

serve. "His mercy endures forever." Taking ample time to simply meditate on such truths can bring thunderous praise from our hearts and provide a healthy reality check as we consider our own friendships.

Understanding and Forgiveness

Sadly, distrust can cause a friendship to deteriorate. Anger and resentment can cause a friendship to completely fail. The amazing thing is that God loves us *despite* having the highest understanding of our unfriendliness. He befriends us over and over again, calling us to true repentance of our foolishness which he has already forgiven. God will not stumble over believer's sins and lack of love for him and our neighbor.

Similarly, true friends strive with diligence to understand others. They resist making preemptive judgments. Yet even the most charitable friend will become hurt by those closest to them. That's where forgiveness comes in. Forgiveness is the balm of friendship.

God befriends all who repent and believe on him, becoming their own great "Friend of sinners" (Matt. 9:9-13). If we would make the effort to read the Gospels more often, we would become more and more like Jesus. We become like the one we hang around with. Husbands and wives find this to be true as the years roll by. How exciting to become more like our Number One Friend!

Never be afraid to love this Friend very deeply, for He is an "ever-present help", "A Friend always," One who will never leave nor forsake you.

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PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity
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THE GREATEST OF FRIENDSHIPS:

Developing Friendship with God



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Most of my high school classmates signed their yearbook pictures with the letters "A. F. A." above their signatures. Back then these letters stood for, "A Friend Always." It goes without saying that most of these messages have proven to be empty promises.

Young people often wonder why their list of close friends actually shrinks as the years go by. For all our *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts, real friendship is often missing. Families barely know their next door neighbors. Some married couples face the reality of waning interest and intimacy with each other. The prospect and pain of old age can gnaw away any sense of real meaning for tomorrow.

It has been well said that our acquaintances are many, but our lasting friends are few. With this reality we need to look to God's word for help in the area of true friendship. More importantly, we need to look to God himself as a personal, perfect and permanent friend, as well as pattern for friendship.

God's Personal Friendship

The truest friendship that you and I can ever experience is rooted in the greatest friendship ever known, the friendship between God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35). The great wonder is that God sent the Son of



his love into a hateful world to befriend lost sinners.

In Jesus' earthly ministry we see the greatest overtures of friendship. He walked the land of Israel reaching out with God's love. Yet, he experienced at the hands of "friends" and enemies more suffering than we can ever fully understand. "Consider Him Who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3).

Then came the day at the end of his life for Jesus to suffer even at the hands of God His Father, paying what He did not owe; the debt of our sins. Jesus settled the anger issue between our Maker and us as sinners. The wrath of God is gone for his people. They can say, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag. And You wrap up my iniquity" (Job 14:17). Though we deserted our Maker and Friend, God reconciles sinners, turning them into his friends. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) He is the One who died in the place of our judgment, and remains our great Friend.

God conquers our rebellion and our unfriendliness. "And there is salvation in no one else: for there is no other Name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Heb. 4:12). This Man is God's true Friend. God the Father brings us into His unending friendship by faith in his beloved Son, the one in whom he is well pleased (Mark 1:11).

God's Perfect Friendship

The friendship we have with God our Father is not bound for the dust heap of an empty promise. God alone could write to us, "A Friend Always," and really mean it. He is our Redeemer with the greatest of overflowing friendliness and bounty. It is impossible that we will ever meet a more perfect friend than God in three Persons.

Look up all the Bible verses with the word "friend." In these verses you will begin to see an ideal image of friendship. You will see that, among other things, true friends are committed, confidential, courageous, caring and compassionate. While these are traits toward which you and I are to strive with regard to others, they ultimately describe God's friendship toward us. Everything good that we search for in a friend is found in God alone. As Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God."

God reveals himself in Scripture as the believer's great Friend because he wants us to trust that he is full of goodness to share with every single sinner who repents and puts his faith in his Son. Though powerful discouragements whirl about in this fallen world, the friends of God can confidently expect to see more and more of "the things of God" come true around us (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

God's Permanent Friendship

While death is the end of things on earth, there is more for God's friends on the other side of the grave. Without God's friendship, hell awaits the

day of your death. But today you can prove the reality of his friendship by putting your faith in Him. He comes to us and says, "Repent and believe the good news concerning my risen Son."

Each of us faces an appointment with the grave. Many men die alone. But, cheer yourself with this thought: Believers never die alone. A song goes, "How much more can any man desire, than to know Jesus is with Him at his death." Anyone who has watched a Christian die knows that God is the Friend of all friends. You cannot take anything of this world with you, but you can die boasting of your friendship with the Lord. "In God we have boasted all day long. And we will give thanks to Your name forever" (Psalm 44:8).

Friends of God can look forward to seeing Jesus who died for them. He is our Friend forever and "the One Who lifts my head" (Psalm 3:3). Christ is the friend who "sticks closer than a brother" through this life, is still with us at our death, and welcomes us into heaven (Prov. 18:24). Believers have an eternal friendship with Christ. He is a permanent fixture in our lives and the greatest Friend of all time!

God Pattern for Friendship

How does the friendship God shows toward us help shape the friendship we demonstrate toward others?

Realistic Expectations

Relationships tend to become difficult when we expect too much from people. But Jesus teaches us by example

that our emphasis should be on what we can give, not on what we may receive.

Jesus gave not only his time and talents but he gave his very life. He practiced what he preached. When Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," he was not simply speaking about money. He was speaking about everything! He knew it was more blessed for him to give and to serve as a true friend, than to wait or expect to be served all the time, like we are prone to do.

If God has saved us from our sins we know that he took the initiative in our friendship. Therefore, rather than always waiting for others to come to us, we should pray for and expect God to open doors for us to befriend others.

Time and Effort

Keeping a friendship going requires time and effort. We can become discouraged when our friends seem to be too busy for us with their work and other activities. But have you ever considered the time and effort that God spends on us?

The Bible says that Jesus, "...Always lives to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). God spent over 1,500 years compiling the Bible for us. When we come to him in prayer he always has time for us.

Mercy and Compassion

The most basic understanding of Christ's friendship toward us would help us show pity toward friends who disappoint us. He calls us his children and does not treat us as our sins de-