

“Friendship With God” | John 15:9-17 | Sunday AM 9/2/18

How should Christians feel about the idea of us being friends with God? For some, that kind of idea might sound a little too casual, a wee bit too comfortable, maybe even sacrilegious. Yet, is friendship with God an unbiblical concept? It certainly is not. While the bridal paradigm of Jesus and the Church likely conveys the deepest level of intimacy between Redeemer and redeemed, there is this other beautiful component between our covenant marriage with God’s Son. What marriage could be said to be healthy and intimate apart from friendship? Note these passages from Scripture:

James 2:23 - “And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” - and he was called a friend of God.”

Isaiah 41:8 - But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend.”

Galatians 3:6-9 - “Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

These passages, along with our text in John 15:9-17, clearly reveal that God offers us friendship with Him. Deep friendship. Holy friendship. Powerful friendship. Christians are invited to become true friends to God. The often-overlooked aspect of spiritual intimacy is this vital concept of our immeasurable privilege to become the friends of God. This message breaks down for us the words of Jesus on how intimacy with the Almighty is revealed in friendship with the King.

I. Intimacy: A Place of Rest (9-10)

“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

Intimacy & Urgency Series – AM and PM message notes
Sunday 9/2/18 – Jeff Lyle

While religion promotes a feverish slaving-away for God, intimacy calls the Christian into abiding oneness. Jesus states here that His desire for us to enter into this oneness is motivated by His love for us. Our response of love and trust is revealed in our obedience to Him. To obey God is not legalism or empty religion. Obeying God is the evidence of our trust in Him. Yet, Jesus is omnisciently aware that humans might also obey God out of fear of punishment if they disobey. In order to dislodge that possibility from our thinking, He gives the example of his own obedience to the Father. Yes, God the son obeyed God the Father in perfect, willing submission while He walked the earth. The reason He did so was because His obedience was inseparable from His love and intimacy with the Father. Do not miss His first statement above: with the very same love that the Father loves the Son, Jesus loves us. There is our motivation for both intimacy and obedience. We can fully trust the One who loves us most. Herein is the Christian's fullest rest.

II. Intimacy: A Place of Joyfulness (11)

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

If you converse with the average church-goer, you will find that he or she will not be able to honestly say that spiritual joy is the normal experience. Intimacy with God will inevitably produce joy in the heart of the believer because intimacy because the Christian's greatest awareness. Challenges, pains and problems do not all disappear, but they become lesser influencers in the believer's outlook who is experiencing intimacy with God. Jesus declares here that He is speaking truth and invitation to His followers because, in part, He desires for them to live with the same joy that He himself lives with. I am moved by the qualifier that Jesus uses to describe the joy that He wants us to experience: full joy. Friendship with Jesus will eventually produce a fullness of joy that replaces the flickering joy that too many Christians settle for. Think on this: if Jesus was walking physically by your side all day, every day, do you not think there would be an elevation of joy in your life? I believe that we are well able to experience that by faith. With the pursuit of intimacy comes the produce of joy. Jesus, in these verses, is priming our hearts to want what He offers. There is an element of “exchange” being presented to His followers. He is inching us closer and closer to this concept of friendship with Him, and He is laying down the pathway with the stones of rest and joy.

III. Intimacy: A Place of Selflessness (12-13, 17)

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends... 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

Not surprisingly, Jesus takes a moment to ensure that we do not lose our awareness that our relationship with Him can never be separated from our relationship with each other. It is common for us to become so caught up in pursuing deeper friendship with God that we mistakenly become aloof in our relationships with one another. Certainly, the vertical beam of the cross of Jesus connects us to God, but that vertical connection, as it rises, always intersects the horizontal beam which connects us with others. Intimacy with God produces a selflessness that motivates us to love others. And this love is no common love. Jesus takes our call to love one another to its greatest extreme: that we would die for the ones we love. We cannot deceive ourselves in believing that we are growing in friendship with God if we are not also growing in selfless love with others. Religion can permit you to go privately deeper with God without it impacting your relationships with others. Jesus, in contrast, never allows for that presumption. He does not suggest that we love others. He commands us to love others selflessly and then empowers our obedience to that command via friendship with Him. Simply put, when we grow in intimate friendship with God, we begin to love what He loves and to the degree He loves. Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for one another. Our families, our work places, our communities and our churches only reflect the vibrant love of God when we so prize the other the other person that we begin to seek their highest good above our own. As you pursue intimacy with God, you will find that He rushes toward you and empowers you in selfless love that brings Him great pleasure and frees you from the chains of serving or protecting yourself.

IV. Intimacy: A Place of Friendship (14-15)

"You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Intimacy & Urgency Series – AM and PM message notes
Sunday 9/2/18 – Jeff Lyle

Now we arrive at one of the most amazing statements that Jesus ever released during His earthly ministry. Here, the Son of God makes a clear distinction between us identifying primarily as His servants versus us identifying as His friends. Notice that He makes an effort to tell His disciples that He considers them to be His friends. Jesus' mind was made up. He did not desire the layer of servanthood to remain between Him and his followers. Of course, they would continue to honor Him as their Master, but the Master wanted them to also know that He is their friend. What was the qualifier that Jesus gave for them to be able to abide in this identity of being His friends? Trust in Him that evidenced itself in obedience. Disobedience is a key evidence of an absence of trust. An absence of trust is a violation of friendship. Ultimately, when we choose disobedience, we are being exposed for a lack of personal intimacy with God. Intimacy breeds deep trust. Deep trust produces joyful obedience. Joyful obedience evidences friendship with God. Jesus also indicates that, on His end, the mark of His friendship to His followers is that He reveals the secrets of the Father to them. This is glorious! Friendship with God contains imbedded within it the ability to hear His whispers. When we begin to hear the voice of God, we know that we are becoming those who experience deeper friendship with Him. Intimacy and obedience are tethered to friendship with God, and friendship with God is evidenced by our growing ability to hear from Him in the various ways which He employs to communicate with us.

V. Intimacy: A Place of Breakthrough (16)

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you.”

As Jesus continues to teach in this passage focusing on oneness with Him, He begins to highlight His design for the lives of each of His followers. He first states that He initiated the relationship with us. That is extremely important because it once again evidences His proactive love towards us. We did not go chasing Him as He was walking ahead of us, dismissing our needs. No, Jesus actually came chasing us down in love while we ignorantly dismissed His offer. He clearly states that He first chose us and that is why we responded in choosing Him. Notice also that His choosing of us contains a breakthrough of purpose for our lives. He wants us to be Kingdom harvesters. He has a specific function and purpose for each one of His friends. The end result of that purpose for your life is that it will bear lasting results - fruit that abides. When our own intimacy with Him reaches the beautiful level of friendship with Him, an

Intimacy & Urgency Series – AM and PM message notes
Sunday 9/2/18 – Jeff Lyle

intertwining has occurred that can only result in lasting fruit for His glory. We are the most satisfied when we are operating at this level with Him. At most as a footnote in this verse, Jesus makes a bold promise that we will receive all that we ask the Father according to the nature of Jesus. When we pray in His name, we are praying from that place of friendship with Him. We know to ask those things that are consistent with His nature, His will and His name. While we have all prayed sincerely for things that did not come to pass, we are told here in the context of friendship with God that our prayers can reach an abiding rhythm of intimacy with Jesus that the Father will always answer. What is the key to this promise of answered prayer from the Father? Deep, abiding intimacy with the Son that is expressed in revelatory friendship which guarantees that we will only ask those things which please Him.

“No Greater Treasure” | Philippians 3:8-14 | Sunday PM 9/2/18

I. Intimacy with God Demands an Exchange (8)

A. Paul was ruined for this world (8a) – “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Prior to Paul’s conversion to Christianity, he was THE rising star in Judaism. His gifting was unparalleled. His zeal was unmatched. Fiercely loyal to the ways of the Pharisees, Paul had made a sport out of wreaking havoc among the early Christians, taking them to prison and standing for their executions. He was formerly the poster-boy for persecution against the followers of Jesus. When the Son of God radically brought him to repentance, Paul took all of that same zeal and commitment and put it into furthering the Gospel of Christ. Because he was viewed as a traitor to Judaism after his conversion, he lost everything. Gone were all the things that once defined his life. Position, status, purpose, friends, family and associates all forsook him when he became a Christian. Paul’s declaration in the verse above is that all of those things he once prized and pursued now amounted to nothing more than obstacles that had gotten in his way. Paul was now driven by the quest for deeper intimacy with his Savior and Lord, Jesus. Nothing else mattered more to Paul than this.

B. Paul was reduced in this world (8b) – “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things...”

Paul made it clear that it was an actual, measurable loss that he experienced. The idea that we can commit to Jesus Christ at no personal expense is not a biblical teaching. Invariably, the Christian must count the cost and be willing to pay it all throughout his or her journey. Nothing can ever be more important to us than our deepening relationship with the One who redeemed us. What is your following of Jesus costing you? Will you continue to pay it if it continues to cost you? Paul had all things stripped from him and the result was a stronger resolve to continue to press in and know Jesus more intimately.

C. Paul was released from this world (8c) – “...and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

Paul knew what his commitment to Jesus had cost him, but he was not mourning the losses. He was fixated on the treasure of Christ Himself. So beautiful had Jesus become to Paul that, in comparison, all that he had released amounted to nothing more than garbage. When we experience the beauty and richness of intimacy with Jesus, all the things which the world offers us begin to lose their value. Intimacy with him produces a detachment from temporal pursuits and fosters a tethering cord to eternal treasure. When we have tasted of the eternal, we lose our appetite for those things which pass away. Most Christians who are growing in friendship and intimacy with Christ are aware of a decreasing desire for things like wealth, beauty, power, position or popularity. Jesus had become all in all to the Apostle Paul. Everything else was diminished in its value.

II. Intimacy with God Requires A Death (9-10)

A. We die to religious substitutes (9-10a) - “and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know Him...”

This is a profound statement from the former Jewish radical. In Philippians 3:4-7, Paul listed several of the things which he once trusted in to make his standing secure before a holy God. He referred to these things as his confidence in his flesh. Everything he trusted in was connected to either his efforts or his family pedigree. Paul once trusted completely in a self-made righteousness fueled by commitments and discipline. When he encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, all of his fleshly confidence was eradicated. In a short time, Paul understood that no one can earn the justification from a holy God. He repented of trusting in his own works and began to surrender to God’s grace by faith. In the end, Paul’s quest turned from justifying himself to submitting himself to Jesus so that he could grow in ever-increasing intimate knowledge of the One whom he loved.

B. We die to all calls to doubt (10b) - "...and the power of His resurrection..."

Paul expressed his desire to know Jesus in the context of His resurrection power. This reference reminds us that intimacy with God should produce the expected result of our operating in His overcoming power. When Jesus came forth from death, He defeated the greatest enemy of human beings. He disarmed Satan's greatest weapon. He immunized us against sin's fatal disease. When we come to understand this, we are emboldened to live with confidence that, because Jesus defeated the greatest enemy, He will also defeat all lesser enemies that seek to come against us. Paul wanted to know this resurrection power from Jesus more deeply. We also do well to recognize that there were 2 days when Jesus DID NOT come forth from the tomb. It looked really bad to those who had trusted in Him because there was a gap between His death and resurrection. Sometimes that gap in our own waiting might allow for doubt to creep in as we are trusting Him for this resurrection power to manifest in our own situations. On Day 2 after the crucifixion, nothing happened...but the gap could not deny His resurrection on Day 3. We experience knowledge of God and intimacy which leads to the power of Christ's resurrection in our own lives **by faith**. Sometimes we have to wait-out the gap between the moment of knowing our need and the provision of power to come.

D. We die to ourselves repeatedly (10c) - "...and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death..."

Paul aspired to know Jesus in the intimacy of His suffering and death. All of us want to know Him in resurrection power. Not everyone is eager to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul wisely teaches us that there can be no resurrection until there is first a crucifixion - a dying. We desire to reach spiritual summits without having to endure the pains of the long climb. Paul was so passionate about knowing his Savior intimately that he could not even think about side-stepping the need to enter into the sufferings of Christ with Him. So many Christians never experience intimacy with God because they refuse to die. They deny their assigned cross of identifying with Jesus. They hate the possibility of pain more than they love the promise of intimacy with Christ. Paul did not see any option other than the call to connect with Jesus in every possible way. This included Paul's need to intimately know

Intimacy & Urgency Series – AM and PM message notes
Sunday 9/2/18 – Jeff Lyle

the sufferings of Jesus. Imagine this: so great was Paul's quest to know Him that he was willing to move even further into losing what was temporary in order to experience that which is eternal. We also must recognize that there is assigned loss to every believer who truly desires to know the Lord deeply. Intimacy requires a death.

III. Intimacy with God Births A Resolve (11-14)

A. Tenacity in your soul (11-12a) – “That by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12a Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own...”

Paul had raised the dead. He had healed the disabled. He had received visions and revelations. He was honored, and he was hunted. Paul was the human architect of most of the New Testament. The further Paul journeyed with the Lord, the more he wanted to know Him. He uses phrases like “by any means possible” and “I press on” so that he can express his inner longings for deeper relationship with Jesus. Paul's example compels us today to continue to move into radical commitment to Jesus as we forsake anything that might get in the way of intimacy with the Almighty.

B. Gratitude in your heart (12b) – “...because Christ Jesus has made me His own.”

Why would Paul undergo everything that he has described in this passage of Scripture? It is quite simple. Paul was fueled by love and gratitude. The chief of sinners never got over the fact that the One whom he persecuted was the same One who came hard after Paul in love, mercy and grace. The ultimate rebel was transformed into the ultimate disciple. He knew that he belonged to Another who had made him His very own. Paul's commitment to Jesus, and his desire to know Jesus, was not motivated by guilt. Paul was motivated by ever-increasing gratitude. Any other motivation for our pressing in to Jesus will eventually prove insufficient. Only loving Him and being grateful to Him will fuel us throughout our faith-journey. Intimacy with Him keeps our gratitude fresh.

C. Singularity in your mind (13) - “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...”

Intimacy & Urgency Series – AM and PM message notes
Sunday 9/2/18 – Jeff Lyle

Let us learn from the Apostle's example in gaining the discipline to be singularly focused. Paul forgot all of his past sins and all his past successes. He was grateful in the present but moved on from it quickly toward what was next. There is a fine line between slowing down to appreciate what God is presently doing and lingering too long there in sentimentalism or premature satisfaction. Paul knew that if he ever allowed himself to stop and soak in everything that defined his Christian experience, he would lose the opportunity to continue to press in and know Jesus more deeply. This is a core motivating factor for all of us to consider: the inexhaustible God can never be fully experienced. The more we press in to know Him, the more He will reveal Himself. Too many of us experience enough of God to satisfy us, but we don't move forward from that satisfaction into deeper experience and knowledge of Him. Not Paul! Paul actually disciplined himself to intentionally forget about some things so that he was able to move on to whatever God wanted to reveal about Himself next. The Christian life is not to be primarily sentimental. God calls us into the adventure of pursuing deeper knowledge and personal experience with Him. We can't do that while looking backwards. His very best for us awaits us in the future. Paul says here that he was "straining forward" toward that reality.

D. Certainty in your spirit (14) - "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

These last words are vital. Paul knew that a prize awaited him. He knew that it would not be fully experienced down here. He speaks of pressing on toward the goal. His calling from God to know Jesus did not fade over time. It did not slow down or dilute itself. How different it is in our generation where we see so many Christians become less zealous, less committed, less radical in their commitments the longer they walk with Jesus. Paul seemed to gain intensity the longer He walked with the Lord. He did not wish to risk losing his reward. He wanted all of Jesus that he could experience while on earth so that he might experience the fullest possible reward when he arrived in glory. Be wise (and careful!) not to view Paul as some super-Christian. His words in Philippians 3 are both the offer and the expectation for every single believer. We press in to know Christ. We surrender all lesser loves and loyalties along the way. We keep our hearts singularly focused on winning the race. We never quit. We gain intensity the longer we go. This is the call for all believers. There is no greater treasure than to know Him.