

# Friendship with God

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[0:00] James 2 is where we're going to go. James 2. And I'm talking about friendship with God. A lot of things in our world are our friends, aren't they?

People we count as friends. There's those friendships. There's something that's precious about friendships. And I know we're amongst friends here tonight. We're friends together. We're friends of God.

And as friends of God, we're friends of one another in many ways too. What do we think about when we speak of someone who's a friend? We speak of someone who's a friend.

We have that sense of closeness, of trust, of that sharing. When someone is our friend, someone we're close to, someone we can trust in, we can share with.

And we see way back in Genesis when God created Adam. And it's interesting, this was, as we know, God created everything good. And then he created Adam. He said it was very good.

[1:17] And then it's actually before sin, he said something was not good. And it's that it was not good that man should dwell alone. So that was before sin.

And it's God's purpose is that we should have companionship. We should have others around us. And, of course, husband and wife is that special friendship. But those things, those friendship bonds are something that's very wonderful.

And it's ordained of God. And God says it's a good thing that we have such a friendship. And so it's interesting that this was such, before the world was corrupted, before sin, that it wasn't good for Adam to be in that lonely state.

But friendship is a good thing. Friendship is a good thing. It's a glad thing. And what's even better than having human friends is that we can actually know as friend our God.

That he would count you and me, us, as his friends. And we can come to know God as a cherished, dearest friend.

[2:21] We see that in James 2, verse 23. James 2, verse 23. Of Abraham, who is called the father of the faithful, really. And the scripture was fulfilled.

It says in James 2, verse 23. His faith, his believing, was counted, was imputed.

It was accounted unto him as righteousness. And it says he was called the friend of God. Wow. Abraham, he was called the friend of God.

Now that's something truly special, isn't it? To think that Abraham could have such a closeness with God. Not only as his Lord, but as his friend.

It's something special to be called a friend, isn't it? When we think of those, we know amongst us that we could call friends of one another. We can call ourselves friends. And there's that closeness, that special bond.

[3:31] Even more so that God himself would deign to call a man, a woman, as his own friend. That's special.

And people here tonight, that can be true for you. It can be true for you. To know this God. To know God, your creator, as your own friend.

To think of that. What a great privilege. There's nothing beats that, really, is there? To think that God can be our friend. To think that God, our awesome and majestic and marvellous creator, would condescend to be acquainted with his own creatures such as we in such a tender way.

That's special. That he can become even our own best friend. And truly, Abraham received many benefits and blessings from God.

Abraham found God's mercy and his grace. And this great friend turned Abraham's difficulties into blessings. And the Lord made even the toughest test of Abraham's life, really his very greatest

blessing, as he learnt to trust the hand of God and spared his son.

[4:49] Think of friends. We're talking about God as being a friend. Friends always have an ear for their friends, don't they? When Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom, the Lord patiently heard Abraham's plea.

And he acted to save Lot. To think that we have God as our friend. And as Abraham prayed, as he besought God, his friend, God acted and saved Lot.

What do we think of when we think of a friend? We think, humanly speaking, of friends. A friend is someone you can count on, isn't it? Someone you can count on, you can be true to, to help you when you're in trouble.

And there's someone you can trust. A friend is trustworthy. Think of God as your friend. How can we build such a relationship with God that we would count him our friend, that he would count us his friend?

How did Abraham become, as James 2, 23 tells us, that he would be called the friend of God? How could Abraham have such a precious relationship?

[6:01] Faith. Abraham believed God. Faith. It's faith.

All other kinds of religion. I was talking with a friend and he was making a point to me too, that relationship with God is really what it, it boils down to that, doesn't it?

Relationship with God. That's the precious truth of salvation, is relationship with God. That by faith we can know God in a personal relationship.

This is astonishing, isn't it? That this mighty God that made us, that made the universe, that made every cell in our body would want to be our personal friend. And he does.

And we receive that friendship by faith, like Abraham did. Now sometimes it's so simple that we miss it.

[7:23] I know Brother Ridings and I were talking with a fellow and it's almost like his intellect got in the way. It's like he had such a big head that, you know, he was happy to follow Darwin and Dawkins, but he wasn't willing to consider that he was actually created by a creator of whom, and to whom he'll have to give account, that he would have to bow his intellect, that he would have to say, actually, it does make more sense to believe that things were created than it came out of nothing.

Because knowledge puffs up and makes you have a big head and it gets in the way sometimes. But yes, it's just simple. A child can believe. A child can believe. And we can believe it, but we've got to be humble enough to believe, to trust, to trust him, to receive his salvation gift, to simply trust him. And Abraham did that. Faith made him God's friend. Another thing about friendship is it's love, isn't it? To have God as your friend, you must love God.

As the Lord says in Mark 12, when he was asked, what is the greatest commandment? In Mark 12, 29, Jesus answered this seeker and he said, the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

[9:05] There is none other commandment greater than these. It's simple, isn't it? Love God. Love God. When we become a friend of God, we will love him.

We will love him with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, with all of our strength. As we become the friends of God, he works in our heart, his own will, and he changes us.

So it's that that friendship can blossom and grow and be stronger. That God can be your true friend. This is my message today, that this friend truly loves you.

And when we get to consider that, we consider the one who loves us. He's the lover of our soul. We learn the nature of God, the character of God, and we get more attuned to his heart.

You know, when you love someone, you become alike to them in some ways. You become in tune with them. You grow in a close accord with them. And as we grow in our love for our Lord, we get closer and closer to that accord with him as our friend.

[10:10] As the old song goes, we'll walk with him and talk with him. That as Enoch was one who walked with God. He had such a close fellowship. You

could imagine him linking arms, as it were, that there was that closeness with God as his heavenly father and as his close friend and companion, that Enoch walked with God.

And he kept on walking, as it were, right on up to heaven with him. The word of God says that, Amos 3.3, Can two walk together except they be agreed?

You know, I was talking with someone about considering marriage, and there's that question that you want to be in accord, that you want to be walking in the same direction.

Can two walk together except they be agreed? And God loves us. He wants us to be in accord with him. We need to come into agreement with God. And as we love him, as we know him more, we'll grow to become more like him.

We'll grow to love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates. When we walk with this one who is our friend, God is our friend, we want to live and love as he did.

[11:19] As Jesus, to be more like him. And as we grow to love Jesus, our Lord, as our friend, we'll identify with him. We'll associate with him.

We won't be ashamed to identify, I belong to him. He is mine and I am his. And those that are also his friends, we won't be ashamed to be identified with them.

We won't be ashamed to belong and be identified as a friend of God, as Abraham. And it's actually our great privilege to be a friend of God. And consider that even though God knows you through and through, yet still he loves you.

That's amazing, isn't it? That he would want you to be his friend, even though he knows you and all of your faults and weaknesses and all the reasons why he should not love you.

Yet he loves you still, doesn't he? While we were his enemies, he loved us. While we were yet sinners, he loved us. We've done nothing to deserve his love.

[12:20] He's simply given it. Unconditional self-giving. And it says in John 15, 16, You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. Think that he has chosen us to be his friends.

That's special, isn't it? That of all the world, that you that have trusted him, that you are especially blessed that he would deign to call you his friend.

You know, when the Lord Jesus comes looking for a friend, as it were, not that he needs one, but the sense when the Lord Jesus looks out on the cosmos and on the human race, that he doesn't go making his friends particularly from necessarily a particular class or culture or those that might be more cool or more popular or more affluent.

He doesn't go and look for his friends necessarily. In particular, he doesn't go looking for the righteous to be his friends. He comes to the sinners. He comes to the weak.

He comes to those unworthy of his friendship. And he makes them his friends. That's the amazing reality, isn't it? That our God's love is so great.

[13:36] In Proverbs 17, 17, it says, A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. This friend, our God, God as our friend, loves us at all times.

He loves us in the good times. He loves us in the bad times. He loves us when we're sinful, yet he still loves us. And that is astonishing love, isn't it?

And it should make us appreciate his love, shouldn't it? How do we nurture that for ourselves, that close relationship with God as our friend? I'll put to you some keys to cultivate that love relationship, that friendship with God.

And here's one here, communication. Communication. Friendships grow by communication, don't they? I know Julie's always telling me, I need to talk more. We need to have that communication so we can get stronger as a married couple.

And friendships grow by communication. What about our friendship with God as our friend? Shouldn't we have more communication? Shouldn't we be talking with him? Abraham knew a constant communion with God.

[14:43] And he was always in touch with him. We see through the word, Abraham and God, they're in conversation. They're in communion. They're in communication. And Moses, likewise, he was another one.

Not just Abraham was called a friend, but Moses is another one that it speaks of that friendship that Moses had with God. We see that in Exodus 33, verse 11.

If you'd like to see that verse, Exodus 33, verse 11, in part it says, And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Wow, that's something, isn't it? Wouldn't you like to speak to God face to face? Wouldn't that be a bit daunting that you can speak to God face to face?

God spoke to Moses and Moses spoke to God. Prayer. Prayer is the key. Friends, as we are God's people, as we are God's friends, that he is our friend, communication is a vital thing.

[15:44] Prayer. Prayer. How often do we neglect to pray? You know, what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and grief to bear. Yet how we neglect to bring everything to God in prayer.

Talk to God. Talk with him. And listen, too. Prayer is a two-way kind of communication channel, if you like, isn't it?

That sometimes when you pray, you just listen. You just still your heart. Be still. And get a sense of what God is saying. How God is prompting.

How God is quickening his word to you. And heed his counsel. If you've got a friend, you want to listen to their counsel. You know, if there's someone that you trust as your friend, you go to them.

How much more should we go to our great friend, amen, and heed his counsel? Another thing, as well as communication, is closeness. Think that he wants to be your friend.

[16:46] Your closest friend. Really, your best friend, isn't he? He's the best friend forever, isn't he? Our Lord God. Our great, almighty Lord. Notice the closeness of this friendship with God.

That the Lord spoke to Moses face to face. You know, you can't get more close than that. And the word says that we are reconciled to God. We who were once his enemies.

That he ordained. We who are yet sinners. Christ died for us while we were his enemies, while we were sinners. And he makes us his friend. It's been said that friends think alike.

There's an agreement there. You know, how can two walk together except they be agreed? Friends think alike. And there's this agreement. And when you, I think, as you grow as a Christian, as you grow in that relationship, that friendship with God, and here with you, that you start to be more conscious of what would God want of me?

What would be a blessing to my Lord, my ultimate friend, my master, really? And we know that privilege of fellowship with God.

[17:58] Now, we think of human relationships, and I've just got a little bit of a tongue-in-cheek story here, but about human friendships really pale into insignificance compared to friendship with God.

And I thank the friend that got me this drink earlier today. Friends look after friends, don't they? But here's a story about two friends that they didn't look after each other, you could say.

There was a story of two friends. They were out camping in the woods, out in the wilds, and they're having their morning coffee. Suddenly there was this rustling in the bushes nearby. And coming towards them at full speed was this large grizzly bear with this very hungry look upon his face.

And one of the friends started pulling on his running shoes, you know, doing up his laces, and his buddy turned to him and said, you don't think you can outrun that grizzly bear, do you? No, the man said, I don't need to.

All I have to do is outrun you. Because he didn't mind his friend getting eaten by the bear. You know, just making the point that sometimes human friendships can only go so far, can't they?

[19:10] But this friend, this friend, our God, our God as our friend is a true friend. Not a so-called friend.

Not some fickle friend. But a friend who will go through times of difficulty and he'll endure. He'll take the hard parts of our life.

He'll help us through. And that's the kind of friend we're talking about here tonight. The Lord Jesus, he truly cares. He cares for us, as we know in John 15, as it tells of the greatest act of a friend.

A friend who will lay down his life for his friends. For us. And the Lord was close to his disciples. We read in John 15, from verse 12, he's speaking of love, that this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants, for the Lord knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends.

[20:21] For all that I have heard of my Father I have made unto you. Now, of course, we're still his servants, but more so he's called us his friends. That's special. That's a blessed privilege. And he says, greater love have no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

That's exactly what your God, as your friend, as the Lord Jesus, as the ultimate friend, has done in his love. And he says, you are my friends if you do what I command you.

Now, there's a kind of saying people say, oh, just, I don't know, I've talked on this line before, but it's a familiar saying, and we often can think alike to it ourselves, when people say, oh, follow your heart.

Obey your heart. Well, actually what we should do, obey what's on his heart. That's what we should do. Obey God's heart. What is on God's heart? And it's not just enough to listen to God, tell us what's on his heart, but we must walk with him.

And it includes his counsel, his corrections. When we have that listening to what our friend would urge us and counsel us and what would be on his heart, then that should guide our decisions.

[21:44] What would God want me to do? And if Jesus, our Lord, is truly our friend, then we should care about what he wants for us to do and do that. The question is, who is it that we are close to?

We're talking about closeness. You know, James talks about being a friend of the world and an enemy of God. Wouldn't it be better to be a friend of God and an enemy of the world, if it must be? That we make up our mind, yes, I want you to be my friend. I want to do what you would want me to do with my life. That we count him such a great friend that it matters what he thinks and what he wants.

And we'll make up our mind to do that. And friendships are something that grow. We can cultivate a closeness with our friends. And likewise with God.

We can cultivate a closeness to our God. We can cultivate that friendship, that relationship. How is it? Let's keep that sensitivity as we think, well, maybe it's time I did a stock take and think, how is my heart?

[22:51] How is my friendship with God? Is he such that I care about him as I would care about my dearest friend and what they would want for me? In James 4 verse 8 it says, draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. How can we grow that closeness to God? Get closer. You know, there's a bit of a saying someone has put where someone was feeling that they weren't as close to God as they used to be.

And the question is, well, who moved? You know, draw near to God, he will draw near to you. Seek those regular times to meet with him, to spend quality time with him, to get to know him.

Now, I know earlier in the week I was talking with a Muslim man and he was very proud of his prayer life, as you could say. He was telling me that, and he was kind of comparing a Muslim prayer life with a Christian's prayer life.

And he was kind of bragging a bit. He was saying, well, I get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and I've got to wash myself all over and then I've got to, you know, face Mecca and I've got to do all of these bowings and these ritual kind of prayers and I've got to do that five times a day, he said.

[24:15] How many times do you pray, he said. It's a confronting question, isn't it? Of course, we know our prayers, as the Bible says, we should pray always without ceasing. And that's essentially what I said to him as much as we can have regular times as Daniel and as other godly men and women and it's good practice to have regular set times to pray.

But our set times and regular times to pray are not as a mechanical kind of, by rote, by parroting, by like repetitive kind of actions and prayers that become very mechanical.

Our prayer is a relationship. Our prayer is our Father. It's our communication channel with God Almighty because we love him and he loves us.

It's a relationship. Our prayer is different from some mechanical prayer as some would attempt. And so we want to regularly meet with him to spend that quality time to get to know him and even such that we can have that close communion as Abraham had, as Moses had, as other men and women through the Bible, as men and women through history.

We see the testimony of men and women, of missionaries, of godly men and women, of martyrs, of old, that they were prayerful people and they were close to God.

[25:43] Time. Spend time with him. Give him of your time. Think of what time you spend on other things and how you spend your time in prayer. How much time?

It's a good question that that man put to me. Made me think. Of course, a Christian's prayer, one who knows Jesus as friend, it's relationship.

That's what makes that prayer so vital and so real. And we can grow in that closeness to God as we take time with him. Not only was Moses called a friend of God and Abraham, here's the third one, Lazarus.

Lazarus also was honoured by our Lord to be called his friend. John 11 verse 11. John 11 verse 11. As we know the context of Lazarus who had passed away while the Lord Jesus had been away. And it says of him, our Lord says, our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep. The Lord Jesus called Lazarus our friend.

[26:49] He had a closeness to Lazarus such that when he came to the graveside, to the tomb, that he wept. Jesus wept. He felt the hurt of the family, of the loss of a friend.

We should have that same heart, should we not? That we would have that, a heart that is moved. Friends, think of it today.

We can learn to know God today in the 21st century like Abraham, like Moses, like Lazarus as a close friend. And I'll put to you that this true friend is faithful always.

Friendship grows through faithfulness, doesn't it? You get a friend who kind of lets you down, disappoints, is not faithful, it hurts the friendship. But this friendship, this friend is ever faithful.

The Lord Jesus is that faithful God. It says of our God, he is a jealous God. A jealous God. You know, trust can be broken. Trust can be broken.

[27:54] And the Lord wants us to be faithful towards him. He wants our faithfulness. Now we can get jealous. I was jealous as a young man from, in some regards of others that were around at the time when I was courting my wife.

And there was a jealousy there. It's a good thing. It's good to be jealous because we want to be defensive. We want to be loyal. We want to be faithful to our spouse. Not that there was any unfaithfulness, but it's just, I'm not meaning to put any thoughts in minds here, but there's that sense where there's a good jealousy that we are absolutely loyal, absolutely loyal, absolutely strongly devoted and faithful such that we want an exclusive trust, that faithfulness is a good thing. And that's exactly what Jesus gives us, isn't it? Our Lord Jesus, he is absolutely faithful. This true friend, our God, he cares enough for us to tell us the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts, but we need that.

You know, the Bible speaks about faithful are the wounds of a friend. That's Proverbs 27, verse 6. You know, Nathan loved David enough to confront him. You know, a true friend will care enough to tell us the truth.

And friends, sometimes what's in this book can hit a nerve, can't it? When we actually read it and God speaks to us, our friend speaks to us, God speaks to our hearts and we get challenged because he cares enough to tell us the truth.

[29:24] And there's need for rebuke and that's a good thing. And a true friend will be honest with us and we need to hear God's honest words to us when we might sense that we've failed, we've fallen, the disappointment that brings to his heart.

And we want to get that right. We want to keep that relationship strong. And it may hurt us for a while when we are rebuked by a friend, but that true friend cares for us and wants us to grow. And so friendships are built that way in that strong, that resilient way. There's actually a benefit when someone cares enough to be honest. And this friendship that we have with our Lord, it can never be taken away.

There was an old story of a patriarch, of an old, one of the leaders of the early church and his name was Chrysostom.

And one of the stories about him was that Chrysostom was arrested by the Roman emperor and he was charged with being a Christian. That was a crime. And if Chrysostom did not reject Christ, renounce him, he would be banished from his kingdom.

[30:36] And Chrysostom responded to the threat here. He said, well, that's not really going to be much of a punishment to be banished from the emperor's kingdom because the whole world is my father's kingdom.

And then replied the emperor, I will take away your life. Chrysostom said, you cannot for my life is hid with Christ in God. And then the emperor, the Roman emperor threatened Chrysostom with the loss of his treasure.

And the saint replied, you cannot for my treasure is in heaven where my heart is. The emperor then made one last effort I will drive you away from here and you shall have no friends left.

Again, Chrysostom replied, you cannot for I have one friend from whom you can never separate me. I defy you for you can do me no harm.

And we have one friend who will never leave us nor forsake us. This friendship, his friendship will be strong and you can have absolute confidence in this friend. This is our great friend, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[31:45] We can draw close to God as our best friend and we can always confide our heart in him and he's always eager to share his heart with us.

To think that we can go to his throne at any time even though he is the mightiest of majesties. We can go to his very throne and open our hearts before him and approach our friend in his very throne room with freedom and confidence.

And it says of him Ephesians 3 verse 12 in whom we have confidence in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Friends, just to come to a wrapping up here we can draw close to God as our best friend.

And when I'm using these terms I'm not meaning to excuse me demean him because we know he's much much more than just a as it were a human friend but as this almighty God who deigns to call us his friend that we can know him as such is a great joy it's a great blessing and privilege it's a great wonderful relationship that is beyond compare that you can draw near to God and he will draw near to you that you can confide in him and that he is always eager to hear from you and in the Lord Jesus you can approach as it were right into the very throne room do you know this true friend is the question tonight it says in Proverbs 18 24 that a man that have friends must show himself friendly and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother this friend will stick with you through thick and thin through good and bad he will be dependable a dependable friend you know some think of God as if God would receive you then reject you and receive you again according to your fickle ways but no this friend says he sticks closer than a brother and it's the same word used in Genesis 2 of a man cleaving to his wife that's how close he sticks with us such that it's like a husband cleaving to his wife that there's a it's like super glue you could say that's how closely God cleaves to us he sticks with us it's like a covenant as marriage is a covenant he is with you for the long haul and he will not give up on you he is faithful he will always stand by you consider this friends tonight as we come to this point where we just make it personal here please make it personal do you know God as your friend do you know Jesus the one who says of whom it says that he is the friend of sinners a friend of publicans and sinners that he can be your friend your faithful friend and if we value his friendship then how can we not be true to him how can we deepen our friendship with God what a friend we have in Jesus what a friend and Christianity it's not about rules it's about answering a relationship with God and when we think just to contemplate just on that simple truth that God is my friend it kind of changes how we pray doesn't it the realisation that he is my friend that I can speak to him as I would speak to my dearest friend and open the secrets of my heart to my closest friend who is God my best friend who is the Lord Jesus and that realisation changes how we pray and we would pray often and we would pray naturally and we would pray in that closeness of a relationship and it changes also if you consider that Jesus our Lord our God is our King it changes how you think about sin because if the ultimate judge is your friend would you want to hide your sin would you want to hurt him by your sin to hurt the one the very one who laid down his life for you that he will be our judge and it makes you want to well if he is my friend

[36:22] I want to be faithful to my friend I want to be God helping me to do my part to not to damage that relationship with him I want my

relationship with God to be close and nothing to get in the way of that and so friends just tonight consider these truths and I pray for yourself I'm not assuming that everybody has that relationship with God that's what matters it's not about religion or rules or theologies of man's inventions but it's about whether you know him whether you know him whether you have that relationship with him and that he can become your friend and how as with Abraham believe and he'll become your friend love him and he'll become your friend trust him and he'll be your ever faithful friend let's pray our Lord God we thank you that we can call you our friend not in a flippant way or an irreverent way but yet Lord in a glad hearted way that you are such a friend a friend as you deign to be a friend of sinners such as we that we can have a friend who sticks closer than a brother an ever faithful friend and Lord we want to cultivate that relationship with you as we trust you that you are the one who laid down your life for us there's no better friend that we can know no greater friend no greater love than what you loved us with and do love us still with that love that is an everlasting love

Lord we thank you for these things we pray that each one might know that wonderful relationship with you and that each one might grow in that day by day that it will get sweeter and sweeter as the days goes by Lord that love between you and us Lord our Lord and us Lord we thank you for that in Jesus precious name Amen