

## Friendship with God

God's interactivity with His creation is a Biblical given. I choose my words intentionally – *interactivity*, not just activity. Activity might imply that God alone is the sole player; *interactivity* means that He welcomes our input and responds to us.

God in His infinite love and wisdom has chosen to create a certain kind of world – obviously *this* one. He could have created any kind of world He wanted (He is God), but in His choice to create our kind of world He revealed a great deal about the kind of God He is.<sup>1</sup> We quickly discover that relationship is crucial to all that happens in this kind of world.

Rereading John 15:14 prompted me to reflect. The setting for these words is the final moments shared by Jesus and the twelve before His arrest.

**“You are My friends if you do (“keep on doing”) what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” John 15:14-15 NAU**

Jesus' words acknowledge that something has changed for the disciples; they have moved from the category of “slaves” to the category of *friends*. What changed?

Now Jesus didn't mean that they had been *literally* slaves, but that earlier in their relationship with Him they were *like* slaves. Specifically, the slave doesn't know the master's mind; he simply does what he is told. In fact, it is not the slave's place to know, only to obey. In the master/slave relationship, the master has no intention or need to bring the slave into such awareness because that is not the kind of relationship that exists between slaves and masters.

*But all that changes for friends.* Jesus has given the disciples the “intimations” of the Father: He has brought them into the very private counsels of the Father and Son relationship, “*all things I heard from the Father I have made known to you.*” Now they know what it is that the Father is about, what He is doing.

They had fully embraced Jesus' mission, they were “all in;” it is this “all in-ness” that is the way of close friends – and it leads to a way of relating and knowing that can only be true of close friends. It also implies that the kind of relationship Jesus wants with His followers is more than some kind of mindless “stimulus-response” non-reflective obedience. Rather, He calls to partnership.

Gen. 18:16-19 presents an intriguing account of God's relationship with His friend Abraham.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the testing of Sodom and Gomorrah (which would lead to their destruction); God visits Abraham.<sup>3</sup> As God looks toward Sodom, He pauses. The text allows us a revealing glimpse into God's inner life - a private moment of Personal musing and thought is revealed.<sup>4</sup>

Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. <sup>17</sup> The LORD said, “**Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,** <sup>18</sup> since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” (emphasis mine)

This personal reflection leads God to reveal to Abraham the dire situation of Sodom and God's intention to discover the truth – are they as far along in evil as it seems? This sharing of God's counsel with Abraham, His friend, leads to one of the classic moments of interchange and interaction in the whole Bible. Abraham's intercession, his "negotiation" for the city is not only listened to by God, but taken with the utmost seriousness. In the end, Abraham's input shapes the way these events move forward. Seemingly, God is reluctant to act without the input of His friend, His covenant partner.<sup>5</sup> While he certainly could have, *that is not the way of friends*. Friends live *responsively*, one to another.

Friendship with God is a place of privilege; but also of awesome responsibility. Says Jesus, "My friends continue to live *responsively* to Me, they keep on doing what I say." Could true friends still be called true if they were related in some other way, any other way? I think not.

It is with the Spirit's coming that such intimacy of friendship becomes *real for us*. In fact, Jesus seems almost eager that the Spirit come, "I must go! I must get out of the way so that HE can come!" He says, "If I don't, He cannot." What value Jesus puts on the coming of the Spirit and the Spirit's role/place in what the Triune God is accomplishing in the world! (John 16:7)<sup>6</sup>

**"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. <sup>13</sup> But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you." John 16:12-15 NAU**

The Spirit will speak to us the very mind and heart of the Father and the Son. To be inhabited by the living God, the Spirit,<sup>7</sup> is to be invited into, to share in, the intimate counsels of the Godhead!

Such friendship is the place of extra-ordinary privilege. It carries both an invitation to deepening intimacy (sharing in the Father's heart), but also real responsibility – "to continue to do" is to stay "current" on what is on our Friend's mind and heart (15:14). It is how we fully participate in friendship with God.

Such is His heart toward us that our responsiveness to Him would deepen our knowing, growing and loving Him (15:9-10). Obedience is such a wonderful and positive word; it is an invitation to share in the very heartbeat of God! Jesus says, "If you continue to do what I command, then it is true that you are My friends." While *we* might tend to see it and say it negatively, "If you stop doing what I ask, you cease to be my friend"; I believe Jesus meant it to be positive, "**Be responsive to Me in everything so that we can *always* be close friends.**" (John 15:14)<sup>8</sup>

Finally, here is the very essence of our call to *mission*. True intimacy with Him must mean that we share the burden and the mission of our Friend God. Those who are "all in" with Him know His heart, *know what it is that He is doing* – and they embrace it fully as their own.

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<sup>1</sup> The God-world relationship is a revealer of the nature and character of God. How the Bible describes God's way with His creation, especially us, is integral to how we come to know Him.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, Abraham is the only person ever called "God's friend" in Scripture. Of course, God had other friends; but Abraham becomes a model, a "prototype," of what friendship with God means.

<sup>3</sup> I say "testing" because God goes to Sodom to discover if Sodom was in fact as evil as the reports. Of course, the omniscient God already knew the exact situation of Sodom. The idea of "going down to see" (Gen. 18:21) seems to be to *test* the people by presenting the Sodomites with a new alternative or circumstance to see how they would

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respond. How they deal with this new situation would reveal their hearts, how far along they were in their depravity. What would they do with *God's* messengers? Their attempt to rape them, despite a supernatural blindness, confirms that they are beyond hope (Gen. 19).

<sup>4</sup> Whether out loud or to Himself, this is an extraordinary moment.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, for this insight.

<sup>6</sup> If we might devalue the Spirit, Jesus certainly didn't. I ask students, "Would you rather have Jesus or the Spirit at your side, 24-7?" It seems reasonable to want a physical Jesus, but Jesus seems to think the *Spirit living in us* a better option! John 14:16-26.

<sup>7</sup> Read 1 Cor. 6:17-20. We are one Spirit/spirit with the Holy Spirit, co-joined at the heart! We, individually and together, are His dwelling place in the world – the fulfillment of the OT temple imagery. See also 1 Cor. 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> This is a third class conditional statement in Greek: "If you do this, then this will be true."