

# Moments *for* You

Volume 68, Number 2

Theme: Friends



## FRIEND OF GOD

*“I [Jesus] have called you friends”*  
(John 15:15).

Jesus came to bring life. He came so that we can experience life the way it was meant to be. Through Him we can have deep fulfilling relationships, contribute to the world in meaningful ways, have joy that isn't dependent on circumstances, and live a life free from guilt and shame and condemnation.

### CONNECTED TO THE VINE

In John 15, Jesus describes what being friends with Him is like. It's described as a close connection, like branches growing from a vine. His description of friendship centers on an invitation: “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” (v. 4). Do we know Jesus like that?

We want intimacy. We want to be known. We want this kind of friendship that Jesus is describing, but it is also terrifying, because every one of us has been hurt before. Friendship with Jesus is different. What He says in this verse is that He isn't going anywhere. The ball is in our court. If we stay, we will experience intimacy. That's not the way a lot of human relationships work. You can do all the right things, you can try your hardest to please someone, and they still might end up walking away.

### ABIDING IN JESUS

But Jesus tells us that if we abide, He will abide. That's a huge promise. What does it mean to abide in Jesus? How do we do it? Jesus isn't like my friend from college. I can't call Him up and watch a movie with Him. But friends always find ways to spend time

together. My friendships all look different depending on the other person. There are different activities that I do with different friends.

Growing your relationship with Jesus means finding those things that work for you. Sometimes in Christian settings you can get the feeling that it's always supposed to look a certain way. I think that idea has done a lot of damage to a lot of people trying to follow Jesus. The beauty of it is that your friendship with Jesus will look different from mine. That's how friendships work. There are a few elements that should always be there. Every friendship involves some form of communication. The Bible is the clearest way God speaks to us. Prayer is our chance to respond. But outside of those two things, your relationship with Jesus will look different than mine.

### FRUIT

What happens when we abide in Jesus? “Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (v. 5). Jesus describes the process here: His identity, our abiding, and finally, what comes of our relationship. Just like a healthy vine grows grapes, a healthy friendship bears fruit.

This model of the Christian life is really different from how we often think about it. We tend to understand our spiritual life in terms of knowledge, performance, and achievement. We learn about God. We do great things for God. We work hard, don't give up, and make great gains. But fruit is completely different—fruit just happens. Of course, there is a bunch of other stuff involved: water and sun and nutrients and stuff like that. But the branches don't worry about it. How

can they? It's the job of the vineyard owner to figure out all those other things. And that is God. He is the vinedresser. He is the one that ensures that fruit happens. All the branches need to do is to stay.

What Jesus is offering in this passage is unheard of in every religion that I know of. Honestly, it is what makes Christianity seem silly and ridiculous to some people. Other religions have followers. They have disciples. They have servants. But no one else talks about being a friend of God. Yet, Jesus invites us to be His friend.

The Gospel says that you are broken, but Christ heals you. You are dead, but Christ gives you life. You can't make yourself alive. If you think you're managing your life just fine, you need to wake up. You need to deal with the brokenness inside. When you accept the forgiveness that Christ secured for you on the cross, you are saved and repaired and set on the path of life by the grace of God through Jesus. He is the vine. He is the source of life. Accept His offer. Stay with Jesus.

—Paul Taylor, adapted

## MOVING FORWARD

The Christian life is all about following Christ on a journey of personal transformation. But we were never meant to make that journey alone. We were meant to be accompanied by other travelers, because it's more fun that way, and because God uses those friendships to shape us—to form us spiritually. This means that your friendships could be as important to your spiritual formation as your daily devotions and your weekly worship.

Spiritual friends help each other find and follow God in all the seasons of life. A biblical example of this is the friendship between David and Jonathan. In 1 Samuel 18:1 we read, “the

soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” Let me set the scene of what had just happened. Perhaps you remember the story. The armies of the Philistines and the armies of Israel are encamped on opposite sides of the valley, and every day Goliath, the giant, the Philistine champion, steps out into the valley to challenge the armies of Israel. He mocks Israel's God and dares anyone to come out and fight him. Day after day, Goliath's challenge is unanswered by the Israelites, until young David volunteers. Armed with a sling and five smooth stones, David steps out into the valley, calls out Goliath, rebukes him in the name of God, and then nails him between the eyes with one stone and brings him crashing to the ground. The armies of Israel are emboldened. They rise up and they drive the Philistines from their land. Immediately afterwards, Israel's King Saul congratulates David, with Saul's son Jonathan watching.

Verse 4 tells us that “Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.” This is a remarkable scene. Jonathan is the prince. He is the heir to the throne of Israel, and yet he honors David by giving his royal garments and his royal weapons.

Jonathan is a great warrior himself. But by the time we read of Goliath, it seems that Jonathan is discouraged, that he's lost confidence in himself, and maybe even confidence in God. But then he sees this shepherd boy come out of nowhere and step out to face the giant, armed with just a slingshot. And when he sees the great victory that God gives to Israel through David, suddenly Jonathan, it seems, begins to remember who he is and who God is. He sees something in

David that resonates with something deep inside of himself, to be passionate for God, to be a warrior of God. And that day, he declares that he will be David's friend forever.

#### **FRIENDS HELP EACH OTHER PROGRESS**

I remember the first time I ever drafted behind another bike. I had been biking for years but always went out by myself. I kind of enjoyed the solitude. But one day, a friend who was a stronger rider was riding with me and he taught me how to draft behind him. You know how that goes. The rider in front literally breaks the resistance of the wind, so it's much easier to make progress. Two riders taking turns pulling each other can ride a lot farther and faster than they ever could ride alone.

Here's Jonathan. He's discouraged. He's out of gas. And all of a sudden, here comes David whizzing by on his way to defeat Goliath, and Jonathan slides in behind him, finds momentum, and his passion and faith in God are restored. We all have days and seasons in our lives when we're discouraged or afraid. Maybe we're disappointed in God. Maybe we're just distracted by the cares of life. And then someone comes alongside of us and they tell us about something God has done in their life. They share some insight from their Bible reading that day. Maybe they just point out the beauty of the day that God has made. And we get pulled along in the wake of their momentum. We need friends like that.

#### **FRIENDS STAY FAITHFUL**

Friends don't give up on each other when the journey gets tough or long or even dangerous. Let's pick up the story of David and Jonathan in chapter 20. They had been riding together for a while now, but things are getting more difficult. Saul has turned against David and seems to be out to get rid

of him. David asks Jonathan to help him, to intercede with his father. It was a difficult and dangerous thing that David was asking Jonathan to do, but Jonathan's answer is, "Whatever you say, I will do for you" (1 Samuel 20:4).

A little while later, Jonathan has a favor to ask of David: "show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house" (1 Samuel 20:14-15). Jonathan understands that David will be king someday and that Saul's household will be destroyed, but he asks David to show mercy to him and his descendants. He uses the words "steadfast love." It's from a powerful word in the original language: the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means enduring, steadfast, loyal love.

Spiritual friends love each other like that. They stick by each other through good times and bad, across the miles and across the years.

#### **FRIENDS HAVE AN ACTIVE VOICE**

Spiritual friends speak faith into each other's lives. Let's drop in one more time on David and Jonathan. Now we're in chapter 23. Saul is definitely out to kill David now. There is no question about it. David has been on the run for a long time, and he's tired of it. He's tired of sleeping in caves. He's tired of looking over his shoulder. And he's a bit frustrated with God. Why has He allowed this to happen? David hasn't done anything to deserve this kind of treatment. Jonathan senses that this is a moment when he needs to go find his friend.

"Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God" (read 1 Samuel 23:15-18). How do you help a person find strength in God? Well, firstly, just by showing up. The same thing happens when you show up in a hospital room or a funeral home or a court-

room or a coffee shop to be with someone in a time of need. You're reminding them that God knows where they are and that He's there too.

But mostly what Jonathan does is speak into David's life. He speaks courage to David: "Do not fear." He speaks hope: "You shall be king." Now this is not just wishful thinking. God has already revealed all of this. Jonathan is simply reminding David of what God has already said. Spiritual friends pay attention to what's going on in a friend's life. They help us hear God's voice when it's difficult. They help us see God's hand at work in confusing circumstances. They help us do God's will when we're tired and afraid.

Do you have a friend like that, someone who speaks faith into your life? Are you that kind of friend?

—Bryan Wilkerson, condensed

## PROVERBS ON FRIENDS

In today's busy world, friendship often takes a back seat to "more important matters." Most of us are too busy with family and careers and hobbies to invest in meaningful friendships. Now, if you're in middle school, friendship is a life or death situation. But once you're an adult, friendships feel like a luxury item because we've learned to power through without them.

Friendship is one of the most fundamental aspects of our humanity. God created Adam with a heart that ached. He woke up in a world that was literally perfect, but he couldn't bear the pain of being alone. He yearned for a friend. Friendship is a significant theme in the Bible. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon is always happy to show us the picture of perfection. So when he gives us wisdom on friendship, he will show us the ideal friend.

### FRIENDS ARE COMPASSIONATE

Look at Proverbs 17:17, "A friend

loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." What a beautiful sentence: a friend loves at all times. If you have a brother or a sister, they inherited a relationship with you. You share the same blood, so when your life falls apart, they'll be there for you. It's part of their job description. But a friend shows up because they love you. And they don't just show up on hard days; they love at all times. They laugh with you and they cry with you.

### FRIENDS ARE LOYAL

Solomon warns us about fair-weather friends. "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.... Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts" (Proverbs 19:4,6). Fair-weather friends are convenient. They're easy to find and they can take away the sting of loneliness, but when you lose your money or position, you lose your friends. Think about the prodigal son. When he went to a foreign land with a fist full of money, he made quick friends. But when his cash ran out, so did his friends. Where were they when he was eating the pig filth? They were mooching off someone else.

Consider the quality of your friendships for a moment. What is fueling your friendships? Is it love or some other reason? If you have a true friend, you have a rare treasure. Guard that friendship with everything you have.

### FRIENDS ARE CAREFUL

One thing that makes a true friend so great is that they know you to the core. They know what makes you tick. They know how to read your face. They know when to lean in and when to give you space. Solomon has strong warnings for people that are not careful with their friends. "Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day"

(Proverbs 25:20). “Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing” (Proverbs 27:14).

The uncaring friend just wants to lighten the mood. They haven’t dealt with their own pain, so they certainly can’t handle your pain. That is why they crank up the happy music when your heart is heavy. If you want to go deep into your relationships, you need to care enough about the other person to sit with him when he’s sad. You need to care enough to back off a little when she needs space. It takes a lot of time and effort to cultivate a true friendship, but it’s worth the effort.

#### **FRIENDS ARE CANDID**

A true friend will say hard things in love. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:5-6). A soft friend will butter you up, but he isn’t a true friend because a true friend will call you out. They even wound you. As Oscar Wilde says, “True friends stab you in the front.” I will never outgrow my need for instruction. If I need to hear hard stuff, I’d like to hear it from someone that loves me and knows me. My friends push me. And it always hurts, but it’s what I need. Do you have friends that will push you out of the mud? Have you given them permission to lovingly rebuke you or are you immune to criticism?

And so this is the picture of an ideal friend. He loves at all times. She is sensitive to your needs. And they speak the truth in love. —Michael Talley

### **THE FRIEND OF SINNERS**

*“The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at Him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Luke 7:34).*

It is often said that you can tell what a person is like by the company he

keeps. There is some truth in it. Birds of a feather flock together, as we often say. But it’s not the whole truth: you have to consider people’s motives for the company they keep. Teachers, for example, spend their lives in the company of children because they regard it a great privilege to have some share in developing their potential. Social workers spend their time with problem families because they hope to be able to help to solve the problems in the families they serve. It doesn’t seem to have occurred to the Pharisees that Jesus might have kept bad company for a good reason. But He did. So should we.

In Mark 2:13-17, we read of the conversion of Levi (more commonly known as Matthew), a tax collector. This story of Matthew is usually taken as a model of conversion, because Jesus called him and he rose up and followed Him. But it seems to be an even better model of mission, of how we can reach people for Jesus. What is most important in the story is not the response that Matthew gave to the call of Jesus but what happened right after—the dinner party. That was the real essence of this story.

#### **MATTHEW INVITED HIS “SINNER”**

##### **FRIENDS TO CHRIST**

Once Matthew had met Jesus, it was the most natural thing in the world that he should want to introduce his friends to Him. New converts ought to be discouraged from dreaming about exotic and distant places to evangelize. The first thing Jesus says to them is, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you” (Mark 5:19).

Our friends and our family, our colleagues at work, and our neighbors where we live—these are the people who have the first priority in our evangelistic witness. Some of them might

be uncomfortable about accepting your invitation to come to church, but they'd accept your invitation to come to your home. That's where they can relax. In the home among friends and neighbors we can talk freely of Jesus. That's the first thing Matthew did. Let's copy him.

### THE PHARISEES' MISTAKE WAS SEPARATING THEMSELVES FROM SINNERS

The word Pharisee means more or less "separatist." The Sadducees compromised with Roman culture, while the Pharisees held themselves apart from it altogether. We can applaud the motive of the Pharisees. They wanted to live a holy and righteous life. They wanted to live a life that was pleasing to God, which is fine. Their mistake was that they interpreted holiness in terms of insulation. They thought the best way to be righteous is to avoid contact with the unrighteous, so they were shocked to see the company Jesus kept.

True holiness is quite different from Pharisaic holiness. True holiness is not a matter of our external contacts. True holiness is a matter of the heart. It's the pure in heart, Jesus said, who see God. The tragedy is that there have been in the Christian church many Christian "Sadducees" who are so determined to live in the real world and not isolate themselves from it that they have adopted its standards. On the other hand Christian "Pharisees" are so determined to live a holy life and not surrender the standards of Jesus that they withdraw from the world altogether. Both get it wrong. Jesus was neither.

### CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS

Just as a doctor spends his time with the sick because he is dedicated to healing, Jesus mixed with tax collectors and sinners. He came into the world to save them. He is the physician

of our souls. Christianity, Jesus taught here, is a rescue religion. The people Jesus came for are those who humble themselves to acknowledge the fact of their sin and guilt and their need of His forgiveness.

This reaching out to people in need, this outreach to sinners that we call mission, tells us what kind of God He is. Christ came into the world to save sinners, and His entry into the world was not superficial. He didn't just touch down upon the earth as the Apollo astronauts touched down on the moon and then withdrew again. Jesus identified with us by assuming a human nature. He exposed Himself to our temptations. He experienced something of our loneliness and of our pain. And on the cross He even bore our sin and died our death. It was total identification. He entered right into the world where we are in order to reach us for God.

What about us? Where do we fit in the picture? Do we care for outsiders like Matthew, who understood the mind of Christ, or do we avoid them like the Pharisees? Let us determine to make friends with unbelievers, to love them, and to seek to introduce them to Christ.

—John R. W. Stott

## THE COST OF FRIENDSHIP

C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was a very thoughtful and perceptive Christian. He wrote some of the most poignant words about friendship: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. Wrap it carefully with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it safe in a casket of your own selfishness. There it will not be broken. It will

become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”

It costs to love. Don't try to have too many friends. You'll bankrupt yourself. But be a friend. Friends cost time. When we ask for time on their calendar, they simply say, "I am available." It costs prayer. It costs energy. It costs disappointment. But it is worth it to us and to them. —Adrian Rogers

## JOB'S FRIENDS

Much can be learned from the example of Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. When we are aware of a friend who is hurting, we can follow the positive example of these men by going to the person, mourning with them, and spending time together. Our physical presence with a hurting friend can be a great comfort in and of itself, even if we have no words to say.

In addition, we can gain wisdom from what Job's friends did wrong. These three men gave a series of speeches to Job, recorded in chapters 4-25. Their speeches include many inaccuracies, primarily involving why God allows people to suffer. God was not pleased: "My anger burns against you [Eliphaz] and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right" (Job 42:7). Be careful quoting verses from Job: the words of Job's friends are not to be trusted.

Unlike Job's friends, we should not assume that troubles are the sure sign of God's judgment (see John 9:1-3). Instead of telling a hurting person to admit his wrong and repent (when we do not know the reason for the suffering), we can join together and encourage a friend to endure faithfully, knowing God sees their pain and has a purpose for it. God used Job's sufferings as a test and as part of His sovereign plan in Job's life.

We can offer great encouragement and hope to those in need. This is a great application of Romans 12:15: "weep with those who weep." When we are willing to enter into the pain of a suffering friend, we follow the example of Jesus, who came to bear our pain and suffer in our place. Our help to those in need is ultimately a way we serve Christ (Matthew 25:40).

—Adapted from GotQuestions.org

## FRIEND OR FOE?

Dick Sheppard served as a chaplain in the British army during World War I. One night he was lying in the dense blackness of no man's land when he heard footsteps approaching. Unable to see who it might be, he was tempted to cry out, "Friend or foe?"

Years later, on another dark night back in his homeland, Dick remembered that experience as he gazed up into the sky and wondered about the God of the universe. Again he felt like calling out, "Friend or foe?"

Often in the blackness of some bewildering trial, unable to discern God's purposes, we are tempted to question His goodness. Some even wonder whether there is a God, and if there is, whether He cares for us.

We who believe the Bible know that the almighty, eternal Creator has revealed Himself as a loving Father, and that He infinitely cares for us. Through His Son, He has shown Himself to be a Friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). When in faith anyone turns to God and accepts the sin-atonement sacrifice of Jesus, that person receives the promise that he will never be forsaken by God (Hebrews 13:5). What a privilege to know that when in our darkest moment we cry out, "Friend or foe?" Jesus answers, "I am your ever-present Friend!"

—Vernon Grounds, Our Daily Bread