



# WISDOM LAB

## Friendship on the Frontline

A better conversation about real relationships in everyday life

### **In a culture of widespread loneliness, how would Jesus have us befriend those beyond the church?**

Jesus was famously described as ‘a friend of sinners’ (Luke 7:34). Eating, drinking, and partying with all the wrong sorts, he demonstrated a radical way of building relationships across every social divide. Following his example, the early church became a light to the nations, revealing a new way to be human.

Yet two millennia on, many of us struggle to name even a few friends beyond the church. What is happening to friendship today – and how can we model the kind of friendship Jesus and the early church offered the world? The need is great: around 20% of people in the UK [have no close friends](#).

But can Christians be committed to those who don’t share our commitment to Jesus? Aren’t we warned that being friends with the world makes us enemies of God (James 4:4)? Isn’t it safer to just be friendly without really becoming friends? And on the flipside, how can we offer true friendship if we’re just looking for an opportunity to bring Jesus into the conversation, pulling away from people if they’re not particularly interested?

As disciples, we need wisdom for the way forward. We need a better conversation about how to practice friendship on our frontlines –where we meet those who don’t follow Christ. So, we’ve gathered a diverse group of Christians to contribute towards this Wisdom Lab, helping you form fruitful friendship right where you are.

## THE SPEAKERS



### **Sheridan Voysey**

#### **Author and Presenter, Friendship Lab**

Sheridan is an author, speaker, broadcaster, and founder of [FriendshipLab.org](https://friendshiplab.org). A regular presenter of Pause for Thought on BBC Radio 2's Zoe Ball Breakfast Show, he has been featured on BBC Breakfast, BBC News, Day of Discovery, as well as in *The Times* and *The Sunday Telegraph*. Sheridan has written eight books including *Resurrection Year* and *The Making of Us*, and writes for the devotional Our Daily Bread. Find him at [sheridanvoysey.com](https://sheridanvoysey.com)



### **Dr Chloe Lynch**

#### **Lecturer in Practical Theology, London School of Theology**

After practising as a City lawyer, Chloe spent ten years working in church leadership. Now, alongside teaching undergraduates and supervising researchers, she reads and writes on leadership and prayer, and practices them together in ministry, mentoring leaders and offering spiritual direction to those who want to pray more. Her book, [\*Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship\*](#), was published by Routledge in 2019.



### **Corin Pilling**

#### **UK Director, Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries**

Corin is Director of [Sanctuary UK](https://sanctuaryuk.org), a mental health charity equipping churches with resources and training to support mental health and wellbeing. Corin's work began with a twenty-year career working with homeless people, before working with a national disability charity in community development and facilitation. He has led Sanctuary since 2020. Corin is passionate about his neighbourhood of King's Cross, London where he has lived on an estate for 13 years.



### **Phil Knox**

#### **Evangelism and Missiology Senior Specialist, Evangelical Alliance**

Phil is head of mission to young adults at the Evangelical Alliance. He is passionate about making Jesus known and the power of friendship. He has degrees in law, and mission and evangelism. He is a runner, water skier, and once broke the world record for the longest five-a-side football match. He is also an award-winning performance poet and author of [\*Story Bearer\*](#) and [\*The Best of Friends\*](#).

## HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Use this guide with a group by watching the recorded video of LICC's 'Wisdom Lab: Friendship on the Frontline' event, and pausing when prompted to discuss and reflect.

Each Wisdom Lab follows LICC's process of cultural engagement, guiding us to be wise peacemakers, and to start better conversations in our everyday lives.

The original event took place over one evening, but take as long as you need to cover the material in this guide. You might want to dedicate one session to the *listen* and *imagine* sections, and another to *create* and *communicate*.

**Find the video online at**  
**[licc.org.uk/friendship-on-the-frontline](https://licc.org.uk/friendship-on-the-frontline)**

## LEADER'S RESOURCES

If you are leading the discussion, you might want to prepare yourself by reading these articles beforehand.

The *Friendship on the Frontline* articles were written by the speakers to go into more depth on the Wisdom Lab topic.

- Friendship on the frontline | [Listening](#) (1/4)
- Friendship on the frontline | [Imagining](#) (2/4)
- Friendship on the frontline | [Creating](#) (3/4)
- Friendship on the frontline | [Communicating](#) (4/4)
- [Wise peacemakers | How to love your culture by triple listening](#)

## INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

### WATCH

Watch the [video](#) from the beginning to 00:05:08.

In this section, Dave explains why this topic matters and how it impacts our witness.

**‘A friend** is someone I can talk to, depend on, grow with, and enjoy.’ – Sheridan Voysey

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

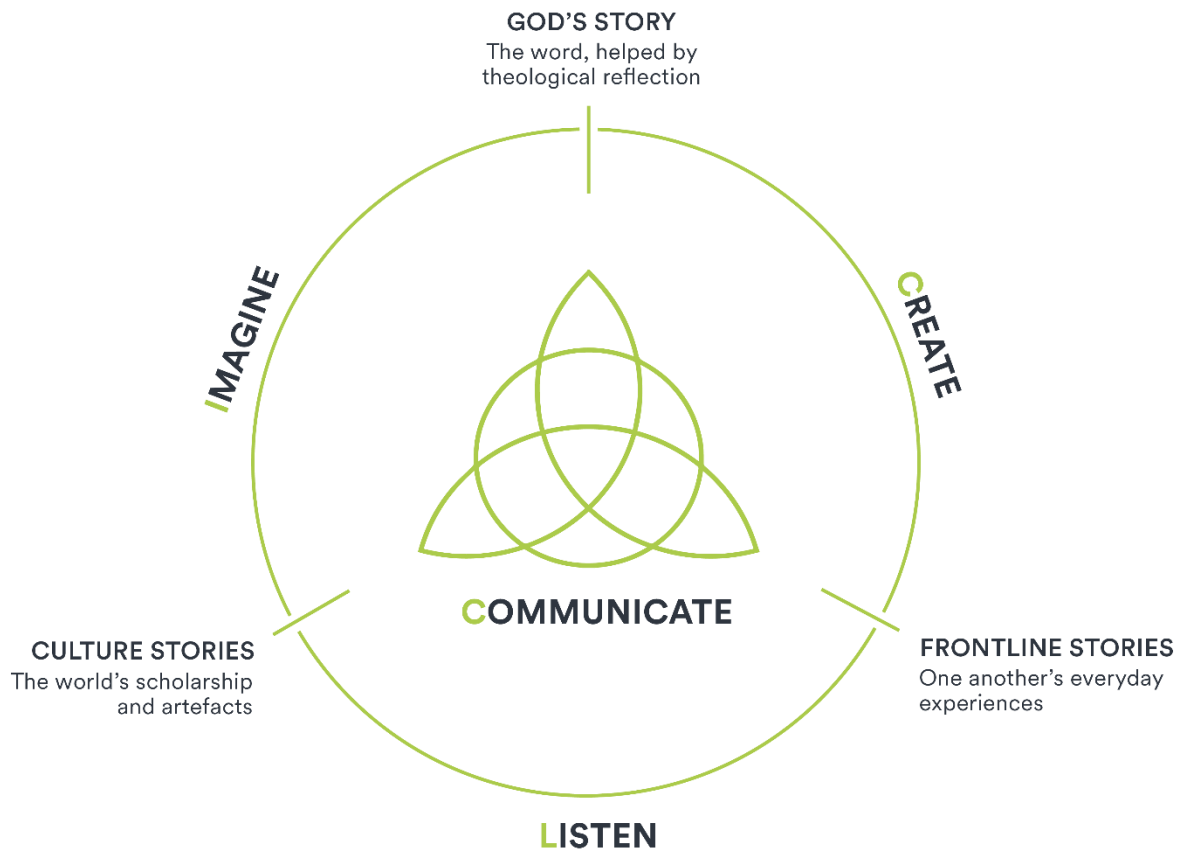
**Q. In your experience, how does friendship in the church compare to being friends in the wider culture? In what ways does this impact our witness as Jesus’ followers?**

# INTRODUCING THE PROCESS WE’LL USE

## WATCH

Watch the [video](#) from 00:05:08 to 00:07:40.

In this section, Dave lays out the framework for this discussion.



## Being a wise peacemaker

**Listen:** What’s going on and why?

**Imagine:** What should be going on?

**Create:** How will we respond?

**Communicate:** How to share the good news?

## Your frontline

Anywhere you live and work, learn and play, shop and serve – especially the places where you spend time day-to-day with people who don’t know Jesus.

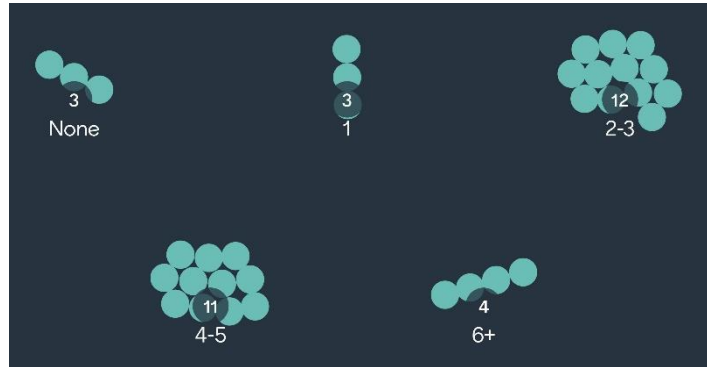
# THE TALKS

## LISTEN | with Sheridan Voysey

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

**Q. How many *close friends* do you have on your frontlines?**

*Right: Attendee answers from the event.*



### WATCH

Watch the [video](#) from 00:07:40 to 00:24:20.

*In this section, Sheridan helps us listen to what's going on now in our lonely culture and think about forces shaping why it's going on.*

#### The problem

- 20% have no close friends
- 12% have only one close friend
- 51% find making new friends hard

#### The barriers

- Busyness
- Mobility
- Workplace changes
- Neglect

#### The foundations

- Freedom
- Equality
- Mutual relationship

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Q. What does this issue look like on your frontline?**

**How have these *four forces* made friendship harder?**

**And do you have friends you can 'talk to, depend on, grow with, and enjoy'?**



## CREATE | with Corin Pilling

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

**Q. What action *most* helped your acquaintances become close friends?**



*Right: Attendee answers from the event.*

### WATCH

Watch the [video](#) from 00:37:58 to 00:50:30.

*In this section, Dave Benson summarises Corin's contribution, exploring how we can create healing action through the practices of lament, gratitude, and play.*

#### **Lament – to name the loneliness**

- Drop the stigma; loneliness is human
- Psalms of lament help us embrace God's healing action in our lives
- Engage others in honest conversation

#### **Gratitude – to embrace the new**

- Count your friendship blessings
- Practise gratitude together
- Expand your common ground

#### **Play – for a fresh perspective together**

- Post-Covid, we need spontaneity and moments of sheer fun
- What was immersive play as a kid?
- Create together, getting out of your head and into your body, even at work

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Q. How would Jesus have you respond on your frontline? What form might these *three practices* (lament, gratitude, play) take as acquaintances become friends?**





# THE Q&A

## WATCH

Watch the [video](#) from 01:03:06 to 01:27:00.

*In this section, our speakers answer many of the questions asked at the event.*

### Questions answered by the panel:

- Q. The church is supposed to be the place where I find community, and yet I feel lonely there. How do I deal with that, when church should perhaps be the ‘playground’ to teach us how to make friends on our frontlines? (01:07:44)
- Q. It seems that the best thing to make friends is simply to ask people their story. Getting practical, how do you make friends, especially on your frontline? (01:14:55)
- Q. What do you do if your close friends actually view *not* sharing personal faith as part of their definition of true friendship? (01:18:47)
- Q. You’ve said we have limited capacity to sustain close friendships. And yet, with mobility we all seem to accumulate more and more friends, meaning each friendship becomes that bit more superficial or strained. So, can a person be a friend for a season rather than a lifetime? (01:22:07)

### Other questions asked at the event:

- Q. Most often in church I feel very lonely. It is supposed to be the place where I find community, fellowship, and even friendship. How should I deal with that?
- Q. How do those that struggle with loneliness both acknowledge their emotions and not get lost in self-pity?
- Q. You mention how often we talk about marriage in our churches, and often single people left out. Might emphasising more intentional friendship perhaps be the answer?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Q. What question would you want to ask the panel?**

**Q. What *one* thing will you *do* in response to this Wisdom Lab, as a Christlike friend in our lonely age? Pray together in response, committing these actions to the Lord.**

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FROM THE SPEAKERS

### From Sheridan Voysey

- **COURSE:** [Friendship Lab](#), evidence-based course for individuals and groups
- **BOOK:** [Friends](#) by Robin Dunbar

### From Chloe Lynch

- **BOOK:** [Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love](#) by Liz Carmichael
- **BOOK:** [God is Friendship](#) by Brian Edgar

### From Corin Pilling

- **COURSE:** [The Sanctuary Course](#), a free resource to explore mental health
- **WEBSITE:** [The Gratitude Initiative](#) by Girma Bishaw, with research and practices from a Christian perspective encouraging friendship and altruism

### From Phil Knox

- **BOOK:** [The Best of Friends](#) by Phil Knox
- **BOOK:** [Living His Story](#) by Hannah Steele

## MORE FROM LICC

For more from LICC on friendship, check out the articles and extra reading – including our Connecting with Culture posts and Word for the Week devotional series – online at [licc.org.uk/friendship-on-the-frontline](https://licc.org.uk/friendship-on-the-frontline).

See all of LICC's Wisdom Labs at [licc.org.uk/ourresources/wisdom-labs](https://licc.org.uk/ourresources/wisdom-labs)

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