

Sermon Study Guide

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Sermon: 'I Call You Friends' - Jesus

IN *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. Give an example of a friend who has had your best interests at heart.
2. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being friend; 10 being slave/servant) how do you identify yourself in your relationships? (ex. Work; neighbour; family; God; etc)

UP *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. Considering the culture of the New Testament times, why did Jesus use the terms of 'servants/slaves' and 'friends'? What terms might be more relevant today?
2. 'The image of friendship with God evokes ideas of relationship, intimacy and trust – that is the heart of the Christian faith!' (Pastor Ashwin) Identify how this statement shows the difference between the Christian faith and 'world religions.'
3. Review the four aspects of the friendship that Jesus extends to us. (See the summary) In the OT, only Abraham and Moses were privileged to be named as God's friends. (James 2:23; Exodus 33:11a) How did their lives incorporate these four?
4. What is the privileged relationship we can have with Jesus? How can we live this out?
5. Which aspect of the four, did the Apostle Paul emphasize in Romans 5:7-8? Why that one and not the others?

OUT *Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community*

1. How has your understanding of being a 'friend of Jesus' changed? Which of the four aspects do you need to reflect on and personally integrate?
2. How can our group pray for you as you seek to deepen your friendship with Jesus? In what areas do you need to have more confidence in your friend Jesus?

Resources pertaining to illustrations in the sermon:

James Bryant Smith,

<https://www.ivpress.com/Search?q=The+Good+and+Beautiful+God>

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/27405.Brennan_Manning

John Milton, 'On His Blindness,'

<http://www.bartleby.com/101/318.html>

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

John 3:29

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

John 15:10-17

¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Romans 5:7-8

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Sermon Study Summary

There are not any 'world' religions wherein one can relate with God as a personal friend. Many Hindu gods are portrayed as mighty and carrying weapons and whose temperament is wrathful. Allah, the god in Islam is distant, revealing his will but not himself. Inside the New Age movement 'god' is a spiritual force with no personal attributes. Yet within the Christian faith, Jesus speaks of an exclusive relationship with His followers: that of friends. The heart of the Christian faith is relationship with our God. Jesus came to us in human form to remove the hostility between God and humans and turn enemies into friends (John 15:12-17). Jesus is fully divine (John 1:1-2), a member of the Trinity, all powerful and creator of the universe, and while on earth performed many miracles. Jesus, too, is fully human. He experienced human emotions, grew weary and thirsty – and He came to live among us. The great ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that friendship arises out of equality; a logical thought but not Biblical. The whole purpose of the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh, was to remove the hostility between God and humans, turning enemies into friends! It does not diminish God at all. It elevates us!

In Jesus' farewell discourse, recorded in John 13-17 He gives His disciples an upgrade: they are no longer slaves but friends. While today the word friend is used quite freely – especially on Facebook! – Jesus understands it differently. He uses the same word for 'friend' as John the Baptist used in John 3:29 to speak of the best man at a wedding. In other words, a friend is one whom you are very close to. And Jesus equated the disciples in the same way.

Typically, Rabbis were not friends with their disciples; the relationship was formal. So too, this privilege was seen only twice in the Old Testament. The first was with Abraham (James 2:23) and the second was Moses (Exodus 33:11). Jesus takes this privilege and makes it available to every one of His followers. It is the highest relationship between God and a human being, as well as within human relationships. As a friend, God is not distant and remote, but Someone who journeys through your life with you. God is still our Lord and Master and King, though that is only one dimension of our relationship with God. We are not just slaves. For many, including Christians, Jesus is far off and remote. He is not one who shares our joys and struggles, laughter and tears. The Bible invites us to experience more. Jesus looks at us today and says we are not just His servants, but we are also His friends.

What are some aspects of this friendship?

1. The friendship originates from **Sacrifice**. John 15:13. The ultimate expression of love is your willingness to give your life for somebody. Who are you willing to die for? That person is near and dear to you. Jesus establishes this friendship with us through His act of sacrifice on our behalf. We were once hostile to God; His enemy. Jesus took the initiative to reverse this situation by way of His atoning death. Does God care about you? Does He love you? Are you important to God? To answer that takes a fresh look at the cross of Jesus Christ. The English word friend comes from the same root word as 'freedom.' **True friendship is a freeing relationship, free from sin and bondage at the cost of Jesus' life.**
2. The friendship is built on **Obedience**. John 15:10-11, 14. If you say, 'you will be my friend if you do what I command you' – who would want to be friends with you? Yet Jesus said this. Friendship does not negate the need for obedience; it is our obedience that characterizes our friendship with Jesus. His commands are not burdensome. They offer life, give us joy and keep us from self harm. Jesus cares about you, wanting the best for you and has your best interests at heart.
3. This friendship is nurtured by **Communication**. John 15:15. There is a difference between why a servant does something for you and why a friend does something for you. The former does things out of obligation while the latter has a different motivation. Friends share and confide in each other. They listen. In Psalm 25:14 (NKJV) the term 'secret of the Lord' can be translated 'friendship of the Lord'. A friend is someone you let into the secret places of your heart. In John 15:15 Jesus is not saying we can confide in Him even though we can. Jesus is saying you are the friend in whom He wants to confide! Does Jesus share His secrets with you or confide in you?
4. This friendship inspires **Confidence**. John 15:16. He chose you. It has nothing to do with you and your abilities. It is all about Jesus, and Jesus appointed you as His friend. For what was coming ahead the disciples desperately needed to hear this. No matter what happened to them Jesus wanted them to know they had a faithful friend in high places. So do you. The Lord Almighty and God of all resources has called you his personal friend. He has chosen you and set you apart – and you have not been forgotten. A slave exists to serve and your value is tied to your performance. But being a treasured friend, your worth is not tied to your performance. You are loved and cared for just as you are. You are God's child redeemed by the blood of Jesus. He didn't save you because He needed help. He saved you because you have a place in His heart and He delights in letting you know what He can do for you.