

Friends of Jesus, part 2 of "Relating to God"
January 27, 2013

We're going to do something a little different this morning. I want to start by asking you a question. **What do you want in a friend?** I've made a list of what I think most people want in a friendship. If you have an answer to that question we'll add it to the list. So, in a word or two, what is something you want in a friend?

Sense of humor

This may have been what first brought you together with the friends you now have, you have a similar sense of humor. Maybe the person makes you laugh, is fun to be with. They understand your jokes. Or maybe they just groan and laugh at you instead of with you.

Honesty

A good friend is honest. Not only do they not steal from you, they return things they borrow.

Trust

I want to be friends with someone who trusts me enough to share who he really is, not just the face he presents to the world.

Loyalty

We want someone who will keep things secret that we share in confidence. We want a friend who is on our side, who does not gossip about us, someone who will stick up for us when others are badmouthing us. If you are in a relationship, you want a friend who isn't going to try to steal your boyfriend or girlfriend.

Caring

Some aspects of caring are being serious when you want to be serious. Some people joke all the time and are never serious. That isn't caring.

Another aspect of caring is not being pushy about time together. I get together with a friend about once a month. Sometimes one of us only has time to chat on the phone. Other times we can meet for coffee. But neither of us is pushy about taking each other's time. We care about the other's workload and don't want to add to each other's stress.

Caring means a person who sticks with you in good times and bad.

Caring doesn't hog the conversation, but is genuinely interested in you. A good friend appreciates me and what I bring to the friendship. We want a friendship that isn't one sided.

Caring notices our mood and responds accordingly, lets us talk about what's bugging us if we need it, and respects our desire not to talk if we don't want to. We want a friend who overlooks our bad mood or when we act like a jerk, a person who is patient with our mistakes.

Caring is supportive of us and our goals.

We want a friend who accepts us for who we are.

In short, a good friend does what it takes to maintain and grow the friendship. A big part of that is time.

I want to say more about time in a moment. First, let me share a verse from the Bible about friendship that you may not be familiar with. This is what Jesus said to His followers near the end of His time on earth.

John 15:15 (NIV) 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.

Jesus gives us a new status, a new kind of relationship with the Lord of all the earth. He has made us friends.

Now let me raise another question to think about. **What does Jesus want in a friend?**

Jesus wants the same things in friendship with us that we want in our friendships with each other. Jesus wants a friend who trusts Him, is caring, loyal, faithful, honest, and consistent.

And Jesus wants time. Jesus wants to spend time with us so our friendship can grow. Any friendship requires time. Time is important to any friendship. **It is in spending time together, whatever the activity, that relationships develop and grow.**

My wife and I are best friends and enjoy spending time together even if it is doing chores. We like doing things together, even if it is yard work, cleaning, travel, shopping. Everything is better when we're together.

I can say the same about spending time with Jesus.

Today I want to suggest two things you could do in your friendship with Jesus. I believe Jesus is hoping for both of these from each of us. Both concern spending time with Jesus.

Jesus doesn't command us to spend time with Him. Jesus doesn't force us to spend time with Him. Nor will Jesus nag you about spending time with Him. But Jesus is hoping you will choose to do so.

There are two aspects that are true of our relationship with Jesus or anyone else. Jesus is hoping for both of these in our relationships with Him.

First, **Jesus is hoping you will choose to share yourself with Him in prayer.**

In prayer, we are expected to praise Him and thank Him. After all, He is the Savior and Lord of the world. He has offered to save us from our sins. He paid a high price to do so. For that He will always deserve our praise and thanks. As our Lord, we should also confess our sins to Jesus. All this is right and necessary and expected of us.

But Jesus is hoping for more from us, something that is not commanded or expected, but is hoped for. Jesus hopes we will share ourselves with Him as a friend. Share your fears, your questions, your motives, your joys, your successes, and your failures with Jesus. Treat Him as a confidant, like a true friend. This we can do in prayer.

I encourage you to pray, to want to pray, to choose to pray, to carve out times to pray. Make spending this time with Jesus a priority, not because you have to, but as a friend of the perfect friend, because you want to.

Jesus is hoping for something else from you. Like any good friend who listens to you tell about you, He hopes you will listen to Him tell about Him. Jesus is looking for friends who desire to know Him better. **Jesus is hoping you will choose to let Him share Himself with you in Bible reading.**

In the Bible we learn everything we know about Jesus. As we prayerfully read the Bible, we learn about Jesus. As we learn about Jesus our appreciation for Him as friend grows.

I encourage you to make Bible reading a regular part of your time with Jesus. Don't do it as a task to get done. Don't set a goal for number of pages or chapters or books read in a sitting, a week, or a year. Relationships don't work that way. **Read the Bible, and pray it, as a conversation with Jesus.**

These two aspects are what heaven will be about. In heaven we will be forever learning about God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. Worship will be pure then, based on friendship with Jesus, in the correct knowledge of ourselves and of Him.

But even now, as you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, you will grow in appreciation for Him. As you grow in appreciation for Him, what He has done for you, you will grow in your love for Him. As you grow in your love for Him you will grow in your trust of Him. And as you grow in your trust of Him, you will grow in your loyalty to Him. Then praise and thanksgiving will come from a different place within you. What a wonderful relationship you will then have with Jesus.

This series is about relating to God. This is what God wants with us, from us, a relationship. Many people... many people believe that God wants religion from us. They think God wants rituals from us. They think God wants people in church on Sundays just because He has designated everyone to be there on Sunday mornings. The truth is far from that.

God doesn't want religion from us. God wants a relationship with us. The incarnation points to that. Jesus coming to earth points to that. Jesus' emphasis on addressing God as Father points to relationship. The Jews had gotten so formal and distant from God that they wouldn't even call God by the name God told them to use. They were focused on religion, on ritual, of formality, as if God did not want a relationship with each of His people. Jesus knew better than that. Jesus points us to relationship.

Under the old covenant God spelled out a lot of ritual. Under the new covenant there is almost no ritual. The only ritual Jesus gave us are baptism and the Lord's Supper. He put great stress on our relationship as friends, and almost none on rituals and worship. He wanted our worship to be more spontaneous and to grow out of love.

Christianity is about relationship, not religion. And until you get that, you will keep trying to relate to God through rituals. You'll keep trying to relate to God through formal and shallow ways instead of informal but more personal ways. You will keep missing what the Christian life was meant to be, what it can be.

Jesus is still Savior and Lord, but calls us friends.

Invitation

God wants a personal relationship with you. Today, choose to grow in your relationship with Jesus. Do the things you don't have to do. Choose to do them anyway.

If you are here and not a follower of Jesus, He wants a relationship with you. That is why He died on the cross. He lived a sinless life. He did not die for any sin of His own. Instead, He died to pay for your sins. He died so that God could lay the guilt of your sin upon Jesus and then lay the perfect relationship of Jesus upon you.

That is what God did in Jesus' death. He made a way for you to be forgiven and to enter into a relationship with Him. Today, right now, say yes to God's offer of relationship through the death and resurrection of Jesus.