

January 23, 2011

“He Calls Me Friend”

John 14:9, 15:13-15 (NLT)

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? ... There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

Jesus says to Philip, and perhaps to you today, “Have I been with you all this time, and yet you still don’t know me?” And Jesus is not saying this as a rebuke. He’s not saying, “what’s the matter with you, dummy, why don’t you know me by now?” No, Jesus is not surprised or angry, He just desires a closer relationship with us. The last person we get most intimate with is Jesus.

When Jesus was on earth He had thousands of followers. Of that group He had a smaller group of disciples or followers, from that group He selected 12 Apostles, who He spent most of His time with, trained, and sent out to minister for Him and of the Apostles He had an even closer group, of Peter, James, and John. All of His disciples had a wonderful intimacy with Jesus, but there was a much closer intimacy to come. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit, to be in every believer.

You may remember that Peter and the other writers of the New Testament, referred to themselves as, “a slave of Jesus Christ.” While that is what they called themselves, did you notice what Jesus called them? He say, “You are my friends...I no longer call you slaves....” There is a much closer intimacy with Jesus and it is this: “You are my friends....” We call ourselves slaves of Christ, although He calls us friends, because we want to remind ourselves that He is much greater than we are, He is our Lord. We are to do what He commands us to do, but He calls those who do what He commands, “friends” not slaves. While slaves are forced to obey, friends obey because they want to.

Friendships are rare on earth, but wonderful when they happen. A close friendship means you identify with the thoughts, and heart, and spirit of another. Let’s think about friendships for a moment (I’m not sure if we should play the theme song of Golden Girls, “Thank you for being a friend
Traveled down the road and back again
Well, your heart is true, you're a pal and a confidante.”

Or the theme from the sit-com "Friends"

I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU

**So no one told you life was gonna be this way [four claps]
Your job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's D.O.A.
It's like you're always stuck in second gear
When it hasn't been your day, your week, your month, or even your year, but**

CHORUS

**I'll be there for you
(When the rain starts to pour)
I'll be there for you
(Like I've been there before)
I'll be there for you
('Cause you're there for me too)**

**You're still in bed at ten and work began at eight
You've burned your breakfast so far, things are going great
Your mother warned you there'd be days like these
But she didn't tell when the world has brought you down to your knees**

That...

CHORUS

**No one could ever know me, no one could ever see me
Seems you're the only one who knows what it's like to be me
Someone to face the day with, make it through all the rest with
Someone I'll always laugh with
Even at my worst, I'm best with you
Yeah!**

**It's like you're always stuck in second gear
When it hasn't been your day, your week, your month, or even your year, but**

CHORUS

If we could interview two friends we would find out that they were drawn together over a common cause or interest; there was something about each other's personality that they liked; We would find out that they don't always agree, may even get mad at each other at times, but they always work it out; we would learn that they can share everything, their thoughts, their problems, their joys and sadness, their mistakes, with no fear of rejection, and receive honest concern and advice; and that they would do anything for their friend (even lay down their life).

That's the kind of relationship Jesus wants to have with you – a friendship. He has already laid down His life for you – there is no greater love! He has confided in you, telling you everything you need to know for life. When we are friends with Jesus we are

never lonely or alone, we can pour out our heart to Him; we have a friend we can trust and rely on; we know we have a secure love, and are valued.

Now, get this: The whole discipline of life is to enter into that kind of closest relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a joy to Jesus when you take the time and the steps to be more intimate with Him.

1. Admission into Friendship: We find that Jesus initiates the friendship:

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

A friend will lay down their life for you. Two things come to mind, (1) hearing my friend is in need, I drop what I'm doing and go to their aid. Jesus does that for us. He left heaven and came to earth for us and He comes to us now when we need Him. (2) The second thing that comes to mind is actually, physically laying down one's life of a friend.

The one thing that can block this friendship with God is sin. When we sin, we are guilty, and there is nothing we can do on our own about that. Sin is breaking God's law, and like any breaking of the law, it has to be punished. But, what if someone loved you so much, that they would take the penalty for you? The Good News is, that is exactly what Jesus did. He was tortured and crucified to take the penalty we deserved in order to pardon us and forgive our sins. He was willing to do that so we could have a close intimate friendship with Him by removing the sin that was in the way, there is no great love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The highest expression of love we could have for another would be laying down our life for someone else — just as Jesus did for those he loved. We may not have to die for someone, but we can practice sacrificial love in many other ways: listening, helping, encouraging, giving. That is what a friend does, and Jesus calls us "friend." Jesus initiates the friendship by giving His life for us.

2. Condition for Friendship:

You are my friends if you do what I command.

Friends do the things that they know their friend would want them to do. Bearing fruit is always mentioned as the manifestation of an intimate union with Jesus Christ.

John 15:4, 10

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me...When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love..."

What is the fruit of remaining in Jesus?

Galatians 5:22-23a

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Who wouldn't want those things in their life? And Jesus offers to produce them in our lives when we live God's way. Remaining or abiding or living or having a close intimate relationship and friendship with Jesus means:

Believing He is the Son of God
Receiving Him as Savior and Lord
Doing what He says.

When we do what God commands we remain in friendship with Jesus, and the evidence of that close connection with Jesus in us by His Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives.

The condition for this friendship with Jesus and for maintaining the friendship is to do what Jesus wants which He reveals in the Bible and in prayer. And as the friendship grows doing what He commands will become easier, it will not feel like a slave obeying a master, but a friend loving a friend.

3. Indication of Friendship

I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

A slave may see what the master is doing, may know about what the master is doing but doesn't understand or know his purpose, the master doesn't confide in his slaves. Jesus says you know you are His friend when He is revealing His will to you. His will is found in the written word and in intimate times with Him in prayer (caution: He will never say something to you privately in prayer that would contradict the Bible). When the Bible is making sense to you; when God is speaking to you, not audibly, but with thoughts and impressions that seem to go to the deepest part of you; that is an indication that you are a friend of Jesus. When you are hearing from God, and obeying Him you will know Him better and the more you know Him the more you will want to do what He says. Are you hearing from God? He doesn't want a slave who HAS TO obey, He wants an intimate friend who wants to obey. And when a close friendship is being built with Jesus He will confide in you and reveal everything the Father wants you to know.

"Have I been with you all this time... and yet you still don't know who I am?"

Jesus doesn't want you to only know about Him, He wants you to know Him. The friendship begins when you accept His offer to be your Savior and your Lord. The friendship is maintained and grows as you spend time with Him in His Word and prayer and obey what He is saying to you. And you will know your relationship with Him is growing deeper when you are receiving more and more revelation from Him. For even to His apostles that He said, "I have told you everything the Father told Me." He later said ...

John 16: 12-13a

"Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth..."

In other words He told them as much as they could understand and bear at that point. They didn't know everything about God, but the Spirit would reveal more as they were ready for it, and the friendship would grow. Jesus initiated the friendship and will reveal Himself and His will to you more and more, all you have to do, is do what He asks you to do. Dependence on Jesus, communion with Him, and obedience to Him will result in a fruitful friendship and a fruitful life.

Jesus gave His life for you, wants to reveal how you can have an abundant life, He wants to give you things like love, joy, peace, patience...He wants to be a Friend, and all He asks of you is to also be a friend by trusting Him and being loyal to Him.

There is a much closer intimacy Jesus desires with you...one in which He calls you friend, and He will bless your life. The whole discipline of life is to enter into that kind of closest relationship with Jesus Christ.