

# Personal Friendship With Christ

by J.R. Miller

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*A personal relationship with Christ is essential for salvation, and it is possible for all Christians to attain a conscious intimacy with him through faith and trust.*

**Scripture:** Song of Solomon 5:16, Matthew 11:28, John 15:15

**Topics:** "Friendship with God", "Personal Relationship with Christ"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of developing a personal friendship with Christ, arguing that true Christianity is not merely about doctrinal beliefs or moral conduct, but about forming an intimate relationship with Jesus as a living Savior. He illustrates that this friendship is essential for salvation and spiritual growth, as it allows believers to experience the fullness of God's love and grace. Miller encourages Christians to trust in Christ, which leads to a deeper love and understanding of Him, ultimately resulting in a transformative relationship that enriches their lives. He highlights that Christ desires this friendship and that it is through loving Him and keeping His words that believers can truly know Him. The sermon concludes by affirming that the friendship of Christ is the greatest blessing, offering profound joy and strength in the believer's life.

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## Transcript

"Yes, He is altogether lovely! This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend!" Song of Songs 5:16

On several sides, we are in danger of superficial and shallow conceptions of a true pious life. One of these is, that it consists in correct doctrinal beliefs, that holding firmly and intelligently to the truths of the gospel about Christ makes one a Christian. Another is the liturgical, that the faithful observance of the forms of worship is the essential element in a Christian life. Still another is, that conduct is all, that Christianity is but a system of morality. Then, even among those who fully accept the doctrine of Christ's atonement for sin, there is oftentimes an inadequate conception of the life of faith, a dependence for salvation upon one great past act of Christ--his death--without forming with him a personal relation as a present, living Savior.

In the New Testament the Christian's relation to Christ is represented as a personal acquaintance with him, which ripens into a close and tender friendship. This was our Lord's own ideal of discipleship. He invited men to come to him, to break other ties, and attach themselves personally to him; to leave all and go with him. He claimed the full allegiance of men's hearts and lives--he must be first in their affections, and first in their obedience and service. He offered himself to men, not merely as a helper from without, not merely as one who would save them by taking their sins and dying for them--but as one who desired to

form with them a close, intimate, and indissoluble friendship. It was not a tie of duty merely, or of obligation, or of doctrine, or of cause, by which he sought to bind his followers to himself--but a tie of personal friendship.

That which makes one a Christian is not therefore the acceptance of Christ's teachings, the uniting with his church, the adoption of his morals, the espousing of his cause--but the receiving of him as a personal Savior, the entering into a covenant of eternal friendship with him. We are not saved by a creed, which gathers up in a few golden sentences the essence of the truth about Christ's person and work; we must have the Christ himself whom the creed holds forth in his radiant beauty and grace.

We are in the habit of saying that Christ saved us--by dying for us on the cross. In an important sense, this is true. We never could have been saved if he had not died for us. But we are actually saved by our relation to a living, loving, personal Savior, into whose hands we commit all the interests of our lives, and who becomes our friend, our helper, our keeper, our care-taker, our all in all. Christian faith is not merely laying our sins on the Lamb of God, and trusting to his one great sacrifice: it is the laying of ourselves on the living, loving heart of one whose friendship becomes thenceforward the sweetest joy of our lives.

The importance of this personal knowledge of Christ, is seen when we think of him as the revealer of the Father. The disciples first learned to know Christ in his disguise, with his divine glory veiled. He led them on, talking to them, walking with them, winning their confidence and their love, and at length they learned that the Being who had grown so inexpressibly dear to them--was the manifestation of God himself, and that by their relation to him as his friends--their poor, sinful humanity was lifted up into union with the Father. They became children of God through their personal attachment to the only-begotten Son of God. Clinging to him, and cleaving to him in deathless friendship, in his humiliation--he exalted them in his exaltation to be joint-heirs with him in his divine inheritance.

It was as if a royal prince should leave his father's palace for a time, and in disguise dwell among the plain people as one of themselves, winning their love, and binding them to him in strong personal friendship; and then, disclosing his royalty, should lead them to his palace, and keep them about him ever after as his friends and brothers, sharing his rank and honors with them.

The friends Christ won in his lowly condescension--he did not cast off when he went back to his glory--he lifted them up with him to share his heavenly blessedness. It is in the same way that Christ now saves men. He wins their love and trust by the manifestation of his love for them--and then exalts them to the possession of the privileges which belong to himself as the Son of God.

Anyone whose life is knit to Christ in love and faith, is lifted up into the family of God. Someone has represented this truth in this way: A vine has been torn from the tree on which it grew and clung, and lies on the ground--it never can lift itself up again to its place. Then the tree bends down low until it touches the earth. The vine unclasps its tendrils which have twined about frail and unworthy weeds, and, feebly reaching upward, fixes them upon the tree's strong, living branches. The tree, again lifting itself up, carries the vine with it to its natural and original place of beauty and fruitfulness, where it shares the tree's glory.

This is a parable of soul-history. We were torn from our place, and lay perishing in our sins, clinging to the earth's treacherous trusts. We could never lift ourselves up to God. Then God himself stooped down in the incarnation, bending low to touch these souls of ours; and when our hearts let go earth's sins and its frail, false trusts, and lay hold ever so feebly, by the tendrils of faith and love, upon Christ--we are lifted up, and become children and heirs of God.

But how may we form a personal acquaintance with Christ? It was easy enough for John and Mary, and the others who knew him in the flesh. His eyes looked into theirs; they heard his words; they sat at his feet, or leaned upon his bosom. We cannot know Christ in this way, for he is gone from earth; and we ask how it is possible for us to have more than a biographical acquaintance with him. If he were a mere man--nothing more than this would be possible. It were absurd to talk about knowing the apostle John personally, or forming an intimate friendship with the apostle Paul. We may learn much of the character of these men from the fragments of their story which are preserved in the Scriptures--but we can never become personally acquainted with them until we meet them in the heavenly world.

With Christ, however, it is different. The Church did not lose him when he ascended from Olivet. He never was more really in the world than he is now. He is as much to those who now love him and believe on him--as he was to his friends in Bethany. He is a present, living Savior; and we may form with him an actual relation of personal friendship, which will grow closer and tenderer as the years go on, deepening with each new experience, shining more and more in our hearts, until at last, passing through the portal which men misname death--but which really is the beautiful gate of life, we shall see him face to face, and know him even as we are known.

Is it possible for all Christians to attain this personal, conscious intimacy with Christ? There are some who do not seem to realize it.

To them Christ is a creed, a rule of life, an example, a teacher--but not a friend. There are some excellent Christians who seem to know Christ only biographically. They have no experimental knowledge of him--he is to them at best an absent friend--living, faithful, and trusted--but still absent. No word of discouragement, however, should be spoken to such. The Old Testament usually goes before the New, in experience as well as in the biblical order. Most Christians begin with the historical Christ, knowing of him before they know him. Conscious personal intimacy with him is ordinarily a later fruit of spiritual growth; yet it certainly appears from the Scriptures that such intimacy is possible to all who truly believe in Christ. Christ himself hungers for our friendship, and for recognition by us, and answering affection from us; and if we take his gifts without himself and his love, we surely rob ourselves of much joy and blessedness.

The way to this experimental knowledge of Christ is very plainly marked out for us by our Lord himself. He says that if we love him, and keep his words--that he will manifest himself unto us, and he and his Father will come and make their abode with us. It is in loving him, and doing his will, that we learn to know Christ; and we learn to love him by trusting him. A dying youth looked up into the face of a friend, and with troubled tones said, "I want to love Christ--will you tell me how?" "Trust him first," was the answer, "and you will learn to love him without trying at all." It was a new revelation. "I always thought I must love Christ before I could have any right to trust him," was the answer.

Ofttimes we learn to know our human friends by trusting them. We see no special beauty or worth in them as they move by our side in the ordinary experiences of life; but we pass at length into circumstances of trial, where we need friendship; and then the noble qualities of our friends appear, as we trust them, and they come nearer to us, and prove themselves true. In like manner, most of us really get acquainted with Christ only in experiences of need, in which his love and faithfulness are revealed.

The value of a personal acquaintance with Christ is incalculable. There are men and women whom it is worth a great deal to have as friends. As our intimacy with them ripens, their lives open out like sweet flowers, disclosing rich beauty to our sight, and pouring fragrance upon our spirits.

A true and great friendship is one of earth's richest and best blessings. It is ever breathing songs into our hearts, kindling aspirations and hopes, starting impulses of good, teaching holy lessons, and shedding all manner of gracious influences upon our lives. But the friendship of Christ does infinitely more than this for us. It purifies our sinful lives; it makes us brave and strong; it inspires us ever to the best and noblest service. Its influence, perpetually brooding over us, woos out the most winsome graces of mind and spirit. The richest, the sweetest, and the only perennial and never failing, fountain of good in this world--is the personal, experimental knowledge of Christ.

That Christ should condescend thus to give to us sinful men his pure, divine friendship, is the greatest wonder of the world; but there is no doubt of the fact. No human friendship can ever be half so close and intimate--as that which the lowliest of us may enjoy with our Savior. If we but realize our privileges, the enriching that will come to our lives through this glorious relationship, will be better than all gold and precious gems!

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