



I Am Christ's Friend

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other."

JOHN 15:12-17

Several years ago a young man entered my college ministry like a storm. It was the most incredible song-and-dance routine I had ever seen in my life. If you looked in the dictionary under "extrovert," it would probably say, "see Danny." For about a month, he showed off his sharp wit and fun-loving nature. Then one day he came to my office deeply depressed and asked me, "Why don't I have any friends?"

I looked at him and said, "I think it's because we don't know who you really are. You come across as this funny guy, but deep down you are really hurting, aren't you?" I told him I thought I could be his friend if I got to know him.

What Is a Friend?

A friend is someone who takes you into his confidence. It's a reciprocal relationship. At my conferences, I always ask the question, "In the short time we are together, if I really got to know you, I mean *really* got to know you, would I like you?" Then I always respond, "I think I would, in fact, I'm sure I would." Without exception, this is true of the people I have come to know intimately, even if they have trouble relating socially or are afraid of getting close to others. After hearing the difficulties from their pasts, I find that as a result of knowing them, I come to enjoy them and love them.

A friend is also someone who loves you, who has your best interests at heart, who stands by you in your lowest moments and sacrifices himself to meet your need. Have you ever had someone you thought was a friend desert you when the chips were down? Maybe you have seen friends scatter during times of adversity. But I hope you've also had a friend stick by you through a tough time, demonstrating commitment and love. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." One counselee wept openly when one of our staff members offered to spend several hours helping her through the Steps to Freedom. "No one has ever spent that much time with me before," she said.

Jesus, the Ultimate Friend

In Christ, you have the best friend you could ever have. Many may desert you during times of trouble, but Jesus invites you to

draw near to Him. In John 15:12-17, He says that you are no longer a servant doing only what is commanded, without understanding the purpose. Jesus takes His friends into His confidence. In John 15:15, He says, "Everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." He also said, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth....All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you" (John 16:13,15). Jesus discloses Himself to us...we know Him...He invites us to draw near...He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother, the One who stays with us through all adversity.

Another proof that Jesus is the ultimate friend is that He purposely gave Himself for us. He sacrificed Himself to meet our greatest need. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). I have heard many people express the sentiment, "Oh, I wish Jesus was my friend." That wish has already been granted. He is your friend because He chose to be your friend, He chose you.

Have you ever wished that a certain person in your life would be your friend? Perhaps you thought, *I am going to do whatever I can to make him my friend*, only to be disappointed because he had his own agenda and didn't share your desire for friendship. But consider what you already have. We are talking about the God of the universe—the most significant other that you could possibly have in your life. And He chose you!

How Can I Be a Friend to Christ?

The critical question then is, "How can I reciprocate our relationship? How can I be His friend?" First of all, let's go back to

what makes a friend. The most important thing you can do is disclose yourself to God, be totally honest with Him, walk in the light, and unburden yourself before Him, knowing that He loves you and has your best interests at heart.

Another dimension of friendship is to love a person sacrificially, to meet his or her needs. But you say, "God doesn't have any needs." In essence, that's true. But what does He deeply desire and require? Not only to love Him above all else, but also to love those around you. "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21).

To dwell above with those we love,

To me that will be glory.

But to dwell below, with those we know,

Well that's another story.¹

Yet, Christ has commanded us to love one another.

What It Takes to Love a Brother as a Friend

First, we have to be real. Someone shared with me this lovely little story Margery Williams wrote called *The Velveteen Rabbit*, in which stuffed animals in a playroom talk to each other:

"What is real?" asked the Rabbit one day. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse.

"It's a thing that happens to you when a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once like being wound up?" he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or have to be carefully kept. Generally by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints, and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."²

Second, as we don't live with perfect people, being real will require us to forgive one another. In no way has God shown His friendship to us more than by laying down His life so we can be forgiven. When we lose our hair and become shabby rubbing up against one another, we are learning to live with the consequences of another's sin.

We are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us (see Eph. 4:32). When He forgave us, He agreed to accept upon Himself the consequences of our sin. He will not use our past offenses against us. What a friend we have in Jesus! "He who covers an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Prov. 17:9).

In helping people find their freedom in Christ, I've come to see that unforgiveness is the number one basis for Satan having access to the Church. Satan revels when Christians fight or harbor grudges and separate one another.

Forgiving Yourself

Many Christians have not realized that they must also forgive themselves. Without that, it is very difficult to forgive and love others. When you forgive yourself, you are simply agreeing with God and receiving His forgiveness. When one counselor suggested a woman forgive herself for having an abortion, she suddenly went catatonic. She had already asked God's forgiveness, but forgiving herself was obviously where Satan wanted to keep her in bondage. After she forgave herself, the harassment she had lived with for so long ceased. The day after her appointment, she approached the counselor again and said, "My mind has never been so quiet and peaceful."

Another lady wrote:

I had spent so much time fasting and undergoing deliverance of my hatred of my father, but to no avail. Going through the Steps to Freedom was so much easier, and it worked. I have experienced immediate transformation. I know who I am in Christ. Now that I'm free of unforgiveness of my father, I see my husband with new eyes, and I appreciate him and love him so much more than ever before. The mind torment and voices have stopped. I am sleeping through the night for the first time in my life. The self-hatred is gone.

Christ commanded us to love our Christian brothers, and He also prayed for us to be one in His love so the world would know He was sent from God (see John 17:20-23). Because I am Christ's friend, I choose to love Him back by obeying Him, and by God's grace, He will enable me to bear fruit and to love others.

Why not settle it once and for all. You are Christ's friend because He appointed and chose you personally. You can respond to Him right now with this prayer:



DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER, *what a privilege to call You Father, and how thankful I am that You have chosen me to be Your friend. I renounce the lie that I am not worthy to be Your friend, because You have made me worthy. I renounce the lie that everybody is Your friend except me. And I announce the truth that I, too, am Your friend, because You have chosen me. From this day forward, I want to express my love toward You by being open and honest about myself to You and by loving and being real with the brethren. Thank You for the privilege, thank You for the calling, thank You for choosing me. In Jesus' precious name I pray. AMEN.*

Notes

1. Author and source unknown.
2. Margery Williams (1881-1944), *The Velvetten Rabbit* (New York: Doubleday, © 1922, renewed 1958).