

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

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Shelby: Welcome to *Daily Grace*. We believe the Bible is true, trustworthy, and timeless. We want to help women like you know and love God's word. The Bible shows us who God is, and who he is, changes everything. My name is Shelby.

Krystal: I'm Krystal. We want to invite you to come join us as we chat about the truth of God's word in our everyday lives. Hey, everyone and welcome back to the *Daily Grace* podcast. This is Krystal, and today I am joined by Christine Hoover. Christine is a speaker, podcaster, and author of several books including a Bible study on the book of Matthew. I am really looking forward to this conversation, Christine, thanks so much for joining me today.

Christine Hoover: Thanks for having me, Krystal. I'm glad to be here.

Krystal: I'm really excited to have you on the podcast for a few reasons. One, we've done several of your books at my church for our women's book club. That's been really sweet. I've seen firsthand how your books have just blessed our women and encouraged them, especially in the topic of biblical friendship. That's really fun for me. Then also I was looking at your website and seeing how you describe your books and your Bible study as a way for you to address how the gospel informs all aspect of our lives and that is our heartbeat here at Daily Grace. I'm excited for our listeners to get to know you a little bit. Before we dive into our topic today, can you tell us just a little bit about yourself?

Christine: Sure. I am back in Texas after a 14-year journey to Virginia. My husband is a pastor, and we moved from Texas, which is our home state, to Virginia in 2008, to plant a church that he pastored for 14 years. We just recently moved back to Texas, but to a part of Texas, we've never lived in, which is Austin. He is serving as an executive pastor at one of the campuses at Austin Stone Community Church. We're brand new here. Our kids are teenagers, and so they are transitioning to a new place. That's been interesting and fun and good.

It's going well. We have three boys. One is in college, one is a junior in high school, and one is a freshman in high school. You mentioned that I write, so I get to write. That's my favorite thing to do in all the world, is just to write what God has taught me through my own study of the word, through my own lived experience. That always sends us back to the word. I love getting to share truths that God has taught me and that have really impacted me and the way I do ministry, the way I do relationships, the way I do parenting, marriage. All of that. It's my great joy to get to do that.

Krystal: Can you tell us a little bit too just about your podcast that you host?

Christine: Yes. I host a podcast called *Ministry Wives*, and it actually is evolved from a podcast that I used to do by myself where we talked about all kinds of different topics, but now focusing on ministry. I get to talk to all kinds of pastor's wives, a few pastors

File name: Ep_202_Mixdown.mp3

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

sprinkled in there in all different kinds of ministry contexts. We're just talking about things that affect ministry wives. Some of that is friendship, which we're going to talk about today, and just everything from criticism to discouragement, to how to; how do I disciple someone, how do I practice hospitality. That kind of thing. I'm really enjoying getting to do that.

Krystal: That's really cool. We'll make sure to link to that in our show notes because I know we have a lot of listeners that are in ministry or married to someone in ministry, and so I know that will just be an encouragement to them. We are here to talk about biblical friendship. You wrote a book called *Messy Beautiful Friendship: Finding and Nurturing, Deep and Lasting Relationships*. What made you want to write a book on friendship?

Christine: Friendship has actually been something that's been really challenging for me. Through my 20s and 30s, I would say that was my biggest struggle. I did not struggle with friendship in high school and college. I know some people did, they didn't have good friends in high school or college, but that was easy for me. You live with your friends in college, you have extra time to spend with them even though you think you don't in college. Then when I became an adult, it just changed, and I couldn't figure out why it had become hard.

Some of that's just responsibility when you become an adult.

Some of it was because, I realized this later, that I was just thinking it was going to happen like it had happened in high school and college, that it just comes to you. You just show up somewhere, and boom, there's your friend. I didn't know that I needed to put intentional effort into it, I know that sounds ridiculous to say. It took me a long time in my 20s and 30s to realize that I was going to need to change the way that I engaged relationships. At the same time, I was a pastor's wife, and that was a whole nother layer of complexity added on to friendship. I was just trying to figure it all out.

When we moved to Charlottesville to plant a church, I started talking to women more about friendship, or they were coming to me to talk about it. That was what I talked about more than anything else, was community, or a fractured relationship, or loneliness, or how do I get plugged in. It was all related to friendship. I realized this is not just me, I'm not the only one who doesn't really know what I'm doing. At the same time, I had started learning some things. I had started putting some new things into practice. I was talking more about those things, and I just thought, "I really want to write about this."

I want to write what God has shown me, some of the mistakes I've made, and the ways that He's taught me to change how I was engaging people, and seeing some fruit from that." I just wanted to share it with other people.

Krystal: I love that. I love too how you define biblical friendships. I want to read it real quick. You define biblical friendship as securing ourselves to the sure, steadfast anchor

File name: Ep_202_Mixdown.mp3

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

of Christ, and while holding to that anchor, giving and receiving the gift of friendship as we have opportunity. What does that look like on a practical level? Then also, how have you seen that in your own life?

Christine: Before I speak about practical, I do want to say I think that's so important. We can skip right over that and think, "Okay, yes, yes, yes, we know the gospel." It's so important to start there because if we don't find our peace and our contentment in Christ, and knowing that we are fully known and loved by him, then we can really distort our relationships with other people and look to them to be a god to us. I write in the book, and it comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *Life Together*, where he talks about that we often have wished dreams about community that are very idealistic.

That was me, that was totally me. That's why I remember that book so well. I think that's what we often do, is we look to people to be God to us, and we don't start with God being God, that He actually does love us unconditionally, He does know us fully. When we really can rest in that and sit in that, it enables us to then go and be a blessing to other people in imitation of how He has loved us. It takes the pressure off, right?

Krystal: Yes.

Christine: Then I think that teaches us, getting to the practical level, that if that's how God has loved us in Christ, that He has come toward us, that He has sacrificed for us, if we are to love people like that, then that means we are going to be initiators. We're going to be the ones who seek to engage, we want to sacrifice for the other. I think just at the very beginning level, basic level is we can do that by being a person who enters places, enters conversations with what I call there you are, being a there-you-are-person versus a here-I- am.

A lot of my mistakes in my 20s and 30s was I would show up like, here I am. I hope someone comes to talk to me, I hope someone includes me, I hope someone invites me. I think that Jesus demonstrates a different love that goes toward and says, "I see you. There you are, I'm interested in you." In conversation, asking questions, trying to get to know somebody. Not just the basic questions, but really trying to understand the heart behind that person. I think that's just a simple practical thing we can do. Not just conversation, also inviting people, including people.

Being the one to say, "I'm going to host something, and I'm going to invite people into my life." That can be uncomfortable if we are not used to doing that. I still feel awkward sometimes when I invite someone to do something, a person that I don't know very well, but that's where it begins. I think that that is in imitation of what Christ has done for us.

Krystal: I love, in your book, there's a question that you have. It's, "Who is your greatest friend?" and you put in parentheses, "This is a Sunday School answer. It is God." [laughter] I think being able to recognize how God loves us, how He sees us, and how we can respond to Him helps us to then have the ability to respond to others in friendship. There are barriers like you said, it could feel awkward. It could be

File name: Ep_202_Mixdown.mp3

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

uncomfortable, like, what if they don't like me, or what if they're too busy for me or whatever it might be. What are some of those barriers that even play into maybe unrealistic expectations that we place on ourselves, or on others, or just friendship in general?

Christine: I think, as I said before, we can idealize community and relationships. I always like to think to myself, if I'm idealizing something, I'm idolizing that thing because nothing is intended to be perfect besides Jesus. Our relationship with God, He loves us perfectly. Friendship is never going to be perfect. There are going to be people who don't respond or who we don't click with, or it's quite possible they may not like us and want to spend time with us. If we go into it thinking this isn't going to be perfect, there's no ideal friendship, then we can take that, we can absorb that because we can take it back to the Lord and say, "Okay, yes, that hurt," or "My insecurities might be flaring right now, but I am loved here, and so I can continue to go back out and engage."

The barrier often, at least in my own life, is when I've been hurt, or my insecurity, being new. As I just described, I'm new. That can create some insecurity. That's a barrier, it's just when we've been hurt, or we feel new or uncomfortable, we want other people to go first. I'm even having to tell myself the things I've written right now. It's like, "Just go ahead and go first. Ask somebody, don't wait for them."

Krystal: Yes, you're really in that season where you're entering into a new church, into a new city, and so you're probably living out some of these things and seeing those barriers firsthand. I think it's interesting too to think about, if we have these expectations on people, on friendships, we're putting a burden on them. They were never created-

Christine: That's right.

Krystal: -to hold the weight of all the things that we are hoping for and dreaming for in a friendship. I love that you mentioned that we can take that to the Lord. Even when we feel that disconnect, that rejection, whatever it might be, we could take it to the Lord knowing that we are fully accepted by Him even if we're not accepted by a friend. If someone is dealing with insecurities, fear of rejection, something that might be preventing them from pursuing a biblical friendship, what are ways that they might overcome some of those fears?

Christine: We've talked a lot already about the gospel, and how important it is to be spending time with the Lord daily and knowing that He knows and sees us and loves us. I think that what it takes is just taking the risk, just saying, "Yes, I feel this, I feel insecure, but," as I say in the book, "I'm going to push through the awkward." What I have found in friendship is, yes, it is inherently risky, it is, to put yourself out there, but the reward is on the other side of that. If we don't try, let's say I have, in my life now, there's women around me I don't know well, but there's a few people where I'm like, "I really like them. I see their faith or I see they're just engaging or whatever. I think I want to spend time with them, I'm going to ask them to spend time with me," that's risky.

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

I'm new, and they don't know me, they may not have time, but I won't know unless I take that step. That's what I tell myself, is, "Yes, it's vulnerable, but there's no way that I can get to the reward of relationship unless I take those risks," so I go in insecure and all. Just, it's okay if this doesn't necessarily work out into a deep friendship. What I think about when insecurity comes in is, at least by doing this, I am honoring the Lord. I am loving this person, showing interest in this person, honoring this person as scripture tells me to do. That doesn't mean it has to become this deep friendship, but God is honored by that.

It can even be a step of obedience to do something like that, to just say, "I'm going to go in, and I'm going to seek to encourage and bless this person and be present with them to listen to them, to ask them questions."

Krystal: I love too just thinking about the reward not just being a friendship, maybe it will grow into a friendship, but the reward being stepping out in faith, honoring the Lord, and if all else fails, the reward is, I did something that was scary and God was still faithful in it, I didn't die. [laughter] To put it to perspective like, okay, maybe it didn't work out but we get more of God in that because we're having to trust Him in potentially some uncomfortable situations. I love too that it's not just this you get it or you don't, it's like no, there's still reward there even if that friendship maybe doesn't come to fruition like we're hoping.

You mentioned someone may be too busy. I feel like that happens a lot. I think for anyone busyness is just a struggle, so what would you say to someone who feels like they're too busy to invest in these kinds of friendships?

Christine: I would say relationships are more important than tasks, and so I would say we need relationships. We are created to be in community and a part of God's work in our life is through relationship and people rubbing up against people. Iron sharpens iron. We need those people in our life to help us to be spiritually strong. I can say this from my own experience that I have at times prioritized tasks over people. I'm a task person. I'm an introvert, and I like to be at home. I like to do my things, but I have found that I become a little malformed when that's all I'm doing because I don't have people in my life who know really what's going on, who can push back sometimes on what I'm thinking, and maybe how I'm engaging certain relationships, and so I need that.

I need relationships that challenge me and grow my faith. How do we make time for that, as to your question, if you feel like, "I want that but my schedule is just so full." I would just say what are pockets of time that you can give, and will you make sacrifices to give it? I think about when I was younger and my kids were little. I was exhausted by the time they went to bed, but could I sometimes make time to go out and meet a friend after the kids go to bed? Could I get up? I used to get up really early to meet people when my kids were little.

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

Get up and go to get coffee at 6:00 AM. Can I do that? Yes. Now, do I want to? Most of the time, no, but when I do it, it's one of those things where you're investing in something.

Every time, every single time I would not want to go. Then I show up, and I'm so encouraged, and then my heart is so full. There's just something about that that fills me for the day ahead, or it just leaves me so encouraged, and so I go back to that every time I'm like, "I don't want to do this." I know it will be a blessing, and it is a deposit into a relationship. Relationships need to be cultivated, and so we're depositing into a relationship that we never know when we're going to have to draw from that when we need the care of someone else.

I would say, what are pockets? If you're married, talk to your husband about how can you guys trade-off, making sure he has time with friends, you have time with friends. You may not have a lot of time, and so choose wisely, choose people that when you spend time with them, you are filled up. It's a life-giving time. Is it going to be like that every single time? Probably not, just as you're not going to be life-giving to them every single time, but choose people that you're so glad that you did once you spend time with them.

Krystal: That's a good word. Think about the pockets of time that we already have because we feel like all of the things that we're called to do, it's like we have to add on. We have to keep-

Christine: That's right.

Krystal: -pushing in the margins, and yet there are pockets of time we have. It's like studying the word. We have the time. Is it a priority, and do we find the space already built into our schedule to make those opportunities to spend time with the Lord, spend time with friends? When I was single, I was mentored by a friend of mine who had at the time two young kids. Now she has six, and at the time, she would just invite me to meet her at Target. We'd get coffee at the Starbucks, and I would just walk with her down the aisles as she grocery-shopped with her kids.

I look back now as a mom and think, "Man, that was a sacrifice for her to invite me in." It was weekly. I met with her weekly for a couple of years. She just always invited me along and just developed a friendship that way. It was just in a natural rhythm of life that she had already established, and I just really valued and cherished that time with her because I knew how valuable it was to invite me into that. I think looking for those pockets even if it is going to the grocery store-- I invited my friend to meet me at Target before our trip. I had to get luggage.

I was like, "Do you want to just meet me and we'll talk?" We just walked around Target, and so I think if it's a priority, and we want friendship to be a priority, we'll find the time to do it, but we might have to get creative.

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

Christine: Get creative.

Krystal: That's okay.

Christine: That's right.

Krystal: That's okay.

Christine: Also, people already probably do this, but I love to use apps that keep me connected with people like Voxer or Marco Polo. Friends who don't live nearby, that's how I communicate with them. It's easy because you can do it when you have the time. I'm driving a lot, I can get on those Voxer, whatever, and just talk to people. They can get back to me when they have time too.

Krystal: Yes, no, that's good. I'm a fan of those apps as well. One thing you talk about in your book is just how the gospel informs our friendships. How would you say the gospel informs our friendships in a way that it helps us to get past just surface-level friendships?

Christine: Oh, I love this question. I think of Galatians 6 where it says, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." That right there, any of the one another's. If you think of any of them, forgive one another, honor one another, bear one another's burdens, as I just described. Love one another. We can't do that unless we know people well, unless we really know what's going on in their lives, what they're thinking about, what they are worried about, what their hopes are, where they've hurt someone, or where they've been hurt.

We can't do any of those one anothers unless we go beyond the surface. The gospel gives such a safety net for us. It's scary to go there with people sometimes, to be vulnerable and say, "I need to," here's another one, "confess." Confess to one another. That is so vulnerable. The gospel allows us to say, "You know what? You and I, we're on the same page. We're both sinners. We've both been rescued and saved by Jesus Christ. There's nothing that I can say or do or nothing you can say or do that will affect my standing before God because we are in Christ."

There's such a safety net in that. It's still scary, but I would say that's where the meat, that's where the heart of friendship is, is at that level where we go below the surface, and we really let people in. Sometimes we have to ask to be let into other people's lives, but to me, that's where the joy is. I think of a specific friend who I was getting to know, and she's one of my best friends now, but at the time, I didn't know her that well. As we were getting to know another, she was the one who said, "There are some things about me that I'm not sure that you would still want to be my friend if you knew."

I was like, "No, that's not true." It took her a while to finally say, and there was something about when she confessed her sin to me, I was able to, I don't hold the power to forgive sin, but to say, "God has forgiven you of that." For me to get to say that

File name: Ep_202_Mixdown.mp3

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

to her, it's the truth of James 5:16, coming out, "Confess your sins to another and you will be healed." Not that I brought healing, but it was something about bringing something to the light. God can use that just to take the power of sin out. That solidified our friendship because she was willing to say, "Here's something I need you to know about me."

I felt so honored that she would allow me into that aspect of her life. That to me is where the good stuff happens, is when we're willing to say, "I want to let you in. I want to be vulnerable with you."

Krystal: I think there's a common theme outside of the gospel, it's wrapped up in the gospel, as you're talking, the common theme that I'm hearing in friendships is being others-focused. Romans 12, "Outdoing one another in showing honor." That's where stepping out in faith to invite someone to come over for dinner, being the one to say, "Hey, there you are," instead of coming into a room, "Here I am," all of these are focused on the good of others. That displays the gospel. That reflects the character of Christ. That requires us to be uncomfortable to make that first move.

You have a whole section in your book on just how to be this kind of friend. Really your whole book is leaning into that, but you have a particular section towards the end, because I think it is tempting to put that pressure on other people, "They weren't a good friend to me, therefore they're out of my life." Again, there's going to be situations in which it's healthy to maybe-- Like you were mentioning earlier, who are the people that are life-giving to be around? There's going to be those situations, but we can often use that as an excuse to push people away, instead of us being that friend to pursue biblical friendship. What advice do you have, just what does it look like for us to be a good friend and to maintain those biblical friendships?

Christine: You're kind of already hitting on one. I think sometimes we think of friendship like a vending machine. Like if I put this in, I get something out. There's a verse in Proverbs that says that whoever waters will himself be watered. We think of it like this reciprocal, what I put in is what I should get out. I don't think that that is what biblical friendship is. I think yes, there's a specific joy that we get when we put in the quarter, we bless someone else, we honor, we try to encourage, we try to serve someone. If we're looking for that in return exactly, or they need to appreciate or they need to do something for me, then we are going to be disappointed so much.

I think that the gospel teaches us too, we have been loved so much by God through Christ that we do those things in His honor. We are really loving Him by loving this person. It's an act of worship. We don't worship God looking for something in return. We worship God because He's worthy of that. For me to serve a friend is an act of worship to God that gets, hopefully, to bless that person. I think that that is the key in being a friend. That we are not thinking, "What do I get in return," but we're thinking, "God, I want you to be honored. I want this person to feel loved because I know what love feels like because you have loved me."

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

I want that person to feel seen. I want that person to be cared for because that's how you have cared for me." I have people like that in my life who love like that. They are a magnet for other people. People want to be friends with that person because when you spend time with them, you feel loved, you feel seen. You feel it's a supernatural love that they are able to love like that. I'm not saying that we do those things to manipulate to gain friends, but I'm saying that's what makes us a good friend. That's what makes us a person that other people will feel safe with, that they can share things with us, that we won't be scared away by that. That if they have a burden we won't be afraid to enter in because we are learning how to love, and hopefully demonstrating how to love the way that God has loved us.

Krystal: Okay. You may have already hit on this a little bit, so I apologize if this is a bit superfluous, but I do want to ask this because I think this might be a new concept for someone to think, "My friendships can be an avenue which I worship God and glorify God by the way I treat others." How would you say the gift of friendship is a way that we can glorify God?

Christine: I think of Jesus saying, when he's about to go to the cross, he prays that we will have unity, that the world will be able to look at us and see that we love one another. That's what we're doing. By gifting ourselves in friendship, we're saying to whoever we interact with that God is love, and we're demonstrating that love. I love that you said the gift of friendship. A lot of times we think of that as who is doing something for me, who is coming for me, who is inviting me? I think too of Paul saying Jesus said it's better to give than to receive.

There is something about the way God has designed friendship that giving it is the joy. Giving love to others is the joy. When we do that, at some point, we are going to get that in return. It may not be the exact thing that we did, or in the exact way that we would do it, but it gives us eyes to see, I think, and appreciate the imperfect people around us just as we are imperfect. That people are trying to demonstrate friendship toward us. I just think it changes our perspective when we think about it as giving friendship, and that's the main focus. It helps us to be really, really grateful for any type of someone coming toward us. Right?

Krystal: Yes. I love just thinking about releasing that burden that we put on ourselves or others of, even in friendships, I want them to make me feel good. I want them to do this particular thing. When we release them of that burden, when they disappoint us it's not as devastating because we haven't put our hope in them, our identity isn't found in that relationship, it's found in God alone. That actually brings a lot of life to our friendships and relationships where it's like, yes, you're going to disappoint me. I'm probably going to disappoint you. We rest in the gospel, we forgive one another, we confess our sins, and we can walk in freedom. My prayer is that anyone who's listening that struggles to make friends, keep friends, whatever it might be, maybe they are really introverted and so they're kind of scared to step out, I pray that they hear this and think, "This is a way I can honor God." Even just saying hi to someone on Sunday morning, instead of them

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

saying hi to me, I will say that becomes a reason that people will leave a church is because no one said hi to me. I always think, "Man, what would it look like for you to say hi to someone, and think, oh, this new guest actually reached out and said hi to me and I've been here 10 years."

That really does model the gospel of reaching out and considering others as more significant than yourself. I've just appreciated so much of what you have shared here today. I do have one final question for you.

Christine: Okay.

Krystal: It is a question we ask every guest that comes on the podcast because, at The Daily Grace Co, we say the gospel changes everything. Christine, what has the gospel changed for you?

Christine: Everything. [laughter] What comes to mind is, I've written a whole book about this, *From Good to Grace*, talking about I did not understand the gospel for a long time as a Christian, and so I lived under such a burden and weight of performance and just trying to earn what I already had in Christ. When I came to understand Grace, it was through the book of Galatians, that book, I feel like it's like if you've ever taken down old wallpaper a little at a time, scrape, scrape, scrape, Holy Spirit just scraped, scraped, scraped my heart, my mind and put up the new wallpaper of the gospel.

Just the freedom that when I realize there's nothing I can do, I already have it, I already have-- I just read this morning in 2nd Corinthians about the spirit as our guarantee. I already have the inheritance. I'm an inheriting daughter. I have everything in him. That changed the way I did ministry because I wasn't trying to prove myself. It changed the way I was able to be in relationship with people because I wasn't looking for their approval and validation. It just completely changed the way I approached God Himself, that I didn't have to be afraid of Him.

I always pictured Him as like, I was on stage, and the audience, there was one person in the audience, and it was God. He had His arms crossed and He had a frown on His face because I wasn't doing it just right. That is not God. That is not God. Once I realized that, it just freed me up to be loved by God and to love Him in return, so, what I said earlier about everything being worshiped, that's what it became. I realized, oh, my life is for worship. I can't earn it, but I can return love by worshiping Him in my relationships, in my ministry. Everything I do, it can be an act of worship because I'm loved. It did change everything.

Krystal: Yes. It does feel like a little bit of a trick question because everyone we ask, they're like, "Well, it does change everything," but it is so sweet to hear. Just there's so many aspects that the gospel just informs, and then it opens up and exposes things in our heart that we didn't even realize. It's always just a joy to hear how different people answer that question. Gosh, thank you so much for joining me. This has been such a delight.

File name: Ep_202_Mixdown.mp3

Daily Grace Podcast Episode 202

Christine: Thanks for having me, Krystal.

Krystal: Thank you to our listeners for joining us today on *The Daily Grace* podcast. We will link to Christine's book, *Messy Beautiful Friendship*, and other resources that we've mentioned in the show notes below. Until next week, come join us as we continue this conversation over on Instagram @dailygracepodcast. We'll see you next time.

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