal for survival, to greater independence and the rise of individualism, was addressed. This shift likely also impacted how humans valued and prioritized their friendship needs. Perhaps in societies where survival is paramount, friendships of usefulness would likely be most (though not exclusively) desired, while a society privileged to be concerned with living a meaningful and a pleasurable life would instead have a preference for friendships which met their emotional needs in preference to meeting physical needs. I would argue however, that there is a right way and a wrong way to approach such a dichotomy. To put the body and soul in competition (in the present or historically) is less than ideal. Rather, acknowledging the integration of the human mind and body (physical and emotional needs) and desiring to resolve any tension or competition between these is seeking to properly understand human nature. Whether approaching this issue from the tradition, empirical data, philosophy or theology, the answer is that humans desire to share their lives with others in deeply meaningful ways. This approach helps to make sense of how the internet can be used in the quest to form deeper bonds in friendship. Problems arise, however, when expectations (from devices, app developers, users, etc.) are not met and frustrations ensue. This also explains why so many of my respondents (and most people with whom I have discussed my thesis) expressed frustration when describing their feelings towards technology, especially regarding its claims to connect people. They expressed both thankfulness and delight at all their devices can do to keep them connected to their friends while also feeling shame, anger, and frustration because of how their devices also make them feel disconnected.

Sharing in friendship does not necessitate physical sharing – though this should not be ignored. Rather, sharing in friendship continues to be a very important aspect of friendship, and with the integration of digital devices to enable continued emotional and spiritual sharing across great distances provides increased opportunities to bond through sharing.

The danger, however, is to neglect the need for physical sharing (space, touch, food, gifts, finances, practical help etc.) which technology can often become more of a hindrance than a help.

7.2.2 The Soul of Friendship

This section deals with aspects of friendship related to the emotional bonds and intimacies of friendship, as well as the exclusivity of friendship. The focus is primarily on the non-material or non-physical aspects of friendship, as well as the qualities which lie at the heart of friendship which continue the ideals of the tradition into the burgeoning digital era. There are three sub-headings for this section, the first of which delves more intentionally into the idea of unity of the soul which was touched upon in the previous section regarding sharing, though this section focuses on unity. This will be followed by exploring the exclusive and inclusive elements of friendship and will conclude by addressing the moral aspects of friendship.

7.2.2.1 *Unity of Soul*

One of Aristotle's most noted phrases was that friends are like one soul split between two bodies.⁸⁴⁷ The other noted quotation regarding two bodies becoming one is from the Bible, in reference to the sacrament of marriage (which also alludes to Christ and the church) of the man and woman becoming one rather than two.⁸⁴⁸ Andrew Graystone discusses this topic in a book about technology and Christianity. He makes the point that this unity of two becoming one is more of a hope, desire, or wish rather than reality. When a man and a woman engage in sexual intercourse their bodies join together but they never merge into one body; they continue as two separate bodies.⁸⁴⁹ He says this within a broader conversation about computers which can do this, in that they can be wired together and

⁸⁴⁷ Laetius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Bk. 5, XX.

⁸⁴⁸ Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8.

⁸⁴⁹ Graystone, *Too Much Information?*, 170-171.

become one big computer rather than two connected computers because there is no individual – it is a machine not a person.⁸⁵⁰ Graystone raises an interesting point about the limitations of the body as well as the importance of the human person. However, to say that such unity is more wished than reality would seem to say that humans have merely claimed this to be true. However, that God himself, who is by his very nature incapable of lying, says this is true – and not only within the context of marriage, would seem to suggest there is some reality to human connection beyond temporary physical or sexual bonding. In Christ's high priestly prayer, he prays for his followers to be one just as he and the Father are one.⁸⁵¹ A second observation is whether it matters that such unity be possible or not. For example, if it is deemed to be impossible to be unified in a meaningful way with another individual person, what would be the point in making the attempt? There may be those who feel an attempt, though futile, would still be of value. However, for most people, it would only make sense to pursue things which have a real possibility of outcome. Whether that outcome is fully achieved may not be necessary for the attempt and journey to be valued in itself, but that the destination exists is part of what makes the journey one of merit. If it is assumed that to attempt and seek out unity, and that the ideal of a oneness between two (or possibly three or four as Plutarch added⁸⁵²) people is to be pursued, then it would make sense that it be achievable in some meaningful capacity, even if rarely accomplished. Assuming then that unity is not impossible, if indeed people are souls and bodies which cannot be separated or understood in isolation, this question takes on a new form from how Andrew Greystone approached it. By seeing people as body-soul composites, then for two to become one need not be a physical unity. The unity could be one of soul or spirit. Of course, this begs the question of identity and personhood even at a non-physical level. Probably the best avenue for understanding these difficult ideas is to turn to God himself within his Triune existence. God, as understood within orthodox Christianity, is a God who is one God (rather than a pantheon of gods) comprised of three persons. God existing in a divine trinity proves that complete unity is not an impossibility along with distinct persons.

⁸⁵⁰ "If a computer connects to another machine then, as far as they're concerned, they are just one bigger computer. Human beings, by contrast, are endlessly conscious that there is me, and there is you, and we are not the same." Graystone, *Too Much Information?*, 80.

⁸⁵¹ John 17:22.

⁸⁵² See chapter 3 section 3.2.4.

Therefore, if God can be in his very essence⁸⁵³ a being of more than one person, and yet utterly undivided and inseparable, and if human beings are made in God's image, and if God declares in Scripture that it is his desire that two or more persons experience a true oneness, then, holding all these things to be true, humans must be capable of meaningful unity with others. Indeed, humans are not machines and cannot merge in the same way (perhaps one error is to compare humans to machines at all). However, merging and unity are not the same thing, and to conflate the two perhaps is where the error lies.

The tradition highlights unity and oneness as exemplars of true and virtuous friendships, but just because this was ideal in the tradition does not mean it is not ideal today. In the responses of those whom I interviewed there was little said directly concerning the idea that two bodies might be so close as to be as one soul, but this should not come as a surprise given how language and cultural expressions have changed. Instead, I looked to see if there were sentiments which expressed this ideal in modern ways. Many respondents, as shown in the previous chapter, desired sharing with a close friend, especially things which they felt were important at the soul level: faith, values, beliefs. They wanted their friends to share as much as possible, and many even use their technology to help keep them consistently in touch, in order to share as much as possible. A more modern way to describe this might be people desiring to be understood and known. They want another person to know them so intimately that, like Isabella said, both joys and sorrows could be felt within the heart of the other as if it was their own joy or sorrow.⁸⁵⁴ Of course, the difficulty is that this is not only complicated to understand, but it is also complicated and difficult to fully embrace within friendship – and how much more so if these ideals are not spoken of let alone taught? While deeper unity in friendship might be desired and the sentiment lingers, the language of unity of soul is not part of modern friendship – at least not in the way that the tradition would have understood it.

⁸⁵³ I am referring to essence as nature and being, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.3, a. 4.

⁸⁵⁴ See chapter 6.

7.2.2.2 *The Exclusivity and Inclusivity in Friendship*

Building on the idea of unity, is the question of how many can be unified. Aristotle said it was two souls that could be united in friendship into oneness, but Plutarch believed three or four might also share a unity. Within the Christian tradition those like Saint Aelred asserted that friendship might be had by a few together⁸⁵⁵ and certainly, the Reformation examples like the Brotherhood of the Common Life and the Puritan Friendship communities illustrate inclusive views of friendship.⁸⁵⁶ In the New Testament, Christ provides a useful example, in that he had twelve disciples and from those twelve, he has three more intimate friendships with Peter, James and John.⁸⁵⁷ Paul was also known to have more than one intimate friendship and he encouraged believers to have so great a love that they would be unified together in Christ.⁸⁵⁸ Of course, to be unified as an entire church is a very different thing than to be unified in friendship with three or four people. Bringing these various biblical ideals together and looking directly to the example of Christ, it would seem that the ideal would be that people could join in friendship as well as in marriage and find meaningful unity. Then, if multiple groups of friends and married couples join together, this creates both community and church. When all these smaller intimate groups are grounded in shared Christian beliefs then the wider community is blessed and there can be greater unity without requiring intimacy between every member. This idea was noted politically by Cicero and Aristotle, namely that a polis, which is comprised of many true friendships, will create better societies.⁸⁵⁹ Thus, perhaps paradoxically, by having some exclusivity in friendship, greater inclusivity can be achieved.

Some of my respondents' stories of friendship were perfect examples of how friendship groups are quite normal. Often people experience friendship with more than one person, or they may have a friendship or perhaps a marriage which is exclusive in certain

⁸⁵⁵ See chapter 3.

Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, III, 82.

⁸⁵⁶ See chapter 3 section 3.3.4

⁸⁵⁷ Matthew 26:36-38, Mark 9:2-3, Luke 8:48-56.

⁸⁵⁸ Ephesians 4:1-3, Romans 12, Philippians 4:2.

⁸⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, ii-iii.
See chapter 3 section 3.2.3.

capacities but is also capable of being inclusive of others in friendship. C.S. Lewis expressed this well in saying that when you bring a third or fourth into your friendship circle, that additional person will likely bring out new qualities in the friend and so the additional friends allow the original friend to become more known.⁸⁶⁰ Indeed if an important aspect of friendship is to intimately know another person, the addition of a new friend who might reveal new aspects of the other friend should be desired. This could also be a reason why people often desire more than one friendship for themselves regardless of whether their friends are mutually friends, because various friends highlight diverse aspects of one's personality. As participant Amber said, there are some things she likes to discuss with her girlfriends because they would enjoy and understand that particular topic more than her husband.⁸⁶¹

Thus, while the internet and subsequent social media applications might make it appear as if friendships are something people can endlessly collect, and while Facebook may have made it possible to boast that someone has thousands or even millions of "friends," the human capacity for friendship has not changed and it is still true that when it comes to friendship, quality necessitates a reduction in quantity. People seem to inherently know that no one has 1,000 "friends". They might have five or six or even ten, but no one has hundreds or thousands of friends online, instead they have online connections. In *The Friendship Cure*, Kate Leaver mentioned one social study which examined the human capacity for connection and devised a scale of sorts which determined that most humans can have friendships with 100-150 people, of some measure of significance, in their lives at a time. That figure then gets divided into ever smaller circles, the more intimate the relationships become, with the most intimate friendships being limited to 1-5 and with one most intimate relationship which, for most people would be their romantic partner, but could also be a friend.⁸⁶²

Friendship continues to be regarded as both an exclusive and inclusive relationship, but with the measurements of who counts as a true friend being blurred there can be

⁸⁶⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 92.

⁸⁶¹ Amber interview 27:11

⁸⁶² Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 25-30.
Dunbar, *How Many Friends Does One Person Need?*.

greater difficulty in discerning where to draw lines and protect one's time and limit themselves to a manageable amount of deep friendships.

7.2.2.3 *Good Influences and Moral Behaviour*

To share one's heart and soul with another person is a unifying act. This unity is most often desired in many different facets of one's life where values and morals are often prioritized. The tradition is full of examples of friendships in pursuit of shared moral values. In some of the more modern social research it seems this previously vital aspect of friendship might be lacking for many people, or simply an afterthought. However, this was not so much the case with my respondents whom I interviewed. Instead, it seemed that people did desire friends who would hold them accountable to their moral beliefs, though this was more likely something brought up if the respondent was religious. However, I thought it was interesting that in popular books like Leaver's and Dubberley's, as well as many of the popular Christian books on friendship, there was something said about friends needing to hold each other accountable, to "call a friend out" when they sin or "mess up". In the New Testament directives are given on how to correct a brother who errs, noting that with repentance comes great rejoicing because that brother has been restored to fellowship.⁸⁶³ Proverbs and Sirach also discuss the role of correction in friendship⁸⁶⁴ as one of the most important aspects of true friendship. This goes back to the idea of obedience in friendship. While the term *obedience* has certain connotations in English it is an interesting choice when considering moral accountability. Perhaps, if obedience was not seen as being tied to a sinful and error prone human but to a shared moral standard, the idea of being obedient to that shared moral standard (and thus to the will of the friend so far as it was aligned with the standard) makes sense of this biblical concept of obedience. Many of my participants wanted friends who would be a positive influence and avoided friendships with negative people.⁸⁶⁵ Of course this is all being expressed within a context where people are

⁸⁶³ Matthew 18:15-22.

⁸⁶⁴ See chapter 2 section 2.2.3

⁸⁶⁵ See chapter 6.

questioning: how to be committed to a friend who has failed the friendship, what to do when friends do not share moral values, navigating a culture that no longer has widely shared moral values, as well as a culture where some people are not as interested in friendships with moral accountability but rather friendships which can be counted on for fun and usefulness. For those who did want deeper friendship (level 3) the moral aspect was mentioned to some extent, while those who were more interested in level 1-2 friendships the moral elements were less important and, when brought up, were in a context of them being about *doing good* generally rather than helping each other *be good* specifically.

7.2.3 Summary

There are many aspects of friendship which follows the tradition with nuances of modern inference which create both challenges and opportunities. Some of the challenges come from distractions online and increased forgetfulness about the importance of being physically present with friends, while some of the opportunities come from the ability to connect with those far away. Sometimes the term friend is too broad, sometimes it can be misleading, and sometimes it is not intimate enough. The shared foundations of friendship and how faith and morality play into this seem to have broadened with increased multiculturalism and moral relativism both creating new opportunities for friendships across previous barriers as well as creating issues for mutual support. In the end, while there are still obstacles to overcome in the attaining of meaningful friendships the desire for friendships that touch the soul persists and hopefully that desire will be a propellant to attain the prize of friendship.

7.3 Diverging from the Tradition

The previous section focused primarily on aspects of friendship which continued from the tradition while this section delves into those aspects where there has been more divergence from the tradition. This section is divided into three subsections. The first concerns defining the term friend and the ways in which modern definitions have diverged

from more traditional definitions. The second sub-section addresses the role of sexuality, touch, and intimacy in friendship and how these relate to commitments in friendship and the ways in which modernity has shifted from more traditional views. The last section delves into various value changes in modern friendship as compared to the tradition from the vantage points of both personal and cultural values.

7.3.1 What is a Friend?

As this thesis has explored, what defines a friend and a friendship is not easily discerned.⁸⁶⁶ While it might seem strange to place this topic in the category of divergence the conglomeration of terms which previously helped distinguish friendship from other social connections and the subsequent loss of meaning to the term friendship would seem to be a divergence from the tradition. Furthermore, concerning the making and keeping of friends, there seems to be a sharp turning from the traditions of the past in part because of changes in technological advances as well as social messaging.

7.3.1.1 *Defining Friendship*

Concerning the language used to define friendship, friend has become a “catch -all” word which covers such a broad spectrum of human relational possibilities, that the word is in danger of losing any real meaning. This is not to say that friendship within the tradition did not encounter difficulties in differentiating between the various levels of friendship; rather the tradition fully acknowledged this difficulty but restrained the definition of friendship so that it would be distinguishable from other relationships. It would be interesting to be able to conduct a historic word study of the various terminologies used to delineate the vast array of human relationships. Fellow citizen, master, apprentice, comrade, acquaintance, brother or sister-in-Christ, disciples, etc. are just some of the many words which described a variety of human relationships. However, many of my respondents

⁸⁶⁶ Petricini, “Friendship in the Digital Age,” 12-13.

expressed frustration that words like “acquaintance” were no longer felt to be socially acceptable. The term “friend” was deemed more appropriate even when mentioning someone whom they had only met a few times, or a work colleague who they saw often but with whom they lacked intimacy. Furthermore, while many ancients understood that not all friendships would be “virtue friendships,” even friendships like Aristotle’s friends of pleasure or usefulness had to meet certain criteria and afford some level of affection.⁸⁶⁷ It is worth asking why other terms like “acquaintance” are becoming no longer socially acceptable and what this says about friendship or indeed about the usefulness of these other relationships.

Online, the new term “followers” has been implemented, which seems to have helped offset some of the issues brought about by the term “Facebook friend”. Follower is a much more appropriate word for much of the online social interactions which are, more often than not, one sided. As Shannon Valor mentioned in an article, one of the issues with online communication is how it is often one-sided which is not friendship as friendship requires two participants rather than shouting into a crowd or posting into the void.⁸⁶⁸

There are also theological implications of taking away any meaningful ramifications of friendship. As Thomas Aquinas argued, friendship with God is the highest end of human achievement,⁸⁶⁹ and as Nora similarly asserted, to be friends with God would elevate friendship and sanctify it.⁸⁷⁰ The gospel itself can be said to be a story of God moving in friendship towards humanity to bring people to salvation; salvation being synonymous with being called friends of God. Books like Andy Crouch’s *The Life We’re Looking For*,⁸⁷¹ Drew Hunter’s *Made for Friendship*,⁸⁷² and Ian Galloway’s *Called to be Friends*,⁸⁷³ are all examples of books that combine theological insight and pastoral care which assert the centrality of friendship in the Christian gospel. If, however, friendship becomes so open to interpretation

⁸⁶⁷ See chapter 3 section 3.2.2.

⁸⁶⁸ See chapter 5.

⁸⁶⁹ See chapter 3.

⁸⁷⁰ See chapter 6 section 6.2.3.8.2

⁸⁷¹ Crouch, *The Life We’re Looking For*.

⁸⁷² Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship: The Relationship That Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joys*. (Wheaton: Crossway; Illustrated edition, 2018).

⁸⁷³ Galloway, *Called to be Friends*.

that it begins to lack significant meaning, then to make a claim like, “God’s desire is to redeem humanity and make them his friends,” no longer carries the weight that more firm definitions of friendship would provide.

While friendship in the past could be defined at various levels while still employing the same word, the breadth which the term “friend” now carries is goes beyond that of the tradition. As words like “acquaintance” or even “colleague” seem to be rapidly leaving the vernacular and being enveloped into “friend” the deeper meanings and specific connotations of friendship are at risk of being forgotten, downplayed, or ignored.

7.3.1.2 Struggles in Friendship Making and Keeping

This leads to the concern of some regarding how to make and keep friends. If it is difficult to define friendship, this could lead to confusion around expectations of friendship. If what someone is seeking is unclear it will be difficult to achieve as the aim is vague. This becomes even more difficult when this struggle is two-sided, where both parties are unsure of the expectations. The situation could be further exacerbated if open communication is not taught or encouraged as a normal and healthy aspect of friendship making. When looking at the friendships of the Bible there were often express expectations and commitments made between friends. By making vows with definitive parameters and expectations it was clear what friendship meant. Similar examples of clear expectations and definitions can be found throughout the tradition. That some of these definitions or expectations were debated, does not undermine this point but rather affirms it, as it proves that doing so was not only useful but considered important enough to debate. Saint Augustine, for example, felt firmly that only Christians could be true friends and that friends must always desire the good and lead their friend into all goodness to the point that he chastised himself for mourning too much his friend’s death, because he should not have so greatly mourned the good his friend experienced in going to the Lord in death.⁸⁷⁴

A few of the participants noted the old adage that one must be a friend to gain a friend. This might be a useful proverb if one was first taught how to be a friend. Amber

⁸⁷⁴ See chapter 3 section 3.3.1.2.

noted in her interview how many of her friends wondered how she made friends and wanted to learn from her.⁸⁷⁵ When asked about any education people were given regarding the making and keeping of friends, most people could not think of any lessons, sermons, etc. being given to them – especially as they got older. They felt that discussion on this subject was lacking in educational settings and even religious settings (many Christians expressed a desire to hear more sermons on friendship at their church).⁸⁷⁶ Just explaining this does not mean this was a negative experience in itself, but these statements were not made without a quality of judgement in the negative. Indeed, the majority of respondents wished more resources on friendship were actively encouraged, taught, and socially promoted.

It is somewhat difficult to claim that this was done widely in history as it could be argued those who did write about, study, and deeply engage on the topic of friendship were in the minority. While this could be true of some cultures and some epochs of history it should, however, not be assumed to be broadly true. The reason for this harkens back to Socrates. History shows he was not a lone desert philosopher but that he was quite influential, even “corrupting the youths” and clearly makes such a stir as to condemn himself to an early death.⁸⁷⁷ The ministry of Christ in the early church exploded because the followers of Christ were commanded to not just make converts but disciples, in relationships which, like friendship, required consistency, moral improvement and love.⁸⁷⁸ Examples from the Reformation show many people were entering into friendship groups or finding communities where friendships were prioritised.⁸⁷⁹ There was also the resurgence of friendship being sought after and studied within the universities as part of the scholastic movement.⁸⁸⁰ Whether this could be regained in the modern era is an interesting question which, based on the responses of my small survey, show that such discussion on the topic of friendship would be welcomed. Whether this should prove true more widely would be an interesting future study.

⁸⁷⁵ See chapter 6.

⁸⁷⁶ See chapter 6 section 6.2.3.4.3.

⁸⁷⁷ Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979).

⁸⁷⁸ Matthew 28:19-20, John 13:34–35.

⁸⁷⁹ See chapter 3 section 3.3.4.

⁸⁸⁰ Lucas, “Christian Virtue Friendship and Puritan Friendship in the English Reformation.”

Overall, the difference in educational resources and the degree to which discussions on the topic of cultivating better friendships seems to have seriously declined both in what is available and in content. The tradition boasts of wise instruction on the worthy endeavours of friendship and as noticed by the majority of my participants, there is little in general western society which provides anything like what can be found in the tradition.

7.3.2 Sexuality, Touch, and Intimacy

I have chosen to categorise all these topics as diverging from the tradition; however, it does not mean they are not of interest to the tradition. To diverge at all, means some connection must have previously existed for a divergence to occur; the same is true of sexuality and friendship. In this section the roles of sexuality, physical touch (non-sexual), and intimacy (primarily in the form of vulnerability) will be addressed.

An important point has been made by both academics and social commentators that male and female friendship is a relatively recent invention. This means sexual tension between men and women, which frequently arises as male-female friendships are explored is something which was not so widespread in the tradition (though it is not entirely silent on the topic). therefore such friendships are predominantly a modern conundrum.⁸⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, in his writings on friendship, was convinced that unless a man and woman were married, or of vastly different ages, the likelihood that one or both would have romantic or sexual attraction would arise at some point in their pursuit of a friendship.⁸⁸² This was certainly Sophie's experience, as she noted how little prepared she was by her up-bringing in a Romanian sub-culture of the USA where male and female friendships were simply assumed impossible.⁸⁸³ In spite of this, she found she could have a friendship with a man she found attractive but needed to create boundaries in the effort to avoid any confusion that their relationship was something other than a friendship.⁸⁸⁴ This is one example of how friendship may have to deal with sexual overtones which could be daunting for some. The question of how the impact of wider sexual openness in the West would affect boundaries

⁸⁸¹ Leaver, *The Friendship Cure*, 111-112.

⁸⁸² Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 98-100.

⁸⁸³ See chapter 6.

⁸⁸⁴ See chapter 6 section 6.2.3.2

in friendships, would also be an interesting study. Unfortunately, this was beyond the scope of this thesis. It should be noted that general opinions and values regarding sexual behaviour were radically altered with the arrival of the birth control pill in the 1960s.⁸⁸⁵ On the heels of the sexual revolution was the rapid acceptance and promotion of LGBTQ+ relationships which may also have had an impact on where the lines between friendship and sexual/romantic relationships are drawn.⁸⁸⁶ The tradition did not make male and female friendships impossible, but it was less common, and with sex being generally considered reserved for the marital union, confusion surrounding intimacy, touch, and sexuality would hardly have been as much of a topic of interest for the ancients as it seems to be today.

There are a few different points which will be helpful to consider. The first is that, scripturally, it is interesting that sexual readings of the David and Jonathan account arise out of the modern context, not the historical context. That there should ever be anything sexual among friendships (with the exceptions of friendship between husbands and wives) would have seemed strange in the tradition. Even in my interviews, regardless of the changes in cultural views of sexuality, friendships were still most often assumed as occurring between the same genders, and when a friendship with someone of the opposite gender was brought up it was done with a clarification. These lines continue to blur however, especially for younger generations, with the integration of digital devices. Sherry Turkle and Mary Aiken had much to say about how the internet is changing the roles of sexuality, emotional connections, and physical sexual activities.⁸⁸⁷ While this is another entire topic outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to understand the increasing confusion around sexuality – especially online. Young children can be exposed to sexually explicit content which can damage their understanding of appropriate behaviour.⁸⁸⁸ What “counts” as cheating is also an interesting question with the various opportunities for pornography or emotional

⁸⁸⁵ David Allyn (David Smith), *Make Love, Not War the Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History* (Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁸⁸⁶ Fiona Anderson, Glyn Davis, and Nat Raha, “Desire Revolution,” *Text (The Hague)* 35, no. 1, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2020.1854978>.

⁸⁸⁷ Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*.
Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*.

⁸⁸⁸ Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*, 126-143.

entanglements with people known only online.⁸⁸⁹ When these lines are blurred, friendship suffers because of the lack of defining qualities to separate them. It is also damaging to link sexual activity with emotional intimacy in the extreme. Psychologist David Richo, states that often those who were not given proper love as children confuse sexual feelings with the love they crave emotionally.⁸⁹⁰ One of the major problems which then arises is that all touch could be mistaken as sexual and create barriers to healthy non-sexual touch.⁸⁹¹ Another problem is to overemphasise sexuality and yet lack actual intimacy.⁸⁹² Non-sexual caring touch was valued by a number of respondents, and the beauty of friendship is that it can provide a place for deeply intimate relationships physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. Friendship, properly understood, should be a place for intimacy without the confusion of sexual tension, though whether this can be fully regained in what has sometimes been referred to as a hyper-sexualised culture, remains to be seen.

The distinctions between sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy have become confused in Western culture generally, leaving a mark on friendship. Of course, some of the changes have led to more friendships between men and women which most people consider an improvement. As the lines of appropriate and desired sexual touch are blurred and emotionally meaningful relationships without sexual intimacy continue to be confused the cultivation of meaningful friendships suffer. As societal rules surrounding sexual behaviour were often more restrained or at least better defined, these issues of sexual tension were less prevalent in the tradition. Contemporary friendship, on the other hand, must learn how to navigate these new difficulties if friendship is going to have any meaningful distinctives.

⁸⁸⁹ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 159-160.

⁸⁹⁰ David Richo, *Daring to Trust: Opening Ourselves to Real Love and Intimacy* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2011).

⁸⁹¹ Wilbert, *Handle with Care*.

⁸⁹² Ferder, *Your sexual self*.

7.3.3 Cultural and Personal Values

Other topics, which have arisen from the tradition, modern social research, and my empirical data, such as social isolation, the effects of “cancel culture,” fear of commitment, social acceptance/promotion of self-help books or counselling regarding friendship, a lack of socially shared rules/etiquette regarding the use of mobile devices and other technologies, are all areas where friendship concerns branch out into new territory. Of course, many of these topics sit upon underlying human struggles which the tradition would likely address; however, given that the surface manifestations of more general human concerns differ from the tradition, they are worthy of consideration.

The modern world boasts technologies that have created strange dissonance in what being alone or being together might mean. The title of Sherry Turkle’s book *Alone Together* is a perfect summary, especially in how she then divided her book into two parts; one focused on how technology creates the sense of being “together” with robotic or AI programmes, which gives the illusion of being with another person when in actuality one is alone (in the sense of not being present with another human).⁸⁹³ The second looks into the phenomenon of being physically alone but connected to other humans via devices which connect to the internet allowing “alone” people to be “together.”⁸⁹⁴ The tension this creates is on the cusp of being studied but already that tension was clearly coming through in many of my interviews, where people expressed both appreciation for being connected to friends over great distances, while also not being sure how to prioritise online and off-line friends. Indeed, that friends would even be in such a competition (face-to-face vs. online) is a new human challenge.

Cultural and personal values seeming to be often at odds with one another was also an interesting point raised by many participants. Even in reading some of the popular books on friendship there were mixed messages regarding these topics. This could explain the confusion felt in addressing friendship concerns such as when to end a friendship, how to end a friendship, etc. One book, for example, discussed the challenge of friendship and

⁸⁹³ Turkle, *Alone Together*.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

importance of forgiveness and sticking with a friend, while later in the book the same author asserted that “toxic friends” or those who betrayed trust should be dumped.⁸⁹⁵ There was little explanation to know when to choose which option, or how to know when a friend deserved forgiveness and when they were too “toxic.” Since society often reflects broadly the values of the majority populous, it seems strange that many of the participants, who personally held friendship in high regard, felt societal messaging about friendship was confusing or even that friendship was not of great cultural importance. Perhaps I was talking with only a portion of the culture which felt this way, or perhaps those who broadcast the cultural messaging (through media outlets, news, and entertainment) are the minority. Perhaps this minority speaks with loud and authoritative voices making the majority feel a sense of disconnect between their values and the values they feel their society is promoting. This would make for an interesting follow-up study to survey people regarding the media’s messaging around friendship and how that compares to their own beliefs and values.

The influence of digital technology has only just begun, though it has done so with impressive integration. This means that the generations living today are on the cusp of change with all the opportunities and obstacles this creates. While the tradition can be helpful in providing guidelines or navigating more general concerns which often manifest online, the digital advances themselves will need to be navigated apart from the tradition.

7.3.4 Summary

It should be clear by now that the impact of technology is as far reaching as it is life changing. Technology has opened new avenues for friendship-making and friendship-keeping. It also, however, often leads to isolation and neglect of the whole human person. Technology could also be harnessed for greater education on friendship needs and values. While there is great potential in these new technologies to address many of the modern concerns surrounding friendship, there is also the danger of living more online than off-line to the detriment of friendship (not to mention other relationships as well as physical and mental health issues). Technology, however, is not the only source of divergence from the

⁸⁹⁵ Dubberley, *You Must Be My Friend... Because I Hate You*, 59-107, 133-149, 231.

tradition. The societal understanding of sexuality and intimacy as well as other cultural shifts around topics like inter-dependence and moral values have also reshaped the frameworks in which friendships operate. None of these shifts are by any means permanent. Indeed, as more people wake up to the discontinuity between their desires for friendship and the messaging from society, the more change is likely to occur.

7.4 Conclusion: A Theology of Friendship

Friendship still reflects ideals from the tradition even though the impacts of social values and technological advances have altered friendship experiences relative to friendship in the tradition. Of course, not all of the changes have been seen to be harmful to friendship; indeed, some changes have helped friendships survive distances, create new spaces to meet as equals, and find new ways of relating to each other. On the other hand, the tradition also recognised negative impacts to friendship, especially regarding the attainment of higher levels of friendship. The nature of the present changes are so invasive and different to the challenges of friendship in the past, that course correction will require change at both individual and societal levels. Furthermore, due to the newness and ever-changing nature of technology, any changes to promote better friendships will likely require trial and error to arrive, not at some historical position, but at a position which combines the best of what the tradition has to offer while adapting to allow spaces for the use of positive means of promoting flourishing friendships in the digital age.

In this thesis friendship has been explored from the literary tradition starting with the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, moving to the ancient Greco-Roman philosophers and the Church Fathers, through the Reformation, as well as touching on some writers from the later modern period like Henry Trumbull, C.S. Lewis, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. With respect to modernity, I have employed an interdisciplinary approach considering research from the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and theology as well as emerging fields of research such as digital ethics, led by scholars like Sherry Turkle. I have also allowed for relevant non-academic voices to be heard from both Christian and secular contexts whose writings provide broader social (and sometimes theological) commentaries on friendship.

Comparing these sources, I considered what areas of friendship still lacked clarity and engaged this knowledge to shape my questions for my own empirical research through semi-structured interviews. The results of those interviews provided insights and further questions, many of which have been discussed in chapter 6. In drawing this thesis to a close, I will use three final sections to summarise and address my original thesis question regarding to what extent friendship, as practiced in a world saturated by digital media, reflects biblical and classical ideals of friendship as well as provide some provisional thoughts for a theology of friendship in this digital age – as promised in the title of this doctoral thesis. These three sections will cover 1) the body-spirit duality, 2) holy friendship in a world of digital devices, and 3) understanding friendship’s role in the eschaton as it highlights the joys and hopes for friendship in the present.

7.4.1 Souls, Bodies, and the *Imago Dei*

One of the main themes which has emerged throughout this study is the inescapable reality that both body and soul are part of what make friendship possible. Even when not being close in proximity to a beloved friend, it is through the body that one thinks, feels, and experiences friendship. Of course, the role of the body becomes even more engaged when friends meet face-to-face. This was seen from the beginning with Scripture both with human friendships like David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi, as well as in friendship with God himself. Scripture provided interesting insights into how friendship is embodied (such as when God would meet humanity face-to-face) as well as the spiritual connections humans can experience (such as with God through prayer, or with others through letters). This theme continued throughout the tradition and was experienced by those whom I interviewed for this study. Clearly the body-soul connection is integral to any meaningful discussions regarding friendship. To help understand these mysteries the doctrine of the *imago dei* becomes quite useful. Being made in the image of God is no simple thing to understand and while an in-depth study was far outside the parameters of this thesis, one of the primary aspects of this doctrine, is how humans exhibit some of qualities of God – sharing in some meaningful way (though lesser) the nature of God. God has been shown to

reveal himself in relational capacities and is not God who is aloof. Throughout Scripture God draws near, seeks intimacy, and embodies love towards humanity. God also forgives and is long suffering – showing He is willing to be hurt to keep and restore relationships. These are all qualities humans are to share and emulate (unlike his omnipotence or omnipresence). Therefore, when it comes to friendships perhaps it would be in our best interests to consider the ways in which we love and forgive; to be intentional in seeking others out in friendship and being open to giving and receiving intimacy over time.

Now, the other main part of this thesis has dealt with friendships in the modern age. Thus, it is important to consider the body-soul composite in relation to technology especially due to the potential negative consequences such as loneliness, depression, isolation, over-stimulation, emotional impotence, etc. Technology is certainly part of the problem, but it can also be part of the solution. Consider how participant Bridget, with her idea to have an application to inform people that one is socially engaged, or Amber's idea to have an app that uses daily check-ins or advice to encourage healthy friendship habits, or Isabella's suggestion of a minimum amount of in-person meet ups each year, could all be means of harnessing the power of technology to aid in friendship making and keeping. Suggestions such as these would take advantage of modern technologies that encourage friendship in ways that do not discount the importance of being able to show physical affection or enjoy embodied experiences of friendship. Furthermore, that technology allows for meaningful encounters at a soul-level should also not be minimised. As Lori Wilbert expressed so well in her book, *Handle with Care*, humans are beings with physical bodies that need *emotional care and physical touch*.⁸⁹⁶ Digital Technology provides so many opportunities to touch the soul, but it does little to encourage physical touch; though perhaps that is not so much an issue with technology but rather the temptations it brings. Just as some respondents mentioned how they preferred to use their phones to facilitate in-person meet ups, technology does not always have to be about meeting online. It can serve as a means to bring the body and soul back together, but this is not as intuitive, and it certainly is not the intention of many of the minds behind the applications and devices. In Johan Hari's book, *Stolen Focus*, he spoke with many whistle blowers and previous

⁸⁹⁶ Wilbert, *Handle with Care*.

technology engineers who could speak to some of the harmful programming imbedded into the design of mobile phones and applications. These men and women expressed deep concern for the ways in which technology has been used to turn humans into products and assets for selling information.⁸⁹⁷ One of the technological gurus Hari interviewed stated it is not that technology is incapable of being used to help people find more connections and meaning in the physical world but rather that the developers have chosen not to use these abilities because, to do so would be financially detrimental as they need people to be online for them to profit financially.⁸⁹⁸

Another effect is how the availability and easy access of the internet has enabled people to relocate away from their friends without having to fear the loss of the friendship due to the impact a phone or video call delivers for enabling one to feel emotionally connected. For example, relocation today looks very different than it would have for early pioneers to the American West, where the magnitude of such a relocation would have meant saying goodbye to friends and family without any promise of communication for potentially years as they waited for towns and post offices to be built. Of course, the new difficulty is not to rely too heavily on the internet to provide pathways to long-distant friendships as this could result in physical isolation or lack of immersion in a new environment. There was a study done exploring how such technologies, available to international students, affected their experiences in a new country. The study found that many students, due to the ease of staying connected to friends back home, did not get as full an exchange experience as they might have without the ties to home.⁸⁹⁹ Turkle noted the same thing with young people traveling abroad and how differently the impact of a trip to Europe as a young adult differed within one or two generations. Before the easy access of WiFi-connected phones, young people would have to actually attempt to speak the language (because they could not count on Google Translate), to learn to navigate with paper maps (without the help of GPS), and to make new local connections, possibly even a friend, since they could not easily or cheaply call home.⁹⁰⁰ Consider the popular book and

⁸⁹⁷ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 101-136.

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁹⁹ Marlowe, "Digital belongings."

⁹⁰⁰ Turkle, *Alone Together*, 2011, 156, 287-299.

movie series of the 2000s *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. The story centred around four high-school aged girls who had all been friends from birth. Towards the end of high school, they were all going their separate ways for the summer. While WiFi and cell phones would have existed at the time, the technologies were not cheap or easily accessible options for staying in touch at this point. They decided to mail letters and a pair of jeans, that somehow magically fit them all, as their way to stay connected over the summer. Each girl ended up having life-shaping encounters that summer because they were each present in their own situations. This did not stop them from going out of their way to get to one of the girls in a time of crisis but imagine if this same story had taken place just a decade later. Would the girls have been as present where they were? Would they have been present to learn and grow, or would they have been so engrossed in staying connected to each other online, so as to miss opportunities to be shaped by the people and cultures around them? While this is a fictional story, it highlights real concerns which arise with technology and which must be thoughtfully considered, not only by individuals, but at the societal level as well. As Mary Aiken said, people are so used to their technology – its intuitiveness has made people forget that they lived without these things just a mere decade before; but technology and the ethics for using it is still quite new and nothing is so set in stone that it cannot be reshaped.⁹⁰¹ Indeed, it is the present generations who have the weighty privilege of encountering these technologies as well as opportunities and responsibilities to determine and even demand how we and future generations will implement the use of digital technology. Indeed, Aiken is right to remind us that it is not too late to turn the tide or make alterations.⁹⁰²

Perhaps considering the wisdom in the Christian idea of “living in the world but not being of the world” can serve as a helpful guide for navigating this transition into the digital age without sacrificing meaningful body-soul encompassing human friendships along the way. Christians believe they are part of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is far more “real” than the physical world, but the physical world pertains to the realities of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, the idea of being in the world but not of the world teaches that one can

⁹⁰¹ Aiken, *The Cyber Effect*, 298-316.

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, 309-316.

participate in and enjoy the world, but that one should not be controlled by or find one's true identity in the world. In a similar way one might consider that the online world is not the "real world," though it engages with aspects of the real world, and that while the online world has many benefits to be freely enjoyed, one should be careful not to allow the online world and one's digital devices control them, dictate their identity, or demean their friendships. Similarly, learning discernment over which "world" to being present in and how to focus one's energy has become increasingly important when living in both physical and digital spaces. Looking back to Christ's example of how he was always fully focused on the individuals with whom he interacted, or noting Paul's dedicated time to letter writing where he was intentionally focused on specific churches and individuals can serve as examples for us. History (both ancient and recent) is full of other examples, some of which we have explored, of people being able to dedicate their full attention to their friends, either by being fully present in the flesh, or by taking time away to write long letters. Today the separation between these spaces has become confused with text messages and notifications ever encroaching upon daily life. As this seemed to be one of the more prominent complaints expressed in interviews considering ways to help bring back such separations would be useful. For example, putting one's phone on silence or out of arms reach when spending time with a friend in-person, and conversely, taking uninterrupted time alone for a phone call with a long distance friend, putting limits on work apps so that work emails do not interrupt a night out with friends are just some examples of how one might intentionally learn to prioritize their time and attention for friendship investment. Making these seemingly changes could result in significant positive impacts by bringing back a more wholistic view of seeing ourselves and others as people comprised of both body and soul – thereby allowing friendships to embrace the whole person, regardless of proximity.

Another suggestion for bringing aspects of theology into conversation with modern issues relating to technology and friendship would be to train oneself to know the difference between what is real and what is a representation; to acknowledge the barriers that exist online, and to remember that the online world is not the same kind of encounter as being face-to-face. Indeed, if friendships of the calibre that seek after virtue, moral goodness, or accomplishing God's will are the goal, then accomplishing such lofty aims

solely online is going to be difficult if not impossible. Therefore, friend's ought to desire and pursue face-to-face encounters whenever possible; using digital means as needed in the interim. Consider again the "snack" analogy where online communication is a snack and face-to-face communication is the substantial meal.⁹⁰³ This analogy reminds us that snacks are not bad in themselves but are meant to hold us between meals.⁹⁰⁴ Continuing the analogy, the type of snack can also be worth consideration: a piece of fruit, yogurt, or carrot sticks would probably be considered "healthy" while candy bars, crisps, or ice cream would be considered "junk-food"; likewise, a phone or video call would be a better friendship snack than perhaps text messages, social media posts, or sharing memes/videos. Regardless of the chosen snack, too many snacks will ruin one's appetite for dinner. In a similar way, using technology to satiate one's appetite for friendship can become a robbery of the feast of true friendship which God intended.⁹⁰⁵ Paul for example, in many of his letters, bemoaned how he was often unable to be present with his friends and used letters, not because they fulfilled his desires to be with those to whom he wrote but because they were the best he could manage in his circumstances.⁹⁰⁶ At the same time, while Paul lamented the fact that he could not be present with his friends, the letters he wrote have blessed Christians for centuries. Therefore, one need not go to the extreme of avoiding technology, but rather endeavour to understand both technology and meaningful friendships and to not allow technology to become a counterfeit for true friendship.

7.4.2 Holy Friendship in an Age of Devices

Friendship, like marriage, is a gift of God in creation. It is a good that is what many theologians would refer to as a "common grace." Friendship is a grace available to sinners

⁹⁰³ See chapter 5 section 5.2.1.2.2.

⁹⁰⁴ Adriana Manago & Lanen Vaughn. "Social Media, Friendship, and Happiness in the Millennial Generation. Friendship and Happiness: Across the Life-Span and Cultures," *Friendship and Happiness*. ed. Melikşah Demir (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 200. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9603-3_11

⁹⁰⁵ One might also argue that this analogy also refers to the time amount and quality of the time given to a friend either online or face-to-face. Therefore, sharing a meme with a friend or checking one's social media is not as significant as a long phone call or video chat, in a similar way that being with a friend during an event or running into them at the shops is not the same as taking a walk together or talking over coffee.

⁹⁰⁶ Colossians 4:7-17, Romans 16, Philemon, 2 Timothy 4:9-22.

and saints, believers and sceptics alike. This desire comes from within mankind's God-given nature and yet it can be sanctified and made holy. There are several aspects of human life which co-exist in ordinary, profane, or sanctified capacities. Take marriage as an example. In an ordinary marriage a couple might be married by the state and enjoy the benefits of the security and bonding nature of marriage plus tax benefits. Marriage can also be profaned where abuse, hatred, and bondage masquerade as love. Marriage as it was designed by God, however, is holy or sanctified, in some traditions it is a sacrament and a holy mystery that represents God and the church. Friendship can likewise be expressed in these three manners. Friendship can be ordinary – enjoyable and pleasant, perhaps even with elements of virtue, longevity, forgiveness, but lacking a shared foundation of faith in God. Friendship can also be profaned and used to bring others down, trap others in cycles of abuse, or entice one towards sin. Friendship can also be sanctified and be a human expression of God's own sacrificial, intimate, and brotherly love towards humanity. Not partaking in profane friendships is perhaps the easiest as it is something one must simply learn to avoid; ordinary friendships or secular friendships of virtue are more challenging as they require at least some level of effort and faithfulness. Holy friendship is, unsurprisingly, the most challenging but also the most rewarding. In both the literature review and in interviews, there was a common theme that the richest forms of friendship require sacrifice and come at a cost, and yet the reward of possessing a trusted, faithful friend where hearts become intimately intertwined is something many people desire – despite the cost. These friendships are therefore, by their very nature, difficult and hard to come by, and technology can both help and/or hinder the process. Thus, it is important to consider both the advantages and disadvantages technology offers when one is pursuing friendships of any kind, but especially those of the highest degree.

One of the key elements of both biblical and virtue friendship was a shared moral foundation along with the desire for moral improvement. For Christians, terms like sanctification and the pursuit of holiness should mark Christian friendships along with a shared desire for God's will to be accomplished and a shared foundation of faith. Many friendships lack not only these shared elements of faith but even a shared moral foundation. In chapter 4 the changes to beliefs and values were explored in relation to friendship. It was

shown that ideologies like moral relativism and other secular philosophies sit in stark contrast to previous value systems which held to universal truths and morality. These are even more different when evaluated alongside friendships in the Bible, which held not only truth but faith as foundation to friendships. Thus, if people desire friendships of greater depth, I argue they must be willing to consider their foundational beliefs and whether their friends share these values. Likewise, in considering seeking out a friendship that could aid in virtue cultivation and holiness, one must learn to discern the values of their friends and whether or not they stand upon the same foundation and are headed in the same direction. Friendships such as these are not meant to be stagnant but are meant to cultivate and mould us, therefore direction and progression should be considered. In the tradition these are themes which emerged repeatedly. The changes in modern society do not, I believe, alter these principles of friendship. Rather these changes have only managed to muddle and confuse the foundational beliefs upon which friendships were previously built. This would make sense of the many expressions of confusion around friendship in my interviews as these basics of friendships are at one point sensed but at others confused.

While there were many other aspects of friendship addressed from biblical and Christian sources, one other worth highlighting, due to its relevance to the changes made to friendship and the present influences of modern society, is the faithful and sacrificial element of friendship. These two qualities were often either expressed in word or action. Ruth sacrificed her home and security to follow Naomi, Jonathan opposed his father the king to support his friend David, and Jesus laid down his very life for his friends. The later classical and Christian authors shared these beliefs and encouraged friendships which would speak difficult truths and make sacrifices. Friendships were also not to be quickly cast aside, but to seek forgiveness and restoration before allowing them to end. This is a far cry to the easily gained and lost friendships which are prevalent in society today. Holy friendships require perseverance and sacrifice, neither of which are easy – yet the rewards offered in exchange for the sacrifices cannot be replicated in lesser friendships.

Holy friendships can still be enjoyed and embraced not only in an age of technology but even through technology. There is no reason that if people can build a friendship upon the tested strong foundations of the past that their phones and internet could not become a

means of providing new ways to cultivate friendships – especially across distances. The key is therefore to build the foundation and then use technology appropriately rather than to try and build on shaky foundations and then to use technology to make up for or blame for faulty foundations.

7.4.3 Friendship in Light of Eternity

Returning to the theological importance of friendship, many of those who wrote of friendship from the tradition, and even many current Christian writers and theologians, comment on the role of friendship at the return of Christ. In the Christian faith, prayer is an expected aspect of daily life. Prayer, while it can concern the body in terms of location and posture, ultimately has more to do with the orientation of the soul and communication between a human spirit and God who is Spirit. In this way, there is no concern as to whether this act of the soul is any less real or meaningful because of the lack of face-to-face communication. At the same time, the hope of the Christian faith rests on the belief that God became a *human being* in the person of Christ, died on the cross, and *bodily* rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven and will come back again *as a human with a body*, and will forever dwell with his people *in new created bodies*. For Christians these spiritual realities are also physical realities. The hope is that spiritual prayer will one day be replaced with worship and friendship face-to-face. Furthermore, in Heaven there will be no marriage or romantic attachments, but there will be friendship. The Bride of Christ will not be limited to one ethnic group or family of people, rather those who will enter into the Kingdom of God will come from every ethnicity and culture, where families by blood will be superseded by families of Spirit. Thus, one would not be amiss to say that friendship is the eternal relationship of love that will exist in Heaven. Indeed, it was the idea of friendship continued on and perfected in Heaven with Christ which spurred on many of the Reformation friendship groups, as they saw friendship as both an earthly and heavenly means of enjoying God's blessing.

Again, not all relationships are described as continuing in the new heavens and new earth at the second coming of Christ. Marriage is explicitly noted as not continuing in

heaven. Familial relationships are simply not mentioned unless when used as imagery of the family of God. Friendship, however, is mentioned in that it is the friends of God, those who are washed by the blood of Christ who will enter the kingdom of God. In a mysterious way we might say that here on earth familial bonds tend to be the strongest and while these are good, it is friendship bonds which pay no regard to blood or marriage or family (though of course friendship can be part of these other relationships) which will become the primary relationship for God and His people. Friendship love, which is intimate, personal, and self-giving will be the eternal bond of love in Heaven. The idea that friendship could be the perfection of love for human relationships should be compelling enough for people to strive for better friendships now and to see the possibilities of depth and longevity which friendship holds. Even for those who are not part of the Christian faith, this understanding of friendship as a relationship so vital to the human experience that it has the potential to extend beyond the grave should give weight to the longing to bring the soul and body together by seeing a friend face-to-face. For even the longing to share physical space itself ought to encourage the cultivation of balance when determining the role that devices will serve in friendship making and keeping.

Finally, consider these words from the Lord's prayer: "let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."⁹⁰⁷ In light of the studies about friendship so far, these words coincide well with the Bible's teachings on friendship love. Consider how Christ came to embody the sacrificial love of friendship in his redemptive salvific plan and if holy friendship is focused on God's will being fulfilled, then these words promise that just as God's will can be fulfilled on earth and is not limited to Heaven, then friendship too can exist on earth as it will in Heaven. The promise of such is, of course, not that friendships will be guaranteed, since human free will and sin often get in the way of God's will – but it does promise that such realities of fulfilment in friendship are possible by God's grace. This should be reason enough to make the endeavour for great friendships which can be cultivated on earth and bloom into full fruition in the coming kingdom.

As it was Henry C. Trumbull's stunning book on Friendship which welcomed me towards this dissertation journey, I will conclude with his words: "...the world's experiences

⁹⁰⁷ Matthew 6:10

bear witness to its central truth that the imitations of friendship are as numerous as its highest attainment is rare.”⁹⁰⁸ Indeed, there are many traps and snares which can distract from true friendship; and yet, while rare, the “highest attainments” of friendship are possible, as history bears witness. Therefore, technology and those who make it, should be held accountable for how digital devices and applications impact friendships. The role of moral teaching and theological training should be encouraged as it has much to offer towards meeting people’s desire to understand the ways in which they were made for friendship as human beings with bodies *and* souls. Those who seek meaningful friendships should continue to persevere and use their technology in advantageous ways which celebrate friendships and teach others to do likewise. These are the tasks for anyone who desires to attain meaningful friendship in the digital age.

⁹⁰⁸ Trumbull, *Friendship the Master Passion*, 101.

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Appendix A

Friendship Survey for Interviews

- 1. What is a friend?**
 - a. How do you differentiate between types of friendships (like a best friend vs a good friend vs and acquaintance or work buddy)?
 - b. Can you tell me about one or two of your closest friends and why they are so close or why they are your dear friend?
 - c. Is friendship always good or can friendship be negative?
 - d. How many friends can/should you have?

- 2. What are the differences between friendships and romantic relationships?**
 - a. What is the same?

- 3. What do you want from friendship? What would make an ideal friendship?**

- 4. In what ways would you say our society's understanding of friendship could be better?**
 - a. What are the struggles in starting a friendship?
 - b. What are the struggles you face in maintaining friendships?
 - c. What are your thoughts on friendships ending?

- 5. Does being physically present impact your friendships?**
 - a. What about a romantic partner?
 - b. Is a Letter a fair comparison to digital communication?
 - c. Is there any significant difference between physical communication (gifts, cards, letters, flowers etc.,) and digital communication (texts, emails, audio messages, etc.)?

- 6. What is the role of technology in your friendships?**
 - a. Has the use of technology in your friendships evolved over time?
 - b. Have there been any positive impacts of technology on your friendships?
 - c. Have there been any negative impacts of technology on your friendships?
 - d. Do you have any kind of code of ethics or rules for online engagement you try to follow or would like to implement?
 - e. Is there any device or app etc. that you would like to have created or changed that would be helpful for you in your friendships?
 - f. Do you think we could ever get to a place where our technology could replace the need to be physically present? Like the idea of the metaverse etc.

- 7. Do you have any friendships with people you have never met face-to-face?**
 - a. Have you talked on the phone?
 - i. Did that make a difference?

- b. Have you seen them on video?
 - i. Did that make a difference?
- c. Would you want to meet them in person? And what could be gained or lost?
- d. Are there benefits to a friend you have never seen in person?
- e. How do online friendships compare to traditional friendships?

8. Does your faith or understanding of God impact your ideas of friendship?

- a. What about your behaviours as a friend?
- b. Can you be friends with God?