A Good Friend of God

9 November 2021



"You are my friends if you do what I command. 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." (John 15:15)

We used to sing the song 'I am a friend of God' and there is some wonderful Scripture that uses this language. Jesus teaches us here that the revelation we have received of the Father qualifies us to be called friends. This is amazing! We can actually be called friends of God.

Like many promises in Scripture, however, we can easily forget that there are conditions. Let us not forget that we are His friends *if* we do what He commands!

> True friendship requires sacrifice, loyalty and a commitment to value what they value.

I'm sure, like me, you have spoken to people about a friend and, as they criticise, gossip and joke about this friend, you start to think, 'Not sure I would want a friend like you!' As the saying goes, 'Who needs enemies with friends like that?!'

True friendship requires sacrifice, loyalty and a commitment to value what they value. This is how true friendship with God is developed. Friendship with God is something we have no right to expect, it is a gift that comes through Jesus. The way we live will either strengthen or weaken this relationship.

I love birds and one of my favourite birds is the Goldfinch. It is, however, a very sensitive bird and if you want to attract them to your garden then a particular environment is needed. They will only eat certain food and are easily scared off by more aggressive birds. With patience and the right setup, they will eventually flock in, but as soon as you neglect them, they will disappear.

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This is an illustration of our relationship with God. We are warned in Scripture that we can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). In another place, we are instructed not to “quench” or “stifle” the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The exciting but also sobering reality in the New Covenant is that God has exchanged elaborate temples made with stones and has chosen rather to take up residence in us. We are His living temples and for this reason, we are instructed to ‘*honour God with your bodies*’ (2 Corinthians 6:20).

The meaning is clear, we can damage our friendship with God.

Four Ways To Build Deeper With God

Positively, there are things we can do to deepen our friendship with God. Here are four ways we can build a deeper friendship with God through His Holy Spirit:

1. Growing in Holiness

We mentioned earlier that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. In the same passage we learn about the kinds of behaviour that grieve His heart: *bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour* (Ephesians 4:31).

To be a friend of God is to imitate the kindness, the compassion, the forgiveness of Christ. Friends of God pursue a ‘*life of love*’ (Ephesians 5:1,2).

We don’t just learn holiness through imitation, however. It is the presence of the Spirit Himself that sanctifies and transforms us into the image of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

2. Pursuing Unity

In the early church, it was the Holy Spirit who created a united community of believers and this is something we emulate in our churches today (2 Corinthians 13:14). When Christians are living in unity it is a source of joy and blessing. If we want what the early church had, we also need to align ourselves with the unifying work of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:1-2).

It is often forgotten that our spiritual gifts are given for a unifying purpose. They are given not so that I would go on to have a fulfilling, individual ministry but so that I might have the privilege of blessing my family for ‘*the common good*’ (1 Corinthians 12:7).

When we yield to the influences of the Spirit, there is a wonderful inter-dependence and harmony in the community of God.

3. Constantly Seeking His Revelation

Friends of God are those who seek Him in order that they may be led by His desires (Romans 8:5). To be ‘*led by the Spirit*’ means that we receive day-to-day guidance from Him (Romans 8:14;

Galatians 5:18). This is so much more than living according to Biblical moral standards. This has to do with our inward desires, the motivations of our heart. God, by His Spirit, wants to have an active participation in our lives, including our decisions, our priorities, finance, family life, service, etc.

As we include God in our choices, we become aware of the pleasure of the Holy Spirit. When the church leaders met at the council of Jerusalem, they could state with confidence that their decision '*seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us'* (Acts 15:28).

We should be constantly growing in our knowledge of who Jesus is and what He has to say. We are on a lifelong journey of discovering the treasures hidden in Christ. (John 16:13, John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:12)

4. Living in His Power

Just as it brings pleasure to us if someone enjoys the gifts we give them, so God delights to see us empowered by His Holy Spirit. As the people of God, our lives should be defined by the power of God and not just empty words (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Spiritual gifts are given to equip Christians and are called 'manifestations' of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11; 1 Corinthians 12:7). The Greek for manifestation is *phanerosis,* which means "discloses, makes publicly evident or clear". So active spiritual gifts are an indication of God's presence in the church.

A close relationship with the Holy Spirit also underpins an effective prayer life. The Spirit gives us the right words to pray and lends His power to our words (Romans 8:26, Ephesians 2:18).

We may be friends of God, but are you a *good* friend to God? May we make this our greatest pursuit in life. As we do so, we will experience more of His power and His presence in our lives and in our churches.

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