



ON LOVE & FRIENDSHIP

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Relationship with God is at the heart of it all...Knowing God as one who desires and offers friendship with us powerfully expands our understanding of God as Creator, Judge, Redeemer and Lover of our souls.

We don't usually think of God as having friends, but several times Abraham is described as being God's friend. Abraham—mostly faithful, generous and obedient but also imperfect and prone to taking short-cuts—is described as one chosen to 'keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice' (Genesis 18:19). Abraham's life was transformed by his relationship with God. He followed God to a new place and a new role; he was chosen and willing to be part of God's purposes. And God was remarkably faithful to Abraham, confiding in him, rescuing him and blessing him.

Jesus calls his disciples friends rather than servants because of shared commitments and purposes (John 15:7-17). The love that Jesus commands his friends to have is the love that he is about to show them. 'No one has greater love than this,' he explains, 'to lay down one's life for one's friends.' The linking of sacrificial love and friendship is key for his disciples, and the result is joy, lasting fruit and a love that endures.

When Jesus is called a friend of tax collectors and sinners, the description is not intended as a compliment (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). But it does acknowledge the shocking welcome he embodied in reaching out to those considered unclean and unworthy. He seems to have enjoyed being there with them. Causing considerable offense to the religious authorities, Jesus gladly shared meals with these friends and brought them love, hope and healing. And the often embraced him with dramatic generosity and powerful spiritual insight.

Friends of God love what and whom God loves. The Scriptures make clear that God's love is abundant and available for each of us, but also that in a particular and protective way God loves those who are most vulnerable: widows, orphaned children, strangers and those pushed to the margins of a community.

Jesus offers us friendship, and that gift shapes a surprisingly subversive missional paradigm. A grateful response to God's gift of friendship involves offering that same gift to others—whether family or strangers, coworkers or children who live on the street. Offering and receiving friendship breaks down the barriers of 'us' and 'them' and opens up possibilities of healing and reconciliation. [Chris Heuertz and Christine Pohl in *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission*]

FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHERS

"We have probably wondered in our many lonesome moments if there is one corner in this competitive, demanding world where it is **safe** to be relaxed, to expose ourselves to someone else, and to give unconditionally. It may be very small and hidden. But if this corner exists, it calls for a **search** through the complexities of our human relationships in order to find it." Henri JM Nouwen

"Some friends don't help, but a true friend is closer than your own family." Proverbs 18:24

"Friends love all the time, and kinsfolk are born for times of trouble." Proverbs 17:17

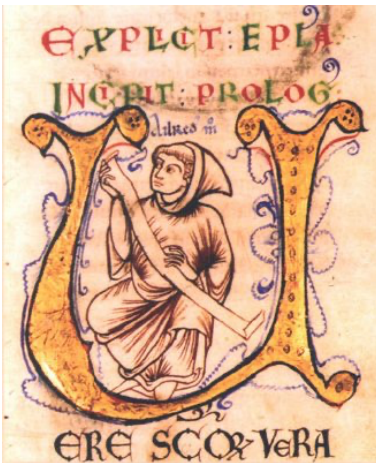
AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1110-1167)

"**When I was still just a lad** in school, and the charm of my companions pleased me very much, I gave my whole soul to affection and devoted myself to love amid the ways and vices with which that age is wont to be threatened, so that nothing seemed to me more sweet, nothing more agreeable, nothing more practical, than to love. And so, torn between conflicting loves and friendships, I was drawn now here, now there, and not knowing the law of true friendship, I was often deceived by its mere semblance." *Spiritual Friendship*

Kinds of friends: "Worldly friendship, which is born of a desire for temporal advantage or possessions, is always full of deceit and intrigue; it contains nothing certain, nothing constant, nothing secure; for to be sure, it changes with fortune and follows the purse. Hence it is written: 'he is a fair-weather friend, and he will not abide in the day of your trouble.' Take away his hope of profit, and immediately he will cease to be your friend ... but a friendship ought in no way to be called true which is begun and preserved for the sake of some temporal advantage." "Let one kind of friendship be called **carnal**, another **worldly**, and another **spiritual**. The carnal springs from hope of mutual harmony in vice; the worldly is enkindled by the hope of gain; and the spiritual is cemented by similarity of life, morals, and pursuits among the just."

"God is friendship. Those who abide in friendship abide in God, and God abides in them."

St. Aelred, from his recasting of I John 4:16



"**For spiritual friendship**, which we call true, should be desired, not for consideration of any worldly advantage or for any extrinsic cause, but from the dignity of its own nature and the feelings of the human heart, so that its fruition and reward is nothing other than itself. ... that is, it is a mutual conformity in matters human and divine united with benevolence and charity."

"There are **four qualities which characterize a friend**: Loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience. **Right intention** seeks for nothing other than God and natural good. **Discretion** brings understanding of what is done on a friend's behalf, and ability to know when to correct faults. **Patience** enables one to be justly rebuked, or to bear adversity on another's behalf. **Loyalty** guards and protects friendship, in good or bitter times."

"How beautiful it is that the second human being was taken from the side of the first, so that nature might teach that human beings are equal and, as it were, collateral, and that there is in human affairs neither a superior or an inferior, a characteristic of true friendship."

Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst ... for what more sublime can be said of friendship ... that it ought to, and is proved to, begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ?"

Selecting friends: "Yet not all whom we love should be received into friendship, for not all are worthy of it. For since your friend is the companion of your soul, to whose spirit you join and attach yours ... since he is the one to whom you entrust yourself as to another self, from whom you hide nothing, you should, in the first place, choose one who is considered fitted for all this."

"A friend ought first to be selected, next tested, and then finally admitted, and from then on treated as a friend deserves." "Therefore, to those friends for whom thus far we have thought probation necessary, we ought not to confide to them all our profound secrets, but at first, external or little things about which one does not care a great deal whether they be concealed or exposed; yet this should be done with very great caution as if these smaller matters should do harm if betrayed, but would be of service if concealed."

"Choose your friends carefully, and let your friendships develop slowly...Knowing a friend—really knowing—takes time, and presence, and patience. It's not possible to speed up the process of coming to know someone; it's the work of a lifetime. Friendship cannot be rushed, even over the internet. We lack reverence for our friend when we think it can." ---Stephanie Paulsell in On Our Way