

The Best Friend

by Newman Hall

Jesus is a perfect friend who demonstrates unselfishness, tenderness, and patience in His relationships with us.

Scripture: Proverbs 18:24, Isaiah 49:15, John 14:3, John 15:13-15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Hebrews 13:8, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Christian Friendship"

Description

Newman Hall preaches about the profound friendship and brotherhood found in Jesus, who exemplifies the truest form of friendship that surpasses all earthly relationships. Jesus, the Elder Brother, demonstrates a friendship that is unselfish, tender, and faithful, seeking reciprocity, communion, and mutual love. His love is individualizing, appreciative, and ever-present, offering unchanging and everlasting companionship. Jesus desires a deep, intimate relationship with His friends, requiring trust, communion, and zeal for His glory, preparing for His return with joyful anticipation. The friendship with Jesus is a model for believers to reciprocate love, trust, communion, endeavors to please Him, zeal for His glory, and readiness for His return, fostering a true brotherhood among believers.

Transcript

Some brothers are not friends. But the brotherhood of Jesus is one that possesses all the qualities of truest Friendship. The man Christ Jesus, the Elder Brother, illustrates the word--"There is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother."

Of all the gifts of God, next to Himself, there is not one so precious as a true friend. This is a treasure which no gold can buy, no genius invent, no power produce. The wealthiest are poor without it, and an empire's crown would be a worthless bauble, if, amid the crowd of courtiers who do it homage, there are none who, for his own sake, love the wearer of it.

Friendship implies reciprocity, mutual sympathy, respect, affection, service. It is much more than kindness shown by one and received by another; much more than beneficence on the one hand and gratitude on the other. There are conventional uses of the word which give a very inadequate idea of its true meaning. A mere acquaintance, known enough to be recognized in the street, is sometimes so designated. With more reason we might thus speak of one who has done us some valuable service. Those also for whom we feel compassion and sympathy, or to whom we have ourselves shown kindness, we may regard as friends, because we have "befriended" them.

But "friendship" implies much more; there must be corresponding communion. It is not enough that one should render and another receive affection and service--each must love and serve the other; kindred sympathies stretching their tendrils to intertwine each with each. Beneficence however generous in the one, and gratitude however sincere in the other, are not enough to secure the special charm of friendship, when the interests, honor and happiness of both are shared.

Such true friendship gilds all pleasures, soothes all sorrows, decorates with flowers the roughest path, and cheers with songs the darkest night. A true friend, strong to help, wise to counsel, tender to sympathize, unselfish, unchanging--is a priceless gift from God. Oh, then, what must be the blessedness of those to whom Jesus, the model Friend, the infinitely mighty, wise, tender, and faithful One, says--"YOU ARE MY FRIENDS."

These words are part of the valedictory discourse which our Lord addressed to His disciples, when grieving because of His expected departure. "Let not your hearts be troubled," is the tender refrain pervading every portion of it. "Have confidence in God--in Me. My Father's house has many mansions. If it were not so--if your hopes were vain, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and will come again and take you to dwell with Me always. Through Me, as the Way, you have come to the Father, and in Me you know Him. He is what you know Me to be. He that has seen Me has seen the Father. He loves you as I love you, and whatever you ask in My name will be given, if for your good. Though no longer seen, I shall ever work and pray for you. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, to be with you at all times. If you really love Me, obey and please Me; and My Father will love you, and we will dwell in your hearts, and fill you with a peace which passes understanding. All that the world could give is not equal to this peace. I will nourish you as the trunk of the tree sustains the branches. As branches in the vine, by faith and obedience abide in Me. I want you to be full of joy. Therefore love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS, if you do whatever I command you."

To all members of the Divine Brotherhood these words are full of Comfort and Counsel. They speak both of Privilege and Duty. Jesus loves us first. He is "The Sinner's Friend." He wins our hearts by unselfish kindness, and kindles within us the fire of reciprocated affection. By the power of His Spirit we are born again, and become His friends. Then, by the love He shows us, and by the kindred love He produces within us, He prompts us to loving service, which is the best evidence of true friendship and Brotherhood.

As all true friendship is reciprocal, the statement, "You are my friends," implies that the speaker is a friend to those whom He thus addresses. Jesus showed that He was more than Teacher, more than Lord. When told that His mother and brethren were waiting to speak with Him, looking round on His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brethren--for whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My mother and sister and brother." In the prayer following the discourse in which He addressed His disciples as friends, He said, "Neither do I pray for these alone, but for all who shall believe in Me through their word." We therefore may with them hear our Lord addressing ourselves as Friends.

WHAT KIND OF A FRIEND IS JESUS?

We see God "in the face of Jesus Christ"; that is, in His words and actions. There are good people we would not select as friends. They may be devout, upright, learned, wise, but yet destitute of qualities required for intimate friendship. They may lack sympathy and tenderness; not be considerate in regard to the circumstances and infirmities of others; or be too much absorbed in their own pursuits. They may be

emotionally cold, and in their manner act as an iceberg. Or, if fervent in affection, they may be so irritable as to render us uneasy lest inadvertently we may give them offence. Or they may be exacting, and the very ardor of their love become a yoke of bondage. Or they may be suspicious and jealous, complaining, without cause, of diminished affection, and rendering impossible that "perfect love" which "casts out fear."

There are others whose expression of face and tone of voice are attractive; in whom there is such a combination of goodness, nobility and gentleness, that their friendship is an inestimable privilege. What qualifications for friendship did Christ's human life reveal?

His friendship was UNSELFISHNESS. Much that often passes for friendship is only self-seeking. Invitations are sent to those from whom similar favors are expected, and when circumstances arise to prevent such return, the name is dropped from the list of future guests. Praise is uttered for the echo. Business friendships are based on the expectation of trading in return. "The rich have many friends." Selfishness hides behind the mask of benevolence, and policy wears the cloak of affection. Such "friendship is counterfeit," and the failure of substantial return proves such.

It was evident to His disciples that Jesus never sought worldly advantages. With eloquence and ability to work miracles, He might, if merely man, easily have won the favor of the great. Why select as special friends the poor fishermen of Galilee? By His purity of life and denunciation of all wrongdoing, He roused the enmity of those whom He might easily have conciliated. On the ladder of His first adherents He might have climbed into courts and palaces, and then thrown the ladder away. But he identified Himself with the poor; was willing to be taunted as "the Friend of publicans and sinners," and sought nothing from His followers but their love. He was thoughtful of them when indifferent to His own comfort and safety. This was illustrated when, advancing to meet the armed band, He asked whose name was in their warrant? And when they replied that it was Jesus of Nazareth, He took them at their own word, surrendered Himself, and demanded that those not included in the summons should not be molested. "If, therefore, you seek Me, let these go their way."

But the greatest proof was giving His life for them. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends." They could not understand the full import of these words; but every action proved how He sought not theirs but them.

To us, no less, He is a unselfish Friend. We had nothing to attract His regard but poverty and woe. "The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." All the tribute He demands as the "firstborn of many brethren" is our trustful obedience, which means our own salvation.

His friendship was TENDER. Generosity may be rough; unselfishness cold; courage harsh. But when we see a brave soldier, a grave philosopher, a renowned monarch, caressing an infant or weeping with a mourner, the tenderness is more impressive because of the strength. The heroism of Hector in the battle lends additional charm to the tenderness that fondles the child.

At the word of Jesus diseases fled, the storm was hushed, the dead arose, devils were cast out. How fearlessly He denounced the vices of the great; and with what impartiality He laid bare the faults and hypocrisies of those who thronged around Him, and whose anger He roused by His unflinching fidelity! But with this preeminent strength, what preeminent tenderness--pausing in His teaching to encourage timid women, and to fold in His arms their little children--delaying His journey to heal the broken heart of the widow, when He raised the young man from the dead "and delivered him to his mother"--leading the blind man by the hand through the town to restore his sight--not merely cleansing the leper, but gladdening the

loathsome sufferer from whom all shrank, by stretching out His hand and touching him.

How thoughtful for the multitude who had come from far to listen to His teaching; unlike many who, absorbed in their theme, sometimes forget the young and the weak and the weary; and while exerting His power as Creator, illustrating His tenderness as a man and a friend! Bartimaeus could never have forced his way through the marching crowd, and his cry would have been vain, had not the Son of David stopped and commanded him to be brought to Him.

Jesus did not, in His own approaching sufferings, forget the grief of His friends. With what varied arguments and consolations He strove to allay their trouble of heart! On His way to crucifixion, He said to the lamenting women, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves." When enduring the intense physical agony of the cross, and when darkness was allowed to brood over His spirit; when offering up the Great Sacrifice for the sins of the world--He was not so absorbed as to be unmindful of the weeping woman beneath His cross.

Not only did He feel for the sorrowful, but He felt with them. This is true sympathy. Those tears at the grave of Lazarus were not shed because the friend He loved was dead. He had purposed to awake him out of sleep. But when He saw the friends and the sisters weeping, He wept too. And looking all down the ages and seeing the multitudes who would weep beside opened graves, in tender sympathy with all His friends in all time, "Jesus wept."

Nor was this tenderness confined to the period of His humiliation. When He arose triumphant over the grave, His very first word was to a weeping friend, whose tears affected the risen Christ--"Woman, why are you weeping?" He called her by the old familiar name--"Mary!" And on the same evening of the Resurrection day, with the laurels of the conqueror's crown fresh on His brow and all heaven jubilant, He had leisure of heart to comfort His friends. He joined two of them as they walked to Emmaus. Familiar with sorrow's features and tone, He kindly inquired, "What are you so sad about?" And then, with painstaking tenderness, He corrected their misapprehensions, calmed their fears and gladdened their hearts.

We know but a very small part of what our Lord did and said to His friends. But if in the brief record we possess there are so many illustrations of His tenderness, how many more must there have been which are unrecorded! Those disciples must have felt that He who, as a Friend, claimed their friendship, was, above all others, tender as well as strong.

He is still as tender and sympathizing to His friends. The heart that has never been lacerated by grief, cannot understand the bitterness of our tears. He who has never known the fierceness of the conflict is not the best suited to encourage us when fainting on the battlefield. But "the Man of Sorrows" retains amid the glory of heaven the memory of human woes. He has Himself felt weariness and loneliness, hunger and thirst, pain and depression. He knows how strong are human instincts, how violent the assaults of the devil, how terrible the struggles of the soul resolved to press on through foes to God. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities, in all points tempted like as we are." Having suffered as we suffer, He is able to support the tempted, and not only helps us, but feels for us and with us.

But He is Faithful in His tenderness; not so blinded by affection as not to see or censure our faults. He often rebuked the disciples He so tenderly loved. And He loves us too well to let us go more and more astray without warning. To affectionate commendation He adds, "Nevertheless, I have something against you."

APPRECIATION OF TRIFLES is an important element in friendship. Some people are more impressed by the occasional favor of a stranger than the uniform kindness of a friend. They appreciate great services on critical occasions, but pass by the multitude of minor actions which chiefly illustrate friendship and make up the substance of life. Alas, how much love seems wasted! What a scene of happiness would many a home now overshadowed with discontent present if little services were appreciated. The daisy offered by tiny fingers to father when he comes home from work; oh, that he would smile, and kiss the dimpling cheek that has been all day desiring only this reward! The tidy hearth, the clean apron, the carefully prepared if frugal supper for the eagerly expected husband; oh, that he would only notice her thoughtfulness of him in absence, and the tender welcome by her--his affection to whom would turn the poor cottage to a palace!

The expression of true friendship does not need sudden perils, unexpected reverses, extraordinary calamities. The ordinary routine of uneventful daily life may serve as well and better. The mere excitement of some unusual occurrence or special trouble may rouse the most selfish and sluggish to occasional and fitful kindness--but true friendship shows itself most in those constantly occurring opportunities which have nothing extraordinary to secure notice.

What friendships have been lost by lack of appreciation of little things! How many a household, now a wilderness, might but for this have rejoiced and blossomed as the rose! If the oversight of apparent trifles may be excused in any, it is in the case of those who are engaged in some great work for humanity. It may be pleaded that they are so much occupied with important schemes and practical exertions for the happiness of others, that they are unable to take notice of little tokens of respect and gratitude. If ever there was one for whom this might be pleaded, it would surely be for the great Teacher, Emancipator, Savior of mankind. Was He too great to take notice of little things? He took notice of them because He was so great.

Standing opposite the treasury, He saw the wealthy people putting in their great gifts. But He took special notice of the poor widow and her two mites, and said that she had put in more than all the rest. When Mary brought the alabaster box and the precious ointment, though all the spices of Arabia and all the treasures of the everlasting hills were His own, He designated for everlasting remembrance this tribute of affection. At the great day of judgment, the smallest acts of service will be remembered. "Verily I say unto you, a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple shall not lose its reward." How precious the privilege of being friends of one so appreciative!

Friends are very often lost by lack of PATIENCE. When Jesus beheld the city which was about to be the scene of His murder, He wept over it. When He hung on the cross, surrounded by His enemies, who mocked and derided Him, He prayed for them. If He could thus bear with His foes, what forbearance might we not expect Him to show towards His friends?

It was customary on the arrival of a guest to supply water for the feet, and oil for the head. The host also saluted the guest with a kiss. These ordinary marks of courtesy were neglected by the rich man who invited Jesus to a feast. No notice was taken of it at the time; but afterwards, not in retaliation for the insult, but in defense of the despised penitent, Jesus said, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss of greeting, but she has kissed my feet again and again from the time I first came in. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume." Our Lord's forbearance with the discourtesy of the rich man was

as conspicuous as His appreciation of the poor woman's grateful homage.

The disciples continually put His forbearance to the test by dullness of understanding and lack of faith. But He was always patient with them, taking pains to explain what they had failed to comprehend, and allaying their fears by repeated proofs of His watchful care. There was one occasion when any failure on their part might justly have been resented. On the night of His great agony, taking three disciples apart from the rest, He admitted them into the inner chamber of His sorrow, as chosen friends on whom He might lean in this hour of darkness. On their constancy He had special claims. They had been with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and they had beheld the glory of His countenance, and had heard the voice of God saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." James, so resolute and strong; Peter, who had avowed his readiness to die for his Lord; John, who had just been leaning on His breast at supper--might not Jesus expect that such friends would not fail Him now? Would not love and sympathy for Him in this hour of agony be enough to banish sleep? If He honored them by selecting them to watch and pray with Him, might He not be sure that He would find them ready for any service He might need?

Oh, what an opportunity they lost! Their failure added another pang to the sensitive heart of the Man of Sorrows. "What! could you not watch with Me one hour?" But this appeal, the utterance of wounded affection, rather than of reproof, was at once followed by words of kind forbearance. He did not wait for their excuses. He anticipated their apology. He provided a balm for the wound their own neglect had caused. He was anxious to comfort them in the sorrow He knew they would afterwards feel. "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Even after this warning, Peter failed Him again. Surely when Jesus stood alone before the Jewish rulers on that eventful night, bound, smitten, maligned by false witnesses, condemned as deserving death--surely then Peter might have been expected to come forward and vindicate his Lord! When instead of this he basely denied all knowledge of Him, Jesus might well have been indignant. But "He turned and looked upon Peter." That was all. It was a look of wounded affection, pity and forgiveness. "And Peter went out and wept bitterly."

No sooner had Jesus risen from the grave, than the angel was commissioned to send the penitent disciple a special message. He alone was mentioned by name among all the disciples, for he most needed an assurance that his Lord did not repudiate him. "Tell His disciples and Peter that He goes before you into Galilee."

All the disciples had shared in some measure in his fault; for "they all forsook Him and fled." He had anticipated this with sorrow--"You shall leave Me alone." When He first met them after this desertion, He might have justly rebuked them. But He knew that their own hearts sufficiently accused them. He would not deepen, but heal the wound. The joy of meeting again should not be marred by reminding them of their faults. And so when, on the evening of the Resurrection, He appeared among them in the upper room, His first word was, "Peace be among you."

It was strange that Thomas would not believe the various testimonies that Jesus was still alive. Unseen, Jesus was present when Thomas declared he would not believe unless he placed his finger on the print of the nails. When Jesus appeared again to His disciples, Thomas being among them, with what exceeding gentleness did He reprove the doubting disciple, and with what kind purpose to remove his unbelief He said, "Reach here your finger, and behold My hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into My side and do not be faithless, but believing." How great the privilege of those whom One so forbearing

designated as His friends!

He is an INDIVIDUALIZING and APPRECIATIVE Friend. He does not simply love His people as a great company. He knows them one by one. The Shepherd "calls His own sheep by name." With discriminating affection He says, "I know them." As each child in a family elicits a special love, and has a separate place in the parent's heart, so Jesus knows and loves every one of us. And as the beauties of feature or character in each child are dear to the parent, and every proof of filial affection is distinctly noticed and prized, so our heavenly Friend appreciates all in us that reflects His own beauty. He sees every little trivial service we render. He knows and loves every kind thought we cherish.

Capacity for STRONG ATTACHMENT to individuals is an important qualification. There are some people whose benevolence is widely diffusive but has no special preferences. All mankind are embraced by it, and none are loved more than others. Such people may be eminent as philanthropists, but are not desirable as friends. Love seeks to have a special and separate place in the thoughts and affections of the person loved. He who cares for everybody in general and for no one in particular, has generally no one in particular who cares for his friendship.

Jesus was the chief of all philanthropists. He loved the whole world, and died to save mankind. The vilest of the vile were not excluded. But if His benevolence had been only of this universal character, there would have been, to the disciples, no special value in His assurance--"You are My friends." But, with the most diffusive benevolence, He cherished strong personal attachments. Disregarding any charge of partiality which some might allege, He reciprocated the pleasures of special friendship. He had a home at Bethany where He found sympathy and rest in reverential affection. "Now Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus." When the brother was seized with dangerous illness, the message sent to the Master was--"He whom You love is sick." When He stood weeping beside the grave, the Jews bore witness to this when they said--"Behold how He loved him!"

Jesus loved all the disciples; but His human heart was drawn towards John with especial tenderness. This was obvious to all, and spoken of without resentment, insomuch that John was designated as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." On that most solemn occasion when the Lord instituted the Holy Supper, this disciple was allowed to recline his head on the breast of Jesus. It was evident to the disciples that their Lord was capable of, and that He felt Himself free to indulge in, strong personal attachments. If this were so, they might every one hope to enjoy increasingly His special love. Already His friends in a far higher sense than the world outside, there was no limit to the growth of that friendship. How great a privilege was it when One, so capable of the strongest affection, said to them--"You are my friends."

We value a friend, not only for his love to us, but for his desire to be loved in return; not simply because of his readiness to help us, but for his dependence on us, and the value he puts on our love or service. Some people are prompt to show kindness, but seen independent of the kindness of others. They are benefactors rather than friends. But true friendship yearns for a return of love, for an interchange of service. It not only feeds, but needs to be fed; it not only sustains, but it leans; it not only gives pleasure, but receives it.

If so, it may be asked whether friendship is altogether unselfish? Yes--for it makes no sordid bargain. It loves and it serves and it blesses by the impulse of love itself. But this love, by its very nature, hungers and thirsts for love in return, and without this, though benevolence may survive, friendship will die. It does not demand equivalent benefit, but it yearns for and must have reciprocity of affection. There is no

mercenary contract, no preliminary stipulation concerning giving and receiving. But there is in the very nature of friendship a necessity for mutual love. It seeks more than mere gifts from the beloved one. It desires, not merely his, but him. It cannot be content with loving; it must be loved.

If any case of friendship might be regarded as exceptional, it would be that of Jesus. He was Divine, and in that aspect self-sufficing. The disciples relied on Him as their Preserver and Benefactor, but what could He need from them? He was Man; yet such a man that He might seem independent of help. Had He not wisdom which required no advice from friends so ignorant? miraculous powers which made Him superior to aid by friends so feeble? heroic courage which required no support from friends so timid? Yet if He had not been in some sense dependent on His fellow-men, He had been less qualified to be a Friend.

His farewell discourse not merely contains the advice of a teacher and the orders of a superior, but is the utterance of Love seeking response, desiring a home in the hearts of others, yearning for affectionate remembrance when the inevitable separation should come. If He was necessary to them as the Vine to the branches, they were necessary to Him as the branches to the Vine. He sought a mutual indwelling. "Abide in Me and I in you." If without Him they could do nothing, so also, without their fruit-bearing, He would not be glorified. It was not enough that as the Father loved Him, so He loved them; He needed their response. "Continue you in My love." He proclaimed Himself Friend to them, but He desired them as friends to Himself. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you."

In the garden of Gethsemane this dependence of the human heart of Jesus was emphatically exhibited. He was about to seek help from His Father, but He also longed for the help of His friends. Three of them He selected to be specially near to Him. He went a short distance from them, and with strong crying and tears appealed to God. Again and again He poured out His soul in an agony of prayer, but again and again He went back to His friends.

There are some who speak as though, if they have God, they are independent of all other help. This may seem very godly, but it is not very human. Christ was perfect Man, and needed human support as well as Divine. He needed to feel the grasp of a brother's hand, the mingling of a brother's tears, the assurance of a brother's love.

With this desire the Holy Supper is forever blended. Superstition has done its utmost to disguise the beauty of this simple sacrament. Sacramentalism has made it an occasion for asserting vain pretensions, and concealing the true High Priest of the Church. Intolerance has made it a test of heresy, and wrested it into an engine of persecution. Ignorance has resorted to it as a sedative to conscience and a passport to heaven. But to those who study its true meaning in the pages of the sacred history, the love of the Divine Friend of man will ever be seen shining above that sacred table as the Shekinah of God. Still we hear the tender words--"Do this in remembrance of Me."

Jesus knew that when His bodily presence was no longer enjoyed, His disciples might be apt to forget Him. Friends whom distance removes from our sight sometimes fade from our memory. He did not wish to be forgotten. He yearned to live in their remembrance. He wanted to have a home in the loving hearts of all His friends in all future years. And so He appointed the broken bread to remind them of His body given for them, and the wine poured forth was to be an emblem of His blood shed for their salvation. Their partaking of it was a token of their spiritual reception of Him, and the strength and joy He gives. Their partaking of it together was an emblem of their fellowship with Him and with each other--a Holy

Communion, a bond of Brotherhood.

They were thus to bear constant testimony to the world of His sufferings and glory. They were to show forth His death until He came again. They were to set Him before the eyes of their faith, to listen to His voice, to feel His Presence, to cherish loving thoughts of Him. Though He was about to ascend to heaven, where He would receive the homage of innumerable angels, He still needed the loving memory of His friends. It was as if He would not enjoy His crown apart from them. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Such qualities and actions as these illustrated the character of Jesus as a Friend, and won responsive affection. The disciples not merely revered Him as Master and Lord; they loved Him as Friend, with a deep personal affection which prompted them to forsake all that they had to follow Him. Though ascended to His throne, He is "the same Jesus"--"The same yesterday, today, and forever." Whatever of tenderness, forbearance, and unselfishness was seen in His communion with them when on earth, He still possesses, now that He is in heaven.

Jesus is an EVER PRESENT FRIEND. Seldom can earthly friends enjoy each other's society without interruption. Wide continents may intervene, and circumstances of various kinds interpose their barriers. Seasons of fellowship may be measured by minutes, seasons of separation by long and weary years. How many hearts yearn in vain for the society of a friend dearer than life! But Jesus is always near, and we may always enjoy His society. We may always open to Him our heart and lay our head upon His bosom, and when all other friends must part from us, Jesus still is with us. He is with us amid the waves of Jordan to uphold us, and on the other shore to welcome us!

Jesus is an UNCHANGING, EVERLASTING FRIEND. Earthly friends sometimes grow weary with continued claims on their sympathy and support. Their love is too much taxed. It may be a mere cistern--the supply may cease, and the thirsty one may hold out a vessel into which falls not a straggling drop. But the friendship of Jesus is a fountain of living waters. Having loved His own, He loves them to the end. No reverse of circumstances can change His affection; the more we need Him the nearer and dearer we shall find Him, "a very present help in trouble." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

And when we see Him on the throne of judgment, it will be "the same Jesus." He will recognize us as His friends; He will receive us to Himself; we shall share His glory--we shall dwell with Him forever. His love will be our heaven. "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend."

What Jesus is as Friend to us, is the MODEL of what we should be as friends to Him. "He that has friends must show himself friendly." "You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you." Is then the perfect obedience of a servant to precede and secure the privileges of a friend? Can we act as only friends of Christ can act before we become His friends? Life must precede service. As branches we first abide in Him and then bear fruit; but the bearing fruit is evidence of being branches. It is not that our love first causes Him to love us as friends, but "We love Him because He first loved us."

"Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit: so shall you be My disciples." Thus disciples will be manifested. The love of God is revealed to us in Jesus; and love to Him is the great motive of obedience, the fire which moves the whole machinery of righteousness. "Faith works by love." "The love of Christ constrains us."

Christ's friends CHERISH LOVING THOUGHTS OF HIM. If this is so of earthly friends, how much more of Him who died for us and intercedes, who counsels, comforts, saves. We shall think, not only of His gifts, but of Himself--His character displayed on earth, His glorious majesty in heaven. In our hearts and lives we shall praise Him, and glorify Him "for His great glory!"

CONFIDENCE. A friend loves to be relied on for sympathy and support; to be fully believed. Thus we prove our friendship to the Friend of friends; "casting all our cares on Him." When we do not understand His method, we shall trust His faithfulness. He is pleased when in the storm our fears subside, as He says--"It is I."

COMMUNION. Without desire for this no friendship is worthy of the name. The duty of praying always is the privilege of habitually enjoying the society of our Heavenly Friend. We should make Him our life-companion, telling Him our joys and sorrows, our conflicts and sins, expressing our affection, and never being weary of receiving the assurances of His love. Let us not remain in the outer court when we may enter the inner chamber where He spreads His choicest banquet. Let us embrace the offered privileges of the inner circle of His friends.

True love yearns for close intimacy. This will increase reverence. The most intimate of the twelve was the disciple who adored most profoundly the Eternal Word incarnate. The more we love, the better we shall know, and the more we know Divine Love, the more profound will be our homage. Let us not fear irreverence in a love which will result from feelings which prompt us to say with Newton--

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer's ear;

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,

And drives away his fear."

Or with Doddridge--

"Jesus, I love Your charming name,

'Tis music to mine ear;

Fain would I sound it out so loud

That earth and heaven should hear."

Or with Bernard--

"Jesus! the very thought is sweet;

In that dear name all heart-joys meet;

But sweeter than sweet honey far

The glimpses of His presence are."

Or with Wesley--

"O that I could forever sit
With Mary at the Master's feet;
Be this my happy choice
My only care, delight, and bliss,
My joy, my heaven on earth be this
To hear the Bridegroom's voice."

Or with Peter--

"Whom having not seen you love, in whom, though now you see Him not, yet believing, You rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

ENDEAVORS TO PLEASE. Love is sensitive. True friends of Jesus avoid grieving Him, by disregard to His wishes, by indifference to His society, by neglect of His interests, by unkindness to His friends. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

True friends not merely avoid grieving, but try to give pleasure. How wonderful that we can do this to One enthroned amid the joys of heaven! If He were now on earth, how we would seek opportunities to show our love! We can do this still. Loving service to His friends He accepts as rendered to Himself--"You did it unto Me." The poorest, weakest, youngest of His friends may give Him pleasure, and thus crown the humblest lot with honor and delight.

ZEAL FOR HIS GLORY. We promote the interests of a friend, vindicate his character, aid him in the purpose of his heart. And so the friends of Jesus desire that all men should know how great, how good He is. They are zealous to extend the kingdom which He has left especially in their charge. "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Friends of Jesus are bound to work and witness for Him, and to try to bring all the world to honor and love their Friend.

PREPARATION FOR HIS RETURN. If we expect a friend after long absence, we are diligent in preparation to welcome him. So we shall be "looking for that blessed hope," "lest, coming suddenly, He find us sleeping." We shall joyfully do the work and bear the trials He has allotted here; but when He calls or comes--O the bliss of knowing that "to be with Christ is far better!" This hope will be an "anchor of the soul sure and steadfast."

Matthew forsook his tables of money, and the sons of Zebedee their boats and nets. O that we may forsake all that is inconsistent with His service! The sisters of Bethany, with reverent love, sheltered Him in their home; so may we receive Him daily into our hearts. Martha served; so let us with unwearied zeal work for Him. Mary sat at His feet; so may we with thoughtful affection ponder His words. John leaned on His breast; so let us repose on His unchanging love. With Peter may we say--"You know all things; You know that I love You." With the Apostles let us rejoice if "counted worthy to suffer for His Name."

What friends has Jesus! His love has kindled human hearts with an enthusiasm which has scorned reproaches, losses, agony, and death. A noble army of martyrs in all ages have testified their friendship! What friends He has at this moment all over the world! Among the myriads round His throne are dear ones with whom our hearts are linked with imperishable cords, now beholding His face, and listening to His

voice. With what zeal they serve, with what rapture they rejoice in Him! We also are the friends of Jesus. O let us walk worthy of the vocation with which we are called, and so verify the title which His love confers--"YOU ARE MY FRIENDS."

Such Friendship with Jesus is Brotherhood with men. Every individual who is linked by such close and ever-enduring bonds with the Head must be linked in love with all the members of the Brotherhood. Let this be practically recognized, and sectarian exclusiveness will be banished from the Church, selfishness from society, and strife from the world.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/newman-hall/the-best-friend/>

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