

God's Friendship

Above and Beyond Serving

August 1, 2021

Today we're gearing up to go above and beyond merely serving the Lord.

But before we get to that, answer me this: **Are you God's friend?** I know He's *yours*; but are you *His*? "I'm a **believer**, a **follower**, and a **child of God**. I'm His **disciple**, His **witness**, His **reflection**, and His **ambassador**." But *are you His friend?* "I **pray**, I **read**, I **appreciate**, and I **worship**." And that's a *great starting place*; but we need to go *above and beyond* all that.



Ever bump into a former school teacher from when you were young, and feel compelled to call them by their Mr. or Mrs. name – because it's just too weird to call them by their first name? I've seen my grade-school principle Don Zorn a number of times; and I *always* call him Mr. Zorn. And he *always* tells me to call him Don. The last time I saw him, I said "Mr. Zorn!" And he laughed and said, "How *old* are you now, Bruce? Getting close to *sixty*, right?" I guess it's time to grow *up* and get *less formal*.

Not less respectful or less reverential, but more relatable and relational and personal. The disciples saw Jesus as their *Teacher and Master and Savior*, as well as the *friend of sinners*.



While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" [like gluttons and drunkards – *partiers* – and probably some prostitutes] came and *ate with Him* and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His *disciples*, [students] "Why does your *teacher* eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ... [Short answer: this is who He came to *befriend and renew and transform*] Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire *mercy*, not [the formality of] *sacrifice*.' [And God *desires to offer mercy*, not the sacrifice that *you offer* to receive it] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." – Matthew 9:10-13 NIV



Jesus prefers hanging with those who are aware of their sin, and aren't afraid to get *real* with Him, and actually *enjoy* spending time just being with Him, and listening to Him and getting to know Him. But those unfriendly Pharisees tried to soil His reputation by His well-known associations.

[So He calls 'em on it] "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a *glutton* and a *drunkard*, a *friend of tax collectors and sinners*.' [Well they *got it half right*] But wisdom is proved [totally] right by her actions." – Matthew 11:19 NIV

Notice, they don't claim He's simply a friend "to" sinners. He *is of course*. But that's *benevolent and respectable* and doesn't make their case at all. No – they're saying, "This isn't *benevolence*; He *likes* hanging out with these *types*." And thus they unintentionally spoke a profound truth: **the Lord likes to hang with the likes of us**. So much so, that He also hung *for us*. And ...

We were restored to *friendship* with *God* by the death of His *Son* – Romans 5:10 NLT

It isn't just our Savior who wants to be our friend, it's also our Father.

["The Message" puts it this way] Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah! – Romans 5:10 TMNT

We love to sing about Jesus' friendship toward *us*, but **is there enough reason to sing about your friendship toward Him?** Let *that* soak in. We're now *called* to friendship through *God's* grace and *Jesus's* sacrifice. God wants us to go from a servant level of doing good "because He commands it," to a companion level of motivation that comes from understanding and agreeing with His heart. At His Last Supper with His boys, pre-crucifixion, Jesus told them:

I no longer call you servants, *because* a master doesn't *confide* in his servants. Now you are My *friends*, since I have told you everything the Father told Me. – John 15:14-16 NIV



The goal is for a sense of relational collaboration to supersede a sense of religious duty, so that our motivation for obedience is **less unaware servant, and more intimate friend**. Mercy over formality! Because the moment *His* heart's desire becomes *our* heart's desire, we become *true* friends.



As believers, we often confuse *believing* with *bonding*, becoming proficient in *servicing* while remaining *unskilled* in just *being*. One of Jesus' *best* friends struggled with this problem – once *famously* forgetting she was *more* than a *servant*. That's ol' *sourpuss* in the background. Martha, of Mary and Martha.



Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister **[but they differed]** – John 11:5 NKJ



Martha opened her *home* to Him. **[Whereas her sister opened her ears to Him]** ... [Mary] sat at the Lord's feet *listening* to what He *said*. But Martha was *distracted* by all the preparations that *had* to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you *care* that my sister has left me to do *the work* by *myself*?" ... "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are *worried* and *upset* about *many* things, but only *one* thing is *needed*. Mary has chosen what is *better*," – Luke 10:38-42 NIV



What'd she choose? **To be His friend rather than simply His servant**, to ignore the distractions rather than *Him*, so she could just sit and listen and get to know Him on a deeper level. Friends certainly serve friends. But Martha took on the anxieties and worries of a *hired hand*. **Closeness with Christ is by choice, not accident**. We always *are*, and we'll always *be*, as close to the Lord as we *choose* to be. So, are *you* more the *servant type* who *accommodates* Him, or the friend who ignores the distractions, and really listens, and receives His unfailing attention? One of life's great joys is when children mature, and then mother-or-father and daughter-or-son go above and beyond being parent-and-child. They become *friends*. Well *our* Father not only shares that same desire and feels that same joy, but *created* us to grow in *closeness* so He can *confide* in us.



And if that's what *you* desire, you're gonna need 1) **conversation that goes above and beyond prayer time**. Because it's not much of a friendship if we don't like to chat. And I'm talking about something more than a daily devotional. Because **He's gotta be more than a scheduled appointment**. If your devotions feel like a chore, *something's* amiss. Because **friendship with Jesus isn't a job, it's a bond**. Now there's a common misconception that spending time with God means being alone with God. But let me tell you, **He likes to get out of the house**. In the Garden of Eden, **Adam's contact with God wasn't a scheduled event**; it was an ongoing reality of daily life. Not that we don't need to *disconnect* from the world for some consistent quiet "garden time" with God. But **we can't stop talking when we start working or playing – we need to practice conversing throughout our day**.

Personally, I'd rather *share* an *experience* or *sit* in relaxed *silence*, than try to *make* conversation when it isn't *natural*. I'm not wired for lengthy prayers. I get *antsy*. Want to see what *He* wants?

Pray continually; **[listening more than talking; and]** give thanks **[show appreciation]** in all circumstances, for *this* is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NIV

That's what He's *after*: constant communication and confidence. So we can't leave Him behind when we leave the house – which means we not only need communication that surpasses a prayer-time, but 2) **contemplation that goes above and beyond a reading plan**. Because it's not much of a friendship if *He* can't *speak*. Therefore we not *only* need to practice an *awareness* of His *company*, but **we must practice an alertness to His Word** – which begins with opening His *Word* when we open our *day*. It might be a verse, or a chapter, or one of the Bible's 66 books. **He's not looking for a quota, just a chance to speak**. And there's no one waiting in the wings to stamp a spiritual timecard.



Ever see 50 First Dates? A woman with short-term amnesia must devise *reminders* for the people and things that matter most. So, **how much of your day consists of God amnesia?** That can be a *sobering* self-examination. And what reminders have you devised to bring Him back to mind after He's fallen off your radar?

Because it's not much of a friendship if we forget He's with us. **The goal isn't a feeling, but just a not-forgetting who He is**. And so, along with consistently friendly *conversation* and *contemplation*, we gotta have 3) **consideration that goes above and beyond gratitude for His gifts**. Because it's not much of a friendship if we don't *respect* the *Giver*. Unlike our *human* friends, friendship with Jesus *isn't* an *equal* partnership with a *pal*.

Friendship with *God* is *reserved* for those who *revere* Him. With *them alone* He shares the *secrets* of His promises. - Psalm 25:14 TLB

Because it's not much of a friendship if we don't share secrets. But **our friendship can't come at the expense of our reverence**. The King is my *friend*, but He's *still* the King. So **don't allow your familiarity to displace His authority**.



Ever have a family member as a teacher? Shar's dad was an English teacher and a coach at Burlington High School. Mr. Erickson. He was *strict*. Which is why – even though he *personally* invited me more than once to take his class – I avoided him – for four years – and then married his *daughter!* If I'd have known, I'd have taken his class!

Shar took his class, and she had to walk that line between relating to him as her *dad* while showing respect for him as her *teacher*. That's a delicate balance that requires *consideration*, as well as a discipline that demands 4) a **connection that goes above and beyond praise**.

Because it's not much of a friendship if we're not *fully* devoted. And so, in whatever way our conversation, contemplation, and consideration comes about throughout our day, just keep in mind that **if it's *mindless* it's *meaningless***, and **if it's *mechanical* it's *monotonous*** – which means **we must practice being *mind-ful* and *heart-felt***. Because *insincerity* is insulting to any friend – human or otherwise. But *here's* what separates *human* friendship and the Friend we have in Jesus: even as Judas – the *ultimate* in sin and insincerity – was *betraying* Jesus ...



Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." – Matthew 26:50 ESV

Is it just me, or is *that* taking the friend-of-sinners thing way too far?! Oh, that's *way* too far ... for us to *comprehend*; but *just* far *enough* to help us to understand that **His friendship holds when our friendship won't**. Jesus remains the friend of *Judas* even as *benedict Judas* betrays Him. At the Last Supper, Jesus had just told 'em how to recognize His *true* friends.



"You are My friends if you do what I *command*." – John 15:14 NIV

Now, what kind of friend demands *that*? Depends on the command. **If it's *selfish*, it's a *bad* friend**: "Loan me the money or we're done!" But **if it's *selfless*, it's a *good* friend**. "Get in that car, I'm taking you to the hospital!" So what's Jesus' command? And is it *selfless* or *selfish*?

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. [Well leave it to Mr. Jesus to create the most selfless command ever conceived] Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. [Which He'll do for the whole world because He's the Friend of sinners; on the other hand] You are My friends if you do what I command. [If you love as I love] I no longer call you servants, [even though you're following My command] because a servant does not know his master's business. [They serve out of duty or fear] Instead, I have called you [My] friends, [because My heart is your heart] for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you." – John 15:12-15 NIV

And He's waiting to share it with those who are *aware* of their sin, and aren't afraid to get *real*, and actually *enjoy sharing* their day, and ignoring their distractions, and *listening* to Him, to really get to know Him – beyond singing and serving and reading and praying – as the closest of friends.