



Being a Friend of God

By: Stephanie Verlooy

What does it mean to be a friend of God? In James 2:23, Abraham is called a friend of God. What defines this friendship? Is it because he spoke to God and God spoke directly to him? In the context of the chapter, Abraham is called a friend of God because of his faith. It was an obedient faith, a working faith—he acted on his belief. God told Abraham to move to a land he didn't know, and he did it. God told Abraham that he would have a son in his old age, and he believed Him. God told Abraham to offer up his son, and Abraham was obedient to God in that as well. Abraham trusted God and was faithful and obedient to Him.

Although God does not speak to people today as He did in times past, we have His written word to follow and through our own obedient and working faith, we can be called friends of God too. To have that obedient faith there are things we must do; we must know His word (2 Tim 2:15), we must be diligent to follow all of His commands (John 14:15, 21; 15:14), we must love Him (Matt. 22:37), we must love our brethren (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17) and we must be ready to teach others (2 Tim 4:2).

In all relationships there must be growth and a continuance of getting to know one another. God has and always will know us better than we know ourselves but we can and must always strive to know Him better. In John 8:31-32 Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." To abide in the word as Jesus instructed would mean to continue in it, continue reading, studying, maturing and growing in His word. By doing this we can know God better and better with each passing day.

"Keep my commandments" can be found at least nineteen times throughout the scriptures, either word for word or a slight variation of it. The importance of a parent's desire for their children to follow their rules is immeasurable. How much more important is it to follow the rules that God has given His children? We cannot choose what parts of God's

commands to keep and which to disregard, we must keep them all. Daniel said in Daniel 9:4 that God will keep His covenant and mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Keeping all of God's commandments can be challenging but loving Him should not be. Luke 16:13 tells us that we cannot serve two masters. We must fully love God or else we do not, we can't try to convince ourselves that we love Him a little or most days, we must love Him always and with our whole heart. After all, He loved us so much that He gave His only Son (John 3:16).

In John 13:34, Jesus gave us a new commandment—that we love one another as He loved us. In verse 35, He said we will be known by all if we love one another. Jesus tells us that the greatest love is to lay down one's life for his friends. This is exactly what Jesus did for us. We should keep this in mind as we go through our daily lives—to remember the love He showed for us and also to remind us how to love others.

Finally, we must be willing and able to teach others by example, through our experience or by studying through the scriptures with both those of the faith as well as those who are lost. If we pick and choose which of God's commands we want to follow or try to keep one foot in the world and one with Him, we will not be called His friend but His enemy (Jas. 4:4). Love the Lord your God with all your heart, follow His commands, study His word, love the brethren and teach others; you too can be called a friend of God.



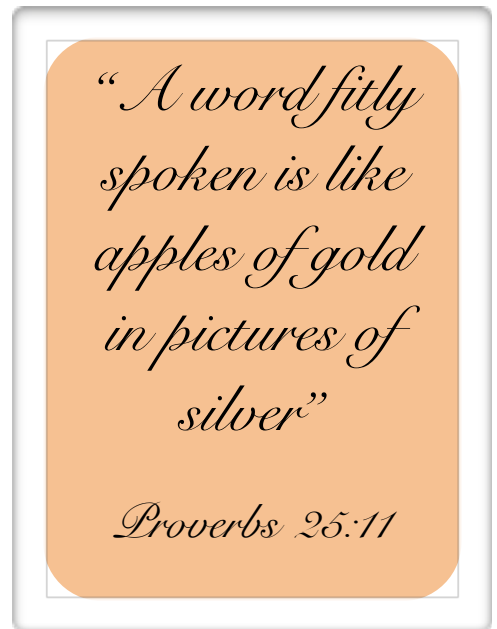
Stephanie is the wife of Life Verlooy SWSBS class of 2017. They have 3 children and will be moving back to Wisconsin to work with the Rice Lake church of Christ. Their primary focus will be on evangelizing in the community and encouraging unity among the existing congregations.

The Words of a Friend By: Karen Speir

We are truly blessed in this life with a myriad of wonderful relationships. First and foremost, of course, is our relationship with God from whom all blessings flow. He, in turn, has given us the husband-wife, parent-child, grandparent-grandchild, and sibling relationships to further enrich our lives. Our focus for this article, however, is another beautiful relationship with which God has seen fit to bless us, and it is that of friendship.

In the book, *Friendship: Handle With Care*, Sister Jane McWhorter highlights the fact that our friends have the ability to “heighten our joys”¹ in times of happiness and “bear our burdens”² in times of grief and sorrow. Friends can help us grow spiritually, offering us much needed encouragement to draw nearer to our Lord (Jas. 4:8), as well as “act as a mirror to our souls” (Jas. 1:23; Prov. 27:17) thereby enabling us to realize our mistakes and make much needed corrections. In each and every one of our relationships communication is the key to forming, maintaining, and strengthening those bonds.

The book of Proverbs is replete with scriptures impressing upon us the importance of the words we speak. Not only, are the great benefits our words can have in the lives of our friends enumerated, but also, the great harm that can be caused by not tasting our words before speaking them, however true they may be.



- “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:24).
- “An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered” (Prov. 11:9).
- “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Prov. 25:11).
- “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov. 29:20).
- “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).
- “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding” (Prov. 17:28).

To “heighten the joy” of our friends and be that “sweet”-ness to the soul, requires a selfless attitude that is able to “rejoice with them that rejoice” and it also requires a tenderness of heart that is able to “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). When we “bear the burdens” of our friends, our words can provide a balm, an ointment that soothes the soul and binds up the wounds life inflicts.

True friends, not only rejoice together in good times and weep together in sad times, but also correct one another in times of sin. The scriptures teach us that “Open rebuke is better than secret love” (Prov. 27:5) and “Faithful are the wounds of a friend...” (Prov. 27:6). Our friends best interest, their soul’s salvation, should always be our primary focus and at times, that will include the difficult task of correction.

Sister McWhorter points out that simply “following the principles of Christianity will enable us to develop the qualities we need to be good friends to others.”³ However, we will still, at times feel slighted by our friends and in turn, our friends will feel slighted by us. These are the instances where one must learn to “throw little things over your shoulder, rather than carry them as a load on your chest.”⁴ Communication, during times of dissension, is intended for growth through problem solving” not for “biting and devouring one another” (Gal. 5:15).

As sister Lottie Beth Hobbs stated in her book *Choosing Life’s Best: The Practical Plan of Proverbs*, “True Friendship is one of life’s most treasured blessings” and involves “the most difficult and delicate art of dealing with others.”⁵ However, the rewards are so priceless that all should strive to develop the skill necessary to be a true friend and to have true friends (Prov. 18:24).

¹ Jane McWhorter, *Friendship: Handle With Care*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1999), 14

² *Ibid.*, 13

³ *Ibid.*, 168

⁴ Unknown

⁵ Lottie Beth Hobbs, *Choosing Life’s Best: The Practical Plan of Proverbs*, (Fort Worth, TX, Harvard Publishing, 1988), 125

The Blessing of Christian Friendship By: Carol Tisdale

Our Lord Jesus lived the example of friendship as he surrounded Himself with casual as well as close, dear friends. He shared meals with them, celebrated with them and mourned with them. Jesus gave us a powerful demonstration in John 13. The hour had come for Jesus to leave this world and go to the Father and by all sensitivities the apostles should have been nurturing and comforting Him, yet it was Jesus who served THEM in selfless fashion when He knelt and washed the filthy feet of each of his beloved friends.

God commands friendship doesn't He? In *John 15:12* He tells us: "This is My commandment, that you love one another..." and in *Romans 12:10*, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." We see that it's impossible to separate the words friendship and love and we must make the connection between being commanded to love the brethren and establishing friendships with the brethren. How can we do one and not accomplish the other? Meditate on *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*.

Proverbs 18:24 wisely says "A man who has friends must himself be friendly..." Ladies, are we fully aware of how much we NEED each other's friendship? When we fail to make ourselves friendly, we rob SW sisters of our friendship – we deprive them of this precious relationship found in Christ.

Practically speaking, what simple things can we each do to make ourselves friendly? We can smile and make eye contact! Speak kind, uplifting words and swallow negative, potentially discouraging words before they come out of our mouth. We can hug, shed a tear, reach out and touch a shoulder. Pray with a sister. Listen, cry, hold a hand. We can bake bread or make a pot of soup. Ease a burden of our oldest or youngest sisters. Write a simple note or send a short text. We can periodically change where we sit in class or worship so we can grow closer to many more in the

congregation. We can encourage our sisters by our faithful presence at worship. Sit next to one who seems lonely and out of place. Laugh and be lighthearted or be comfortably quiet with a sister. Fellowship when occasions are presented. Very importantly, we must nurture a loving, trusting relationship with a sister so when she needs correction, our words will come closer to sinking into her heart without resentment. We can physically work alongside a SW sister. Some of the greatest places to strengthen bonds are in the kitchen when we wash and dry dishes together, in the bathrooms when we clean together, in the auditorium when we vacuum together, in the classroom when we teach together. We grow closer when we visit the sick and homebound together and when we serve on a Ladies' Day committee together. The list goes on and on.

Oh, but isn't it ever so much easier to get caught up in our circle of closest friends and not see the sister who is sitting alone or standing alone with nobody paying attention to her? When services are over or when we walk into Ladies' Bible Class, a visitation meal, a baby shower or a craft night. Let us not fail to smile and engage with the one who is relatively new or who we have just never gotten to know very well. Instead of initially gravitating to our best buds, let's use these opportunities to build relationships by having one-on-one intimate conversations with our lesser acquaintances. Let's often ask ourselves the question: "What if every woman at SW imitated ME when it comes to exhibiting friendliness? How closely knit would our congregation of the Lord's church be?"

Sisters, I cannot measure the depth of the blessing my SW friends afford me! You keep me humble, you build me up, you fill my heart with your love. I don't want to imagine life without all of you. I know this is what God desires for me and it's what He desires for you too.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..."

Romans 12:10

Words to Grow By

Friendship is Ageless By: Catherine Akin

It's no secret that God is a genius. I can't help but think of His amazing foresight when I think of all the friends I have had, or all the incredible friendships others have had over the years. Some of the greatest things have come about in Scripture because of the friendships God's people formed. And they weren't limited to being from the same generation.

The most common friendship is the "staple" friendship we can have with the people our age (1 Sam. 18:1-3). However, there are many other forms it takes, like the bond of a mother and a daughter in law (Ruth 1:15-18; 2:22-23; 3:13-17). You can also find friends in your mentors and parental figures (1 Tim. 1:1-2; Esther 2:5-11, 4:12-17), as well as companions in the people you work with or make hard choices with (Ex. 1:15-21). Friendship isn't a term that can be strictly defined by just a few things. Instead, age and life experiences can offer *limitless* opportunities for finding a fiercely loyal and God-loving friend.

While all of this is true, I would be amiss if I didn't say that even God offers Himself as a friend to those who love Him (Ps. 25:14; John 15:14-15). How's that for a generational gap? All of this proves that despite a difference in age or background, your friendships can be world-changing. It's my hope that you will consider these when finding an older/younger confidant whose values align with your own (Phil. 3:14-15)!

Getting to Know

Getting to Know - Patricia Sanchez By: Courtney Westbrook

For this issue our featured member is Patricia, "Ms. Pat", Sanchez, who has recently become a member of the church and placed her membership here at the Southwest church of Christ. Ms. Pat was born in Waco, TX but says that her family moved often. She was raised by her mom and dad and grew up with 3 older sisters and 2 older brothers.

Ms. Pat is married to Rico, who also recently obeyed the gospel, and she recalls that they met by accident when her sister and her boyfriend were coming to town and Rico accidentally came with her dad. She didn't give me many details, but I'm interested to know more! They have 3 children who she says she loves "soo much!"

Many people know Ms. Pat as the Chick-Fil-A lady and this is because she works there in the dining room and does an exceptional job of ensuring that all guests are taken care of in whatever capacity. She has been working at the store in Southpark Meadows and is loved by many employees and customers.

Friendliness is a quality that Ms. Pat exudes in every relationship she has whether at work, church or with her family. She is able to cheer up anyone just by a smile and heartfelt greeting. When asked her advice to others who find it challenging to be genuinely friendly she states that "It's nice when people treat you with respect and [share] a smile", She also shared that ladies need to remember that friendliness can make a difference.

Ms. Pat shared that she is happy to have special, beautiful, and loving Christian relationships in her life and has stated that she would like to be more involved with women's events and functions to really get to know her sisters better. She says that she does not have ANY hobbies which is hard to believe... ladies, we need to get her to craft night and start her on a project!

Upcoming Events

Southwest Ladies Day - October 14, 2017 with Evelyn Bonner

About *The Upright Woman*

The Upright Woman publication is intended to educate, promote, and encourage the women of the church to strive for righteousness in every aspect of life. It is the mission of this publication to provide women an opportunity to study the word and share articles about various issues and topics to encourage us to be upright women in an upside down world.

"For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face." Psalm 11:7

We pray that with every issue and in every article all glory is given to God.