



How Can We Be Friends?

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August 23, 2015

Blurb for the website/podcast:

Jesus gave everything to his friends -- up to and including his own life. How does Jesus' loving sacrifice transform our understanding of friendship and empower us to love other people like he does?

Sermon:

Good morning again, Transformation Road!

My name is Chris, and I'm on the leadership team here at Transformation Road. Today we'll be hearing from Jesus about true love and real friendship.

If you have your Bible, please turn to John 15. We're going to start at verse one but we'll be really focused on verses 12 through 17.

If you don't have a Bible with you, you can use the softcover blue one you see near you. If you don't have a Bible, don't own a Bible, you can keep that one; it's our gift to you!

Before we read the text, let's take a moment to pray...

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us what true love is, for showing us what true friendship looks like. And for not just telling us about it. But demonstrating it in the most visible, most powerful way possible -- through your life, death, and resurrection. I pray that what we're about to read and talk about and pray through brings you glory and brings about real transformation in all our lives and in the lives of those we love and serve. In your precious name, we pray. Amen.

Here we go... John 15 starting with verse one:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ **I am the vine; you are the branches.** Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for **apart from me you can do nothing.** ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² "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. ¹⁴ 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. 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. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

This is God's word.

A [recent survey](#) revealed that people in the U.S. would do some pretty interesting things to help out a good friend.

- According to the survey, 81% of us are willing to donate their kidney to a friend in need, if they are a match.
- 56% would find a way to overcome a fear of heights if a good friend wanted to go skydiving with them.
- 92% would drop whatever they are doing to help a friend with a broken-down car.
- 84% of women are willing to help a friend when it comes to hair removal.
- And a somewhat startling 54% of men said they'd help a friend with "manscaping."

We're going to move on quickly from that last statistic.

I think, as Christians, we talk a lot about grace and sin and redemption, and those are all good important things. We don't talk a lot about friendship, though. It's almost like that's too normal a thing. But in the Bible, love and friendship are actually pretty big themes.

So let's take a moment to consider friendship.

If I asked you to describe friendship, how would you answer?

If you've been deeply hurt or betrayed by someone who was close to you, someone you once called a friend, you might say friendship is scary. Something to be avoided.

If you've had more positive experiences with people, you'd probably describe friendship more in more glowing terms. You'd probably say it's a relationship with someone you like, someone you want to spend time with, right?

You go out to lunch together. Maybe you go for a run with them, or you play video games together. Maybe you even take a vacation together.

And if you're **really** good friends -- I mean, really, really good friends -- maybe you'll even inconvenience yourself in order to help them move to a new home, or help them out if their car breaks down on 213 in Methuen.

Now, let's be clear: None of those are bad things -- and clearly just looking at the world around us, we can see that you don't need to be a Christian to be friends with somebody, right?

There are millions of people who don't know or follow Jesus who hang out together, eat meals, and help one another.

But as good as all that is -- and it is good -- friendships apart from Jesus are very different and fall way short of the kind of relationship that he's describing in the verses we just read.

In verses 1 through 11, Jesus is calling His followers to live in this deep, intimate, organic relationship with him -- just like branches live in a deep, intimate, organic relationship with the vine that they're connected to.

And this relationship, Jesus says, results in fruit -- another word for "evidence" of a life transformed by the love Jesus shares with us, with the friendship Jesus extends to us, and the relationship we enter into with him when we turn away from our sins and turn toward him.

What we're going to do now is really look at verses 12 through 17 and look at **three hallmarks or character traits** of people who are friends with Jesus.

What are the three traits? I'll tell you:

1. Jesus' friends love one another.
2. They obey Jesus because of the love he's shown them.
3. And they're on mission together to tell the world about Jesus and see the gospel transform everything, everywhere.

Okay? Let's unpack that. We'll start with verses 12 and 13:

¹² "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.

The first characteristic of a friend of Jesus is that **he loves other friends of Jesus**.

And not in a superficial way. Not just when it's convenient for you. Essentially Jesus is saying, "I want you to love one another with the same kind of love I showed you."

And if you think about that a second, that's pretty intense.

When Jesus is saying these words to his disciples, he knows his death is just a few hours away. And Jesus knows, if he doesn't die, then these guys, when they eventually die, will spend eternity in hell, apart from God, in endless agony and suffering... and so will I, and so will you, and so will everyone else who's ever lived... because their sin, our sin, separates us from God, and only Jesus' death, in our place, for our sins, can bridge that gap.

You and I, we can't redeem the world. But the good news is, we don't need to. Because of Jesus' loving sacrifice on our behalf.

Now, can we love in the absolutely pure way, divine way, that Jesus does?

No. Because we're not him. But -- but! -- we *can* love others with his character: **We can love each other in a sacrificial, selfless way that counts the needs of others before our own.**

That's more than just helping a good friend move, or even giving up a kidney for them. It's looking at your brother or sister in Christ and seeing them how Jesus sees them. Seeing them in terms of their deepest needs and caring for them in an honest, transparent, soulful way.

Even if you don't like them. You're still called to love them.

I think we have a hard time with that sometimes. And maybe that's part of why we don't talk about friendship in the church too much.

I'll admit, it's hard for me sometimes. It's easy to be friends with someone you like. And it's easy to be friends with someone who's like you. Right?

You like the same things. Maybe you have similar kinds of work so there's a connection there. You make each other laugh. It's easy to be friends with someone you get along with.

But being friends with someone you don't like?

Sacrificing your time, talent or treasure -- let alone your life! -- for someone you don't like?

Who does that?

Well. Jesus did that. While we were still sinners, he loved us -- and he loved us so much, he was willing to lay down his life for us. Not just so we could be brought into God's family but so that we could turn around and show that same deep love to other people.

And if you look around you, right now, what do you see? Who do you see? I don't mean that metaphorically. Take a second and look around!

Some of us need encouragement. Some of us need correction. Some of us need a shoulder to cry on. Some of us might need financial help or advice. *All of us need someone to pray for us.*

True friends of Jesus do these kinds of things for other friends of Jesus.

So I would encourage you to look around and ask, who needs what around here, and how can I lovingly minister to them?

And if you don't know the answer to those questions, I'd encourage you to pray and to connect with someone and live into this life that Jesus has called you into.

Okay. So that's the first trait -- **Jesus' friends love one another.**

The second trait -- **Jesus' friends obey him because of the love he's shown them.**

We see that in verses 14 and 15:

¹⁴ 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.

I remember the first time I read this a while ago, imagining if I said this to someone, like my wife Jamie when we first met. What would her response have been?

Or what if Ben Valyou said this to me one day: “You’re my friend if you do what I command you to...” I’d be like, excuse me? Like, that’s how my kids talked to each other when they were little.

Joseph would tell David to do something, like get him a glass of milk. David would say no. And then Joseph would say, “Well, you’re not my friend.”

And then I would say, “That’s right; you’re not friends, you’re brothers” and then they’d both roll their eyes at me because that’s what kids do.

But if you look at verses 14 and 15 together, you see that Jesus isn’t saying “if you don’t get me a glass of milk, you’re not my friend”.

Jesus is not commanding us to be robots and blindly execute his commands.

Just for a minute -- in your Bible, flip to the book of Esther and take a look at chapter four, verse eleven. This verse describes what it’s often like with human kings, with people who have power and prestige. Their pride puffs them up and the result can be something terrifying, like this description that Esther gives for King Xerxes:

¹¹ “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live.

Can you imagine being the servant of that kind of king? What would that be like? It’d be awful. And you definitely wouldn’t want to be friends with that kind of person, because if he’s having a bad day, he could make you have a really, really bad day.

Jesus is the King of the Universe. If anyone has a right to have an attitude and feel superior to others, and keep people at arm’s length, it’d be him. But Jesus isn’t like that.

Everything that Jesus heard from God the Father, he tells his friends.

Jesus isn’t like that boss at work who just barks out orders all day, who never explains things, who just expects you to do what you’re told and never question him or ask about the bigger picture. In a situation like that, do you as the employee even care what the boss is thinking? Or do you just mail it in? You do the work to get your money and then you go home.

With Jesus, it’s different. Completely different. Yes, he’s the King of Kings. But when you’re friends with Jesus, you’re in on things. You get the big picture.

Jesus shares his motivations. Jesus shares his heart. Jesus doesn't hold back anything we need to know. And as a result, our own motivations change -- we want what he wants, we do what he commands, out of love for him and because of what he's done for us.

You see the difference?

We're not grinding it out, out of fear, or to prove our worth, or to earn our keep.

Our obedience, our behavior, is motivated by love; we're responding in love because he's already shown his love for us.

And that's the second trait: **As friends of Jesus, we're in on the divine plan, and we're motivated to obey Jesus out of love, because of what he's done for us.**

And now let's look at the third trait in verse 16:

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but **I chose you**" -- *underline those three words in your Bibles; they're important; 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.

Usually friends choose each other. You meet somehow, you get to talking, you like each other. Eventually, you become friends. It doesn't work that way with Jesus.

In his own words: "You did not choose me, but **I chose you.**"

That's pretty remarkable. And maybe even uncomfortable. But ultimately freeing.

Because, if you unpack that, what is Jesus saying? It's not our good deeds that catch his eye. It's not like you helped him move, or bought him a bottle of water on a hot day and he's like, "Dude, I owe you one; you're a life saver."

No. It's all on him. Jesus doesn't love us because we give time or money to important causes, or because we help out around the church, or because we try really really hard to be good.

And that's great news for us, because there is nothing we could ever do that's going to put him in our debt.

You could give away all your money to the poor. You could have paintings and portraits of Jesus all over your house. You could fight injustice and care for widows and orphans. You could be Batman, and save Gotham City from the Joker 100 times, and in the end, it would not be enough to win God's approval because that's how big, how grave, how serious, sin is, and how desperate we are apart from God.

If you just compare yourself to other people you could think, “Yeah, I’m pretty good compared to that guy. God has to accept me, right?” But if you do that, you’re looking at the wrong guy.

You have to compare yourself to Jesus to understand how “good” you really are. And when you do that -- and when you do that, what does that checklist even look like?

Let’s see...

- Have I healed any blind people by touching their eyes? No.
- Have I raised anyone from the dead? No.
- Have I 100% adhered to God’s moral law my entire life since birth? Strike three.

When you compare yourself to Jesus, then you understand that Jesus didn’t choose you because you’re so good and so great.

Jesus loves whom he loves simply because he loves them.

That’s it. That’s grace.

Friendship with Jesus can’t be bought, and it can’t be earned. It’s freely given to people who don’t deserve it, because that’s who God is.

And it isn’t given to us just so we could stay here and hang out here on Sundays.

Look at verse 16 again:

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.

Jesus chose a group of men out of a world of darkness. He loved them. He served them. He trained them. And then he sent them back out into the same world he got them from. Only this time, when they went back, they were different. And they had a mission: They were to tell people about Jesus, and show people Jesus, and love people like Jesus.

If you’re a friend of Jesus, that’s the calling you have, too: You’ve been saved, given a mission, and now you’re sent back out into the world on that mission in your everyday life, with the goal -- and desire -- to see the gospel transform everything. Not some things. Every. Thing.

And it’s not like TV show “Naked and Afraid” where you’re dropped off in some remote jungle location, with nothing except a flint or a machete, and then you see if you can survive.

No. We're given new life in Christ. We're given new brothers and sisters to love, help, encourage, train, and correct us. And we're given access to God the Father **through prayer** -- so that anything we ask for, in Jesus' name, he'll give to us if it aligns with God's will.

So those are the three things, the three characteristics, of people who are friends with Jesus.

Jesus' friends love one another. They obey Jesus because of the love he's shown them. And they're on mission together to tell the world about Jesus and see the gospel transform everything, everywhere.

So. How about you? As a friend of Jesus, are you actively loving your brothers and sisters in Christ? Think about that. Pray about that. And if you're not, do something about that.

If you're not a friend of Jesus, are you longing for the deep, intimate kind of relationship we've been talking about? Are you searching for love? Do you think the Truth is out there, but you haven't found it yet? Are you looking for meaning in a world that can often feel totally random and pointless?

If that's where you're at, I'd encourage you to be a friend of Jesus. And if you don't understand how, or what that means, that's okay. Please, come talk with me after the service or talk with anyone you've seen up here today.

And if you're thinking, "Wait a second, Chris -- you just said -- you just said! -- Jesus chooses his own friends. So how can I be friends with him?"

I would say this: "You're right. He does. And if you're feeling something right now, feeling some desire to be friends with Jesus or to learn more about what that means, then I'd say that's him calling you right now. And you need to respond personally, and individually. Like a friend."

Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father -- thank you for teaching us again this morning. For showing us what true love is and what true friendship looks like. Jesus, there are people in our lives, maybe even people listening to me right now, who you've chosen to be your friends and you're waiting for them to respond. I pray that they would do that, today. And receive forgiveness and new life and your friendship. Father, for those of us who are friends with Jesus, I pray that you would help us to be the truest of friends, so you would be glorified in us and the world around us would see you and want to know more about you. Please transform our hearts and our lives -- for your glory, for our joy, and for the good of the people around us. And we pray this, Jesus, in your beautiful name. Amen.

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